

WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS ME:
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL HOLY FOREMOTHERS
OF
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S WRITING

By

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AUTOBIOGRAPHIC HOLY FOREMOTHERS
OF
BLACK U.S. WOMEN WRITERS

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Abstract

The autobiographies of the nineteenth-century black women evangelists, along with the petition of their strongly African eighteenth-century precursor Belinda, have never been examined collectively as a genre changing considerably throughout the nineteenth-century, and developing in a chiasmic return throughout the twentieth-century to give rise to contemporary African American women's literary forms. Through close readings of primary texts, I examine the ways in which the evangelists employ discourses produced by socio-economic determinants such as race, gender and class to create a complex black female narrative economy, with its own unique figurations and forms. These figurations and forms-- for example the cult of the "unnatural" woman, the quest for community, the trope of trial, or the valorisation of the sermonic mode-- develop and change over time. This changing black female spiritual narrative economy is indicative of an important line in the ongoing traditions of black women's writing which has only now begun to be reclaimed and validated. In their texts, evangelist autobiographers such as Rebecca Jackson, Sojourner Truth or Julia Foote maintained African traditions (for example, orality), and African American ways of being and telling (such as the preacherly, or the performance of the blues) which were signified upon in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, and are still of utmost importance to many African American women writers today.

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Introduction

*I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole
of my people.*

(Alice Walker In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens)

*

In 1787, in the American Museum or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces Prose and Poetical, the petition of one "Belinda," an "African slave," to the Legislature of Massachusetts appears. The petition, written in the third person, presumably by an amanuensis for the illiterate Belinda, has been cited by Frances Smith Foster (44-5) and Joanne Braxton (2) as the earliest known precursor to date of black female autobiography in America. In her petition, Belinda relies upon the power of the West African Orisa-- great spiritual forces embodying important aspects of nature (Neimark 14)-- to aid her in claiming financial compensation from her master for her aged self and her indigent daughter; she refers to the Christian God and his worshippers only in a cynical and derogatory fashion, using the very discourse of Christianity to condemn the hypocrisy of its followers. But until very recently, serious analyses of African American women's autobiography have not begun with Belinda's petition; instead, they have started with the book-length spiritual narrative of Jarena Lee, written in 1836, almost fifty years later. Lee's The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel was followed by a series of published and

unpublished black women's spiritual autobiographies: spanning the years between 1830 and 1864 Rebecca Cox Jackson kept a journal which was not brought to print until 1981;¹ Zilpha Elaw published her Memoirs in 1846; in 1851 Sojourner Truth published her Narrative with the aid of Olive Gilbert, a white amanuensis; Julia Foote's A Brand Plucked From the Fire appeared in 1879; a short autobiography entitled Elizabeth, a Colored Minister of the Gospel Born in Slavery was published in 1889; Amanda Berry Smith published her Story of the Lord's Dealings With Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist in 1893; the spiritual autobiography of Virginia Broughton appeared in 1907.²

Recently, Thelma Marie Townsend (1993) has examined the antebellum works of three of the spiritual autobiographers, Lee, Elaw and Jackson, as well as the speeches and meditations of Maria W. Stewart, and the secular life writings of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson, in her study of black women's quest for freedom and literacy, and their attempts to reimage the Divine for their own personal power. However, she does not examine the manner in which literacy is seriously problematized in the writings of the evangelist women. Rosetta Renae Haynes (1997) conducts a more comprehensive analysis of five nineteenth-century black women's spiritual autobiographies-- those of Lee, Elaw, Foote, Smith and Jackson-- using feminist literary theory, historical methods and liberation theology to develop a conceptual framework she designates as "radical spiritual motherhood." Candis Anita Laprade (1996) links the work of three autobiographers to twentieth-century African American women's writing. She investigates the discursive strategies Lee, Elaw and Jackson (all antebellum writers) use to become active speaking subjects rather than

passive objects of patriarchal discourse. However, the autobiographies of the nineteenth-century black women evangelists, Lee, Elaw, Jackson, Truth, Foote, Smith, Elizabeth and Broughton, along with the petition of their strongly African precursor Belinda, have never been examined collectively, as a genre changing considerably throughout the nineteenth-century, and developing in a kind of chiasmic return throughout the twentieth-century, to give rise to contemporary African American women's literary forms.³ That is the contribution I propose to make here. Through close readings of primary texts I examine the ways in which the evangelists employ discourses produced by socio-economic determinants such as race, gender, and class to create a complex black female narrative economy, with its own unique figurations and forms. We may ask, for example, how do the cult of the "unnatural" woman, the quest for community, the trope of trial, or the valorisation of the sermonic mode develop and change over time? This changing black female spiritual narrative economy is indicative of an important line in the ongoing traditions of black women's writing which has only now begun to be reclaimed and validated. I join in this reclaiming because, in the words of Barbara Christian: "Literary criticism is promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response, to folk who need the writing as much as they need anything. I know, from literary history, that writing disappears unless there is a response to it" (78).

The task of reclaiming is, now, as necessary as ever, because African American women's contestation for a self-defined subjective voice in the face of a virulent, silencing racism and sexism continues even as we near the twenty-first century in America. The citation of contemporary names

such as Maxine Thomas, Tawana Brawley, or Anita Hill gives rise to the disturbing question of why black women, if depicted at all by American media, are still so often and oddly spectacularized as truth-distorting, failed, silenced, humiliated.⁴ As Nellie McKay comments, black women have a history of speaking out in America; but "often, in a racist-sexist disregard and even denigration of them, others do not listen, and therefore almost never hear their voices" (287-88). But as Nell Irvin Painter establishes:

Black women, who have traditionally been discounted within the race and degraded in American society, are becoming increasingly impatient with our devaluation. Breaking the silence and testifying about the abuse, black feminists are publishing our history, and dissecting the stereotypes that have been used against us.

(Painter 214)

Thus, it becomes crucial not only to understand how that dissection occurs in women's writing at the present time, but also to examine the ways in which current strategies of resistance have evolved out of past forms. Henry Louis Gates issues a call for such research. Gates suggests that in the writings of contemporary black women such as Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid and Gloria Naylor, the "roots" of the nineteenth-century black foremothers have "branched luxuriantly." These roots which have "founded and nurtured the Black women's literary tradition" must be

revived, explicated, analyzed and debated before we can understand more completely the formal shaping of this tradition within a tradition, a coded literary universe through which, regrettably, we are only just beginning to navigate our way. . . . To demonstrate this set of formal literary relations is to demonstrate that sexuality, race, and gender are both the condition and the

basis of *tradition*-- but tradition as found in discrete acts of language use.

("Foreword" Narrative of Sojourner Truth xxiii-xxiv)

How nineteenth-century black women's spiritual narratives provided the groundwork for a contemporary womanist⁵ literature rooted in spirituality is part of the focus of my investigation.

Several key critics, among them Joanne Braxton, Frances Smith Foster, Jean Humez, Phebe Davidson, Alice Walker, and William Andrews have pointed out the initial necessity for *all* early women writers to adopt spiritual forms of writing, in an attempt to use God's authority for their own purposes of female self-expression. However, it seems to me that in African American women's autobiography, black women's use of spiritual forms was much more than an expedient necessity; it was a way of maintaining African traditions (such as orality), and African American ways of being and telling (such as the preacherly, or the performance of the blues) which are still of utmost importance to many African Americans today. In my study, I have included Belinda among the black women evangelists, because in the eighteenth century-- many years before her autobiographer-sisters-- she stands as a claimant, in the whitemale public domain, for African spiritual modes of vision and for the sacred rights of herself, a black woman, and her indigent daughter. I will be exploring how this scene of a black woman (and her child or children) before a jury of her oppressors (whites; sometimes black men) is replayed in the spiritual writings of later black women, becoming a trope which writers such as Hurston, Morrison, Walker, or Bambara also use.

Around 1861, when Harriet Jacobs published Incidents in the Life of

a Slave Girl, black women's autobiographies diverged in two distinct directions. Critics and theorists such as Joanne Braxton, Frances Smith Foster and Hazel Carby have traced one direction, concentrating on later works (such as those by Nella Larsen, Frances Harper, or Pauline Hopkins) which, like Jacobs' pivotal text, became generally more secular and conformed more readily to the literary conventions for sentimental Euro-American female writing of the time.⁶ These black women's texts Houston Baker calls the writings of the "Northern-departed daughters." But it is the spirit of the black evangelist women which retains the seeds that would sprout the "eruptions of funk" (the term is Susan Willis')⁷ of other black women writers (Baker 37). For example, I suggest that the African remnants of form and content in the novels of Zora Neale Hurston or Toni Morrison are more easily found in the petition of Belinda, or the evangelical autobiographies of Julia Foote (1879), Rebecca Cox Jackson (1843-1864), or Sojourner Truth (1851) than in the secular, sentimental autobiographies of Harriet Jacobs (1861), Elizabeth Keckley (1868) or Kate Drumgoold (1896). Baker and others (Bruce 4-5; Giddings When and Where 49-55; Shockley 111) observe that the Northern-departed daughters reject the black vernacular in their search for "a mulatto utopia" (Baker 30). In other words, in their examination of blackness, whiteness and the interaction of the races, they as black writers choose, instead, the gentility of a white, European, Victorian existence, void of an "inversive, revolutionary, symbolic spirit" (Baker 36)-- the very spirit which I argue is retained by many of the evangelists.⁸ Strangely, while Baker, in his insightful text Workings of the Spirit, acknowledges the crucial importance of the spiritual to African American literature, he does not examine these

first writings by black evangelical women, which paved the way for black American women's autobiographies and novels to come.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. has demonstrated how the most prominent of the early black male autobiographers, such as Hammon (1760), Gronniosaw (1770), Marrant (1785), Equiano (1789) or Jea (1815), wrote themselves predominantly in accordance with the European expectation which equated civility with literacy and Christianity (Gates Signifyin(g) Monkey 139-169). Gates examines the manner in which these early black male slave narratives created the framework for later black literary works. Negotiating the expression of the African voice in Western letters, the earlier writers developed the trope of the "talking book," often employing it to "signify" or comment upon each other's works. The act of signifyin(g) is strongly rooted in an oral-based African American tradition. Gates concludes that Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker, as well as Ishmael Reed, are culminations of the development of the talking book trope through signifyin(g). But the African American aesthetic of signifyin(g) propounded by Gates needs to be modified to take into account the early roots of a distinct women's tradition. For example, Gates does not examine in detail differing male and female representations of either the phenomenon of the "talking book," or ensuing issues of orality versus literacy in male and female texts. I argue that, while most black men rejected it, many of the black women evangelists embraced orality in their earliest writings--something Gates has overlooked, and which no one has subsequently addressed at length. For example, I contend that Zora Neale Hurston's use of free indirect discourse in Their Eyes Were Watching God evolves not only out of a tradition of black male encounters with the "speakerly text"

as Gates posits, but also out of distinctly female experiences of orality and literacy, arising from and continued in black women's spiritual autobiographical forms.

I use Zora Neale Hurston as a pivotal writer, a crucial connection between the early black women evangelists and contemporary black women writers, because her work clearly signifies upon the texts of the early religious women. In Conversions and Visions in the Writings of African-American Women, Kimberly Rae Connor has attempted a similar strategy: Connor examines three black women's narratives-- the spiritual autobiographies of evangelists Sojourner Truth and Rebecca Cox Jackson, and the secular autobiography of Harriet Jacobs-- loosely terming all the women "converts" and visionaries, precursors to Hurston's Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God. But such a conflation of the writings of spiritual and secular women seems to leave a number of issues unaddressed. For example, how do Truth and Jackson operate as African American visionary spiritual evangelists in a manner that the secular Jacobs can not? How does Janie reject the Christianity of her evangelist foremothers for much more African forms of spirituality? While Connor acknowledges the existence of "the tension that is created between expressing individual personality and satisfying requirements of communal experience" (174), she neglects to pursue some extremely complex issues of community which have affected the writing of black evangelist women. For example, does Janie's black friend Pheoby belong to the same "community" that white abolitionist women belong to? Connor believes that she does, but this seems to me to be dangerous conflation. As I will demonstrate later, the white women editors who helped Harriet Jacobs get her story

into print were often self-serving and insensitive in the manner in which they orchestrated the publication of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, and it is highly doubtful whether the version of Hatty Jacobs' story which they relayed "back to the community" (which community?) is the one Jacobs would herself have printed. The vexed issue of editing and literary performance for black writers is one which Connor does not examine.

Phebe Davidson explores the "suggestive phrasing," "imbedded subtext," subtle metaphor, and other forms of subversive rhetoric employed by two black evangelists, Jarena Lee and Amanda Smith, but she compares and likens these strategies to those employed by white women autobiographers, rather than presenting us with a vivid sense of the many complex ways in which the structure and rhetoric employed by a variety of African American women *differ* from those employed by their white female counterparts. I suggest that while only some nineteenth-century white women's autobiographies emerge out of Western enthusiastic religious traditions, *all* of the nineteenth-century black female spiritual autobiographies currently extant come out of those traditions.⁵ As a rhetoric of "counter discourse" (Hawes 234), enthusiasm appears in a variety of forms in all of the black women's texts. But this prevailing tendency toward the Western enthusiastic mode is encouraged and uniquely coloured by a tradition of African expressivity. Such expressivity is especially powerful in Belinda's Petition, Julia Foote's A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia Foote, Sojourner Truth's Narrative and Rebecca Cox Jackson's journals. For example, I will examine how Truth, writing out of the space of the (African American) abject, the voiceless, the void of the unspoken, writes the blues-- a form

which James Cone traces back to its African roots:

As with the spirituals, the Africanism of the blues is related to the *functional* character of West African music. And this is one of the essential ingredients of black music which distinguishes it from Western music and connects it with its African heritage. "The fact that American Negro music, like the African, is at the core of daily life explains the immemorial African quality of all Negro *folk* music in this country, if not of the Negro in exile everywhere."

(Cone 98)

As Esther Terry observes, in traditional black American culture, the Blues singer voices the hard experiences of her life so that she may confront and overcome them: "The great need to sing the Blues is the need to survive a reality that threatens to pull one down to annihilation" (430). Thus, Truth's autobiography and narrative strategy becomes a kind of blues in the order of testimony-- "I must tell it. I have been there; and I know" (Terry 431). Indeed it seems to me that the evangelists may all be seen as blues "bad" women-- to use Bernard Bell's coinage in his description of Shug Avery in Alice Walker's Color Purple (Bell 264)-- of a more pious cloth than their singing sisters.¹⁰ Harrison quotes Alberta Hunter: "'To me, the blues are almost religious. . . almost sacred-- when we sing the blues, we're singing out of our own hearts. . . our feelings. . . . Maybe we're hurt and just can't answer back'" (63). Even though they are women of God, the blues "bad" women challenge hegemonic systems of race and gender. Consequentially, they are read out of churches and threatened with violence. They are "unnatural" women. The "unnatural woman" is the black woman preacher, litigator, speaker in the public domain who challenges the tenets of "true (natural) womanhood"-- the Sojourners, Elaws, Broughtons, Janies, Shugs and Pilates of black women's writing. How do these women, through (per)formance of self in

tropes and narrative strategies in their autobiographies bring the very notion of what is "natural" in white/male terms into question? By "(per)formance" I mean a profound self-fashioning which demystifies and challenges the "performance" of black womanhood prescribed and/or described as "natural" by hegemonic discourses. As Neil Evernden suggests in his text The Social Creation of Nature, if there is nature, then we as a society speak of things "belonging to nature," or of the "natural." If some things are "natural," we then speak of others as "unnatural"--there are some things which may exist which are "beyond or against nature." Evernden quotes C. S. Lewis's playful definition of the unnatural: "anything which has changed from its sort or kind may be described as *unnatural*, provided that the change is one the speaker deplures. Behaviour is *unnatural*. . . not simply when it is held to be a departure from that which a man's *nature* would lead to of itself, but when it is a departure for the worse" (Evernden 21). The unnatural, Evernden encourages us to notice, is a "pejorative term."

Joanne Braxton examines the development of black women's spiritual autobiography using the writings of Jarena Lee and Rebecca Cox Jackson as representative works (Braxton 49-72). She also briefly examines the career of Sojourner Truth, which she (mistakenly, it seems to me) terms a "secular narrative" (Braxton 72). While Braxton chronicles the autobiographers' quest "for personal power and their assertion of the literary self. . . the problem of attaining freedom and literacy. . . expressed in dreams, premonitions, and visions" (p. 49), she does not conduct a close examination of their writings, or of the writings of the numerous other female spiritual autobiographers which constitute a complex

genre complicated by issues of editing, performance, sexuality, historicity, community, class, and denominational affiliation. I will undertake that examination here.

Frances Smith Foster also focuses on the writings of Jarena Lee (Written 56-76). She tentatively suggests that African influences might explain "certain stylistic features" of early African American writing, and refers to the "praise-songs" mentioned by Lee; but she does not pursue such influences or features or examine how they might have been modified over time, location or religious denomination. For example, how do the formal and rhetorical devices employed by Philadelphia-born Rebecca Cox Jackson, initially an African Methodist and finally a Shaker writing around 1843, differ from those used by Southerner Virginia Broughton, a Baptist missionary?

*

The evangelists preached and wrote in a unique manner which complicated a number of autobiographical modes. Significantly, they favoured neither the individualistic "moi, moi seul" favoured by most white and many black male American autobiographers (for example, Britton Hammon, John Jea, or Frederick Douglass); nor the (self)imposed domestic solitude in which the first white American female autobiographers most often found themselves (Davidson 65). Against great obstacles, many African American evangelist women struggled long and hard to come to terms with the ideal expressed in West African autobiography, of co-existence within the community or group-- of autobiography as "'autophylography'. . . a portrait of 'nous, nous ensemble'" (Olney 218). Olney argues that, unlike the individualism of typically Western

autobiographies in which the writer makes a "claim of absolute uniqueness and imagines that his experience is unrepeated and unrepeatable" (218), African "autophylography" emphasises both the life shared by the group in the present moment, as well as the shared life lived "countless times before, shaped by the ritual stages of birth and naming, initiation, marriage, parenthood, eldership, and death that have given form to the life of [the] people for as far back as the legendary, mythic memory of the people extends" (218). In this schema, memory is not a personal phenomenon, but a collective one. Thus, we witness in the personal narratives of Belinda, Julia Foote and Sojourner Truth, narrative strategies such as the recounting of communal tribal ritual, sermonality (communal preacher-congregation interaction) and collective story-telling respectively. These narratives prefigure the communal telling and/or remembering played out in Zora Neal Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Toni Cade Bambara's The Salt Eaters or Toni Morrison's Paradise. But for the early black American women evangelists, "nous, nous ensemble" is complicated also. The sense of the too-womanish black woman dwelling "like a speckled bird" (a Biblical metaphor used by both Elaw and Elizabeth to describe themselves) among various communities, black and white, in a long, difficult and often frustrated search for belonging, becomes a recurring and troubling theme, echoed in the works of many contemporary black women.

I have already mentioned that the sentimental autobiography of Harriet Jacobs was accepted by nineteenth-century readers, while the narratives of the evangelists were not. Aside from its popularity as a sentimental autobiography/novel, I suggest that the work might have

appealed to its readers as a kind of pornographic text. William Andrews (To Tell a Free Story) observes that abolitionist editors wanted slave narratives to titillate audiences, and we may wonder if that is exactly what Jacob's narrative accomplishes. I suggest that her text about black women's sexuality became immensely marketable *because* of its prurient theme, "recognizable" to a nineteenth-century community of readers (well-acquainted, for example, with Sara Baartman, the famed "Hottentot Venus")¹³ who saw black women as inextricably entangled in sexuality. I ask if Jacobs' text functions, even as it protests the sexualization of black women, as a kind of pornography in the sense Judith Butler suggests (Excitable Speech 82-86)-- that Jacobs' words, appropriated by eager readers, are words made to signify the *opposite* of what she intends them to mean. Black women writing in the nineteenth century struggled to be heard on their own terms; but it seems that how and what their writing signified was often dependent on audiences whose narrative economies about the lives of black women differed drastically from the narratives by the women themselves. If the women were recognized at all, it may not have been in the manner that they intended (as may be the case of Jacobs). Lacking any material that could be misread as pornography, and refusing to employ the sentimental form and content of so many nineteenth-century women's texts, the majority of the black female evangelists' works simply fell out of circulation, ignored and bypassed on the literary market. In the history of black women in America, this theme of speech, recognizability and silence¹³ has been an ongoing one-- one which I will explore in my examination of performance as trope and narrative strategy in black women's texts. How and to whom do the black women evangelists strive to

make themselves recognizable?¹⁴ What are the gains and sacrifices involved in this performer/audience transaction?

Harriet Jacobs' autobiography attempts to resist-- but I believe, comes dangerously near to reinforcing-- white desire to see black women as what they had always been in white American patriarchy-- the sum of their body parts, an obscene and titillating display or spectacle. I want to investigate how the narratives of the black evangelists resist such gross embodiment differently than Jacobs does. How do they make the very fact of their physical existence as black women in America matter? As Butler proposes: "What challenge does that excluded and abject realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as 'life,' lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?" (Butler Bodies 16).

Further, how do the black women's writings function as performances of black female selfhood, negotiating the fine balance between maintaining themselves as subjects acquiescent to white and/or male expectations, and performing insurrectionary acts of re-subjectification? How do they exhibit what Darlene Hine terms the "culture of dissemblance" in which, to counteract negative social and sexual images of their womanhood, black women develop "the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually [shield] the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors" (Hine 912)? Are there ways in which the black women evangelists say one thing and mean another, as Hine has suggested? Judith Butler refers to Soshana Felman's observation that "the relation between speech and the body is a scandalous one. . . . [Felman] calls attention to the way in which

a speaking body signifies in ways that are not reducible to what such a body 'says'" (Butler Excitable 10). Thus, if the body "says" differently than speech, then how does the body or form of the text of the black women evangelists "say" differently than the contents of the same text? How does the text perform? What does it actually accomplish? Are the two outcomes the same? How do the evangelists write of their bodies? How do physical exhibition, stripping and selling the body, and castration become tropes of power as well as of subjugation and fear? For example, Zilpha Elaw likens herself to the "Ethopian eunuch," a castrated man, who, oddly, does not display any fearful psychological effects of castration, but goes on her way "rejoicing." How does Elaw's "inward man" present a unique mode of fearless resistance and power?

The manner in which the unrecognizable, unnatural, "unspeakable" texts of the evangelists become speakable is perhaps a gradual process of what Butler calls "resignification"¹⁷ or "social iterability" (Excitable 152)--so that what is unintelligible or illegitimate to nineteenth-century discourses of, say, true womanhood, becomes intelligible and legitimate to contemporary readers.

How, over time and across religious denomination, African American women spiritual autobiographers combine the variety of discourses available to them with African influences, and African American expressive strategies will be the subject of my investigation. The evangelists employ sermonizing structures, narrative style, tropes, orality, and what Karla Holloway terms "revision, remembrance, and recursion" (Moorings 13) in ways which differ from formal strategies used by their black male, white female, or black female "club" counterparts. In my examination of the

writings of Belinda and eight spiritual autobiographers-- Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Julia Foote, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth, Amanda Smith, and Virginia Broughton-- I explore the tensions in the texts between the manner in which each text carries the seeds of the mothers' gardens,¹⁶ and the manner in which it exhibits the traits of the "Northern-departed daughters." I investigate how, across a variety of times and denominations, tropes of the body, music, literacy, trial, and performance of the "unnatural" are reflected in self-conscious narrative performances of communal telling, sermonality, and song.

In Chapters One and Two I examine a select number of representative autobiographies by black men and white women, for later comparison with the black women evangelists' works. The writings by black men and white women which I have chosen derive mainly from the spiritual genre, but I have included some secular writings, because I consider it important to present as complete a portrait as possible of the milieu of discourses within which the black women evangelists operated: Frederick Douglass' Narrative, perhaps the most popular autobiography written by a nineteenth-century African American, provides rich material for comparative analysis. Douglass' secular narrative grew out of the genre of the spiritual autobiography, and critics such as Gates, Braxton and others, demonstrate how Douglass signifies upon and secularizes important spiritual moments in earlier religious texts. The question of why the black evangelist women cling to an "outdated" spiritual genre while more popular black writers, such as Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, were turning to the secular mode is an important one. What did the living of a deeply spiritual life and the writing of a spiritual text mean to these

women in terms of preserving an African American world view which valorised the immanent power of the divine?¹⁷

I have also used the spiritual autobiographies of Richard Allen, founder of the AME (African Methodist Episcopalian) Church; later AME Bishop Daniel Payne; and itinerant evangelist John Jea. These three texts represent "officially" accepted and published male spiritual works (Allen's and Payne's), and an "unofficial" work (Jea's) published at the author's expense respectively. I use Jea because I feel he, like some of the black women I examine, tended to be subversive in his text, and more inclined to use African forms. In this, he seems different from the majority of black male spiritual autobiographers, and I am interested in whether and how the tropes, strategies and types of discourse he uses differ from those used by the black evangelist women. The extensive work of William Andrews in To Tell a Free Story has proved invaluable in my examination of black male autobiographers. Andrews looks briefly at Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw, but the strength of his text lies in his study of the male writers.

I use the secular autobiography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the spiritual life-writings of Church of Galilee believer Harriet Livermore and Methodist Holiness preacher Phoebe Palmer, as well as the Shaker autobiography of Jane Blanchard as representative white women's texts. How do the tenets of the cult of true womanhood affect the white women's narratives as compared to the narratives of the black evangelist women? How do the conversational narrative strategies of white evangelist Palmer differ from those employed by Foote, Truth or Jackson? How do the use of music, and metaphors of the divine operate in the white and black

religious women's texts? How do descriptions of conversion differ in the white and black texts?

Chapters Three and Four deal with Belinda (Ife, 1784); and Jarena Lee (African Methodist Episcopalian, 1836) and Zilpha Elaw (white Methodist, 1846). In my Chapter Five study of Rebecca Cox Jackson (Shaker, 1830-64) I investigate how (mainly white) editorial processes change the conversion stories of black evangelist women such as Jackson, altering the very sense of who she is as an African American. I have used some of Jackson's manuscripts, as well as information about the editing process Harriet Jacobs underwent in the publication of her Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, to extrapolate and to tentatively suggest what the process might have been like for the other black women such as Sojourner Truth. Chapter Six deals with Truth (non-denominational, 1850); Chapters Seven and Eight examine Julia Foote (AME Zion, 1879); and Amanda Smith (AME, 1889), Elizabeth (non-denominational, 1889) and Virginia Broughton (Baptist, 1907) respectively. While I compare the works of these women with those by their black male and white female counterparts, using the framework I have delineated above, I also examine the texts against each other, over denomination and time.

My discussion of Zora Neale Hurston in Chapter Nine focuses on how Hurston operates as a connection between early black women evangelist writers and black women writing today. The mothers have laid the groundwork for several important themes and tropes still visible in the works of the daughters-- for example, the trope of the talking book; the image of the unnatural blues "bad" woman as performer and priestess; the vexed issue of the strong black woman's quest to be both individual and

member of her community (whatever community that may turn out to be); the black woman's body and text as site of contest; the black woman on trial.¹⁶ In Chapter Ten, I turn to the works of the daughters: Alice Walker's The Colour Purple, Toni Morrison's Paradise; Toni Cade Bambara's The Salt Eaters.

The gardens of the mothers were never completely abandoned. While critics have traced a line of development of black women's writing from Jarena Lee and one or two other evangelists, to Harriet Jacobs and the sentimental writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to Zora Neale Hurston in the Harlem Renaissance, the words and writings of the evangelists have remained largely forgotten, silenced. It is time to dig them up again, to see how the mothers kept the traditions of *their* mothers alive. As Alice Walker has written:

We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone.

(Walker Gardens 92)

The remainder of this text is a response to that admonition.

Endnotes

1. I have included Jackson's writings in my study, because, although they were unpublished until 1981, and could not have influenced the writings of any other black women, I suggest that the tropes, modes of discourse and themes found in her work are, nevertheless, those of a black woman signifying upon dominant ideas of her day. It is startling to see how her themes compare with those of her published sisters, each party writing, in this case, without knowledge of the other.

2. William Andrews ("Politics" 131) includes Broughton in his list of five women autobiographers writing from Reconstruction to 1920. According to Andrews' calculation, Broughton is the only female spiritual autobiographer to write between 1899 and 1920. Thus, although my study primarily concerns itself with nineteenth-century evangelists, I have included Broughton among them as a bridging writer between the earlier evangelical women and the twentieth-century novelists Hurston, Walker, Morrison and Bambara.

3. In 1789 Maria Stewart's Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart also appeared. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers classifies this work as "spiritual narrative," but it seems to me that, rather than a sustained autobiography in the sense that the other black women's works are, this text is primarily a compilation of the speeches and meditations of Stewart. For this reason, I have omitted the Meditations from my study.

4. In Alchemy of Race and Rights, Patricia Williams gives the following account of the "inexplicable" nervous breakdown of prominent Judge Maxine Thomas:

The world is full of Black women who have never really been heard from. Take Maxine Thomas, for example. According to one version, Los Angeles Municipal Court Judge Maxine Thomas' nervous breakdown was inexplicable. ("I thought Maxine was a lady of unlimited potential,' said Reginald Dunn, of the Los Angeles City Attorney's office.") She was as strong a Black woman as ever conjured-- a celebrated, savvy judge who presided over hundreds of mostly white male judges. Yet one day she just snapped and had to be carted from her chambers, helpless as a baby. ("Clerk Richard Haines found Thomas-- the first Black woman to head the Municipal Court and a role model for young Blacks in Los Angeles-- slumped in her leather chair. The 40-year-old judge's head was bowed, and she wept uncontrollably.")

(Williams 191-2)

Paula Giddings comments upon the similarities existing between the circumstances of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings and those of black women in the late nineteenth-century:

There is no question that, in some ways, the essential aspects of racism and sexism still affect us. This was evident in the statement "African-American Women in Defense of Ourselves," first appearing in the New York Times as a paid ad on November 17, and signed by 1,603 Black women, most of them scholars, in respect to the treatment of Anita Hill during the hearings. Insisting that the "malicious defamation of Professor Hill insulted all women of African-American descent," it concluded that "throughout U.S. history, Black women have been stereotyped as immoral, insatiable, perverse; the initiators in all sexual contacts-- abusive or otherwise. . . . as Anita Hill's experience demonstrates, Black women who speak of these matters are not likely to be believed. . . ." The words sound very much like those that led women to organize the NACW almost exactly a century ago, and in fact, the similar conditions that previously made us want to wrap ourselves in that protective skin have come back around with a vengeance.

("The Last Taboo" 457)

Finally, the 1988 case of Tawana Brawley involved a fifteen-year-old black girl, found feces-smearred and nearly naked in a garbage bag, who lapsed into silence as her story of physical abuse and sexual violation became a loudly contested public event. Adults who spoke on Tawana's behalf, her mother, lawyers, counsellors, were seriously doubted by the media as to the credibility of their motives and testimonies (see Maclean's July 4, 1988; Newsweek March 14, 1988; Time July 4, 1988; Time March 28, 1988; Time June 20, 1988). Karla Holloway writes: "Words like 'seemingly,' 'allegedly,' and 'contradictory' began to surround this child." Holloway observes that Tawana's traumatized lapse into silence was understandable, as the girl witnessed the "spectacle of what was happening around her. Speaking out is a dangerous practice for black women" (Holloway "The Body Politic" 489-90).

Black women have resisted reifying narratives about them in a history, both written and oral, fictional and autobiographical, as old as slavery itself in America. Writing about the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, bell hooks observes:

The Thomas hearings served notice to black feminist thinkers and our allies in struggle that we must be ever vigilant in our efforts to resist devaluation, that it is a mistake for us to think that we have "arrived," that our political efforts to transform society and to be seen as subjects and not objects have been realized. That struggle continues.

(Sisters of the Yam 3)

Indeed, black women's devaluation is entrenched in the narratives created about (rather than by) them. Whaneema Lubiano argues that hegemonic systems of power do not need to effect such devaluation of oppressed subjects "via conspirational agreement of arrangement"; rather, that devaluation continues because public and private institutions such as media, churches, schools, families, and civic organizations continuously

reiterate "particular narratives and not others." Such "consistently reinforced" narratives serve to reproduce what is constituted as reality in certain already predetermined ways (Lubiano 329). In this manner, Lubiano concludes, black women have been demonized as abnormal, problematic, inscribed within the contemporary narrative economy of either welfare queen or betraying black-lady overachiever-- both figures about which Daniel Moynihan warns us in The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report (Lubiano 333).

5. **Womanist** 1. From *womanish* Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *wilful* behaviour. . . .
 2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility. . . and women's strength Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. . . .

(Walker Gardens, xi)

6. The antecedents of fiction writers such as Jessie Fauset Harris or Nella Larsen seem different than those of a writer like Zora Neal Hurston. Claudia Tate argues that late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century sentimental texts--for example, Hopkins' Contending Forces (1900), Amelia Johnson's Clarence and Corinne (1890); Emma Dunham Kelley's Megda (1891)-- are preoccupied with marriage as the idealization of the formation of the family unit, and a sense of "middle-class propriety, civility, domesticity, and commodity consumption" (Tate 106). Such preoccupations, while they seem to undercut "the sanctioned preeminence of the discourse on interracial hostility," actually served to subvert popular (white) connotations of race and class, demonstrating in essence that blackness did not mean poverty or danger, by definition. As Tate concludes, nineteenth-century Victorian society viewed material comfort as an indication of a virtuous life. In such a context, then, "what seems to be black women writers' general preoccupation with fine clothing and expensive household articles becomes the semiotics of an emergent bourgeois-capitalism in which black people are full participants" (Tate 106-7).

Antebellum black women's texts, both fictional and nonfictional, had expressed the moral indignation black women felt at the "sexual and maternal" abuses they had suffered under slavery, an indignation which paralleled the outrage of black men denied the rights of American manhood. Thus, in the postbellum texts of black women, we find a privileging of "domestic ideality" which "centers a more equitable reconstruction of women's positions in their families and intraracial society." As such, these sentimental narratives by black women "construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct Victorian gender conventions in order to designate black female subjectivity as a most potent force in the advancement of the race" (Tate 107).

7. See Susan Willis, "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," in Black Literature and Literary Theory, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed. New York: Methuen, 1984. "Eruptions of funk" serve to disrupt an

"American (male) grammar of white mythology". The term "eruptions" is Toni Morrison's. It depicts what Hortense Spillers terms "figurations of the flesh," and what Baker himself calls "theory". It is "a powerful black figurative negotiation of a blackmothered past" (Baker 37).

8. Teresa Zackodnik suggests that writers such as Larsen, Hopkins, or Harper both "utilize and parody the very qualities designed to ensure the 'purity' of whiteness and womanhood" (iii). Through the use of "an African American tradition of parodic performance that played to and on white notions of 'blackness' and constructions of white identity," (iii) they "challenge" and "destabilize" strictly white-encoded racial identities with mulatto heroines who ultimately choose to "pass for white" (iv). However, as Baker points out, these writers-- in spite of what he terms their "provocative dancings at the very borders of social and sexual taboo" and their dreams of nonracist and "nonracial utopias" (Workings 36)-- cater in the form and content of their narratives, to a "white public opinion" with white sentimental sensibilities (see also Bruce 13). Such an audience, Baker argues, can "never be effectively *moved* to more than sentimental tolerance. And that very tolerance disappears if the mothers' southern texts are summoned figuratively to view" (Baker 36). I present the texts of the evangelist women as some of the mothers' texts which cater much less in form and/or content to white sentimental opinion -- and so fall out of material circulation as "unintelligible" texts in the largely white-hegemonic public reading domain.

9. Hawes cites an extensive summary of characteristics of enthusiastic-- or what he terms "manic"-- rhetoric from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century: 1) preoccupation with themes of socio-economic resentment; 2) use of socially "levelling" lists of hierarchies and catalogues; 3) excessive, often blasphemous wordplay; 4) the blending and thus the "levelling" of incongruous genres; 5) justification of symbolic transgression, especially in the context of lay preaching, as a prophetic behaviour; 6) imagery of self-fortification against persecution and martyrdom; 7) preoccupation with themes of praise and gratitude, often based on the Psalmic tradition; 8) excessive use of allusion and echo; 9) hyperbole; 10) extreme disjunctiveness (Hawes 10-11). In its critiques of hegemonic systems of power and stratification, enthusiastic discourse was almost always suppressed by social and religious institutions. Hawes' study is partly an examination of the ways in which the propagators of enthusiastic rhetoric have been pathologized by institutions in an attempt to (often physically) arrest and contain them.

10. We may wonder if the same circumstances which "influenced black [blues] women to pursue the itinerant life of "tent show and theater performer" (Harrison 58) also influenced the evangelist women. Harrison notes that famous blues singer Ida Cox, born in Knoxville Tennessee in 1889, started travelling with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels at the early age of fourteen-- a career which reflects a pattern characteristic of many classic blues singers-- "that is, early apprenticeship in the rough, tough life of the tent shows" (Harrison 61). The evangelists also led this kind of life, "performing" under tents in camp meetings. Poverty forced many black

women performers to the streets to find a living through music, even though the black community, in its classification of a "proper" life for young women, saw theatre, music and performance as sinful callings for "nice young ladies" (Harrison 63). In the case of the evangelists, many regarded them as lewd, greedy and self-serving, out to "pick up" men, or worse yet, as women who were lesbians. As Betty Overton observes in her study of fictional depictions of black women preachers, black literature presents a "half-view" of these women-- a view "characterized by an attitude that women do not belong in the pulpit and that they earn their suffering and problems by their daring to take on this role." The women are presented as caricatures of "the worst that is in religious ministry," becoming "normal" only after leaving that ministry (Overton 165). Overton examines novels by Claude Brown (Manchild in the Promised Land); Kristin Hunter (The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou); Langston Hughes (Tambourines to Glory); James Baldwin (The Amen Corner and Just Above my Head); Ann Shockley (Say Jesus and Come to Me) as works which "collectively present a rather negative picture of the black woman preacher" (158). My work will examine for the first time what black preacher women as a group in America had to say for *themselves*.

11. James Olney ("Value of Autobiography" 217-18) borrows this term from autobiographer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who portrays himself as unique and different from other men.

12. See Sander Gilman's article, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature". Gilman observes that the famous museum exhibition of the genitals of Sara Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus," demonstrates that whites' hypersexualized "perception of the prostitute in the late nineteenth century thus merged with the perception of the black the primitive was associated with unbridled sexuality" (229).

13. This theme has recently been exemplified in the circumstances surrounding the public recognition of Clarence Thomas as Supreme Court Justice, and the non-recognition of the voice of Anita Hill. Kimberle Crenshaw observes:

Ideology, seen in the form of the narrative tropes available for representing our experience, was a factor of social power to the extent that Anita Hill's inability to be heard outside the rhetorical structures within which cultural power has been organized hampered her ability to achieve recognition and support.

(Crenshaw 403)

The public's non-recognition of Hill, indeed, its defamation and (sexual) degradation of her, led a group of 1,603 professional African American women to submit a letter of protest to the New York Times, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the protest of nineteenth-century black women against *their* sexualization and degradation. Giddings observes:

Insisting that the "malicious defamation of Professor Hill insulted all

women of African-American descent," it concluded that "throughout U.S. history, Black women have been stereotyped as immoral, insatiable, perverse; the initiators in all sexual contact- abusive or otherwise. . . as Anita Hill's experience demonstrates, Black women who speak of these matters are not likely to be believed. . . ." The words sound very much like those that led women to organize the NACW almost exactly a century ago, and in fact, the similar conditions that previously made us want to wrap ourselves in that protective skin have come back around with a vengeance.

("Last Taboo" 457)

Thus, like Hill, like other black women who speak outside the bounds of the speakable, the narrativizable, their speech becomes discounted, and their very viability as subjects is "called into question. The consequences of such an irruption of the unspeakable may range from a sense that one is "falling apart" to the intervention of the state to secure criminal or psychiatric incarceration." (Butler Excitable 136)

14. As Butler argues,

One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects.

(Butler Excitable 5)

Recognizability-- or *nonrecognizability* as such-- is how the words of some come not to be heard at all, or to be altered to mean something else altogether.

15. Butler's "resignification" resembles Henry Louis Gates' "signifyin(g)", in that both speech acts seek not only to counter, but often to alter the meaning of a previously spoken speech act. Signifyin(g) differs from resignification in that signifyin(g) is a social and socially accepted act, with roots deeply embedded in African and African American communities. Not only that, but signifyin(g) is a game, a public performance in the fun-loving sense of the word, a chance to humorously demonstrate one's verbal prowess at the expense of another. However, Gates has also used signifyin(g) to refer to the loving exchanges which occur between black artists. In the case of black women writers, signifyin(g) becomes a transference of the seeds of the mothers' gardens, or a "saving of the text" (Hurston Their Eyes) for the late twentieth-century daughters. Thus, the "resignificatory" autobiographies of Truth (1850) and other black evangelist women are "signified" upon by Zora Neale Hurston, whose signification in Their Eyes is echoed by Alice Walker in The Color Purple and so on, until what was unintelligible has become intelligible.

16. A term coined by Walker in her text of a similar name. Houston Baker makes beautiful use of this metaphor in his Workings of the Spirit.

17. William McCain writes that African American religiosity reflects an "openness, a free-style and a closer relationship to life in which the sacred and secular come together to affirm God's wholeness [and] the unity of life. . . . Worship in the Black Church celebrates. . . the power to survive. It reflects a life-style of persons who live on the existential edge. . ." (3). Lincoln and Mamiya also note: "The core values of black culture like freedom, justice, equality, an African heritage, and racial parity. . . are raised to ultimate levels and legitimated by the black sacred cosmos. . . . The close relationship between the black sacred cosmos and black culture has often been missed by social analysts who impose sacred/secular distinctions too easily upon the phenomena of black culture" (7).

18. Trial by peers is, of course, a scene which often occurs in the life writings of white women evangelists also. For example, the autobiographies and/or biographical histories of Dame Julian of Norwich, seventeenth-century Jane Lead, eighteenth-century Shaker founder Ann Lee, or nineteenth-century Shaker Elizabeth Ashbridge all recount judiciary, familial or communal moments of trial by the evangelists at the hands of their peers. What I want to examine is how, in the nineteenth-century autobiographies, and in the novels of twentieth-century African American women, these moments of trial in the realm of the spirit are expanded and complicated by issues of race, history, culture and class as well as gender.

Chapter One/ The Brotherhood of Men

The black quest in letters for dignified personhood is a pervasive one. In the nineteenth-century autobiographies of AME Bishops Richard Allen and Daniel Payne, manhood is marked by politeness, education, gentility and male community and mentorship. In the 1845 secular autobiography of Frederick Douglass education and Euro-civility¹ are also the key to manhood. But Douglass' manhood is gained precisely at the moment in which he singlehandedly overcomes the physical subjugation he experiences at the hands of a sadistic slave driver, Covey. Douglass' manhood-- and his autobiography-- is characterized by a rather impolite, expressive and insolent recalcitrance, and a restless, pugnacious individualism. For Douglass, community is what keeps many men in slavery, since "thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends. The thought of leaving my friends. . . . was my tender point, and shook my decision more than all things else" (110). Like Douglass, John Jea (an itinerant minister writing his autobiography in 1811) first experiences a sense of his manhood in a moment of individual triumph, in which he stands alone before a tribunal of New York magistrates and miraculously demonstrates his new-found ability to read the word of God (115). For Jea, savage ignorance and hostility give way to a civilized resistance, which is nevertheless outspoken, expressive and aggressive in the manner of Douglass.

William Andrews writes that Richard Allen's 1833 autobiography is primarily a narrative of the founding history of the AME church. As

such, The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen To which is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America demonstrates not only the (white) male propensity toward individualism-- "moi, moi seul"-- but also, the triumph of the black *community* of believers in its struggle to establish an African Methodist church independent and separate from white Methodism. In Allen's autobiography, the powerless black petitioner, oppressed by racism in the white Methodist church, becomes the powerful institution man who creates his own place of worship for himself and others. It is certainly the story of the unique Allen, but more importantly it becomes the story of the new black Methodism (Andrews 68-9).

As representative of that Methodism, Allen manufactures an exemplary autobiographical self that is beyond reproach. His narrative, as orderly and staid as the man himself, comprises a chronological factual description of Allen's life, followed by a series of meditations and documents which he provides as a kind of substantiating evidence of the upstanding nature of the man/church him/itself.² Framed by discourses of American liberty, patriotism and the white Protestant work ethic-- all powerful markers of white male selfhood-- Allen's portrait of himself, the AME church and the blacks of Philadelphia, is virtually perfect-- white and black readers of this autobiography alike can only respect the veracity and virtue of this leader.

Andrews points out that Richard Allen's autobiographical tendency to present "facts" is the result of a suspicious white readership's demand that black narrators present their stories in a "truthful" and "objective" manner, supporting all statements with proper documentation and the

attestation of white sponsors as to the reliability of their narratives. Allen relates all the particulars of his birth, childhood and conversion in the first page of his text, providing us with very little of what Andrews calls the "expressive"-- that is, a sense of what it is the narrator actually feels. Like other early black "organization" men such as George White (Andrews 53), Allen offers the reader only the unemotional "facts" of his situation. Allen writes in much the same manner as White, who, in 1810, "keeps the reader so far outside the realm of the narrative consciousness that one feels almost as screened off from the private White as one does from [John] Marrant [1790] or [Albert] Gronniosaw [1774] in their dictated stories" (Andrews 55-6). Thus, as the impersonal, staid narrative of a respected representative of the black Methodist community, Allen's Life, Experience and Gospel Labors possesses none of the expressivity, lyricism, visionary-ness, or the sense of difference and doubt we find in the writings of many of his sister evangelists. In a highly formulaic rendition of his conversion, Allen writes:

[Around] twenty years of age. . . I was awakened and brought to see myself, poor, wretched and undone, and without the mercy of God must be lost. Shortly after, I obtained mercy through the blood of Christ, and was constrained to exhort my old companions to seek the Lord. I went rejoicing for several days and was happy in the Lord, in conversing with many old, experienced Christians. I was brought under doubts, and was tempted to believe I was deceived, and was constrained to seek the Lord afresh. I went with my head bowed down for. . . days. My sins were a heavy burden. I was tempted to believe there was no mercy for me. I cried to the Lord both night and day. One night I thought hell would be my portion. I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner, and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and, glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled. I cried, enough for me-- the Saviour died. Now my confidence was strengthened that the Lord, for Christ's sake, had heard my prayers and pardoned all my sins. I was constrained to go from house to house,

exhorting my old companions, and telling to all around what a dear Saviour I had found. I joined the Methodist Society. . . .

(Allen 15-16)

As Kathleen Swaim observes, in her description of Puritan spiritual narratives, the genre from which American autobiography arises, these life writings seek to align the experience of the individual with "the grids of conversion morphology." The stories express an "inner turmoil and deliverance from sin" in a manner which is "intense, confessional, and introspective," but they are also unoriginal, conforming to a distinct formula which does not admit details of "time, place and person." What we find is a rote rehearsal of the narrator's spiritual salvation, a testimony that the narrator has conformed to a certain communal pattern of belief and behaviour. The autobiographical act thus becomes an initiatory rite in which the newcomer professes his or her profound spiritual affinity with the other members of the "club" s/he stands poised to enter (Swaim 35).

Indeed, Allen's brief and perfunctory declaration of his conversion --which, as I have mentioned, occurs on the first page of the narrative (15)-- seems to act as the ticket which admits him to the club of Methodist believers, where his career as an unofficial travelling preacher begins. The young black man, who "received nothing from the [white] Methodist connection" (Allen 23), eventually joins forces with "three colored brethren" (24), Rev. Absalom Jones, William White and Dorus Ginnings, and from that point on, the narrative of "nous, nous ensemble" begins: "We felt ourselves much cramped; but my dear Lord was with us, and we believed, if it was his will, the work would go on, and that we would be able to succeed in building the house of the Lord" (Allen 24-5). The pronoun "we" replaces "I" almost completely thereafter, throughout the 90-

page autobiography, as Allen records the struggle of the fledgling black church to overcome the trials of racism both within the white Methodist church and in the city of Philadelphia in general. In a section of the autobiography entitled "A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Colored People During the Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793; and a Refutation of some Censures Thrown upon Them in Some Publications," Allen presents himself, along with Absalom Jones, as a spokesman for black people:

In consequence of a partial representation of the conduct of the [black] people, who were employed to nurse the sick in the calamitous state of the city of Philadelphia, we were solicited by a number of those who felt themselves injured thereby, and by the advice of several respectable citizens, to step forward and declare facts as they really were. . .

(Allen 48)

Later, Allen cautions blacks in his address "To the People of Color" to be on their most impeccable behaviour, since "much depends upon us for the help of our color." Indeed, laziness and idleness will provide "the enemies of freedom" with a "cause why we ought not to be free," and a reason to argue that "we are better in a state of servitude, and that giving us our liberty would be an injury to us" (73). What the "enemies of freedom" say about "us" seems (understandably) to be a central point of concern for Richard Allen. For Allen the performance of a free self-respecting black manhood must meet the standards of whites who sit in judgement of it. Indeed, the title page of his narrative carries a Biblical injunction for the reader to assess him, using nothing less than "perfection" as a yardstick: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.-- Ps. xxxvii, 37." Allen's narrative of "the perfect man" of peace is written only two years after the publication of black insurrectionist and

religious leader Nat Turner's Confessions in 1831. In that 60-person uprising in Southampton Virginia, 55 whites were killed. We can only wonder at the effect Allen's self-imposed standards of impeccable behaviour had upon the actual man; we will never know, since Allen never tells us. What he does tell us is that he was willing to work hard, relinquish grudges and love the very country of his enslavement with a fierce patriotic pride. Early in his narrative, Allen again reveals his concern with what white men say about him. Neighboring whites, observing that Allen's master "indulged us with the privilege" of attending bible meetings once every two weeks, comment that "Stokeley's Negroes would soon ruin him." In order to resist such accusations, Allen and his brother decide "that we would attend more faithfully to our master's business, so that it should not be said that religion made us worse servants." Indeed, the two men "work night and day to get the crops forward so that they should not be disappointed" (16). Allen is so concerned to disprove negative white expectations about "lazy" blacks that he sets highly unreasonable work demands for himself, placing them before his religious obligations:

We frequently went to meeting on every other Thursday; but if we were likely to be backward with our crops we would refrain from going to meeting. When our master found we were making no provision to go to meeting, he would frequently ask us if it was not our meeting day, and if we were not going. We would frequently tell him: "No, sir, we would rather stay at home and get our work done." He would tell us: "Boys, I would rather you would go to your meeting; if I am not good myself, I like to see you striving yourselves to be good." Our reply would be: "Thank you, sir, but we would rather stay and get our crops forward."

(16-17)

The end result of Allen's hard work is that: "our master said he was convinced that religion made slaves better and not worse, and often boasted of his slaves for their honesty and industry" (17). Indeed, Allen

is no Nat Turner. Religious vision does not transform him into a black upstart. As Hodges observes: "few slave masters welcomed black evangelists with messages of freedom and Christian baptism" (25). Allen, unlike Turner, is a peace-loving, hard-working man. If he is intent upon obtaining his freedom, he will do so by non-violent, respectful, "cheerful" (Allen 31, 66), and industrious means only. And, having obtained it, he never stops working; he works as a woodcutter, a bricklayer, and finally as a laborer on the side of the Americans in their war against Britain: "I was [after the brickyard] employed in driving of wagon [sic] in time of the Continental war, in drawing salt from Rehoboth, Sussex County, in Delaware. I had my regular stops and preaching places on the road" (19). Allen always supplements his preaching as a Methodist with manual labour at which he works hard to procure a living: "My usual method was, when I would get bare of clothes, to stop travelling and go to work, so that no man could say I was chargeable to the connection. My hands administered to my necessities" (23). External systems of power and control become relentless internalized censors for Allen; rather than question a system which keeps him working for his sustenance while white ministers are supported by the white Methodist church, Allen is more concerned about appearing industrious so that "no man could" lay the charge he dreads most against him-- that of lazy, idle, Negrohood.

An industrious worker and true patriot, Allen-- unlike Frederick Douglass-- never criticises the fact that black men could not be soldiers in the Continental war. Nor does he make any references to the conditions of racism which a black man would have encountered upon entrance to the "free" workplace. "Duty" and "usefulness" to one's country is of the

utmost importance; in his description of the contagious plague which beset Philadelphia in 1793, Allen recounts the response of the black people:

Sensible that it was our duty to do all the good we could to our suffering fellow mortals, we set out to see where we could be useful The Lord was pleased to strengthen us and remove all fear from us, and disposed our hearts to be as useful as possible.

(49)

In freedom and slavery, patience, forgiveness and hard work are the necessary characteristics blacks must cultivate. He assures other blacks that in serving God, slaves will begin to "feel an affectionate regard towards your masters and mistresses, so called." Such affection will be noticed, and will "tend to promote your liberty" if one's masters are of the "feeling" sort; otherwise, "you will [nevertheless] have the favor and love of God." He advises freed blacks to "manifest your gratitude" toward "compassionate masters who have set you free," and to "let no rancour . . . lodge in your breast for any bad treatment you may have received from any" (72-3).³

Interestingly, it is only in presenting the facts of how he bought himself from his master that Allen presents any criticism at all of that master:

[After some time, on religious grounds, my Master] could not be satisfied to hold slaves, believing it to be wrong. And after that he proposed to me and my brother buying our times, to pay him 60 l. gold and silver, or \$2000, Continental money, which we complied with in the year 17--.

We left our master's house, and I may truly say it was like leaving our father's house; for he was a kind, affectionate and tender-hearted master, and told us to make his house our home when were out of a place or sick.

(17-18)

In a wonderful sleight of hand, the truthful, respectful and uncritical Allen manages to expose the hypocrisy of a master who cannot hold slaves on

religious principle, but has no trouble making those slaves pay large sums for their freedom.

Nevertheless, Allen asserts on several occasions that this very same master was "a father" to him: "He was more like a father to his slaves than anything else. He was a very tender, humane man" (16). On other occasions, Allen uses the same metaphor to describe other men who help the young convert Allen on his way: Benjamin Abbott, a preacher who takes Allen in "was a friend and father to me. I was sorry when I had to leave West Jersey, knowing I had to leave a father" (19); Jonathan Bunn and his wife "were a father and mother of Israel"; and Rev. Richard Whatcoat is also described as "a father in Israel. In his advice he was fatherly and friendly." Nurtured by a series of kindly "fathers," Allen is finally able to join with his "three colored brethren that united with me" to form the beginnings of the collective "we" which informs the rest of the autobiography. This "we" is represented by the group of black "brethren" who challenge white religious leadership; in the narratives of black women evangelists, it is this very same blackmale "we" which the women in turn question.

If Allen's 1833 autobiography is excruciatingly conscious of itself as a text written under the scrutiny of white men, a text painfully attentive to its own conformity, orderliness, chronology, objectivity and staidness, then I would suggest that AME Bishop Daniel Payne's Recollections of Seventy Years, written fifty-five years later, falls into a category of *hyper-consciousness* regarding itself. Payne may also be classified as an "institution man" of weighty importance-- a fact he signals in the frontespiece of his autobiography where he inscribes himself "Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, D.D., L.L.D., Senior Bishop of the African Methodist

Episcopal Church." Yet, even more intensely than Allen, he desires to present to whites the face of a thoroughly Europeanized black man, and to claim for himself a position of importance within a collectivity of refined, educated and civil men. For Allen in 1833 that collectivity is black; Payne in a postbellum America where blacks increasingly sought and gained bourgeois status, envisions himself as part of a historical collectivity of exemplary black *and* white men. Payne's Recollections creates a veritable gallery of male portraits-- a family of "nous, nous ensemble" which Payne begins to construct immediately after his Chapter One description of his biological family. Chapter Two begins with a list of the black men who formed the Minors' Moralists Society, the institution under whose tutelage Payne comes as a fatherless boy of eight: "As early as 1803 the Minors' Moralists Society was established in the city of Charleston by James Mitchell, Joseph Humphries, William Cooper, Carlos Huger, Thomas S. Bonneau, William Clark, and Richard Holloway-- all free colored men" (14). The influence of these men on Payne is invaluable. After reading a tract written by a male ancestor of the Hugers, a Minister to the court of Belgium, Payne develops "a great desire to learn the French language." Payne is schooled by Thomas S. Bonneau, and apprenticed as a carpenter to James Holloway, eldest son of Richard Holloway. This list of male mentors is extended to include the names of great white men the boy Payne encounters in books; a biography of the Reverend John Brown, a Scotsman, "became the turning-point of my life; for, after reading it, I came to the conclusion to try and be what he was." Reading all the books "within my reach," he also becomes enamoured of "the 'Scottish Chiefs.' Wallace and Bruce became my ideal great men" (15). Payne is intensely

conscious of himself as part of a male lineage. Eventually, he chooses a career as an educator over a career as a warrior in the style of Wallace and Bruce. It is education which gains him admittance to the (white) male world, and his extensive descriptions of his intellectual pursuits are in the American philosophical and naturalistic tradition of Emerson or Thoreau. He begins to teach himself geography, map-drawing, grammar, composition, mathematics, chemistry, natural philosophy, descriptive astronomy, Greek, botany, and zoology, and proudly describes his visit to the house of "the most distinguished naturalist in South Carolina" where he is treated with the respect which would be accorded to a white man:

[Dr. Bachman] took me into his parlor and introduced me to his wife and daughters as "the young philosopher." There I sat and conversed with his family as freely as though all were of the same color and equal rank; and *by my request* his daughter skillfully performed several pieces upon the piano. [my emphasis]

(24)

In this world of (white) men, then, Payne sees himself momentarily as an equal, a man whose sense of power and agency is respected by other men.

It is in this visit to the house of Dr. Bachman, and in the lengthy poem which Payne writes in the following chapter that we see any glimpse whatever of male sexual desire on the part of Payne. In the parlor of Dr. Bachman, Payne is confronted by Bachman's daughter. The scene in which the young (white) woman plays the piano for Payne at his request is followed by a curious passage:

A remark of [Bachman's] at that visit has occurred to me many times through life. There was upon the center-table, protected by a large glass globe, an artificial tree bearing a collection of beautifully-mounted birds. My attention was drawn to them, and I expressed myself to the effect that he had about him every thing to make his home pleasant. His reply was substantially this: "Yes; I feel it my duty to throw around my home every possible

attraction for my daughters, so that they may never have occasion to seek elsewhere for forbidden pleasures."

(24-5)

What is unmentioned is of interest here-- the silent dynamics between the paternal (white) naturalist who entertains his daughters with "forbidden pleasures" (exotic birds, young black men) in carefully controlled and monitored situations over which he presides; his (white) daughter who entertains the young (black) male visitor at that visitor's request; and Payne, so obviously impressed with himself and his situation as (black) guest in the (white) house, entertained by the (white) girl. It is Bachman's remark and the power it assumes in the mind of Payne, occurring to him over and over again, which alerts us to the irony that Payne as aspirant to young (white) male status, situates himself at the scene of "forbidden pleasures," frustrated youthful desire, where he (himself "domesticated" by Bachman and no longer sexually threatening to the white household) may only look at, but not touch the (white) woman. Like the glass which protects/imprisons the birds, sexual (and Southern racial) codes present an unspoken and unacknowledged barrier for Payne-- he assumes the role of the young (white) suitor to his teacher's daughter, but he can go only so far. Payne's obvious pleasure at being entertained as a young man of promise by this older (white) man and his daughter is heightened by unspoken frustration, the barring of the (black) son by the (white) father from the object of the young (black) man's desire. (If this sexual interaction remains unelaborated, then the racial element of the interaction is doubly suppressed-- although its silence speaks more loudly than any words could).

Payne's youthful desire, then, is for (white) erudition, and for the

rewards of (white) male intellectual prowess, recognition by the (white) father, and the winning of the (white) woman. Later, sexual desire transfers itself wholly to Payne's mission as a man of education in the AME church. We see this transference nowhere more clearly exemplified than in his poem "The Mournful Lute, or the Preceptor's Farewell" which he writes when he discovers that racist laws forbid him, as a black man, to teach in Charleston. For Payne, knowledge and education are figured in the classical mode as a (white) woman: virtue is "fair" (30), and he, Payne, situates himself as the educational leader of black children-- a leader who must "Minerva's field explore" and "Spread open wide fair nature's roseate door" (31). The poem bursts with a scarcely-concealed sensuality, which finds its "climax" (32) in "proud science. . . where good John Locke or Newton blooms" (32). Payne urges his students:

Before you nature spreads her blooming fields;
 On verdant breast her fragrant produce yields.
 Go seek her lilies, tulips, roseate sweets
 When morning light her swelling bosom greets.

(32)

In the closing lines of the poem, sexual desire has been transformed into a desire for "usefulness" (as in the case of his precursor Allen)-- "A useful life by sacred wisdom crowned,/ Is all I ask, let weal or woe abound!" (34). From this point onward, Payne's male sexual desire is replaced by an equally intense desire to present to young black boys an exemplary text designed to stimulate them to join the ranks of "nous ensemble"-- men of intellectual and spiritual accomplishment. His autobiography ends:

But what will be the use of these recollections of men and things;
 what of these reflections on them if they will not awaken some
 slumbering boy; if they fail to excite the latent faculties of a

sportive lad; if they be not effective in stimulating the energies of some youth, who, having strong, pure, good blood flowing from a large, broad heart through his entire body, is by nature fitted to accomplish good work for God in heaven and good things for man on earth? O youthful reader, hear me! The spirit of Rev. John Brown, of Haddington, Scotland, aroused my soul to a life of usefulness. Shall not my soul start thee on a career of study and usefulness that shall be pleasing to thy Creator, and that will bring blessings to mankind?

For a useful life by holy wisdom crowned,
Is all I ask, let weal or woe abound.

(335)

The final lines of Payne's early poem are also the final lines of his entire text-- a narrative return to the pivotal moment in which the untamed and sexually passionate (black) boy becomes the useful man, in a long line of men described throughout the Recollections, including (to name only a few) Rev. John Brown, Fredrick Douglass, John Wesley, George Washington, Thomas Beckett, President Lincoln, Dr. Frederick J. Jobson (266-7), Gerrit Smith (70-1) and James Forten (51).

In Payne's narrative, men help other men. Payne relates a story in which he, as a young aspirant to the church, bears a letter of introduction to Rev. Peter Williams, a black Protestant Episcopal clergyman. While Payne is visiting Williams, a "lad of dark complexion" enters the parlor and asks for Williams' aid in obtaining an education. Williams hands the boy ten dollars, and following his example, young Payne donates two Spanish silver dollars. Later, Payne writes, he had the pleasure of observing the young boy as a man in the pulpit: "As he preached I listened to him with delight, and thanked God with joy unspeakable that he had enabled me to contribute my small mite to the development of such a mind. . . ." (43). In the chain of male mentorship, Payne becomes another Peter Williams: "[Williams] loved to see talented young men educating themselves, and

substantially aided more than one in his efforts. Above all he valued an educated ministry. He was the friend of my youth" (46). Thus, fathers assist sons in the pursuit of civilized and educated black manhood.

As I have suggested, black manhood strives to approximate white manhood, and throughout the text in his presentations of male exempla, Payne frequently confounds distinctions between the two. His portrayals of exemplary men include at least as many white as black personages, and we are sometimes uncertain of the race of the men being described. In his discussion of his own family lineage, he traces his paternal ancestry back to white men. But the circumstances surrounding the point at which miscegenation occurred are obfuscated. We deduce that Payne's father was black, since he was born of "free parents," kidnapped as a boy and sold into slavery, from which he purchased himself when he reached manhood, for one thousand dollars. We also deduce that one of the "free parents" of Payne's father was a white man:

[My father's] father, I am informed, was one of six brothers who served in the Revolution. Their father was an Englishman by the name of Paine. In the early immigration from England to Massachusetts two of the brothers arrived on the shores of New England. One remained in Massachusetts; the other concluded to go and join the colonists at Jamestown, Va. But before parting they agreed to change the letter "i" to "y" in the name of the one who had resolved to identify his fate with that of the Virginia colonists, in order that his descendants might be identified. Thus our family name became Payne.

(12)

Payne's ready identification with the Southern white Paynes ("our family") leaves certain questions unanswered; was the white Virginian Payne a slave-holder? Who was the free (nameless) black woman with whom he fathered a child (Daniel's father) in the late 1700s? What was the nature of their relationship? It is at this early point in the narrative that Payne

situates himself in the tradition of America's (white) founding fathers, confounding the color line, and at various other points in the text summoning up white America's history (complete with its ruthless oppression of Indigenous peoples) as one blacks as "civilized men and devout Christians" should also be proud of:

We visited the shores of Plymouth the following day. There is nothing striking, nothing bold, nothing grand; but what a grand history has been evolved out of the landing of the forty-one men with their families who stepped upon that modest rock in 1620! . . . What a vast empire of free-men has been constructed from that little colony! Out of the wild wilderness-- the habitation of nomadic savages-- at their very landing-place has sprung up a forest of flourishing villages, towns, and cities, the abode of civilized men and devout Christians; and this little band has multiplied, spread, and received accessions until now we count them by the millions-- at the very least 60,000,000-- made up of all the races descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

(246-7)

Thus, Payne's portrayal of "nous ensemble" includes both white and black men, in an American family which boasts a European ancestry. However, exempla of historical fathers are always white men-- for example Thomas Beckett, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, John Wesley. As in the case of Payne himself, it is the *white* father who lends to black men a sense of cultivation and legitimacy. In his quest for Euro-civility and education, Payne refers to his black predecessor Richard Allen, as well as Allen's black "coadjutors" as "illiterate men" (Payne 220).

The Preface to Payne's text, written by his compiler, promises, in a strictly enumerated list, that the purpose of the autobiography is:

1. To give accurately the salient points. . .
2. To weave in as far as possible historical *data*. . .
3. To choose such material as will best exhibit his character. . . so that such an example may prove an incentive to the children and youth.

4. To preserve intact, as nearly as possible, his own words, keeping the chronological order.

(3)

Payne's *Algeresque*⁴ text exhibits his intense reverence for the systematic and orderly (6), the "classical" (326), the "civilized" (326), the "scientific" and "philosophic" (278), the clearly illustrative (216, 223, 294, 310), the "concise, lucid and comprehensive" (283). The formal language of the text demonstrates Payne's familiarity with contemporary literature-- many of his passages are written in the manner of a travelogue, in a romantic mode which speaks of the "picturesque" (243-4), the "verdant" (103) and the "sublime" (238, 249, 174, 279). On several occasions, he glibly quotes passages in French, or refers to French texts: "It was my fortune to meet at this time the Minister from Hayti to the court of France, Louis Salomon, whom I found not only *un homme grand*, but, as I have been told, *un grand homme*" (197). Further describing his travels in France, he informs his reader not only of his anthropological and ethnological interests, but of his connections with established (white) men in the discipline-- a discipline, we might observe, which has been notorious, historically, for its reification and "othering" of non-European cultures: "One of my first calls was upon Professor Quatrefages. . . . He gave me his last ethnological work-- 'L'Espèce Humaine'. . . . I was pleased to receive it, as I had been paying much attention to another work of his for many years-- 'Rapport sur les Progrès de l'Anthropologie'" (271). In a footnote to this passage, he adds: "I am now engaged in reading another work of this great anthropologist entitled 'Les Polynesiens et leurs Migrations,' which is equally instructive."

Payne's hieratic narrative demonstrates little use of the sermonic (236-37), the rhetorical, the musical or the expressive, as do the texts of John Jea and many of the black women evangelists who retain such oral forms. His use of the sermonic mode is limited to one passage, in which, taking a text (Psalm 48) and expounding upon it, he argues for the use of instrumental music in the church: "If it be right to call upon all the works of God to praise him, why not call upon all the works of men to praise him. . . . The instruments are the product of man's genius and skill. Why not use the sounds of these instruments to praise the creator?" (237). Interestingly, while he is an advocate of instrumental music in the Church, Payne does not employ any form of music or musicality in his autobiographical text. Where the narratives of many of the black women evangelists are full of references to and uses of shouting and song, Payne decries the "disgusting," "disgraceful," "heathenish" and "ridiculous" use of shouts ("cornfield ditties") by the more "ignorant" (253), lazy and dissipated members of the church. Indeed, his long argument against this "incurable religious disease" and the "grossly immoral" preachers who perpetuate it presents the attitudes which many foremost black male leaders held toward preachers such as the black evangelist women, who retained African forms of worship:

[I]t is with me a question whether it would not be better to let such people go out of the Church than remain in it to perpetuate their evil practice and thus do two things: disgrace the Christian name and corrupt others. . . . How needful it is to have an intelligent ministry to teach these people who hold to this ignorant mode of worship the true method of serving God. . . . The time is at hand when the ministry of the A.M.E. Church must drive out this heathenish mode of worship or drive out all the intelligence, refinement, and practical Christians who may be in her bosom.

(255-57)

Rarely does Payne employ the expressive in his writing; his exemplary narrative teaches, illustrates and reports, often reading like a historical treatise of the AME Church, or a travelogue to Europe as he describes his excursions there to try and raise funds for black missionary work in America.⁵ At other times, his text becomes a personal resume of "colored" (male) Associations organized, books and articles written and published, even of manual labour expended: "The Society being too poor to put seats in the basement, I laid aside my books, bought a jack-plane, smoothing-plane, saw, hammer, rule, etc.; threw off my coat, and, the Society furnishing the lumber, in a few weeks I fully seated the basement of Israel Church" (75).

Like Richard Allen's account, Payne's description of his conversion is strictly formulaic, and without great emotion:

. . . I have felt the spirit of God moving my childish heart. When I was only eight years old such was the effect of a sermon upon my young heart that I went home crying through the streets, and sought the garden and prayed. After my mother's death I was often led by the Spirit to go to the garret to bend the knee and look up into heaven, beseeching the Lord to make me a good boy. . . . My conversion took place in my eighteenth year. . . . Here I . . . gave [God] my *whole heart*, and instantly felt that peace which passeth all understanding and that joy which is unspeakable. . . .

(16-17)

Payne's Recollections veer away from subversive or intensely emotional expressive passages on the part of the author. His expressivity seems controlled and non-threatening: his trust in God to end slavery puts out the "burning fire" in his soul; rather than resist the efforts of a white conductor to remove him from a train, Payne complies, and is ultimately silent; the language he uses to relate his anguish at failing to fulfil an

engagement is strangely passive-- "disappoint[ed]," "nervous," "tortured" (292).

Education is for Payne the difference between white and black Methodism; while English and American Methodism planned and executed "in behalf of education," the benighted founders of African Methodism, through no fault of their own, had not "a trace of a thought in their minds about a school of learning" (220). Education precedes the desire to establish schools, argues Payne, and so black men must seek to be educated. Payne continually measures the progress of the black man against that of the white. Duplicating the traditional equation of literacy and Christianity in the texts of black male autobiographers, Payne suggests that not only education, but also an attentiveness to the Bible is the reason for the progress of Europeans and the ignorance of Africans:

I showed them how England had become great by habitually making her people read the Scriptures. . . and how the colored race, who had been oppressed for centuries through ignorance and superstition, might become intelligent, Christian, and powerful through the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the word of God.

(253)

Thus, Payne's text becomes an exemplary demonstration of a black man's ability to Europeanize himself through education and hard work.

The Life, History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher was published by the author in England in 1811. While it shares the strong work ethic of Allen, Payne and Douglass,⁶ it exhibits little of Allen's and Payne's sense of American patriotism, narrative continuity, objectivity, or emotional distantiation. Jea, a travelling independent preacher, always works to provide himself an income: "During the time I was pouring out my supplications and prayers unto the Lord, my hands

were employed, labouring for the bread that perisheth. . ." (112); or as he later writes: "I had engaged myself on board of the. . . ship, as cook, for seventeen Spanish dollars per month, in order that I should not be burdensome to the church of God; and this was the way I acted whenever I travelled; for as St. Paul saith, '*I would rather labour with my hands than be burdensome to the church*'" (146). However, Jea's similarity to Payne and Allen ends here. He is no staunch patriot in the manner of these black men who go to great lengths to demonstrate their loyalty to the "vast empire of freemen" (Payne 247). Jea, returning to America from England, is captured by the French as a prisoner of war. In a decidedly *unAmerican* passage, his powerful political feelings preempt his previously demonstrated work ethic-- he refuses to work for the French and the slave-holding Americans, demonstrating through his passive resistance, his allegiance to Africa and to Britain instead.⁷ In 1811, when British-American hostilities are high, such a declaration of allegiance borders on the mutinous:

. . . we were sent on board of a French corvette, under American colours, to go and fight against the English, but twenty, out of two hundred that were sent on board, would not enlist under the banner of the tyrants of this world; for far be it from *me* ever to fight against Old England. . . . They then took me before the council and the head minister of the Americans, to examine me. They asked me which I liked to do, to go back to the ship, or to be marched to Cambria. I told them they might send me on board of the vessel, if they liked; but if they did I was determined not to do any work, for I would rather suffer any thing than fight or kill any one. . . . The head minister then asked me what I was at, that I would not fight for my country. I told him that I was not an American, but that I was a poor black African, *a preacher of the gospel*.

(155)

Jea's narrative is little concerned with American patriotism, order, or the

emotionally staid. Perhaps this is why, unlike Allen and Payne whose texts were published by established and relatively conservative American institutions-- a white press (Martin and Boden), and the AME church press respectively-- Jea was forced to finance the printing of his autobiography himself, in England. In this self-publication he resembles all but the last two (and also the two most bourgeois-aspiring) of the nine female evangelists (Amanda Smith 1889, and Virginia Broughton 1907).

Jea's narrative text continuously channels itself into exhaustive sermonic biblical quotations, preachments and song. Where Payne's 335-page narrative is marked by three brief song excerpts (84 & 255)-- two of them negative exempla of "cornfield ditties" (255)--, and Allen's 89-page Life contains two hymns (76 & 35), Jea's 70-page Life comprises at least eight song quotations. While he does not document or use shouting⁶ in his narrative, Jea refers to the music he does quote as "the language of my heart" (102 & 129), or the manner in which he "spoke in the name of Jesus" (150). Three of these quotations are long hymns through which Jea transforms his literal travels into a metaphorical journey, as in the following instance:

After I had been at Boston three months and a half, I was constrained by the Spirit of God, to take a journey into a foreign country; so I took my leave from the people at Boston, who were sorry to part with me, so we parted with each other in body, but not in mind; and sung the following hymn:

We part in body; not in mind;
Our minds continue one;
And each to each in Jesus join'd,
We hand in hand go on.

(144-5)

The hymn continues for another twelve stanzas.

Not only music, but the language of the Bible disrupts his narrative

for pages at a time (we often forget what incident prompted the outpouring, and must turn back the pages of the text in order to maintain the narrative connections), as though he is possessed by God-- a speaker of tongues, God's mouthpiece, in a kind of monologic discourse of the soul. Indeed, Hodges observes that unlike white autobiographies of that time, the narratives of Jea and George White (another black preacher) "read like transcriptions of camp meeting sermons." Both narratives become "oral as well as written documents [which] help trace the elusive transition between oral and written culture" (9). For example, after his conversion, Jea thanks God rather than his master for his food, thus incurring the wrath of his master. I quote the passage at length in order to demonstrate its sermonic quality:

. . . for I was led, guided, and directed by the Spirit, who taught me all things which are of God, and opened them unto my understanding. Thus I could join with John in the Revelations, saying, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" Rev. iv. 9. For I then viewed all the things upon the earth as coming from God. . . He also made hell for the devil and his angels; and when I took a survey of all these things, I thought "*I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne. . . .*" Rev. v. 12, to the end. . . . Seeing then the greatness, power, and goodness, of God, how thankful ought we to be. . . . but, on the contrary, how many do we see walking contrary to God's will and commands; swearing, cursing and abusing the holy name of God. . . . How often do we hear our fellow-creatures swear in a most dreadful manner. . . .The time is drawing nigh when we must all appear at the bar of God, to give an account of the deeds done in the body O impenitent sinner! consider the uncertainty of time, and that "*Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation*". . . .

(102-3)

This long aside, in which Jea at times speaks in his own voice, and at other times speaks in the voice of the Bible, continues for another two pages. Jea's narrative is full of such sermonic sequences. Out of these

sequences emerges the orality of his text; the written language he uses to persuade the reader is the very same language he has used in the past in his spoken sermons: "Thus I spoke to the ministers. . ." (153) he writes, after another long sermonic passage arguing salvation by grace rather than by predestination; or, after urging his "[d]ear reader" to "confess unto God our sins and our wickedness, and return and repent of our iniquities" he concludes: "This is the way I spoke to the people when I arrived at Liverpool, and they gladly received me as a brother in Christ, and believed the exhortation which I gave them" (140).

Rather than a hieratic, staid narrative, such as that presented by institution men Allen and Payne, Jea's sermonic autobiography constructs the portrait of a "true religious independent" (Hodges 18) who travels America, Europe, and the East and West Indies as an itinerant preacher, affiliated with no particular Christian denomination. It is perhaps this freedom which enables him to speak out against slavery with a bold, graphic emotionality which is absent in the later works of Allen and Payne. As I have mentioned, William Andrews observes that expressivity does not often arise in black men's autobiographies until later in the nineteenth century. But in Jea's 1811 work, we see such expressivity in no uncertain terms. This is not to say that Allen and Payne do not also condemn the institution of slave-owning, or the racism they encounter outside of the AME church; but as I have pointed out, their condemnations are always polite and submissive, and their threats and/or anger indirect.⁹

In contrast to Allen and Payne, Jea demonstrates the "personated passion" (Andrews III) we also see in Douglass' 1845 narrative. For example, where the emotionally inexpressive Allen is careful to speak

highly, and offer only veiled criticism of his less-than-perfect master, Jea asserts in the first lines of his narrative: "At two years and a half old, I and my father, mother, brothers, and sisters, were stolen, and conveyed to North America. . . . the man who purchased us was very cruel, and used us in a manner, almost too shocking to relate. . . ." (Jea 89). Jea goes on to describe in horrific detail the treatment he and the other slaves receive on a plantation where "we esteemed ourselves better used than many of our neighbors" (89): "The horses. . . enjoy[ed] greater privileges than we did. We dared not murmur, for if we did were corrected with a weapon an inch and-a-half thick, and that without mercy, striking us in the most tender parts. . . ." Complaining results in tying and flogging "in a manner too dreadful to behold"; often the slaves are shot or bludgeoned to death. And "we were obliged to thank him for the punishment he had been inflicting on us, quoting that Scripture which saith, 'Bless the rod, and him that hath appointed it'" (89-90). Later, Jea describes the hatred he feels for his persecutors. In 1811, he is much more vocal about his animosity than Allen is in 1833, or Payne in 1888. Like Frederick Douglass, Jea verbally and physically resists his master, and describes that resistance in a language of violence. Indeed, for Jea, even after his conversion, tropes of violence pervade his narrative. His battle with *his* master becomes a spiritual one. Before his conversion, the "savage" Jea silently questions, but does not seem to possess the mental and emotional fortitude to openly challenge his owner's claims that "our masters were our gods" (90). But after conversion, the powerful new Jea engages in a spiritual wrestling match with his master and wins. It would seem that while Douglass' manhood resides in the handling of his fists to physically

resist his oppressor, Jea's manhood here comes out of his ability, as triumphant convert, to handle Biblical references at will in order to win at wars of rhetoric with white men:

. . . when [the master] gave me any refreshment, I acknowledged that it came from the immediate hand of God, and rendered unto him humble and hearty thanks. . . which provoked my master greatly, for his desire was that I should render him thanks. . . For I then viewed all the things upon the earth as coming from God, and I asked my master where the earth came from; from God or man, and who had made it. He answered, that God made it. Then said I unto him, if God made the earth, he made the things on the earth, and the things in the earth, and the waters under the earth, Exodus xx.4. . . . When I took view of the smallest insect, it showed me, that none but the Almighty could make them, I therefore asked my master who made the insects. He answered, that they came forth out of the ground, but I said unto him, that if God made the ground, surely he made the insects also; for *"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."* John i.4.

(102-3)

His sermonic passages are directed specifically at white readers; he enjoins them to "consider the great obligations you are under," by dint of their great fortune to be born in Britain, a "land of freedom" abounding with opportunities to know God. However, attendant upon this blessing is God's expectation of much in return: "unless you improve your advantages, you had better be a slave in any dark part of the world, than a neglecter of the gospel in this highly favoured land. . . ." (93). Jea's text abounds with the threats of violence God will visit upon such sinners. Disobedience of the commandments will result in the infliction of "'terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart. . ..'" A sword will "'avenge the quarrel of my covenant"; sinners will eat the flesh of their sons; and God will "'destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of

my idols, and my soul shall abhor you'" (138-9). Jea also uses the militaristic in his oratory on the power of death: "It is possible to escape the edge of the sword-- to close the lions' mouths-- to quench the fiery darts;-- but when death shoots its poisoned arrows-- . . . it is altogether impossible to secure ourselves, to guard ourselves from its merciless fury" (106). Jea extends this metaphor of death as marauding plunderer for several paragraphs. In another passage, God strikes a blasphemous sailor down with a mortal weapon, the "DART OF DEATH" (138). Daniel Payne, the only male writer I have examined who did not experience slavery, merely considers the option of violence-- in considering a future for himself, the young Payne looks to warriors such as William Wallace as heroes and role models, but in a dream, he is revolted by killing and carnage, and subsequently chooses consciously to be a man of education rather than war. As a young male, he too must grapple with violence as one of his options for manhood. Jea himself describes his preaching as "alarm[ing]" injunctions meant to frighten sinners into conversion to God (156). Interestingly, this language of violence is also expressed in the autobiography of the mild-mannered Allen, to demonstrate the power of God to convert sinners. Through the use of militaristic tropes such as "slain of the Lord" (Allen 21) and "cut to the heart" (Allen 20), Allen presents God as the head of an army of (albeit, polite) soldiers for Christ. Indeed, God is likened to a soldier in a "proverb" cited by Allen: "God and a soldier all men do adore/ In time of war and not before;/ When the war is over, and all things righted,/ God is forgotten, and the soldier slighted" (65).

But institution men Payne and Allen, in their contemplations of

violence, come nowhere close to Jea, whose autobiographical passages seem to reflect the hardship which he experiences in his own existence. Perhaps this difference is attributable to class distinctions-- where Allen and Payne become men of a bourgeois class, Jea (like most of the black female evangelists) remains forever the itinerant, existing outside of established church and social structures. As a slave, Jea is cruelly treated by his master; his shipmates physically and emotionally intimidate him; his first wife kills her own mother and the infant she bears by Jea; hecklers outside his congregations "beat and use" him "in a very cruel manner, saying, as the Jews of old did to Jesus Christ, when they smote him with the palms of their hands, '*Prophesy unto us it was that smote thee!*'" (116); in more than one passage he describes other ministers who disagree with his doctrines as wanting to kill him:

They could only say, that I would not believe their doctrine, neither would they believe mine; and one of the head priests said, that I was going to hell. . . . They then went out full of rage and fury, and determined to lay in wait for my life. After this I had greater success than ever, although running greater hazard of losing my life. . . .

(150)

There is one notable exception to his violent depictions of God, and this occurs in a passage describing his conversion. The passage gives a biblical reference to God as a tender caregiver:

And while I was thus crying, and begging God to have mercy on me. . . it pleased God to hear my supplications and cries, and came down in his Spirit's power and blessed my soul, and showed me the clear fountain of living water. . . . and he applied it unto my heart, and cleansed it from all iniquities. . . .

(99-100)

The words God speaks to Jea are those spoken to the unfaithful city of

Jerusalem. Metaphorically God becomes a lover who washes, anoints and clothes the nakedness of a woman "'polluted in thine own blood'" (100). Interestingly, Julia Foote uses a similar trope, but where, for Jea, the description is an isolated instance-- a vision of the kindness of God toward him-- in Foote, it recurs throughout her narrative. For Jea, Foote and several other black female writers (Elaw, Truth, Lee), the tropes of stripping¹⁰ and re-clothing seem to operate in oppositional relation to the narrators' brutal experiences of slavery and oppression.

Violence in Jea becomes a topological discourse reflecting the submerged rage of a mature and civilized narrator who claims to have overcome his "savage" inclinations. Where Frederick Douglass expresses what Douglass himself might call an overt, unapologetic, "manly" rage as he recounts the attempts of his master to reduce him to something less than a man, narrator Jea apologises for *his* sentiment as one felt only in the past-- the anger of the young Jea (whom Jea presents as an unconverted, ignorant and innocent naif) toward all Christians. The young Jea is so ignorant that initially he is unable to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical with reference to God: "At one time, the minister said that God was in the midst of [the congregation], which astonished me very much, and I looked all about to see if I could see him, but I could not, and I thought I had as good eyes as any one" (Jea 95). In another passage, he describes his child-like self as standing outside the common understanding of the "similarity of experience"; assuming that the minister's sermon is directed expressly at him, thus "exposing me to all the people," Jea is so agitated that he "could not stay any longer, but left the place of worship, and returned home, crying and weeping all the way."

In this state of "distress and affliction," fearing the wrath of God for his sinfulness, Jea "groan[s] and cr[ies] in a most dreadful manner" (96-7). With the simplicity of the naif, he concludes that if his master is cruel and is a Christian, then all Christians must be equally hateful. The rebellious Jea "told them what I thought of their ways," and receives a "most dreadful" beating for his insolence. But this makes him only more stubborn, "not caring whether I lived or died." In addition to this beating, he is forced to attend church during the slaves' resting period.

Jea's hatred of God and God's worshippers he describes as the ignorance of the "natural man," who, in the words of Scripture "'understandeth not the things which are of God. . . because he is not spiritually discerned'"; indeed, his "rage and malice" against all religious people is so great that "I would have destroyed them all, had it been in my power," and on entering the church, "[m]y fury was more particularly kindled against the minister, and I should have killed him, had I not feared the people" (94). Upon his conviction of sin, however, Jea's fury is quelled. He goes from desiring to kill the minister to a sense of distress at his own sinfulness: "In this miserable condition, I went to the minister, whom once I had so much despised, and enquired of *him*, what I must do to be saved (97). Eventually "the Lord was pleased to remove gross darkness, superstition, and idolatry, from my heart, and shined upon me with the glorious reconciliation and light of his countenance. . ." (101). And after his conversion he is "regenerated. . . and became again as a little child" (105). It is Jea's Christianity which frees and civilizes him, both spiritually and temporally; he is able to love his enslavers in a truly Christian manner, and through a "miracle," he can read the Bible in front of the magistrate

who requires a slave to give proof both of his literacy and Christianity before he can be granted freedom. I suggest that in a brilliant use of what Henry Louis Gates calls the Talking Book trope, Jea turns his masters into "savages." Gates observes that where Gronniosaw, Equiano, Marrant and Cuguano used the Talking Book as a trope for the manner in which black people attempted to make "the white written text speak with a black voice" (Gates 131), Jea literalizes that trope-- "God-in-the-text. . . emerges from the text, and rewards his servant's unusual plea with its fulfilment at its most literal level" (Gates 164). Jea never does learn to read; God literally tells him what is in the Book, and by reciting what God tells him, he gains his manumission:

. . . and [the minister] said to me, "You read very well and very distinct"; and asked me who had learnt me. I said the Lord had learnt me last night. He said that it was impossible; but, if it were so, he should find it out. On saying this he went and got other books, to see whether I could read them; I tried, but could not. He then brought a spelling book, to see if I could spell; but he found to his great astonishment, that I could not. This convinced him and his wife that it was the Lord's work, and it was marvellous in their eyes. . . . From that hour, in which the Lord taught me to read, until the present, I have not been able to read in any book, nor any reading whatever, but such as contain the word of God.

(Jea 114-115)

According to Gates, Jea uncovers the Talking Book as used by his black male predecessors as a metaphor not of black men's acquisition of letters, but of the white metaphor of literacy-- "literacy being Western culture's trope of dominance over the peoples of color it had 'discovered,' colonized, and enslaved since the fifteenth century" (Gates 165). I would argue that Jea not only makes it plain that the Talking Book is a white man's metaphor, he also signifies on the tendency of his black male predecessors Gronniosaw and Equiano to ridicule themselves as "uncivilized" black

savages, comically expecting a book to speak to them. In Jea's narrative the ridiculous idea of books speaking to people is not his, but that of racist whites who think they can fool an ignorant black man. Indeed, Jea imposes the marks of "savagery," such as "darkness" and "superstition" upon these whites:

My master's sons also endeavoured to convince me [not to leave their father], by their reading in the behalf of their father; but I could not comprehend their dark sayings, for it surprised me much, how they could take that blessed book into their hands, and to be so superstitious as to want to make me believe that the book did talk with them. . .

(Jea 112)

The impressionable and ignorant Jea takes his cue from these civilized, Christian, European men who, he argues elsewhere in the text, should know better than to mislead him spiritually (93). It is only after the white men's suggestion that the Bible has spoken with them that Jea does what Gronniosaw, and Equiano do, supposedly of their own ignorant-savage accord:

. . . every opportunity when they were out of the way, I took the book, and held it up to my ears, to try whether the book would talk with me or not, but it proved to be all in vain, for I could not hear it speak one word, which caused me to grieve and lament, that after God had done so much for me as he had, in pardoning my sins, and blotting out my iniquities and transgressions, and making me a new creature, the book would not talk with me. . .

(114)

Thus, Jea exposes this trope of the black savage standing with the text to his ear, this metaphor of a metaphor, as nothing more than a "stupid nigger" joke. But ironically, the black Jea, naively believing the lie of his white masters, that the Bible literally speaks to them, is not disappointed in expecting that text to speak to him also-- for God answers the prayers

of the stupid, and the Bible *does* speak to him, as it never did for his naive black predecessors. The joke is not on Jea then, but on the white man. Such scenes of God coming to the aid of the stupid black man are recurrent in Jea's narrative. For example, Jea recounts one of his first experiences as a hired seaman. The naive Jea boards ship with only the clothes on his back, believing that "a person going to sea could go one day, and return the next." So terrified is he by the rolling of the ship that he falls down the hold, to the great merriment of the other (white) sailors. Their laughter "made me the more afraid and terrified, and after I had got down into the hold, I was afraid the ship would fall, and I strove to keep her up by pushing. . ." (124-5). Jea believes that the beating of the waves signifies the roaring of sea lions, and is "afraid they would beat a hole through the ship's side, and would come in and devour me." Daybreak finds him completely exhausted from "holding and trying to keep the ship upright all the night." Such scenes of black minstrelsy are absent in the narratives of Allen, Douglass and Payne.

What arises here is the important issue of performance-- the manner in which the black writer manipulates his self-presentation for the benefit of (or in spite of) the (white) reader. Related to performance and performativity (what the text actually does accomplish) is the issue of truth-telling in the narrative. If the text is meant to convince white readers of the humanity of the black writer-subject, then, as Andrews has noted, that text must also conform to white demands for non-expressivity, objectivity and absolute veracity. However, Jea's autobiography presents some difficulty in this regard. Jea makes rather bold truth claims that "the Lord had learnt me to read last night" (114), that God temporarily

took away his eyesight while striking down irreverent sailors (125), and that, on several occasions, God struck insolent disbelievers down (138, 146). Finally, after declaring in his frontispiece that he has "compiled and written" his narrative "by himself," Jea's penultimate paragraph is this:

My dear reader, I would now inform you, that I have stated this in the best manner I am able, for I cannot write, therefore it is not so correct as if I have been able to have written it myself; not being able to notice the time and date when I left several places, in my travels from time to time. . . nor would I allow alterations to be made by the person whom I employed to print this narrative.

(159)

The veracity of Jea's narrative seems seriously compromised by this final revelation. What, therefore, are we to make of this discrepancy between frontispiece and closing information? That Jea, consummate salesman, is not above lying, using the famous catch-words of slave autobiography "written by himself" in order to advertise his narrative? But then, why the blatant exposure of such a ploy, in parting? Was his frontispiece designed by white editors, with a view to what would sell a black slave narrative and what would not? Regardless of the extenuating circumstances, Jea leaves his readers holding in their hands the narrative they have bought, leaves them also with the confession that he has *not* written his book on his own-- they have been duped by a stupid black man.

Jay plays the part of the naive and devout black man, whose Christianity has taken the frighteningly violent savagery out of him forever. But the violence of Jea's sermonic exhortations, coupled with the final revelation that he has misled the reader works to instill a certain nervousness about the easy trustworthiness of this "good nigger."

Interestingly, while Jea would have his white readers laugh at him, the ignorant black who is more a clown than a man, it is always God-- and Jea-- who laugh last and best:

When they saw me praying to God, they called me by way of derision, a Jonah. . . they were making game of the works of the Lord, and said that the old man had fine fire works, for it gave them light to go up on the yards to furl the sails; but to their great terror, after they had furled the sails, it pleased the Lord to send his lightning and thunder directly, which killed two men on the spot.

(125)

For Jea, then, Christianity, literacy and freedom, in that order, seem to be related achievements. It is Christianity which takes the savage out of the man, miraculously enables him to read, and so, grants him his freedom. Christianity is what gives Jea his pride in himself as a black man; although the picture Jea repeatedly paints of himself is that of a *stupid* black man, he is protected by the arm of a violently interposing God. Douglass removes both Christianity and black minstrelsy from this equation. What replaces the Christian's desire for Heaven, is Douglass' desire for freedom. He describes that desire in a passage, the language of which echoes the penitent's growing conviction of his own enslavement to sin in traditional Christian autobiography. Slavery becomes the "horrible pit" from which "the silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness." Douglass, like most sinners who become aware of their state of "enslavement" desires to commit suicide: "but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed" (Douglass 67-8). Douglass is never a savage or buffoon; his proud manhood is taken as an a priori in his narrative.¹¹ That manhood is what eggs him on to want the things which

all (white) men have-- literacy, freedom, and dignity. Jea's obstinate and violent resistance is replaced by Christian forgiveness and a bold sense of assertiveness in God. It seems that God carries out the violence which Jea, as a converted Christian, claims to have relinquished. For Douglass, however, his own violent resistance is exactly what gains him his freedom-- Douglass kicks his way out of slavery in a scene of heroic bravado that the converted Jea would not have sanctioned:

You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man. . . . I resolved to fight. . . . Hughes came, and, while Covey held me, attempted to tie my right hand. . . . I gave him a heavy kick close under the ribs. . . . We were at it for nearly two hours. . . . The whole six months afterwards, that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. . . . This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. . . . It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom.

(97-105)

Douglass' is a fighting language-- he subscribes to the Liberator, an abolitionist newspaper, because it sets his soul "all on fire," and because of "its scathing denunciations of slaveholders. . . and its powerful attacks upon upholders of the institution" (153).

For Allen, Douglass, Payne, and even Jea, selfhood rests upon literate manhood. Payne, writing after the Civil War, constructs that manhood in terms of diligent study and the pursuit of an extensive education, in emulation of a whole canon of exemplary black and white men. Allen's is the polite manhood of united and hard-working black Christian "brethren". While institution men Allen and Payne are careful to praise the beneficence of whites and to portray themselves as polite, Europeanized black men, Jea the independent preacher and Douglass the abolitionist openly criticize

their cruel slave owners, and describe themselves as angry and disobedient. In Jea's narrative, anger is linked with savagery and ignorance, and is replaced by a righteous, Christian condemnation of slavery as a system which prevents savages (and white slaveowners) from coming to God. Jea's black Christian manhood is backed by the power of a potentially violent God. However, Douglass' anger, as he reaches the literal and metaphorical end of "boyhood,"¹² is a "*man's*" anger, and will be assuaged by nothing short of temporal freedom. Indeed, "the heaven of freedom" replaces the Christian heaven in Douglass' narrative, as the Christian autobiography becomes a palimpsest upon which he lays the story of his own call to preach the gospel of abolitionism. For Douglass, selfhood is a manhood born out of individualism, violence, and his own efforts to "speak and act like a person of cultivation and refinement." That "cultivated" manhood is maintained by bold aggression and violent emotions such as "hate" (155) and "unutterable loathing" (156). The corresponding sense of selfhood as "womanhood"-- or a questioning of "womanhood" in the autobiographies of white and black women is the issue to which I now turn.

Endnotes

1. Today, Douglass' historic home in Washington D.C. stands as a museum, open to public visitation. There, one may witness the evidence of Douglass' valorization of Euro-culture. The large house sits on a hilltop, ironically reminiscent of "the big house" of a Southern plantation. Its shady veranda is supported by large pillars. Greek busts and portraitures adorn Douglass' extensive library, inside the home.

2. The narrative proper closes with a hymn (one of three employed in the text), and is followed by a section entitled "African Supplement" which lists the seven articles of the new AME church; next follows a series of meditations entitled "Acts of Faith," "Acts of Hope," and "Acts of Love"; the subsequent seventeen-page narrative dated 1794, which exonerates the black people of Philadelphia from accusations of theft during a serious plague in the city, ends with a verse from a hymn comparing the work of God to the work of Soldiers. This is followed by a letter of self-defense to the Mayor of Philadelphia in which Allen describes the heroic acts of service which blacks performed during the plague, and a letter from the Mayor himself commending those acts. Finally three addresses in sermonic mode are directed "To Those who Keep Slaves. . .," "To the People of Color" and "To the Friends of Him Who Hath no Helper." The last address is accompanied by a hymn.

3. In this, Allen resembles later black male autobiographers such as Josiah Henson, Moses Grandy, Lunsford Lane, and Daniel Payne. Writing in the 1840's, at the same time that the recalcitrant Douglass wrote his autobiography, Henson, Grandy and Lane were praised by northern whites such as editor Ephiram Peabody, who commented that Douglass should be more like Henson-- "tolerant, calm, benevolent, wise" (Andrews 109).

4. The boys' stories of Horatio Alger (1834-99) recount the adventures of young heroes who achieve success by leading exemplary lives and overcoming poverty and adversity against great odds.

5. Zilpha Elaw goes to England to convert the white natives there, rather than to petition whites for funds for missionary work among blacks as Payne does. Payne's, of course, is the more typical situation for nineteenth-century black evangelists and missionaries.

6. Douglass also possesses a strong sense of the value of work. In fact, a strong work ethic is associated with his sense of himself as a man. When his master, Hugh Auld, allows him to hire himself out for wages, the greater part of which he must relinquish to Auld as payment for his own room and board, Douglass chafes at the injustice of the situation. But, "hard as it was, I thought it better than the old mode of getting along. It was a step towards freedom to be allowed to bear the responsibilities of a freeman. . . . I bent myself to the work of making money. . . ." (108). A free man in Newport, racism forces him to work as a common labourer in spite of his experience as a ship caulker: "It was new, dirty, and hard work for me; but I went at it with a glad heart and a willing hand I worked. . . with a pleasure I had never before experienced. I was at

work for myself and newly-married wife" (117). In a somewhat romanticized description of the joy of the Northern worker, Douglass writes: "I saw no whipping of men; but all seemed to go smoothly on. Every man appeared to understand his work, and went at it with a sober, yet cheerful earnestness, which betokened the deep interest which he felt in what he was doing, as well as a sense of his own dignity as a man" (116). But then, we must remember that Douglass is a black man recently escaped from slavery, and, indeed, all things are relative.

7. We may observe the unintended irony involved in Jea's construction of Britain as a country which he excludes from "the tyrants of this world." Jea, however, is not alone in such a construction. In the autobiographies of other black writers such as Frederick Douglass, and Zilpha Elaw, Britain is juxtaposed with America as lands of freedom and oppression respectively.

8. In his autobiography A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, an African, published in New York in 1810, George White refers to shouting on at least two occasions (White 70 & 74). On one of these occasions he gives a detailed account of the shouting in which he participates at a dying black woman's bedside:

Between eleven and twelve o'clock the following evening, she requested her mother to call the family together into her room. When they were come, she told them, that her soul, which was bound for heaven, would shortly quit the mortal body: but said she, "I shall give you the signal for my departure by shouting, being fully assured of dying triumphant in the faith". . . . As she drew near the moment she had said she should expire, she asked her mother. . . if she would shout with the rest present. . . . "Mother, help me all you can to praise God; I know you are weak, but come around my bed and get ready, for the chariot is coming-- are you all ready? are you all ready? Now! now! Here it comes. Glory! Glory! Glory! Shout! Shout! Mother, are you shouting? Jane, are you shouting? Are you all shouting?["] And thus she continued till she expired, which was at the very moment she had before said she should die.

(74-5)

9. In a section of his autobiography entitled "An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves and Approve the Practice" Allen writes:

We believe if you would try the experiment of taking a few black children, and cultivate their minds with the same care and let them have the same prospect in view as to living in the world, as you would wish for your own children, you would find upon the trial, they were not inferior in mental endowments. I do not wish to make you angry, but excite your attention to consider how hateful slavery is in the sight of the God who hath destroyed kings and princes for their oppression of the poor slaves.

(69-70)

In another passage, he describes the polite resistance he and his black brethren offer to white Methodists who try to drag them from their knees during prayer, and eject them from certain pews in the church: remaining passively immobile, "Mr. [Absalom] Jones replied, 'Wait until prayer is over.'" The white men continue to try and remove the black men until the service is finished: "Mr. Jones said, 'Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more'. . . . By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church" (25).

10. Stripping for Douglass symbolizes emasculation. I suggest that the two instances in which he describes such an action are closely related. The first instance, the stripping of Aunt Hester, becomes a kind of prurient exhibit, in which Douglass' description heightens the manner in which the black woman is sexually objectified. Captain Anthony, Douglass writes, seemed "to take great pleasure in whipping a slave" (24). Douglass then describes this "pleasure" by citing the case of Hester "whom [Captain Anthony] used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood." This scene becomes a literal orgy of sadism: "He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin" (25). Maurice Wallace comments that Douglass identifies with the ravished body of the violated female, and that his fear of also being raped and beaten by Captain Anthony "instantiates a fluid pubescent libidinality" located between the masculine and the feminine. It is from this fluidity that Douglass must ultimately emerge, extinguishing his "polymorphic nature" for a firmly masculine phallic sexuality (Wallace 252-3).

For Douglass, stripping and beating come to represent sexual objectification-- an objectification, or *emasculation*, if you will, which he must avoid at all costs. The second scene of whipping introduces the polaric situation which culminates in Douglass' climactic attainment of manhood through violent physical resistance against Mr. Covey. This second scene is strongly reminiscent of the earlier stripping and beating of Aunt Hester. But now, Douglass actually assumes the role of the sexually violated and objectified female slave. It is by subjecting Douglass to this role that "Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (75). The second whipping scene evolves as follows: Covey deliberately sends an adolescent Douglass into the woods to fetch chopping wood with a cart and team of uncontrollable oxen. Douglass is almost killed by the oxen; his cart is destroyed, along with the woods-gate:

He ordered me to return to the woods again immediately. I did so, and he followed on after me. Just as I got into the woods, he came up and told me to stop my cart, and that he would teach me how to trifle away my time, and break gates. He then went to a large gum-tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming

them up neatly with his pocket-knife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offenses.

(72)

Slavery, then, is connected with feminization, and it is his own masculine determination and aggression which reverses Douglass' situation as slave, to one in which he is his own master. In his famous chiasmas Douglass writes: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (77). He then proceeds to relate how he physically subdued Mr. Covey.

11. Douglass' description of his emerging manhood is interestingly marked by an ambivalent description of the role played by African vodun in the attainment of his black man's status. In an ongoing battle with Covey, Douglass, beaten and blood-soaked, runs away to escape another beating. He stays at the house of another slave, Sandy Jenkins, and receives from Jenkins the following advice:

He told me, with great solemnity, I must go back to Covey; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain *root*, which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it *always on my right side*, would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. . . . To please him, I at length took the root, and, according to his direction, carried it upon my right side. This was Sunday morning. I immediately started for home; and upon entering the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey. . . . He spoke to me very kindly, bade me drive the pigs from a lot near by, and passed on towards the church. Now, this singular conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the *root* which Sandy had given me; and had it been any other day than Sunday, I could have attributed the conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and as it was, I was half inclined to think the *root* had to be something more than I at first had taken it to be. All went well till Monday morning. On this morning, the virtue of the *root* was fully tested.

(80-1)

The climactic fight with Covey ensues, in which Douglass emerges unwhipped and triumphant: "From this time I was never again what might be called fairly whipped, though I remained a slave four years afterwards. I had several fights, but was never whipped" (83). Douglass' ambivalence about the part played by African vodun in his attainment of manhood is of interest here. On the one hand, he presents a rational explanation for

what seems to be the power of the *root* (always italicized by Douglass)--Covey behaves civilly because it is Sunday; after their fight, Covey does not deliver Douglass to the authorities to be whipped publicly because Covey's reputation as a slave-breaker would then be ruined. But on the other hand we are never quite free of the suspicion Douglass plants that the root indeed possesses the powers Sandy Jenkins attributes to it. After all, Covey never succeeds in whipping Douglass after he begins to wear the talisman, and neither does any other white man.

Douglass patronizingly observes in a later footnote about Sandy Jenkins:

This is the same man who gave me the roots to prevent my being whipped by Mr. Covey. He was "a clever soul." We used frequently to talk about the fight with Covey, and as often as we did so, he would claim my success as the result of the roots which he gave me. This superstition is very common among the more ignorant slaves.

(89)

But on the following page, he writes: "The year passed off smoothly. It seemed only about half as long as the year which preceded it. I went through it without receiving a single blow" (90).

12. Douglass recalls the rites of passage of his adolescence: "I was fast approaching manhood, and year after year had passed, and I was still a slave [read 'boy']. . . . I talked to [fellow slaves] of our want of manhood, if we submitted to our enslavement without at least one noble effort to be free" (91-2).

Chapter Two/ Writing (White) Womanhood

I have chosen to examine several autobiographies by white American women in order to establish some points of comparison between these and the autobiographies of the black women evangelists. These texts are: Elizabeth Cady Stanton's secular autobiography Eighty Years and More (1898); Church at Galilee evangelist Harriet Livermore's Narration of Religious Experience in Twelve Letters (1826); Methodist evangelist Pheobe Palmer's The Way of Holiness, With Notes by the Way; Being a Narrative of Religious Experience Resulting From a Determination to be a Bible Christian (1855) and Four Years in the Old World (1867); and Shaker Jane Blanchard's "A Sketch of Her Experience previous to 1868" (1875). Inevitably, any attempt to make these texts "representative" of the diverse life writings of white American women will be fraught with the problematics of over-generalization on my part; but in order to establish a number of common tendencies I have relied upon the observations of a number of critics in the field of women's autobiography, among them Margo Culley, Susan Friedman, Mary Mason, Shirley Neuman, Sidonie Smith, Domna Stanton, and Kathleen M. Swaim.

I want to examine five salient tendencies which often mark (white) women's autobiographical forms: 1) alterity; 2) privileging of the private over the public realm; 3) struggle for self-authentication in the face of inadequacy, alienation and doubt;¹ 4) awareness of the split subject; 5) narrative discontinuity and fragmentation. The narratives of black evangelical women share some of the tendencies found in white women's

texts. I examine these tendencies with a view to addressing the issue which theorists such as Benstock, Neuman and others have posed-- that is, the need to question whether such characteristics as "fissures of female discontinuity" are to be attributed to "functions of gender" more than they might be attributed to functions of race, class, or sexual preference (Gooze 419). Or, as Neuman posits, it is important to "anchor generalizations about 'gender differences' in an analysis of specific historical and cultural circumstances" (Neuman 3). I am also interested in how the evangelists present 1) a much more disturbed and deferred sense of alterity than many white women; and 2) a distinct valorisation of the public over the private. Finally, in their use of religious language, many of the black women evangelists demonstrate a metaphorical and sermonic language of conversion and epiphany absent in similar passages by white women; and the black women writers' personal relationships with the divine are marked not by tropes of discipline and violence (as in the case of the white Harriet Livermore or Phoebe Palmer), but by tender nurturance and care.

First, however, I want to examine how the characteristics I have mentioned above (alterity, the struggle of the self against alienation, the split self, the fragmentary text, the privileging of the private over the public realm) operate in the autobiographical works of several white women-- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Phoebe Palmer, Harriet Livermore, and Jane Blanchard. Shirley Neuman (2), Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (8, 11), Kathleen M. Swaim (44, 58, 71), Domna Stanton, Susan Friedman (34-62), and Mary Mason note that (white) women's autobiographies are predominantly characterized by alterity, or a sense of identity established and written about in relation to some important Other. As Mason writes,

these autobiographies reflect a concern to: "acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness. . . . [T]his grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other seems. . . to enable women to write openly about themselves" (Mason 22). Such concern with alterity is often manifested in women's strong need for communal bonding. Edkins notes of eighteenth-century Puritan and Quaker women, "these autobiographies were not written by rebels or artists but by women who searched very hard and sometimes very long for a niche and who, once having found it, symbolically celebrated their sense of community via the written word" (Edkins 52). Women's societies and female academies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fostered the development of peer relations among women, giving rise to new consultative networks in which the women, working within the congregational system of norms and limits, "were able to push the limits of what was possible and maintain their respectability without ever challenging the limits themselves" (Culley 72).⁶

Early theorists of women's autobiography in the 1980s maintained that women's life-writings most often delimited, as would have been societally expected, the private and familial, rather than the public sphere. Their works very seldom reflect "the establishment history of their times"; what is emphasized is not so much public life events, world affairs, or career accomplishments as the details of personal lives-- "domestic details, family difficulties, close friends, and especially people who influenced them" (Jelinek Women's Autobiography 7). However, more recent theories examine the often uneasy dialectic many women autobiographers maintain between the public and the private, sometimes using descriptions of their private lives as assurances to their readers that they have not deviated too far

from social injunctions delimiting "true womanhood." For example, Sidonie Smith examines how both the white Elizabeth Cady Stanton and black secular autobiographer Harriet Jacobs negotiate the divide between 1) "embodiment" and the private sphere of woman, and 2) the "metaphysical self" of men and the public domain (Smith 75-111).

It is the women's struggle to delineate a self in the face of pervasive societal discouragement and personal self-doubt which makes the negotiation of the autobiographical self within the text a complex and often troublesome task. Jelinek posits that in contrast to the "self-confident, one-dimensional image" often projected by men, women's autobiographical selves are multidimensional, fragmented, and colored by a sense of "inadequacy and alienation, of being outsiders or 'other.'" The women often struggle for authentication, "to prove their self-worth." Interestingly though, the women's writings also project self-confidence, and a "positive sense of accomplishment in having overcome many obstacles to their success-- whether it be personal or professional" (Jelinek xiii). This awareness of the split self-- a discursive entity in the text which is painfully conscious of the allegiance it owes to many discursive influences rather than to a unitary one, as is most often true in the life-writings of men-- is reflected in the disjointed and fragmentary forms of autobiography which women create (Pomerleau 37-8; Jelinek Women's Autobiography 17-19; Brodzki & Schenk 1 & 11; Neuman 2). Such fragmentation might manifest itself in narrative disruption; non-chronology; self-sustaining and compartmentalized units of text rather than connecting chapters; combinations of forms such as diary entries, formal autobiography, speech excerpts, letters, all in one text (Jelinek Women's

Autobiography 17-19; Neuman 2).

Estelle Jelinek and Sidonie Smith observe that in spite of the fact that Stanton's Eighty Years and More³ is prefaced by the author as the story of her private life as "enthusiastic housekeeper" and mother of seven, the narrative ultimately becomes an account of Stanton's public career in the women's rights movement (Jelinek 72; Smith 87). After the start of Stanton's public career in 1845, her husband is not mentioned until 1885, and then only in passing. We read little about her children until the 1880s when Stanton recounts the visits she makes to their homes once they are adults. Jelinek argues that Stanton's anecdotes on household matters are "scattered through the book and hardly constitute the major theme" (Jelinek 72). They are part of Stanton's attempt to present herself as "an *ordinary* human being, but *not* as a wife-housekeeper-mother" (Jelinek 72). For Jelinek, Stanton is ordinary because she "mixes easily with ordinary people, has a cheerful disposition, is self-reliant and healthy, and has varied domestic interests in addition to her political ones" (Jelinek 72). It is through Stanton's presentation of herself as such that she is able to "persuade her readers to accept her and her reformist ideas" (Jelinek 73). Thus, Stanton's autobiography is "rife with paradox, contradiction, and, at the very least, ambivalence" (Jelinek 73), even as it struggles to persuade the reader of its own legitimacy and truthfulness. Such contradictions are evident in the very form of the narrative. For the most part, it adheres to a continuous, linear chronology; however, that chronology is often delayed by anecdotes, excerpts from letters, speeches, and published articles throughout the text.

While Jelinek distinguishes between the category "ordinary" as

opposed to "wife-housekeeper-mother," I argue that Stanton is extremely concerned to conform to the tenets of the cult of true womanhood (which uphold woman as wife-housekeeper-mother)-- indeed to present herself as an "ordinary," dutiful and legitimate woman.⁴ Indeed, to counter (white) male suspicion, Stanton performs for her readers, devoting numerous passages to her delight in the duties of the ordinary woman. In a later copy of her autobiography edited by her son Theodore Stanton in 1922, a daguerreotype of Stanton depicts her holding an infant in her arms, like the Madonna. The caption reads: "Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Child" (Stanton and Blatch, frontispiece). Stanton's advice to mothers, in a chapter entitled "Motherhood," is this: "above all other arts and sciences, study first what relates to babyhood, as there is no department of human action in which there is such lamentable ignorance. . . ." (Stanton 70). The chapter recounts Stanton's experiences as a first-time mother, presenting details about feeding, bathing, and bandaging (67-70). Domestic assertions such as the following demonstrate her adherence to "natural" and "ordinary" womanhood:

My second son was born in Albany. . . under more favorable auspices than the first, as I knew, then, what to do with a baby. Returning to Chelsea we commenced housekeeping. . . . A new house, newly furnished, with beautiful views of Boston Bay, was all I could desire. Mr. Stanton announced to me, in starting, that his business would occupy all his time, and that I must take entire charge of the housekeeping. So, with two good servants and two babies under my sole supervision, my time was pleasantly occupied . . .

(Stanton 72)

But in spite of her desire to present herself as a "natural" woman Stanton is decidedly ambivalent about her role as wife and mother. As Smith posits, she decries men throughout her text, "displacing Henry Stanton [her husband] as source of inspiration" with her friend

Susan B. Anthony and assuming for herself "the fiction of 'man,' reproducing the culturally valued story of 'metaphysical selfhood' with its powers of self-reflectiveness and self-fabrication and its preoccupation with quest" (Smith 88-9).

In one of her less contented moments Stanton writes:

My duties were too numerous and varied, and none sufficiently exhilarating or intellectual to bring into play my higher faculties. I suffered with mental hunger, which, like an empty stomach, is very depressing. . . . Housekeeping under such circumstances, was impossible, so I packed our clothes, locked up the house, and went to that harbor of safety, home, as I did ever after in stress of weather. I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children.

(73-4)

I quote this passage for two reasons: one is to demonstrate the relative luxury in which Stanton lives; the second is to draw attention to Stanton's perception of herself as "woman" apart from "servants." Throughout her text, Stanton situates herself as a woman of the luxury class, often describing objects of luxury in elaborate detail, and situating less fortunate others-- servants, working-class women, blacks-- as distinctly separate from her. Stanton's reality is one adorned with indicators of affluence-- a "new house" (72); an apartment in Paris (103); antislavery fairs in which "one could get a most *recherche* luncheon in the society of the literati of Boston; for, however indifferent many were to slavery *per se*, they enjoyed these fairs" (71). Her childhood, in stark contrast to the childhood of the black autobiographers, male and female, is marked by frivolity and material ease: barrels of hickory nuts, maple sugar; spinning wheels and bags full of silk, cotton, flannel, calico; apples, vegetables,

butter; and three "colored men" whose chief delight is to "sometimes play on the banjo for us to dance, taking real enjoyment in our games. They are all at rest now with 'Old Uncle Ned in the place where the good niggers go'" (49).

It is perhaps Stanton's lack of familiarity with the hardships of "niggers" and/or the lower classes which enables her to embrace the sentimentality of the cult of true womanhood in a manner that the black women evangelists do not. For example, we may compare the lack of sentimentality and romanticism in black evangelist women's descriptions of their husbands with Stanton's description of her courtship:

One morning, as we came out from breakfast, Mr. Stanton joined me on the piazza, where I was walking up and down enjoying the balmy air and the beauty of the foliage. "As we have no conventions," said he, "on hand, what do you say to a ride on horseback this morning?" I readily accepted the suggestion, ordered the horses, put on my habit, and away we went. The roads were fine and we took a long ride. As we were returning home we stopped often to admire the scenery and, perchance, each other. When walking slowly through a beautiful grove, he laid his hand on the horn of the saddle and, to my surprise, made one of those charming relations of human feeling which brave knights have always found eloquent words to utter, and to which fair ladies have always listened with mingled emotions of pleasure and astonishment. . .

(61-2)

The luxury of Stanton's social position, then, enables her (or, perhaps exerts greater pressures on her?) to present a picture of herself as "true woman," or "fair lady," in a way that the black women do not depict themselves.

In Stanton's secular autobiography, no moment of spiritual epiphany occurs in a religious sense. In fact, Stanton describes her own experience with religion in scathingly cynical terms-- in the face of a religious onslaught by famed revivalist Charles Finney, "a terrifier of human souls,"

Stanton wryly comments, "many of us imagined ourselves converted" (59). Later, Stanton's real conversion proves to be a secular one-- when a trip is planned by her parents "to change the [religious] current of my thoughts" (59), her "religious superstitions gave place to rational ideas based on scientific facts, and in proportion, as I looked at everything from a new standpoint, I grew more and more happy, day by day" (60). In Stanton, enthusiastic religious sentiment (often rooted in the body, as believers are possessed by the spirit, and experience a number of physical and highly emotional reactions) is ridiculed and dismissed in favor of the metaphysical-- the "clear sunlight of Truth" found in the rational, the scientific (60), and the pursuit of new ideas-- phrenology, man, moral philosophy (59). The Reverend Finney, whose influence "swept over the city and through the seminary like an epidemic, attacking in its worst form the most susceptible" (58), is described in terms of the ludicrous: "I can see him now, his great eyes rolling around the congregation and his arms flying about in the air like those of a windmill" (59). Religious testimony, dreams, visions, sermonic oratory and song are not to be found in Stanton. On the one occasion in which she engages in strong rhetoric, criticizing American women who refuse to support female suffrage, she comes closest to the sermonic oratorical mode we see so often in black evangelist women's writings:

The history of the world shows that the vast majority, in every generation, passively accept the conditions into which they are born, while those who demanded larger liberties are ever a small, ostracized minority, whose claims are ridiculed and ignored. . . . That only a few, under any circumstances, protest against the injustice of long-established laws and customs, does not disprove the fact of the oppression, while the satisfaction of the many, if real, only proves their apathy and deeper degradation. That a majority of the women of the United States accept, without protest, the disabilities which grow out of their disfranchisement is simply

an evidence of their ignorance and cowardice, while the minority who demand a higher political status clearly prove their superior intelligence and wisdom.

(Stanton & Blatch 269-70)

But as Jelinek observes, "[s]uch an outburst, which might antagonize those she most wants to win to her cause, is the exception rather than the rule in Eighty Years. Generally, the presentation and tone of the autobiography are mild and low-keyed" (Jelinek 89-90)-- in the manner of an "ordinary" woman.

I have chosen to examine Phoebe Palmer's Four Years in the Old World (1864) and The Way of Holiness (1843) because as "arguably the best representative figure, male or female, of the beginnings of the holiness tradition of spirituality in America" (Oden 5), her eighteen books, and her numerous articles published in the periodical Guide to Holiness (having at its peak, a circulation of 37,000) were read avidly by many religious aspirants (White xv). Both Four Years and The Way are autobiographical (Oden 58-65; 258-288). Four Years, written mainly in a travelogue style, recounts Palmer's "Travels, Incidents, and Evangelistic Labors" with her husband in Great Britain between the years 1859 and 1863, and is listed among other autobiographies in Davis' and Joyce's Personal Writings by Women to 1900. The Way of Holiness, first published in 1843, had gone through thirty-four American editions by 1855 (Palmer The Way title page),⁵ and fifty editions by 1867 (Oden 165). In the Ladies' Repository, the book is touted as highly recommended reading, especially for Christian women (Palmer Way 9). The Way of Holiness was influential in establishing Sanctification as a religious option⁶ for the numerous Christian women and men-- among them the black evangelists I investigate-- who flocked out of

the more conservative Methodist and other Protestant churches to seek salvation in highly enthusiast perfectionist sects.⁷ The female protagonist of The Way seems to be Palmer herself-- a young religious "sister" (17) who seeks and helps others to discover the "shorter way" (17) of entering into perfect relation with God. The way of holiness is "shorter" and "better," because, as the young sister realizes after one of the male "children of Zion" questions her about it:

On looking at the requirements of the word of God, she beheld the command, "Be ye holy." She then began to say in her heart, "Whatever my former deficiencies may have been God requires that I should *now* be holy. Whether *convicted* or otherwise, *duty is plain*. God requires *present* holiness."

(Palmer The Way 19)

The Way is divided into two parts. The first, entitled "The Way of Holiness" and comprising nine "sections," describes the spiritual process through which the "sister" finds the "shorter" and "better" way of holiness. That process is a rigorous one, involving deep spiritual self-examination (Palmer Way 22-4). The second part of the text presents what begins as the early-life biography of this female aspirant, but becomes a diary in which the subject, now a young woman, records the progress of her soul (117). We quickly realize that the biography/diary delineates the life-story of Palmer herself.

The Way ends with a touching anecdote about the aspirant's small daughter, "my little S___" (203), which begins as follows, and most probably describes Palmer's own daughter Sarah: "April 16. The birthday of my little S___. She has now been spared to us six years" (253). We later learn that:

Dear S___, whose sixth birthday I now commemorate, was the next [child, following two baby sons taken by God] we were permitted to embrace. I shall never forget the chastened feelings with which I first looked upon this beloved one. My heart seemed to be perfectly subdued, and I indeed received her as a precious *loan*.

And now my beloved husband and my self are fully united in purpose, in endeavouring to bring her up for the Lord.

(Palmer Way 256)

Finally, Palmer describes the six-year-old girl's conversion, the ultimate triumph with which the book ends:

It is now the third day since her change, and she still gives blessed evidence of its reality. She has always been very precious to us; but now, a new and yet more endearing tie binds her more closely to our hearts. Allelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!
THE END

(Palmer Way 287)

In actual life, Palmer bore two sons before her daughter Sarah. The boys both died in infancy, but Sarah, born April 11, 1833, lived to adulthood, along with another brother and sister, "all of whom entered some form of professional Christian service" (White xvii).

In Four Years in the Old World this Sarah is also addressed as "dear S." The obvious and deep affinity Palmer has for this daughter demonstrates the profound sense of alterity which marks both Four Years and The Way. Indeed, the importance of the daughter to each text is central. Four Years addresses the reader as "you," but this "you" turns out to also mean "dear S," so that both "you's" become elided to form an implied reader whose relationship with Palmer is intimate and personal. The travelogue begins as follows: "Have you ever crossed the Atlantic? Do you say, No? Then permit me to introduce you to some scenes, which, though not marvellous, may interest you. If thy heart be as my heart, give me thy hand, and together we will proceed over the mighty ocean"

(Palmer Four Years 13). Later, however, the "you" of the opening lines expands to encompass "dear S":

Here I am in the midst of the ocean, endeavouring to steady my position amid heaving billows, hoping that I may be able to write a few intelligible lines to my dear S.

On Saturday we parted with you at twelve o'clock. It is now Tuesday. I am sitting in the large dining-saloon. . . And here I sit surrounded by over a score of fellow passengers. Oh, how unlike the companionship of the hour to that of last Tuesday between three and four o'clock!

(Palmer Four Years 15)

As this letter to S__ proceeds, however, we notice that its beginning is not signalled by quotation marks, and its end is nowhere indicated; rather, the letter becomes the text, as personal references to "your dear papa" (16) give way to more general references such as: "Paul, as you will remember, was a *local* preacher, a class of ministers to which I am particularly partial. . ." (18) or "I am not sure that I shall be able to write in a way to interest either you or myself. . ." (18) or "Now, think how it would strike you to see a duly accredited Congregational minister and a Baptist minister together at a game in the presence of a score of beholders!" (20)

If S__ becomes all readers in Four Years, as I have suggested, then the triumphant conclusion of The Way of Holiness, centered around Palmer's daughter, effects a similar transference. In this conclusion, as "the sister" nears her death (who is Palmer herself, as everywoman), the sublime conversion of her daughter, S__ becomes the conversion of all God's children whom "the sister" has helped throughout The Way to bring to the throne of grace and redemption-- a man whom she admonishes: "'Well, if you will not pray for yourself, remember, there will be one praying for you between five and six every morning. . . .'" (143; a distraught penitent

whom "I had no intention of leaving. . . until he had received comfort" (162); a bible class, the "burden" of whose souls "the Lord has laid. . . upon me in such a manner, that my soul is continually saying, 'I will not let thee go' until thou bless them" (154). The sister's is a highly engaged alterity, an intimate, harmonious and communal relationship with the world and its people which is symbolized in none other than her relationship with her own daughter, "dear S___," who will live to carry on the message of God.

Palmer's struggle is not with others who disparage, discredit or undermine her, but with herself as an aspirant to holiness. There is no sense, as in Stanton, that she attempts to placate the disapproval of any prevailing hegemonic order, and this may be in part because of Palmer's insistence that she did not preach "technically," but bore witness and exhorted (Raser 77)-- which were callings permissible for women. Thus, Palmer challenged no hegemonies openly, as Stanton and the black evangelist women did. In fact, as White observes, Palmer was entirely accepted by Methodist leaders, and had ready access to the columns of The New York Christian Advocate, America's largest Methodist newspaper. No one questioned the extensive exhortations she increasingly gave in camp-meetings after 1841. Indeed the fact that "she (and her husband) should have become so famous by the 1850s as to conduct entire services by themselves simply displayed to the Methodists of that Period what everyone knew was characteristic of that denomination's work in America: the important role it gave to laypersons. . . ." (White viii). I would suggest, however, that while "her husband" is contained in parenthesis in the above passage, the existence of this (parenthesized) husband is Pheobe Palmer's

ticket to legitimacy, her claim to the public sphere; without him, her career as an "exhorter" might not have been so well-countenanced. It is *he*, Dr. Palmer, not *she* who is touted by Palmer herself as the holder of the pulpit, the leader in prayer and worship. It is "we" who dispense the word of God, Palmer assures the reader in her entries in Four Years (677). In fact, Four Years is advertised on its frontispiece as "Comprising the Travels, Incidents, and Evangelistic Labors of Dr. and Mrs Palmer. . ." It seems that when Dr. Palmer is ill, Phoebe has serious doubts about venturing forth alone: "It is one week since Dr. P___ has been laid aside . . . and I have felt as if we should have to forego all future labor in this country, and leave either for America or the Continent" (494). And as if to insinuate that it is Dr. Palmer that congregations most desire to hear, she humbly observes: "Today, though Dr. P___ is unable to leave the house, I have been answerable to two services" (494). An excerpt Palmer cites from a British periodical, the Wesleyan Times, states: "'Monday last was announced as the day when the doctor and his lady would close their labors in this town'" (682). Another article reads: "'The doctor then read and expounded part of a chapter appropriate to the occasion, and was followed by Mrs. Palmer, who spoke in her usually winning style in a short but solemn address. . .'" (684). In a description of exactly the same services rendered to a very large gathering of aspirants divided into two groups, Palmer describes her husband as "taking charge" of his group, while she "assist[ed]" the other (546). Throughout the text of Four Years, it is Dr. Palmer who assumes leadership, even if "Mrs. Palmer" is "the better speaker" (White xvi): "We had made arrangements to close our services. . . and Dr. P___ having announced accordingly, an unusually

large concourse assembled. . ." (692). On board their homebound ship, "[t]he captain asked Dr. P___ to take the service on Sabbath. . . . Dr P___ told the captain that his friend Rev. G. Hughes and himself would take the service" (700). Whether "Mrs. Palmer's" privileging of her husband is a consciously (and astutely) developed tendency throughout Four Years can only be left to conjecture. How she actually felt about such a privileging, the reader is never allowed to know. But the fact remains that Palmer, as female autobiographical subject, inscribes herself in a space made comfortable by a socially accepted alterity based on wifedom and motherhood-- both highly desirable roles for women in patriarchy. Hers is an alterity based upon a textual relationship in which her daughter, her religious followers, and her implied reader become one. Palmer does not seem to experience any internal struggles for self-authentication, because she stands demurely behind her husband at every turn. In this way, she enters the public realm shielded and protected by him-- it is he who precedes her in public, as is expected and socially prescribed. In both Four Years and The Way of Holiness-- although, as Raser asserts, "Attendance at meetings . . . where she was the speaker rivalled that of any of the well-known revivalists of the time" (76)-- Palmer's concern seems not with preaching independently or with congregational leadership, but rather with private internal struggles (The Way), bearing witness to individuals, assisting her husband (Four Years), leading Bible classes, and managing her domestic life, her children, and women's religious societies. "Her experience as a mother. . . is never far out of sight" notes White (viii). White also observes that because of her widespread acceptance among other Methodists, Palmer's "feminism never

needed to be aggressive" (viii). There is, as in Stanton, no sense of an oppositional self divided, no bifurcation of discourse-- Palmer's is the discourse of true (religious) womanhood.

Palmer uses the language of demure womanhood to describe some of her most intense spiritual epiphanies:

When he found he could not drive me from my purpose of making confession, [Satan] continuously urged upon me, while [I was] speaking, that the cold matter-of-fact manner in which I made my statements, as if destitute of all feeling, would prevent the reception of my testimony. . . . I went to the evening meeting. Our dear brother S__ preached, but I scarcely heard a word. I had resolved to *die* in the struggle to believe rather than to give up my confidence, and it seemed as if the matter had now come to a climax. . . . New light burst upon my soul. The Holy Spirit took of the things of God, and revealed them unto me.

(The Way 134-5)

However, this emotionally controlled language at a moment of great importance may be compared to another (less momentous) incident when Palmer describes, in highly erotic and physical language,⁶ one of many frequent instances in which the sister "wrestles" with God:

But, conscious that she had *not the witness of entire consecration to God*, neither the assurance that the great deep of her heart. . . was pure. . . and impelled onward by such an intense desire to be *fruitful in every good work*, the emotions of her spirit could not perhaps be more clearly expressed than in the nervous language of the poet--

"My heart strings groan with deep complaint;
My flesh lies panting, Lord, for thee;
And every limb and every joint,
Stretches for perfect purity."
And yet. . . it was a "sweet distress". . .

(The Way 26)

For Palmer, God is perceived as romantic object, and the sister, the lover sick with unrequited love:

[A]fter having wrestled with the Lord till about midnight, she sought the repose of her pillow with feelings expressed by the poet--

"I'll weary thee with my complaint,
Here at thy feet for ever lie,
With longing sick, with groaning faint--
O! give me love, or else I die."

(The Way 76)

Another (male) seeker finds God, "and I was soon afterward sent for the rejoice with him in the ardor of his first love" (145). The "beauty of holiness more and more captivates my enraptured soul" (157), the sister writes, as she entreats the spirit to "continue to breathe upon me," and, finally, speaks of Christ as one through whom "I had. . . begotten [a young female supplicant] in the gospel. . ." (249) But the God of Palmer's supplication is a cool, remote and martial God. In a bathing trope (one I will later examine in the works of several black women), Palmer recalls Christ's Biblical promise to "'sprinkle you with clean water, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you'" (121). We may recall black male evangelist John Jea here, in a similar scene in which he refers to his own "pollution." Palmer, in relation to a disdainful Christ in this scenario of sprinkling, is "greatly deficient," a "worm of earth" (121). The image seems to me to be one of humiliation in which Palmer's God sets out to "humble" his supplicant in a Master-slave dynamic of abusive will-breaking (all for the slave's own good) which the black female evangelists understandably avoid:

"And thou shalt remember all the ways which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee. . . . And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna which thou knewest not,. . . that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only. . ."

(The Way 72)

This God has ransomed his people and set his seal upon them, "legibly enstamped upon the forehead" (The Way 45); his people are "marked men" (210 Four Years 210, 325), who will be punished if they do not "put their necks to the work of the Lord" in "upbuilding the walls of Zion" (Four Years 324). Indeed, it is by forceful means that Palmer's God persuades his supplicants to accept Him. One woman describes the Lord's subduing of her "rebellious" (64) heart as follows:

She has since told us that the pressure on her heart was so crushing, it seemed as though she must die. In the mean time, the Holy Spirit demanded, "Will you give up the world? will you give up dancing?". . . . To just the degree she yielded the pressure was lightened, till at last she gave up to be saved on God's terms, and took Jesus as her Saviour.

(Four Years 65)

He is a marauding God of coercion and violence, sword-wielding leader of a holy "phalanx," arresting (Four Years 55, 61), slaying, stabbing, wounding and striking down shrieking and moaning supplicants in what Palmer refers to as an epidemic "revival sickness" (Four Years 59):

I saw one of his people yesterday, who was suddenly arrested She had been so deeply and suddenly wounded by the sword of the Spirit, that she scarcely reached the vestibule ere she shrieked and fell. . . . Strong men, as well as females, have been suddenly struck down in the street. . . .

(Four Years 61)

In another instance one woman

felt the arrow of conviction. . . the Holy Spirit sent the arrow to her soul. . . . Presently she heard a shriek; and her sister came running toward her, crying for mercy. At the same moment, the arrow of conviction so powerfully penetrated her own heart as to prostrate her utterly. This was the helpless condition of the sisters when a humane person found them.

(Four Years 64)

In The Way of Holiness, it is Satan by whom the "sister" is buffeted, but

the metaphor of spiritual struggle is still a military and imperialistic one: ". . . I had severe buffetings from Satan. . . and though the enemy did not cease to throw his darts, I trusted in my Saviour to ward them off, and soon fell asleep, and awoke, after sweetly refreshing repose, with peace reigning throughout all my borders. . ." (148). Here, Christ acts as "shield," "weapon," and "sword" (214), making the supplicant "impervious to the assaults of the enemy" (214). In more peaceful metaphors, Christ becomes an "ambassador from the court of heaven" (219), and in the reign of God, it is as "traveller[s] in the King's highway" that spiritual aspirants journey (221).

Tropes of war, empire, punitive discipline and imprisonment also describe the workings of God in the spiritual narrative of white evangelist Harriet Livermore, A Narrative of the Religious Experience: In Twelve Letters (1826). The God of Livermore is figured as one of "mercy, forbearance, long suffering, and abundant kindness" (257). He, as well as Livermore's spiritual processes, are often described in metaphors of Romantic natural phenomena; for example, "the earth was covered with his Royal Robe of glory" (54); or "the meekness and gentleness of Christ. . . ensures a never fading crown of glory and honour, where genius buds no more, nor beauty blooms, but there with earthly treasures are concealed in oblivious silent shade" (91). Yet God/Christ represented in more intimate, familial terms as longed-for lover or father becomes "Omniscient inspector" (33), punitive disciplinarian: "After I left my first love, the love of espousal to Christ, I needed the rod that I might not quietly sleep on the world's lap; and often to this day, I bless the chastening hand of Almighty love. . . . I can praise him for all his dealings with me, yea most

for the severe. . ." (94-5).

Livermore claims that she began to preach and write out of fear:

. . . I felt under the most solemn obligations to dedicate the whole of my time. . . to God. And farther it appeared to me, that a neglect of doing this, would excite his indignation, and bring down vengeance upon my defenceless head. . . he would cut me down with a sudden stroke, or bereave me of my senses, or leave me in a state of despair. I owned it just, his dreadful threatening just. . .

(144-5)

Walls and imprisonment figure throughout Livermore's narrative. Sometimes they are the protective walls a restraining God builds around her to safeguard her from sin: "my Creator has constantly walled me in, with his blessed restraints, so that I do not recollect in my life, that I ever felt any temptations, to offenses which come within the pale of capital in human jurisprudence. . ." (115). At other times walls and imprisonment signify Livermore's incarceration in sin itself, once Satan has invaded her soul: "Toward the last of December, I grew distressed; and was harassed by the cruel tempter, who, I doubt not, longed to regain his influence, by driving me into unbelief's dark and dreary prison" (125). Livermore, in describing her own propensity to bad-temperedness quotes Solomon: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (22). Incarceration and warfare become powerful tropes of spiritual struggle in the text: "[I] found an inward warfare, though I had but little strength to fight the internal foes which essayed to spoil my soul, and cast her into the prison of unbelief: . ." (61-2). Christ the disciplinarian lover/protector, battles Satan the marauding invader: "After I left my first love, I had no strength to endure temptation, or watching power to enable me to escape my foes. The canaanite dwelt in the land-- that is, sin dwelt in my borders. . ." (68). It seems that Livermore's internal

state of warfare externally manifests itself in some of her interactions with other people. In a narrative which demonstrates an interesting tension between a professed comfortable alterity and a more subtle, underlying anxiety and alienation, she is sometimes fearful, judgmental, and openly antagonistic. The reason for this anxiety becomes clear as we observe the manner in which the powerful, hegemonic disciplining forces of her church become manifest in the open derision she endures at the hands of other church members. Ridiculed by members of the Congregational church after she has spoken during a Free-Will meeting, she loses faith in herself and in the propriety of public speaking for women, and uses war as a metaphor to describe her alienation: "[I] lost the union out of my heart, that I had felt with the free brethren in Christ; and shame gaining complete ascendancy over me, in order to clear myself from them, I declared war with their beliefs proclaiming it contrary to the [teachings] of Christ" (107). In another instance, she is agitated into openly challenging the beliefs of a Universalist lecturer: "While the man was going through [his lecture], I felt the Word shut up in me like fire-- I knew I must declare open war with error. . ." (217-18)-- and does so, writing that afterwards "I then warned them all [the audience] to prepare to meet GOD; and went out, resolving I would defend my Saviour's cause. . . I however, hope, it is the last preaching of the kind, that I shall ever hear" (220). Livermore's tropes of war, conquest, discipline, and imprisonment, then, seem to characterize the intimate and personal relationship she has with God as a lover/father figure. In contrast, the writings of black evangelical women-- emerging out of a history of disempowerment and brutal subjugation-- are virtually void of such metaphors of violence.

Although her search for religious community is a long one, Livermore eventually adheres to a protestant religious band which seems to be a derivative of an eccentric offshoot sect; at the date of publication of her autobiography, her "Church at Galilee," led by "Elder B," boasts twenty-eight members. The Church was formed when that elder left the Smithites, taking a small band of followers (Livermore among them) with him. The Smithites, Livermore writes, were themselves an unusual group. She is led to them around 1822, and writes, "I had formerly indulged a kind of abhorrence to the appellation "Smithite;" and thought I could never be known, or as I conceived stigmatized, by that mark; but on this supernatural communication of Elder B.'s name, all my dislike and prejudice vanished, as a cloud passeth over the sun. . ." (Livermore 120).

Livermore's declared sense of home in the small Church at Galilee, as well as the fact that her narrative is written in the form of twelve letters to a nameless "sister" present a certain alterity which is lacking in the autobiographical texts of the black women evangelists. Livermore's letters, personal and conversational in tone, begin with an address to: "My Dear Friend. . ." and continue to address this reader as "my dear sister" (8, 9) throughout. Interestingly, as I have already mentioned, this alterity exists in tension with an underlying sense of alienation which persists until the final pages of the text. Livermore's alienation exists in her relationship to a critical (patriarchal) world which she often fears in spite of her assertions to the contrary: "As to pleasing mortals. . . I knew there were before me men of science, in whose sight I should appear like quite a fool; and perhaps if they had spoken their opinion, I might have heard the mad coupled with idiot; but this is not my care and concern

. . ." (224). Her alienation is expressed in the closing pages of the narrative as a necessary prerequisite to her relationship with God:

I am happy to say to you that I feel an increasing indifference to the world, in all respects, its friendship I dare not, I will not seek, "it is enmity with God." I pray to be deaf to its censures and applause. . . and dead to its influence.

As to applause, it is rather needless to name it, I by no means expect it. I know I am branded with the following epithets:

1. Enthusiast. . . .
2. Eccentric. . . .
3. Crazy. . . .

And as the venerable Lorenzo says, "what next?" "None of these things move me," at all. I can look at them, and smile with pity, yet love and pray.

(275-6)

Passages such as the above are numerous, in which Livermore denies being troubled by the various epithets others direct at her. These epithets she reiterates compulsively, over and over again. But even while her text is troubled throughout by an unacknowledged alienation, the strong and unambivalent sense of positive alterity which Livermore achieves with her reader-- addressed through a series of personal letters as "dear sister"-- and with her band of like-minded believers is one which many of the black women evangelists do not. Instead, they stand somewhat outside their congregation of readers/listeners as leaders and sermon-givers. As sojourners at the unstable borders of intersection of race, gender and class, they often write without a sense of inclusivity in any one stable, homogeneous organization.

Even in her alienation, more often than not, Livermore speaks of the sense of support and community she receives in relation to other people:

At [Salem] I became acquainted with Elder Jones, who gave me a letter of commendation to the christian churches, desiring them to treat me kindly. . . . In Salem I received much kindness. A few unwearied sisters. . . appeared feelingly interested for my

convenience and comfort. . . . Two of these sisters accompanied me to Boston. . .

(156-7)

Often, she claims that she is encouraged by male Elders:

. . . I resolved to attend, if possible, the General Annual Conference, of Elders, at their session in 1823, and request an opportunity to relate the travail of my mind to them; concluding if they disapproved my undertaking I should be free from the work. In this design I was prospered. . . . On the second day of their session, I was admitted to sit in the Elder's Conference, accompanied by two female members of the church, and opened my mind. It is evident that those brethren and fathers gained an evidence that the Holy Ghost was my teacher; for the same afternoon I received a certificate of their approbation to visit the christian churches, and improve my gift among them. . . . For this mark of charity and christian fellowship, I still conceive myself bound to feel grateful toward those Elders and brethren.

(160)

The reason for the support Livermore receives seems to lie in the fact that her "preaching" seems more correctly to be exhortation (public urging during meetings or services, which would be approved by the preacher, Elders and other higher-ups in the church hierarchy). Livermore's narrative, like other narratives of white women, privileges the private realm even as it purports to delineate a public existence. In an episode which comes the closest to describing actual preaching, she writes:

After [speaking] with me a short time, the Deacon went to the minister, and society or church committee, with my letters of commendation, who agreed that I should have liberty to improve in their meeting house, half the following day, (Sabbath). I went into the Deacon's seat and spoke from these [words]: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . ." [The Elder] spoke his approbation of my testimony, and closed the meeting with thanks giving and prayer. As soon as the Congregation was dismissed, he came to me, and expressed a desire that I should address the people in the afternoon. I did so. . .

(173)

Livermore's description of this public appearance as a "testimony"

in which she speaks as guest of an actual deacon or preacher, belies her

description of her actions as "female preaching" (5, 12, 57, 158). In actuality, Livermore's public speaking challenges no hierarchical church systems in a legal or ecclesiastical sense; it is fully sanctioned as mere "testimony"⁹ by the body of (male) elders presiding over such matters.

Indeed, although Livermore promises to relate her preaching career, she does not arrive at "the most solemn subject [of] the travels and public exercises of your feeble, unworthy scribe in meetings for the worship of God" until more than half-way (page 143) through her 278-page text. Her narrative presents a much more detailed progress of her private spiritual struggle than it does of her "preaching" career. Passages such as the following abound:

The commencement of Autumn in 1822, was a season of solemn visitation to my soul, in deeper conviction of the necessity of again seeking the Lord. I wallowed in the mire where there was no standing. . . I cried to the Lord to have mercy on me. Toward the close of September, I felt an increasing desire for a new pardon

. . .

(117)

or: "July 31. Thursday Night-- . . . I have been this day in a troubled state. The affecting circumstances of A.B.'s exit from this mortal scene, have almost overwhelmed me. Doubts and fears have risen mountains high . . ." (89-90). In her inner struggle to achieve sanctification, she decides: "I was near the conclusion it was not for me. . . [I am] sick of the corruptions in my heart-- I am weary of my nature's evil. O, I wonder why I was never convinced of this [the necessity of seeking sanctification] before. . . The Scriptures plainly declare it. . ." (232). Livermore details her private journey of the soul in a way that she does not detail her public career.

Ironically, in spite of Livermore's readiness to document her private

life, her language during moments of spiritual epiphany conforms to the relatively staid and controlled prosaic language that I have suggested is found in the narratives of many white women. Although her text is extremely rich in metaphor, it is the metaphoric language of a woman well-versed in the literature and literary convention of her time, rather than a language of heightened emotional power. Her passion for self and for the world she describes as the distraction she might feel if she were hundred-eyed Argus: "How strong the passion of self-love-- it supplies me now, with glasses equal to Argus optic powers, which look a hundred ways at once in visto" (8). In another moment, as she contemplates Calvinism, she describes herself as being unmoored and tossed on an ocean of doubt, in her "Calvinistic skiff" (65). Romantic metaphors of nature often characterize her spiritual state of being: "O that the sun of righteousness would arise in my soul, shedding on every dark place his glorious rays. . . and the dew of Heaven descend and moisten the dry clods of insensibility. . ." (85). Livermore describes her conversion experience as follows:

After meeting in the afternoon, I retired to my chamber and locked my door. . . . I sat in the corner of the room, trying to meditate upon my situation, when a sudden impulse [urged] me to give myself away to Jesus. I dropped quick on the floor, crying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." I can recollect no more, till I stood upon my feet; and walked the room, where all about me seemed wrapt in mystery. . . .

(48)

She describes her second justification in a language of rich metaphor which perhaps comes closest to the highly emotive epiphanic passages we find in the text of some black women, but which demonstrates none of the techniques of orality (for example, metric rhythm, rhyme, repetition,

alliteration) that the black women's texts, in their imitation of their own public, preacherly styles, exhibit:

O! how precious the moment, my dear sister, when my captivity was turned by the . . . hand of redeeming love. I was like "them that dream." My mouth was filled with praises, as in the day of my first espousal to the Lamb. A young convert's love and zeal glowed in my bosom. . . . The blue vault of Heaven, exhibited to my view the same glory and majesty, as eleven years before I saw in them. . .

(118)

If Livermore's language is metaphorically rich, yet demurely restrained, it may be due to her (constantly reiterated) disdain of religious enthusiasm. While all of the black women I examine are characterized by tendencies toward the enthusiastic-- a religious mode of expression associated with the socially marginalized-- in both the content and form of their narratives, a Livermore anxious to merit social approval writes that "in transcribing my exercises. . . I have not in a single instance overrated them." In fact, some of her "most remarkable conflicts, as well as joyful seasons" she has studiously "omitted purposely to avoid even the appearance of enthusiasm" (229). Livermore's narrative, then, is the highly self-conscious text of a woman who, perhaps out of this self-consciousness before the eyes of a critical public, privileges the private (a realm more socially acceptable for women) in her writing, while only claiming to privilege the very public act of "female preaching." Her style, rich in literary metaphor, is nevertheless controlled and staid. And her sense of positive alterity is challenged by a more subtle alienation which creeps into the text.

There is no such sense of alienation, no split subjectivity in Shaker autobiographer Jane Blanchard's text, except that which Blanchard comes to feel as a Shaker toward "the world" and all things worldly. That

alienation, however, is quickly replaced by the powerful sense of wholeness, community and alterity which she feels in her new Shaker home: "My treasure is here-- my home and all my interest. Here are my gospel relations whom I love above every other" (Blanchard 317).

Blanchard's work is described by Jane Sasson as "one of the most conventional Shaker narratives" extant, "completely fulfil[ing] the requirements of Shaker testimonial literature" (215). In her groundbreaking analytical work, The Shaker Spiritual Narrative, Sasson examines about forty Shaker testimonies and autobiographies (x), presenting detailed readings of five-- three by men, and two by women. Sasson does not set up extended comparisons between male and female Shaker texts, but simply notes in her preface the tendency of women's texts to be "more lyrical and more introspective than those written by their male counterparts" (xi). She observes that in comparison to men's texts, the two women's texts she examines in detail-- Jane Blanchard's and black evangelist Rebecca Cox Jackson's-- are "both more interested in charting internal spiritual development than recording the events in the external world" (xii).

For the purposes of my study, I want to briefly summarize the observations Sasson makes in her analyses of Blanchard and Jackson, concentrating at this juncture on the characteristics of the white woman's autobiography. A "well-wrought artifact, a beautiful memento of the perfect Shaker life" (Sasson 106), Jane Blanchard's narrative employs as its central unifying motif the metaphor of the journey. Blanchard's physical journey to find the Shakers becomes a representation of the spiritual quest she also makes. This trope of travel, employed in many

Shaker narratives, comprises not only the suggestion of journeying, but also of *travail*-- "the physical [journey] and mental efforts [travail] required to bring forth spiritual gifts" (Sasson 103). Procter-Smith notes that later Shaker writings frequently substitute "travel" for "travail," in a multiplicity of significations ranging from physical work, to persecution, to a spiritual journey: "All of these experiences were summed up in the central image of a woman birthing a child; like childbirth, Shaker life was always progressing toward a longed-for end" (108-9). The prevalence in Shaker literature of metaphors associated with the traditionally female-- metaphors of baking, nourishment, cleaning, washing or sweeping, for example (Edward Andrews Gift 125 & 127; Edward Andrews Shakers 161)-- may be explained by the female origins of Shakerism. The founder of Shakerism was a woman, Ann Lee, who established a dual leadership system (composed of Elders and Eldresses) which likely emerged out of her belief that God was both male and female-- the traditional Father, but also Sophia, divinity in its female, wisdom aspect (Procter-Smith 155-7)-- and that Mother Ann (Lee) was the manifestation of Christ's second coming (Youngs 9-10).

In Blanchard the journey (travel/travail) both to the Shakers and then back to her natural relations for a final visit, comprises "symbolically the whole essence of her existence" (Sasson 107). That existence is a highly private one, in the sense that Blanchard never ventures into the public realm as speaker, exhorter or preacher; her narrative simply charts the journey (often simply in the very literal sense of losing direction, and walking through brush and mire) of a young woman who literally and symbolically travels from one private enclosure (her biological family) to

another (her Shaker family).

A vision is the catalyst which begins her spiritual quest. In the vision, many Shaker motifs appear-- the presence of a spiritual "lead" or guide (Sasson 64), whiteness and white clothing as signifying purity (Sasson 73), a white building representing the Shaker community (Sasson 41-3, 50), the premonition of a hard journey ahead (Sasson 28, Procter-Smith 108-9). The language used to describe this pivotal moment is emotionally controlled and even, in comparison to that used to describe similar moments of revelation, conversion, etc. in the narratives of black Shaker Rebecca Cox Jackson, and other black female evangelists who employ folk and African Methodist sermonic strategies in their narratives. Blanchard writes:

I never saw anything so heavenly before. I felt as tho I was in heaven in reality. . . . [The spirit] told me I could [be there with the Shakers] if I wanted to but I would have to go back & get ready, for my time had not come. O what a feeling came over me at the thots of going back. I burst into tears & felt as tho my heart would break. . . . When I awoke, I was on my bed in my own room. . . . When I was alone, I meditated & cried to God, that if there was any place on earth like that which I had seen, that I might live to see it.

(307-9)

The trials of the journey precipitated by this vision of the Shakers-- encountering a washed-out bridge; losing her way; crawling over and under roots and walking on logs, over brush, and on walls and fences-- may be read both literally and symbolically, as is the case in many Shaker spiritual narratives. Other metaphors of physical/spiritual nourishment, of the Enfield Shaker community as a kind of enchanted other-worldly realm, and of Blanchard's final visit to her natural family as a funereal process present us with a highly-focused narrative, "aesthetically satisfying and

harmonious. . . in which all details contribute to a tightly woven whole" (Sasson 114). As such, Blanchard demonstrates none of the formal discontinuity and fragmentation we see in the spiritual autobiographies of both black and white women, but instead presents a brief, concise, and unified narrative.

Blanchard's closing paragraph summarises her quest, and expounds the virtues of the new life she has found among the Shakers:

I was eighteen years of age when the gospel first reached my ears. To me it was Good news & Glad tidings, Salvation to my sin sick soul. My treasure is here-- my home & all my interest. Here are my gospel relations whom I love above every other. As the Lord liveth & as my soul liveth, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. For here I find an hundred fold of the blessings of life, with all the assurance of life Eternal in the world to come.

(Blanchard 317)

The sense of certainty, fulfilment and closure Blanchard demonstrates at the end of her narrative is the testimonial completion Shaker readers desired; as Sasson observes, Blanchard's narrative is one of the most conventional, satisfying the requirements of Shaker testimony: "Shaker writers and their readers derived much satisfaction from observing how authors reworked the experiences of their lives to meet the narrative expectations of Shaker readers" (Sasson 215). However, other Shaker narratives "of less predictable form"-- Rebecca Cox Jackson's among them-- "frequently express unresolved conflicts" (Sasson 215). For example, it is not "the world" from which Jackson is alienated, but rather, from Shaker injunctions requiring her to relinquish the world (which includes her Philadelphia community of African Americans). Such conflicts are reflected in the hybrid form of Jackson's autobiography-- a text both (white) Shaker and African American in its narrative strategies.

White women's autobiographies generally exhibit 1) a sense of fulfilled alterity; 2) a privileging of the private over the public; 3) a struggle for selfhood in the face of alienation; 4) awareness of the split subject; and 5) narrative discontinuity and fragmentation. I have added to these characteristics: 6) a conversion language or language of epiphany which is most often controlled and staid; and 7) tropes of war, violence, discipline and conquest which (in Protestant evangelists Palmer and Livermore) describe relationships with God. We find exceptions to the above generalizations-- for example in the carefully-ordered texts of Stanton and Blanchard; or the absence in Stanton and Blanchard of metaphors of violence to describe God. But for the most part, the texts I have examined share the above mentioned characteristics. It seems that black female spiritual autobiographers share with their white sisters a struggle against alienation; an awareness of the split subject; and a tendency toward narrative fragmentation. However, the uneasy sense of an alterity forever deferred; the valorization of the public realm over the private; the employment of metaphorical and sermonic modes of discourse at moments of epiphany; and the use of tropes which *counteract* a history of violence in the lives of black women mark their narratives as different from white women's spiritual texts in a number of important ways. These narratives begin with Belinda's petition, written in 1779. In that written petition speaks the first known recorded voice of an African woman publicly uttering her selfhood on American shores.

Endnotes

1. For a brief, yet concise summary of major trends in criticism and theory of women's autobiography, see Marjanne E. Gooze, "The Definitions of Self and Form in Feminist Autobiography Theory."

2. See also Donna Stanton and Susan Friedman (34-62).

3. I have used two editions of Stanton's autobiography. The abridged edition in Fowler and Fowler derives from Stanton's first autobiography published in 1898. I cite this edition as "Stanton." Stanton's second edition of her autobiography was written in 1902, and appears in the text edited by her children Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch. I refer to excerpts from this edition as "Stanton and Blatch." The editions are very similar, with some additions and omissions in each throughout.

4. Sidonie Smith is also of this opinion. She writes:

. . . the shadow existence of both husband and children in the text serves the function of legitimizing Stanton's "excessive" narrative.

Since her cultural authority and readability depend upon her fulfillment of that generic contract whereby she presents herself as a "woman," husband and children establish her identity and credibility as a narrating woman. . . . All parts having assumed their proper places, her body has fulfilled its destiny. Having positioned herself toward the body in this way, Stanton achieves at least two effects. She diffuses the lurking threat of the monstrous female body, which always threatens to return from the margins of "woman's" text to disrupt the processes and practices of patriarchal culture. Second, she provides herself with a strategic counter: she can use brief, fleeting references to husband and children to reinforce her legitimacy again and again in a text that quickly begins to contest the institution of marriage itself.

(87)

5. I use the first Canadian edition, taken from the American thirty-fourth edition of The Way.

6. William Andrews explains that Holiness aspirants experienced three stages of salvation-- conviction, justification, and sanctification:

first, repentance [comes] as result of the conviction of one's sinfulness; second, justification from the guilt of sin by Christ's atonement and forgiveness; and third, sanctification, or a "new birth," free from the power of sin by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

(Andrews Sisters of the Spirit 15)

Many Christians believed, however, that sanctification could not be attained

in this life, that for the religious aspirant to claim holiness was a heretical and prideful notion. For such skeptics, there *is* no "shorter way." Interestingly, it seems to me, holiness was predominantly attractive to oppressed people-- blacks, the poor, women. As William Andrews notes in his discussion of three black evangelist women:

Through sanctification, Lee, Elaw, and Foote believed that they had recovered their true, pristine identity in Christ. It was their religious duty, therefore, to be faithful to that renewed and purified self. If this meant challenging, even disobeying, ecclesiastical or social authorities, then these women were prepared to do so.

(Andrews Sisters 15-16)

7. Holiness originated as a reform movement within Methodism. The original Wesleyan tenet of sanctification or Christian perfection became the spring-board for the movement, which was perhaps born out of the intense revival and camp meetings of the mid-nineteenth century's Second Great Awakening (Lincoln and Mamiya 78). The fully sanctified Christian attained spiritual perfection, or holiness, which was "evidenced by inward and outward righteousness" (William Andrews Sisters 15). The sanctified believer possessed the sense of being in total harmony with the will of God, of being perfectly pure in intention and action insofar as his or her acts [were] determined by individual intention. The sanctified Christian enjoy[ed] the inner peace that comes of being convinced that, having been liberated from sin, one is now completely identified with God in thought, word, and deed.

8. Eroticization of the spiritual relationship with God is a common literary and artistic motif. It may be seen in the Old Testament *Song of Songs*; the replication of the Petrarchan lover's anguish and longing in the *Holy Sonnets* of John Donne (1633); or in a sculpture such as Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (1645-52) in which the enraptured supplicant, surrounded by the rays of God's magnificence, is pierced with an arrow by Cupid.

9. The word "testimony" derives etymologically from the Latin root "testis"-- the male sex gland. Thus, the "word" is made manifest in the flesh in a witnessing that, by traditional definition is available to males only. Since the interdictions of the Apostle Paul, women have struggled to speak in churches, and by the nineteenth century were accustomed to testifying about their personal spiritual salvation. To preach, on the other hand, derives from the Latin "praedicare," meaning to proclaim, instruct or prophecy publicly. It is perhaps the pedagogic implication of the word which made "preaching" a forbidden act for women, even today in some denominations-- after all, what can women teach men that men do not already know?

Chapter Three/ The Cruelty of Men Whose Faces Were Like the Moon

*Petition of An African Slave, to the Legislature of
Massachusetts.*

*To the honourable the [sic] senate and house of representatives,
in general court assembled:*

The petition of Belinda, an African, Humbly shews. . .

("Petition" 538)

These are some of the first words we know were uttered in the public domain by African women in America. They were published in 1787 by a Philadelphia magazine, five years after the aged and penurious Belinda began a determined, ongoing petition in a Boston court for money her master owed her. I do not write "African American women" at this juncture, for the petitioner whose African name we do not know-- this woman called "Belinda"-- identifies herself in no uncertain terms as "an African" although it is in the legal discourse of the Legislature of Massachusetts that she begins her litigation. Speaking out of what Henry Louis Gates has called the "deafening silence" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 133) in black writing in English up until the eighteenth century, Belinda-- the earliest-known black woman in America whose life story survives (albeit in the form of a legal petition) among those of a number of eighteenth-century black male autobiographers-- attests to the power of the doubly marginalized black female voice to find expression through whatever means it finds available.

Non-autobiographical writings of other black women have emerged from the eighteenth century-- the highly British-imitative, mainly occasional verse of Phillis Wheatly (Poems on Various Subjects, Religious

and Moral 1733) is extant, as well as a poem by Lucy Terry Prince entitled "Bars Fight" (1746) detailing an Indian massacre of a predominantly white settlement. But nothing by a black woman, except Belinda's petition, has so far come to light which we may call autobiography¹-- that is, in the words of William Andrews, a sustained taking "one's own life (or some major portion of it) seriously enough to find in it a significance that makes reconstructing that life valuable to another" (Andrews, To Tell A Free Story 16). Belinda's petition before the Massachusetts Legislature would certainly qualify as autobiography under this definition. However, problems arise when we examine Andrews' next criterion; in his valuable analysis of the first century of African American autobiography, he chooses to admit "all the forms of first-person retrospective prose narrative that came from the mouths or pens of American blacks between 1760 and 1865" (19). This includes: spiritual autobiographies, criminal confessions, captivity narratives, travel accounts, interviews and memoirs (19). Because of the problems of origin, composition, editing and manuscript control which "complicate the study of early Afro-American autobiography and limit the conclusiveness of interpretive strategies that require a fully determinate text and identifiable 'author-function'" (22) Andrews is careful not to treat as autobiography anything which does not "[emanate] from the consciousness of the black man himself" [sic]; therefore, he argues, his primary criterion is "any work. . . written in the first person singular" (19). Such a criterion would exclude Belinda's third-person (black woman's) narrative.

I would argue, however, that the self-effacing slave narratives or criminal confessions supposedly taken down verbatim from the mouths of

slaves themselves are at least as problematic as third-person accounts written at the behest of a slave-- such as Belinda's petition. The complicated issues of voice, origin, editing, composition and manuscript control exist with all early African American autobiographies-- not only those written by white amanuenses, but even those written by blacks themselves. The question of "performance" (Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 89) creeps into all autobiography, and certainly into all black writing that has passed through any form of white-controlled editorship. Thus, to ignore the third-person petition of Belinda because it seems more "biographical" than "autobiographical" is to ignore the life-writing of a black woman who found a way, over insurmountable obstacles, of getting her voice heard at all. The injunction of Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis concerning early African American women's writing is relevant here:

[M]ost early autobiographies of African American women can be found in this gray area, this middle ground between subject (autobiography) and object (biography). These women arrived at autobiography through a mongrel form-- the slave narrative, many of which were "as told to" or ghost-written accounts. Dismissal of these texts because of their collaborative authorship would have permanently lost to obscurity crucial aspects of American history and culture.

(Etter-Lewis 161)

It is impossible to believe that Belinda was not a present and powerful agent in the formation of her petition, or that the petition emanates principally from any consciousness other than her own, when we consider that the petition is the result of actual conditions which prompted a black woman identifiable only as "Belinda" to take legal action in alleviating her situation; and that the petition is a bold valorization of African epistemological and ontological belief systems.

Documents show that Belinda petitioned the Legislature not once, but

several times. Kaplan and Kaplan observe:

The General Court quickly responded to Belinda's plea, granting her an annual pension of some fifteen pounds out of the expropriated rents and profits of her former master. But this pension came to a halt after the first year. Time passed; despite her many requests for relief, she "never could obtain any more. . ." During the spring of 1787, she again memorialized the legislature. . . In June, the sympathetic editor of a Philadelphia journal printed her original petition. In November, the Court granted the old woman another year's pension. How long "Belinda an african" and her "more infirm daughter" plodded along in Boston is not known.

(244)

The Kaplans suggest that Belinda's amanuensis might have been another African American (243). In light of the strong Africentricity of the work, this seems entirely possible. But white or black, s/he has not been identified, and it is difficult to say how much of the petition is of his/her design, and how much of it is Belinda's. We can only surmise that Belinda was a driving force behind the creation of her own petition, and examine how her text negotiates dialogue with the prevailing discourses of its day. In the case of early black male autobiographers, Gates and Andrews point out that the general movement in their writing was one of assimilation-- a desire to appear as European as possible in a world which saw blackness as negativity or "absence." In these early men's writings questions go unanswered, and large gaps and silences appear, because, as Andrews notes: "the thematic sub-structure [is] generally defined according to the semantic fields and constitutive rules of white institutions and discourse. As a result, much early black autobiography traffics in ignorance about the actual choices black people had in America and about the meaning of those choices from a black perspective" (To Tell a Free Story 42). Helen Buss, in a completely different context-- her study of Canadian women's autobiography-- refers to such textual gaps as "fissures" or "black holes,"

problematic areas in the "map" of selfhood which the writer is creating. Such "fissures" are the unexamined, unquestioned, or problematic aspects of self with which narrators struggle in a culture antagonistic to them, which also prescribes their selfhood. Using the "maps" handed down to her by dominant power structures, we may surmise that a black woman might have found it necessary, as the earliest black male autobiographers did, to define herself using prevailing white notions of what the black person should be-- as Gates calls Gronniosaw, a studious "European-in-the-making" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 141).

But Belinda rejects all such notions and creates a self-definition genuinely her own. Silence about the harsh realities of black existence in America does not inform her narrative. Neither does she maintain a European value system. Instead, her petition is constructed around a powerful African point of reference which does not present a suitably Christianized, literate, and westernized black consciousness, in accordance with prevailing expectations for blacks, but rather, demonstrates a stubborn oppositionality to prevailing western discourses. Belinda, seeking to have her grievances heard, turns to the petition as a means of resistance, and so finds a palimpsest for the mapping of a resistant African self.

By 1782, the petition had been used by blacks in America for some time, as a means of seeking redress for injustices committed by whites against them. Kaplan and Kaplan trace the beginnings of black petitioning to New England, 1773-1774, when five petitions reflected a mood among blacks there of "exasperation, even anger, although the phraseology is sometimes cautious. Freedom is their impassioned theme" (11). It is in

these petitions that we see references to black Americans as "Lover[s] of True Liberty" and "The Sons of Africa." Here we have no Hammon, Marrant, Equiano or Gronniosaw describing himself in terms of black "absence" (Gates 137; Andrews 33), but rather, a statement of blackness as presence-- and *contentious* presence into the bargain. This blackness challenges whites to honor the spirit of their soon-to-be-legislated Declaration of Independence, to abandon a hypocrisy which prevents them from extending the tenets of the rights of freedom not only to whites, but to blacks also. One petition, signed on May 25, 1774, by "a Grate Number of Blackes of the Province" and submitted to the new governor of Massachusetts reads in part:

we are a freeborn Pepel and have never forfeited this Blessing by aney compact or agreement whatever. But we were unjustly dragged by the cruel hand of power from our dearest frinds and sum of us stolen from the bosoms of ourtender Parents and from a Populous Pleasant and plentiful country and Brought hither to be made slaves for Life in a Christian land.

(Kaplan and Kaplan 13)

It is this language which informs the petition of Belinda to the Massachusetts Legislature eight years later, in 1782. Strikingly similar references to a happy native country, as well as mentions of "tender parent[s]" and "the cruelty" of white men (Belinda 539) suggest that Belinda borrows a mode of discourse as yet unexamined in the research of early African American autobiographical forms. This is a discourse of aggressive resistance, and as such, it situates itself against the more assimilative writings of black men such as Gronniosw, Marrant, Hammon and Equiano.

Yet, even among black petitions, Belinda's is singular in that it is

written and signed with the mark not of a man, or a number of male petitioners, but by a lone woman. Also, it goes further than other petitions in its refusal to subscribe to any Western socio-moral codes whatever. Black male autobiographers and petitioners speak of the Christian God, "'that impartial Judge'" (Caesar Sarter's manuscript in Kaplan and Kaplan 12); quote Scripture as a means of asserting themselves as equal to whites in a common Christian brotherhood; or declare themselves law-abiding Christians: "'There is a great number of us sencear . . . members of the Church of Christ'" (Kaplan and Kaplan 13). Such declarations are a means of attaining credibility with Christian whites. But Belinda asserts that it is a plurality of male and female Nature spirits, "the great Orisa, who made all things," and the "dishonoured deity," presumably Oludumare,² whom she worshipped as a child in Africa. This assertion, when combined with a metaphorical allusion to her master which suggests a condemnation of Christianity and its followers, can only be read as an exceedingly bold gesture on the part of this black woman, standing as she does, before the great white presence of the Legislature of Massachusetts: "What did it avail her that the walls of her lord were hung with splendor, and that the dust trodden under foot in her native country, crowded his gates with sordid worshippers! The law rendered her incapable of receiving property. . ." (Belinda 539-540). The reference to her white master as "lord," the obvious Christian suggestiveness of this word, and the implicit conflation of Christian worship with gold-lust all create a "savage" indictment of hypocritical Western religious systems that claim to worship God, but instead worship men and wealth. The hypocritical nature of Belinda's master is even further exposed as she recounts the manner in

which he goes off to fight a war "in the cause of freedom. . . in a land, where lawless dominion sits enthroned, pouring blood and vengeance on all who dare to be free" (540).

As eagerly as the narratives of Hammon, Marrant, Gronniosaw, Equiano and Pomp embrace Christianity and the trappings of whiteness, Belinda rejects it. Hers is a refusal of white American standards of morality; it is a refusal similar to that of the disillusioned autobiographer Venture Smith, who, after failed attempts to succeed in the world of white men, stands "at the end of his life's quest, without power, community, or religious faith to assuage his sense of alienation" (Andrews 52). Earlier than Smith's creation in 1798 of "an idealized African point of reference for defining morality" (Andrews 51-2), Belinda asserts her own Africentricity. But Belinda differs markedly from Smith in that her final stance is not one of disillusioned alienation: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," Smith laments at the end of his narrative, after bitterly commenting on the futility of engaging in legal struggles with white men: "But Captain Hart was a *white gentleman*, and I a *poor African*, therefore, it was *all right*, and good enough for *the black dog*" [italics are Smith's] (Smith 30). In contrast, Belinda's last words suggest hope and a readiness to continue the struggle: ". . .she prays that such allowance will be made her. . . as will prevent her, and her more infirm daughter, from misery in the greatest extreme. . . *and she will ever pray*" [italics mine] (Belinda 540). These words offer a double meaning; while Belinda assures her readers that she will "ever" continue to petition the Court, she will also petition God. But, in light of her earlier comments, we have our suspicions that her God is definitely not the God of the Legislature of Massachusetts. This fighting

spirit is apparent throughout Belinda's narrative. We see it nowhere else so pronounced in eighteenth-century black autobiography; what we do see in the eighteenth century are black male writers for the most part addressing European and white-American debates about race, intellect, literacy, and the admissibility of Africans into the category delineating "human" subject. In these endeavours, they were forced to negotiate Western and African ways of knowing and being. As Andrews comments: "the intertextual presence of the trope of the talking book demonstrates that from its inception black American life-writing has been profoundly concerned with making the language and conventions of the Western literary tradition speak to and through the voice of black oral culture" (Andrews "Introduction," African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays 4).

I would like to examine some of the integral ways in which Belinda's text differs from the texts of black men writing in the eighteenth century. I will begin an investigation of Belinda's attitude to literacy and "making the language and conventions of Western literary tradition speak to and through the voice of black oral culture" by suggesting that in a kind of chiasmic reversal, Belinda seemed more concerned with making the voice of black oral culture speak to and through the language of the West rather than vice versa. I have already examined how nineteenth-century writer John Jea, signifying upon eighteenth-century black male autobiographies, concerns himself with the trope of the "talking book," in his quest to become a pseudo-European Christian man of letters. If Belinda is not aware of the literary trope of the talking book, she is certainly aware of the issues of orality, literacy and humanity with which her black male

counterparts grappled. But, unlike them, Belinda critiques literacy, as other black women autobiographers like Jarena Lee (1833), Sojourner Truth (1851), and Julia Foote (1879) would do after her. Like Jea, and the eighteenth-century Gronnoisaw and Equiano (Gates 136 & 155), Belinda positions herself in two time frames: one as the present narrator Belinda, and the other as the young, ignorant "savage." But, while the men trace a process of becoming from "savage"-object (a lowly link in the ontological Chain of Being, to whom another object, the text, refuses to speak) to "civilized"-subject (now occupying the same Chain link as white men, and perfectly able to read the text), Belinda changes very little from the "savage" she once was in her narration. Refusing the equations of "savage"-object and "civilized"-subject, Belinda maintains an equation of her own, ever remaining the *"savage"-subject* of her own life and narrative, intent on deriving her sense of existence from "the land where she received her being" (Belinda 539). Her descriptions of her early, ignorant perceptions of things alien and/or Western-- the white men with "faces. . . like the moon," the "floating world" of the slave ship, the "sporting monsters of the deep"-- are not framed comically as those of Equiano, Gronniosaw or Jea are. There is no attempt to hold the young naive self up as the object of condescending authorial and readerly amusement, no sense of the funny pathos of a young "savage" cut off from the white "civilized" world by his color and his ignorance, as in Gronniosaw, who writes:

[My master] used to read prayers in public to the ship's crew every Sabbath day; and when I first saw him read, I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master, for I thought it did, as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips. I wished it would do so with me. . . when nobody saw me, I

opened it, and put my ear down close upon it, in great hopes that it would say something to me; but I was very sorry, and greatly disappointed, when I found that it would not speak. This thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despised me because I was black.

(Gronniosaw 16)

Instead, Belinda asserts that a series of novelties (ship, sea creatures, the meeting of the sea and the horizon) "strove, but in vain, to divert her attention from three hundred Africans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torment; and some of them rejoicing that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds" (Belinda 539). Belinda does not let us overlook the fact that, for her, the issue is not one of becoming literate or "civilized," but rather, of remaining identified with her African brothers and sisters, and refusing to forget the monstrous circumstances which have brought her before a white reading public in the first place. Just as Gronniosaw, Equiano and Jea bring their scenes of naive comedy hard up against the scene of reading, in which the young slave encounters the "talking book" and realizes the necessity of leaving savagery behind, Belinda's scene of naivete also immediately precedes a passage about the learning of Western language. However, learning the "sounds" of this new language are enough for the illiterate Belinda; she is not enamoured of the language, as her male counterparts are. Her learning to speak English does not help erase her sense of oppression and isolation, but exacerbates it as she learns the true extent of her powerlessness in this new world:

Once more her eyes were blest with a continent: but alas! how unlike the land where she received her being! Here all things appeared unpropitious. She learned to catch the ideas, marked by the sounds of language, only to know that her doom was slavery, from which death alone was to emancipate her.

(Belinda 539)

Belinda's petition is evidence, of course, that she does not remain completely powerless, but learns to use English language in ways which subvert and criticize her oppressors. Belinda becomes her own "talking book," intent upon conveying orally her African history and experience, as well as her knowledge of the hypocrisy of American legal systems, through the language and conventions of Western tradition. One hundred years later, her attitude is reflected in that of Sojourner Truth, another black woman whose stubborn illiteracy did not prevent her from producing an autobiography, or from taking her grievances to court on numerous occasions-- and winning.

Belinda's lack of concern with literacy is extended to her attitudes toward gold, another trope which Gates has examined in the writings of eighteenth-century black male autobiographers. The gold chain given Gronniosaw by his mother becomes a symbol of savage greed which he happily casts off. This gesture, suggests Gates, is a symbolic signification upon an Ashanti creation myth which Willem Bosman recounts in A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea (London 1705). In the myth, God presents the greedy African with a choice between the gift of gold, and the gift of Western letters. Observes Gates: "The African, much to his regret, elected gold and was doomed by his avarice to be a slave. As a footnote to Bosman's first edition tells us, the African's avarice was an eternal curse, and his punishment was the doom of never mastering the Western arts and letters" (141). Gronniosaw casts off the gold chain given him by his ancestor, in order to adopt Western letters and Western ways of being; Marrant encourages the Savage Indian chief to give up *his* gold chain; Equiano longs to gain power over the objects which seem to invest

his master with power, one of which is a watch (which Gates presumes to be gold); and finally John Jea turns the gold chain into metaphorical "chains of sin" from which he as spiritual aspirant must free himself. Only Ottobah Cuguano, writing in Britain, explicitly locates greed in the desire not of Africans and other savages, but of Europeans, "mak[ing] the gold chain of Gronniosaw and Marrant the perverted booty gained by the immoral use of European words" (Gates 151).

Like Cuguano's narrative, Belinda's petition stands in direct opposition to the Ashanti myth. If Willelm Bosman recounts a story which paints "the African" as both stupid and greedy, and most black male autobiographers portray themselves as needing to relinquish such innate greed, Belinda's story reverses such attitudes. As a child, she did not realize that "*Europeans* [my emphasis] placed their happiness in the yellow dust, which she carelessly marked with her infant footsteps" (539) or that this "dust trodden under foot in her native country" (540) crowded her master's gates with "sordid worshippers." Belinda disrupts any essentialist perceptions of "the greedy savage African" by presenting us with an oppositional story of her own. Her text indicates that she was a worshipper of the Orisa; as such, she most likely belonged to the Yoruba people, who, from Belinda's account, obviously lay no claim to "savage" gold-lust. The wealth of Belinda's Africa is marked in her estimation by "mountains, covered with spicy forests-- the vallies, loaded with the richest fruits, spontaneously produced-- joined to that happy temperature of air, which excludes excess. . ." The idyllic picture of Africans living in contented moderation is disrupted in the next breath by the advent of the true savages-- Sango-like³ "men, whose faces were like the moon, and

whose bows and arrows were like the thunder and the lightning of the clouds. . ." This European savagery and gold-lust is next juxtaposed against African spirituality, familial kinship, and devotion to God: "[E]ven when she, in a sacred grove, with each hand in that of a tender parent, was paying her devotion to the great Orisa, who made all things, an armed band of white men, driving many of her countrymen in chains, rushed into the hallowed shades!" (539).

While Gronniosaw, Marrant and Jea associate the shedding of gold chains with the shedding of the chains of savage greed and the adoption of white Christianity, Belinda (like the British Cuguano) creates a new relationship between the three elements Christianity, chains, and gold-lust. Belinda draws attention to the actuality of the situation, to the eighteenth-century reality of the relationship between chains and black men. She suggests that for her people, gold signifies nothing; it possesses none of the symbolic exchange value it accrues in the West, but lies undifferentiated from the dust under the feet of Africans intent upon worshipping their own gods.

In the passage describing her experience in America, Belinda again presents us with the reality of the relation between Christianity, gold, and chains. As I have already mentioned, she conflates whites' worship of the Christian "lord" with their worship of slave-owning aristocrats and the gold that such aristocrats accrue from slavery. Belinda, herself legally chained chattel, can only stand by and observe the scene of this hypocrisy: "What did it avail her that the walls of her lord were hung with splendour. . . The laws rendered her incapable of receiving property . . ." Although "never had she a moment at her own disposal [having

been] compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of [her master]," none of his wealth belongs to her. But Belinda, having exposed the reality of the African/gold/chain/religion relationship, sets out to change that reality, and does. In the final analysis, her petition is a performative act which breaks the legal chains keeping her from accessing her master's wealth; and all the while, she vows that she "will ever pray," not only to the Court, but also, implicitly, to her own African God for deliverance from the injustices of her oppressors.

To read Belinda's petition is to read a captivity narrative of sorts. However, it is unlike the captivity narratives of Briton Hammon or John Marrant, who, situating themselves as honorary whites, imitate the conventions of a white literary form very popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the conventional captivity narrative, white men and women recount their horrific experiences as hostages at the hands of "savage" Indian tribes. Hammon, who after his title page, never once refers to the fact that he is a black man calls his Indian captors "those barbarous and inhuman Savages" (6), and repeatedly thanks God's providence for his deliverance. Marrant brings Christianity to the benighted Cherokee, and avoids death at their cruel hands. Belinda, however, is no emissary of Christian white men. Her tale certainly adopts the discourse and form of a captivity narrative, detailing an idyllic scenario of peaceful existence which is violated by marauding savages who tear innocent children from their parents' bosoms, and loving husbands from their wives. But in a profound reversal, those living in "complete felicity" upon the bounteous land are not European settlers, but Africans, and Belinda's savages are white men.

The astuteness with which Belinda "learned to catch the ideas" of her day is not to be underestimated. She is obviously able to enter into and comment upon a number of dominant eighteenth-century discourses which vilify blackness-- discourses which equate civilization with whiteness, Christianity, and literacy, and which attempt to rescue blacks from the "chains" of savagery and gold lust. Illiteracy does not prevent Belinda from entering into these discourses, for she comes before the Massachusetts Legislature with nothing but her voice to present her case, and an amanuensis who could translate her African experience into Western letters on a page. Standing defiantly outside of Euro-American ontological and epistemological systems, she challenges them with a fierce oppositional Africanness which would not be seen again in black women's writing for many years.

Endnotes

1. While Phillis Wheatley's poems do not comprise an autobiography, they include life moments which may be compared to those recounted by Belinda. For example, in "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Wheatley struggles with oppositions similar to those Belinda describes-- America/Africa, black/white, Christian/pagan.

2. Oludumare is the One God of Ifa, a religion of the Yoruba people of West Africa. The Orisa are nature spirits, Oludumare's ambassadors, the link between Heaven and Earth (Neimark 58)

3. In Ifa religion individual humans are governed by their own Orisa; one bears the characteristics of one's presiding nature spirit. Sango, one of the Orisa, is the spirit of thunder and lightning. An Orisa of "quick and vociferous temper" he is best known for his warrior-like nature and his ability as a strategist. Neimark comments: "Sangos using their energy in a nonproductive manner can wreak havoc" (105). Belinda characterizes the invading white men as children of Sango-- interestingly, a sky god, like the God of Christianity.

Chapter Four/ Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw: The Beginnings of African American Women's Christian Autobiography

Forty-nine years after the 1787 publication of Belinda's petition in a Philadelphia journal, in 1836, the autobiography of Jarena Lee appears. Lee's twenty-odd-page narrative is the second known attempt by a black woman in America to record the story of her life in writing. It is entitled The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel. Revised and Corrected From the Original Manuscript, Written by Herself. Ten years after Lee, another black woman would publish her autobiography-- the Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Colour; Together with Some Account of the Great Religious Revivals in America [Written by Herself] appears in London in 1846.¹

Who "revised and corrected" Lee's manuscript is unknown (Andrews Sisters of the Spirit 6), but we do know that she paid five dollars for the service (Lee 1849 ed., 97), and that three years after the 1833 revision, Lee had one thousand copies of her autobiography printed at a cost to herself of thirty-eight dollars (Lee 1849 ed. p. 127). As Sojourner Truth would do almost three decades later, Lee sold her book at various camp meetings, Methodist quarterly meetings, and "even on the streets" (Andrews Sisters 6). In 1839 Lee had another thousand copies of her Life printed, and in 1844 attempted to gain the support and financial backing of the AME Church for an expanded version of her work. However, the

AME Book Committee refused Lee, claiming that her manuscript was "written in such a manner that it is impossible to decipher much of the meaning contained in it" (Andrews Sisters 6). But disregarding the Church's injunction that travelling preachers publish books or pamphlets only with formal Church approval, Lee again financed the 1849² edition of her Life. After the publication of her 1849 autobiography, Lee, then sixty-six years old, falls into obscurity and silence, her activities unknown (Andrews Sisters 7).

We may observe a somewhat similar pattern of independence in the trajectory of Zilpha Elaw's writing career: supported by her own means, she travelled the country-side preaching under no particular denomination. Unlike Lee, who sought out the AME church, Elaw found herself occupying an uneasy position of liminality between black and white communities, which perhaps accounts for her description of herself as a "speckled bird" in her text. She was self-consciously concerned that, in the words of a white Quaker advisor, her "'deportment. . . be prudently conducted,'" since she is "situated. . . in connexion with two distinct communities, so opposite in condition, so contrasted in intelligence, and so antipodal in their feelings and prejudices. . ." (93) Sailing for England in 1840, she preached there until 1845, when she made plans to return to America. She was then about fifty-five.³ Her autobiography was "Published by the Authoress, and Sold by T. Dudley, 19, Charter-House Lane; and Mr. B. Taylor, 19, Montague-St. Spitalfields" (Elaw frontispiece) in 1846. However, it is not known if she actually did return to America, or what her activities were thereafter (Andrews Sisters 9).

Writing a half-century after Belinda, Lee and Elaw situate

themselves within the parameters of a polite, Westernized, Christian identity. Their spiritual autobiographies (Elaw's often reads like a white lady's travelogue)⁴ seem much more assimilative in their commentaries on religion, race and slavery than Belinda's petition; unlike Belinda, these women are increasingly concerned with the impact of their testimony upon a readership of predominantly white people. If Belinda represents a powerful African sensibility, the autobiographies of Lee and Elaw display the "double-consciousness"⁵ of which W.E.B. DuBois would later speak. For on the surface, the women present themselves merely as ignorant sinners who join the fold of believers, becoming pious preachers of God's word. In their autobiographies civil liberty for American blacks seems to become subsumed under the Christian ideal of liberty from sin, and all men and women become equal before the legislature of a Christian God. On the other hand, they never forget the socio-political implications of what it means to be a black woman in nineteenth-century America-- as Elaw tells God: ". . . thou knowest we have many things to endure which others do not" (Elaw 89). That sense of their Africanness emerges in a certain, carefully guarded "black expressivity"-- a term Houston Baker employs in his discussion of black artistic style. It is an expressivity in which "the spirit comes through; the vernacular resounds in brilliant coalescence with the formally literary" (Baker Workings 40). In a number of subtle trickster-like reversals, Lee frustrates white demands for reliable black autobiographical fact-reporting; she also questions the shifting nature of Biblical "Truth" (even as she claims Truth's stability), challenging the validity of patriarchally interpreted Biblical meaning concerning women. William Andrews posits that we do not see such trickster-like strategies in

black (male) autobiographers until about 1855, nineteen years later than in Lee.⁶ In a similar manner of veiled resistance, Zilpha Elaw's autobiography, while appearing to be an exercise in "whiteface" and borrowed masculinity, demonstrates an oblique indictment of racial injustice toward Blacks in both Britain and America; a sense of self not as black female (sexual) object, but as subversive eunuch-subject; a privileging of the expressiveness of black song over the ornateness of the very white literary language she herself employs; and a subversion of the prevailing European-over-African equation by one which valorises the African and demotes Europeans from their presumed position of power.

Both Lee and Elaw demonstrate in their autobiographies a universalizing and depoliticizing trend common in black spiritual life-writing of the nineteenth-century, in which "the conventional image of the pilgrim for Christ usurps the persona of the righteously indignant African . . ." (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 48). Elaw claims early that her text is a spiritual one, portraying not the "features of my outward person" but the "lineaments of my inward man, as inscribed by the Holy Ghost" (Elaw 51); and Lee posits that her story is that of the progress of the inveterate liar and "wretched sinner" (Lee 27) from a state of ignorance and guilt to one of Truth in Christ, and spiritual salvation. No Belinda speaks of the power of the Orisa or the savage cruelty of hypocritical white men here. Yet, although she links herself in a universal "holy communion" (51) with her British readership, Elaw nevertheless opens her Dedication to them in a highly didactic style which recalls the Apostle Paul's addresses to his flock of early Christian churches (Andrews Sisters of the Spirit 239; fn.1); and after advising them in the way they should go, she bids farewell: "And

now, dear brethren, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (52). Positioning herself as teacher and her flock of British "Brethren" as student-aspirants, Elaw is hardly the nineteenth-century African hopeful seeking a universalizing consubstantiation with whites, or travelling to the "Old World" to be "trained" and civilized in European ways (Baker Workings 28). In a text which often reads like a nineteenth-century travelogue to some strange, exotic and heathen land, Elaw is the traveller abroad in a Britain needing civilization, presenting herself as educator, the Ambassador of God to the (white) spiritually disinherited heathen there.

Similarly, writing of her first attempt to attend a (white) church, Lee levels a veiled criticism of the racism existing there: "it appeared that there was a wall between me and a communion with that people, which was higher than I could possibly see over, and seemed to make this impression upon my mind, *this is not the people for you*" (Lee 28). But later, upon attending the African Methodist church: "I had come to the conclusion, that this is the people to which my heart unites. . . I embraced the opportunity. Three weeks from that day, my soul was gloriously converted to God. . ." (29). It is through such brief, implicit references only that she examines issues of race and racism.

In dealing with other issues, Lee is much less subtle; for example, she uses the discourse of white feminism in no uncertain terms, to critique the sexism she encounters in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church. Her references in her 1836 narrative to the sexism she encounters on her spiritual quest create an oppositional feminist discourse which is

much bolder than her textual challenges to nineteenth-century racist ideologies. The fact that Lee is much more explicit in her condemnation of gender oppression seems to suggest that, in 1836, discourses of feminism-- as threatening as they may have been to the male power structure-- were more acceptable than abolitionist sentiments. In her 1849 expanded narrative, Lee is more explicit concerning issues of racism and her support of abolitionism-- which, again, seems to support the historical fact that by mid-century, the issue of slavery had become a central one; laws and social conditions regulating the lives of blacks had become much more repressive, and black writers in anger and frustration had become bolder in their expressions of self, and their condemnations of the peculiar institution.

But in 1836, it is a discourse of feminism rather than abolitionism which Lee adopts with great fervour. Frances Smith Foster observes that Lee's aggressive rhetorical arguments supporting women as preachers in the church demonstrate a pattern common in women's spiritual autobiography-- "the citation of arguments for women's ministries, arguments which by their very repetition become almost characteristic of this literature" (Foster 72-3).

Foster has also observed Lee's rejection of the criteria of the cult of true womanhood. These dictates would require Lee to assume "physical as well as social attributes that African American women did not generally possess" (Foster 66). Lee challenges such dictates, however, by referring to herself as a "coloured lady," a concept which "would startle many readers, for it contrasts greatly with the portrait of the pale, modestly-- even elegantly-- costumed, genteel woman most often imagined" (Foster 66). Yet the drawing of Lee which appears on the frontispiece of her

autobiography depicts again, a certain double-consciousness, for although Lee is a black woman, she is represented as narrow-featured and thin-lipped. Underneath her white bonnet, we may see what appears to be straight black hair. Confounding white expectations of black women's "place," Lee wears a white shawl and sits at a desk with books and paper before her. In her right hand (on which there appears a ring on her fourth finger), she holds a quill pen.

The tenets of true womanhood would dictate that Lee remain at the hearth-side with her sickly son; but Lee is not to be found here. Maternal love and/or quiet modesty do not define Lee, who, like Belinda and black preacher women after them both, transgresses various laws which decree that as a woman, she be silent, passive and compromising. As foremothers of the "cult of the unnatural woman" Belinda, Lee and Elaw enter the public domain of men, breaking the prescribed, demure silence of "natural" femininity, performing acts and uttering statements unthinkable for those who inscribe themselves within the tenets of "true womanhood." Leaving her son with family, Lee travels up and down the country preaching the word of God to black and white communities alike, in the simple language of God's "poor coloured female instrument" (Lee 37).

But the seemingly simple language of Lee's autobiography is not simple at all. Lee challenges what is natural, holy, or accepted with the unnatural, unholy and unaccepted in a kind of metalanguage which confounds lying and truth, fiction and fact; and altogether disrupts the supposedly simple relationship between signifier and signified. That linguistic relationship was valorised in the spiritual and literary contexts in which Jarena Lee found herself-- Christianity demanded truthfulness,

as did white abolitionists who demanded that black autobiographers tell the truth in a manner which was "objective" and unemotional.

As Foster suggests, Lee was probably familiar with other spiritual autobiographies and slave narratives, such as those of black writers John Marrant (1785), Solomon Bayley (1825), and AME church founder and bishop Richard Allen (1833). Lee came into contact with Allen on a number of occasions. Initially, when she approached him to request recognition for herself as a preacher Allen refused her; later he endorsed Lee not as a preacher, but in the lesser role of a travelling exhorter (Andrews Sisters 5-6). Lee makes several mentions of her interactions with Allen in both her 1836 and 1849 autobiographies. In the later text she also refers to a biography of a black preacher, John Steward, entitled The Essence of John Steward "a Colored man, with his miraculous call to the ministry" (Lee, 1849 p. 69). As Foster asserts, Lee "[c]learly. . . knew herself to be part of a literary tradition" (Foster 69).⁷

Lee might have also been aware of the new trend in American literature of her day-- what Andrews refers to as a "genre developed in response to a well-publicized desire on the part of abolitionists, white and black, to marshal the most forceful evidence available in the battle against slavery, the testimony of eyewitnesses" (To Tell a Free Story 62). The first narratives of this genre are strangely lacking in authorial emotion. For in order to provide curious white readers with the "truth" about slavery, narrators were instructed to be as factual and objective as possible in the presentation of information:

By implication the truth of a slave narrative is proportionate to the degree of objectification achieved by the narrator. The more distance he can place between himself as perceiving ego and as receiving, transmitting eye, the more his story will be assumed to

approach reality. Thus Isaac Fisher, the ostensible editor of Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, solicited his reader's confidence in the truth of Ball's story by promising that subjective elements of the Negro's narration had been "carefully suppressed" in the final written form of the autobiography.

(63)

The "reality" white readers were seeking to discern was one in which, according to the secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1837, "'facts and testimony as to the actual condition of the slaves' would 'thrill the land with Horror'" (To Tell a Free Story 62). The titillative quality of the "facts" cannot be overlooked here. Whites, uninterested in what Charles Ball actually felt while atrocities were being committed against him, were concerned to read about the details of the atrocities in the way that they might read the Gothic horror scenes of Irving or Poe, (both writing during the 1820s and 30s). Emotional distancing lent the narratives of Charles Ball (1836), Moses Roper (1837) and James Williams (1838) an "objective" status. In these early slave narratives, the reader is assured that "the direction of fit in this 'unadorned detail of acts' will be. . . 'word-to-world'. . . Decoding would be conducted in one direction, from the signifier to its presupposed signified in the world of slavery. In no other way would language be allowed to sidetrack the reader" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 83).

But on many occasions in *her* autobiography, Lee examines the shifting nature of writing, language and meaning. Early in her text, Lee is well aware that the language of texts can deceive, damage and dehumanize. At the moment that Satan tempts her to drown herself in a brook, she writes:

At the time I had a book in my hand; it was on a Sabbath morning, about ten o'clock; to [the brook] I resorted where on coming to the water I sat down on the bank, and on my looking into it; it was suggested, that drowning would be an easy death. It seemed as if some one was speaking to me, saying put your head under, it will not distress you. . .

(28)

Lee's conflation of "book" with "brook" suggests that "looking into it" (the book? the brook?) can be a dangerous affair. Like the brook, this talking book is an ever-shifting, treacherous concourse of language, which has the power to spiritually and physically obliterate her. Lee's autobiography is written in 1836-- *after* the time when Henry Louis Gates Jr. claims the trope of the talking book disappeared. For Jarena Lee, unlike her black male literary predecessors, literacy is *not* analogous with civility. Already literate, she is still a "wretched sinner," painfully aware of the socio-economic discrepancies still existing between her work-shirking, lying black servant self and her exacting white mistress. She is still plagued by suicidal tendencies. Like her black religious sisters, Lee does not believe in the power of literacy to civilize and redeem, but must continually discriminate between texts which are detrimental or conducive to her well-being.

After the b(r)ook incident, a well-meaning mistress takes the Bible away from a troubled young Lee and gives her a novel to read instead. Realizing she has been given a fictional text, Lee "refused to read [it]" (Lee 28). Later, in her discussion of the Biblical account of an eternal Hell "where all liars, who repent not, shall have their portion" (31), she points out the inability of humans, constrained by their limited understanding of "time," to truly comprehend the meaning of the Biblical concept of the

"bottomless pit":

This [biblical] language is too strong and expressive to be applied to any state of suffering in *time*. Were it to be thus applied, the reality could no where be found in human life; the consequence would be, that *this* scripture would be found a false testimony. But when made to apply to an endless state of perdition, in eternity, beyond the bounds of human life, then this language is found not to exceed our views of a state of eternal damnation.

(31)

If a discrepancy exists between heavenly and earthly understanding of language, such a discrepancy is also evident between early church notions of the word "preach" and contemporary patriarchal notions. Lee argues that as early as Mary Magdalene's first announcement of the resurrection of Christ, women have preached and continue to preach. Indeed, Mary, an uneducated woman who did not need a Scriptural text from which to preach, is no different from the first disciples, also uneducated, unread men:

But some will say, that Mary did not expound the Scripture, therefore, she did not preach, in the proper sense of the term. To this I reply, it may be that the term *preach*, in those primitive times, did not mean exactly what it is now *made* to mean; perhaps it was a great deal more simple then, than it is now:-- if it were not, the unlearned fishermen could not have preached the gospel at all, as they had no learning.

(36-7)

Later in her spiritual development she calls the Sabbath "seventh-day," since, "after my conversion I preferred the plain language of the Quakers . . ." (47). Once again, Lee draws attention to the fact that language and signifiers do not automatically define the signified, but are affected by factors such as historicity, gender, race, or religious affiliation.

Phebe Davidson observes that "[b]y specifically rejecting the fiction represented by the novel in her text, Lee asserts her own textual

identity as non-fictional, as absolutely real" (168). Davidson goes on to assert that for Lee, "language, as vivified by religion, is real/non-fictional . . . by virtue of its religious function; but, paradoxically. . . it is subject to the judgment and control, the use, of one such as herself, not merely "a coloured lady," but a human being for whom the saviour died and who shares the inspiration and experience of her predecessors -- even the Apostle Paul" (Davidson 173). I have already argued, however, that there is an undercurrent in Lee's text which problematizes language, and conflates the fictional with the non-fictional (Spiritual) in the very manner that Lee ostensibly denounces.

Lee claims God's authority in order to speak truth, or give language its proper meaning. She encourages us to believe her as she expounds on what "preaching" is "*made to mean*," as opposed to what she tells us it really signifies. As an instrument of God, she asks her readers to rest assured that she, a black Christian female autobiographer, has complied with their demands that she give the truthful facts only. But in her narrative Lee disappoints her readers' demands for factuality, objectivity and truthfulness. Her narrative begins with a reference to lying, and throughout the remainder of her story, although Lee claims to be commissioned by God as she boldly interprets Biblical passages, her own dreams, and other people's words, the language of her text seems to encourage us to question the veracity of her claims. Lee writes:

My parents being wholly ignorant of the knowledge of God, had not therefore instructed me in any degree in this great matter. Not long after the commencement of my attendance on this lady [Mrs. Sharp], she had bid me do something respecting my work, which in

a little while after, she asked me if I had done, when I replied, Yes-- but this was not true.

(27)

bell hooks has commented upon the significance of lying for a race of people who has survived largely thanks to this habit. As I have mentioned above, the black slave narrative was at once suspect as a lie in the eyes of defensive southern and ignorant northern whites, and white abolitionists took extreme precautions in tutoring their black charges on the art of objective fact-relaying. Thus, for Lee to open her autobiography by telling her reader that she was once an inveterate liar seems an invitation for distrust-- a distrust she then must set about dispelling:

At this awful point, in my early history, the spirit of God moved in power through my conscience, and told me I was a wretched sinner. On this account so great was the impression, and so strong were the feelings of guilt, that I promised in my heart that I would not tell another lie. But notwithstanding this promise my heart grew harder, after a while, yet the spirit of the Lord never entirely forsook me. . .

(27)

Who, indeed, would believe Lee's story as she wavers between self-doubt and certainty throughout the entire process of her conviction, justification and sanctification? This is the challenge which Lee initially sets us-- to believe in the power of God to convert (black) liars. Yet throughout her spiritual struggle, Lee is continuously plagued by the fear that Satan might be deluding her:

Satan well knew that if he could succeed in making me disbelieve my conversion, that he would catch me either on the ground of complete despair, or on the ground of infidelity. For if all I had passed through was to go for nothing, and was but a fiction, the mere ravings of a disordered mind, then I would naturally be led to believe that there is nothing in religion at all.

(34)

Her abundant use of phrases like "there seemed to be" (43), "there seemed to sound" (35), "I felt I was led" (43), "I thought I distinctly heard" (35) work to undermine our sense of sureness about this spiritual pilgrim. Is she indeed chosen of God? Or, like the dangerous Nat Turner, is she simply a deluded fanatic presenting us with "the mere ravings of a disordered mind" (34)? Preoccupied with the telling of truth until the end of her narrative, she writes in her penultimate sentence: "But let it be remarked that I have never found that Spirit to lead me contrary to the Scriptures of truth, as I understand them" (48). Yet the niggling question still remains-- in what manner *does* a "poor female coloured instrument," plagued by doubt, and once a hardened liar, understand Scripture? For nineteenth-century readers, grappling with issues of truth-telling in black autobiography, and with issues of women's ability to speak sensibly in public at all, the question would have been a disturbing one.

If Lee presents us with a before-and-after picture of herself as sinner-made-saint/captive-made-free, in which, as Andrews argues, the black narrator is always at pains to dissociate the good latter from the evil former, we may rest assured that she has left her lying days behind. But before we reach the end of her first page, Lee presents us with a "Psalm" (because she capitalizes the word, we are led to presume the reference is Biblical) which sounds suspiciously as though half of it is of her own making:

At the reading of the Psalms, a ray of renewed conviction darted into my soul. These were the words, composing the first verse of the Psalms for the service:

Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin,
Born unholy and unclean,

Sprung from man, whose guilty fall
Corrupts the race, and taints us all.

(27)

Phebe Davidson has commented on Lee's manipulation of Biblical text for racial purposes:

Although her text, and one presumes, her sermons, are pointedly concerned with the issues of salvation and damnation, there is a carefully embedded subtext dealing with the more inflammatory issue of race.

In the first psalm quoted by Lee, the word "race" pertains, apparently, to the human race; yet the word and the quotations do not stand sole and separate from the rest of the text in the mind of the reader. Although Lee has said nothing overt of race in her narrative up to this point, she has announced herself as "a coloured lady" in its title, and has found herself moved toward salvation by the quoted lines of a psalm. . .

In her search for spiritual community, she persists in suggestive phrasing.

(173)

There is no Biblical Psalm which reads like Lee's excerpt. The Psalm which begins in a similar vein to Lee's is 51:5-6, which reads: "Surely I have been a sinner from birth,/ Sinful from the time my mother conceived me." However, the next lines to follow have nothing to do with the corruption of "the race," but with God's desire for truth: "Surely you desire truth in the inner places;/ You teach me wisdom in the inmost place." What are we to make of Lee's "suggestive phrasing," her manipulation of Biblical text? In light of the fact that Lee, as black objective "eye" and as Christian pilgrim, is expected by her readership to replicate the facts and tell the truth, her discrepancy is of interest here. Is it simply a discrepancy? A slip of the pen, or a bit of negligence on the part of someone too lazy to go and check her Biblical references? Because of the onus (both imagined and real) on Lee to prove her rehabilitation from lazy, lying black servant to Christian preacher, to define her story as God's

truth, we must ask if her suggestive phrasing is nothing other than a manipulation of facts-- executed to create a kind of "fiction" of Lee's own making. Our suspicions are heightened when, in a later passage in which Lee attempts to describe her sanctification, she likens herself to Saint Paul, and refers inaccurately to an incident recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Foster notes that Lee "found an archetypal model" in Paul/Saul and "not only described a conversion experience strikingly similar in both incident and language to Saul's but also made direct comparison between her life and his" (Foster 62). Lee writes: "There is no language that can describe it, except that which was heard by St. Paul, when he was caught up to the third heaven, and heard words which it was not lawful to utter" (34). In actual fact, it is not Saint Paul, but a friend of his who experiences the "third heaven," and the reason that Paul tells us about his friend rather than himself, is that he refuses to boast about his strengths, but prefers to boast about his weaknesses only. The actual passage by Paul reads as follows:

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. . . And I know that this man. . . was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

(2 Cor. 12:1-6)

Lee not only "boasts" about her own sanctification, but twists the truth in that boasting, in order to align herself more directly with St. Paul. Again, it is difficult to believe that a woman intent on proving to sceptical readers her worthiness and ability to preach the Bible would err twice in

quoting that Bible within the parameters of a small, twenty-seven-page pamphlet. I would suggest that Lee's discrepancies come from a desire on her part to manipulate the truth for her own convenience-- in the first case, to engage in a "suggestive phrasing" which combines her sense of her own sinfulness with her search for a black community or "race" with which to unite in Christian worship. In the second instance of fact-tampering, Lee establishes her spiritual authority by associating her sanctification with the conversion of St. Paul. She is unable to find the appropriate language to describe the incident, but, attempting to maintain her comparison with St. Paul, she conflates two incidents: Paul's conversion, and Paul's recollection of a friend's inability to express words he heard while caught up to the "third heaven." Again, Lee engages in some inaccurate, but suggestive phrasing in order to drive home a powerful message of her own.

Such phrasing belies her assertions that she is telling us nothing but the pristine truth as a converted Christian, and black autobiographer. For while Lee writes outwardly as a truth-teller, her suggestive phrasing and her comments on the nature of language betray another Lee-- a knowledgeable black female trickster of sorts who understands the shifting nature of all (white/ patriarchal) "Truth," and knows that all reality-- including her own-- is a kind of fiction, constructed by the language and the memory which defines and orders it. The line between truth and fiction in this black woman's autobiography becomes a shifting and problematic one.

Zilpha Elaw

While Jarena Lee openly challenges patriarchal notions of Biblical

"Truth" concerning women, and continuously undermines white belief in her capacity as a black woman for "truth-telling," Elaw is more oblique in this regard. We do not often doubt the veracity of Elaw's claims⁸ because, unlike Lee, her tone is self-assured and erudite. Indeed, early in her text, she carefully warns us about the deceptiveness of the written word: "Take heed what you read: as a tree of knowledge, both of good and evil, is the press; it oftentimes teems with rabid poisons, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness" (52). But this does not dispel the fact that her very text contains its own contradictions, which demonstrate the self-preserving double-speak which blacks (men and women)-- and women (white and black)-- have used in order to survive their tenuous and problematic position within the "contradictions and complexities" (Smith 85) of a racist, patriarchal America. Elaw's description of the Quaker family she works for as a girl is a telling example of her tendency toward truth-avoidance. At the age of twelve, after her mother dies, Elaw writes that her father, "having placed my younger sister under the care of her aunt, then consigned me to the care of Pierson and Rebecca Mitchel. . ." (53). Here we are presented with a misleading parallel, for we only gradually come to realize that "care" provided by a family relation is not the same as the "care" of the Mitchels, "those kind benefactors under whom my dear father had placed me" (53). Elaw works as a servant girl for the Mitchels; she later refers to Mrs. Mitchel as "my mistress" (58). We also realize that her initial description of them as caring kindly benefactors may have been less than truthful-- may have been, quite possibly, the attempt of a black autobiographer to solicit white approval as a "good nigger" in the first lines of her text. For Elaw later reveals: "I *sometimes* met with very

severe rebukes from my mistress, and I endured her reproofs without the exhibition of my former resentments and saucy replies. . ." [my emphasis] (58). We begin to wonder about the nature of her relationship with the Mitchels. The following passage provides us with even greater insight:

Prior to my experience of the life and power of godliness, my mistress *frequently* charged me with pertness and insolent behaviour; but after I had imbibed somewhat of the meekness and gentleness of Jesus, and had been instructed by his religion not to answer again when chided, then she *frequently* charged me with sullenness and mopishness. This treatment often sent me to the throne of grace, to seek the sympathy of Him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. I now felt, bitterly, the loss of my dear mother. . . [emphasis mine]

(59)

Mrs. Mitchel, it would seem, falls somewhat short of the initial description we have of her as "kindly benefactor." In similar oscillations,⁹ Elaw urges women to be submissive in one breath:

The boastful speeches too often vented by young females against either the paternal yoke or the government of a husband, is both indecent and impious-- conveying a wanton disrespect to the regulations of Scripture. . . That woman is dependant on and subject to man is the dictate of nature. . .

(61)

and in another openly recounts the manner in which she disobeyed the injunctions of her own husband:

. . . [my husband] advised me to decline the work [of preaching] altogether, and proceed no further. I was very sorry to see him so much grieved about it; but my heavenly Father had informed me that he had a great work for me to do; I could not therefore descend down to the counsel of flesh and blood, but adhered faithfully to my commission. . .

(84)

Other instances of contradiction involve Elaw's praise of the simplicity of an oral, heavenly, song-like language, in spite of her frequent

use of a belaboured, and pretentiously erudite literary style. Elaw's language certainly suggests a linguistic attempt at whiteface. She begins her address in the following manner:

Dear Brethren and Friends,
 After sojourning in your hospitable land, and peregrinating among you during these last five years; in the course of which period, it has been my happiness to enjoy much spiritual intercourse with many of you in your family circles, your social meetings, and in the house of God, I feel a strong desire again to cross the pathless bosom of the foaming Atlantic and rejoin my dear friends in the occidental land of my nativity. . .

(51)

Stilted, formulaic eighteenth-century descriptions of nature in which the sky becomes a "broad canopy above," and the fish of the ocean are "finny tribes pouring out by thousands" or "the great leviathan" (139) suggest Elaw's desire to demonstrate her erudition. However, Elaw's attempt to master the "master's" literary style is puzzlingly countered by her rejection of that style in favour of simple language couched in song. She is exposed to this pure language at her sister's death-bed-- a kind of song "doubtless in use among the holy angels," which "seems to be a matter of gracious promise on the part of Jehovah, on behalf of his redeemed people. Zephaniah iii.9." (Elaw 74). The tiny Book of Zephaniah to which Elaw merely alludes in passing, deals in its entirety with God's wrath upon "the city of oppressors" (iii.1). God promises to deliver Israel: "Sing, O Daughter of Zion;/ shout aloud, O Israel!/ Be glad and rejoice with your heart. . . I will deal with all who oppressed you. . ." (iii. 14-19). Israel has been a common metaphor for blacks in their literary explorations of their condition as an enslaved people in America. Thus, Elaw's reference to a pure language of song, laid upon the palimpsest of God's dealings with those who oppress his chosen people, seems to me a powerful

assertion of an oral, black Christian spirituality on the part of Elaw. Her oblique strategy here, and her engagement in fervent song at other moments in the text-- such as the pivotal transcendent moment of her conversion-- suggests the "black expressivity" to which Houston Baker has referred (37). Baker uses the autobiography of Frederick Douglass as an example: Douglass' remembrance and privileging of black musical expressivity is "the unifying affective bond between a spirited and singing text and the written autobiography of. . . Douglass" (40). At the bedside of her sister, in a passage which demonstrates her obvious knowledge of rhetoric, Elaw notes how death may cause the dying to:

break forth and sing with a melodious and heavenly voice, several verses in a language unknown to mortals. A pure language, unalloyed by the fulsome compliment, the hyperbole, the tautology and circumlocution, the insinuation, double meaning and vagueness, the weakness and poverty, the impurity, bombast, and other defects, with which all human languages are clogged, seems to be essential for the associations of glorified spirits and the elevated devotion of heaven. . .

(74)

Yet, ironically, throughout her text, and even in the above passage, Elaw uses the very language she condemns, in a double-consciousness we do not see in the early petition of Belinda, "an African." This poignant passage also describes the manner in which Elaw receives her call to preach the word of God (significantly, from her sister): ". . . she. . . informed me, that she had seen Jesus, and had been in the society of angels; and that an angel came to her, and bade her tell Zilpha that she must preach the gospel; and also, that I must go to a lady named Fisher, a Quakeress, and she would tell me further what I should do. . ." (73). In the actual description of the death of her sister, variations of the word "sing" are repeated seven times:

. . . she then began singing, and appeared to sing several verses; but the language in which she sung was too wonderful for me, and I could not understand it. We all sat or stood around her with great astonishment, for her voice was as clear, musical and strong, as if nothing had ailed her; and when she had finished her song of praise, (for it was indeed a song of praise, and the place was full of glory,) she addressed herself to me . . . The next day. . . she asked me if that hymn which she had sung on the previous night was not beautiful; adding, "Ah, Zilpha! angels gave it me to sing. . ." She continued in this happy frame of mind until her soul fell asleep in Jesus. . .

(73-4)

Elaw's narrative is interspersed with further references to song such as the following: "It is like heaven descended upon an earthly soil, when all unite to: 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.'" (64). In a revelatory moment in which Elaw realises that she has been resisting the direction of God:

. . . [the pastor] gave forth the following lines to be sung--
 "Jesus, the hindrance show,
 Which I have feared to see;
 And let me now consent to know,
 What keeps me back from Thee."

While singing these lines, I was led to discover that I had not obeyed the call of the Lord, by refusing to go to Mr. Budinot's as I had been directed.

(69)

Early in her autobiography, Elaw alludes to the importance of song in her spiritual wholeness. Comparing the happy, song-filled atmosphere of her parents' home with that of the morose white Quaker household she later serves after her mother's death, she writes that "in my father's house" family prayers were said and "the praises of God" sung both morning and night. However, "the persons with whom I now resided were Quakers, and their religious exercises, if they observed any, were performed in the secret silence of the mind. . . I soon gave way to the evil propensities of an unregenerate heart. . ." (54). In her moment of

revelation, however, Christ finds the young black servant girl in the songless white household fervently engaged in religious song. In the space of three paragraphs, she draws attention to her singing three times: ". . . one evening, whilst singing one of the songs of Zion, I distinctly saw the Lord Jesus approach me with open arms. . . I was singing the following lines. . . As I was milking the cow and singing, I turned my head, and saw a tall figure approaching. . . " (56). In this moment, Elaw is no longer silent in a white household of silence; she is no longer the obedient servant girl. Instead, she becomes the teller of miraculous and incredible tales:

[T]he beast of the stall gave forth her evidence to the reality of the heavenly appearance; for she turned her head and looked round as I did; and when she saw, she bowed her knees and cowered down upon the ground. I was overwhelmed with astonishment at the sight, but the thing was certain and beyond all doubt. I write as before God and Christ, and declare, as I shall give an account to my Judge at the great day, that every thing I have written in this little book, has been written with conscientious veracity and scrupulous adherence to truth.

(56-7)

She is a disruptor of silence, a transgressor of the proprieties of white mistress/black servant relations, the recalcitrant female-- in other words, a woman who stands outside of "true womanhood," an unnatural woman, a monster. Like Lee, Elaw too abandons her child in order to preach, unconcerned about the duties of motherhood: "Thus I left my child. . . not knowing whither I should go. From Philadelphia I started for New York; and on my journey passed within three hundred yards of my own home, yet did not call there. . . . I was absent from home seven months. . . ." (90). Tropes of monstrosity-- in the form of her body as male and castrated, and in the forms of illness and "speckled[ness]" (59)-- function

in Elaw's text in a manner which Susan Gubar describes as common to women writers of the nineteenth century. These writers, "who feared their attempts at the pen were presumptuous, castrating, or even monstrous, engaged in a variety of strategies to deal with their anxiety about authorship" (Gubar 295). But if Elaw's monstrosity signals her dis-ease as woman preacher/writer in a nineteenth-century whitemale discursive field which would label her as monster, we must question why it is that she can go on her way rejoicing "with the blooming prospects of a better inheritance"; why it is that, although illness becomes an important trope in her text, Elaw's figurative castration is juxtaposed *against* illness--becoming, indeed, a sign of spiritual *wellness*, a "regenerat[ion]" (51), a cause for great celebration.

In the very first paragraph of her autobiography, Elaw presents her readers with a

contour portrait of my regenerated constitution-- exhibiting, as did the bride of Solomon, comeliness with blackness. . . and, as did the apostle Paul, riches with poverty, and power in weakness. . . a representation not, indeed of the features of my outward person, drawn and coloured by the skill of the pencilling artist, but of the lineaments of my inward man, as inscribed by the Holy Ghost, and according to my poor ability, copied off for your edification.

(51)

Perhaps, in her portrayal of herself Elaw adopts the very persona of the male writer. But how are we to read this claim to spiritual *castrated* "manhood?" Is it perhaps a tortured representation of Elaw's own feelings of lack as a (black) woman writing? Painfully conscious of her physical embodiment as a black woman in a society which degrades black female embodiment, does Elaw attempt to displace that female physicality completely? As Katherine Fishburn observes, in a white Victorian literary

discourse where "elaborate metaphoric displacements" (93) substituted for (white) women's embodiment, black women were overembodied. Thus, we see in nineteenth-century genteel black women's writing, especially writing in the postbellum era, a tendency to hide "the black body from view because they no longer felt they could trust their (white) readers" (Fishburn 96). Fishburn posits that this "narrative distrust" has its origins in Harriet Jacobs' autobiography Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and other less-known black female narratives. We may suspect that Elaw effects such a concealment; but in spite of her insistence that her "inward man" is "not. . . of the features of my outward person" (51), she nevertheless presents a paradoxical physical spirituality defined by bodily characteristics of "comeliness" and "blackness." As such, her spiritual "contour portrait" becomes a "fleshly," black-expressive (Baker Workings 37) representation, signifying not merely a disembodied, colourless, spiritual consubstantiation of her black self with white readers, but rather the very physical fact of Elaw's existence in America as a black woman.

But we are still faced with Elaw's presentation of herself as "man," more precisely as "eunuch." The first indication we receive that Elaw's "inward man" (51) does not possess the same endowments as other men occurs in her description of her conversion-- her powerful recognition, as a teenager, of Christ. Elaw writes that, after the incident, the peace of

the peace of God which passeth understanding was communicated to my heart; and joy in the Holy Ghost, to a degree, at the last, unutterable by my tongue and indescribable by my pen; it was beyond my comprehension; but, from that happy hour, my soul was set at glorious liberty; and, like the Ethiopic eunuch, I went on my way rejoicing in the blooming prospects of a better inheritance with the saints in light.

It would seem that this is the exact moment at which Elaw's previously "unregenerate" constitution (54) becomes "regenerated"-- she alludes to herself as eunuch thereafter on a number of occasions. It is helpful to examine the details of Elaw's life before her regeneration. Until the age of twelve, Elaw lived with her family of origin-- three children including herself, and her "religious parents" who praised God with song (53). On the death of her mother, however, her father consigns her to the care of the Mitchels, for whom Elaw works as a servant girl. It is in this songless white Quaker household that Elaw loses her early sense of religion, becomes "unregenerate" (54), and experiences a disturbing sense of aloneness borne out of "the singularity with which I was treated" (59). Here she "dwelt as a speckled bird" (59). Only later, while still in the "care" of the Mitchels, does Elaw rediscover Jesus on her own, becoming the "regenerated" eunuch of the above-quoted passage, who goes on his way singing and rejoicing. Thus, it would seem that the disruption in Elaw's young life, which takes her from the soulful happiness of a religious and whole black-family existence to a strange, silent, white environment, is a rupture or illness, healed by the advent of Jesus. But the idea of this healed rupture is problematized by the paradoxical fact that the metaphor for this healed spirit is a black man, castrated. Andrews (To Tell a Free Story 12) has noted that paradox in the slave narrative is a common figuration, reflecting the systemic oppression of blacks in America; white liberty and equality as expounded in the Declaration of Independence take on their opposite meanings for African Americans since blacks live in an America where "freedom" for the white man means "slavery" for the black, where white wealth is black poverty, and white hope is black despair.

Elaw uses paradox in a similar manner. Disfigurement and regeneration are tropes which she introduces early. In her dedication she presents her readers with her "regenerated constitution," and exhorts them to "[shun], carefully, the destructive vices which so deplorably abound in and disfigure the Christian community. . ." (51). But in the spirit of paradox which suffuses Elaw's text, her "regenerated constitution" is a castrated man. Perhaps Elaw's inward man rejoices *because* of his lack of that commodity deemed indispensable by patriarchal standards. We must remember the fact that one of the first things Elaw reminds her readers of is the paradox inherent in Scripture: that in Christ she has found "comeliness with blackness. . . riches with poverty. . . power in weakness . . ." (51) Throughout her text, Elaw urges her readers to renounce their love of all those qualities extolled by prevailing white American standards--all the "current traditions and prejudices" (52). Whiteness, riches, and social standing are the evils which "disfigure the Christian community" (51). She further admonishes: "abhor the pride of respectability" (52); "renounce the love of money" (52) as well as "the pride of a white skin [which] is a bauble of great value with many. . ." (85). Only by rejecting prevailing notions of power can the Christian be whole:

Cautiously, diligently, and habitually observe and obey the directions and statutes of Christ and his apostles, that your foundation may be built not upon the sands of current traditions and prejudices, but upon the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. . . and that you may become His true and finished disciples, perfect and entire, lacking nothing, but complete in all the will of God.

(52)

Lack in prevailing discourse, then, becomes wholeness, "perfect and entire" in the subversive discourse of Elaw. Elaw draws her readers' attention to

lack. But it is that very lack-- lack of whiteness, lack of riches, lack of social position-- represented by the shocking physical lack of the phallus which facilitates her ability to go on her way rejoicing in Christ.

Hortense Spillers observes that in Alice Walker's "The Child Who Favored Daughter" and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, castration is a spectre which haunts both African American men and women. Spillers argues that Freudian and Lacanian theories of incest and phallic signification apply to African American existence "only by accident" (148)-- black family relations are so skewed by slavery that in the writing of Walker and Ellison, we see a suspension of the incest taboo, because undifferentiated black father/daughter/son/brother/sister/mother relations are "spread across the social terrain in horizontal display" rather than the (white) lawful vertical configurations. In such a skewed horizontal display, the paternal connection is shrouded in uncertainty, children are "lost, stolen, or strayed from their mothers" (148) and castration becomes a metaphor for spiritual mutilation and social confusion and disempowerment. Daughters are impregnated or otherwise physically abused by fathers and fathers are emasculated in their relations with "the big house" (Spillers 136). For example, Trueblood, the consummate storyteller of Invisible Man, impregnates his hapless daughter, and becomes the "whore/gal" (Spillers 134) of his whitemale listeners, entertaining them compulsively with sexually titillating stories of the experience. In these stories, he "disappears into an endless progression of enclosures that replicate the vaginal/uterine structure in which he has every right to fear that he will get lost and, quite correctly, fall bereft of his penal powers. . . . [This becomes] a symptom of an inverted castration complex" (Spillers

134). And in Alice Walker's "The Child Who Favored Daughter," the daughter, assuming "proportions of monstrosity" (145) because she dares to write her own desire, symbolically suffers her "castrated breasts [to be tossed] to the dogs" (144) by an impotent father who "will not use his 'gun' where it counts [against white men] but only against one who will whimper and drag her hair in the dirt ground before him" (144). For black Americans, then, castration and the castration complex is a condition which pertains not only to daughters as symbolic accident of birth or to sons as fear of paternal reprisal, but to all African American men and women as symbol-- and all too often actual *fact*-- of a brutal, sustained and systematic familial rupture and racial degradation enacted on the bodies of black persons.

Yet the newly regenerated Elaw, castrated as she is, needs no phallus to go on her way rejoicing. Her "inward man" subverts expectation, ecstatic in spite of the fact that he lacks the thing which for men is most valued. Elaw, then, defies a triple brutalization: the violence patriarchy perpetuates in its aggressive valorisation of phallic hegemony over all women black and white; the shame of the sexual brutalization experienced by *black* women under slavery-- who, Baker argues, transmute that shame into a genteel, whiteface approval of white patriarchy (Baker 30); and the castrating emasculation (both in a literal and a figurative sense) which African men in America have resisted since their involuntary arrival on these shores.

The disfigured body of the castrato, then, becomes for Elaw a trope of spiritual power and resistance in the face of a racism and sexism which threatens to spiritually and physically annihilate her. From the bold

defiance of Belinda; to the subtle and manipulative strategies of Lee; to Elaw's representation (in white Western erudition) of lack and absence as indicative of the ultimate Presence of the power of the Spirit, the mothers' gardens have been tended by a strange and (to the readerly white sensibilities of the cult of true womanhood) terrifying trinity indeed. The African Orisa-worshipper, the rehabilitated(?) trickster-liar, and the eunuch all stand before us, inhabiting a different space than that of their more genteel black sisters. Four years after Elaw published her Memoirs in 1846, Sojourner Truth's Narrative appears. Truth, consummate performer before the jury of her readership, is a new addition to this cult of unnatural (black) womanhood. She privileges black female presence and dignified embodiment over hyperembodiment and absence in a manner which makes her the most well-known of the black female evangelists.

Endnotes

1. Until recently, Elaw's text has received relatively brief analysis. Frances Smith Foster, Joanne Braxton, and William Andrews devote about two pages each to Elaw in their texts Written by Herself, Black Women Writing Autobiography, and To Tell a Free Story respectively.

2. I examine the 1836 version of Lee's autobiography here. It is about twenty-seven pages, much shorter and more concise than the 1849 version, which Andrews describes as little more than "a travelogue" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 62-9).

3. Andrews estimates the date of Elaw's birth at around 1790 (Andrews Sisters 7).

4. For example:

I returned to Huddersfield on the 11th of July, where I remained a few weeks; it is delightfully situated; being entirely surrounded with majestic hills, with several streams of water running through it, which conduces much to the prosperity of its manufacturing enterprise. There are in this town four places of worship belonging to the Episcopalians. . . . The houses are neat, and chiefly built of stone; there are several bridges, watering places and baths. It has a large market; and appears to be situated in a fruitful soil, abounding with fruit trees; the gardens are extensive and many of them tastefully laid out; and the approaches to it are by railway and good high roads. . .

(153)

5. Bell notes that Du Bois was the first to describe the "sociopsychological experience of black Americans as double-consciousness" -- that is:

a second sight. . . which yields him no true consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation. . . this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,-- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

(Bell 12)

6. Henry Bibb (1849) describes the lies he was forced to tell as a slave, as the only self-defence he possessed; James Pennington (1849) asserts his truth and facts as his own private property, not to be judged by others. William Wells Brown (1855) is the first writer whose formal strategies Andrews refers to as "trickster-like"-- Brown's lying, delightfully glib alter ego "Sanford" continually undermines Brown's

insistence that "slavery makes its victims lying and mean" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 147-165).

7. In addition to the autobiographies of Marrant, Bayley, and Allen, and the biography of Steward, it is quite probable that Lee also knew of George White's Brief Account (1811) and Nat Turner's Confessions (1833). White's narrative recounts his struggle to attain preacher-status within a racist white Methodist Episcopalian church. While his is the first African American narrative to "place words like 'liberty,' 'speak,' and 'text' in relationship to each other" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 56), White "keeps the reader so far outside the realm of the narrative consciousness that one feels almost as screened off from the private White as one does from Marrant or Gronniosaw in their dictated stories" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 56). This "screening" or censoring of the inner processes of the black narrator characterizes a general attempt on the part of many black autobiographers, until the mid-nineteenth century, to achieve "consubstantiation" with a white readership-- that is, a sense of harmony with the white reader in which the reader's "cultural ideals of justice" (To Tell a Free Story 29) remain undisturbed. Not only George White, but also writers like Allen, Marrant and Bayley, exhibit this censorship. Marrant presents himself to us simply as honorary white man; Allen, an "institution man" (To Tell a Free Story 68), is remote and objective in his recounting of the injustices perpetrated against him as a representative of the new African Methodist Episcopalian church; and Bayley turns "the individual slave into the generic sinner. . . His enslavement and his lonely and desperate flight are converted from signs of degradation and alienation into 'consubstantiating' metaphors that link his plight with that of the white reader on the spiritual level of interpretation" (67).

These consubstantiating narratives stand in opposition to a work like Nat Turner's, which also becomes consubstantiative, but only because its editor discounts Turner's story as a negative exemplum. The immense popularity of the Confessions is evidenced by the fact that its editor, Thomas Gray, printed and sold 50,000 copies (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 73). Gray, concerned with demonstrating the demonic fanaticism of a black insurrectionist, allows Nat Turner to present his story freely-- *after* Gray has presented readers with an introduction instructing them how the narrative is to be read. Thus, while Turner recounts visions and messages received from God, the reader already discounts the slave narrator's veracity on the grounds of his insanity, certain that his notions are misguided products of "'his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind.'" (73). Unlike narrators White or Allen, Turner is no "good" slave, willing to state objective facts only, and ready to accept white societal values upon becoming a freeman.

8. On two occasions, Elaw raises the question of veracity in her relation of two miracles. As such, she ignores white demands for truth-telling, but she uses God as her witness. It is He who provides this black woman with the licence to relate seemingly incredible events. The miracle is certainly to be found in abundance in any number of white and black autobiographies. Thus, God acts as a great equalizer of persons. After her description of the bowing of the cow in the milking-stall, Elaw

immediately claims that she does not stretch the truth, and, in the spirit of paradox, asks her readers to believe what they are inclined to disbelieve; what *seems* like a lie, is Truth:

Some persons, perhaps, may be incredulous, and say, "How can these things be". . . . [But] the thing was certain and beyond all doubt. I write as before God and Christ, and declare, as I shall give an account to my Judge at the great day, that every thing I have written in this little book, has been written with conscientious veracity and scrupulous adherence to truth.

(56-7)

Elaw later claims that she mysteriously subdued three savage dogs, an arrogant young white man (who later dies inexplicably of a lung eruption), and a group of stone-throwing white youths (who suddenly lose the use of their arms).

9. I borrow this term from Sidonie Smith for whom "oscillations in . . . posture" in women's writing are a result of the female writer's tenuous and problematic position "within the complexities and contradictions of patriarchal ideologies of gender" (Smith 85)-- and, I might add, race.

Chapter Five/ Sojourner Truth and the Embodiment of the
Blues-Bad-Preacher-Woman Text

Writing in the late twentieth-century about Erma Brodber's contemporary analysis¹ of the (non)position of Jamaican women in Jamaican male culture, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note:

Texts-- the "fairy tales" of Europe-- have not only subjectified Jamaican women, but through cultural interpellation effected the erasure of the black female body within Jamaican male culture. Hence the black "Prince Charming" of Brodber's fable can *sense* his female counterpart, but when he looks for her he can see "no/body."

(250)

To white (and black male) minds across the African diaspora, the black female may indeed be "no/body"-- in both the literal and figurative sense of the word as Brodber's fable suggests. But this situation is not limited to the twentieth century or Jamaica in particular; it is also highly operative in mid-nineteenth-century America, the time during which the first black female spiritual autobiographers were writing. But in the nineteenth century, if she is no/body, the black woman is also *all* body, in the sense that she represents the epitome of that which is uncivilized, animal, grossly indelicate, unworthy of artistic representation in any other capacity than obeisant (and very often sexualized) servant. In fact, she is sometimes so reified that *parts* of her body are to be found in various exhibitions and museums-- the famed Hottentot Venus, Saartjie Baartman, "summarized [black women's] essence for the nineteenth-century observer, or, indeed, for the twentieth-century one, as they are still on display at

the Musee de l'homme in Paris. . . [W]hen one turns to the autopsies of Hottentot females in the nineteenth century, their description centers about the sexual parts" (Gilman 216). Thus, the black woman becomes no/body who, if she is found at all in the pages of polite texts, or in the display rooms of exhibitions of the fine arts, is bereft of the privilege of dignified personhood. Sidonie Smith argues that nineteenth-century women autobiographers, both black and white, strove to resist the "gaze of embodiment" (75-110), and indeed, black women fought an objectifying embodiment in which they were degraded and often *hypersexualized*. As Hammonds observes

. . . the construction of black women's sexuality, from the nineteenth century to the present, engages three sets of issues. First, there is the way black women's sexuality has been constructed in a binary opposition to that of white women: it is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses. . . . [R]esistance to these dominant discourses has been coded and lived by various groups of black women within black communities at different moments. . .

(Hammonds 170-71).

I want to examine, then, how nineteenth-century black female evangelists strove to become "some/body" in the face of an erasure so profound that it simultaneously embodied and disembodied them, in a discourse of contradiction which Morrison notes is common when white people conceive of black women. In her discussion of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings, Morrison observes: "[Hill] could be called any number or pair of discrediting terms and the contradictions would never be called into question, because as a black woman, she was contradiction itself, irrationality in the flesh" (Morrison "Introduction" xvi).

Sojourner Truth's Narrative, first published in 1850, presents the

self-portrait of a black female preacher, feminist and abolitionist for whom the public-- and textual-- performance of self as "some/body" becomes a delicate and tricky negotiation of the contradictory discourses surrounding black women in mid-nineteenth-century America. Some of the most prominent of these discourses for Truth are black women as absence, such as in the sculptures of Hiram Powers or Erastus Dow Palmer; black women as hypersexualized objects; and black women as romanticized servants, strong and wise in the sense that "noble savages" are. Where Truth finally positions herself as consummate performer in her public and textual negotiation of these conflicting representations is the question I will investigate here. While, indeed, all autobiographies are a performance of self, Truth's narrative becomes a *metaperformance*; its strategies of interruption and inconsistency expose the complex and problematic realities of what it means to be a black woman speaking in a white/male American public domain. Truth creates a self out of the very discourses of contradiction which threaten to simultaneously embody and disembody her-- she demystifies the "naturalness" of such discourses, playing, in her own self-performance, upon that contradictory black female self constructed by white Americans; she becomes elusive, "unnatural," trickster-like.

For artists such as Hiram Powers and Erastus Dow Palmer, the brutalized bodies of black women, displaced by the figure of a seductive and captive white woman, become the invisible ground upon which the artists reconstruct a complex and prevalent nineteenth-century white American discourse. That discourse in effect *condones* the enslavement of Africans, in its presentation of whitemale terror of "Other" (dark-skinned) peoples; in its fixation on the preservation of white masculinity; and in its

creation of the whitemale self as heroic protector of threatened white womanhood. Powers' sculpture The Greek Slave was mounted at various exhibitions across America and Britain during the 19th century, including London's famous "Great Exhibition," the 1851 World Fair at which fugitive slaves Henry and Ellen Craft were paraded on display, arm in arm with American abolitionists²-- the year after Truth's narrative was first published. Donald Martin Reynolds describes The Greek Slave as "the statue that would establish for the sculptor an international reputation" (140). Albert Boime quotes Freeman Henry Morris Murray as observing that "it excited much public attention" (Boime 156), and according to J. Carson Webster, the work was "the most famous statue, for Americans, of that time" (Webster 100).

Early in his career, Powers secured a name for himself through the commissioned busts he completed of such famous politicians as John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, and Andrew Jackson (then American President). Later sculptures such as America,³ Franklin, Jefferson, California,⁴ and The Last of the Tribes⁵ reflect Powers' concern with the moral, political and ideological development of America as a fledgling nation. Thus, the fact that he created and exhibited his Greek Slave at the height of the raging African-slave debates in America is no coincidence, but seems instead to be Powers' commentary on an American situation which commanded attention on an international level. Indeed, his Slave reflected the "widespread interest in the themes of bondage of one form or another" (Reynolds 216) which prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century. Other sculptures (to name only a few) such as American Erastus Dow Palmer's The White Captive (1859) and Peace in Bondage (1863), William Wetmore

Story's famous Libyan Sibyl (1868), John Quincy Adams Ward's Freedman (1863), or the staggering success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) attest to this nineteenth-century preoccupation.⁶

Hiram Powers' obsession with his theme, as well as numerous personal requests for the statue from wealthy friends, drove him to produce six replicas of the Slave between 1843 and 1869. The statue portrays a white woman, standing upright with her hand resting on a support. The support is covered by a piece of Greek drapery. Captain John Grant, a client for whom Powers produced a Slave describes the work as follows:

[S]uch is the softness in parts, as the relaxed muscles of the face, that the statue seems rather to have been modelled than carved in the marble-- the expression of the countenance is a retiring modesty-- the hands are bound in chains, this is not truth, but necessary to the description. In a few words, we pay the artist the highest compliment that can be offered: it is insufficient to say that his work reminds us of the antique-- it competes successfully with the best remnants of Greek art.

(148-9)

Powers himself describes the impetus behind his work:

. . . I remembered reading of an account of the atrocities committed by the Turks on the Greeks during the Greek revolution, which were finally put an end to by the destruction of the Turkish fleet by Admiral Corington and the Russian Naval Commander, whose name I do not now remember. During the struggle the Turks took many prisoners-- male and female, and among the latter were beautiful girls, who were sold in the slave markets of Turkey and even Egypt. These were Christian women and it is not difficult to imagine the distress and even despair of the sufferers while exposed to be sold to the highest bidder. But as there should be a moral in every work of art, I have given to the expression of the Greek Slave what trust there could still be in a Divine Providence for a future state of existence, with utter despair for the present mingled with somewhat of scorn for all around her. She is too deeply concerned to be aware of her nakedness. It is not her person but her spirit that stands exposed, and she bears it all as Christians only can.

(141)

The "Greek Revolution" of which Powers speaks culminated in the July 6, 1770 Battle of Chesme. This Revolution seems to be part of a concerted European effort, dubbed "the Greek Scheme," in which Russia's Catherine the Great and Austria's Joseph II joined forces in an attempt to drive the Turks out of Europe (Langer 519).

Reynolds observes that the Slave became the subject of many poems, including one by Elizabeth Barret Browning which I have reproduced in its entirety here:

They say Ideal beauty cannot enter
 The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
 An alien Image with enshackled hands,
 Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
 (That passionless perfection which he lent her,
 Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands),
 To so confront man's crimes in different lands
 With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
 Art's fiery finger, and break up ere long
 The serfdom of this world. Appeal, fair stone,
 From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
 Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
 East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong
 By thunders of white silence, overthrown.

(Reynolds 149)

While it may be argued that, by using a white woman to portray the appalling reality of millions of black women in America, Powers sought to both shock by defamiliarisation and to ask the rhetorical "What if this were your sister?"⁷ we are nevertheless faced with several disturbing concerns. These concerns are substantiated when we acknowledge what seems to be Powers' reluctance to be seen as an abolitionist at all in his creation of another sculpture, Liberty/America. Debating how the sculpture will be represented, Powers writes: "I would add chains under. . . the foot if I thought it would not be noticed as having some relation to slavery in America. Indeed, if I could venture to do so, I would place chains. . .

under the foot, for chains would fully express the sentiment intended" (Reynolds 166). Finally, Powers writes: "America is done-- all but the chains under the left foot. Do not start! They are not manacles-- no allusion to the "Peculiar Institution" but simply an emblem of despotism or tyranny. . ." (Reynolds 179).

In his description of the Slave, Powers' conflation of white womanhood with Christianity, Europeaness and the Ideal, is set against his conflation of darkness with that which is heathen, non-European and "atrocious"; neither conflation can be overlooked here. What we see in his rendition of The Greek Slave is the first conflation-- white womanhood represents Christianity, etc. The second conflation (that of darkness with the heathen, etc.) has no existence before the spectator who stands looking at The Greek Slave; if we argue that Powers condemns the white American institution of slavery, especially the enslavement of women, we must acknowledge that he erases the black female slave altogether. Her presence is signified only by a "white silence" in the terms of Browning, as if the black woman in herself were too crude a subject to represent the horror felt by whites upon witnessing the "Ideal beauty" of the spirit bound in chains. The fact that the Slave is "too deeply concerned" about a future, otherworldly, Christian state of existence to care about her nakedness presents further troublesome contradictions-- the reality of the slave market, for instance, would reveal something far from the image Powers offers us of a spotless, unscarred, well-groomed and serenely preoccupied pubescent woman bound by rather delicate-looking leather thongs and reposing in a leisurely and thoughtful manner upon a piece of Greek fabric. The woman gazes demurely downward, away from the

spectator, and, rather accidentally it seems (for, after all, she is unconcerned about her nakedness) she covers her pubes with her hand, drawing the spectator's attention to this place immediately. Thus The Greek Slave is titillating, but inaccessible to the spectator-- again a complete denial of the reality of black female enslavement; the Slave stands in an eternal moment of Christian reverie, obviously untouched by the "atrocities" waiting to be committed against her by "heathens," for as Powers asserts: "It is not her person but her spirit that stands exposed, and she bears it all as Christians only can." (We must wonder if Powers' turn of phrase "bears it all" is an unconscious pun here.) Of course, it is Christianity which will save the slave. While the consciences of white slaveowners may have been pricked somewhat by Powers, another part of his message-- if indeed, his sculpture is meant as an indictment of slavery at all-- is that the slave must forbear. For in Christianity, political activism, rage, and shame are unnecessary-- one need only abandon one's heathen beliefs and be washed clean and white by the salvation of the Lord.

But Powers' concern that he not be seen as indicting the "peculiar institution" in his creation of Liberty/America seems an indication that, in sculpting The Greek Slave, he was not criticising slavery either. What, then, was he doing? Nowhere in Powers' notes or correspondences do we read that the Slave was a commentary on American slavery. Instead, we read that Powers was concerned to convey the plight of European women taken hostage by marauding (dark-skinned) Turks.

The White Captive of Erastus Dow Palmer, sculpted in 1859 at the height of political tensions over slavery, two years before the onset of the

American Civil War, has nothing to do with American slavery at all, either.

What it does represent, according to Palmer, is:

My finest work. . . . the young daughter of the pioneer in "Indian bondage," standing and bound with bark thongs at the wrist to a truncated tree, as if with the hands behind her; but as she turns her person away (keeping her eyes and face toward the foe) from the objects of terror, it brings the tree at her side, and the right hand is nervously clasped against the rough bark of the stump, which is between the hand and the hip. She is entirely nude; her only garment, the night-dress (as if she had been taken from her home during the previous night), is torn from her and lies upon the ground at her feet, excepting a portion of it which is held between her hip and the tree and falls to the ground In the two statues [Indian Girl (1855) in which a young, half-nude Native woman examines a crucifix she has found; and White Captive] I desire first to show the influence of Christianity upon the savage and, second, the influence of the savage upon Christianity.

(Webster 278)

One critic, Henry T. Tuckerman rhapsodized: "In this statue the artist has illustrated one of those tragic episodes of border life on this continent [T]he "White Captive" shows. . . civilization, in its purest form, dragged into the cruel sphere of barbarism, yet unsubdued in its moral superiority. The subject is thoroughly American. . ." (Webster 29). The similarities, physical and ideological, between Tuckerman's description of Palmer's White Captive and Powers' description of his own Greek Slave are too striking to ignore here. What both Powers and Palmer seem intent on preserving, as debates on slavery rage all round them, is the European ideal of Civilisation, Culture and Christianity, represented by the figure of assailed white womanhood. The immense popularity of both their works attests to a mood in mid-nineteenth-century America which bespoke a fear and contempt of blackness (African, Native American, Turkish, etc.) and of black demands for freedom-- without actually speaking or representing that fear. Indeed, it is the body of a white woman which represents what

it is white men must preserve for themselves. Thus, works such as The White Captive and The Greek Slave impose upon the shocking actuality of black women's enslavement, their own obsession with white masculinity and maintaining a sense of the (fearful) whitemale self in the face of threatening (even while enchained) "Other" civilizations. What black female evangelists such as Sojourner Truth attempt to establish in the face of this erasure of their realities in the culture of dominance is a reclaiming of their black bodies and black selves as dignified subjects. Truth's Narrative presents us not only with her text, but with a daguerreotype of her black body under which she has had printed: "I sell the shadow to support the substance." This daguerreotype depicts a black woman gazing frankly into the camera, her head covered by a bonnet, and her shoulders draped by a shawl. Her hands are clasped in her lap, and she sits calmly before what looks like a fireplace, the mantle of which is decorated with ornaments. Thus, as she travels the countryside preaching abolition, women's emancipation and God's word, Truth resists objectification and erasure through the selling not of her body nude and shackled, but of representations of that body demurely dressed and located at the hearth-side. Truth herself commented that she "'used to be sold for other people's benefit, but now she sold herself for her own'" (Mabee 216). That a daguerreotype depicting Truth in her public role as roving lecturer and preacher-- a much more accurate representation-- is not used, suggests that Truth, astute business-woman, offers what will sell. Her obeisance to the dictates of the cult of true womanhood (woman seated in her proper sphere by the fireplace) seems to take precedence for Truth in matters of saleswomanship. Truth actively peddles her self as commodity in a manner

which is both a signification upon and an undermining of the commodification of black bodies by the slave trade. Like Ralph Ellison's *Trueblood*,⁸ Truth as performer creates a "cult of Sojourner"; storyteller par excellence, she privileges presence over absence of the dignified black female self, communal telling over individual account, and the spoken vernacular over the written word-- creating a marketable public persona in shrewd strategies which sometimes belie her self-selected name. Entering the white abolition circuit to negotiate public spaces, she receives far more recognition than her black sister evangelists ever do; Truth alone of them all resists complete obscurity, her legendary name surviving well into the present time.

By standard definitions, Truth's 1850 Narrative qualifies as biography since it is written in the third person, and Olive Gilbert, her white amanuensis, refers to it as such. In the 1850 text, Gilbert relates the events of Truth's life up until 1850, before Truth's actual career as abolitionist and women's rights activist began. However, I have used the 1878 version of the Narrative, compiled by Frances Titus (also white) here because I believe it may be characterized even more fully as what James Olney terms "autophylography"-- that is: ". . . a portrait of 'nous, nous ensemble'" (Olney 218). The 1878 Narrative is written communally, by Truth, Olive Gilbert (her 1850 amanuensis), and Frances Titus-- who, in 1878 added to the stereotyped 1850 Narrative "The Book of Life," a collection of articles, letters, anecdotes and commentaries written by various white people about Truth (Mabee 202-3). Although the Narrative, along with its compilation of testimonies, does not conform to standard definitions of "autobiography" I nevertheless include it in my study since,

as Mary Helen Washington argues, new definitions are necessary if we are to recuperate black women's literature in all its forms:

As we continue the work of reconstructing a literary history that insists on black women as central to that history, as we reject the old male-dominated accounts of history, refusing to be cramped into the little spaces men have allotted women, we should be aware that this is an act of enlightenment, not simply repudiation. . . . The making of a literary history in which black women are fully represented in a search for full vision, to create a circle where now we have but a segment. . .

(xxvii)

Truth's text may also be characterized as "testimony," which Ketu Katrak includes in her definition of autobiography, as a form of oral self-revelation by working-class women (Katrak 258). Sometimes this self-revelation is facilitated through the process of interview, and always, it is set down in the presence of actual witnesses-- hence the term "testimony," a "declaration or statement made under oath or affirmation by a witness in a court, often in response to questioning to establish a fact" or a "public avowal, as of faith or of a religious experience" (Neufeldt & Guralnik 1383). Indeed, Truth's Narrative is a *testimony* of her life in both the legalistic and the spiritual sense; interviewers Gilbert and Titus act as witnesses to the claims of Truth, and provide the testimonials of others who witnessed Truth in her spiritual journey from slave woman to evangelist/political activist. These testimonials are often contradictory in nature, creating in the text a virtual courtroom of evidence in which we as readers must eventually judge Truth for ourselves. Truth's Narrative is a tangible embodiment of the complex relationship which existed between the illiterate Truth, her white amanuenses and other whites who supported or derided her.

Truth presented herself to the public gaze as a simple truth-telling black woman who was most often surrounded by liberal white abolitionists eager to befriend her. Carlton Mabey notes that while her "primary focus as a reformer was on improving the condition of blacks, she lived primarily among whites and spoke primarily to whites" (213). As something of a legend in her own time, she was well known for her "Amazon[ian] form" (Truth & Gilbert 133), and was dubbed, after an article written by Harriet Beecher Stowe referred to her as such, the "Libyan Sibyl"-- to which Truth commented: "I don't want to hear about that old symbol; read me something that is going on now, something about this great war!" (Truth & Titus 174). The comment indicates that while Truth may have encouraged whites' legendizing of her, she also harboured a certain amount of contempt for such romantic reification. But the politically astute Truth, deeply and seriously concerned with assisting black soldiers and freedmen during and after the Civil War, concerned with emancipation and women's suffrage, recognized early the need to create the public persona which would be most expedient in helping her to accomplish her aims. The body which came before a predominantly white public, the body of Truth, was one carefully constructed and presented by Truth herself, according to her negotiation of at least two considerations-- Truth's own political agenda, and the expectations of whites who assisted her and/or heard her speak publicly. In order to further her political mission, Truth-- like her literary descendant Zora Neale Hurston-- is always the performer. As Nell Irving Painter observes, Truth self-consciously created her public Self, having been recognized as a consummate performer for twenty years before she gave her now-famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech in Akron, Ohio. Painter

argues that Truth created a persona which "appealed enormously to educated white Americans. Her manipulation of the imagery of slavery and difference recommended her to talented publicists who guaranteed her place in the history of antislavery feminism." In Frances Gage's description of the circumstances of Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech Gage portrays Truth in a manner which emphasizes Truth's body and reiterates notions asserted by Truth herself-- that her slavery experience, "in which she worked like a man, suffered the loss of many children through sale [a fabrication on the part of Truth], and felt a mother's grief but had no solace," gave her speech "a potency that the white women at the meeting in Akron lacked, no matter how well they had been educated." Indeed, I would argue that, like Ellison's Trueblood, on many occasions Truth lies in order to achieve white support. Painter continues that, taking our cue from Truth, most of us as readers conclude (along with Frances Gage), that Sojourner "embodied some fundamental characteristic of blackness rooted in slavery, some power of race in rhetorically concentrated form." Truth purposefully presents herself as the illiterate, oracular naif.⁹ But the complexities of that presentation result in a Narrative rich in its own multiplicities of signification.

Distance and difference play pivotal roles in Truth's creation of herself as legend-- the distance and difference of romantic exoticization. It is what allows the white abolitionist audience to be "entertained" (Truth 202) by a "peculiarly amusing" (232) Truth. However, difference concerning more serious and uncomfortable issues of white abolitionist racism must be silenced. On few occasions do we observe Truth's discomfort with the dynamics of her relationship to the white abolitionist

"community" in which she situated herself after 1850 (the date of publication of the first Narrative). These occasions are located in the second part of her 1878 Narrative, the "Book of Life." One (which I have already described) is Truth's impatient dismissal of white attempts to effect her "apotheosis" (278) as mythical "Sibyl" in the manner of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Another hint of Truth's dissatisfaction with white abolitionists concerns Truth's attempts to gain land, funds and education in Kansas for free blacks. Frances Titus writes: ". . . she says that not much encouragement is given her, except the constant adjuration to talk to the people, and 'stir 'em up,' and adds, 'why don't you stir 'em up? as tho' an old body like myself could do all the stirring.'" (234) Truth's double meaning is sharp-edged. Her signifying upon a white abolitionist system structured very much like the system of slavery it purports to destroy cannot be missed here. Indeed, if a sketch of Truth, pencilled by Charles C. Burleigh Jr., son of a prominent New England abolitionist family, is any indication, after Emancipation was actually achieved, white abolitionists *did* expect Truth to "do all the stirring"-- for they largely lost interest in the cause of black people, ignoring the fact that millions of blacks were now homeless and destitute. In Burleigh's sketch, a sinewy-armed, light-skinned and Caucasian-featured Truth bends over a washtub as she stirs-up and scrubs the washing therein. Two points are of interest here. One is the attempt to ennoble Truth, by "whitifying" her physical features, a common nineteenth-century artistic strategy (as in the case of Hiram Powers, or William Wetmore Story's Libyan Sibyl). Another common strategy, of course, was the insulting representation of blacks as buffoons in cartoon-like caricature. But it is Burleigh's artistic attempt to

romanticize and idealize Truth (as white, and therefore as deserving of admiration and empathy) which pertains here. The other point of interest is that Burleigh represents Truth, not at the podium where the public would have seen her, but at the wash-tub. His portrait, then, seems a codification of two conflicting public perceptions of black women-- both of which served to simultaneously objectify and erase them. One perception is of the black woman as stereotyped Mammy figure (washing clothes at a washtub), but the other is as romanticized heroine. In the former, the black woman is "all body," fit only to perform the menial duties reserved for those of the servant class; in the latter, she becomes "no-body," a presence represented by an absence-- when one looks at the artistic representation, the physical reality of the black woman's body is not to be found. Similarly, in Frances Gage's rendition of Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech at the Akron Ohio women's rights convention, Truth is portrayed as powerful rescuing hero and comrade of a (white) women's movement, but also as (black) servant: "She had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor" (135).

But at times, Truth herself helps to perpetuate her "super-mammy" role. At an anti-slavery meeting, a pro-slavery speaker gives an abusive and "inflammatory" speech, comparing blacks to "monkeys, baboons, and ourangoutangs." As he concludes his speech:

Sojourner quietly drew near to the platform and whispered in the ear of the advocate of her people, "Don't dirty your hands wid dat critter; let me tend to him!" The speaker knew it was safe to trust her. "Children," said she, straightening herself to her full hight, "I am one of dem monkey tribes. I was born a slave. I had de dirty work to do-- de scullion work. Now I am going to 'ply to dis critter"-- pointing her long, bony finger with withering scorn at the petty lawyer. "Now in de course of my time I has done a great

deal of dirty scullion work, but of all de dirty work I ever done, dis is de scullionist and de dirtiest." Peering into the eyes of the auditory with just such a look as she could give, and that no one could imitate, she continued: "Now, children, don't you pity me?" She had taken the citadel by storm. The whole audience shouted applause, and the negro-haters as heartily as any.

(149)

A somewhat amused and dismissive article about Truth, written in the New York Tribune, portrays her as an odd, ranting personage, who condemns "war, slavery, and the *prided fashions*" (245) in the same breath: "We leave Sojourner Truth with her intuitiveness and without the letter, to battle almost alone these world-wide evils. May Heaven bless and sustain her in her humanitarian work and 'God-like mission'" (245) the article condescendingly concludes. This picture of Truth, battling "almost alone" for blacks after Emancipation is perhaps a telling encapsulation of Truth's career as a black activist among white abolitionists. In the Narrative the words "entertain" and "amuse" are so often used by white abolitionists-- including Frances Titus-- with reference to Truth that we can hardly overlook the fact of the vast (yet unmentioned) distances which existed between them, in the same manner that a minstrel stands apart from her audience.

Truth plays minstrel on many occasions, but if the role of the minstrel is to slavishly cater to white expectations of her in her performance, she is also adept at manipulating the emotions of her audience in order to solicit the most out of them in the way of financial patronage. Thus, crafting *untruths* in order to maintain the "super-mammy" image her white abolitionist audience desires, Truth belies the very veracity-announcing promise of her (also self-crafted) name. For example, her claim

in her "Ain't I a Woman" speech that she bore thirteen children and lost most of them to slavery is complete fabrication-- what Esther Terry and Sterling Stuckey, in their description of Truth as a blues woman, might call Sojourner's wily singing of the blues: "I have borne thirteen chilern and seen'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard-- and ar'n't I a woman?" (Truth 134). Mabee notes that Truth in fact bore only five children, Diana, Elizabeth, Sophia, Peter and James. Of these children, James died in infancy. Peter was sold South into slavery at age five, but Truth, in an astounding story of bravery and determination, retrieved him through court proceedings (see Appendix 1). Truth, upon taking leave of her former master Mr. Dumont, eventually took Peter with her to New York City, and left her daughters to live as bound servants with the Dumonts (Mabee 23-4 & 248).

In another instance of fabrication, a scene recorded by a white observer recounts the manner in which Truth moves an entire assembly with her words:

Just as the meeting was about to close, Sojourner stood up. Tears were coursing down her furrowed cheeks. She said: "We has heerd a great deal about love at home in de family. Now, children, I was a slave, and my husband and my children was sold from me." The pathos with which she uttered these words made a deep impression upon the meeting. Pausing a moment, she added: "Now, husband and children is *all* gone, and what has '*come* of de affection I had for dem? *Dat is de question before de house!*" The people smiled amidst a baptism of tears.

(149-50)

No mention is made in the Narrative of the traumatic events of which Truth speaks. In fact, the text early on relates that Truth was forced to marry a slave named Thomas after her lover Robert (a slave from another

plantation) was beaten and sent back to his master. When Truth escapes from the Dumont plantation, and eventually leaves Dumont for New York city, taking only her son Peter with her, no mention is made at all of the husband she leaves behind. We wonder what "affection" she had for this husband Thomas, to whom only a fleeting allusion is made in the text.

In another example of Truth's manipulateness as performer, Mabee notes that Truth spoke with a Dutch accent, in the "broken English of white illiterates," in black dialect, and in standard English-- "a unique combination of [accents] which varied from time to time" as Truth chose, or the occasion warranted (Mabee 64). Various news reports describe her as speaking in any manner of diction ranging from "'broken negro dialect'" to "'correct and beautiful English'" to "'grammatically correct, and. . . as [good] as the most learned college professor'" (Mabee 64). Indeed, in the text itself, Truth's voice is recorded sometimes in an almost caricatured dialect, sometimes in perfect standard English. We may compare this recording of Truth's speech: "'Chile, do n't be skeered; you are not going to be harmed. I don't speck God's ever hearn tell on ye.'" (Truth 136) with: "Sojourner says: 'I went in company with several ladies and gentlemen to see the president. While waiting in the ante-room with other visitors, a gentleman called, to whom I was introduced. . . .'" (Truth 273). Truth's performance, then, as both Super-mammy and as the articulate and astute political figure she was, suggests a canny ability to "play" her audience, as a blues bad woman ready and willing to sing the tune which would gain her both their attention and their monetary support. As Mabee notes, Truth claimed with pride: "'I tell you I can't read a book, but I can read de people'" (64).¹⁰

Finally, in describing the eventual fate of Mrs. Gedney, the white woman who derides Truth for attempting to regain custody of her son, Truth gives two astoundingly contradictory accounts. The first derives from Olive Gilbert's rendition of the Narrative: "The derangement of Mrs. G. was a matter of hearsay, as Isabella saw her not after the trial. . . ." (58); the second is Harriet Beecher Stowe's account of how Truth told the story to her and a group of her friends:

"Well, I went in an' tended that poor critter [Mrs. Gedney] all night. She was out of her mind-- a cryin', an' callin' for her daughter; an' I held her poor ole head on my arm an' watched for her as ef she'd been my babby. An' I watched by her, an' took care on her all through her sickness after that, an' she died in my arms, poor thing!"

(164)

The "truth" which Sojourner, as blues performer, imparts to Gilbert seems very different from the heart-rending and infinitely more entertaining "truth" she imparts to Stowe and Stowe's husband,

who was wont to say of an evening, "Come, I am dull, can't you get Sojourner up here to talk a little?" She would come up into the parlor, and sit among pictures and ornaments, in her simple stuff gown, with her heavy travelling shoes, the central object of attention both to parents and children, always ready to talk or to sing. . .

(165)

In the course of the Narrative, at least three references are made to Truth's performance as singer. In one scenario, she subdues with song an entire gang of ruffians who threaten to violently disrupt a camp meeting (Truth 117-19); the Narrative proper closes with a Civil War song composed by Truth, to be sung to the tune of "John Brown," one passage of which reads:

They will have to pay us wages, the wages of their sin;
They will have to bow their foreheads to their colored kith and

kin;
 They will have to give us house-room, or the roof will tumble
 in,
 As we go marching on.
 (126)

Another song composed by Truth to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" and recorded in the "Book of Life" begins: "I am pleading for my people--/
 A poor, down-trodden race,/ Who dwell in freedom's boasted land/ With no
 abiding place. . . ." (Truth 302).

The manner in which Mrs. Stowe says that Truth introduced herself to her provides us with Stowe's first exposure to Truth's performance of the blues:

She seemed perfectly self-possessed and at her ease. . . . Her whole air had at times a gloomy sort of drollery which impressed one strangely.

"So this is you," she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, honey, de Lord bless ye! I jes' thought I'd like to come an' have a look at ye. You's heerd o' me, I reckon?" she added.

"Yes I have. You go about lecturing, do you not?"

"Yes, honey, that's what I do. The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation, an' I go round a-testifyin', an' showin' on em' their sins agin my people."

So saying, she took a seat, and stooping over and crossing her arms on her knees, she looked down on the floor, and appeared to fall into a sort of reverie. Her great, gloomy eyes and her dark face seemed to work with some undercurrent of feeling; she sighed deeply, and occasionally broke out, "O Lord! O Lord! Oh, the tears, an' the groans, an' the moans, O Lord!"

(152)

For Truth, performance is a singing of the blues in all its forms. Mabee notes that at least fourteen songs of Truth's own making have been preserved. The tunes of five of her songs are known, because the songs were adapted to popular melodies of Truth's time. According to Mabee, Truth's singing style "reflected African influences more clearly than most aspects of her life" (Mabee 219). If Truth performs as blues artist inside

and outside of her text, singing and telling "the tears an' the groans, an' the moans, O Lord!," we must remember that the performing artist is a manipulator of information, never merely conveying a story unadulterated, but always deciding what will be *withheld* as well as what will be told. Gilbert comments upon Truth's reticence at certain moments in the text. In the case of Mrs. Dumont's harsh treatment of Truth, we are told that "delicacy" prevents outspokenness, as does an awareness that "the relation of [some things] might inflict undeserved pain on some living." Therefore, "the reader will not be surprised if our narrative appear somewhat tame at this point, and may rest assured that it is not for want of facts, as the most thrilling incidents. . . are from various motives suppressed" (30). Mabee argues that the "delicate" silence referred to here might conceal sexual relations between Mr. Dumont and Truth, which Mrs. Dumont discovered (Mabee 8-9). Later in the Narrative, Gilbert refers to "some hard things" in Truth's life as a slave which "she has no desire to publish," first because of the negative implications for innocent parties, and second, "because they are not all for the public ear, from their very nature." But, it is the third reason for withholding information which provides us with the most important insight to Truth, the performer: the truth would not be believed by "the uninitiated"-- "'Why, no!' [Sojourner] says, 'they'd call me a liar! they would, indeed! and I do not wish to say anything to destroy my own character for veracity, though what I say is strictly true'" (81-2).¹¹ The tongue-in-cheek irony of Truth's statement performs a number of things simultaneously: 1) her use of the word "uninitiated" creates an automatic hierarchy in which the superior "initiated" (blacks who have had experience of slavery) possess knowledge

which those excluded from the club of knowers, the "uninitiated" (whites) do not have; 2) her suggestion that she would be branded a "liar" if she told the truth about the atrocities of slavery points to the double oppression of blacks by whites, first in enslaving blacks and then in refusing to believe their stories about the horrors of that enslavement; 3) her admission that she will say nothing to "destroy [her] own character for veracity," may be read as Truth's lady-like reluctance to let crude facts tarnish her pure image-- but more subversively, Truth hints at the fact that for her as performer, truth-telling does not stand in the way of the maintenance of the persona she has created for public consumption.

Truth, like Trueblood, deftly manipulates white preconceptions of blacks in order to gain credence, room, board, financial backing. As such Truth's and Trueblood's acts of minstrelsy become subversive acts, which seek to overturn hegemonic systems of power, even while seeming to reinforce them. Thus, what Mabee refers to as inconsistency, disturbing omission and poor organization in Truth's Narrative (Mabee 52), seem to me to be more accurately described as suggestions of Truth's power as performer. Deliberate or indeliberate, they point to a relational dynamics-- both in the incidents and in the rhetoric of the text-- in which Truth as illiterate and "amusing" entertainer wields more power than her audience (and perhaps many readers of her text) realise.

Truth's Narrative functions-- in a number of striking reversals-- as oppositional text as well as minstrel performance. Truth's very text, first published in 1850 (at the height of both the slavery debate and the popularity of productions such as Erastus Palmers', Hiram Powers' and Elizabeth Browning's) is a kind of reversal in itself; its first announcement

is "A PREFACE which was intended for a postscript." In addition, the list of white names and comments which, in other slave narratives, is presented at the beginning as a kind of endorsement of the veracity of the slave narrator appears at the end of Truth's text in the form of a number of autographs. These include signatures of such famous personages as William Lloyd Garrison, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. However, these white supporters do not endorse Truth here; instead, what we read is *her* commendation of *them* as suitable and worthy enough to be included in her "Book of Life." They are the names of those whites whose names have been noted in God's holy register: "Autographs of distinguished Persons who have befriended Sojourner Truth by words of Sympathy and Material aid" (313), the "names of men and women. . . pure and sparkling as the shimmer of a white wing flashing through the yellow sunlight-- names of those who manifested their love to God by tender compassion for the lowliest of his children" (316). Immediately after the actual autographs come a series of commendations-- "Notes on the Autographs"-- to which there are no names attached. Thus, in what amounts to good Christian modesty, but very bad autobiographical etiquette, we do not know which commendation belongs with which name; we cannot attach the commendation to the one commented upon. For example: "The name of one who was dragged through the streets with a halter about his neck will be remembered. . . for the immortality attained through his sublime heroism. . . . The name of one is written who only 'awaited the opportunity to enfranchise millions. . .'" Another inscribes this formula in Sojourner's "Book of Life": "'Equality of rights is the first of rights'" etc. In this confounding of beginnings, endings, and

accreditations Truth establishes not only a reversal, but a circularity which Karla Holloway attributes to many contemporary black women's texts: "A decentered ethic also shifts the place of logic from one that emphasizes a binary argument (between polar opposites) to one that seems more circular, and more woman-centered. . . . Complexity, multiple presences, and cyclic rather than linear principles are definitive aspects of the works of black women writers" (Moorings 33).

Truth's Narrative, then, in its very structure, acts as an oppositional text, subverting prevailing nineteenth-century autobiographical form, challenging the glaring absence of the black female self as perpetuated by renowned whitemale artists such as Hiram Powers or Erastus Dow Palmer. But, if on the one hand, she must struggle to resist her disembodiment, she also conversely challenges the prevailing white abolitionist obsession with black *embodiment* in the form of what Houston Baker calls "the negro exhibit:"¹²

A standard feature of abolitionist meetings. . . [t]he fugitive slave was a silent, partially naked body turning to a predominantly white audience. The silent, fugitive slave's body became an erotic sign of servitude in the social, liberational discourse of white abolitionists and their predominantly white audiences. Gasps and moans (of empathy? reassurance? relief?) followed.

(Workings 13)

Baker argues that writers of slave narratives, such as Tubman, Douglass, Truth and Jacobs refused to accept this silent exhibition of themselves "for private, indoor use" (13), but instead, "wanted to craft and tell [their] own horrendous tale rather than serve as an illustration or mere exhibit in that society's inside tale-tellings." Thus, Frederick Douglass made a "consciously crafted decision to become a floating signifier. . . [a decision

which carried] him beyond abolitionist historical containment" (14). One must ask, however, if Douglass' very description of the act of abuse is not, ironically, in itself a kind of exhibit, which Truth, in her own Narrative challenges.

It seems that in the narrative of Douglass, the beating of women is described in much greater detail than the beating of men, a strategy which, of course, elicits the appropriate horror in the reader. The first instance of whipping which Douglass describes involves a beautiful slave woman, Douglass' Aunt Hester, who is jealously guarded by her master when she demonstrates interest in a slave from another plantation: "Why master was so careful of her, may be safely left to conjecture. She was a woman of noble form, and of graceful proportions. . . ." (25). The incident proceeds as follows:

Before [master] commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into 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 in the joist. . . He made her get upon the stool and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. . . and soon the warm, red blood. . . came dripping to the floor.

(25-6)

The suggestion of the sexual titillation the sadistic master receives cannot be missed in Douglass' creation of what virtually amounts to a sentimental scene of ravishment.¹³ The detailed description of the stripping, and the phrase "she now stood fair for his infernal purpose" establish Aunt Hester as the "fair" (?) heroine about to be despoiled by the "infernal" villain.¹⁴

Truth, however, even before her narrative begins, counters the danger of a discourse liable to slip in spite of itself into the exhibitive

mode, with her daguerreotype, which, as I have already mentioned, becomes a pictorial "discourse" of her own. Unlike Harriet Jacobs, whose autobiographical story of sexual abuse at the hands of a white master was discreetly published in 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent, without daguerreotypes, Truth presents us with a frank camera likeness. As such, the likeness promises to offer not the passive Negro exhibit, but Truth's own staring-down of white hypocrisy; again and again in the text, this black woman marches, fully clothed, into the arenas of learned white men to deflate their rhetoric with (to use the words of white abolitionist Parker Pillsbury), "a single dart" of her own rhetorical making (Mabee 86). In examining her daguerreotype, the reader becomes the object examined as Truth returns her/his gaze with her own unwavering stare. Significantly, in one incident in her Narrative Truth executes a deliberate public "exhibition" of her own body in a manner which merits some examination:

. . . Dr. T. W. Strain, the mouthpiece of the slave Democracy. . . stated that a doubt existed in the minds of many persons present respecting the sex of the speaker, and that it was his impression that a majority of them believed the speaker to be a man. . . . [I]t was for the speaker's special benefit that he now demanded that Sojourner submit her breast to the inspection of some of the ladies present, that the doubt might be removed by their testimony. There were a large number of ladies present, who appeared to be ashamed and indignant at such a proposition. . . . Confusion and uproar ensued, which was soon suppressed by Sojourner, who, immediately rising, asked them why they suspected her to be a man. The Democracy answered, "Your voice is not the voice of a woman, it is the voice of a man, and we believe you are a man." Dr. Strain called for a vote, and a boisterous "Aye" was the result. A negative vote was not called for. Sojourner told them that her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring; that some of those white babies had grown to man's estate; that, although they had sucked her colored breasts, they were, in her estimation, far more manly than they (her persecutors) appeared to be; and she quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck!. . . [S]he told them that. . . it was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their shame.

(Truth 138-9)

The implications of Truth's action as a *diserasure* (a "dissing"¹⁵ of erasure) of the black woman's body are astounding here. While Hiram Power's Greek Slave stood exposed at the London Fair, her white nakedness a representation of a lofty spiritual transcendence and Ideal beauty, slavemasters at a political gathering attempted to shame Truth into silence by goading her to do something which they and their forefathers did to all black women and men in the slave-market-- reduce them to a naked piece of chattel, whose nakedness was not a sign of the transcendent, but rather of their shameful impotence before white purchasers who prodded, probed and poked before buying. As such, the black woman (and man), reduced to the sum of their parts-- a strong arm, exposed genitals, a naked breast-- is simultaneously all body and nobody. What Hiram Powers does with his Greek Slave is to remove from the public eye the too-shameful embodiment of black women. Black women, then, as The Slave suggests, become simply nobody. But Truth, in her action, as it is related in the text, brings herself and her body out from under erasure, casting shame where it belongs-- back upon the slaveowners. Prepared to deride the proud black woman who must lose this battle of wits by either slinking out of the meeting-hall (her challenged womanhood left in doubt), or succumb to a demand to let "the (white) ladies" physically examine her, the white male slavemasters are shocked by Truth's response. The shame of the black woman's being at once all body and nobody, becomes their embarrassment, confronted as they are by things for them best left unsaid -- the fact that most of them grew up on black women's milk; that black babies were deprived of their mothers and their mothers' milk so that

white ones could thrive; that the request of the men is puerile and as shameful as if they were to be caught suckling at the breast of a black woman (which was indeed a reality for many white men, to which the miscegenation laws they created for their own benefit¹⁶ will attest).

Truth again reclaims the black female body from erasure in her "Ain't I a Woman" speech. Truth, a powerful, physically arresting, deep-voiced black woman activist who has been forced to work the fields as well bear children, is denied the status of womanhood according to the standards of the cult which prescribes what "true womanhood" is. But Truth divorces femininity (of the white variety as depicted by Hiram Powers) from womanhood, and in so doing, challenges the skewed white assumption that the black woman, because of her blackness, her hard labour, her intrusion into the public speaking sphere of men, is both all-body and nobody: "'I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me-- and ar'n't I a woman?'" she demands (Truth 134).

If Truth wrests the task of black embodiment from the hands of white abolitionists eager to display the silent black body in the "negro exhibit," she also wrestles with her white amanuenses over this very same issue. While Gilbert and Titus attempt to assist Truth in her creation of a dignified self, they very often concentrate on the particulars of her body, in a Romantic reification of Truth as what Painter describes as the dark-skinned mother, primitive, and "picturesquely charming" (158). Olive Gilbert closes her Preface to the Narrative with a gesture which suggests nothing less than perfect presence, a perfect embodiment in which Truth and her narrative become one: "This is Sojourner Truth at a century old. Would you like to meet her?" (xii). The complexity of this embodiment,

however, merits closer examination.

In the Preface alone, we are struck by the manner in which the voices of Truth and Gilbert vie with each other in their attempts to create Truth as persona, as presence. The Preface begins with a reference to the very fact that Truth is a "self-made woman." An anecdote about her reads: "Sojourner Truth once remarked, in reply to an allusion to the late Horace Greeley, 'You call him a self-made man; well, I am a self-made woman'" (v). Truth self-consciously creates herself in direct opposition to the Algeresque liberal whitemale individualism which a man such as Greeley represents-- a man who initially supported emancipation, but afterward "opposed any special help to blacks now that they were freed" (Mabee 161). But while Truth fashions herself in oppositional comparison to famous supposedly liberal whitemale politicians, Olive Gilbert effects an embodiment of Truth which compares her with the forces of Nature:

Her mind is as clear and vigorous as in middle age. Her finely molded form is yet unbent, and its grand height and graceful, wavy movements remind the observer of her lofty cousins, the Palms, which keep guard over the sacred streams where her forefathers idled away their childhood days.

Doubtless, her blood is fed by those tropical fires which had slumberingly crept through many generations, but now awaken in her veins; akin to those rivers which mysteriously disappear in the bosom of the desert, and unexpectedly burst forth in springs of pure and living water. . . . Her sun of life is about to dip below the horizon; but flashes of wit and wisdom still emanate from her soul, like the rays of the natural sun as it bursts forth from a somber cloud. . . .

(vi-vii)

Allusions to Truth's "idle" forefathers, and "slumbering" tropical fires reflect a nineteenth-century propensity to conceive of Africa and Africans in terms of slothfulness, power yet unrealized, civilization yet unattained.¹⁷

Truth, then, both in her life and in the double-voiced rhetoric of her

Preface, performs in opposition to white tendencies to reify and/or silence her as exotic object. The conflicting strategies which Truth and Gilbert employ in their attempts to effect Truth's dignified embodiment in the face of disembodiment and hyperembodiment point to a significant characteristic of the Narrative-- the communal manner in which its joint telling is accomplished, but also the problematization of that telling throughout the text.

In Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, community-- the community of two formed by Janie and Pheoby-- creates what Gates calls the voice of free indirect discourse. The written standard English voice of the nameless narrator (presumably someone who heard Janie's story from Pheoby) begins to sound more and more like the quoted, oral, vernacular voice of Janie, as the voices of Janie and narrator become intertwined. I believe that it is a similar process of communality which creates what amounts to the free indirect discourse of Olive Gilbert and Sojourner Truth. The style of Truth's Narrative is conversational, anecdotal, tangential, and non-chronological, very much in the manner of informal verbal communication. However, if the community of Janie and Pheoby is one of black sisterhood, that of Gilbert and Truth presents problems which arise out of the racial difference existing between the latter "sisters." Kimberly Rae Connor observes that "Linda Brent and Sojourner Truth both relied on the goodwill and faith of abolitionists to get their stories told." According to Connor, Pheoby, like the abolitionist scribes and editors, "stands within a traditional role of women who take their message back to the community" (162). But, for early black women autobiographers, the issue of community is a difficult and vexed one, and it is this problem

which constitutes what I will call the "grammar of interruption" that we see in Truth's Narrative. In Chapter Six I examine how issues of white editing affected the self-written autobiographies of Linda Brent and Rebecca Cox Jackson. In the Narrative of Truth, I want to explore a similar editing issue-- the troubled "community" of voices in the Narrative and how it creates the interrupted grammar of the text.

Because Truth's narrative is actually written by white women, authenticity becomes problematic in her text. Jeffrey Stewart argues, understandably, that Truth's Narrative "suffers" as a result of the fact that it was written with the help of white abolitionist Olive Gilbert. Stewart surmises that the "unfortunate" decision to have her story told by Gilbert may have been influenced by Sojourner's astute awareness that because the truthfulness and reliability of black autobiographies was often questioned, "having a white woman tell her story would lend credibility to [Truth's] accomplishments. . . . Sojourner may have believed that Gilbert would give her story a more authoritative voice" (Stewart xxxix). As Stewart sardonically observes, Truth's Narrative is interrupted-- "marred" -- by Gilbert's

tendency to interpolate her own opinions in the text. Rather than let her subject speak without *moralizing* interjections, Gilbert seizes upon Sojourner's life story as a vehicle for her own indictment of slaveowners and their justifications for slavery. . . . Sojourner's narrative thus provided Gilbert with an opportunity to find her voice.

(xxxix)

However, in considering Stewart's indictment of Gilbert's motives for writing the narrative, we must also consider Truth's role as performer-- in the creation of both her narrative, and her public Self. Thus, rather than lament the fact that some "pure" narrative by Truth is obscured by

the interference of her white amanuensis Gilbert, we might instead examine the dynamics which shaped Truth's performance of her public Self. I suggest that whatever it was that propelled Truth out of the African American community to seek white American public circles, and to negotiate a number of (often conflicting) discourses is the same force which lies behind the conflicting voices in her multi-voiced and contradictory narrative.

In the relation of Truth's Narrative, Olive Gilbert obviously seeks to include Truth but we are struck by the manner in which the women struggle with each other in telling-- struck by a text which, in effect, struggles with itself. While Gilbert relates the major portion of the Narrative, she almost never allows us to forget that Truth is at her side while Gilbert writes. For example:

She shudders, even now, as she goes back in memory, and revisits this cellar, and sees its inmates, of both sexes and all ages, sleeping on those damp boards, like the horse, with a little straw and a blanket; and she wonders not at the rheumatisms and fever-sores, and palsies, that distorted the limbs and racked the bodies of those fellow-slaves in after-life.

(14)

Often, Gilbert quotes Truth's direct speech: "'And then, as I was taking leave of him,' said his daughter [Truth] in relating it, 'he raised his voice, and cried aloud like a child-- Oh, how he DID cry! I HEAR it *now*-- and remember it as well as if it were but yesterday. . .'" (22).

But other moments in the text reveal discrepancies of opinion between Truth and Gilbert, or Truth and other white witnesses in the text. For example, in "The Book of Life" compiled by Frances Titus, we compare Truth's attitude to the freed blacks who congregate around Washington

after Emancipation, with the attitudes of white abolitionists. Titus quotes a letter written by Truth to a white friend, Rowland Johnson: "I find many of the women very ignorant in relation to house-keeping, as most of them were instructed in field labor, but not in household duties" (179). In contrast, Titus herself writes: "Sojourner spent more than a year at Arlington Heights [in Washington], instructing the women in domestic duties. . . . She especially deprecated their filthy habits. . ." (182) Similarly, a police summary included by Titus disdainfully begins:

"I have the honor. . . to submit a report, based mainly upon personal inspection, of the sanitary condition of certain localities in the city of Washington, inhabited by colored people, mostly known as 'contrabands,' together with certain other facts connected with the condition of these people". . .

(188)

and proceeds to describe how "crime, filth, and poverty seem to vie with each other in a career of degradation and death" (188).

And a newspaper article advertising a talk by Sojourner Truth on solutions to the problem of destitute free blacks in Washington reads: "No gang of paupers should be allowed to huddle together like pigs anywhere, and be fed out of the public funds. Go and hear on the subject" (202). Nowhere in the representations of whites do we find the compassionate attempt which Truth makes to explain the "ignorance" of the freed blacks with respect to "house-keeping."

Gilbert's own ambivalence about Truth's ability to tell her story herself is evident in the following passage: "One comparatively trifling incident she wishes related, as it made a deep impression on her mind at the time-- showing, as *she* thinks, how God shields the innocent, and causes them to triumph over their enemies, and also how she stood between

master and mistress" (30). Gilbert's emphasis of the word "she" suggests a difference of opinion between Truth and Gilbert on the matter of the incident's importance for each woman. In another instance, in a chapter which reveals how slaveholders fail to fulfil their promises to slaves, Gilbert presents a long narration by Truth in direct discourse (quoted speech). Here, Truth relates a story which had considerable effect upon her-- the fatal beating with a stick of a slave who insisted on going to see his wife after completing the harvest as his master promised. Truth did not witness the beating, but heard about it; however, the impact of the incident upon her as a black woman is still profound: ". . . The poor colored people all felt struck down by the blow." Gilbert concludes the chapter with a moralistic aside of her own: "Ah! and well they might. Yet it was but one of a long series of bloody, and other most effectual blows, struck against their liberty and their lives. But to return from our digression" (40). We can only wonder at the complexities of a relationship in which what one woman describes as a "digression" the other experiences as a painful, horrific and significant memory.

I have already noted Carlton Mabee's description of Gilbert's writing in the Narrative as "earnest and sometimes, by later standards, gushing. The book contains contradictions and disturbing omissions, and is not well organized" (Mabee 52). But what these textual "flaws" suggest to me is the existence of converging, diverging and struggling voices in the Narrative-- a grammar of interruption, which is evident in the very first line of the text: "The subject of this biography, SOJOURNER TRUTH, as she now calls herself-- but whose name, originally, was Isabella-- was born, as near as she can now calculate, between the years 1797 and 1800."

(13) If we examine the grammatical structure of this sentence the uncertainty of its voice(s) becomes immediately apparent. The core of the sentence, carrying its basic meaning and containing subject, verb and adverbial clause, is: "Sojourner Truth was born between the years 1797 and 1800." However, what Karla Holloway refers to as "recursion" in contemporary black women's texts-- the repetitive, reflective, backward glance important to strategies of revision and (re)membrance (Holloway 3) -- serves to re-present Sojourner Truth three times here as: 1) "the subject of this biography"; 2) "Sojourner Truth"; and 3) "Isabella." In addition, the sentence is complicated by a multiplicity of interruptions: the interruption "as she now calls herself" is itself further interrupted by "-- but whose name, originally, was Isabella." . And finally "as near as she can remember" disruptively separates the verb "was born" from its adverbial clause "between the years 1797 and 1800." What the reader is left with is a frustrating uncertainty about "the subject of this biography"; is her name Sojourner Truth, or Isabella? When exactly was she born? This grammatical uncertainty of voice reflects the state of existence for most slaves in nineteenth century America-- one's name and birth date were very often tenuous assignments. But the uncertainty reflects something else-- a recursive naming and renaming, a multi-directionality of voice and meaning which suggest the problematics of self-fashioning. In this first sentence, we understand that to be a "self-made" woman is not a simple task; the vision and revision it entails involves a proliferation of strategies and voices.

Throughout Truth's narrative, breaks in the structure of sentences, indicating parenthetical elements, appositives, and other disruptions

abound. For example, the following excerpt in which Gilbert discusses the filthy and abject accommodations of Truth's family as slaves of a certain Charles Ardinburgh, demonstrates the interruption of Truth's views (as expressed by Gilbert), by a moral outburst purely Gilbert's own:

Still, she [Truth] does not attribute this cruelty-- *for cruelty it certainly is, to be so unmindful of the health and comfort of any being, leaving entirely out of sight his more important part, his everlasting interests*-- so much to any innate or constitutional cruelty of the master, as to that gigantic inconsistency, that inherited habit among slaveholders, of expecting a willing and intelligent obedience from the slave, because he is a MAN. . . [my emphasis]

(15)

If the body of the text is marked by such interruption, however, there are also places where interruptive voices become indiscernible from one another. Often Gilbert directly quotes the speech of Truth, but at times, free indirect discourse-- the adoption of spoken black dialect within the otherwise standard English of the narrator's written text-- seems to suggest itself. The narrator begins to take on the speech patterns of the person she narrates about. Indeed, this adoption is apparent in the text's first sentence: ". . . SOJOURNER TRUTH. . . was born as *near* (my emphasis) as she can now calculate, between the years 1797 and 1800" (13). We may contrast this non-standard use of the adverb with a later sentence in which the accepted grammatical form is rendered: "Her teachings were delivered in Low Dutch. . . and. . . ran *nearly* (my emphasis) as follows . . ." (17)

In another instance, referring to the thoughts of Truth (then Isabella) and Gertrude, the young daughter of Truth's master:

Isabella thought that she had done all she well could to have [the sullied potatoes] *nice* [my emphasis]; and became quite distressed

at these appearances. . . . Gertrude. . . advanced to Isabel, and told her. . . she would get up and attend to her potatoes for her . . . and they would see if they could not have them *nice* [author's emphasis], and not have "Poppee," her word for father, and "Matty," her word for mother, and *all of 'em* [my emphasis], scolding so terribly.

(31)

And in describing Truth's treatment at the home of her new master, Gilbert writes: "They gave her a plenty to eat, and also a plenty of whippings" (27).

At the end of the Narrative, the voices of Gilbert and Truth become one; we are no longer able to discern where one ends and the other begins:

"Never mind," says Sojourner, "what we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord." She thanked the Lord with fervor, that she had lived to hear her master say such blessed things! She recalled the lectures he used to give his slaves, on speaking the truth and being honest, and laughing, she says he taught us not to lie and steal, when he was stealing all the time himself and did not know it! Oh! how sweet to my mind was this confession! And what a confession for a master to make to a slave! A slaveholding master turned to a brother! Poor old man, may the Lord bless him, and all slaveholders partake of his spirit!

(125)

Gilbert begins this final passage by quoting the direct discourse of Truth ("'Never mind,' says Sojourner. . ."). But half-way through the passage, a clause which begins as indirect discourse-- that is, a paraphrasing of what was said (" . . .she says he taught. . .")-- turns into something which seems to be direct discourse, but is not signalled as such by the usual quotation marks: "she says he taught us not to lie and steal. . ." The omission of the quotation mark before the word "he" creates an intriguing problem around the word "us." Without the missing mark, "us" becomes not Truth and the other slaves, but Truth, the slaves, and Gilbert also.

In this final conflation of voices, narrator and amanuensis become one. How Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker use this conflation of voices in a negotiation between standard English and black American vernacular, Henry Gates has examined in detail in The Signifyin(g) Monkey. But more than eighty years before Hurston, the joint efforts of Truth and Gilbert produced what Gates would call "free indirect discourse" in his discussion of Hurston's work.

Truth, consummate performer, embodies her Self in the creation of her text, and so counters a powerful whitemale nineteenth-century discourse which threatens in turns to disembody and hyper-embody African American women. But the voice of Truth becomes entangled with the voice of the white woman who narrates her story for her. For critics such as Stewart and Mabee this confounding of voices becomes problematic-- Truth's voice is somehow corrupted or lost in the text. Truth, however, is the double-voiced trickster-- like Esu Elegbara, like Trueblood-- "blues singer. . . virtuoso prose narrator. . . . creative and commercial [wo]man" (Baker 175), who embodies the tragedy and the comedy of her complicated situation in the very fabric of her text.¹⁸ As African American trickster-performer she "can detach [herself] from, survive, and even laugh at [her] initial experiences of otherness" (198); in so doing, Truth becomes, indeed, a "self-made" woman.

Endnotes

1. Brodber's short essay is entitled "Sleeping's Beauty and Prince Charming" (1989).

2. See Barbara McCaskill's article, "'Yours Very Truly': Ellen Craft--the Fugitive Slave as Text and Artifact."

3. In his description Powers describes America (initially called Liberty) as follows: "I have been at work with continual industry upon a new statue to be called Liberty. An old and stale subject perhaps you will say, but I am trying to make something out of it suited to our day and the peculiar institutions [ie. slavery] and feelings of our country and nation" (155). Later, Powers replaced the diadem with chains. This was not done without some misgiving, however-- Powers debated the political implications of his decision: "The diadem and scepter could be offensive to the British and the chains might be unacceptable to certain sensibilities in the United States. . ." (Reynolds 166). His friend Edward Everett "expressed his confidence that the subject would no doubt be imposing. He believed that it was 'certainly seasonal'.. ." (Reynolds 156).

4. California, begun just after the discovery of gold in California and the ensuing gold rush, was initially to

appear as a young savage in the Indian costume, and I shall make her as pretty and attractive as I can, as is the gold over which she presides-- but she will have a capricious expression-- for while she points to the ground with her divining rod before, she conceals a bunch of thorns behind. . . . I am attempting to create a goddess of riches for future times. I hope she will be grateful to her creator and give me some of her gold without allowing me to see or feel her thorns. . . . I should like to place a diadem upon the head of my statue with a single star (a state) in the center-- the diadem would be of gold set with precious stones.

(Reynolds 165)

Powers later modified California; she was still to wear a kirtle from waist to knee, embroidered with gold, but her diadem was now "a wreath of bits of native gold and pearls upon her head. This is the front view presenting the 'Golden Vision'. . . heightened by womanly attractions, all is lovely and voluptuous. . ." (Reynolds 176). The history of whites' representation of Native American women is a long one, dating back to the discovery of the Americas. The figure of the "voluptuous" Indian princess became an icon for America itself, symbol of "virgin" territory of the United States, fertile Earth Mother. In one story, "corn sprouted where her right palm had rested, beans where her left hand pressed the ground, and tobacco where her divine ass had touched the earth" (Fielder 85-6).

5. Powers wrote:

I am doing a new statue, The Last of the Tribes. Cooper wrote The

Last of the Mohicans, but I am writing in marble. The last of all of them. It is an Indian girl dressed in a kirtle ornamented with wampum and feathers-- moccasins and leggings-- fleeing before civilization. She runs in alarm, looking back in terror. The upper parts of the figure will be nude. . .

(Reynolds 206)

6. For a comprehensive study of representations of blacks in the nineteenth century art, see Albert Boime's The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century. When black women are represented at all in the fine arts, they are very often depicted as having long, wavy, or braided hair and/or Caucasian features. See, for example, John Rogers' The Fugitive's Story (1869), Edmonia Lewis' Forever Free (1867), Eastman Johnson's A Ride for Liberty (1862-3). In an interesting reversal, popular newspapers and magazines of the time such as America's Harper's or Britain's Punch, present caricatures depicting black men and women with exaggerated African features-- very curly hair, huge noses and lips, and very black skin (see fn. 7 below).

7. Boime quotes Murray as arguing that "the reception of [the Greek Slave was tied] to the antislavery agitation of the period, 'but then, as now, a "white" slave would attract more attention and excite far more commiseration than a black one or one less white than "white"'. . . . Murray concludes that Powers's work, which he considers the nation's first internationally acclaimed sculpture, is 'America's first anti-slavery document in marble'" (Boime 156-157). I would suggest, on the basis of evidence discussed above in relation to Liberty/America, that Powers' Greek Slave is not an "anti-slavery document" at all.

8. In his excellent analysis of the Trueblood episode in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Houston Baker argues that Trueblood performs his way into a steady source of income from benevolent white philanthropists who believe his story of how he impregnates both his wife and daughter. They believe it because the story fits the preconceived notions these whites have of blacks as lascivious and sexually insatiable. Baker writes:

. . . the question of integrity looms large. But the most appropriate inquiry. . . is, Integrity as what? To deliver the blues as entertainment-- if one is an entertainer-- is to maintain a fidelity to one's role. Again, if the performance required is that of a minstrel and one is a genuine performer, then donning the mask is an act consistent with one's stature. There are always fundamental economic questions involved in such uneasy Afro-American public postures.

(Blues Ideology 194)

9. In comparing her to her contemporary Frederick Douglass, Painter writes that Truth "resisted or ignored the temptation, as Frederick Douglass did not, to create an educated persona to display the benefits of freedom" (Painter 154). Unlike Douglass, for whom literacy became

obsessedly synonymous with freedom, Truth's concern with learning to read and write is non-existent. In fact, she is quite comfortable being read to, especially by children, who "would re-read the same sentence to her, as often as she wished, and without comment" (109). Thus, for Truth, reading becomes not an individual but a communal task. Indeed, the very fact that she has relied upon others to produce her narrative attests to the fact that it is in community (especially with women and children) that she establishes a sense of selfhood-- even if that community is predominantly a white one.

Douglass, whose autobiography is written with a sense of strong individualism, refused to play the role of untutored fugitive which white abolitionists felt he should perform in order to conform to (white) public expectations. Throughout his career as an abolitionist, he repeatedly disagreed with his white "mentors," resolutely refusing to speak in the black vernacular, or to write in a more objective, and less angry and expressive style. But Truth, in the words of Douglass "'was a genuine specimen of the uncultured Negro. . . [who] seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms'" (Terry 430). Terry suggests that men of culture, the talented tenth, such as Douglass, might have "perceived Truth as he felt (feared) others saw him. . . an 'uncultured Negro'" (Terry 430). Truth, if she had adopted the style of Douglass, would perhaps have allied herself with educated and relatively affluently-bred black club women such as Anna Julia Cooper or Ida B. Wells. But Truth, along with her evangelist sisters, occupied class positions of poverty rather than affluence. Truth is perhaps the luckiest of the female evangelists-- with the help of white abolitionist friends she was able to purchase a small home; we are able to locate her whereabouts and activities until her death (we are unable to do this with the other evangelist women); and after her death, a large commemorative tombstone was erected (again, by white friends) to mark the place of her burial in Battle Creek, Michigan. That tombstone still stands as a landmark in Battle Creek today. Interestingly, however, if we compare the trajectory of Truth's life to that of her black male contemporary Douglass, we find that she died in relative poverty and obscurity. Douglass lived to become an American statesman-- marshall of the District of Columbia, and minister to Haiti. He resided in a grand Victorian house, very much like one his former master might have owned. Douglass' house was furnished with Greek busts, and other European works of art. He was paid \$150 plus expenses for every one of the numerous lectures he gave until his death. In contrast, Truth died penniless, the last printing of her narrative an "offering . . . to the public. . .[so] that by its sale she may be kept from want in these her last days" (Truth & Gilbert viii). (This revelation comes directly upon the heels of a statement which suggests that Truth should be granted a government "pension for her services in the war, no less than for her labors since the war, for the amelioration of those yet half enslaved" (viii). While Titus does not indict the American government for its lack of responsibility in supporting Truth, the silent insinuation cannot be missed.)

The textual self-crafting or performance of Truth, who, although she never achieved the fame of Douglass her male counterpart, felt it "'her duty' to 'trip' him in his speeches, and to 'ridicule' his efforts to elevate his cultivation" (Mabee 113) is what I examine here. How are we to

interpret Truth's ridiculing of the very cultural "refinement" Douglass presented as an antidote to white expectations? Who is the minstrel here? The refined Douglass, aspiring to Euro-civility, or the unrefined Truth presenting the very image which whites wanted and expected of black fugitives? This problem of performance and minstrelsy is, of course, a difficult and complex one. In her presentation of her narrative, does the illiterate Truth valorize African ways of saying, or does she merely reinforce damaging white stereotypes of African Americans as uneducated naifs? Significantly, this same question would later arise in the critical controversy surrounding Truth's literary descendant, Zora Neale Hurston in her departure from the prevailing theories of blackmale writers such as Alain Locke and Richard Wright during and after the Harlem Renaissance. At the end of the twentieth-century, however, literary criticism favours Hurston in *her* privileging of orality over literacy, communal telling, and the black vernacular. Can Truth, writing almost one hundred years earlier than Hurston, be regarded as a foremother of Hurston?

10. We may note that Truth, in her refusal to learn to read, joins her evangelist sisters Lee, Elaw, and later, Foote, in their intrinsic distrust of the written word. Truth knows the danger of misinterpreting texts. She has children read the Bible to her, in order to "see what her own mind could make out of the record. . . and not what others thought it to mean" (Truth & Gilbert 108-109). Even so, "she came to the conclusion that the spirit of truth spoke in those records, but that the recorders of those truths had intermingled with them ideas and suppositions of their own" (109).

What are we to make of this disillusionment with literacy on the part of these black women? It may be that once they attained a much-prized literacy sometimes denied to black women, and very often denied to blacks, they found that they as black women still were not acknowledged as literate subjects within their black communities-- not to mention the larger white society. Thus, while the most popular nineteenth-century black male autobiographers could abandon God as their authority, to move on to more secular, elite political platforms where they had a voice, the Christian soap-box remained the only constant means of self-assertion for many black women autobiographers. The writings of these preacher women demonstrate a deep concern with the religious as a means through which their voices could be maintained-- voices claimed by preaching women's equality in the same breath as the word of God. Perhaps the fact that they were preachers encouraged in them a preference for the oral over the written word. As their works will attest, they fought daily for their voices to be heard. For them, orality rather than literacy seems to be the site of contest. It is preaching in vernacular language (most often in defiance of the injunctions of church fathers) to popular audiences of anyone who would listen, which gives the black women their greatest sense of self-- in spite of the fact that preaching has been regarded as a calling unfit for in some churches even of our own era.

11. Compare Truth's words with those of Linda Brent:

Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that

some of my adventures may seem incredible; but they are, nevertheless, strictly true. I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts. . . . I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history

. . . .

(Brent 335)

Brent's abolitionist friend and endorser, L. Maria Child, is concerned to rationalize the sexual content of Brent's autobiography:

I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public; for the experiences of this intelligent and much-injured woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate. This peculiar phase of Slavery had generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn. I do this for the sake of my sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them.

(337-38)

I am interested in the use, in both Truth's and Brent's narratives, of the words "delicacy" and "silence" here. Can we surmise, as Mabee does, that Truth's amanuensis Gilbert refers to sexual experiences in the life of Truth? While Maria Child "willingly" takes the "responsibility" for presenting Brent's sexual history "with the veil withdrawn," are we to conclude that Truth, not Gilbert, refuses to "draw the veil" which conceals the "private parts" of Truth's life? Gilbert writes, in a chapter entitled "Gleanings" (which means, literally, to collect or find out, bit by bit): "There are some hard things that crossed Isabella's life while in slavery, that she has no desire to publish, for various reasons" (81). Thus, the desire to conceal seems to be Truth's.

12. Barbara McCaskill notes the eagerness with which white abolitionists sought to display escaped slaves Henry Brown, Ellen Craft and William Wells Brown at the World's Fair in London, 1851: "William Wells Brown and his panorama must be displayed. Henry "Box" Brown and his crate must be displayed. William Craft, too, and Mrs. Craft, costumed in the masculine garments of her escape, must be displayed-- both standing on an auction block!" (524). Eventually, the escaped slaves simply "strolled [through the Fair] arm-in-arm with a prominent British abolitionist of the opposite gender" (524). McCaskill also notes that

William Wells Brown did bring, as a souvenir of sorts, London's infamous Punch illustration excoriating American enslavement. The drawing, entitled "The Virginian Slave," depicted a forlorn, bare-breasted Black woman chained to a post garlanded with Old Glory. Dramatically, Brown posted the drawing with New York artist Hiram Powers's "The Greek Slave". . . a romantic nude of a white slave

and one of the Fair's most popular attractions.

(527)

13. Truth's description of her own whipping, unlike Douglass', presents no sentimental scene of ravishment, but one of ugly brutality:

. . . she was told to go to the barn; on going there, she found her master with a bundle of rods, prepared in the embers, and bound together with cords. When he had tied her hands together before her, he gave her the most cruel whipping she was ever tortured with. He whipped her till the flesh was deeply lacerated, and the blood streamed from her wounds-- and the scars remain to the present. . .

(26)

The description of how her lover is beaten is even more gruesome: "

. . . they . . . [beat] him with the heavy ends of their canes, bruising and mangling his head and face in the most awful manner, and causing the blood, which streamed from his wounds to cover him like a slaughtered beast, constituting him a most shocking spectacle.

(35)

14. Barbara Welter describes the "fair" heroine and the (dark) diabolical male villain as stock fare in the sentimental novel.

15. To "dis" means to disrespect verbally or otherwise.

16. The miscegenation law stated that a black child must always follow the condition of its mother (who was almost invariably black, and enslaved). This law allowed white slave owners unlimited and unencumbered access to the bodies of black slave women-- indeed, it *encouraged* such access, since one's slave capital was increased by the (undoubtedly enjoyable) practice of "studding" one's own female slaves oneself.

The following passage from Toni Morrison's Beloved recounts an incident of whitemale violation of a black woman and its significance for that woman, Sethe:

"After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn' speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. School-teacher made me open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still."

"They used cowhide on you?"

"And they took my milk."

"They beat you and you was pregnant?"
"And they took my milk!"

(Morrison Beloved 16-17)

17. See depictions of "Africa" and "America" as women in postures of sloth and happy industry, respectively, in Albert Boime's The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century.

18. Baker quotes Ralph Ellison: "[The blues] combine the tragic and the comic in a very subtle way. . . . [But] if you are going to write fiction there is a level of consciousness which you move toward which I would think transcends the blues" (Blues Ideology 174).

Chapter Six/ Rebecca Cox Jackson and the Black Vernacular Text

The issue of self-fashioning is one I want to examine further in relation to Rebecca Cox Jackson's autobiography in order to understand how the process of editing acts to alter her performance and modify her discourse-- specifically, how the "contour portrait" or the "shadow" (the metaphors of Zilpha Elaw and Sojourner Truth respectively) which Jackson created of herself was radically altered by a well-meaning editor who aimed to present a reading public with a text which that public could readily accept and digest. Jean Humez' edition of Jackson's writings has been an immensely important contribution to the field of African American women's literature, ensuring a wide dissemination of Jackson's writings, and opening a path for new scholarship. It is with the intent to recover Jackson's voice more fully that I suggest a rereading of her work in its original form-- as a black vernacular text. It seems to me that this text privileges oracy over literacy, employing its own system of spelling and grammar, and speaking with the black voice of Jackson, a voice which "looks back to an African linguistic tradition which was modified on American soil" (Smitherman 15).

In conjunction with my examination of Jackson, I will also look at the editing processes involved in Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, because I believe that an understanding of the manner in which Jacobs had to negotiate her performance of self in her work is helpful in surmising about similar processes (either of self-censorship, or of editing carried out by others) which the evangelist women may have experienced

also.

I have already sought to uncover how Belinda, Lee, Elaw and Truth dealt with issues of autobiographical performance, (white) reader expectations and self-censorship in their own life-writings. In my examination of Truth, for example, I have dealt in detail with the manner in which the "grammar of interruption" and the multi-voiced or hybrid nature of Truth's text reflects its complex editorial history. We may describe Jackson's autobiography in a similar manner, since it reflects not only a Shaker mythology,¹ but also powerful African influences in its language and style. In a sense, editing (or censoring) forces the black women's texts into a certain conformity with prevailing hegemonic discourses. In the case of Harriet Jacobs, the editorial work and presumptuous attitudes of Lydia Maria Child alters not only the persona Jacobs presents in Incidents, but also the language and structure of her text. While Jacobs' autobiography was written and published in the nineteenth century (1861), the manuscripts of Rebecca Cox Jackson were not published until 1981-- about 150 years after Jackson wrote them. Jackson's twentieth-century editor, Jean Humez, presents Gifts of Power in a language and style palatable to a contemporary audience. Humez is certainly more concerned about issues of editorial intrusiveness than Lydia Child seems to have been; yet, Humez' "normalization" (Humez 66-7) of Jackson's numerous spelling idiosyncrasies and unconventional grammatical constructions gives us a sanitized portrait of Jackson, one in which I feel we lose a crucial sense of Jackson the black woman writing a Shaker autobiography in nineteenth-century America.

Of course, I am aware that my desire to find the "real" author

behind the text seems futile by certain contemporary theoretical standards which claim that the concept "real" author, or authorial "intention" signifies a misguided attempt to classify what might more correctly be termed the "author function." But, no study of black writing in America can be complete without an examination of the strategies black writers have employed to negotiate white mainstream editorial processes, discourses, and expectations which encourage(d) them to say what they do not mean, and mean what they do not say. Those strategies are defined by authorial class, race and gender. I want to decipher as nearly as possible what the writer *does* mean in the case of Rebecca Jackson and Harriet Jacobs-- for Jacobs, I contrast the persona she presents in actual letters she wrote to her white editors with the persona of "Linda Brent" whom we see in Jacobs' edited Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. In the case of Jackson, I will compare an excerpt from Jackson's original manuscript with the edited, standardized-English text Humez gives us. In both cases, we will see behind the "white-washed" (whiteface?) text, a black woman, in part erased. How this erasure operates in other black women's texts for which there are no hand-written manuscripts, letters, etc., must be left to conjecture. But interestingly, the black women whom I find behind the edited texts of Jacobs and Jackson demonstrate that black expressivity which so far we have found often submerged in the writings of Belinda, Lee, Elaw and Truth. It is an expressivity which later fictional writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara and Alice Walker are much bolder about claiming in their texts. But while Morrison, Hurston, Bambara and Walker operate in a late twentieth-century black literary discursive field which has been powerfully affected by political

movements toward black power in the sixties and seventies, and heightened black nationalism in the eighties and nineties, Jacobs and the other nineteenth-century writers operate in different circumstances. Thus, Morrison and Walker attempt to reclaim what Jacobs (or is it Maria Child?) rejects; similarly, Jean Humez in the interest of presenting standard-English to mainly academic readers discards the "incorrect" spelling and grammar of Jackson at the expense, I feel, of losing an important aspect of Jackson herself.

I will in subsequent chapters investigate how later nineteenth-century black women evangelist writers increasingly subsume aspects of themselves under cover of a genteel, "white-face" discourse-- yet those subsumed aspects nevertheless continue to emerge as disruptive "fissures" (Africanisms, disrupted chronology, disruptive metaphors, etc.) in the otherwise genteel text.

In order to examine how the "real" Harriet Jacobs differed from the presented "Linda Brent," I examine the editorial process involved in getting Incidents printed, and compare letters written by Jacobs with textual excerpts from Incidents. Interestingly, Jean Fagan Yellin, the critic responsible for authenticating the veracity of Jacobs' narrative, comments that "the discovery of Jacobs' correspondence shows that the style of Incidents is completely consistent with her private letters" (Yellin "Text and Contexts" 269). I disagree with Yellin; it seems to me that a study of Jacobs' letters reveals a persona quite different from that presented in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Indeed, Yellin, in presenting Jacobs' letters, offers us a standardized-spelling version-- with no explanation or rationalization (as in the case of Rebecca Jackson's editor, Humez) for why

she does so.

Jacobs' letters to white friend and editor Amy Post, Post's missives to Jacobs, and white editor Lydia Maria Child's letters to Post reveal a number of important "incidents" in their own right. After reading them, we realize that the narrative structure of Jacobs' autobiography has been significantly altered by Lydia Child. Child writes in a letter which Jacobs forwarded to Post:

I have very little occasion to alter the language, which is wonderfully good, for one whose opportunities for education have been so limited. The events are interesting, and well told; the remarks are also good, and to the purpose. But I am copying a great deal of it, for the purpose of transposing sentences and pages, so as to bring the story into continuous *order*, and the remarks into *appropriate* places. I think you will see that this renders the story much more clear and entertaining [emphasis is Child's].

(Sterling 83)

How much language has been altered? What Child considered "continuous order" and "appropriate places" are what we read in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. What *Jacobs* considered acceptable, we do not see. I concern myself with this because, as Susan Willis writes in "Histories, Communities and Sometimes Utopia," the narrative strategies of black women differ radically from what is deemed "appropriate" by white, mainstream standards. Black women often write in what Willis calls "the four-page formula"-- that is, stories which are told anecdotally, rather than chronologically, in small segments which can easily be read by people who do not have the leisure to digest a text in one sitting, but who must read during short work-breaks, or at bus stops (Willis "Histories" 821). Such anecdotes are connected in a novel-length work according to theme, not chronology. One memory triggers another in a kind of web-like effect

which has little to do with "order." Is this what Jacobs' original manuscript might have been?

We are led to seriously question the suitability of Child as an editor handling Jacobs' text, when we realize the disregard with which she treated Jacobs as a person. Jacobs writes to Amy Post, being careful not to offend any party, that the death of her mistress' infant, and the subsequent urgency of the white household's demands upon her prevented her from attending an editorial meeting with Maria Child:

For this reason my dear friend I could not attend to my own business as I should have done. I know that Mrs. Child will strive to do the best she can, more than I can ever repay but I ought to have been there that we could have consulted together, and compared our views. Although I know that hers are superior to mine yet we could have worked her great Ideas and my small ones together.

(Sterling 83)

Why Maria Child did not schedule another meeting with Jacobs, in light of the circumstances, can only be left to conjecture. We have the presentation of Child's "great ideas" in Incidents, but what were Jacobs' "small" ideas? Only an examination of Jacobs' original manuscript (no longer extant) could reveal this. Jacobs' timid insecurity among white friends, her fear of their censure and ridicule, and their disregard of her does not emerge as nakedly in her autobiography as it does in her letters to Amy Post. In the double-speak of black writers who say one thing to "Massa" but mean something else entirely, Jacobs writes in Incidents:

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.

(Jacobs 513)

The word "bind" suggests that Jacobs' "friendship" with white women like Child and "Bruce" (in reality Mrs. Willis) is a qualified friendship indeed. That friendship allows the white women to carelessly disregard the feelings and wishes of Jacobs, and the limitations under which she must operate. In fact, the limitations themselves are imposed on Jacobs by her white friends. She writes to Post of her constraints in the Willis household:

If I was not so tied down to the baby house I would make one bold effort to see you. Patience. Perhaps it will not be always thus. I have kept Louisa [Jacobs' daughter] here this winter so that I might have my evenings to write, but poor Hatty name is so much in demand that I cannot accomplish much. If I could steal away and have two quiet months to myself I would work night and day. To get this time I should have to explain myself, and no one here accept Louisa knows that I have even written anything to be put in print. I have not the courage to meet the criticism and ridicule of educated people. . . . I stayed ten days to do the Winter shopping for Mrs. Willis. Having a young baby she could not go herself. I had the little girl portrait painted while there. I had a long distance to go to the Artist and they refused one day to take me in the cars. . . . Will you please try and get my Brother Daguerotype from Miss Charlotte Murray and keep it for me. If this said Book should ever come in existance I want to have an illustrated Edition and the whole family in.

(Jacobs in Sterling, 80)

I have quoted this long excerpt because in it a number of important questions and issues arise which drive home much more clearly some intimations Jacobs makes in Incidents about her new mistress' disregard of her. In Incidents we learn that, in spite of Jacobs' explicit wishes that she not be purchased, Mrs. Bruce pays money to rescue her from her owner. "I am deeply grateful to the generous friend who procured [my freedom]," Jacobs is hasty to assure her readership, "but I despise the miscreant who demanded payment for what never rightfully belonged to him or his" (Jacobs 512). It is not Mrs. Bruce whom she despises. Later, she includes Mrs. Bruce in a list of family who has "tried to buy me" over the

years-- father, grandmother, other relatives: "but God had raised me up a friend among strangers. . . . Friend!. . . . when I speak of Mrs. Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred" (512). Jacobs certainly hints at some aspects of her relationship with Mrs. Bruce (Willis) which trouble her. But I would argue that she is tight-lipped with her criticism and profuse with her praise. This strategy does not change in the letters-- the difference seems to be that she tells Amy Post a great deal more about the restrictions of her circumstances at the Willises than she reveals in her autobiography.

From her letters we must wonder, did Mrs. Willis use the services of both Louisa (Harriet's daughter) *and* Harriet Jacobs, getting, in essence, the labour of two for the price of one? Did Jacobs feel so insecure with her "sacred friends" the Willises that she could not share with them something so emotionally significant as the fact that she was trying to write her autobiography? Where are the daguerreotypes that Jacobs writes about, and why did the published text not contain them as Jacobs wished? In addition to such questions, we may observe that the persona of the genteel, northern black "lady" which we see in Incidents seems to contrast the "Hatty" who emerges in Jacobs' letters. Jacob's writing style in her letters is not as "polished" as Incidents presents it. For example, Jacobs omits the use of the possessive-- as in "Hatty name," "my Brother Daguerotype" or "the little girl portrait" (instead of "Hatty's name," etc.) This is a West African speech pattern common to people of African descent in the diaspora (Smitherman 28). Non-standard spelling also appears, as in "shoping," "existance" or "couloured." Sentences seem much shorter and simpler than they do in Incidents. Jacobs' last line, "If this said Book

should ever come in existence I want to have an illustrated Edition and the whole family in" suggests a kind of conversational orality ("in" instead of "into" and "in *it*") which also does not appear in Incidents. The autobiography is impeccable in its spelling, sentence structure and grammatical "correctness," as Jacobs' letters are not. If there can be such a thing as the "real" Jacobs, I believe that she emerges much more clearly in her letters than she does in her edited autobiography. What would Jacob's unedited, "unordered," illustrated work look like? At this point we can only imagine.

In Rebecca Cox Jackson's text, similar issues of spelling and grammar arise. The woman we see in the unedited manuscript is a different woman than the one portrayed by the comparatively polished text Humez presents us. Jackson's autobiography remained stored in manuscript form in "various Shaker archives" (Humez 65) until Humez' publication of it in 1981. What we can surmise from this late "discovery" of Jackson's text is that Jackson either never considered it valuable enough (as other black Evangelical sisters did) to be published, or was unsuccessful in obtaining a publisher for her work. Intent upon spreading God's word from Shaker communities to urban black populations, she might have written down her experiences only because of the Shaker community's "intense interest in her prophecies" and their "long-established practice of soliciting written testimonial from Believers with vivid stories to tell . . ." (Humez 43). After her death, the "single, cherished, intimate woman friend"-- Rebecca Perot-- with whom she lived and travelled for thirty-five years (Humez 24), relinquished Jackson's manuscripts to the care of "visiting Shaker leadership" (Humez 65). Alonzo G. Hollister gathered the

writings into a single anthology, beginning with the incomplete narrative and adding to this smaller books in Jackson's handwriting, which he arranged according to date. Later, he received a second autobiography written by Jackson, a more elaborate version. Hollister compared the two autobiographies, and recorded variations and new material at the end of his original manuscript anthology. He never managed to produce a second, comprehensive draft, however; this task was accomplished (badly) by another Shaker who was not as familiar with Jackson's life, history and friends as Hollister was, and who made many "scribal errors" (Humez 65). Humez' published version of Jackson, then, derives from the original manuscripts and Hollister's compilations.

In order to derive a sense of the Jackson of the manuscripts, we may compare the following excerpts. The first is from Humez' text. It is a disturbing passage of brutalized embodiment which reflects a recurring preoccupation in Jackson-- that of self-preservation in the face of threatened physical violence. Humez writes that this fear of violence must have had its roots "in the growing tensions that produced the explosions of white mob violence against black Philadelphians, beginning in 1829 and reoccurring in 1834, 1835, 1842, and 1849. . . . It is hard to see how any black person living in Philadelphia during these years could have escaped feeling terror and rage. . . ." (14). But in addition to racial violence, Jackson seems to have been plagued by fears related to her position as a preaching female. She identifies the murderer in her dream of slaughter as "a Methodist preacher and about four years after I had this dream he persecuted me in as cruel a manner as he treated my body in the dream. And he tried to hedge up my way and stop my spiritual useful influence

among the people and destroy my spirit life" (Jackson 95). Later, this same minister, along with two others "appointed what death I ought to die. One said I ought to be stoned to death, one said tarred and feathered and burnt, one said I ought to be put in a hogshead, driven full of spikes, and rolled down a hill. . ." (149). Jackson's response to her fear of such violence is her attempt to gain complete control of her physical body, by means of guidance from the Spirit. For Jackson, that control seems to involve a kind of "via negativa"-- a joyful embracing of *denial* of the world's enjoyments-- sexual activity with her husband, food, sleep-- in order to increase her spiritual "gifts." Eroticism is then sublimated in spiritual metaphor-- such as Jackson's dream of Rebecca Perot "abathing herself. . . . She looked like an Angel. . ." (225), or her dream of Christ's entering her heart with a mantle wrapped "close around him" during a period of particularly virulent persecution (148). Humez' version of Jackson's "Dream of Slaughter" script reads:

A Dream of Slaughter

In a night or two after I had this dream, I also dreamed I was in a house, entered in at the south door. I heard a footstep quick behind me and looked at the east window and saw a man coming. I run upstairs, told the child's nurse a robber was in the house. She fled. I went to the east window, then to the west, to jump out. I found in so doing I should kill myself, so I sat down on a chair by the west window with my face to the north. He came up and came right to me. He took a lance and laid my nose open and then he cut my head on the right side, from the back to the front above my nose, and pulled the skin down over that side. Then he cut the left, did the same way, and pulled the skin down. The skin and blood covered me like a veil from my head to my lap. All my body was covered with blood. Then he took a long knife and cut my chest open in the form of the cross and took all my bowels out and laid them on the floor by me right side, and then went in search of all the rest of the family. This was a family that I sewed in. When the lance was going through my nose it felt like a feather was going over my nose. I sat in silent prayer all the time saying these words in my mind, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

After I found he was gone I thought I would make my escape before he returned.

(Jackson in Humez 94-5)

It is only by "sit[ting] still" (95)-- again a resistance of *not*-acting as she receives the instruction and protection of God-- that Jackson is able to survive this incident: "But a voice above my head told me to sit still, as though I was dead, for that was the only thing that would save me" (95). A second version of the above is taken from a single-page facsimile in Humez, of Jackson's own handwritten manuscript:

A Darm of Slopter

In A night or two after. I had this Dram also I was in A hous entered in at the South Door I heard A footstep queck behind me I looket at the east Winder I saw a man coming I run up Sares [stairs] tould the Childs noss a robber was in the house She flad I whent to the east Winder then To the West to Jump out I found in So douing I Should kille my Selfe So I Set down on A chare by the West Winder With my faces to the north he com up And com rit to me he tok a lanc [lance] and layed my nous [nose] Open and then he cut my head on the right sid from The back to the front nous A bov my nous and pult the Skine down over that Sid then he cut the left Sid the Same Way and puld the Skin down the Skins and the blood covered me like a Wale [veil?] from my head to my lap all my body Was covered With blood He then tok a long kniffe and cut my Chest open in the form of A croos and tok all my bowles Bowlles out and lad them on the floor by my rit Sid and then Whent in Such [search] of all the rest of the family this Was A family that I Sowed in When the lanc Was going throu my nowse it felt like a father [feather?] going over my nose I set in Silent Prare all the tim Saying this Wordes in my mind Lord Jesus recive my Sirit after I found He Was gon I thought I Would mak my a Skett Skept [escape]. . .

(Jackson in Humez 64)

As in the case of Jacobs' editing process, Humez has radically altered Jackson's original manuscript. Sentence structure has been changed, spelling standardized, and the text generally "cleaned-up" (violated?) in a manner which erases the woman standing behind it. Jackson seems to

spell her words as she would have pronounced them, thus presenting us with an opportunity to *hear* her, which Humez' standardization obliterates. The fact that Jackson was a self-educated woman struggling to put her life on paper is nowhere in Humez so clear as it is in Jackson's original manuscript. That lengthy manuscript, housed in the Berkshire Athenaeum, must be examined again in detail and printed with attention to Jackson's details, in order that we may have what I believe would be a text truer to Jackson herself.

Yet, even in Humez' edited version of Jackson's autobiography, we become aware of Jackson's pervasive use of the colloquial, and of "non-standard" English grammatical constructions throughout her text. Gifts of Power demonstrates a preponderance of the black colloquial-- which is to say, an aspect of the expressive vernacular-- which we do not see with such frequency in the other black evangelist women's writings. For example, in the very opening of her autobiography, Jackson writes: "In the year of 1830, July, I was wakened by thunder and lightning at the break of day and the bed which had been my resting place in time of thunder for five years was now *taking away*. . . my only place of rest is *taking away*. . . [my emphasis]" (Jackson 72). Or: "And all this time it was athundering and lightning as if the heavens and earth were acoming together. . . ." (72). Her use of "improper" verb conjugations is also common: ". . . we *was* all called to get something to eat" [my emphasis] (75). Another example: "And it began to rain, a little while after I got there, so the streets *was in one slush*" (76). The use of the italicized words suggests a colloquial manner of using the superlative (the standard-English expression would be: "the streets were in a most terrible slush").

Later, Jackson refers to the sympathetic Methodists who try to defend her against men who persecute her: "So when they found that I would not [defend myself against the persecutors], they took it in hand. They said it was a shame, a set of men ariding through the country, persecuting a poor, strange, lone woman" (153). The term "a set" to describe a "large number" is, again, colloquial usage.

Jackson's frequent use of the colloquial suggests an "orality in literacy" which we see in the narrative of Sojourner Truth, in its fluctuations between standard English and the black vernacular. As Humez observes: "Jackson's modern readers can hear her making connections, thinking aloud about the meaning of events. . ." (45). As such, her work becomes an oral text (Humez 45). However, if we read the original "unsanitized" manuscript of Jackson, it is a much more powerful sense of the black vernacular which emerges. I will examine how a later writer, Julia Foote, also incorporates oral style into a written text, in a much more conscious and deliberate literary strategy than Jackson ever brings to her manuscript. It is in the work of such women as Jackson, Truth and Foote that we see the precursors of what Henry Louis Gates would call "free indirect discourse" in the Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Humez writes: "I. . . scrupulously retained Jackson's own narrative ordering of material as in BA [Berkshire Athenaeum] even in cases where she probably would have changed it herself, preparing it for publication" (Humez 67). Yet, as I have mentioned, Jackson's unordered autobiographical entries adhere to Susan Willis' "four page formula"; the entries are fairly short and divided by subheadings-- for example, the

section entitled "My Heavenly Lead Entered Her Little Temple" is followed by a passage called "The Blind Receive Sight." In "My Heavenly Lead" Jackson recounts a mystical experience in which she achieves union with a divine female figure: "And as soon as I was under, this woman entered into me, who I had followed as my heavenly leader for over three years This was in the fall." This passage of female spiritual empowerment seems to engender another memory of such empowerment for Jackson. In the following passage ("The Blind Receive Sight") she describes how "[t]he summer before. . . ." she healed a blind old woman who recognized Jackson by her singing voice: "My mother and her used to belong to band meeting together when I was a child. It was my mother's voice she heard in me. . . ." (133). In another instance, dreams in which Jackson bakes for multitudes, washes quilts, journeys and has visions-- dreams which she interprets as harbingers of her ministerial calling-- seem to nudge her memory backward in time to the beginning of her ministry, when she assumed a role of leadership in initiating a small prayer-group for herself, her husband, and two sisters too shy to attend large-group meetings (102). In both the examples I have cited, Jackson disrupts the chronological progression of her text. Such disruptions occur frequently as she relates stories according to theme rather than chronological teleology.

Whatever Jackson's reasons for not editing, ordering or publishing her autobiography, the fact remains that it represents a voice given scant recognition in Jackson's (and in our own) time-- the voice of many black women for whom literacy and publication was (is) of little concern. As Humez observes, somewhat condescendingly:

Even with the opportunity to finish the autobiography and supervise the publication of her writings, however, Jackson would

not have displayed the kind of literary sophistication and sense of overall form that a reader of modern books routinely expects in a "writer". This is simply because Jackson was not a professional writer-- she was a working, religious woman who attained literacy painfully, by her own efforts, in middle age. . . Her models for prose composition, beyond the Bible, would therefore have been the oral forms of religious testimonial and storytelling, as well as a very few pieces of published religious testimonial and theological tracts.

(Humez 46)

I suggest that the autobiographies of other black evangelist women hardly represented the works of "professional writers" either-- women such as Amanda Smith, Jarena Lee, Julia Foote or Zilpha Elaw also published their autobiographies predominantly for religious rather than literary reasons. However, their texts are much more "polished" in terms of standard English style than Jackson's, which in the case of Lee, we know reflects her employment of an unidentified outside editor (Andrews Sisters 6). This may also have been the case with the other women's autobiographies. Another explanation for the standard English of the evangelist texts might be that the women independently demonstrated a level of literacy which Jackson in her manuscripts either did not care about achieving or could not achieve. (The content and style of Elaw's autobiography, for instance, demonstrate a knowledge of literature and a pervasive orotundity for which it is doubtful an editor would have been responsible.) But at any rate, regardless of whether she was urged by others to publish her work as some black women were, Jackson did not publish. Thus, her rough manuscripts present us with the writings of a black woman seemingly unconcerned with standards of literacy or literary conventions of her day.

In addition to Jackson's colloquialisms, her text is rich in what Zora Neale Hurston has termed "hieroglyphics" or word-pictures. Humez

suggests that:

Jackson's inexperience with secular nonfictional narration only partly explains the comparative flatness of the writing that links the extraordinarily vivid and moving accounts of visionary experience. Another explanation comes to mind that seems more telling. Her lifelong, cultivated habit of excluding from her mind the distractions of external, ordinary material reality, in order the better to concentrate upon the revelations occurring within, undoubtedly took its toll on her ability, as a writer, to reconstruct that ordinary reality.

(46)

If we read Jackson's abundant visionary descriptions as priestess-like states of spiritual transcendence, however, we may describe her text not by traditional literary standards as flawed in its failure to combine her "moving accounts" of the visionary with colourful glimpses of ordinary reality, but as demonstrative of a life of the spirit so intense for this black woman that all else pales in comparison. Humez surmises that Jackson acquired her story-telling from "a repertoire of visionary conventions, with which Jackson would have been familiar as a woman growing up in a black Methodist churchgoing environment in the early nineteenth century" (Humez 47). Indeed, at one point in her struggle to adopt Shaker ways of being, Jackson writes: "I was so buried in the depth of the tradition of my forefathers, that it did seem as if I never could be dug up." And at another junction: "Then I woke and found the burden of my people heavy upon me. . . . I cried unto the Lord and prayed this prayer, "Oh, Lord. . . [I pray] Thou art going to make me useful to my people, either temporal or spiritual,-- for temporally they are held by their white brethren in bondage. . . and spiritually they are held by their ministers, by the world, the flesh, and the devil. . ." (181-2). Although Jackson describes her African heritage in extremely negative

terms here-- perhaps under Shaker influence-- we can hardly dismiss the fact that, as she herself admits, the impact of that heritage upon her and "her people" is a deep and lasting one.

Diane Sasson echoes Humez' conviction that Jackson is steeped in black Methodist influence. In describing Jackson's incredibly powerful opening passage, Sasson notes that the imagery Jackson uses is unusual in Shaker expression, but "frequently appears in black conversion narratives and black spirituals" (162). Sasson also observes that Jackson's "acute sense of rhythm and meter. . . gains beauty through the poetic devices appropriated from folk sermons" (164), but more specifically: "Mother Rebecca wrote a conversion narrative that retains the theology and the language of black evangelical Protestantism. Her experience among the Shakers seems hardly to have affected the quality of her recollection of this personal religious drama" (166).

Jackson's (and other black evangelist women's) propensity for sermonic and lyrical/metaphorical modes of description² may be seen in the following passage concerning Jackson's justification. For Jackson, "thunder" and "lightning" become the rumbling voice of God, and "streams of bright glory to my soul" respectively, operating together in a call and response pattern, and producing what is virtually an audio-visual effect. In repeated response to this virtual symphony of light and sound, Jackson is physically moved to leap up in ecstasy and praise. Jackson's repetition creates a sense of the sermonic, and of dramatically heightened emotion:

. . . I was wakened by *thunder and lightning* at the break of day and the bed which had been my resting place in time of *thunder* for five years was now taking away. About five years ago I was affected by *thunder* and always after in time of *thunder and lightning* I would have to go to bed because it made me so sick.

Now my only place of rest is taking away. . . And all this time it was *athundering and lightning* as if the heavens and earth were coming together. . . While these thoughts with many more rolled against my troubled breast, they covered me with shame, fear and confusion. . . My sins like a mountain reached to the skies, black as sack cloth of hair and the heavens was as brass against my prayers and everything above my head was of one solid blackness . . . And in this moment of despair the cloud bursted, the heavens was clear, and the mountain was gone. . . And the *lightning*, which was a moment ago the messenger of death, was now the messenger of peace, joy, and consolation. And I rose from my knees, ran down stairs, opened the door to let the *lightning* in the house, for it was like sheets of glory to my soul. . . And at every clap of *thunder* I leaped from the floor praising the God of my salvation. I opened all the windows in the house to let the *lightning* in for it was like streams of bright glory to my soul and in this happy state I praised the Lord for about an hour without ceasing [my emphases].

(Jackson 71-2)

We may contrast Jackson's sermonic description with what Virginia Lieson Bereton cites as a traditional Euro-American nineteenth-century depiction of Protestant conversion by Sara Hamilton. Bereton characterizes (mainly white) male and female nineteenth-century spiritual autobiographers as reticent in describing their conversion experiences. "As good Victorians, most nineteenth century narrators-- and women in particular-- shied away . . . from sensuous imagery. . ." (21). She further suggests that the narratives employed "stylized" and "stock" descriptions. I quote Sara Hamilton and two other white female autobiographers at length in order to effect a comparison between these recitations of a pivotal spiritual moment of conversion and those of a relatively large percentage of the black female spiritual autobiographers:

. . . surprising astonishment filled my soul: I beheld the Son of God expiring in agonies unknown, to gratify the malicious rage of wicked men. I thought he died to save my life, and arose again for my justification. . . I then saw that God could be just and justify him that believeth in Jesus, even such a wretch as I was. In this view, no tongue can tell the ecstasy of joy that I was the subject

of; my distress left me, and I could give glory to God with all my heart. I longed to praise him with every breath; my prayer was, Lord, what wilt thou have me do? Lord, speak; for thy servant heareth.

(Hamilton in Bereton 20)

Hamilton's passage possesses little of the intensity we see in Jackson. Repetition and metaphor are absent. Jackson takes the reader to heights of transcendence which Hamilton can not-- in essence telling of the ecstasy Hamilton claims "no tongue can tell" with words. Bereton also cites Church of Galilee believer Harriet Livermore, of whom I have spoken in Chapter Two. Livermore belonged to an evangelical sect, as virtually all of the black women spiritual autobiographers did. Her conversion experience is more expressive than Hamilton's:

I retired to my chamber and locked my door. No eye but those flames of fire which fill all Heaven with light, was upon me. I sat in the corner of the room, trying to meditate upon my situation, when a sudden impulse moved me to give myself away to Jesus. I dropped quick upon the floor, crying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." I can recollect no more, till I stood upon my feet and walked around the room, where all about me seemed wrapt in mystery. And as poor as was the offering I presented, even my sinful self, Jesus took me up in his arms of mercy. I was a volunteer in the act of giving myself up to God. . . Feeling a solemn stillness in my mind, as I walked the room, I could not account for the alteration, as it had so recently resembled the surging waves in a violent gale. The noise of an accusing conscience was suddenly hushed. . . The first thought that I recollect passing through my mind, breathed perfect purity; it was like this-- O, I hope I shall never sin again. . . I believe when a soul is given to Christ, he . . . separates the weeping sinner from the old crimes; and heals every wound, making perfectly whole. The newborn soul is white as snow.

(Livermore in Bereton 21)

Livermore employs metaphor to describe the fires of hell and the purity of the "newborn soul," but does not exhibit the sense of repetition and climactic momentum which black evangelists Jackson, Lee or Foote do. Livermore "dropp[s] quick upon the floor" at one juncture only, while

Jackson, "at every clap of thunder. . . leap[s] from the floor praising . . . God." We may recall that Livermore, throughout her autobiography, repeatedly attempted to disavow any predilections in herself toward religious "enthusiasm"; this may explain her emotional restraint. However, the conversion experience of evangelical Holiness leader Phoebe Palmer reflects a similar staidness to that of Livermore and Hamilton:³

When about thirteen she acknowledged herself, before the world, as a seeker of salvation, and united herself with the people of God. One night, about this time, after having wrestled with the Lord till about midnight she sought the repose of her pillow with feelings expressed by the poet--

"I'll weary thee with my complaint,
Here at thy feet for ever lie,
With longing sick, with groaning faint--
O! give me love, or else I die."

She believed herself to have fallen asleep, when, with a power that roused body and mind by its heavenly sweetness, these words were spoken to her inmost soul--

"See Israel's gentle shepherd stands,
with all-engaging charms;
See how he calls the tender lambs,
And folds them in his arms."

The place seemed to shine with the glory of God; and she felt that the blessed Saviour indeed took her to the bosom of his love, and bade her "be of good cheer." All was light, joy, and love.

(Palmer Way 76-7)

The power of God in Palmer is represented as a "heavenly sweetness"-- a far cry from the intense "sheets" and "streams" of glory which flash into Rebecca Jackson's soul. Words such as "gentle" and "tender" characterize Palmer's experience. Interestingly, in Jackson's text, as well as in the texts of other black female evangelists-- for example Lee, Foote and Elaw -- singing, shouting, and "leaping" or "springing" characterize the actions of the converts, as opposed to the descriptions of Hamilton, Livermore and Palmer; Hamilton mentions no physical reactions, Palmer speaks objectively about a sweet and heavenly power which "roused body and mind," and

Livermore "walked about the room" in a "solemn stillness."

The black women's reactions and rhetoric may reflect a religious expressivity (physical, vocal, spiritual, textual) common in white nineteenth-century Holiness sects which as early as the 1820s branched away from more traditional churches.⁴ But I am interested in the fact that among the eight nineteenth-century African American female spiritual autobiographies I examine (which comprise a complete group of such works currently extant) not including Belinda's legal petition, seven privilege and/or demonstrate an expressivity not evident in such a high incidence in similar bodies of black male or white works.⁵ The prevalence of the enthusiastic in such an overwhelming number of the black women's spiritual texts suggests not only an adherence to what Clement Hawes terms a (Western) religious rhetoric of rebellion "toward traditional hierarchies of socio-economic privilege and their related hierarchies of discourse" (2), but also the black women's *choosing* of this form of spiritual expressivity because of its resemblance to the religion of their African forefathers. As Lincoln and Mamiya note:

In spite of. . . obvious obstacles to the retention and the transmission of the African's cultural heritage in the new context of the American experience, the evidence that critical elements of that heritage managed to survive and their adaptation in the New World is substantial, especially in religion. Black singing and performance practices associated with it is perhaps the most characteristic logo of the African heritage retentive in the Black Church. . . . [I]t was the spiritual romance of the camp meetings of the Awakening that first stirred the religious imagination of the black diaspora, and brought thousands of displaced African Americans and their descendants into meaningful Christian communion for the first time.

(Lincoln and Mamiya 347-48)

Black women choose the enthusiastic mode more often than their black

brothers and white sisters because they occupy two of the most precarious positions in America: that of blackness and of femaleness. And as such, it is of necessity that in their texts they employ, often in a uniquely African American manner, a "prophetic and revolutionary" religious rhetorical mode, which hopes "*against all odds*, that God sides with the oppressed" (Hawes 235).⁶

The language employed by Jackson in her unedited manuscripts, then, is a black vernacular, often visionary, sermonic and enthusiastic. We do not see these elements so pronounced in published black evangelist women's works either before or after her. Indeed, subsequent to Julia Foote-- writing in 1879, fifteen years after Jackson's last autobiographical entry in 1864-- AME evangelist Amanda Smith (1889) and Baptist missionary Virginia Broughton (1907) produce autobiographies which demonstrate the sentimental gentility marking much black women's writing after mid-century. While she does not write in the vernacular as Jackson does, Foote identifies her intended readership as blacks of scant financial means -- a small readership indeed, given that the rate of literacy for blacks in 1880 America was a mere twenty percent (Farley & Allen 190). Thus, the number of blacks who could read Foote's book at all would have been none other than the proverbial "talented tenth" she seems unconcerned about addressing. Valorising vernacular practices such as shouting (a highly unpopular form of worship as far as official AME pronouncement was concerned), Foote locates herself firmly within the working class, and presents virtually her entire autobiography in a sermonic folk style. As such, she, like Jackson (and Sojourner Truth) presents a hybrid work, one in which the writer's complex search for community is reflected in the

oracy *and* literacy, blackness *and* whiteness, vernacular *and* nonvernacular
-- indeed, the very *doubleness* of the form of the text.

Endnotes

1. Diane Sasson provides a comprehensive study of what I term the hybrid nature of Jackson's text. Shaker influences emerge in Jackson's use of certain metaphors and strategies common to Shaker autobiographies -- for example, the Shaker emphasis on "subjective religious experience, [and] the fading away of interest in external events. . ." (159). Certain Shaker motifs are apparent, for instance, the "feeling" of "gifts"-- that is, a divinely inspired urge or vision; the description of often female spiritual "leads" perceived in visions; manifestations of a female deity-- in Jackson, a "woman clothed with the sun"; dreams of white lambs representing the Shaker community (Sasson 171); dreams of spotted garments. However, as Sasson comments, Jackson's use of traditional Shaker motifs often betrays Jackson's own individual twist-- for instance, dreams of walled enclosures are common in Shaker narratives as representative of the security of the Shaker community, but "Jackson rarely expresses confidence in the protection offered by the community. When houses appear in her visions, they are often prisons instead of havens. . . . Thus, even when Jackson employs conventional images and metaphors from Shaker literature, she often molds them to convey her personal fears" (172).

2. In Chapter Four I examine the significance of song during Elaw's conversion. The justification experience of Julia Foote reads as follows:

The minister preached from the text: "And they *sung* as it were a new song before the throne. . ."

As the minister dwelt with great force and power on the first clause of the text, I beheld my lost condition as I never had done before. Something within me kept saying, "Such a sinner as you are can never *sing that new song*". . . . I fell to the floor, unconscious, and was carried home. Several remained with me all night, *singing* and praying. I did not recognize any one, but seemed to be walking in the dark, followed by someone who kept saying, "Such a sinner as you are can never *sing that new song*". . . . The voice which had been crying in my ears ceased at once, and a ray of light flashed across my eyes, accompanied by a sound of far distant *singing*; the light grew brighter and brighter, and the *singing* more distinct, and soon I caught the words: "This is the new *song-- redeemed, redeemed!*" I at once sprang from the bed where I had been lying for twenty hours, without meat or drink, and commenced *singing*: "Redeemed! Redeemed! glory! glory!" Such joy and peace as filled my heart, when I felt that I was redeemed and could *sing the new song*. . . [my emphasis]

(Foote 32-33)

Lee gives a detailed account of her sanctification:

When I rose from my knees, there seemed a voice speaking to me, as I yet stood in a leaning posture-- "Ask for sanctification" [my emphasis]. When to my surprise, I recollected that I had not even

thought of it in my whole prayer. . . . But when this voice whispered in my heart, saying, "Pray for sanctification," I again bowed in the same place, at the same time, and said, "Lord, *sanctify* [Lee's emphasis] my soul for Christ's sake." That very instant, as if lightning had darted through me, I sprang to me feet, and cried, "The Lord has sanctified my soul!" There was none to hear this but the angels who stood around to witness my joy. . . . That Satan was there, I knew; for no sooner had I cried out, "The Lord has sanctified my soul," than there seemed another voice behind me, saying, "No, it is too great a work to be done." But another spirit said, "Bow down for the witness-- I received it-- *thou art sanctified!*" The first I knew of myself after that, I was standing in the yard with my hands spread out, and looking with my face toward heaven.

(Lee 11)

3. Thomas Oden situates Palmer as an integral "missing link" (Oden 16) between Methodism and Pentecostal spirituality. While her "rationalistic tendency distinguished her from those who emphasize[d] experience predominantly without rigorous reflection on scripture," (15) she nevertheless occupies an important place within the development of revivalism in America.

4. Lincoln and Mamiya observe that African Americans found in some of the more expressive (white) Christian sects, a mode of worship familiar to them as Africans with their unique experience of "the black sacred cosmos" (6). How African Americans and whites influenced each other regarding religious worship has only relatively recently become the subject of study (influential critics as late as the 1960s thought that blacks merely mimicked what white religion they found in America).

5. Elizabeth is the only one of the evangelists to denounce "shouting," in spite of the fact that she admits that others have labelled her as an enthusiast. This suggests that in her modes of worship-- if not in her text-- she probably exhibited some of the expressivity I attribute to the other black women's autobiographies.

Jean Humez notes, "most accounts of the Holiness movement suggest that it, like evangelical religious experience in general in nineteenth-century America, was from the outset a predominantly female affair, growing even more disproportionately attractive to women as the century advanced" (5). Periodic conflagrations of enthusiasm ranging from seventeenth-century Britain to nineteenth-century "Great Awakenings" in America were denounced by the more traditional religious as disruptive and heathenish. The history of patriarchy's response to enthusiasm is at least as old as Plato's denouncement of inspiration (allied with the feminine) as disruptor of reason and order (masculine) in his Ion and Republic-- disciplining of such behaviour as a threat to established social order has historically included anything from ridicule on the part of other community members, to excommunication from the church in question, to physical intimidation-- for example, the threats of violence many of the black women

evangelists receive.

6. More than the white women I have used here (Hamilton, Livermore, Palmer), the black evangelist women exhibit many of the characteristics of enthusiasm in their autobiographies. I would suggest, however, that the black women do not fall into the category of extreme enthusiasm, where writers demonstrate excessive, blasphemous wordplay; excessive allusion and echo; or radical disjunctiveness. Hawes cites as further examples of extreme enthusiastic rhetoric: "paralogical figures of speech"; "incantatory rhetoric that promotes sound over sense" (56-7); the use of "esoteric" and "hieroglyphic connotations" which "completely fragment the verbal surface" (59); and the use of acrostics and anagrams as a "path to divinity" (61). These tendencies point to a much more radical enthusiasm than that we see in the black women's texts. The highly expressive writings of the black women arise out of an oral, communal, and communicative mode, and also out of a tradition of black writing which in part attempted to demonstrate the eligibility of blacks to the (white) human family. As such, their texts, while more enthusiastic than the texts of black men or most white women, nevertheless remain logical and accessible to a wide reading audience.

**Chapter Seven/ The Politics of Conversion: Julia Foote and the
Sermonic Text**

In a trance-like vision, during which Jesus himself gives her a "letter . . . from God" authorizing her to preach, Julia Foote (1823-1900) describes the event of her spiritual baptism by Christ:

[God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit]. . . looked me over from head to foot, but said nothing. . . . [Christ] then lead [sic] me . . . till we came to a place where there was a great quantity of water. . . . Christ. . . stripped me of my clothing. . . . Christ then appeared to wash me, the water feeling quite warm.

During this operation, all the others stood on the bank, looking on in profound silence. When the washing was ended, the sweetest music I had ever heard greeted my ears. We walked to the shore, where an angel stood with a clean, white robe, which the Father at once put on me. In an instant I appeared to be changed into an angel. The whole company looked at me with delight, and began to make a noise which I called shouting. We all marched back with music. When we reached the tree to which the angel first led me, it hung full of fruit. . . . The Holy Ghost plucked some and gave me, and the rest helped themselves. We sat down and ate of the fruit. . . . When we had finished, we all arose and gave another shout. Then God the Father said to me: "You are now prepared, and must go where I have commanded you." I replied, "If I go, they will not believe me." Christ then appeared to write something with a golden pen and golden ink, upon golden paper. Then he rolled it up, and said to me: "Put this in your bosom, and, wherever you go, show it, and they will know that I have sent you to proclaim salvation to all." He then put it into my bosom, and they will went with me to a bright, shining gate, singing and shouting.

(Foote 203)

The incident marks a pivotal visionary moment in the life of Foote-- the moment at which Christ appoints her to preach His Word publicly. But while Foote records what is a conventional experience in the life writing of men and women who embark upon a public spiritual career, she effects a distinct and transformative narrative strategy both in the visionary

passage above and throughout her narrative. In that narrative she subverts white (male and female) and black male Christian narrative practice to present a very *unconventional* spiritual text. Using oral strategies of African American folk sermonizing instead of the literary conventions defining written spiritual autobiography Foote transforms her 1879 spiritual narrative into a political and revolutionary sermon. In a number of rhetorical strategies Foote also reclaims the black female body from its dehumanizing objectification under both slavery and the white abolitionist gaze. As such, she produces a narrative of spiritual conversion that is-- unlike either conventional spiritual autobiographies, or the largely conservative, patriarchal, bourgeois-aspiring majority of black writing (both fictional and autobiographical) in the post-Reconstruction era-- a uniquely oral, African American, womanist text.

Foote's autobiography is written in 1879, two years after the end of Reconstruction in America. That end was signalled by the restoration of white rule in the Southern States and the withdrawal of all federal troops from the South. Reconstruction marked a period of hopefulness for African Americans. Although blacks were increasingly terrorized during that time by vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1866), they made important gains: public facilities became accessible to them as well as whites; some black men attained positions of major political office; and black men secured the vote (1870). But Reconstruction's end precipitated a rapid downward spiral in the social, political and economic condition of blacks. By the 1890's the process of disfranchisement in the South had begun; during that same period segregation was instituted in virtually all facets of Southern (and many facets of Northern) life; racial violence which

saw a marked increase during Reconstruction, rose to new heights in the North and South as Reconstruction ended; and racist notions of blacks as sub-human beings focused increasingly on the conviction that emancipation had given rise to a degenerate and idle class of free blacks whose hypersexuality, criminality and propensity for brutality and violence posed a grave threat to the fabric of white American society (Bruce 4).

Black literary output during this time is marked by what Bruce calls its "assimilationist" tendencies-- that is, the desire on the part of black writers to demonstrate their membership in the "same cultural community" as whites (Bruce 13). As such, most black writing was produced by a black bourgeois class, in sentimental and melodramatic literary styles (Bruce 4-5; Baker Workings 30; Shockley 111; Giddings When and Where 49-55). Black writing valorized such white Victorian tenets as gentility, true womanhood, Euro-cultural refinement and education, and a dignified conservatism-- a valorization which the writers (including leading black intellectuals Frederick Douglass and AME Bishop Daniel Payne) felt would ultimately serve to produce a literature which would appeal to-- and so educate-- a white readership (Bruce 13).

What we see in the autobiography of Foote, however, is not the literary gentility demonstrated by her black contemporaries. As Hazel Carby demonstrates in her study of the development of novels by black American women, the popular black sentimental heroines of Elizabeth Keckley's autobiographical Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (1868), as well as those of fictional works such as Frances Harper's Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted (1892), Pauline Hopkins' Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South

(1900), and Nella Larsen's Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929), all belong to the bourgeois-aspiring genre of the mulatto woman bound to uplift herself and/or her race.¹ Although they often critique the hypocrisy of a white society which sets different standards for white and black women, these works largely adopt the formula of the white sentimental novel, and the precepts of the cult of true (white) womanhood: chivalrous, manly heroes; chaste, fair and beautiful belles; evil, dark, lascivious villains; a happy, domestic ending at the hearth-side; or the tragic death of the heroine and/or her dreams. For example, while Harriet Jacobs, in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), defends her decision to take a white lover in order to protect herself against her master's sexual advances, she also feels the need to apologise to her white readership for her fallen virtue: "The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. . . I will not try to screen myself. . . I know I did wrong. . ." (384-86). The dream of Jacobs' life is to possess a home and hearth of her own, where she is surrounded by her children-- even though, because of slavery and racism, that dream "is not yet realized" (513). Thus, Jacobs criticizes not so much the tenets of white American society (for women: a valorisation of motherhood, hearth, children and home), as the white hypocrisy which denies her access to those tenets, denies her the opportunity to live the life of polite bourgeois gentility available to all hard-working and industrious (white) Americans.

Foote, however, writing at the height of the American Victorian era, rejects its cult of true womanhood, and writes against discourses of the sentimental novel and black elite racial uplift, replacing them with a black-womanist-defined discourse of her own. Foote never dreams of cooking

and sewing for her children beside a warm hearth as Harriet Jacobs does. Piety and purity, the first two tenets of the "cult of true womanhood" (Welter 21), might be virtues to which Foote aspires. But submissiveness and domesticity, the final two tenets, she rejects. For it is not the dream of Foote's life to have a home and hearth of her own, as many other black women after Emancipation might have desired.² Foote has no permanent home, no children. She is not the victimized sentimental heroine. Neither is she intent upon honouring, obeying, and otherwise empowering the manhood of a strong, providing husband.³ When, in exasperation, George Foote leaves her for the sea, Julia is torn between appearing appropriately distressed at the departure of her husband, and expressing her feelings of exhilaration at her new-found freedom. How she reconciles this difficulty is to very subtly legitimize her exhilaration with Biblical text. Foote's strategy is a complex one which is much more powerful than it first appears. Hers is an indirect "signifying" upon (both white and new-black-bourgeois) societal injunctions for women to cleave to husband, family and children. What Foote does is reject those injunctions completely, but in a manner unnoticed by the reader unless s/he further pursues the Biblical text which Foote offers. On the surface, Foote appears to struggle between the desire to condemn her husband for abandoning her, and the Christian duty to exercise wifely patience and forbearing:

The day my husband went on ship-board was one of close trial and great inward temptation. It was difficult for me to mark the exact line between disapprobation and Christian forbearance and patient love. How I longed for wisdom to meet everything in a spirit of meekness and fear, that I might not be surprised into evil or hindered from improving all things to the glory of God.

(197)

It is the Bible which solves Foote's dilemma:

While under this apparent cloud, I took the Bible to my closet, asking Divine aid. As I opened the book, my eyes fell on these words: "For thy Maker is thine husband" [Isa. 54-5]. I then read the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah over and over again. It seemed to me that I had never seen it before. I went forth glorifying God.

(197)

The Biblical passage, Isaiah 54, which she reads "over and over again" but quotes only one line of (Isaiah 54-5) begins as follows:

"Sing, O barren woman,
 you who never bore a child;
 burst into song, shout for joy,
 . . . because more are the children of
 the desolate woman
 than of her who has a husband,"
 says the Lord.

(Issiah 54:1)

In a well-calculated manoeuvre which she uses repeatedly, Foote speaks loudest when she plays the silent and prudent woman, ruled by "a spirit of meekness and fear" while cleverly employing Biblical references to argue for her. As I have mentioned, I refer to what African Americans have coined "signifying"-- a black mode of discourse (often insulting) in which the speaker's apparent meaning is not to be taken merely at face value, but points to another unspoken meaning, nevertheless understood by everyone present (Gates 85-86). Foote, then, signifies silently and/or indirectly upon the tenets of the cult of true womanhood. (What "true" woman would burst into rapturous song at her own inability to keep a husband and bear children?) Foote's seemingly silent voice literally becomes one with the Biblical text as she uses its authority to convince her readers.

Foote rejects not only the "true womanhood" aspired to by many postbellum black women, but also any semblance of politeness and gentility

when discussing the terrible past of slavery. We may contrast her bluntness with the attitudes of Amanda Smith, who writes her autobiography in 1893, or Virginia Broughton in 1907. Smith, in the genteel and lady-like manner in which all of her text is written, describes her parents' owners as "good," "kind," and "proud of [her parents] for [their] faithfulness" (Smith 17). Broughton refers to the South as "the fair South Land" (7), and to whites only in terms of their kindly benevolence toward blacks. Foote, on the other hand, in a post-bellum era which encouraged African Americans to down-play their humiliations under slavery and aspire to genteel, bourgeois ideals, describes an incident in which her mother's master whips her for refusing "to submit herself to him" (the sexual connotation cannot be missed). Her mother's mistress rips the slave's blood-congealed garment from her back "which took the skin with it, leaving her back all raw and sore" (Foote 166). Foote describes the manner in which her mother was shunted from one cruel master to another, until "she found a *comparatively* kind master and mistress in Mr. and Mrs. Cheeseman, who kept a public house" [emphasis mine] (166). The implications of this statement are revealing. Unlike the genteel Smith, Foote does not refer to her mother's new masters as "good" or "very kind," but rather as "comparatively kind." In light of previous treatment received, "comparatively kind" makes the kindness of the new masters questionable, to say the least. Foote refuses to adopt an attitude of refinement and gentility, but maintains an accusatory tone. Emancipation has not erased her memory of the atrocities of slavery, nor has it allowed *her* family access to higher status, or the cult of true womanhood; Foote's sister, the first child of her parents is now, in 1879, "more than seventy

years old, and an invalid, dependent upon the bounty of her poor relatives" (Foote 166).

Thus, it is not the culture of the "talented tenth"⁴ which Foote privileges, but that of black people without access to financial means and/or education: "My object has been to testify more extensively to the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus Christ to save from all sin. Many have not the means of purchasing large and expensive works on this important Bible theme. . ." (163). Indeed, at a time when black contemporaries such as Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, Maria Stewart, or Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins or Julia Cooper have abandoned the spiritual and the oral in favour of literary, intellectual and political pursuits of a more temporal nature, the tenacity with which Foote clings to an oral sermonic, spiritual mode of writing places her outside the black elite intellectual circle.

Foote's encounter with learning and literacy most explicitly demonstrates her distrust of these markers of gentility in the new black bourgeoisie. In his study of the development of the talking book trope, Henry Louis Gates observes that this trope gives way in later nineteenth-century male autobiographies to a more literal "scene of instruction in terms of reading and writing." Gates suggests that "an angel teaches the [male] slave how to read and thus escape the clutches of the devil that keeps the slave in chains. Equiano's angel was a young white boy; Frederick Douglass' guardian angel was the white woman married to his master. Many of the post-1830 slave narrators' guardian angels were also white women or children" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 166). However, the white man who teaches Julia Foote to read is no angel. In 1879, Foote describes her disillusionment when this man who teaches her to read the Bible is

hung for the senseless and brutal killing of a woman: "Never shall I forget the execution of my first school teacher. The remembrance of this scene left such an impression upon my mind that I could not sleep for many a night" (173). The moment of literacy for Foote is also the moment of the shattering of girlhood trust-- a moment of intense disillusionment. Thus, Foote questions the indiscriminating acceptance of white hegemonic systems of education, social training and religious instruction. Instead, she privileges a spirituality based in non-bourgeois, non-white traditions-- one rooted in African American forms.

How Foote alters the traditional discourse of white spiritual autobiography into a spiritual African American sermonic folk orality is an accomplishment which requires some examination. Foote indeed adopts the genre of spiritual autobiography, following the formula of the early American Puritan spiritual narrative, and the autobiographical examples of famous Methodist figures such as the white English Methodist George Whitefield (A Short Account of God's Dealings with George Whitefield From His Infancy to His Ordination, 1714-1736 1740; and A Further Account of God's Dealings With George Whitefield From the Time of His Ordination to His Embarking for Georgia, June, 1736-December, 1737 (Age 21-22) 1744); George White, black founder of the New York AME church (A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, an African; Written by Himself, and Revised by a Friend 1810); or African American Richard Allen, founder of the first African Methodist Episcopal church in America (The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen. . . Written by Himself and Published by His Request 1833). Kathleen M. Swaim outlines the formula for traditional Puritan spiritual

autobiography as: an initial account of the horrible, sinful state of the narrator's soul before conversion; the call of God; the struggle with Satan before conversion; the conversion, generally brought about through the reading of some holy book; the struggle with temptation, despair and doubt after conversion; one last terrific bout with Satan; the promise of glory ever after (32-38). However, Foote alters the discourse of spiritual autobiography in two important ways. First, her extensive use of song turns her narrative into something more than traditional English autobiographical prose; and second, her adoption of African American sermonic techniques turns her readership into a congregation with whom she maintains an ongoing sermonic call-and-response dialogue throughout her text. The final three chapters of the text are really two parting sermons "A Word to My Christian Sisters" and "Love Not the World," as well as a song, "Holy is the Lamb," which Foote composed herself and set to music. In Foote's thirty-chapter, sixty-eight-page autobiography, what I term "lined" verses (the use of hymn excerpts to comment upon the text) are used a total of fourteen times; her final closing hymn is a fifteenth instance of such musical commentary (a total of a twenty-two percent occurrence of song in her text). By contrast, white autobiographer George Whitefield's sixty-page, two-part autobiography of his early life and ordination contains only two songs, one at the end of each part (three percent); black autobiographer George White quotes excerpts from four hymns in thirty-four pages (about twelve percent); and Richard Allen (also black) four in seventy-four (five percent). White preacher Harriet Livermore cites fifty-two verses in an 1826 epistolary autobiography of two hundred and seventy-eight pages (nineteen percent) written in the form

of "Twelve Letters." The daily journals of George Whitefield and white Holiness evangelist Phoebe Palmer (as opposed to their autobiographies) contain a great many excerpts from songs, psalms, etc. However, journal entries written on a daily basis, ostensibly for one's private contemplative purposes, "for personal use or pleasure, with little or no thought of publication" (Abrams 15), differ from the public autobiographical act. In the specific case of Foote, the sermonic, oratorical nature of her autobiography, combined with her numerous hymn excerpts create a congregational atmosphere which is not found in the autobiographies of Whitefield, Palmer, Livermore, White or Allen.

Foote's work is written primarily in the narrative prose mode in which she uses her life as exemplum to illustrate a number of biblical themes-- God's saving of sinners (she has been "a brand plucked from the fire"); drunkards as excluded from the Kingdom (she was once a "drunkard"); obedience to parental authority (her father taught her to celebrate in Christ); obedience to God's authority (which may override parental authority); women's calling to "labour. . . in the Gospel" (Foote herself was called); Christ's stripping of the sinner and washing her clean (Foote was called by Christ in this way), etc. However, in the telling of her prose narrative, Foote privileges hymn-shouting and uses black-church musicality at a time when a great number of her black sisters strove for the right to be "ladies" and bookish intellectuals in a white bourgeois society. Foote's liberal use of music and song throughout her autobiography-- in other words, "lining," reflects a practice which began when early white Puritan deacons read out a line to be sung back by illiterate congregations. African Americans, long versed in West African

call-and-response story-telling patterns, also practised this type of worship, using their own unique modes of singing and responding. The practice was gradually abandoned by eighteenth-century white Methodists, because the congregation often "'stole the show' with their virtuoso projections of the hymn lines" (Mitchell 133); but in black churches the practice remained, was built upon, and thrived. Indeed, black members of the "Amen Corner" did not merely wait to parrot back a line given by the minister, but sang their own enraptured lines in response to whatever it was he might be preaching upon. According to Mitchell, himself a preacher:

The dialogic method has been completely "road-tested" in Black culture, approved, and given permanent place. It includes responses from the pew which range all the way from brief bursts of affirmation (Amen! Sho' 'nough! Yes sir! So true! etc.) to culturally choreographed counterpoint, with the preacher's intoned Gospel cast in a continuous context of congregational chant ("The Lord is My Shepherd, and I Shall Not Want" or "Lord Have Mercy. . . on my Soul" or "Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, Feed me till I want no more" may be the lyrics of this chanted background, but in every case they are less important than the musical setting and support which they provide. I find it literally impossible to preach in such a context without my own matching intonation, in the same key.)

(Mitchell 116-117)

It is important to note that lining is used to encourage the efforts of the minister, in a climactic building of ministerial and congregational emotion. ("Come on up!" might be the cue given the minister from some ecstatic soul in the Amen Corner.) As Hamilton observes: "The preacher and his people are more often than not in thorough agreement on the style and substance of the service they want" (31). Thus, lining and call-and-response are used in a supportive manner, and the service becomes a kind of buoying up of both preacher and black worshippers, a re-energizing which allows them all to return fortified to a society in which they must deal with

opposition on a daily basis.

Foote's entire autobiography reads like a long sermon, or perhaps a series of sermons, in which Foote as preacher encourages her "congregation" to join her in lining, shouting, call-and-response, and dialogic patterns. Foote accomplishes this oral scenario in her written text, by either recalling lines of a song she remembers that she or somebody else sang; or simply providing hymn lines in a kind of script that might be acted out as if she indeed were preaching to a receptive and verbally responsive congregation. Unlike her signifying through use of Biblical quotations, her lining is meant not to oppose or insult, but to enhance and support.

Foote's first use of lining occurs as a particularly powerful, black-family-centered memory recall in the second chapter of her autobiography, "Religious Impression-- Learning the Alphabet." When Julia is eight years old, two kindly ministers from the white Methodist church to which her parents belong call at the Foote house. One of the ministers asks Julia if she prays, to which she tremblingly replies that she does, "and began to say the only prayer I knew, 'Now I lay me down to sleep'" (169). Julia is terrified by the minister. Later, a white woman who comes to the Foote house to sew teaches Julia to say the Lord's Prayer, something which fills the young girl with great joy: "It has always seemed to me that I was converted at this time" (169). Julia, inspired by the family worship and song led by her father, then desires to learn to read the Bible. Interestingly, lining is not used to support the anecdote of how a kind white benefactress teaches a fearful young Julia to pray the uplifting "Our Father." And while her feelings of joy and celebration are certainly

initiated with the learning of the "Our Father," the actual lining supports the climactic "great delight" the girl experiences in "family worship" led by her earthly father, the black man who teaches her the initial fragmentary rudiments of reading and writing: "I took great delight in this worship, and began to have a desire to learn to read the Bible" (Foote 169). The song sung by her father counters the petitionary and death-focused night-time prayer "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" with the celebratory observation: "When my father had family worship, which was every Sunday morning, he used to sing, 'Lord, in the morning thou shalt hear/ My voice ascending high'" (Foote 169), a song Foote lines from a Methodist hymnal.⁵ Thus, the prayer to her heavenly Father gives way to the image of black family worship and an actual citation of song led by her beloved father on earth. In turn, these lines, sung by the father, who praises the Father, inform the rest of the chapter-- an exhortation to children to read Scriptures and obey and learn the ways of God from earthly parents.

The second type of lining occurs as Foote praises God for saving her from the snares of anger and despair. Oppressed by a societal racism which makes it well-nigh impossible to get an education in spite of her greatest efforts, the young Foote "was brought into great distress of mind; the enemy of souls thrust sore at me; but I was saved from falling into his snares-- saved in the hour of trial from my impetuous spirit, by the angel of the Lord standing in the gap, staying me in my course" (184-185). This testimony is immediately followed by two lines from a song: "Oh, bless the name of Jesus! he maketh the rebel a priest and king;/ He hath bought me and taught me the new song to sing" (185). The insertion of this hymn of

praise into the text seems a kind of script-writing in which Foote provides us with a hymn that might well be heard today from the Amen corner at such an emotional preaching juncture-- a song of praise and thanks to God for turning the young black youth from gangsta to Gospel preacha at a critical moment in her life.

A final example of lining seems to recreate a congregational scene in which a worshipper, succumbing to the preacher's gentle encouragement, suddenly becomes sanctified in the Lord: "Why not yield, believe, and be sanctified now-- while reading?. . . Say: "Here, Lord, I will, I do believe; thou has said now-- now let it be-- now apply the blood of Jesus to my waiting, longing soul" (234). This invocation is immediately followed by what might be a burst of song from the redeemed soul in the congregation: "Hallelujah! 'tis done!/ I believe on the son;/ I am saved by the blood/ Of the crucified One" (234).

Significantly, nearly half (six) of Foote's fourteen instances of lining refer to the act of singing itself. Foote's conversion at the age of fifteen is steeped in musicality; the "song" becomes the trope representing salvation:

The minister preached from the text: "And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and. . . no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth.". . . Something within me kept saying, "Such a sinner as you can never sing that new song." No tongue can tell the agony I suffered. . . In great terror I cried: "Lord, have mercy on me, a poor sinner!" The voice. . . ceased at once, and a ray of light flashed across my eyes, accompanied by a sound of far distant singing; the light grew brighter and brighter, and the singing more distinct, and soon I caught the words: "This is the new song-- redeemed, redeemed!". . . Such joy and peace as filled my heart, when I felt that I was redeemed and could sing the new song.

Foote's unapologetic association of climactic celebration with song-- more specifically African shouting-- seems a deliberate attempt to reclaim a disapproved form of musical celebration and to dissociate herself from that elite class of black Americans which would be embarrassed by such "primitivism." During his term of office as AME Bishop in the mid to late nineteenth century, Daniel Payne consistently condemned shouting. Payne was "unrelenting in his denunciation of spirituals, which he called 'cornfield ditties,' and the ring dance, [shout] which he described as 'ridiculous and heathenish.' Even James Weldon Johnson concluded that shouts were . . . 'semi-barbaric remnants of primitive African dances'. . ." (Lincoln and Mamiya 354). The shout, a distinctly African form of spiritual worship, is described by an unidentified eye-witness as follows:

". . . all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' [spiritual] is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration. . . . Song and dance are alike extremely energetic, and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night, the monotonous thud, thud of feet prevents sleep within half a mile of the praise-house."

(Southern 61-62)

Mitchell comments on the classist nature of the rejection of expressions such as call-and-response, or ring shouts. Most blacks, "including most of the 'primitives' themselves, [look] down on the ancient culture, and, of course, on the low socioeconomic status of its practitioners. . . . How often have marvellously warm black worshipers publicly apologized to bodies of White visitors, 'You'll have to excuse us. We haven't learned to worship quiet and dignified like yet'" (124). At the climactic moment of baptism by Christ, Foote's narrative is steeped in the shouted song. Her decision

to retain this pivotal scene of black "primitivity" seems a calculated one, part of her effort to present her written text in oral sermonic form. In the passage, shouting is referred to three times.

Repetition, often serving to heighten the oratorical effect of her narration, is also frequent in other parts of Foote's narrative. Foote, through the use of repetition in the following two examples, builds a sermonic passage to the climactic moment at which she introduces an important biblical idea:

Why was Adam afraid of the voice of God in the garden? It was not a strange voice; it was a voice he had always loved. Why did he flee away, and hide himself among the trees? It was because he had disobeyed God. . . . Dear children, honor your parents by loving and obeying them. [emphasis mine]

(170)

This address to children is followed by one to parents:

Parents are you training your children in the way they should go? Are you teaching them obedience and respect? Are you bringing your little ones to Jesus? Are they found at your side in the house of God. . . or are they roving the streets. . . ? Or, what is worse, are they at home reading books or newspapers that corrupt the heart. . . ? [my emphasis]

(172)

At other times, repetition serves to intensify an emotional incident. The highly metaphoric description of the last moments of a dying woman on her sick bed is full of rapture, with the words "sang" and "glory" repeated several times:

She sang with us in a much stronger voice than she had used for many days. As we sang the last verse, she raised herself up in bed, clapped her hands and cried: "He sets the prisoner free! Glory! Glory! I am free! They have come for me!. . . Don't you see the chariot and horses? Glory! glory to the blood!" She dropped back upon her pillow, and was gone. She had stepped aboard the chariot which we could not see, but we felt the fire. While many in the room were weeping, her mother shed not a tear, but shouted,

"Glory to God!"

(195)

In addition to verse lining and repetition Davis describes another important element of the African American sermon as the identification of "floating thematic bridges" (repetition and development of a key sermon idea) (Davis 18). Foote's repeated use of the titular phrase "a brand plucked from the fire" establishes the most important thematic bridge of her autobiography. Foote first uses it to describe how God saved her as a child, from drunkenness. The cause of her alcoholism is her family's habit of making "morning sling" for the children-- "the bottom of the cup, where the sugar and a little of the liquor was left, on purpose for them. It is no wonder, isn't it, that every one of my mother's children loved the taste of liquor?" (167). A family relative, observing a five-year-old Foote taking liquor from the chest in which it is kept, "came in great haste, and at once pronounced me DRUNK. . . . Sickness almost unto death followed, but my life was spared. I was like a 'brand plucked from the burning' [Zech.3:2]" (168). Foote uses the "brand" reference a total of eight times, each reference marking a progressively more critical moment in her autobiography, as the rebellious drunken young girl (168) conquers self-doubt, ridicule, illness and racist and sexist oppression to become God's spokeswoman (218). In continuously reminding her "congregation" of the many times and ways God has plucked her from the fire, preserving her as His instrument, Foote encourages that congregation to have faith that God will do the same for them also. The biblical reference which Foote cites is, significantly, one which again involves a stripping off of and putting on of clothing (recall Foote's trance vision). In this Biblical

reference, God battles Satan for Joshua, God's high priest; Joshua is stripped of his filthy rags, and an angel of the Lord then dresses him in "rich garments" and a "clean turban."

We might also examine how Foote adopts another important trope of stripping-- this time from the discourse of white abolition-- in a manner which problematizes and reconstitutes it for her congregational reading audience. How Foote deals with the symbol of the "negro exhibit" provides an excellent case in point. The fact that this trope of the stripping off of clothes is used twice in Foote's short first chapter merits closer examination. One of the first things Foote relates is the brutality her mother suffers at the hands of her owner. But in Foote's reworking of this initial story of stripping and exhibition, Foote is "looked over" and stripped not by a lascivious master, but by Christ himself. Brute sexuality becomes (erotic) religious ecstasy in her description of her baptism by Christ: "My hand was given to Christ, who led me into the water and stripped me of my clothing. . . Christ then appeared to wash me, the water feeling quite warm" (203). Once stripped of worldly encumbrances and oppressions, Foote becomes able herself to wield the whip of holy castigation. In a chapter entitled "Further Labors-- A 'Threshing' Sermon," Foote demonstrates how she, as preacher, adapts a biblical concept to suit the context of her congregation. Asked by an "influential man in the community" (222) to preach on Micah iv:13, "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion. . . .," Foote explains:

[In] 710 B.C. corn was threshed among the Orientals by means of oxen or horses. . . .Corn is not threshed in this manner by us, but by means of flails, so that I feel I am doing no injury to the

sentiment of the text by changing a few of the terms into which are the most familiar to us now.

(222)

Foote then uses the metaphor of the "Gospel flail" to preach on the application of the lash to sinners. She herself stands poised, and ready to strike:

With the help of God, I am resolved, O sinner, to try what effect the smart strokes of this threshing instrument will produce on thy unhumbled soul. . . . This Gospel flail should be lifted up in a kind and loving spirit. Many shrink at the sight of the flail, and some of us know, by blessed experience, that when its smart strokes are applied in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, it causes the very heart to feel sore and painful.

(223)

Foote signifies upon a scene imprinted upon the memory of blacks which would be hard for her reader to overlook. But the tables are reversed, for a black Foote now bears the whip, ready to "beat in pieces many people" (Foote 223). This (somewhat aggressive) affirmation is followed by references to Isa. xxiii.18 and Isa. lx.6-9, which, although Foote does not quote the passages, describe the fates of Tyre and Zion, great metropolitan cities which are destroyed by God as a result of their corruption. The profits of Tyre are set apart for God, and God mercifully allows Zion to be rebuilt by "foreigners." That Tyre and Zion are metaphors for white America, and that "foreigners" include African Americans, it would be reasonable to assume here.

Foote, then, superimposes her stripping by a loving, Heavenly Master, upon the violent stripping scene of abolitionist narratives, and her "threshing" of sinners upon the thrashing received by her mother and other blacks in the slave narratives of her day. By this superimposition she reclaims the victimized black female body-- a body used in nineteenth-

century abolitionist literature as the ultimate horrific symbol representing slavery's brutal inhumanity. For Foote-- as well as for Rebecca Cox Jackson and Sojourner Truth, this black female body is subject to no man, but is the property of God, who encourages the evangelist women not to remain confined and silent, but to go forth, out of the private enclosure, loudly and publicly proclaiming His word to all.

Interestingly, as the hellish stripping and thrashing performed in slavery is replaced by heavenly stripping and threshing in Christ, so does the hellish fire from which the "brand" is plucked become the heavenly fire of spiritual baptism: "By the baptism of fire the church must be purged. . ." (231) Fire, indeed, replaces the "great quantity of water, which looked like silver" (203) in which Foote was bathed by Christ, as the medium of cleansing. We must wonder if this is Foote's version of the slave spiritual: "No more water, Lord (meaning the water of the Atlantic over which the traffic of slaves and the exchange of great quantities of silver and gold occurred); but the fire next time."⁶ Indeed, Foote writes to her "Christian Sisters": "Be not kept in bondage by those who say, 'We suffer not a woman to teach,'. . . . What though we are called to pass through deep waters, so our anchor is cast within the veil, both sure and steadfast!" (227) Again metaphors of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade seem strong here. For Foote, the water becomes blood-- the cleansing blood of Christ. This blood is the "sentinel, keeping the tempter without, that you may have constant peace within; for Satan cannot swim waters" (232). And Foote's final words are silent ones as she ends her chapter with another reference to Issiah-- Issiah xxx.7. This time, it is not of Tyre or Zion that the prophet speaks, but of Egypt. Foote does not quote

the reference, but it reads as follows as, again, Foote's voice becomes one with the Biblical text: ". . . Egypt. . . is utterly useless./ Therefore, I call her/ Rahab the Do-Nothing." The metaphorical equation of white America with Egypt, and of African Americans with the oppressed Israelites is an oft-reiterated theme in black Christianity. Foote's silent excerpt is couched in a much longer Biblical passage in which God castigates the obstinacy of the sinful Egyptians:

Woe to the Obstinate Nation
 "Woe to the obstinate children,"
 declares the Lord,
 "to those who carry out plans
 that are not mine. . .
 heaping sin upon sin;
 who go down to Egypt
 without consulting me;
 who look for help to Pharaoh's
 protection;
 to Egypt's shade for refuge.
 But Pharaoh's protection will be
 to your shame.
 Egypt's shade will bring you
 disgrace. . .
 because of a people useless to
 them,
 who bring neither help nor
 advantage,
 but only shame and disgrace."

(Isaiah 30: 1-5)

The passage ends as God destroys the "obstinate nation," to the accompaniment of song, celebration and music:

you will sing,
 as on the night you celebrate a
 holy festival;

 Every stroke the Lord lays on
 them
 with his punishing rod
 will be to the music. . . .

(Isaiah 30: 29-32)

In a series of intriguing reversals, then, Foote turns the metaphorical into the political as she takes us on an inward journey into the world of soul and the shouted song. But this is no escape to the "other-worldliness" of Christianity; rather it is an African American Christian reclaiming of a sense of community, power, body and Self-- what Cornel West calls in 1992 the "politics of conversion":

Like alcoholism and drug addiction, nihilism is a disease of the soul. It can never be completely cured, and there is always the possibility of relapse. But there is always a chance for conversion -- a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. . . .Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done by one's own affirmation of one's worth-- an affirmation fuelled by the concern of others. This is why a love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion.

(43)

Subverting prevailing discourses of the cult of true womanhood, black elitism, and white abolitionism, Foote "converts" her spiritual autobiography into a uniquely African American, womanist work. Foote's text, incorporating African story-telling, African American sermonizing, and music, diverges from the path taken by bourgeois-aspiring nineteenth-century postbellum sentimental writers. For Foote, sermonic performer, the burning fire of Hell becomes the fire of the shouting Spirit; the outward stripping of the female body becomes Jesus' stripping and cleansing of the soul; the beating of slaves becomes the threshing of sinners; and the water of the Atlantic, stained with the blood of purchased human merchandise, becomes the saving blood of Christ as Foote achieves a kind of spiritual returning home.

Endnotes

1. Carby also discusses the reasons for the use of the mulatta figure in novels dating from the post-bellum era well into the first half of the twentieth century (88-92). Briefly, the mulatta served as "a vehicle for an exploration of the relationship between the races," a figure who allowed authors to "express the relationship between white privilege and black lack of privilege. . ." The mulatta "was a recognition of the difference between and separateness of the two races at the same time as it was a product of a sexual relationship between white and black" (89-90). I would add, however, that popular submission guidelines for black writers of the day reflect an internalized societal colorism which refused to legitimize black-skinned African Americans: "The heroine should always be beautiful and desirable, sincere and virtuous. . . [She] should be of the brown-skin type" (Gates The Signifyin(g) Monkey 179-180).

2. Giddings describes the dilemma of black women as follows: "For Black women, *acculturation* was translated as their ability to be 'ladies'-- a burden of proof that carried an inherent class-consciousness" (When and Where 49). She quotes the exhortations of Maria Stewart to her nineteenth-century black sisters: "In keeping with the Victorian ethic, Stewart believed that Black women had an important part to play in the race's moral and intellectual development. She counselled that Black women excel in 'good house-wifery, knowing that prudence and economy are the road to wealth.' The role of mothers was essential. . . As a woman of her times, Maria Stewart believed in the 'cult' notion that only 'true women' could exercise the proper moral influence on the family" (When and Where 50-51).

3. Giddings observes that after Emancipation, some black men "were determined to establish their authority in the household" (When and Where 62). She quotes historian Peter Kolchin: "'there were signs of a fundamental alteration of the matrifocal structure that had previously prevailed under the slave regime. There was a new determination for men to reassert their position as head of the family'" (62).

4. Bernard W. Bell describes W.E.B. DuBois' coining of the term as follows: ". . . DuBois opted for the urban, aristocratic concept of a 'Talented Tenth,' his cosmopolitan-inspired term for the exceptionally qualified men and women of the race, the cultural elite, to lead the masses in the struggle for full American citizenship" (13).

5. Andrews cites The Methodist Harmonist and Hymnal of the Methodist Church With Tunes as texts to which Foote, Lee, and Elaw would have had access (Andrews Sisters 243, fn. 2).

6. One of the verses of the Negro spiritual "I Got a Home in Dat Rock" is:

God gave Noah the rainbow sign, don't you see?
 God gave Noah the rainbow sign, don't you see?
 God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water,

the fire next time
Better get a home in dat rock, don't you see?

(Campbell 162)

Chapter Eight/ Smith, Elizabeth, Broughton: The Daughters' Departure

In 1892, the number of African Americans being lynched numbered 255-- a peak in the steady escalation which had begun a decade earlier (Hall 132). The end of the nineteenth century, a period which marks "the nadir' of race relations in America" (Baker 29), is also the period in which the black women's club movement was formed in response to white terrorism against blacks in the aftermath of Emancipation. The National Association for Colored Women (1896) "would act not only as a means to realize suffrage, education, and community development, but [it would be] the vessel through which black women challenged, in public, the beliefs that were getting black men lynched and black women raped and exploited" (Giddings "Last Taboo" 454). However, such a challenge on the part of both the clubwomen and black women authors largely meant a rejection of the black vernacular, and an embracing of a kind of whiteface (Baker 28) in the name of "racial uplift." Black club women, in a concerted pursuit of Victorian morality, cleanliness, "middle-class values . . . education and material progress" (Giddings When and Where 95), sought to "'go among the lowly, illiterate and even the vicious, to whom they are bound by ties of race and sex. . . to reclaim them'" (Giddings When and Where 97). Fannie Barrier Williams described the mandate of the black women's club movement-- "'to help and protect some defenceless and tempted young woman. . . to aid some poor boy to complete a much-coveted education . . . to lengthen the short school term in some impoverished school district . . . to instruct deficient mothers in the difficulties of child training'"

(Giddings When and Where 98). "[T]housands of self-sacrificing young women teaching and preaching in the lonely southern backwoods" (Giddings When and Where 98) brought a social and religious gospel of racial uplift to the black poor.¹ Mary Church Terrell claimed: "More homes, better homes, purer homes is the text upon which sermons have and will be preached" (Giddings When and Where 99). We may better understand this adoption of "whiteface" when we examine prevailing white attitudes toward black women in nineteenth-century America:

Black women were seen as immoral scourges. Despite their achievements, they did not have the benefit "of a discriminating judgment concerning their worth as women," as the Chicago activist Fannie Barrier Williams noted. Assumed to have "low and animalistic urges" that cast them outside the pale of the movement for moral reform, Black women were seen as having all the inferior qualities of White women without any of their virtues. . . . Like White women, one writer said, "Black women had the. . . brains of a child, the passions of a woman," but unlike Whites, Black women were "steeped in centuries of ignorance and savagery, and wrapped about immoral vices." In this era the idea of a moral Black woman was incredible.

(Giddings When and Where I Enter 82)

For black men and women, then, Emancipation was a new beginning; where slavery kept blacks in a position of subservience and inferiority to whites, universal freedom seemed to point the way to equality with whites, toward a sharing of the (white) American Dream. That is how it first seemed.

As Dorothy Sterling notes, the emancipation proclamation opened a floodgate through which long-separated mothers, fathers and children poured in search of each other, hoping to be reunited as families:

All during that first summer of freedom, [black] women struck out across the fields or followed the railroad tracks. "They had a passion, not so much for wandering, as for getting together," wrote a Freedmen's Bureau officer. "Every mother's son seemed to be in search of his mother, every mother in search of her children."

Often it was the family as defined by white Victorian moral standards to which newly emancipated blacks aspired:

Missionaries, schoolteachers, and Freedmen's Bureau officials were all eager to tell the freedpeople how to live. General Clinton B. Fisk, the popular head of the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, gave a series of lectures titled "Plain Counsels for the Freedmen." "Be a Man," Fisk said: *Husbands* must provide for their families. Your wives will not love you if you do not provide bread and clothes for them. . . . By industry and economy you can soon provide a real good home, and plenty of food and clothing for your family, and you should not rest until this is done.

(Sterling 319-20)

The female members of his audiences he advised:

Do not think of getting married until you know how to knit and sew, to mend clothes and bake good bread, to keep a nice clean house and cultivate a garden, and to read and write. A wife should take good care of her person, be clean, neat, tidy, and look as pretty as possible. . . . A wife must do her very best to help her husband make a living. Much of the beauty and happiness of home depends on the good sense, economy, and industry of the wife.

(Sterling 320)

Fisk's lectures were published as a pamphlet, and illustrated with a drawing captioned "A Happy Family." Foregrounded in the drawing are a knitting mother, and a solicitous grandmother bending over her grandchild. The child is framed by a large burning hearth-place,² complete with mantle. Two bust carvings stand upon the mantle, and a large framed portrait hangs above it. Framing the drawing are a grandfather on one side who reads a book, and a father on the other, who sits writing at a table (Sterling 319). "A Happy Family" and Fisk's injunctions encapsulate the Dream, the bill of goods extended by white America to black America in the years following Emancipation.

If the first novels of nineteenth-century black women aimed to

achieve the Victorian sentimentality, melodrama, and moralistic values of white fiction (Shockley 111), even if they (demurely) denounced racism and sexism, it is no surprise. Shockley asserts that, because the novelists attempted to imitate the white Victorian model of fiction, the themes of racism and sexism "were not expressed so boldly" in their works as in the writings of black evangelist women such as Amanda Smith (1893), Jarena Lee (1833), Zilpha Elaw (1846), Julia Foote (1876) and Rebecca Cox Jackson (1830-64). However, even if the evangelists were bolder than their sister novelists in their condemnations of racism and sexism, there are important and complex differences to be found over time in both the structure and content of their individual writings on these subjects. By examining such differences, we may understand how, to use Baker's metaphor, the evangelist daughters gradually departed from their mother's southern gardens, how in their writings they more and more relinquished a sense of personal power, outspokenness and orality in which we may locate a certain Africanness. Nowhere in the writings of the evangelists is the departure more pronounced than in the autobiographies of Amanda Smith (1893), and Virginia Broughton (1907). Smith, an AME evangelist living and travelling mainly in Pennsylvania and New York State, is unable as a woman to receive funding for missionary work from the AME church. She eventually goes overseas as a missionary, funded by a white organization. Virginia Broughton is a Southern black woman involved in what seems to be a black division of a white-administrated Baptist organization. It is these texts that I want to examine here. While Broughton does not draw attention to her preaching as readily as the other evangelists do, she does preach on occasion. I include her in my study of nineteenth-century black

women's spiritual autobiographies because her text acts as a kind of liminal marker between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also include the brief autobiography of "Elizabeth" (1889)-- an evangelist of lower socio-economic background and greater religious marginality than either Smith or Broughton. Elizabeth, born of Methodist parents, seems to have adopted an independent evangelical travelling mission of her own, and spent her final days among white Quakers. Born in Maryland, Elizabeth lived in various locations, including the states of Michigan and Virginia, and the cities of Baltimore, and Philadelphia. In comparing Smith and Broughton's texts with Elizabeth's we may examine the role class distinction plays in late-nineteenth-century black women's adoption of white Victorian value systems.

The autobiographies of Smith, Broughton and Elizabeth mark an important turning point; it is in these works that we witness the black female evangelist becoming not only a spokeswoman for Christ, but also a "missionary" of Euro-Empire. Baptist Broughton speaks of Christianity as "the King's highway" (58) and, in her work to educate "[o]ur people, en masse. . . so unaccustomed to such work, lacking the needed training to succeed without some teacher or leader to constantly stimulate and instruct them" (109) she rejoices "[t]he fact that the Bible is being magnified" among blacks, because "[a]ny nation is blessed whose God is the Lord" (110). References to Baptist missionary work in Africa seem equally Euro-centric:

This meeting was specially memorable because of the presence of our returned [white] missionary, Miss E.B. Delaney, and the glowing report she brought of her experiences in that dark land. All were touched by her pathetic story and a liberal contribution was given her. Her native boy, Daniel, who had walked several hundred miles through the jungle of Africa to reach the coast and accompany his

teacher to America to learn more of her Jesus, also greeted us in Chicago, and added greatly to the interest of our foreign mission work.

(104)

With similar Christian Euro-centric bias, AME evangelist Amanda Smith writes of her own missionary experiences: "I am often asked, 'What is the religion of Africa?' Well, where I was they had no real form of religion. They were what we would call devil worshippers" (383). Later, she advocates the preferability of white to black missionaries in Africa:

When the whole work is left to [native helpers] the interest seems to flag, and the natives themselves seem to lose their interest [T]he white missionaries, as a rule, give better satisfaction, both to the natives and to the church or society which sends them out. . . . "Then you think, Mrs. Smith, it is better that white missionaries should go to Africa."

Yes, if they are the right kind. If they are thoroughly converted and fully consecrated and wholly sanctified to God, so that all their prejudices are completely killed out, and their hearts are full of love and sympathy. . .

(422-3)

Independent evangelist Elizabeth, finding "a wide field of labour amongst my own color" establishes a school for black orphans. She "always felt the great importance of the religious and moral *agriculture* [her emphasis] of children, and the great need of it, especially amongst the colored people. Having white teachers, I met with much encouragement" (12). With the eye of the benevolent moralist, she writes: "Since the Benefactor of all has granted emancipation to this people, they need much to improve their morals. . ." (14). In spite of the fact that she performs missionary work among blacks, it is black people and black vernacular modes of religious worship which seem to bear the brunt of Elizabeth's disdain: "Ah, jumping and shouting are not religion! how much there is of this, and how little

true prayer" (15). But interestingly, elsewhere in her narrative, Elizabeth draws attention to the fact that she has been called an enthusiast (8), and that on at least one occasion, a watchman attempts to break up one of her meetings where "'Complaint has been made to me that the people round here cannot sleep for the racket'" (7).

The discrepancies between this ex-slave's own self-presentation (both as benevolent bourgeois missionary and as disruptive enthusiast), as well as the evidence of an observer's description of her in her last days present a portrait of Elizabeth which is disjunctive and jarring. Working among the "degraded. . . people of color in Philadelphia" as a very old woman, the benevolent Elizabeth is herself plagued by physical ailments which, it appears, receive little medical attention: "Through months of bodily anguish, occasioned by gangrenous sores upon one of her feet, which extended from the toes to the knee, destroying in its terrible course all the flesh, leaving the bone bare and black, many sweet sayings of heavenly wisdom fell from her lips. . ." (13-14).

As Mary Helen Washington observes: "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" (73). The works of Smith, Broughton and Elizabeth fall into this category of "frozenness." If, as Shockley asserts, texts such as Smith's are "bold" in comparison to the writings of Smith's novelist sisters, the opposite is true when we compare these three late-nineteenth-century evangelists to earlier black women writing spiritual autobiographies.

The "culture of dissemblance" (Hine 916) prevails in the form of a polite

self-conscious gentility in the writings of Smith, Broughton and Elizabeth. It is a gentility which accompanies a strange sense of dissociation from the black self. Toward the end of her life, a poverty-stricken Elizabeth locates herself not among blacks, but white Quakers, whose role in editing her text seems substantial; the writers claim to have reproduced "her simple language" as "strictly as was consistent with [white?] perspicuity and propriety" (2). Her narrative follows a chronological and staid, standard English form. Elizabeth, although born a slave, is most adamant and outspoken in her narrative not about racism, but about sexism in her ministerial career; she criticizes black vernacular forms of religious worship and distances herself from black people-- "It is not from the worldly, so called, that I have endured the most, but from high professors, mostly amongst my own people" (12-13). (Perhaps it is this rejection which drives Elizabeth into the company of a white religious organization.) Northern AME missionary Amanda Smith's text, like the independent Elizabeth's, very often exhibits a lack of emotional expressivity. It also betrays a number of conflicting assertions, and (although she protests to the contrary) we are made aware of both her extreme discomfort with her own blackness, and her privileging of whiteness. In a similar manner of self-dissociation, Southern Baptist Virginia Broughton refers to herself in the third person, as though her autobiography were written by another member of her Baptist Bible Band community, eager to recount the exploits of "our heroine" (23).

Throughout the "simple, unvarnished story" (iv) of Amanda Smith's life-- which is in actuality a long-winded text of 506 pages-- we are, in spite of Smith's verbosity, constantly made aware of her sense of reticence

and self-censorship. Smith assures us repeatedly of her own propriety: "I was the only colored person there and I had a very keen sense of propriety; I had been taught so. . ." (77) she says of her experience of sanctification in a white New York city church, during which she is tempted to shout and jump for joy, but refrains from doing so. Similar statements about her propriety abound in the text: "I did not want to do anything that would not be perfectly agreeable to all" (252) Smith declares on one occasion. Elsewhere, her concern over others' judgment of her becomes an all-consuming preoccupation, as in the case of her inability to make payments on a house which white friends secure for her, but prove unable to finance:

I was ashamed to tell anyone, it would look to white people like bad management on the part of those who were my friends. Then I knew what some of my own people would say, and had said already, that I was a kind of a "white folks' nigger," and I knew they would say, "That is just what I told you it would all come to, can't tell me about white folks." They wouldn't see God in any of it, so here I was. What to do I didn't know. I could not speak of it publicly for the reason I have already mentioned. . . . I came home in great distress of mind.

(232)

On a later occasion, Smith agonizes over what bonnet to wear in England:

I prayed and cried about it a great deal for the Lord only knows how I hate deception or sham in anything. . . . I thought if I take off my [plain Quaker] bonnet, and I did not want to do so, for I really loved it, but still if I should take it off, and see persons from America who knew me, that they would say, "Yes, that is just what we thought, Amanda Smith would take off her plain bonnet when she got to England." Then the people on this side thought I was representing myself, by wearing the Friends' dress, to be what I was not. So there I was, between two fires, and the thought of sailing under false colors, this was more than I could bear. . .

(494-5)

Appearances, and externally-oriented performance then, seem all-important

to Smith, who is careful not to offend the sensibilities of white people, or lend fuel to the fire of black people's condemnation of her. On her arrival in England from missionary work in Africa, she is seriously ill, but "did not go to any of my [white] friends in Liverpool, or Southport as they wanted I should do" (486). Smith claims that her reason for not visiting her friends is that "I thought of the care and anxiety I would be to them, and then the extra work for the servants. . ." (486). In the next breath, surmising that no British lady would ask her servants how they felt about entertaining a black woman, she relates a story of ill treatment received at the hands of white ladies and servants in America:

I was at a good lady's house in Philadelphia, not long since; she was very kind to me, and wanted to ask me to stay for tea, but did not dare to do so on account of an old servant who would have been vexed if she had to serve a colored woman, whom the lady herself had asked to sit at her table. It was night, and I only had to ride two and a half hours, from Philadelphia to Newark, my home, and I got my own supper, thank the Lord.

Well, I had no fears of this kind in England. But I felt that I wanted to be quiet, and simply let alone.

(486)

Even though she denies it, we can only wonder how much Smith's fear of humiliation at the hands of condescending British servants forced to wait on her prevents her from calling on whites in a moment of dire necessity. But it is a distanced objectivity, rather than passionate expressivity which marks Smith's relating of such painful incidents. For example, in what is perhaps the most intense scene of her autobiography, Smith relates how, with forty of the fifty dollars she borrows from her employer (fifty dollars is more than eight months' pay), she buys her sister from a white man who purchased the girl. Her sister, travelling without her free-papers, has been kidnapped by whites and sold to a Mr. Hutchinson:

. . . [Mr. Hutchinson] was considered to be a very good man to his black people, yet he was rough when I told him what my errand was. . . I cried, but he raved; he swore, and said Frances had not been of any use anyhow. At first he said he would not let her go at all. Then he went into the house. His wife was a very nice woman. How well I remember her. . . I cried, and cried, and could not stop. I was foolish, but I could not help it. . . [He] said he was not going to let her go for less than forty dollars . . . [He] walked up and down and swore. . .

(52-3)

Amanda engages the help of a Quaker man, but Mr. Hutchinson cannot be convinced to let Frances go without payment.

I paid him the money. Then she got ready. She went to get her shawl, and he said to her she should not have anything but what she had on. . . So we started; just what she stood up in, with one domestic dress under her arm, was all she had. He flourished the horses-whip around so I didn't know but we were both going to get a flogging before we left; but we got out without the flogging. But oh! wasn't he mad! I thanked the Lord for the old Quaker gentleman. But for him it would have been much worse. Then how I prayed the Lord would bless Mrs. Hutchinson. I believe she was good. . .

(53)

Smith's analysis of the scene then proceeds as follows:

There were a number of little black children around there, and Mr. Hutchinson was kind to them, and played with them, and put them on the horse and held them on to ride, and they seemed to be very fond of him. But then they were slaves. What a difference it made in his feelings toward them. My sister was free. He had not any business with her, and I had no right to pay him any money; and if I had as much sense then as I have now, I would not have paid him a cent; I would have just waited till he went to bed, and taken the underground railroad plan.

(53)

The constrained, polite and mild indignation Smith expresses as she recalls the incident ("But oh! wasn't he mad!"), and the casualness with which she describes the course of action she would have taken had she been wiser, belies the seriousness of her dilemma, and the extreme danger involved in "just tak[ing] the underground railroad plan." Unlike Broughton, Smith

cites numerous examples of the racism she encounters. But often, her reminiscences are delivered in a demure tone, any indignation cooled by the sense of distance, suggestions of humour which accompany her more intense feelings, or blatant contradictions in the text. For example, within three pages, Smith describes the white passengers aboard a ship she is on as "critical" and condescending (250), so "curious" that she prays to God to "'make them let me alone, for Jesus' sake'" (250), "all very nice" (252), and "not even [saying] good morning to me" (253). The divided consciousness of the departed daughters is certainly manifest here.

Smith's struggle to overcome her own self-consciousness about her blackness is an ongoing one. The reason for this self-consciousness can perhaps best be encapsulated in Smith's analysis of what it is like to be black in America:

It is often said to me, "How nicely you get on, Mrs. Smith; everybody seems to treat you so kindly, and you always seem to get on so well."

"Yes; that is what you think," I said; "but I have much more to contend with than you may think." Then they said: "Oh, well, but no one would treat you unkindly." Then I said: "But if you want to know and understand properly what Amanda Smith has to contend with, just turn black and go about as I do, and you will come to a different conclusion." And I think some people would understand the quintessence of sanctifying grace if they could be black about twenty-four hours.

(116-117)

For Smith then, "sanctifying grace" can be best understood as a relieving of the condition of anxiety which accompanies blackness. In the passage immediately following, Smith admits wishing she were white only once in her life. But her dialogue reveals her ambivalence about her blackness, and her constant sense of inhibition and discomfort (expressed on numerous occasions) at being routinely scrutinized:

I was at a white Methodist church in Lancaster. . . . As [the minister] preached the Lord blessed me wonderfully, and I did want to shout, "Praise the Lord;" and I remember saying "I wish I was white, and I would shout 'Glory to Jesus.'" They did not look at white people nor remark about their shouting; for they did use to shout! I did not shout. . . . And that was the only time in my life I ever wanted to be white. But, praise the Lord! I shout now whenever His spirit prompts. No, we who are the royal black are very well satisfied with is gift to us in this substantial color. I, for one, praise Him for what he has given me, although at times it is very inconvenient. . . .

(117)

Her final word on the matter in this instance, is:

Yes, thank God, I am satisfied with my color. I am glad I had no choice in it, for if I had, I am sure I would not have been satisfied; for when I was a young girl I was passionately fond of pea-green, and if choice had been left to me I would have chosen to be green, and I am sure God's color is the best and most substantial. It's the blood that makes whiteness. Hallelujah!

(118)

The last line of this statement, as well as the hymn she quotes next seem to belie all of her previous assertions about the "royal" nature of blackness:

"The blood applied
I'm justified,
I'm saved without, within,
The blood of Jesus cleanseth me
From every trace of sin."
"There is power in Jesus' blood,
There is power in Jesus' blood,
There is power in Jesus' blood,
To wash me white as snow."
"Many years my longing heart
Had sighed, had longed to know,
The virtue of the Saviour's blood,
That washes white as snow."

(118-119)

As I have mentioned, sanctification relieves some of Smith's discomfort about her difference. But late in the text, she proudly quotes a letter from a superior in the missionary field, which, even as it denies the

importance of color and status in Heaven, establishes whiteness as a metaphor for ultimate salvation:

And now, in these latter days, you have come into our organization of The King's Daughters and Sons. I am so glad to see the gleam of the silver cross on any Daughter or Son, but when I saw it on you, my princely sister, I was peculiarly happy. Many jewelled hands I shall forget, but never your dark hand, raised so high when singing. . . . You are a real daughter of the King, "all glorious within." . . . Well he has worked wonders through you. Many an owner of a white face would have been willing to have exchanged it for your white soul, but we are in a spiritual kingdom where there is neither bond nor free, white nor black.

(483-4)

Smith, then, occupies the uneasy ground between shame and pride in her physical blackness, always influenced by her intense awareness of that physicality. In her autobiography's final pages she expresses the courage she must sum up to cast the pearls of her Gospel before a group of whites, "not the best type of English ladies and gentlemen" (504):

They were of an "airish" quality, and that class of English or Americans, especially when travelling, are not the class that good taste would be apt to admire or fall in love with; and to do your duty in spite of these surroundings takes a good deal of pluck, especially for a colored woman.

(504)

But if, as "a colored woman," Smith must demonstrate her ability to adopt the "whiteness" of Victorian Christianity and gentility, there are still (brief) moments in her text where we see remnants of her vernacular roots. These moments reside in Smith's strangely incongruous use of slang and dialect in the text, and in a disruptive narrative strategy-- both features which demonstrate the "recursiveness" Karla Holloway marks as a common feature of twentieth-century black women's texts:

. . . . recursion [is] a way of retaining an idea of repetition even if there is no visible repetition of words or phrases in the sentence. Literary recursion. . . focuses on the metaphorical

dimensions of the text. It is a figurative and symbolic signal that the reflective, backwards glance of the recursive process is significant to the strategies of revision and (re)membrance. Linguistic inversions (like dialect and redundancy) signal recursion [A] relationship between memory and experience is encouraged through linguistic recursion.

(14)

Events, and the memory of them, become "multiple and layered rather than individual and one-dimensional. . . . strain[ing] against the literal narrative structure for an opportunity to dissemble the text through their diffusive character" (Holloway 55-6). In Smith's 506-page autobiography, there are several incidents of "linguistic inversion"-- moments when Smith's mask of whiteface civility shifts, and oracy and the vernacular (dialect) slip their way into the text. Such moments often accompany a situation of emotional and spiritual intensity, as in Smith's description of her distress when she believes she has missed a sermon which would have aided her sanctification:

. . . I said, "Oh I have missed my chance; two Sabbaths ago I had such a drawing to come here and I did not do it; O, Lord, I have disobeyed that spirit and I am so sorry; do forgive me and help me, I pray Thee."

O, how I wept, for I had lost my chance and I am so hungry for the blessing; but, "Lord forgive me and help me to listen now" [my emphasis].

(75)

The emphasised words of Smith exhibit two shifts as Smith moves from formal narrative structure to what amounts to a kind of oral theatricality; her sudden shifts from the standard descriptive past tense she uses throughout the text ("O, how I wept. . ."), becomes the present tense ("I am so hungry for the blessing") and finally the urgent immediacy of directly quoted discourse ("but, 'Lord forgive me . . .'").

At the moment of her sanctification, Smith again slips into the vernacular: "Just then such a wave came over me, and such a welling up in my heart, and these words rang through me like a bell: '*God in you. God in you,*'. . . . O, what glory filled my soul!" [my emphasis] (76). The elliptical omission of the verb "to be" is a common one in the language of the African diaspora.⁴

In another example of Smith's use of the vernacular, she receives badly needed money from a kind benefactor:

I put my hand in my pocket and took it out; there was one two dollar bill and three one dollar bills. I spread it on the table and counted it. It was the first time I ever had that much money given me in my life, *just for nothing, like*, and I thought I must have made a mistake in counting it, so I counted it again [my emphasis].

(134)

In a moment of acute indecision, Smith reflects: ". . . I prayed and told the Lord how I had been asked to go [to Martha's Vineyard], that Brother P. was a good man, and he said he thought I had better not go, and *I wanted He should show me His will*" [my emphasis] (221).

Recursion in the form of narrative incongruities, in which Smith breaks her usual chronological time sequence, also signal a desire to re-present past incidents. In this re-ordering of events, Smith is able to make such subtle commentary upon certain issues in her life that it goes unnoticed until subjected to closer investigation. I want to examine three important occasions here. The first involves Smith's sanctification, which occurs around October 1868 (97), and the death of her husband a year later, November 1869 (96). While these two incidents occur a year apart, they become interestingly intertwined in Smith's relation.

How her narrative structure reflects her attitudes toward her

husband and the negative role he plays in her life merits investigation. Sometime after her marriage to James Smith (her second husband), "things began to get very unsatisfactory. . . . At times things in the house were very unpleasant. I was greatly disappointed. . ." (57). At one point Amanda describes James rather sympathetically as: "one of those poor unfortunate dispositions that are hard to satisfy, and many a day and night my poor heart ached as I wept and prayed God to help me" (68). But she gradually presents us with a few incidents which reveal why and how James Smith was "hard to satisfy." We learn, for example, in a chapter which describes her desperate struggle to attain sanctification, that he stands in the way of her efforts: "I would talk to my husband, but he had no sympathy with holiness" (70); she believes she can do better out of his presence: ". . . I told the Lord one day if He would send James away somewhere till I got the blessing [of sanctification] he would never get it away again, but that he hindered me from getting it" (71). We learn also that Smith fears him. When James loses his job placement, Smith writes: ". . . I was afraid to talk too much. He was like a fish out of water when he had no work. It was two weeks before he got a situation" (71). James' new job takes him out of town, and he demands that Amanda accompany him:

I reasoned every way I could, but he was determined I should go. At last I said, "James, I am afraid to go; you have done me so bad right here where I have just begun to get used to the people, and know how to turn around, and what will it be if I go there out in the country, no church near, and a stranger, and if I give up my washing what will I do. I can help myself a little now." But this did not please him, and I told him I would wait till spring. The landlady died, and a new landlord raised the rent,-- thirteen dollars. He paid the rent, but would do no more. . . . He came home regularly every fortnight. I said, "Now, Lord, while James is

away do please give me the blessing I seek. I will be true, I will never let anything he may say or do get the blessing away from me."

(71-2)

In Smith's recounting of how she attained sanctification, James figures prominently as the obstacle to that attainment. Once she achieves it however, Jesus replaces James as husband, as is the case in the autobiographies of Foote, Truth, Lee, and Jackson: "I had never felt such a soul union with Jesus before in my life, so I sang, 'I am married to Jesus/ For more than one year,/ I am married to Jesus/ For during the war' (81). However, after Amanda's sanctification, James again figures as an obstacle, as he undermines her achievement:

He listened patiently. When I got through he began his old argument. I said, "Now, my dear, you know I can't argue."

"O well," he said, "If you have got something you can't talk about, I don't believe in it."

"Well, I said, "I have told you all I can and I cannot argue." O, how he tantalized me in every way, but God kept me so still in my soul, and my poor husband was so annoyed because I would not argue. . . . I could only weep and pray.

(84)

At this moment Smith goes backward in time, relating a series of incidents before her sanctification, when she was "so hungry" for the blessing (90), but was deterred or misguided in a number of attempts to attain it. In this backward movement, the narrative changes from one of chronological continuity to one of contiguity, as Smith's mention of how her husband undermined her blessing triggers a whole array of memories which deal with blockage and frustration. (One of the memories, incidentally, is of her actual marriage to James: "After a year or two I went to Philadelphia. There I was married to my second husband, James Smith. Then I had given up seeking the blessing definitely. . ." (90)). The chapter which

follows returns us to chronological time, resuming with the events occurring after Smith's October 1868 sanctification. At this point in the narrative, as in her replacement of James with Jesus, Smith again returns to a position of complete empowerment. She relates two incidents in which God aids her to overcome Satan's undermining of her self-esteem. In the first incident, overcoming the fact that, in an all-white church, "I was a colored woman, [and] did not like to push myself forward" (94), Smith boldly goes to the aid of a young white woman who is struggling to be sanctified.

In the second incident, John Bentley, son-in-law to James' employer, castigates Amanda for coming to visit James to ask for rent money:

So, that day in New Utrecht, John Bentley came in, as I was in the next room talking with James, my husband. I had gone over to see him. My rent was due, and [James] had not been over for two weeks, and had not sent me any money. . . . I was crying and talking. . . . So, when John Bentley cursed and swore at me, I turned to him quietly, and said: "Why, John Bentley, haven't I a right to come where my own husband is?" But he was fierce. I did not know but he was going to strike me.

(95)

What occurs next is tantamount to a "fixing" scene:

He went on talking and abusing me terribly. There seemed to come an indescribable power over me, and I turned and lifted my hand toward him, and I said to him, "Mind, John Bentley, the God that I serve will make you pay for this before the year is out." He said: "Well, I don't care if He does. Let Him do it." He had not more than said the words when he seemed to tremble and stagger. There was a chair behind him, and he dropped down into the chair. I never saw him from that day. This was about two weeks before Christmas, and before the New Year came, John Bentley was dead and buried! I always feel sad when I think of it, but I believe that God was displeased with that man for cursing me that day.

(95)

The paragraph which immediately follows is a curious one. A seeming non-sequitur, it appears to interrupt the sequence of events concerning

Amanda's triumphs after sanctification-- her assistance of the white woman; her cursing of John Bentley; (and after the paragraph in question) her self-conscious raising of her black hand in a white church, upon which "the power of the Spirit fell on the people and the whole congregation . . . [and] the people shouted and my own heart then filled with adoring praise" (97). The paragraph in question leaps ahead in time about one year, to describe nothing other than the death of Amanda's husband, James Smith:

My husband, James Smith, was formerly of Baltimore, Md. He was for many years a leader of the choir of Bethel A.M.E. Church, in that city. Afterward he moved to Philadelphia, and was ordained deacon in the A.M.E. Church. He died, in November, 1869, at New Utrecht, N.Y. Since then I have been a widow, and have travelled half way round the world, and God has ever been faithful.

(96)

Smith's insertion of her husband's death here, rather than thirty-six pages later where it should chronologically occur seems to suggest again, a disruption of the narrative's normal teleology; James' decease is remembered not within a chronological telling of events, but as contiguous to Smith's recounting of the triumphant experiences God sent her after she attained sanctification through Him. The only event Smith mentions about the winter of 1869 (the time of James' death), once she arrives at that point in her narrative, is the conversion of her daughter, Mazie, and following Mazie's conversion, Smith's own triumphant going out into the world:

As the Lord led, I followed, and one day as I was praying and asking Him to teach me what to do I was impressed that I was to leave New York and go out. I did not know where, so it troubled me, and I asked the Lord for light, and He gave me these words: "Go, and I will go with you." The very words he gave to Moses, so many years ago.

(132)

In the recounting of James' death, then, Smith "dissembles" the logical teleology of her narrative, subtly ordering memory in ways which create her own sense of empowerment. The seemingly polite, orderly, Victorian text masks a woman who is able with God's help to do away with those who challenge her in her own self-fashioning.

While the death of James serves as a kind of metaphor for empowerment, the deaths of Amanda's father and brothers, also introduced out of chronological order, are mentioned in relation to a passage dealing with extreme spiritual angst and frustration. Amanda initially fails in her struggle to attain sanctification: "I was in such distress that I never thought about faith; I was taken up with my desire and distress when seeking the blessing. Well, I did not get it then, of course, for faith without works is dead, so works, without real faith in God, are dead also" (63). This description is followed by a quote from a hymn: "I struggled and wrestled to win it,/ The blessing that setteth me free,/ But when I had ceased all my struggle,/ This peace Jesus gave unto me" (63). It is "[i]n this connection"-- spiritual struggle and death-- that Amanda gives "a brief account of the closing years of my father's life, as doubtless some may desire to know how he who had fought the battle of life so bravely met the last great enemy-- death" (63). In presenting this story, she jumps forward about two years in the narrative, explaining how, after she does attain sanctification, "my burden for my poor father increased" (64), because he has fallen away from his church, and "lost his spiritual life." In worrying obsessively about her father Samuel Berry's spiritual and physical safety (he works atop high buildings), she ultimately learns to "let go of father and [take] hold of God" (64). As a result, "the Lord

seemed to bring him to Himself; took all the harshness out of him; sweetened him down so beautifully" (65), and her father's death is a peaceful one. But if the story of Samuel Berry demonstrates the beautiful outcome of "sink[ing] into the will of God" (65), is also a story of terrible loss for Amanda, and, in turn triggers the memory of three other losses:

I had three brothers in the late war. My youngest brother came home sick, and died in the hospital at Harrisburg. . . Oh, what a blow it was to me! He was my favorite brother. . . . My next brother, Samuel Grafton, served three years. He lived at Towanda, Pa., and about a year ago he was drowned.

My oldest brother, William Talbert, served two years in the war, and died about eight or nine months ago. . . . But I return to the story of my experiences in New York.

(65)

Thus, at a nadir in Smith's spiritual career, the deaths of father and brothers, inserted out of chronological order, seem contiguous to Smith's own soul-death; it is these losses she recalls, before going on to describe even further hardships experienced in New York city-- a new baby dies, husband James becomes a troublesome obstacle, etc.

The final narrative disruption I want to examine concerns Smith's cancelled trip to Broadlands, once she has arrived in England some years after the death of her husband. Again, Smith's narrative continuity collapses as she interrupts her chronologically arranged journal entries to recreate over and over again an incident which, we must conclude, is of great concern and anguish to her. The incident is important to Smith for two reasons, both unspoken-- first, it involves the inherent racism of her white friends, and second, it ultimately brings the bourgeois-aspiring Smith into the sphere of the English gentry, satisfying a vain obsession she frequently denies having. The incident occurs as follows: Smith arrives in England and is hosted by several religious people, among them a Mrs.

Menzes. One or two days later, she receives an invitation to attend a religious convention in Broadlands, hosted by Lord Mount Temple. Smith's new friends try to dissuade her from going on the grounds that the convention will be beyond her understanding; Smith believes God wants her to go. Ultimately, her friends arrange for her to speak at another religious convention, thus actively preventing her from attending Broadlands. A year later, Smith receives another invitation from Lord Mount Temple, which she accepts. At the home of his lordship, to her delight, she is escorted to table by Mount Temple himself. Smith first introduces the Broadlands story when she describes her initial meeting with Mrs. Menzes, "a wonderful lady" (259), in July 1878. At this point, the Broadlands fiasco is a future incident, not to occur until August of that same year. Smith then relates the entire Broadlands fiasco in detail, disrupting her chronology to skip about a week or two ahead to August 1878 when the fiasco occurs, and then further, to August 1879 (the second, happy Broadlands conference) and the gratifying completion of the story at Lord Mount Temple's. After this digression from July 1878 to August 1879, she resumes temporal chronology, reverting back a year to her very first introductions in England, in July of 1878, and the initial kindness of her white friends who at that time raised money for her. Following this reversion is a series of chronological entries for July 1878: Friday. . . [July] 26th, 1878; Monday 29; Wednesday 31; Thursday, Aug. 1; Saturday Aug. 3; Sunday August 4; and Monday August 5 respectively. But what is most interesting about these entries is that they are chronological accounts of the events of the entire Broadlands fiasco, unfolded all over again. The very first one begins on Friday July 26, 1878: "This is a day that I had

to regret. I had been invited to Lord Mount Temple's. . ." (263). This first entry re-encapsulates the initial two-page story in about three paragraphs. It recounts the reluctance of Smith's friends, Smith's prayers to God about the situation, the manner in which Smith's friends arranged for her to be at Victoria Hall rather than Broadlands. Where the second account differs significantly from the first is in the addition of a new piece of rather disturbing information about the reaction of Smith's friends to her first Broadlands invitation:

They said the teaching at that Conference was so deep, and they were afraid I would be confused, and it would not be good for me. *And then, besides, for one like me to be entertained where there was so much elegance and style, it might make me proud and turn my head.* But, poor things! they didn't know that I had always been used to a good deal of that, though in the capacity of a servant; so that no style or grandeur affected me at all [my emphasis].

(263)

Smith's is a gradual and pained revelation of the racist attitudes of her white friends. Subsequent to this new revelation, she disembarks from the train (as in the first account) and stands before the sign which advertises her. The dated entries which follow go into further detail about the incident, repeating its unfolding a *third* time. It is only in this third telling that we are able to learn what the sign advertising Smith actually says: "The first thing that struck me when I got out of the carriage was large bills pasted up, beautiful pink paper, with black letters: '*Mrs Amanda Smith, the Converted Slave from America, will give Gospel Addresses and Sing in Victoria Hall for so many days.*' My knees felt very weak, but there I was in for it" (264). (In actuality Smith was born of staunchly Christian parents and had been a Christian all her life.) I have

quoted the moment of disembarkment and confrontation with the sign in each of its three recreations by Smith, because it seems to me that there is a progressive narrowing down of events from a kind of factual first report, complete with directly quoted discourse; to a shorter, denser, more accusatory summation of the event ("they so arranged it. . . they had advertised me beyond the date I was to go to Broadlands. . . I knew nothing about the advertisement myself. . . but that I could not explain . . ." (263)), to a final synecdoche in which the entire event is represented in the offending sign in stark black and pink, jarring as a slap.

Ten pages later, in an entry dated "Monday, August 11th [1879]," Smith recounts her happy visit to Lord Mount Temple's yet again, and follows this last telling with another story of "honor conferred upon me," this time "in America" (274)-- belying her earlier protestation that "no style or grandeur affected me at all" (263): ". . . Dr. Newman, who is now Bishop Newman, was pastor of the Metropolitan Church in Washington When we got down into the parlor Dr. Newman came and said, 'Take my arm, Mrs. Smith,' and we led the way; and he gave me the seat of honor at his right. . . . Of course, this was all before Dr. Newman was Bishop." (275-6).

Smith's telling and retelling of certain events, and the manner in which that telling disrupts the chronological narrative structure seems a kind of reiterative catharsis, as though recounting the injury over and over will somehow purge her of the damaging effects the occasion had upon her. The disruptive repetition is also a healing balm-- just as she must reiterate the thoughtless treatment she receives at the hands of her friends, it is equally important to reiterate *lavish* treatment received from

white men much more important than her insulting friends could ever be.

If Amanda Smith's narrative is a kind of genteel saying without saying, Southern Baptist Virginia Broughton's Twenty Year's Experience of a Missionary is even more genteel, her emotions even more disguised. The autobiography begins with a stilted and sentimental encomium to the South:

"In a certain city of the fair South Land of the United States of America there was born a wee little girl baby, whom her father named Virginia, in honor of the state of her nativity, which he never ceased to praise" (7).

Later, Broughton speaks of the Southern slaveocracy in fond, familiar and romantically self-inclusive terms: ". . . [on one of her missionary travels] she [Virginia] was cozily tucked to bed in one of the old-time typical high soft beds that prosperous farmers have on our southern plantations" (16); she describes black sharecroppers in the following manner: "It was cotton-picking time and the people were having a merry time weighing their cotton when Virginia rode up to the settlement" (17) In this "fair" south, Virginia's father, an "industrious, intelligent man" improves himself by his own determination to succeed, and Virginia is thus able to "enjoy the privileges of education that only very few of our race could enjoy at that time" (8). In Broughton and Smith, the female autobiographer's (often troubled) relationship to literacy is no longer of importance, as it was in the texts of several black female evangelists (Belinda, Lee, Foote, Truth, Jackson); basic literacy as an issue is replaced by the pursuit of institutional education and upward social mobility as "the new day of freedom dawned upon the race [bringing] with it the glorious light of education for all who would receive it" (7). Broughton's education does not consist of a young black woman's difficult rite of passage in her

ability to master (or reject) the (dangerous) lettered text. The illiterate Belinda and Truth reject Western letters; Lee almost drowns in a book/brook; Foote experiences several traumatic disillusionments at the same time that she learns to read; Jackson is pitted against her black brother at the moment of her attainment of literacy. But Virginia Broughton is able to attend a private school in the manner of any privileged (white) American girl. Later, she attends a black post-secondary institution founded by white philanthropists.

If Broughton's sister evangelists critique the harmful effects of racism and sexism and America, we are given no evidence of Broughton's awareness of such oppressions early on in her text. Broughton later describes the sexism she encounters in the formation of Baptist female Bible Bands, but racism seems an issue she is completely unwilling to examine. Race relations in America boil down to a kind of Washingtonian⁵ portrait of black self-improvement: "after all the salvation and education of the Negro depended largely upon himself, and men and women of the race should be helped and trained for leadership along all lines of religious and educational work as well as industrial pursuits" (22). In this programme of black betterment, whites are universally supportive and approving. Broughton describes a Trenton District meeting to set up Bible classes and socio-educational uplift programmes, at which the "good white people of Trenton" provide food and other supplies for the convention: "Large numbers of the white citizens attended this meeting and expressed themselves as pleased with our effort" (27). Indeed, Broughton's reason for writing her autobiography hinges on her desire to improve her race: ". . . we send forth this booklet as our contribution to the history of a

race, whose true story must yet be told by members of the race would we give our young people the needed encouragement to make their lives what they should be" (Broughton 3). In this desire to set an example, to live according to the dictates of how one "should" live, Broughton aspires to write a polite, unaggressive, and feminine text. There are echoes of the genteel Richard Allen here, whose 1833 autobiography is also informed by his own desire to impress those who might criticize him. Broughton seems to be the female equivalent of what William Andrews terms an "institution man" (Andrews To Tell a Free Story 68-9)-- her autobiography, like Allen's, is the genteel story of the development not of the writer herself, so much as the Baptist Bible groups and programmes she establishes. In Broughton, as in Allen, there is a sense of "we," a communality of spirit which represents the writer as a leader and member of an order larger than herself. Indeed, Broughton's text seems to follow a trend prevalent in black male autobiographies which privileges "racial solidarity, grounded in black institutions" (Andrews "Ministerial Autobiography" 112) over individualism. But, as an "institution" woman, Broughton can never establish institutions or head them; instead, downplaying her own womanism, she focuses upon her community involvement as an auxiliary worker-- a "missionary," co-operating within "bands" of other women to accomplish "woman's work." At Fisk University she is eager to let us know that she might have taken the principal's examination, but "declined to do [so], as she did not wish to be a rival of her male classmate who was aspiring for that position" (8). Giddings notes that many nineteenth-century black women felt male pressure to put aside individual aspirations in deference to auxiliary work for the cause of freedom and race equality:

In periods of Black radicalism, which always includes a self-conscious quest for manhood, Black men attempt to exercise their male prerogatives more vigorously. . . .Following the Civil War, men attempted to vindicate their manhood largely through asserting their authority over women. . . .

(60-1)

Interestingly, it is as "man's helpmeet in the church as well as in the school and home" (24) that Broughton is able to establish a strong community of other black women, unlike her sister evangelists before her. What she often terms "this woman's work" (26) does not involve overt preaching or ministerial callings as it does in the case of her historically obscure maverick evangelist sisters, but rather, the much better known and documented efforts of many black church women as religious and moral educators, church mothers, preachers' wives.⁶

But even this work is met with the disapprobation of male church members suspicious of their wives' "associating with that mannish woman which many called Virginia" (60). Why Broughton should be singled out for disapproval is a question which deserves some investigation. Black male church leaders normally sanctioned the auxiliary work done by church women. The reason for the male resistance Broughton receives perhaps lies in the threatening fact that she is not content to keep her place, but preaches on occasion-- and, indeed, is often well-received by her audiences:

The news of a woman missionary being in town soon spread, and the small church house was filled to over-flowing; both white and colored people came out. Evidently God used the missionary to give the right message, from the many expressions of joy and God bless you heard from all sides. The white and colored people stood on the roadside to bid us farewell, as we began our return trip the next morning. Throughout this section Virginia was received warmly and the messages she bore were heard gladly.

(Broughton 17)

It is significant that nowhere in this passage, or throughout Broughton's entire text, does she state that she actually preaches to gathered congregations of people. But the suggestion, as it is presented in the above passage, seems clear, especially when we consider the aggressive male resistance Broughton later receives in a church which normally encouraged the work of women. Broughton describes this resistance in the same distanced tones with which she addresses other issues. A chapter entitled "A Period of Stern Opposition" goes on to relate violent incidents in which: "[a] brother who opposed our work said. . . 'I would rather take a rail and flail the life out of a woman than to hear her speak in the church'" (37); "a certain minister. . . came. . . with the expressed intention to throw Virginia out of the window" (38); "violent hands [were] even laid upon some" (38); and "Brother F. P. became so enraged he drew a gun on his wife. . . and threatened to take her life" (39).

Broughton's response to this violence is to express a complete and optimistic trust in God. It is God who permits Virginia to abandon her maternal duties in pursuit of her religious work. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in her autobiography, assures her reader that she willingly assumes her obligations on the domestic front, using "my 'mother's instinct'" (70) and advising "every mother [to] above all other arts and sciences, study first what relates to babyhood" (70), we see Broughton also making a conscious attempt to directly address the problem of her woman's duties. More concerned with an open apologia than her black evangelist sisters were, Broughton is nevertheless much less apologetic than Stanton, for she concludes that God has given her licence to *relinquish* her calling as a mother. Broughton deftly introduces the subject by putting the

concerns and accusations of her male detractors, into her own mouth:

After the service one of the good women approached [Virginia] and said, "God surely sent you to us at this time; our hindrances are so great and so numerous that we could not possibly carry on our Bible Band work without an occasional visit from you." Virginia replied, "I don't know when I'll come again, for it seems that I ought to be at home with my children."

(43)

Broughton then counters her own supposed concern with a message from God: "Immediately there on the spot, this revelation was made to Virginia's innermost soul, 'What if God should take all the children away.'" (43) She proceeds to relate the story of how, called home to her sick daughter's bedside, she nurses the girl day and night, only to watch her die in spite of Broughton's motherly administrations. The lesson which Broughton learns is this: "Through this affliction Virginia was made to see plainly that she could stay home and sit by the bedside of her children and have all the assistance that medical skill could render, and yet God could take her children to himself if he so willed it" (44). Thus:

This darling child was laid to rest Friday afternoon. Virginia went on her mission Saturday morning. So mightily did God use her on that occasion that her bitterest opposers said: "Let that woman alone, God is truly with her." She has ever since been enabled to trust God for the care of her home and her children; nothing has been allowed to hinder her from doing her Master's bidding. . .

(45)

Broughton is completely confident in the guidance of God: "While men opposed and Satan strove our progress to retard, God was with us and was only permitting those trials our dross to consume and our gold to refine. Those oppositions proved to be stepping stones to nobler and more extended endeavors" (39).

Interestingly, her language at this moment is the language of Biblical

hymn-singing-- for example, a popular Methodist hymn begins "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform." In such hymns, the object ("his wonders") of an infinitive of purpose ("to perform") is inserted between the verb ("moves") and the infinitive ("to perform"), rather than after the entire verbal construction, as is normally the case ("God moves to perform his wonders"). We discover that it is in hymn-singing that Broughton's sense of resistance lies; as Broughton herself writes in her final chapter: "God has taught her many lessons through songs" (119). Perhaps this is the seed which Broughton carries from her African American mothers' gardens, for as she asserts: "Virginia well knew at this time her Master's voice when he spoke to her in song" (122), and often she describes sung messages from God as "ringing in her soul" (124, 15, 47). In a strangely non-emotional text, hymns and songs occasionally seem the only mode of expression through which "her great conflict[s]" (83) are resolved.

The turn-of-the-century daughters, then, frozen into self-consciousness, only rarely exhibit returns to the ancestral places of their mothers-- the vernacular, the circular, the contiguous, the power of song. By the time Virginia Broughton wrote her autobiography in 1907, Zora Neale Hurston was six years old. Hurston's first short story "Drenched in Light" (1924) remembers the exuberance of six-year-old-ness; but more importantly, it is a spiritual recuperation not of the southern Christian mothers, but of their African mothers before them. In a movement of circularity, then, it is to Belinda that we return as we examine how Hurston effected a "conversion" which changed the face of African American women's literature which came after her.

Endnotes

1. This is not the case with evangelist Zilpha Elaw, who, in a reversal of popular assumptions, resolutely created her own itinerary of benevolent missionary work which took her not to Africa, or into communities of poor blacks, but to England. Elaw's Memoirs were published in 1846, before the era of "racial uplift."

2. In The Country and the City Raymond Williams observes that the hearth-place figured as a central icon in popular media creation of nuclear family values from the late nineteenth-century onwards.

3. Other black female evangelists employ the metaphor of whiteness as purity. Julia Foote quotes the same hymn Smith does. Rebecca Jackson dreams about people in spotless white garments. Diane Sasson comments that this is a common motif in Shaker literature. Indeed, the motif of whiteness as purity is itself a common one. The fact that the black evangelist women use it suggests to me a consciousness deeply rooted in a (white) Christian system of symbolism, while struggling against the obvious conflicts which the adoption of such a system precipitates for black people.

4. As Geneva Smitherman observes: ". . .West African languages allow for the construction of sentences without a form of the verb *to be*. . . . Such sentence patterns, without any form of the verb *be*, can frequently be heard in virtually any modern-day black community" (6).

5. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), black orator and educator, with the aid of white philanthropists, organized the Tuskegee normal and industrial school for blacks in 1881. His autobiography, Up From Slavery (1901) emphasizes rigorous work and industrial training as the means to self-improvement and economic independence for blacks. However, Washington's public conciliatory attitude on the issue of race equality earned him the disfavor of some black people, including W.E.B. Dubois, an advocate of higher education and full and immediate equality for blacks. Washington was condemned by more militant blacks for his famous Atlanta Exposition speech of 1895 (dubbed his "Atlanta Compromise"). In that speech he advocated that blacks should

forgo equality and integration in favor of education and economic assistance. The speech's most memorable line was, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." It played to rave reviews by Southern white movers and shakers who would have welcomed anything that sounded like a delay in ending segregation.

(Powledge 13)

6. See Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. "The Politics of 'Silence': Dual-Sex Political Systems and Women's Traditions of Conflict in African-American

Religion." in African-American Christianity: Essays in History, 80-110.
Also, Eric C. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in African
American Experience, 274-5.

Chapter Nine/ Zora Neale Hurston: The Daughter's Return

Thirty-five years after Their Eyes Were Watching God was published in 1937, Alice Walker set about saving the text from the obscurity into which it had fallen. The powerful voice of a black woman spoke to her out of that text, and she wanted to make sure other people heard too. It was a passing down of something between women. Walker was moved by the words of Zora Neale Hurston's nameless narrator, who presumably heard Janie Crawford's story from Pheoby, who heard Janie tell it herself while the "kissing young darkness became a monstropolous old thing" (7) and "all around the house the night-time put on flesh and blackness" (10). It is out of this black female communication that the rhetoric of Their Eyes emerges. In The Signifyin(g) Monkey Henry Louis Gates Jr. names this rhetoric the "speakerly text," "a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed 'to emulate the phonetic, grammatical and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the "illusion of narration"'" (181). This "free indirect discourse," a combination of diegesis (the narrative standard-English voice), and mimesis (directly quoted speech, reproducing African American dialect) begins to sound more and more like black vernacular as Their Eyes progresses. While Gates notes that this voice signifies "an awareness of self in Janie" and that "Their Eyes is a bold feminist novel, the first to be explicitly so in the Afro-American tradition" ("Afterword: A Negro Way of Saying" 187), he elsewhere asserts that Janie's quest is, most importantly, to become "a speaking black subject" (Signifyin(g) Monkey

181), "a transcendent, ultimately racial self" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 183). He suggests that Hurston's novel signifies upon a black (male) writing tradition which he traces from Gronniosaw's preoccupation with white Western literacy in 1774, through John Marrant (1785), Ottobah Cugoana (1787), Olaudah Equiano (1789), John Jea (1815), and Frederick Douglass (1845), to the various uses of the black vernacular employed by Paul Dunbar (Lyrics of Lowly Life 1895), Jean Toomer (Cane 1923) and Sterling A. Brown (Southern Road 1932). But exactly how Hurston's distinctly *womanist* voice emerges out of this plethora of male antecedents Gates does not explain. In a similar vein, Bernard Bell asserts that the rhetoric of Their Eyes, "rather than being exclusively female. . . is black, oral and southern" (Bell 127). And how Janie's "unified black sensibility" (Awkward 56), her "text of a common blackness" (Gates, Signifyin(g) Monkey 183) is achieved when Janie has been rejected by her black community I find equally problematic. As a way out of this difficulty, I ask whether it is possible that the formal rhetoric of Their Eyes-- with its strong thematic overtones of religious oratory-- emerges not only from a black male literary tradition, but also (and more importantly) from a black *female* tradition with which Hurston might be identified.

I suggest that Hurston's Janie and the speakerly text Hurston creates both descend from a long tradition of orality-embracing, back-talking, deeply spiritual black women. While Hurston may or may not have read the texts of the black preacher women, she was certainly knowledgeable about the womanist preacherly traditions which bred the texts. In The Sanctified Church, Hurston describes the "calls" to preach received by several black women (23-29 & 85-90), and it is likely that she

would have read at least the autobiography of Sojourner Truth, whose name appeared in many a newspaper, and whose narrative enjoyed several reprints in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, Sojourner Truth's narrative may have been a palimpsest upon which Hurston placed her story of Janie. Certain tropes and pivotal moments in Truth's autobiography may be precursors upon which Hurston signifies, creating a parallel fictional narrative of Janie's spiritual development. For example, in Truth's autobiography, it is the figure of the tree which is most used by others to describe Sojourner. Indeed, Truth is descended from a tree-like parent, as Janie is in Hurston's novel. Of Truth's father, Olive Gilbert writes: "Isabella's [Truth's] father was very tall and straight, when young, which gave him the name of 'Bomefree'-- low Dutch for tree. . . and by this name he usually went" (15). Sojourner herself is described by her amanuensis as follows: "Her finely molded form is yet unbent, and its grand height and graceful, wavy movements remind the observer of her lofty cousins, the Palms, which keep guard over the sacred streams where her forefathers idled away their childhood days" (Gilbert vi). On another occasion she is referred to as "calm and erect, as one of her own native palm-trees waving alone in the desert" (153). Truth describes herself in her old age as one who has "'budded out wid de trees, but may fall wid de autumn leaves'" (145). Correspondingly, in Their Eyes, Hurston creates an animistic belief system which is reflected in tropes of vegetation and fertility throughout the novel. Leafy is the name by which Janie's mother comes to be known. Tea Cake's birth name is Vergible Woods, a conflation of two root words-- the Latin "veritas" meaning truthfulness; and "virgeus" meaning green twig, slip, or rod. In

the French, "virgeus" becomes "verge" meaning rod, or penis. Janie herself experiences an early spiritual/sexual awakening amidst a veritable eruption of bloom:

Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom. . . . She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life. . . .

(10-11)

We may compare this spiritual awakening with Truth's account of her own experience:

[S]he was deeply impressed with the idea, that if *she* also were to present her petitions under the open canopy of heaven, speaking very loud, she should the more readily be heard; consequently, she sought a fitting spot for this, her rural sanctuary. The place she selected, in which to offer up her daily orisons, was a small island in a small stream, covered with large willow shrubbery beneath which the sheep had made their pleasant winding paths; and sheltering themselves from the scorching rays of a noon-tide sun, luxuriated in the cool shadows of the graceful willows, as they listened to the tiny falls of the silver waters. . . . It was a lonely spot, and chosen by her for its beauty, [and] its retirement. . . . When she had made choice of her sanctum. . . . she improved it by pulling away the branches of the shrubs from the centre, and weaving them together for a wall on the outside, forming a circular arched alcove, made entirely of the graceful willow. To this place she resorted daily. . .

(60)

The natural setting of both experiences, and the description of each resort as sacred space, a "sanctum" or "sanctuary," prepares the way for the epiphanic scene to follow-- in the case of Truth, it is her first personal encounter with Jesus. In Hurston's novel, Janie has another kind of spiritual encounter-- that of her initial sexual knowledge of herself. At

the height of her epiphany, Truth perceives Jesus:

But who was this friend? became the next inquiry. Was it Deencia, who had so often befriended her? She looked at her with her new power of sight-- and lo! she, too, seemed all "bruises and putrefying sores," like herself. No, it was some one very different from Deencia.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, as the vision brightened into a form distinct, beaming with the beauty of holiness, and radiant with love. She then said, audibly addressing the mysterious visitant-- "I *know* you and I *don't* know you." Meaning, "You seem perfectly familiar". . . . Now he appeared to her delighted mental vision as so mild, so good, and so every way lovely, and he loved her so much!. . . . [T]he world was clad in new beauty, the very air sparkled as with diamonds, and was redolent of heaven Jesus, the transcendently lovely as well as great and powerful; for so he appeared to her, though he seemed but human; and she watched for his bodily appearance, feeling that she should know him, if she saw him; and when he came, she should go and dwell with him, as with a dear friend.

It was not given her to see that he loved any other; and she thought if others came to know and love him, as she did, she should be thrust aside and forgotten. . . . and she felt a sort of jealousy, lest she should be robbed of her newly found treasure.

(66-8)

I want to compare this scene with two passages in *Their Eyes*. In the first, Janie, after her sexual awakening, sees "shiftless Johnny Taylor" in an entirely new light: "Through the pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up the road. In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean. That was before the golden dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes" (Hurstons 11).

In the second passage, Janie encounters another tall, shiftless and equally bewitching man: "At five-thirty a tall man came into the place. Janie was leaning on the counter making aimless pencil marks on a piece of wrapping paper. She knew she didn't know his name, but he looked familiar" (Hurstons 90). Later, with Tea Cake, "Janie learned what it felt like to be jealous" (130). So begins Janie's life with Tea Cake, the "son

of the Evening Sun" (180), whose resemblance to Osiris, the resurrected Egyptian god, precursor to Christ, is too striking to be overlooked here. Osiris was called "Lord of Death or Lord of the Westerners, meaning those who had 'gone west' into death's sunset land" (Barbara Walker 751). Walker explains: "Of all saviour-gods worshipped at the beginning of the Christian era, Osiris may have contributed more details to the evolving Christ figure than any other" (748). Describing Tea Cake's burial, Hurston writes: ". . . Tea Cake slept royally on his white silken couch. . . Janie bought him a brand new guitar and put it in his hands. He would be thinking up new songs to play to her when she got there. . . . Then the band played, and Tea Cake rode like a Pharaoh to his tomb. . . ." (180).

Tea Cake's burial is accomplished in Egyptian style, where dead royals are buried along with the earthly possessions they loved best when alive.

I am interested in the ways Hurston's text seems to echo Truth's-- Jesus/Johnny/Tea Cake, familiar-looking,² the "glorious" and "transcendently lovely," appearing to the previously-blind young female supplicant out of a "beglamored" world "clad in new beauty," has the power to transform, to create in both Truth and Janie a "jealousy" which sweetly torments, and a knowledge of God and self gained through a strong sense of natural being-in-the-world. In Their Eyes, this sense of communion with nature becomes the root of an African, animistic belief system. In Truth's narrative, Gilbert describes the animistic beginnings of Truth's Christian belief:

In the evening, when her mother's work was done, she would sit down under the sparkling vault of heaven, and calling her children to her, would talk to them of the only Being that could effectually aid or protect them. . . . "My children, there is a God, who hears and sees you." "A *God*, mau-mau! Where does he live?" asked the

children. "He lives in the sky," she replied. . . . Then again, she would point them to the stars, and say, in her peculiar language, "Those are the same stars, and that is the same moon, that look down upon your brothers and sisters, and which they see as they look up to them, though they are ever so far away from us, and each other."

Thus, in her humble way, did she endeavour to show them their Heavenly Father, as the only being who could protect them. . . . at the same time, she would strengthen and brighten the chain of family affection, which she trusted extended itself sufficiently to connect the widely scattered members of her precious flock. These instructions of the mother were treasured up and held sacred by Isabella. . . .

(Truth 17-18)

The religious belief system of Truth's mother seems to derive from an animism which does not distinguish God from the stars which protectively "look down upon" Truth's scattered siblings. I suggest that Hurston signifies on the animism embedded in the Christian belief system of Truth; if Truth's is a Christianity cultivated out of the soil of her mother's animism, then Hurston's is a chiasmic return to that animism, which she nurtures out of the bankrupt clay of a Grandmother's Christian belief and its damaging effects on African American girl-children.

One final scenario I want to examine is that in which Truth and Janie each use their intimate, personal, and interactive relationship with God to resist systems of oppression established in the constitution of America, and the constitution of marriage respectively. At a religious meeting "where some speaker had alluded to the government of the United States, and had uttered sentiments in favor of its Constitution" (Truth 147), Truth

stood, erect and tall. . . and in a low and subdued tone of voice began by saying: "Children, I talks to God and God talks to me. I goes out and talks to God in de fields and de woods. [The weevil had destroyed thousands of acres of wheat in the West that year.] Dis morning I was walking out, and I got over de fence. I saw de wheat a holding up its head, looking very big. I goes up and takes holt ob it. You b'lieve it, dere was *no* wheat dare? I says,

God. . . what *is* de matter wid *dis* wheat? and he says to me, 'Sojourner, dere is a little weasel in it.' Now I hears talkin' about de Constitution and de rights of man. I comes up and I takes hold of dis Constitution. It looks *mighty big*, and I feels for *my* rights, but der aint any dare. Den I says, God, what *ails* dis Constitution? He says to me, 'Sojourner, dere is a little *weasel* in it.'" The effect upon the multitude was irresistible.

(147)

While Truth interrupts a conversation concerning the American constitution, Janie also interrupts the conversation of a group of males-- in this instance, discussing the benefits of wife-beating amongst themselves:

Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation.

"Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens."

(70-71)

For Janie, this is only the beginning of a deadly strategy of resistance against a husband who, like Truth's ailing American constitution, "looking very big" but bearing no wheat, "'big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice'" (75).

Out of such resistance, in both texts, comes a sense of oppositional women's own power, expressed in metaphors of increased physical stature. Truth, in winning the battle to regain the custody of her enslaved son, proclaims: "'Oh, my God! I know'd I'd have him agin. I was sure God would help me to get him. Why, I felt so *tall within*-- I felt as if the *power of a nation* was with me!'" (Truth 45). Later, describing the same incident, she writes: "I tell you, I stretched up. I felt as tall as the world!" (162). We may compare these words with Pheoby Watson's

exclamation after she has listened to Janie's story: "'Lawd!' Pheoby breathed out heavily, "Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. . .'" (Hurston 182). For example, Truth's call to preach is preceded by a religious vision in which Truth creates a "sanctum" (Truth 60; see also Hurston 10) under a willow tree where she converses with God. When Jesus appears to Truth at home, she exclaims: "'I *know* you, and I *don't* know you.' Meaning, 'You seem perfectly familiar. . . yet I know you not-- I cannot call you by name'" (Truth 67; see also Hurston 90). Truth's conversion clads the world "in new beauty, the very air sparkled as with diamonds. . . Jesus [was] transcendently lovely as well as great and powerful; for so he appeared to her, though he seemed but human. . .'" (Truth 68; see also Hurston 11).

The following questions will serve as a framework for investigation:

- 1) Exactly what "unified black sensibility" or "common blackness" does the voice of Their Eyes actually represent? In Their Eyes and in the narratives of so many of Hurston's preacherly foremothers, the issue of "community" is not a simple one, complicated as it is by considerations of not only race, but class and gender.
- 2) Hurston privileges a black oral tradition in a 1930's black (male) literary milieu which saw the vernacular as-- in the words of Richard Wright-- "counter-revolutionary" (Hemenway 241). How is Hurston's privileging of a narrational black orality in 1937 a function of her own-- and Janie's-- black *womanist* voice?
- 3) While writing and getting a silent white text to "speak" to them (what Gates calls the trope of the Talking Book) was important to the first black male autobiographers (Signifyin(g) Monkey 165), why were these concerns not equally important to the black women who began to set their stories down

a century later? 4) If, as Gates suggests, the most recognized black male writers of the nineteenth century discarded the centrality of Christianity and conversion in favour of increasingly secular and political autobiographies (Signifyin(g) Monkey 167), why did the black preacher women refuse to do likewise? 5) How does Hurston signify upon the attitudes and writings of her preacherly foremothers as a means of attaining a black female voice?

Investigating who Janie's community is, I want to examine two issues in Their Eyes which I feel are central to the interpretation of Janie's voice as strongly female-identified. One is the consolation and protection offered to Janie by women both in the courtroom scene, and in Janie's final return home; the other is Nanny's role in the text.

Janie's relationship with the black community (both in Joe Starks' town and in the Everglades) is at times difficult and problematic. At various times throughout the novel she is the object of their jealousy and condemnation. However, in the courtroom scene, we hear not Janie's individual words, but those of the narrator representing what seems to me to be a community voice and reiterating the legendary scene for us: "She tried to make them see how terrible it was. . . . She made them see how she couldn't ever want to be rid of him. She didn't plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed" (178).³ But we must wonder what community voice actually represents Janie when it is the white women who "cried and stood around her like a protecting wall, and the Negroes, with heads hung down, shuffled out and away" complaining: "'Yeah, de nigger women kin kill up all de mens dey wants tuh, but you bet' not kill one uh dem. . . . Well, you know whut dey say

"uh white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth." Dey do as dey please'" (179-80). While we may question the motives of crying white women who "applaud when the black (male) community is controlled" (DuPlessis 103), we cannot dismiss the fact that Janie yearns to tell her story to women, "instead of those menfolks" (Hurstun, Their Eyes 176), or that while Janie as black woman is isolated "at the intersection point where race, gender, and class and the hegemonic story of romance meet" (DuPlessis 105), she ultimately chooses to tell her entire life story to a black woman, Pheoby. It is Pheoby who Janie hopes will represent her before the harsh jury of her own black townfolk. Thus we must question whether the narrative voice of free indirect discourse in the novel is that of the general "unified" black community, or rather, a community of outspoken, own-mind black women who occupy the troubled spaces of interstitiality between a number of communities, never quite fitting into any of them-- very much like Hurston herself.

The second issue which establishes a strong sense of female voice in Their Eyes is Hurston's treatment of Nanny. Critics Gates and Awkward (Gates, Signifyin(g) Monkey 187; Awkward 25-6) dismiss Nanny as perverse and domineering, but I contend that she represents an extremely important and complex link in the continuity of a womanist tradition. Hurston portrays Nanny as an arresting Medusa figure, her head and face resembling "the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered" (12). But Gates sees Nanny as a suffocating negation of Janie's wonderfully lyrical image of blossoming pear trees: "Nanny is truly, as she later says to Janie in her own version of an oral slave narrative . . . a branch without

roots, at least the sort of roots that Janie is only just learning to extend" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 187). I would point out that for Hurston, Nanny represents the potential for a re-planting of roots, in spite of the fact that she is figured as a tree uprooted, and indeed includes herself among the uprooted (Their Eyes 15).

The figure of Medusa, while terrible, was not always negative, as the patriarchal myth of Perseus would lead us to believe. More ancient than the Greek legend is the Egyptian one, where Medusa or Maat was the serpent-goddess representing infinite female wisdom, signifying past, present and future, "all that has been, that is and that will be" (Barbara Walker 629). As such, this Medusa-like Nanny who wanted to "'preach a sermon about colored women sittin' on high'" has "'saved de text'" for Janie (Their Eyes 15-16). While Janie hates her grandmother for having taken "the horizon. . .and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her" (85), we cannot forget that it is Nanny who removes Janie from the yard of the white Mistress so that the child can have a proud black identity of her own; it is Nanny who has been a mother to Janie; it is Nanny who tells Janie the story of black women's lives, and it is Nanny who wants to protect Janie, however misguided and insensitive her sense of protection may seem:

"So you don't want to marry off decent like, do yuh? . . . You wants to make me suck de same sorrow yo' mama did, uh? . . . Mah back ain't bowed enough to suit yuh! . . . You answer me when Ah speak. Don't you set dere poutin' wid me after all Ah done went through for you!"

She slapped the girl's face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle. With her hand uplifted for the second blow she saw the huge tear that welled up from Janie's heart and stood in each eye. She saw the terrible agony and the lips tightened down to hold back the cry and desisted. Instead

she brushed back the heavy hair from Janie's face and stood there suffering and loving and weeping internally for both of them.

(13-14)

Nanny, in her fierce desire to protect Janie from the harsh realities of life at the hands of whites and men, resembles many black American mothers.

As bell hooks observes:

We were raised hearing stories about mothers punishing black children who were given no clear sense of what they had done that was considered wrong or inappropriate, because they felt that the child might assert themselves in ways outside the home that might lead white people to abuse and punish them. . . . [A]fter maternal rage had subsided, we might be given a bit of tenderness, behaviour that further reinforced the notion that somehow this fierce, humiliating critique was for our own good. Again these negative parental strategies were employed to prepare black children for entering a white-dominated society that our parents knew would not treat us well. They thought that by making us "tough," teaching us to endure pain with a stiff upper lip, they were ensuring our survival.

(34-7)

In refusing to marry Logan Killicks, Janie defies her grandmother's system of female self-defence, but does not forget Nanny's caution against white/male domination. Indeed, it is poignantly ironic that, hating her grandmother all the while, Janie spends her life expounding the very text Nanny passes down to her-- the desire to escape servitude and abuse at the hands of whites and men. But Janie takes this text farther than Nanny ever could in her limited, Christianized world-view. It seems to me that Janie becomes, in the metaphoric language of the nameless communal narrator, an Egyptian queen accompanied by her Pharaohic Tea Cake, burying her consort like a king, with his beloved earthly possessions about him. Tea Cake is the "son of Evening Sun" who rides "like a Pharaoh to his tomb" (180). In Egyptian myth, the goddess Isis, mother to the king (her consort), was also Medusa in another aspect (Barbara

Walker 454 & 629). Presiding over the principles of both creation and destruction (as Medusa also did), Isis was represented as the Egyptian throne: "Pharaohs sat on her lap protected by her arms or wings. The symbol she carried on her crown was the mu'at, 'foundation of the throne,' which also represented her alter ego Maat, the motherhood-principle called Right, Justice, Truth, or the All-seeing Eye" (Barbara Walker 454). The boyish Tea Cake as Pharaoh is also Osiris, Isis' son (prefiguring Christ), whose death and resurrection symbolize two processes: the ancient matrilinear process by which successive kings came to Egypt's throne; and the continuous cycles of the earth's vegetation. "Osiris was [Isis'] moon-fruit, the vegetation that was yearly destroyed and then regenerated by her" (Sjoo & Mor 168). And, indeed, for Janie, the end becomes the beginning as she returns full circle home: "So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead" (1).

Hurston's familiarity with Egyptian history, myth and culture would have derived from her training as an anthropologist. She began this work under the supervision of Franz Boaz, and later Charlotte Osgood, collecting data which related to black history, music, folklore, poetry, hoodoo. In her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," she compares black modes of expression to non- "Occidental," Egyptian ones: "So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the negro thinks in hieroglyphics" ("Characteristics" 50). Hurston's prototype for Janie-as-Isis, powerful goddess figure, arises in two of Hurston's earlier writings-- a short story entitled "Drenched in Light," and Jonah's Gourd Vine. In Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), Isis is one of Lucy Pearson's daughters. If Lucy, once "'full uh pepper'" (Hurston, Jonah's Gourd Vine 35) becomes "almost a parody of

the faithful, betrayed wife [subordinating] her dreams to [her husband's] ambitions" (Dove xiv), she does not want such a fate to befall her young daughter Isis. Lucy's poignant death scene is reminiscent of the exchange which occurred between Hurston and her own dying mother. In Dust Tracks on a Road Hurston writes: "I thought that she looked to me. . . . Her mouth was slightly open, but her breathing took up so much of her strength that she could not talk. But she looked at me, or so I felt, to speak for her. She depended on me for a voice" (86-7). In Jonah's Gourd Vine, the dying mother speaks, imparting important advice to her daughter and entrusting Isis with last-wish tasks to fulfil:

"Stop cryin', Isie, you can't hear whut Ahm sayin', 'member tuh git all de education you kin. . . . Don't you love nobody better'n you do yo'self. Do, you'll be dying befo' yo time is out. And, Isie, uh person kin be killed 'thout being struck un blow. Some uh dese things Ahm tellin' yuh, you wont understand 'em fuh years tuh come, but de time will come when you'll know. And Isis, when Ahm dyin' don't you let 'em take de pillow from under mah head, and be covering up de clock and de lookin' glass. . . . Ahm tellin' you in preference tuh de rest 'cause Ah know you'll see tuh it"

(130)

But like Hurston at the bedside of her own mother, young Isis is powerless to prevent her elders from performing the rituals she knows Lucy would not have wanted:

"Get her head offa dat pillow!" Mattie Mosely ordered. "Let her head down so she kin die easy."

Hoyt Thomas moved to do it, but Isis objected. "No, no, don't touch her pillow! Mama don't want de pillow from under her head!"

"Hush Isie!" Emmeline chided, "and let mama die easy. You makin' her suffer."

"Naw, naw! she said *not* tuh!" As her father pulled her away from her place above Lucy's head, Isis thought her mother's eyes followed her and she strained her ears to catch her words. But none came.

(Jonah's Gourd Vine 133)

Of her own failure to honour her mother's last wishes Hurston writes:

I was to agonize over that moment for years to come. In the midst of play, in wakeful moments after midnight, on the way home from parties, and even in the classroom during lectures. My thoughts would escape occasionally from their confines and stare me down.

Now, I know that I could not have had my way against the world If there is any consciousness after death, I hope that Mama knows that I did my best. She must know how I have suffered for my failure.

But life picked me up from the foot of Mama's bed, grief, self-despisement and all, and set my feet in strange ways. . . . That hour began my wanderings. Not so much in geography, but in time. Then not so much in time as *in spirit* [my emphasis]

(Dust Tracks 88-89)

The potential power of black women's voice, passed down by communities of mothers to daughters in a matrilinear process, is for Hurston an intensely personal/spiritual/mythical phenomenon. In "Drenched in Light," one of her earliest writings, we see Hurston shaping that phenomenon-- or myth, in tropes and characters that would appear in her later works. The short story was published in Opportunity, a black magazine, in 1924. The religious undertone of the title becomes more apparent as "Drenched in Light" develops. In the story, a mischievous and exuberant young black girl named Isis-- whom her repressive grandmother refers to as "'dat limb of Satan'"-- sits atop her grandmother's gatepost, yearning to partake in the excitement of the world which passes by her lookout. Hurston's descriptions of Isie as "perched upon the gate" ("Drenched in Light" 371) and of Janie as commencing her life "at Nanny's gate" (Their Eyes 10), strongly echo the manner in which she describes her own child-self in her autobiography:

I used to take a seat on top of the gate-post and watch the world go by. One way to Orlando ran past my house, so the carriages and cars would pass before me. The movement made me glad to see it. Often the white travellers would hail me, but more often I

hailed them, and asked, "Don't you want me to go a piece of the way with you?"

They always did. . . .I did not do this with the permission of my parents. . . . My grandmother worried about my forward ways a great deal. She had known slavery and to her my brazenness was unthinkable.

"Git down offa dat gate-post! You li'l sow, you! Git down! Setting up dere looking dem white folks right in de face! They's gwine to lynch you, yet. And don't stand in dat doorway gazing out at 'em neither. Youse too brazen to live long."

(Dust Tracks 45-6)

Dressing herself in various costumes ranging from "trailing robes and golden slippers with blue bottoms" ("Drenched in Light" 371) to her grandmother's "brand new red tablecloth" ("Drenched in Light" 373), the girl "[rides] white horses with flaring pink nostrils to the horizon. . . . She [pictures] herself gazing over the edge of the world into the abyss. . . ." ("Drenched in Light" 371). This goddess-like creatrix becomes the object of a white philanthropist's curiosity. The white woman is significantly named Helen, which seems a reference to that which is Hellenic, white and appropriating⁴ in relation to that which is Egyptian and black. Helen, enthralled by Isie, wants to adopt the child. The story ends with Helen's "hungrily" uttered admission: "'I want a little of her sunshine to soak into my soul. I need it.'" ("Drenched in Light" 374). Hurston's construction of the creative black girl as Egyptian Isis makes "Drenched in Light" an ironic story of spiritual conversion-- not the traditional conversion of Blacks to whiteness and/or Christianity, but of a soul-starved white woman to the joyfulness of Blackness: "The lady went on: 'I want brightness and this Isis is joy itself, why she's drenched in light!'" ("Drenched in Light" 373). Thus, Zora becomes Isie, who later becomes Janie, who becomes Isis again, as the Egyptian goddess trope introduced in "Drenched in Light" is refigured and completed in Their

Eyes Were Watching God.

Indeed, Egyptian blackness manifests itself in the very language of Their Eyes. I have already mentioned Hurston's theory that while white westerners communicate in a written language, Egyptians and "the Negro" think "in hieroglyphics" ("Characteristics" 50). In 1937 she alienated herself from her black male contemporaries by daring to do what they would not-- speak in the language of her own blackness. During and after the Harlem Renaissance, foremost black writers such as Alain Locke and Richard Wright viewed "characteristics of Negro expression" and the emphasis on folklore which marked Hurston's work as storytelling identified with the uncultured, intellectually lacking, passive, minstrelsh-- perhaps "feminine." At a time when neither the womanist voice nor strong black folk forms were being particularly valorized by foremost black male literary aspirants to "legitimacy," Hurston boldly claimed both. Thus, it is both a black and a female-valorised metaphorical/oral language that she develops in her bold creation of the "speakerly text." As Lorraine Bethel observes:

Black women embody by their sheer physical presence two of the most hated identities in this racist/sexist country. Whiteness and maleness in this culture have not only been seen as physical identities, but codified into states of being and world views. The codification of Blackness and femaleness by whites and males is contained in the terms "thinking like a woman" and "acting like a nigger," both based on the premise that there are typically negative Black and female ways of acting and thinking. Hereafter, the most pejorative concept in the white/male world view would be thinking and acting like a "nigger woman." This is useful for understanding literary criticism of Hurston's works, which often attacks her personally for simply conducting herself as what she was: a Black woman.

(178-179)

Janie, like Hurston's literary foremothers, undergoes conversion and receives a call to preach, but her vision is not that of her Christian

grandmother's. Nanny relates her own aspirations:

"Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah'd take a broom and cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost offa de highway and next thing Ah knowed here you was in de world. So whilst Ah was tendin' you of nights Ah said Ah'd save de text for you."

(Their Eyes 15-16)

The significance of this sermon of sorts becomes clear in light of the importance of preaching for Hurston's literary foremothers. Nanny's aspirations to attain a powerful voice for herself as a woman have failed. The dream of the woman preacher has been subsumed, altered beyond all recognition by life's harsh contingencies. Now all Nanny can hope for is to protect Janie from sexual and racial degradation.

The young girl's conversion, however, is not a conversion to the Christian religion and bleak life view of her grandmother, but a conversion to a religion of sensual paganism. The blossoming pear tree in the yard has "called her to come and gaze upon a mystery"; the "singing she heard . . . had nothing to do with her ears"; the bees hum in an "alto chant" before sinking "into the sanctum of a bloom"; she "had been summoned to behold a revelation!" Through the eyes of the newly converted, Janie sees a Jesus-like young man, "a glorious being coming up the road. In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor" (10-11). Cheryl Wall, in her discussion of Hurston's Mules and Men comments that the "final section. . . locates the sources of female empowerment firmly within the pre-Christian, Afro-centric belief system of hoodoo" (Wall 672). In Their Eyes also, the pagan subverts and replaces the Christian. The Pharaonic Tea Cake is first described in a manner strikingly similar to the

one in which Sojourner Truth encounters Jesus: ". . . a tall man came into the place. . . She knew she didn't know his name, but he looked familiar" (Their Eyes 90). Indeed, while Tea Cake is an ambivalent and problematic figure, Hurston nevertheless presents him as the closest embodiment of the "truth" which Janie has been seeking to fulfil her visionary dream. His Christian name, Vergible Woods, while perhaps a pun on "veritable," also is suggestive of the Latin "vergere"-- to bend, turn, or be inclined; "woods," of course, indicates the direction of that bending or inclination-- toward that which is nature-based. It is Tea Cake who takes Janie deep into the heart of the South. There, on the healing and cleansing "muck," she discovers a sense of spiritual vision and richness she never had with Logan Killicks or Jody Starks.

Janie's call to preach her gospel of independent womanhood comes on the porch of Jody Stark's store. During a male conversation concerning the benefits and drawbacks of wife beating,

Janie did what she had never done before, that is, thrust herself into the conversation.

"Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens."

(71)

It is only after this symbolic recourse to the license of God that Janie is able to signify on Jody, precipitating her own reclaiming of self and power, and Jody's simultaneous loss of these attributes. But Janie is no agent of God here. Jody and the inhabitants of their town are certain that Jody "'was fixed and [Janie] was the one dat did it'" (78).

If Hurston is signifying on the Christianity of her literary foremothers, refiguring the power they found in God as a pagan, animistic power, how are we to interpret the apocalyptic flood scene? The echoes of the Biblical Flood in which Noah builds an ark while his pagan neighbours blithely ignore the coming of the deluge are too loud to ignore. In a scene of reversal, the Christians become the fools while the pagans are the "saved" ones. Ironically, it is Janie and Tea Cake who become these foolish (Christian) neighbours, as they ridicule the (pagan) Indians who have observed the natural signs of the coming disaster and have headed out of the hurricane area. Janie and Tea Cake are descendants of a white economy of slavery-- an economy undergirded by a religious system based upon a slave-like adherence to the dictates of a master-God. As such, in the crucial moment of the hurricane, they revert to a dependence on white/Christian knowledge, and can only passively "question God." It seems that we may interpret this scene in two ways: we can see Janie's experience in the flood as (Christian) divine punishment for her "womanish" self-assertion; or, as the result of Janie's refusal to heed natural signs as her pagan Indian brothers and sisters do. Janie, Tea Cake and Motor Boat can only wait helplessly for the storm to reach them: "They huddled closer and stared at the door. . . The time was past for asking the white folks what to look for through that door. Six eyes were questioning God" (150-151). But the powerful and punitive Christian God of white men will provide no answer: "They sat in company with others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God" (151). In

the ultimate analysis, for Hurston, the Christian God must be replaced by a belief in the power of human beings who can, as Cheryl Wall cites Lawrence Levine: "'read' the phenomena surrounding and affecting them because people [are] 'part of. . . the Natural Order of things, attached to the Oneness that [binds] together all matter, animate and inanimate, all spirits, visible or not'" (Wall 672). This is the essence of Vodou-- which means "life force," and from which the western corruption, "voodoo" derives (Teish x-xi).

Janie can and does return from the Day of Judgment. The end is the beginning in a cycle of death and resurrection. Even if we are left to ponder Janie's fate, we are also left with the words of her friend Pheoby: "'Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie'" (182). It is interesting to note that in the narratives of Foote (209), Elaw (67 & 124), and Truth (xi) there is mention of the Biblical Phoebe, whom in the words of St. Paul: "I commend to you, our sister. . . I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me" (Romans 16:1). Hurston's Pheoby is indeed the bearer of Good News, but rather than the Good News of the Gospel, she carries the message of female power and continuity which the narrator also conveys to us. Perhaps the increasingly vernacular free indirect discourse of the novel is not that of Janie, but of the narrator, the "sister" who becomes more and more identified with the story she is telling and the woman she is telling about. As Janie acquires a stronger sense of unified black female self, so does the narrator, who, in listening and telling, becomes one with Janie, Pheoby and a common black sisterhood.

Hurston's text, then, stands on the threshold of modernity, between the profoundly spiritual works of Hurston's descendant daughters -- women such as Morrison, Walker and Bambara-- and the equally powerful spiritual autobiographies of her ancestral mothers-- Belinda, Lee, Elaw, Jackson, Truth, Foote, Smith, Elizabeth and Broughton-- the first black women to inscribe an African American spirituality on American shores. An examination of these early spiritual narratives fills an important gap in the analysis of Their Eyes Were Watching God as a speakerly text. While Gates and Awkward regard the text's orality as most importantly indicative of a developing black sensibility in Janie, it would seem that Hurston also uses a strongly defined but scarcely acknowledged early black *women's* sensibility. Such a sensibility does not privilege literacy in the manner that the early writings of black males do. The narratives of the nineteenth-century black women evangelists record a literal struggle to speak as preachers and as women. It is in the power of a vernacular, sermonic speech that these early women writers most often defend their rights as women-- and that speech is very often reflected in their written narratives. And unlike black male autobiographers who replace religious with secular concerns, black preacher women continue to cling to God as the directing and legitimizing force behind their voices. Replacing God with a female sense of power derived from Egyptian goddess worship and voodoo, Hurston accomplishes an astounding chiasmus; she carries on the oral tradition of her Christian foremothers, but as they increasingly left Africa and the vernacular behind, Hurston effects a *return* to African ways of knowing and saying. In her development of the speakerly text, she challenges respectable white/male "literacy" with the

black vernacular, creating a new tradition (or is it an old one?) which Alice Walker would rescue from obscurity many years later. In that tradition the vernacular voices of black women can be heard in their own right. Belinda, standing before the Massachusetts legislature in 1797, is nowhere more close to us than she is in the writings and the dreams of her granddaughters-- Hurston and the contemporary African American women novelists. It is to these contemporary women that I turn now.

Endnotes

1. As Audre Lorde explains, such erotic self-knowledge becomes the spiritual basis for an all-encompassing knowledge, creativity and love:

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek work *eros*, the personification of love in all of its aspects-- born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

(Lorde 55)

2. The Gospel of Luke recounts the manner in which the resurrected Jesus appears to two followers on their way to Emmaus. The men "were kept from recognizing him," and it is only after Jesus breaks bread with them that "they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight" (Luke 24: 15 & 31). While the sense of this encounter is that the men were "familiar" with Jesus without initially recognizing him, the actual word "familiar" is not used in Luke, as it is in both Truth and Hurston-- along with the assertion in both cases that the women did not know the name of their visitors.

3. Critics have debated the vexed issue of Janie's voice in the courtroom scene. Alice Walker, Robert Stepto and Mary Helen Washington feel that the relation of the scene by the narrator suggests Janie's silence. Washington relates a debate she witnessed between Walker and Stepto, in which Walker argued that "women did not have to speak when men thought they should, that they would choose when and where they wish to speak because while many women *had* found their own voices, they also knew when it was better not to use it" (Washington, "Foreword," xii). Both Washington and Stepto, however, are "uncomfortable with the absence of Janie's voice in the courtroom scene" (Washington, "Foreword," xii). I argue that the relating of events by the narrator suggests not silence on Janie's part, but the opposite-- a communication of stories between women so that, by the time the story comes to be told by the narrator, Janie's courtroom experience has become a legendary tale, handed down from one woman to another.

4. George James cogently argues that the intellectual conquest of Egypt by Greece began as a result of the Persian invasion around 525 BC, during which time Greeks began to travel to Egypt "for the purpose of their education" and continued to do so until the Greeks gained possession of Egypt, and access to Egypt's renowned centers of learning through the military conquests of Alexander the Great (James 42). In this way, many of Egypt's myths were appropriated by Greece, and the mythical characters assigned Greek names.

Similarly, during the Harlem Renaissance in America, white "adoption" of Black art, Black artists, and Black culture was a

controversial issue. In the words of "the acerbic and self-publishing" Wallace Thurman, a Black Renaissance writer, Black artists found themselves competing for favouritism "'among those whites who went in for Negro prodigies'" (Anderson 212). Hurston herself often wrote and researched under the aegis of white patrons like Franz Boaz and Fannie Hurst, and, by her own admission to black friends, was not above being "ingratiating and accommodatng" in her relationships with them (Bell 119-20). I see this not as an indictment of Hurston herself, but of the harsh economic realities facing a black woman writer who "was forced to rely, like Tennessee Williams's Blanche, 'on the kindness of strangers.' Can anything be more dangerous, if the strangers are forever in control? Zora, who worked so hard, was never able to make a living from her work" (Alice Walker 90).

**Chapter Ten/ The Blues Bad Preacher Women: (Per)forming of Self
in the Novels of Contemporary African American Women**

I have investigated how recursion, music, sermonality, free indirect discourse, the black female body, trial, alterity and search for community, alienation, performance, and unnatural womanhood figure in the religious life-writings of early African American women. I now want to examine how the fictional works of contemporary African American women-- in exhibiting many of the above themes, tropes and formal strategies-- demonstrate the existence of a spiritual-literary lineage which connects the contemporary women to the spiritual mothers writing before them. I argue that, while some of the connections between early and contemporary works are deliberate significations on the part of the modern writers (for example, Walker's significations in The Color Purple on Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, or Hurston's significations on the nineteenth-century Christian black preacher-women), there are times when the connections are *not* deliberate, but, rather, seem to derive from a powerful commonality of shared histories, discourses, and ways of seeing and knowing which have been passed down among African American women over time. It is to these commonalities that I finally turn, focusing here on 1) the figure of the "unnatural" preacher woman; 2) scenes of communal trial, and 3) the issue of black female performance both as thematic and rhetorical device in the text. How contemporary novels signify on the literary configurations of nineteenth-century black evangelist women demonstrates what Karla

Holloway, Barbara Smith, and other black theorists have asserted-- that "black women's literature reflects its community-- the cultural ways of knowing as well as ways of framing that knowledge in language" (Holloway Moorings 1). Indeed, "thematically, stylistically, aesthetically, and conceptually Black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experience they have been obliged to share" (Smith 174).

The Blues Bad Preacher Women

In contrast to their white counterparts, the early black spiritual mothers present almost unanimously in their autobiographies a preacherly self negotiating the public realm. This figure of the preacher woman recurs with astonishing frequency in the fictional works of contemporary black American women. I am interested in how the figure recurs, because, rather than the holy woman called by a patriarchal Christian God, she increasingly appears as whore, mad-woman, blues performer, conjure woman, priestess or any combination of these. Interestingly, in black American literature, the figure of the black preacher woman has been viewed with suspicion and disapproval by those subscribing to patriarchal Christian religion. As Betty J. Overton observes in her discussion of black female ministers in African American literature:¹

What one does garner from the few women ministers in black literature is a half view, a view characterized by an attitude that women do not belong in the pulpit and that they earn their suffering and problems by daring to take on this role. For the most part they are not admirable characters but stereotypes of the worst that is in religious ministry. They often become normal people only after leaving the ministry.

(165)

The suspicion with which black women ministers are viewed may be

extended to all black women who question prevailing hegemonies, taking on roles traditionally reserved for (white and/or black) men, and living outside of male power systems. I want to examine several contemporary novels in which the figure of the "blues bad preacher woman" appears: Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Toni Cade Bambara's The Salt Eaters, and Toni Morrison's Paradise. (All four titles are religious in reference, conflating both Christian and animistic notions of the divine.)²

If the modern blues bad holy woman exists outside of Christianity, what I will call the blues *good* holy woman (and even then, she is still wrapped in controversy)-- perhaps the original blues woman-- is to be found inside of it. The nineteenth-century evangelists (some more so than others) are such women. Jeffrey Stewart comments that in reading the 1851 autobiography which Truth wrote with the help of white editor/amanuensis Olive Gilbert,

[i]f we follow Sterling Stuckey's suggestion to view Sojourner Truth as a great blues artist, and if we listen to her words with an ear to the "blues voice" that Houston A. Baker has found in African-American literature, then we can still hear her voice. . . in spite of the amendments and interpolations of others.

(xxxv)

Stuckey himself argues that Truth is "a kind of priestess. . . one who, like a great Blues singer, embodied and helped sustain a number of the most essential values of her people" (vii). According to Esther Terry, Truth is a blues singer in the traditional African American grain-- one who "gives voice" to or "calls up"

the harsh experiences of her life. . . in order to confront them and thereby gain dominance over them. The great need to sing the Blues is the need to survive a reality that threatens to pull one

down to annihilation. Sojourner's moans, so utterly connected with her memory of slavery, are her Blues.

(431)

If Janie succeeds Truth as blues holy woman, in Alice Walker's The Color Purple it is Shug Avery who becomes "the blues singer who is the moral center of the novel" (Bell 263). Bernard Bell observes the manner in which Walker uses the black vernacular, black American religion, and Shug as blues singer to signify on a "tradition of such blues 'bad' women as Bessie Smith" (264). Shug Avery "embodies and evokes the moral ambivalence of many black Americans toward music and behavior that they feel make the best of a bad situation by being as raw, mean, and wild as human existence itself frequently is" (Bell 264). It is Shug who introduces Celie to an animistic belief system. Shug is religious in the manner of the blues bad holy woman, explaining to Celie: "'Just because I don't harass it like some peoples us know don't mean I ain't got religion'" (Walker 199), and representing "a contemporary symbol of the ideal pattern of sexual and spiritual liberation and a rebuke of traditional Afro-American values and institutions" (Bell 264). Indeed, Shug's sermon about God operates in direct juxtaposition to the preacher's sermon in which Shug is morally condemned and criticized:

Even the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery, now she down. He take her condition for his text. He don't call no name, but he don't have to. Everybody know who he mean. He talk bout a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking other women mens. Talk bout slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner.

(46)

In contrast, Shug asks Celie: "'tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to

show'" (Walker 200). The ultimate blues holy woman, Shug preaches:

"God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks, I think. Sorrow, lord. Feeling like shit. . . . I believe God is everything. . . . Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it. . . . But more than anything else, God love admiration I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

(Walker 202-203)

Bell seems vaguely uncomfortable with Walker's lack of moral and political sympathy toward "what she considers anachronistic, chauvinistic conventions in the black family and the black church" and with the fact that Walker "ascribes Celie's abject shame and passivity to the dominance of patriarchy, hypocrisy, and otherworldliness in the black church and family. . ." (Bell 264-5). His description of what Walker intends to be celebratory in The Color Purple rings strangely terse and hollow: the novel is "a contemporary rewriting of Janie Crawford's dreams of what a black woman ought to be and do. But rather than heterosexual love, lesbianism is the rite of passage to selfhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood for Celie, Walker's protagonist" (263); or later: "The color purple signifies a metaphysical, social, and personal rebirth and a celebration of lesbianism as a natural, beautiful experience of love" (265). Bell finally feels able to articulate his discomfort directly as he addresses what he calls the "problematic" nature of the "implied author and protagonist's hostility toward black men, who are humanized only upon adopting womanist principles of sexual egalitarianism" (266). Indeed, it is this very discomfort of Bell's which we see manifested over and over again when the gatekeepers of (black and white) male hegemony-- both within and outside

of black women's texts-- are confronted with what I have termed the "cult of unnatural womanhood"-- the Sojourners, Rebeccas, Celies, Shugs, Tashis, Pilates, Sulas, Janies, Sethes, Violets, Minnie Ransoms, Velmas, Mama Days, and all the Convent women of Paradise.

These women-- Janie Crawford (Their Eyes Were Watching God); Minnie Ransom and Velma Henry (The Salt Eaters); and Consolata Sosa and the Convent women (Paradise)-- as "unnatural" holy-women, figures of communal scrutiny, stand outside of their communities, spectacles put on trial by (often skeptical) juries of their peers. For these black women reconstructing their lives can be a dangerous undertaking. How do they make their lives valuable in the face of a hegemonic system of ethics often virtually in complete opposition to their own?

Trials of the Spirit and the Blues Bad Women

As I have mentioned, the scene of trial first appears in one of the earliest precursors to date of African American female autobiography (Smith Foster 44-5)-- Belinda's petition to the legislature of Massachusetts, dated 1787. Standing resolutely outside of a Euro-American ontological system, she challenges it with the fierce oppositionality of one who is more African than American, more pagan than Christian. The fiction of Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Toni Cade Bambara, written two centuries after Belinda's petition, seems a return to that original point of arrival (or is it departure, in the manner of the enchained Ibos who, arriving on American soil, took one look and walked off upon the water, saying they were going home? (Dash xi)) of defiant African and Africentric women upon America's shores. It is the conflation of the scene of the trial with what I will call the departure of the African daughters from

Eurocentric mores that I want to examine.

Between Belinda and these modern novelists, however, there stand several black women who also undergo trial, and it is perhaps in the autobiographies of the nineteenth century black evangelical women that we first observe how trial of the spirit is mapped upon trial of the black woman (as black and as woman) by her peers. Autobiography after autobiography recounts at least one scene of trial in which the black female evangelist, convinced of her powers to speak the Word of God, must answer to a jury (official or unofficial) of those who would condemn her for speaking as African American and as woman. Concerning the long history of black women on trial for speaking up and speaking out, in particular the trials of Phillis Wheatley (1772) and Anita Hill (1991), Karla Holloway points out that "skepticism, outright disbelief, and implied derision surrounded both events, and the powerful presence of the judiciary stalked both the margins and the centers" (Holloway "The Body Politic" 481). Holloway observes that because Wheatley "had the audacity to claim she was the author of a thin volume of poems," and because Anita Hill dared to accuse black Judge Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, the women found themselves positioned "at the center of a conflict over credibility. . . . attempt[ing] a negotiation of racial and gender politics within which neither had a stable or legitimized presence" (Holloway "The Body Politic" 482). Speaking out becomes a public event, and the black woman a spectacle, a doubly negative example (as black, as woman) for all other black women who might attempt similar action. Thus, it is silence which seems safest:

The positions of the black and female body in literature and in contemporary cultural politics reinforce notions of constraint and

the conflicted nature of our silence. Even some who believed Anita Hill's testimony found her guilty of speech: she should have kept quiet, they argued, rather than tell on a black man and fracture the fragile unity of the African American community.

("Body Politic" 489-90)

Holloway goes on to cite other contemporary examples of black women who were faced with the injunction to be silent-- for example, Robin Givens and Diseree Washington, victims of prizefighter Mike Tyson's "explosive violence," were accused of hurting black men with their testimonies and of possessing "some motive other than truth-telling in their public recitations of his abuse." The scrutiny black women have found it necessary to subject themselves to in order to gain for themselves the "inalienable rights" which others often take for granted is a scrutiny still widely operative in America today. The autobiographies of Julia Foote, Sojourner Truth, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Jarena Lee, and the petition of Belinda have recorded the spiritual and secular trials of black women scrutinized in the public realm. Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Morrison's Paradise, Bambara's Salt Eaters, and Walker's Color Purple turn these trials into heightened scenes of crisis where black women, in facing communal juries, act as catalysts for individual and communal transformation.

Repeatedly, the autobiographies of black women chronicle the disbelief and disapprobation which meet their efforts to speak publicly, and to preach the word of God. Such disapprobation comes from friends, superiors, brothers, husbands, but I am most interested in the public condemnations the women face, since these set the stage for the trope of the trial-by-communal-jury we see in later black women's works of fiction. In a chapter entitled "Public Effort-- Excommunication," Julia Foote (1879) describes the sneering ridicule she receives from a minister of the AME

church:

From this time the opposition to my lifework commenced, instigated by the minister, Mr. Beman. . . . I then held meetings in my own house; whereat the minister told the members that if they attended them he would deal with them, for they were breaking the rules of the church. When he found that I continued the meetings, and that the Lord was blessing my feeble efforts, he sent a committee of two to ask me if I considered myself a member of his church. I told them I did, and should continue to do so until I had done something worthy of dismembership. At this, Mr. Beman sent another committee with a note, asking me to meet him with the committee, which I did. He asked me a number of questions. . . . The next evening, one of the committee came to me and told me that I was no longer a member of the church, because I had violated the rules of the discipline by preaching. . . . At that time, I thought it my duty as well privilege to address a letter to the Conference, which I took to them in person, stating all the facts. . . . My letter was slightly noticed, and then thrown under the table. Why should they notice it? It was only the grievance of a woman, and there was no justice meted out to women in those days. Even ministers of Christ did not feel that women had any rights which they were bound to respect.

(206-7)

Significantly, as William Andrews notes, Foote's final comment purposely echoes the edict of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in the Dredd Scott Court Decision of 1857, that African Americans "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect" (Andrews Sisters of the Spirit 20). In conflating her own experience before several "committees" of sexist AME ministers with the racism of the Dredd Scott edict, Foote comments loudly upon her complex situation at the intersection of blackness and femaleness. As Holloway asserts, it is these very identities which have created implicit and explicit legal, political and cultural contracts in America which enforce silence on black women, and encourage black women to themselves exercise "vocal constraint" ("Body Politic" 489). But it is in facing a public jury (official or unofficial), and in breaking silence that some black women achieve a sense of selfhood, often at great cost to themselves.

Sometimes, as we have seen in the case of Belinda, black women *request* a court hearing, purposely entering the public sphere in order to sue for justice³-- a dangerous action, indeed, since the very judiciary to which they appeal has been instrumental in the oppression of blacks and/or women. In the public space of the courtroom or community, it is the black woman who goes on trial, regardless of the fact that she is often the one suing for justice. Rebecca Cox Jackson, for example, repeatedly requests that the male ministers of the AME church publicly try her instead of privately attempting to sabotage her preaching efforts; but for this request, Jackson is ridiculed, condemned and made the object of community rumour. Finally, she receives the savage indictment of her own brother. In a chapter entitled "Occasion sought against me. A trial of faith," she writes:

[T]hey had stoned me out of the Jersey [sic], and. . . they were going to stone me to death in Philadelphia. . . . I went to Brother Peterson, asked him who gave me the appointment in the Presbyterian church. He said he did not know. I told him I thought it was him, as his wife brought it to me. "However, I have just come from New York. I heard there that they were agoing to stone me here for preaching an awful doctrine. . . Now, Brother Peterson. . . .[i]f I have preached a false doctrine, I wish to be tried by your Bishop and five or six of your ministers, men that can read and that are spiritual, and four or five of the ministers of Big Wesley Church, two or three of the Little Wesley Church, and the minister of the Presbyterian church, and yourself. . . ." So I left and went home. On the next morning, my brother came around. He seemed as if he could tear me in pieces. He was like a lion. I told him the same as I told Brother Peterson. He said, "Try thee?-- Ah, *that* thee will never get, me girl!"

(150-1)

Thus, *not* being granted the legitimacy of a trial becomes a continuing trial in itself, as Jackson doggedly continues to speak publicly in the face of savage condemnation and resistance. Such resistance to the self-assertion

of black women amounts to what Jackson calls a "cut[ting] and carv[ing]" of the self (Jackson 103). Jackson recounts a brutal dream in which the intruder who carves out her entrails is none other than a group of ministers who later indirectly threaten her with incredible violence:

And there was three Methodist ministers that said I ought not to live. . . . These three appointed what death I ought to die. One said I ought to be stoned to death, one said tarred and feathered and burnt, one said I ought to be put in a hogshead, driven full of spikes, and rolled down a hill.

(149)

If the autobiographies of Foote and Jackson recount trials of the spirit, Sojourner Truth's narrative straddles both the spiritual world of religious preaching and the secular arena of abolition and women's rights. In Truth, spiritual trial ultimately produces the strength for her to sue in a secular court for custody of her son. It is a strong belief in God and the power of resistance, maintained against the derision of her mistress, which drives Truth to legal action. With the help of God and a kind Quaker, Truth "was taken and set down near Kingston, with directions to go to the Court House, and enter complaint to the Grand Jury" (47).

Truth's oppositionality in relation to everything the U.S. court system represents is perhaps best captured in her naive understanding of legal discourse:

By a little inquiry, she found which was the building she sought, went into the door, and taking the first man she saw of imposing appearance for the *grand* jury, she commenced her complaint. But he very civilly informed her there was no Grand Jury there; she must go up stairs. When she had with some difficulty ascended the flight through the crowd that filled them, she again turned to the "*grandest*" looking man she could select, telling him she had come to enter a complaint to the Grand Jury. . . .

(47-8)

In these scenes of naivete, which we see also in the works of male autobiographers such as Gronniosaw, Marrant and Jea, the "simple savage" encounters European "civilization", only to be found deplorably and comically ignorant of its sophistications. But where the male writers contrast these portraits of their past savage selves with the men of (Euro) culture they have now become, Truth never achieves metamorphosis into a pseudo-white sophisticate. Instead, she remains forever the naif. On the one hand, as Nell Painter argues, this tactic on the part of Truth encourages a "black-as-ignorant-primitive" stereotype which "struck educated whites as quaintly and picturesquely charming" (Painter 158) while erasing Truth's status as respected and respectable "woman." On the other hand, I would argue that Truth's refusal to become "woman" (do whites not also define the parameters of "womanhood" and female respectability?) keeps her on the margins of hegemonic discourse, forever able to ridicule it, even as it ridicules her. As her experience in Court demonstrates, Truth in her naivete (and she uses this naivete in similar ways on many other occasions) exposes the racist and sexist workings of a white court system which professes fairness and objectivity, but which permits only white males of a certain class and order to sit in judgment over plaintiffs and defendants. Literally speaking, Truth knows very well whom she should seek out-- the grandest looking (white) men she can find. When she eventually locates the proper group of whitemales, they can only "burst into an uproarious laugh" at her further naivete; when ordered to "'swear by this book'" (48) that the boy she desires to retrieve is indeed her son, Truth raises the "book, which she thinks must have been the Bible. . . putting it to her lips [and] began to swear it was her child" (48).

This image, of Truth putting her lips to the bible, is strikingly reminiscent of what Gates describes as "the trope of the (un)talking book" in his study of early black male autobiographers. But where Gronniosaw and Marrant raise the Bible to their ears, expecting that it will "speak" to them, Truth's action seems a reverse one. Gronniosaw and Marrant are disappointed by the text's refusal to "speak." The silence in which their symbolic action occurs is indeed deafening, as Gates comments; and it is only much later that they obtain the knowledge of Euro-culture necessary to combine oracy with literacy, to interact with and produce the written text. Their acquisition of literacy goes hand in hand with their acquisition of grand clothes, European manners and Christianity. However, Truth-- who refuses to acquire literacy, or any other European accoutrements-- revises the scene of the (un)talking book by privileging oracy only. In fact, she literally talks all over the (un)talking book, and while her white audience (both the grand jurors and the implied reader) may laugh "uproariously" at her, Truth (unlike her black male counterparts) achieves her intended purpose. Early black male autobiographers remain ineffectual until they acquire the necessary Euro-characteristics, literacy being foremost among these. But Truth-- without literacy, in the manner of her foremother Belinda-- effects legal action in her own favour: "When the pleading was at an end, Isabella understood the Judge to declare, as the sentence of the Court, that the "boy be delivered into the hands of the mother-- having no other master, no other controller, no other conductor, but his mother" (53). Thus, it is in a going-against hegemonic systems, while using and/or being subjected to them, that Truth and other black women who find themselves subject to public judgment or communal trial,

attain a voice with which to assert themselves.

In Chapter Nine I discussed the manner in which the trial scene in Their Eyes Were Watching God functions as Hurston's secular literalization of the spiritual trial of her evangelist foremothers. In this courtroom scene, it seems to me that the communal voice of the nameless narrator bears witness to Janie's story as it was told to Pheoby in a powerful instance of free indirect discourse. Critics such as Bell, Stepto and Washington have questioned the effectiveness of this third-person account (Bell 123, Washington "Foreword" xii) and others have queried the significance of the fact that Janie is supported only by a group of "crying white women" (DuPlessis 103) whose relief at seeing black men controlled might explain their supportiveness; but it is here that Hurston demonstrates her understanding of the complicated politics at work at the intersection of race, class and gender. The "colored people" are "all against [Janie]," "pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks" (Hurston Their Eyes 176). The white women have "made a little applause" (178), "cried and stood around [Janie] like a protecting wall," these "kind white friends who had realized her feelings" (179). Yet it is the nameless -- and race-unspecified -- narrator whose voice becomes one with Janie's. That narrator relates how Janie "didn't plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed" (178). I suggest that it is a community of women that the nameless narrator represents, women black and white who, with their own various (mis)understandings of the politics of Janie's situation at the intersection of race, class and gender, support her for a number of reasons and individual motives. It

seems fitting, in light of our understanding of the complexities and shrewd astuteness of Hurston herself, that her presentation leaves many problematic questions unanswered. In this scene of trial, then, Hurston herself comes under scrutiny, as does her nameless narrator, Janie, Janie's white supporters, and all (im)perfectly "wild women"⁴ who dare to operate outside male hegemonic systems.

I have already mentioned the manner in which Shug in The Color Purple advocates her own animistic belief system over and against that of the town preacher who "got his mouth on" her (Walker 46). Indeed, Shug as blues bad woman, comes under scrutiny and judgment of the entire town: "Shug Avery sick and nobody in this town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. . . ." (45). Interestingly, in this same passage, Celie describes the manner in which *she* feels scrutinized by the town women who "look at me there struggling with Mr. ___ children. . . . [T]hey stare at me. Puzzle. I keep my head up, best I can" (45). The passage connects Celie and Shug-- both of whom undergo communal examination for different reasons entirely-- and demonstrates the hypocrisy of the "jury" which passes judgment on both women. That jury of townswomen would smile at Celie's husband Mr. ___ while "say[ing] amen against Shug" (46). Celie's sentiment, "[s]omebody got to stand up for Shug" (46), allies her with this blues bad woman and marks the beginning of a liason in which Celie and Shug, along with Nettie and "our children" build a matriarchal community of their own within the larger township.

In The Salt Eaters the voice of black preacherly female assertion, linked strongly to African animistic belief systems, is put on trial as the last alternative in the healing of one woman, Velma Henry, and their entire

Southern black community. Minnie Ransom, like Janie Starks, Shug Avery and many other blues bad preacher women, derives from Christian roots; "sent off to Bible college" (53) in her youth, she performs⁵ upon the psychically wounded Velma "the miracle of. . . laying on the hands" (9) within an apostolic "circle of twelve" (11) which functions as a "prayer group" (12). Yet, in her dialogue with Christianity, this blues bad preacher woman must always find her own voice, her own story to tell: "'They packed me off to seminary thinking helping and healing and nosing around was about being good. . . . No, good ain't got a blessed thing to do with it. . .'" (Bambara 54-55). Minnie becomes a figure of communal scrutiny in the text because the community of Claybourne, while struggling to embrace ways of black being, must reconcile such strategies with inherited white belief-systems:

The visiting interns, nurses and technicians stood by in crisp white jackets and listened, some in disbelief, others with amusement. Others scratched around in their starched pockets sceptical, most shifted from foot to foot embarrassed just to be there. . . . There seemed to be, many of the visitors concluded, a blatant lack of discipline at the Southwest Community Infirmary that made suspect the reputation it enjoyed in radical medical circles.

(9-10)

Thus, Minnie Ransom, whose very name suggests the spiritual contribution which will be demanded of Velma once she is finally psychically well ("'Can you afford it, is what I'm asking you, sweetheart,' Minnie persisted" (106)), is by turns a figure of veneration and vilification-- "fabled healer of the district" (Bambara 3), the "legendary spinster of Claybourne, Georgia" (4) "finally into her dotage" (Bambara 16), who, "'[l]ooking more like a monkey every day'" (Bambara 17), sits,

her bright-red flouncy dress drawn in at the waist with two different strips of kenti cloth, up to her elbows in a minor fortune

of gold, brass and silver bangles, the silken fringe of the shawl shimmying at her armpits. Her head, wrapped in some juicy hot-pink gelee, was tucked way back into her neck, eyes peering down her nose at Velma as though old-timey spectacles perched there were slipping down.

(3-4)

Minnie, the rather zany healer of Claybourne, is affectionately if sceptically granted recognition by the Infirmary fathers as a practitioner of alternative healing practices; but there was a time when she was feared and ostracized by her community, as all females who belong to the cult of unnatural womanhood and blues bad women must be:

They called her batty, fixed, possessed, crossed, in deep trouble. . . . [T]he sight of full-grown, educated, well-groomed, well-raised Minnie Ransom down on her knees eating dirt, craving pebbles and gravel, was too much to bear. And so jumpy, like something devilish had got hold of her, leaping up from the porch, from the table, from morning prayers and racing off to the woods, the women calling at her back, her daddy dropping his harness and shading his eyes, which slid off her back like slippery saddle soap. . . . [S]he'd encounter Old Karen, the Old One, Wilder's woman, Old Wife, the teller of tales no one would sit still to hear any more. . . . And the older woman would hold her there on the path like a mama cat with gripping teeth. A full-grown Minnie blocked, it seemed, to the women who hurled warnings at her back, by front-pew every-Sunday-spreading-no-gettin-around-them Karen Wilder hips. . . . And Minnie'd stumbled off bewildered and spooked cause Karen Wilder after all was a teller of strange tales, and who could know then that the message wasn't about death coming to sting her but about a gift unfolding?

(Bambara 51-3)

Minnie goes on trial as a healer-woman in the first pages of the text; the jury and the judged stand and sit assembled in order to learn if Minnie can bring Velma Henry (also deemed an unnatural woman-- "'Crackpot'" (100), "' . . . predisposed to strife and conflict and crises'" (236), "'Always going against the grain,'" "'Always. . . contrary'" (252)) back from the brink of suicide into the circle of black community and redemption. Velma's healing, however, far surpasses any redemption this

community is able to offer, for it is a community wrestling with its own psychic pain-- welfare mothers, black "boy-men," "veterans of the incessant war-- Garveyites, southern Tenant Associates, trade unionists, Party members, Pan-Africanists-- remembering night riders and day traitors and the cocking of guns. . ." (15). And Velma's breakthrough into wellness under the hands of Minnie Ransom, conjure woman, becomes an epiphanic moment, in which the ecosystem responds synchronically to the power of the event. Not only Velma is affected, but all the people of Claybourne:

Fear and dread at the unspeakable level puts thunder in the air. The zig-zag strike between the clouds crackling down. Would Velma find an old snakeskin on the stool? The sky is lit by tomorrow's memory lamp. Slate rained clean, a blessing. . . . Twenty-four more hours to try and pull more closely together the two camps of adepts still wary of the other's way. "Causes and issues. They're vibrating at the mundane level." Rain. Delay. New possibilities in formation, a new configuration to move with. A flood one moment in time could drown the earth, the next create fish farms in the deserts. The wind that lifts everything up this minute used to bury it all in the sand last time. Children streaming past the window on skateboards, bikes, skates, on foot. Balloons spotted, kites limp, masks dangling from their cords and trailing behind like the kites won't. With masks it was the same. A plaything or a summons. Be a fool or become a god. Timing was all and everything in time.

(293)

If Minnie Ransom, Shug Avery and Janie Starks are blues bad preacher women who undergo communal trial but ultimately precipitate community healing and/or the formation of new communities, Consolata Sosa and the Convent women of Toni Morrison's Paradise also form healing community. However, at the hands of the larger township, the Convent women become catalysts for communal catharsis of a completely different kind. In Morrison's novels, community can turn sinister;⁶ in Paradise Ruby

becomes a spiritually bankrupt town, where the virtually all-black "eight-rock"⁷ inhabitants take the lives of a group of blues bad women as their sacrifice. I will focus on the figure of Consolata in Paradise because, while all of the Convent women are blues bad women, it is Consolata who, by virtue of her position as "heiress" to the duties of Mother Mary Magna, becomes a Christ-figure, a spiritual leader of the other women. In a ritual very much resembling a Last Supper rite:

[t]he table is set; the food placed. Consolata takes off her apron. With the aristocratic gaze of the blind she sweeps the women's faces and says, "I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for. . . . If you have a place . . . that you should be in and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here and follow me. Someone could want to meet you." No one left.

(Morrison Paradise 262)

Consolata, who goes blind as she develops the gift of healing through "seeing in" (247), and whose name means "she who encouraged or comforted,"⁸ was nine when Sister Mary Magna rescued her along with two other orphans from the streets in South America:

By anyone's standard the snatching was a rescue, because whatever life the exasperated, headstrong nun was dragging them to, it would be superior to what lay before them in the shit-strewn paths of that city. When they arrived in Puerto Limon, Sister Mary Magna placed two of them in an orphanage, for by then she had fallen in love with Consolata. . . . Consolata worshipped her.

(223-4)

Consolata's roots, then, are planted firmly in the soil of the convent life to which Mother Mary Magna brings her-- in Christianity, and more specifically, in Roman Catholicism:

For thirty years she offered her body and her soul to God's Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself. To her of the bleeding heart and bottomless love. To her quae sine tactu pudoris. To the beata viscera Mariae Virginis. To her whose

way was narrow but scented with the sweetness of thyme. To Him whose love was so perfectly available it dumbfounded wise men and the damned. He who had become human so we could know Him touch Him see Him in the littlest ways. Become human so His suffering would mirror ours, that His death throes, His doubt, despair, His failure, would speak for and absorb throughout earth time what we were vulnerable to. And those thirty years of surrender to the living God cracked like a pullet's egg when she met the living man.

(225)

Her carnal relationship with Deek Morgan "the living man" is what precipitates Consolata's metamorphosis from docile pseudo-nun (she has never taken vows) to a woman of the flesh, literalizing the figurative nature of the last supper, eating the body of the god and drinking his blood in the much more ancient version of Christ's sacrament of communion,⁹ an "unnatural" woman:

Consolata had lost him. Completely. Forever. . . . Not when she bit his lip, but when she had hummed over the blood she licked from it. He'd sucked air sharply. Said, "Don't ever do that again." But his eyes, first startled, then revolted, had said the rest of what she should have known right away. Clover, cinnamon, soft old linen-- who would chance pears and a wall of prisoner wine with a woman bent on eating him like a meal?

(239)

Indeed, the unnatural woman must be tried and exterminated by those who uphold the male hegemonic order:

But [Lone] could not have fathomed [Deek's] personal shame or understood how important it was to erase both the shame and the kind of woman he believed was its source. An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed; a beautiful, golden-skinned, outside woman with moss-green eyes that tried to trap a man, close him up in a cellar room with liquor to enfeeble him so they could do carnal things, unnatural things in the dark. . . . That ravenous ground-fucking woman who had not left his life but had weaseled her way into [his wife] Soane's affections and, he suspected, had plied her with evil potions to make her less loving than she used to be. . . . Lone didn't, couldn't, know all, but she knew enough and the flashlights had

revealed the equipment: handcuffs glinted, rope coiled and she did not have to guess what else they had.

(279-80)

It is the unnatural woman's ability to form liaisons with other women independently of men, to instill in other women a sense of their own power which frightens the men of Ruby most of all. The women led by Consolata are inspired by her tale of nurturing received at the hands of another woman of mythical proportions. That woman, Piedade,¹⁰ cares for Consolata in a mystical scene of bathing:¹¹

"We sat on the shorewalk. She bathed me in emerald water. Her voice made proud women weep in the streets. Coins fell from the fingers of artists and policemen, and the country's greatest chefs begged us to eat their food. Piedade had songs that could still a wave, make it pause in its curl listening to language it had not heard since the sea opened. Shepherds with colored birds on their shoulders came down from mountains to remember their lives in her songs. Travellers refused to board homebound ships while she sang. At night she took the stars out of her hair and wrapped me in its wool. Her breath smelled of pineapple and cashews. . . ."

(284-85)

It is this remembering of Consolata's which encourages the other Convent women to perform their own acts of (re)membrance:

Then. . . she told them of a place where the white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color of plums swam alongside children. She spoke of fruit that tasted the way sapphires look and boys using rubies for dice. Of scented cathedrals made of gold where gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation. Of carnations tall as trees. Dwarfs with diamonds for teeth. Snakes aroused by poetry and bells. Then she told them of a woman named Piedade, who sang but never said a word. That is how the loud dreaming began.

(263-4)

Karla Holloway describes (re)membrance as an acknowledgement of a "spiritual point of origin" when poetry and oracy were intimately connected to each other. This privileging of telling rather than writing the poetic

is also an embodying-- a "membrane"-- emphasized by the "restorative aspect of the prefix" (re).

Akin to (re)membrane is recursion, the layering of memory, discourse, and mythic figures in language and culture until "each is folded into the other" (Moorings 13). Recursion can be a "way of retaining an idea of repetition even if there is no visible repetition of words or phrases" in the sentence or text. Paradise is a recursive text, in which past events are revisited over and over again-- memory working to (re)member the fragmented events of black women's past, the fragments of the soul, memory which "banishes pain" (Morrison Paradise 211).

The "loud dreaming" is a rite of healing, attended with "kerosene lamps and candle wax" (Morrison Paradise 264). However, it is no Christian rite the women perform, but artistic rituals involving "tubes of paint, sticks of colored chalk," "[p]aint thinner and chamois cloth" (Paradise 264-5). These rituals of (re)membrane sometimes extend beyond the ability of language to articulate feeling:

monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do They spoke to each other about what had been dreamed and what had been drawn. . . . [T]he Convent women were no longer haunted. . .

(Paradise 265-6)

(Re)membrane eventually becomes an intense, wordless and spontaneous pagan dance of healing for these holy-women:

The rain's perfume was stronger north of Ruby. . . . Mavis and Pallas, aroused from sleep by its aroma, rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come. Gathered in the kitchen door, first they watched, then they stuck out their hands to feel. It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and

upturned faces. Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans children thrill to water. In places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain. They would have laughed, had enchantment not been so deep. . . . Seneca embraced and finally let go of a dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed the successful cleansing of a white shirt that never should have been stained. Mavis moved in the shudder of rose of Sharon petals tickling her skin. Pallas, delivered of a delicate son, held him close while the rain rinsed away a scary woman on an escalator and all fear of black water. Consolata, fully housed by the god who sought her out in the garden, was the more furious dancer. . . .

(283)

What the Christian men of Ruby perceive when they raid the Convent, however, are indications of diabolism-- in the cellar, the women's chalk drawings become "filth carpet[ing] the stone floor":

K.D. fingers his palm cross. Deek taps his shirt pocket where sunglasses are tucked. He had thought he might use them for other purposes, but he wonders if he needs them now to shield from his sight this sea of depravity beckoning below. None dares step on it. More than justified in their expectations, they turn around and climb the stairs.

(287)

Perception becomes a trope in the text, where what is seen and understood is also what is (mis)taken-- which is to say, misperceived, but also "taken" as Truth, "taken" in the sense of meanings, goods, lives appropriated. And rushing to judgment can be a dangerous act indeed. For example, the men of Ruby, ignorant of the healing rites in which the Convent women have immersed themselves, see in the untended mason jars of the women only evidence of their laziness, a neglecting of proper women's tasks: "Slack, they think. August just around the corner and these women have not even sorted, let alone washed, the jars" (5). Tiny statues which the women have used as icons are also misread by the hysterical men:

"Holding a baby or gesturing, their blank faces fake innocence" (9). A letter-- which we learn only much later, in Seneca's acts of (re)membering and recursion, was a sister's message of love written in red lipstick-- the men interpret as "a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered" (7). Such acts of (mis)taking on the part of the men would seem almost comical--childish, the imagination-run-wild of little boys, boys who perceive with eyes as "innocent" (12) as those of the brothers Deacon and Steward-- if we were not cognizant of the sinister consequences of such misperceptions. What follows these (mis)takings is the hunting and shooting of the women. The men take it upon themselves to try the women, in a series of shared (mis)takings in the absence of the accused:

But there was no pity here. Here, when the men spoke of the ruination that was upon them-- how Ruby was changing in intolerable ways-- they did not think to fix it by extending a hand in fellowship or love. They mapped defense instead and honed evidence for its need, till each piece fit an already polished groove Remember how they scandalized the wedding? What you say? Uh huh and it was that very same day I caught them kissing on each other in the back of that ratty Cadillac. Very same day, and if that wasn't enough to please the devil, two more was fighting over them in the dirt. Right down in it. Lord, I hate a nasty woman. Sweetie said they tried their best to poison her. . . . All I know is they beat Arnette up some when she went out there to confront them about the lies they told her. . . .They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they haven't been warned

(275-6)

Tried and found wanting by the men of Ruby, the convent women of Paradise-- "unnatural" women-- do not fare as well as Janie, Celie and Shug, or Velma Henry and Minnie Ransom. Indeed, their fate is ironically that of countless black men and women before them who were "tried" in the kangaroo courts of white lynch mobs. Lone DuPres tells Frances Poole

DuPres:

"Woman, listen to me. Those men got guns with sights on them."
 "That doesn't mean anything. I've never seen my brother go anywhere minus his rifle, except church, and even then it's in the car."
 "They got rope too, Frannie."
 "Rope?"
 "Two-inch."
 "What're you thinking?"

(281)

Morrison's final pronouncement on the fate of "unnatural" black women at the hands of their own communities is indeed a sobering one.

Performance and (Per)formance: Something Inside Me Which Banishes Pain

Finally, I would like to investigate the manner in which black women (through their rhetorical strategies as the writers of texts, or as characters within texts) become consummate performers. I have already examined this aspect of the black women evangelists, especially Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Sojourner Truth and Amanda Smith, and I suggest that self-conscious performance in the narratives of the contemporary black women I examine-- either the performance of the writer herself, or of some significant character in her text-- is of considerable significance in any study of a tradition of African American women's writing. As Houston Baker observes, black performance in America involves negotiating a fine line between minstrelsy and integrity:

To deliver the blues as entertainment. . . is to maintain a fidelity to one's role. Again, if the performance required is that of a minstrel and one is a genuine performer, then donning the mask is an act consistent with one's stature. There are always fundamental economic questions involved in such uneasy Afro-American public postures. As [Ralph] Ellison suggests, Afro-Americans, in their guise as entertainers, season the possum of black expressive culture to the taste of their anglo-American audience, maintaining, in the process, their integrity as performers. But in private sessions-- in the closed circle of their own community. . . everybody knows that the punch line to the recipe and the proper

response to the performer's constrictive dilemma is, "Damn the possum! That sho' is some good gravy!" It is just possible that the "gravy" is the inimitable technique of the Afro-American artist, a technique (derived from lived blues experience) as capable of "playing possum" as of presenting one.

(194)

In contemporary black American women's novels, formal and rhetorical strategies of performance comment upon tropes and themes of performance within texts. If we regard "signifyin(g)" as performance,¹² which it most certainly is, then we may see the manner in which Alice Walker's The Color Purple signifies on Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God as a playful and "loving" performance of "literary bonding" (Gates 244) between these two black women writers. Gates has already conducted a fine examination of the manner in which signifyin(g) as play functions as both trope and rhetorical strategy in Their Eyes (Gates Signifyin(g) Monkey 193-202); he has also discussed how Walker uses free indirect discourse (I suggest, as a performance strategy) to rewrite the speakerly text of Hurston's Their Eyes. What I would like to investigate is how performance operates as trope in The Color Purple, as well as trope and strategy in Paradise and The Salt Eaters; and how, as in the texts of the evangelists, performing the "good" minstrel self based on white and/or black male hegemonic codes is replaced by a *(per)forming*-- a profound experience of self creation-- in Hurston's, Walker's, Morrison's and Bambara's texts.

Gates observes that Celie's "~~I-am~~" functions, like Janie's perception of herself as "Alphabet," as an "erased presence, an empty set" (243). This device of striking out "reminds us that [Celie] is writing, and

searching for her voice by selecting, then rejecting, word choice or word order, but also that there is some reason why Celie was once 'a good girl' but no longer feels that she can make this claim before God" (247). Another possible reading of Celie's "~~I am~~" is that Celie, choosing her words carefully before God-- indeed, performing an act of self-disclosure in His presence-- is careful to indicate that, not only is she now a good girl, but *has always been* good. The use of the present perfect conjugation of the verb "be" suggests past *and ongoing* goodness. Celie still claims goodness before God; it is "what is happening to me" which is not good, which needs clarification. But what goodness represents to Celie, for whom "God" is none other than a "big. . . old. . . tall. . . graybearded. . . white" man (201), or, in the divine Master's absence, her incestuous stepfather himself, has nothing to do with self-assertion. Early in the text, the semantic conflation of "God" and Alphonse suggests that Celie's perception of the world is a confusing one in which she has little agency; the divine can be simultaneously caring confidant (God) and cruel abuser (Alphonse)-- indeed, Celie's is the chaotic world of emotionally, physically and sexually abused children. The first words of the novel, in fact, hover in italics above the rest of the text of Celie's letter/diary. They are a threatening injunction masked by concern for the well-being of Celie's mother: "*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*" (1). The triple negative, "not never. . . nobody" suggests to me that the (per)formed Celie is indeed at this point an absence-- that the Celie who writes initially, performs as "good girl." Celie is a child whose sense of self is fear and shame-based, and who possesses a desperate desire to "be good" in a world that is careening beyond her control and understanding:

"Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me"

(1). For Celie, God and Alphonse are on some level elided into the same cruel/kind entity:

She ast me bout the first [baby] Whose it is? I say
God's. . . .

Finally she ast Where it is?

I say God took it.

He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it
out there in the woods.

(3)

Later, when Mr. _____ asks for Nettie in marriage: "Mr. _____ finally come right out an ast for Nettie hand in marriage. But He won't let her go" (7).

"He," marked in upper case, refers to Alphonse, who for Celie, is also God. Pleasing such a God implies a performance based on self-negation: "She ugly. . . But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. . . . You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it. . . . [S]he'll make the better wife. . . [S]he can work like a man. . ." (9). But this God, Celie comes to realize much later, "is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (199). If Celie must perform the duties of a "good wife" for such a man/God, (per)forming-- a self-fashioning directly opposed to "performing"-- requires not that she *do* anything-- her only requirement is to *be*: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (214). To *this* (per)formance of self, Shug enjoins in true church style: "Amen, say Shug. Amen, amen." Interestingly, at this point in her forming of self, Celie is yet to be integrated with her own sense of voice and agency. The voice with which she makes her pronouncement "to everything listening" is "a voice" which she does not identify as hers, or as having spoken aloud. It is Shug's

"Amen" which confirms both uncertainties. Thus, (per)formance seems to be a function of not only self, but other; it is only in relation to another black woman-- first Shug, and later in letter-writing to Nettie-- that Celie is able to achieve selfhood at all.

Performance as (per)formance operates in The Color Purple in a number of powerful ways. First, I have already mentioned Gates' observation that Walker performs rhetorical acts of signification upon her maternal ancestor Hurston's text, most notably Walker's signifyin(g) use of Hurston's free indirect discourse. Where the language of Hurston's unnamed narrator is initially that of standard English, becoming more and more marked by dialect as the novel develops, the language in The Color Purple "avoid[s] standard English almost totally" (Gates Signifyin(g) Monkey 251). Further, I suggest, Walker's tropes of performance support her rhetorical use of performance in her text. That is, the manner in which Walker lovingly signifies on the narrative strategy of her foremother Hurston is reflected in Walker's performance metaphors-- "oral hieroglyphics" (to use a theoretical term of Hurston's) depicting various forms of black performance as the power of shared influence, as black mentorship. Shug, blues bad woman, becomes a performance mentor for both Squeak and Celie. It is Shug who transforms Celie's razor-wielding anger into art:

[Shug] say, Times like this, lulls, us ought to do something different.

Like what? I ast.

Well, she say, looking me up and down, let's make you some pants. . . . [E]veryday we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think.

(152-3)

Directly after Shug's "sermon" about God Celie (with further instigation

from Shug) is able to conduct her own surprising oppositional performance against Mr. _____ at the communal dinner table:

Celie is coming with us, say Shug.
 Mr. _____'s head swivel back straight. Say what? he ast.
 Celie is coming to Memphis with me.
 Over my dead body, Mr. _____ say.
 You satisfied that what you want, Shug say, cool as clabber.
 Mr. _____ start up from his seat, look at Shug, plop back down again. He look over at me. I thought you was finally happy, he say. What wrong now?
 You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need.

(206-7)

In this same dinner-table scenario, Mary Agnes (Squeak) announces her decision to leave Harpo, as well as to rename herself once and for all. Performance works as a domino effect:

Nobody say nothing. It so quiet you can hear the embers dying back in the stove. Sound like they falling in on each other. Finally, Squeak look at everybody from under her bangs. Me, she say. I'm going North.
 You going What? say Harpo. He so surprise, he begin to sputter, sputter, just like his daddy. Sound like I don't know what.
 I want to sing, say Squeak.
 Sing! say Harpo.
 Yeah, say Squeak. Sing. I ain't sung in public since Jolentha was born. . . .
 You ain't had to sing in public since Jolentha was born. Everything you need I done provided for.
 I need to sing, say Squeak.
 Listen Squeak, say Harpo. You can't go to Memphis. That's all there is to it.
 Mary Agnes, say Squeak.
 Squeak, Mary Agnes, what difference do it make?
 It make a lot, say Squeak. When I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public.

(209-210)

Mary Agnes' history is significant in view of Walker's use of the performance trope in The Color Purple. She is nicknamed Squeak by Harpo (86) and it is only after her encounter with the prison warden (in which

he rapes her) that she decides to assert herself as Mary Agnes again: "She stand up. My name Mary Agnes, she say" (102). The (in)significance of a name such as Squeak, given to Mary Agnes by Harpo, son of Mr. _____ is obvious: a performer who squeaks is no performer at all; but Mary Agnes, inspired first by her oppression as a "yellow woman," and then by the boldness of Shug as singer, resolves to sing herself into being:

6 months after Mary Agnes went to git Sofia out of prison, she begin to sing. First she sing Shug's songs, then she begin to make up songs her own self.

She got the kind of voice you never think of trying to sing a song. It little, it high, it sort of meowing. But Mary Agnes don't care.

Pretty soon, us git used to it. Then us like it a whole lot. . . . It put me in mind of a gramophone. Sit in the corner a year silent as the grave. Then you put a record on, it come to life.

(103)

Singing, writing, speaking the self as (per)formance becomes an act accomplished not alone, but publicly, in the company of other black (per)formers: "Shug like Squeak too, try to help her sing. . . . Shug say to Squeak, I mean, Mary Agnes, You ought to sing in public" (120).

In a discussion of Celie's vernacular free indirect discourse, Gates notes a passage in which the words spoken echo a multiplicity of sources: "It's hot, here, Celie, she write. Hotter than July. Hotter than August *and* July. Hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July. Hot" (Walker 154). Gates ponders this passage: "Who said, or wrote, these words, words which echo both the Southern expression "a cold day in August" and Stevie Wonder's album Hotter Than July? Stevie Wonder? Nettie? Celie? All three, and no one" (Signifyin(g) Monkey 250). The motive behind Walker's intertextual use of Stevie Wonder's words in this instance of triple-voicedness becomes clear when we read the

quotation which follows Walker's dedication of the book. That dedication is "To the Spirit: Without whose assistance/ Neither this book/ Nor I/ Would have been/ Written." "Assistance," what I have already called the power of shared influence, or in-spiration, brings both text and author into being through the act of writing. The quotation from Stevie Wonder then reads: "Show me how to do like you/ Show me how to do it." Performance becomes (per)formance, text becomes author, student becomes teacher, and congregation becomes preacher in Walker's sermonic work. "Amen" is the penultimate signification of the novel, written by Celie; and the final words, written by Walker, are: "I thank everybody in this book for coming. A.W., author and medium." This note of thanks on the part of the "medium"-- she who brings the spirits of the dead (the characters as well as the literary foremothers) before a collective audience of the living-- is directed toward the reader also, who, like God, Celie, Shug and Nettie, reads all the missives of this performance-text.

In Their Eyes, Janie's (per)forming of self occurs first through her relationship with Tea Cake, and finally in the communal story-telling setting of the porch, in the presence of Pheoby Watson, as she relates the drama of her life to her friend, who will "tell it" to others:

Dat's all right, Pheoby, tell 'em. Dey gointuh make 'miration 'cause mah love didn't work lak they love, if dey ever had any. Then you must tell 'em dat love ain't somethin' lak uh grindstone dat'd de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore.

(182)

The (per)formance of Janie's life counters the empty performance of it which Nanny demanded-- to marry early, to be "good" wife to an

respectable black husband: "'Brother Logan Killicks. He's a good man, too'" (13). As in The Color Purple, the initial performance of "goodness"-- that hollow, external presentation of self which Janie instinctively knows she must (per)form against-- is fear-inspired, based upon Nanny's experience of black women's double oppression at the hands of white and black men. Nanny's past is figured as the theatrical, as performance: "Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind-pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart" (16). Indeed, the metaphor for both Nanny's and Janie's lives, as I have observed in Chapter Nine is the sermon-- itself a performance: "'Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me" (15). As Smitherman observes the sermon is a highly performative act:

We're talking, then, about a tradition in the black experience in which verbal performance becomes both a way of establishing "yo rep" [your reputation] as well as a teaching and socializing force. This performance is exhibited in. . . . black folk sermons. . . . [W]hoever speaks is highly conscious of the fact that his personality is on exhibit and his status is at stake. Black raps ain bout talkin loud and sayin nothin, for the speaker must be up on the subject of his rap, and his oral contribution must be presented in a dazzling, entertaining manner. Black speakers are flamboyant, flashy, and exaggerative; black raps are stylized, dramatic, and spectacular; speakers and raps become symbols of how to git ovuh.

(Smitherman 79-80)

In The Salt Eaters and Paradise, (per)formance becomes a trope for the recursive process of (re)membering black women's lives. As in Their Eyes and The Color Purple, performance as "good" or socially acceptable action gives way to (per)formance as self-fashioning. In both Salt Eaters and Paradise, this (per)formance becomes a form of audience-witnessed art

in a most profound sense. "Good" is a word which Minnie Ransom, legendary conjure woman of the black community of Claybourne, has had to ponder deeply in her journey from young Christian seminarian to "fabled healer" (3). In a conversation with her spirit guide, Old Wife, the women discuss the morality of old Minnie's sensual nature:

"You learned to pray some, Min. You never be listening too much. Just a little around the edges," grinning.

"But you learned to pray some."

"Learning still, Old Wife, learning still."

"But ain't learned to quit casting a voluptuous eye on the young mens, I notice," chirping her teeth.

"When you gonna learn, you ole stick in the mud, that 'good' ain't got nothing to do with it?" Minnie sliding her palms down her thighs and winking at her companion. . . .

(54-5)

It is a strange combination of African vodun and Christianity which Minnie practises, and her conversations with Old Wife on goodness as dutiful performance are interspersed with addresses to the "Lord" concerning a (per)formance for which Minnie has been divinely chosen:

"Lord, I hope you are recording this all. I hope you are beaming down on this scene I never auditioned for, Lord. Hope you see how your humble servant got her hands overfull with both the quick, not so quick and the dead. So when I petition you, Lord, with feeble praise and bold requests, don't turn me down now, gotta help me and answer my prayers."

"So little faith? Your prayers are always answered, Min."

"This I know. But sometimes the answer is no, Old Wife. Look who I got for a spirit guide, an old stick-in-the-mud who don't even remember from one session to the next the diagnoses and the treatment. Sweet Jesus."

"Be careful, Min Ransom, you heading for a fall. I'm not even sure you deserve your gift."

"Old Wife, good and bad and deserve and the rest of that stuff have got nothing, I'm telling you, nothing to do with it. Now you hold that thought while I get on back there and put on some music for the folks."

(63)

Indeed, Minnie Ransom's (per)formance is an iterative act; the ultimate

(per)former, her self-fashioning becomes her public healing power to help others fashion themselves also:

Rumor was these sessions never lasted more than ten or fifteen minutes anyway. It wouldn't kill [Velma] to go along with the thing. Wouldn't kill her. She almost laughed. She might have died. *I might have died.* It was an incredible thought now. She sat there holding on to *that* thought, waiting for Minnie Ransom to quit playing to the gallery and get on with it. . . . [Velma] understood she was being invited to play straight man in a routine she hadn't rehearsed.

(7-8)

If Minnie's (per)formance of self as African healer becomes a challenging of the performance of what is "good" in the Western Christian sense, Velma Henry undergoes a similar transformation. Caught up in the magic of her own healing, and approaching a crucial moment of recursive remembrance central to the text, Velma, in her utterance of the word "good," approaches a crossroads of meaning: "There's nothing that stands between you and perfect health, sweetheart. Can you hold that thought?" "Nothing can hold me from my good," Velma drawled, reciting a remembered Sunday school lesson, "neither famine, nor evil, nor. . ." (104). Although she uses the word "good" as something remembered in a Christian context, Velma-- and the reader-- sit poised on a threshold, on one side of which words such as "good" and "afford" are imbued with Western Christian and Western economic connotations respectively; but on the other side of which they signify something else altogether:

"Can you afford to be whole?" Minnie was singsonging it. . . .
 "Afford. . . Choose. . ."
 Velma groaned, sore and sodden. . . . "But I thought. . ."
 "You think I mean money? Mmm."

(106-111)

For Velma, the performance of "goodness" has been secular-- social

activism. She engages in this performance not with a sense of the oppressiveness of the performance (like Celie of The Color Purple, or Janie of Their Eyes), but rather, with a sense that she is *resisting* oppression. Velma's initial performance of self is conducted with an intensity, a conviction, a "wildness" (12) in which she clings tenaciously to past pain--

" . . . It's got to be costing you something to hang on to old pains. Just look at you. Your eyes slit, the cords jump out of your neck, your voice trembles, I expect fire to come blasting out of your nostrils any minute. It takes something out of you, Velma, to keep all them dead moments alive. Why can't you just . . . forget . . . forgive . . . and always it's some situation that was over and done with ten, fifteen years ago. But here you are still all fired up about it, still plotting, up to your jaws in ancient shit."

(22)

It is not until her encounter with Minnie that she is able to relinquish performance as frenetic social activism for (per)formance as a spiritual self-centeredness:

She thought she knew. . . . how to build resistance, make the journey to the center of the circle, stay poised and centered in the work and not fly off, stay centered in the best of her people's traditions and not be available to madness, not become intoxicated by the heady brew of degrees and career and congratulations for nothing done, not become anaesthetized by dazzling performances with somebody else's aesthetic, not go under. Thought the workers of the sixties had pulled the Family safely out of range of the serpent's fangs so the workers of the seventies could drain the poisons, repair damaged tissues, retrain the heartworks, realign the spine.

Thought the vaccine offered by all the theorists and activists and clear thinkers and doers of the warrior clan would take. But amnesia had set in anyhow. Heart/brain/gut muscles atrophied anyhow. Time was running out anyhow. And the folks didn't even have a party, a consistent domestic and foreign policy much less a way to govern. Something crucial had been missing from the political/ economic/ social/ cultural/aesthetic/ military/ psychosocial/ psychosexual mix. And what could it be?

(258-9)

Frenetic social activism (as opposed to an activism deriving from an

internal centeredness) is a hollow performance in which Velma keeps her interiority from others and from herself. She is an absence: "Velma . . . had down cold the art of being not there when the blow came" (4); a Velma who "withdraw[s] the self to a safe place where husband, lover, teacher, workers, no one could follow, probe" (5). Indeed, it is centeredness and presence-- the presence, initially, of self to the self-- which heals, and makes way for communal revitalization in the novels of African American women. In Bambara's novel, a sense of "orientation" is what Velma and the black community of Claybourne need in order to be healed: "Then James standing, turned toward the window, arms wide to the sun, then turned toward her and the baby. 'I orient myself,' he smiled. 'I de-occident myself,' she answered. A private joke whose origins they'd forgotten. . . ." (119).

In a novel in which tropes of musical, sermonic and theatrical performance abound, I am interested in the way in which Bambara as African American story-teller performs her own acts of formal orientation-- de-occidenting and centering in the text. While self-conscious performance figured prominently as an issue in the autobiographies of some of the nineteenth-century black women evangelist autobiographers, and Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker use free indirect discourse and the vernacular as ways of performing a return to African American modes of saying and signifying, similarly, Bambara creates a text which is literally centered on non-Western ways of telling and being. The Salt Eaters seems to spin on an Afri-centrality-- in many senses of the word "spin,"¹³ Bambara's tale is woven in a multi-layered, non-chronological circular pattern of remembering and metamorphosis. The tumultuous climax of this remembering is

Bambara's orchestration of a number of characters and events in a theatrical and carnivalesque scene of epiphany-- a Spring festival of drumming performance, drama, and political demonstration in Claybourne-- where nature itself is caught in the grip of a shuddering, apocalyptic storm of renewal:

"That one was enough to shift the needle on the university's seismograph," Doc said, the heh-heh smothered in his throat constricted with fear. The room was shaking, and Claybourne was nobody's California. . . .

"That was the kind of thunderbolt that knocked Saul off his steed and turned him into Paul," Cora said. . . .

Velma would remember it as the moment she started back toward life, the moment when the healer's hand had touched some vital spot. . . .

(278)

Bambara's text spins on a number of epiphanic axes, but the principal centrifugal point occurs roughly at the center of the novel. That point of orientation is rife with tropes of spinning and centeredness, and occurs just as Minnie and Velma contemplate the spiritual meaning of the word "afford": "'Afford?' Velma was still muttering like she'd never heard the word before. 'Oh, I don't mean money, sweetheart. You know that'" (114). What follows this interaction is a series of remembered scenes, the central trope of which is Jan's demonstration to an audience of black female onlookers the art of pottery-making-- "The pottery wheel spinning" (115). The women present contemplate why the clay is wobbling and tearing on the spinning wheel,

[a]nd Velma was like the lump of clay, two hands holding her on the wheel, one hand pushing her hard up against the other in an effort to get her centered. And she was turning and lifting at last, the ridges of her sides smoothing out, rising moist and spreading, opening up, flaring out. But a lump in the beat, the rhythm wobbly. The healer's hands steadying her, coaxing her up all of a piece.

(115-6)

The women compare the loss of rhythm on the spinning wheel to "being in bed with a Black trick who's been sleeping white a long time, ya know?" (116), like "that Reilly boy" (116). In the scene of (re)membrance which follows, Velma, Jan and Ruby encourage Jan's husband Robert (who, interestingly, is practising his own spin on a golf ball-- in his pursuit of perfection in that white-dominated sport) to talk to the Reilly boy:

"It's not about sisters being uptight, Robert. Or white folks being uptight. It's about the boy himself. Old Man Reilly is so old. And that boy's been to all those white schools, white camps"

. . . .

"I always took you for your word, Robert. Nation building?" Jan's whispering, realizing finally that she might have done this in private. But Velma appreciating finally why she didn't.

"And don't forget to build the inner nation, Robert". . . .

"It's like trying to build a bowl when you haven't got the clay properly centered," Jan was saying after Robert left the house, confident they all agreed on a common reference for 'it.'

(117-8)

And finally, the last scene in this moment of centrifugality revolves around Velma, Obie and their newly adopted, as yet nameless son. "[T]urning slowly on the stool" (119), Velma watches her husband: "I orient mysf,' he smiled. 'I de-occident mysf,' she answered" (119). Bambara performs an act of de-occidentation, in a theatrical novel in which the seen (scene), the re-cognized, is everything.¹⁴ It is a kind of bearing witness, which, just before the moment of her healing, Velma almost cannot accomplish:

She is in the park around the bonfire singing. Minnie is there, M'Dear, Doc Serge. . . . And Obie is there, Mama Mae, Palma and Lil James called Jabari now and Marcus and. And someone or something hovering near daring her to look, to recognize. Not an old friend but someone she hasn't met but ought to know but dare not look at. A taboo glance, formidable, ancient, locking her jaws, her thighs, keeping her head down. Medusa, Lot's Wife, Eurydice, Noah, she will not look. She keeps her eyes on her feet, swollen from stomping. They are all stomping, agitating the ground, agitating an idea, calling up something or someone, and the idea

clusters in the image centers and settles there. She will not look at that either. It is taking all of her to concentrate on not looking.

(257)

Minnie, Velma, and Bambara (per)form themselves in acts of healing and centering in the presence of other black women and men in order to be whole.

We find this (per)formative act of healing in Toni Morrison's Paradise also. The Convent women defy the performance of "true womanhood" demanded of them by the men of Ruby:

Steward seethed at the thought of that barely averted betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old Fathers. . . . The women in the Convent were for him a flaunting parody of the nineteen Negro ladies of his and his brother's youthful memory and perfect understanding. They were the degradation of that moment they'd shared of sunlit skin and verbena. They, with their mindless giggling, outraged the dulcet tones, the tinkling in the merry and welcoming laughter of the nineteen ladies who, scheduled to live forever in pastel shaded dreams, were now doomed to extinction by this new and obscene breed of female. He could not abide them for sullyng his personal history with their streetwalkers' clothes and whores' appetites; mocking and desecrating the vision that carried him and his brother through a war. . . .

(279)

Instead of the performance which shapes the vaguely empty lives of "ladies" such as Dovey, Soane and Sweetie, the Convent women heal themselves through (per)formance rituals of memory, art and incantation. How Morrison herself comments upon her own act of (per)formance in the text is to be found, as in Bambara and Walker, roughly in the center of the novel¹⁵-- in the chapter entitled "Patricia" which describes that character's attempt as (significantly) teacher, writer and historian, to make sense of the fragmented remembrances of the people of her town. Morrison's commentary is embedded in a scene which details the yearly

Christmas performance enacted by the children of Ruby. That performance depicts the "Disallowal"-- the barring of the then-homeless black founders of Ruby from a town of yellow men they encounter-- and the subsequent founding of their own all-black town. The children of Ruby perform the Disallowal and the black town-fathers' retaliatory cursing of the yellow men, as an act of catharsis, iterated and reiterated. Indeed, it is this reiterated act, this church-like sermonic, amen-saying performance of cursing in self-defense which so hardens the hearts of the citizens of Ruby that in the final analysis, they kill the Convent women:

Pointing forefingers and waving fists, they chant: "God will crumble you. God will crumble you." The audience hums agreement: "Yes He will. Yes He will."

"Into dust!" That was Lone DuPres.

"Don't you dare to mistake Him. Don't you dare."

"Finer than flour he'll grind you."

"Say it, Lone."

"Strike you in the moment of His choosing!"

And sure enough, the masked figures wobble and collapse to the floor, while the seven families turn away. Something within me that banishes pain; something within me I cannot explain.

(211)

This last sentence I suggest is the centrifugal point of the novel. In it, Morrison (per)forms an act of authorial intervention with such sleight of hand that her audience might easily miss it: "Something within me that banishes pain; something within me I cannot explain;" this sudden shift to first-person in a passage written entirely in third-person seems to me to be Morrison's commentary on the reason she as black artist performs at all. What "banishing pain" means, however, is the question this novel asks. For the men of Ruby, the pain of the history of African Americans is to be looked at down the barrel of a gun. For the Convent women-- and for Morrison-- the unnameable "something" which heals is not the performance

of communal violence as banishment of the painful, but communal performance as healing, art, writing, remembering against pain. The blues bad preacher woman has always (re)membered herself against pain. (Per)forming her Self out of the initial ~~I am~~ of her existence, she becomes -- through various strategies of oppositionality, rememory, recursion and resistance-- a figure who stands trial before a jury of her communal peers. This sense of communal judgment of individual (per)formance is one which permeates the earliest black women's life writings, from Belinda's petition to Jarena Lee's insistence upon her own truthfulness, to Sojourner Truth's self-fashioning, to the self-conscious (per)formances of black women in contemporary black women's fiction. The spiritual trials of nineteenth-century African American women become a metaphor for trials of another order-- over and over again, black women's writings attest to the fact that it is under scrutiny of the public eye that "womanish" black women have always found themselves in America. And it is before that gaze that they have (per)formed themselves into blues bad being.

Endnotes

1. Overton examines Sterling Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land (1965), Kristin Hunter's The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou (1968), Langston Hughes' Tambourines to Glory (1968), James Baldwin's The Amen Corner (1968), and Just Above My Head (1979), and Ann Shockley's Say Jesus and Come to Me (1982).

2. "But more than anything else, God love admiration. . . . I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker The Color Purple 203); "You never really know a person until you've eaten salt together, she told herself" (Bambara The Salt Eaters 147). As a Biblical metaphor, eating salt signifies a purification or healing through suffering. In Zora Neale Hurston's novel, her title refers to a line in the text which reads: "Six eyes were watching God". In Chapter Nine I have discussed the significance of this watching. Other titles which reflect the deep spiritual preoccupation of contemporary African American women: Beloved, Song of Solomon (Toni Morrison); The Healing Gayl Jones; Jonah's Gourd Vine, Moses, Man of the Mountain (Zora Neale Hurston); The Temple of My Familiar (Alice Walker).

3. Lucy Terry Prince (1730-1821), roughly a contemporary of Belinda, is known for her poem "Bars Fight" and for her shrewd and bold oratorical ability. Prince came into "national prominence" when she brought a suit against Colonel Eli Bronson, her neighbor, for encroaching on her property. Her suit reached the Supreme Court where the future governor of Vermont, Issac Ticknor, represented her. Dissatisfied with his representation, Prince dismissed him and argued her own case. The presiding judge Samuel Chase commented that "Lucy's plea surpassed that of any Vermont lawyer he had ever heard" (Shockley 14).

4. I borrow this term from the blues song "Wild Women Don't Get the Blues". Bambara alludes to this song in Salt Eaters: "And up under the brass of horn and cymbals was the sister still singing faintly, 'Wiiillld women doan worreeeee.' But it was hard to concentrate cause something was happening, she was about to surrender it up whatever it was. Well hell, she'd always been wild" (267).

5. I use the word "perform" and "performance" in this chapter mainly in the sense of enactment ultimately resulting in what I have already described as "(per)formance"-- a profound self-fashioning which demystifies and challenges the empty performances of black womanhood prescribed as "natural" by hegemonic discourses. When I use the word in the latter hegemonic sense, I specify that usage.

My usages, especially my use of hegemonic "performance," are somewhat different from those of J.L. Austin, Judith Butler, or Henry Louis

Gates Jr. Austin and Butler write of performance as specifically a speech act, and of the performative as that act of speech which results in a desired action. Gates' use of "performance" centers around signifyin(g)-- in the African American tradition, an act accomplished with other members of the community as audience looking on, a theatrical, sometimes musical, always communal act, such as the storytelling which unfolds on Joe Starks' porch. My use of "(per)formance" certainly contains echoes of the usages employed by Austin, Butler and Gates in that (per)formance, once accomplished, "makes things happen"; (per)formance is the ultimate artistic act; (per)formance is necessary as self-healing before communal healing can begin.

6. In Sula the townspeople of The Bottom lapse into despair after Sula's death, not because they have loved her, but rather, because their common spitefulness when it came to Sula, sustained and united them:

A falling away, a dislocation was taking place. Hard on the heels of the general relief that Sula's death brought a restless irritability took hold. . . . [M]others who had defended their children from Sula's malevolence. . . now had nothing to rub up against. The tension was gone and so was the reason for the effort they had made. Without her mockery, affection for others sank into flaccid disrepair. . . .

(Morrison Sula 153)

In the novels of Morrison, the bad blues preacher woman is also the communal sacrifice. Although she may bring good things to her people-- as in the case of Baby Suggs, holy, who teaches her community to "love your flesh"-- her fate is Christ-like; she is figuratively crucified:

She sighed at her work and, a moment later, straightened up to sniff the disapproval once again. Resting on the handle of the hoe, she concentrated. She was accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her-- but this free-floating repulsion was new. It wasn't whitefolks-- that much she could tell-- so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess.

(Morrison Beloved 138)

It is the town's resentment of Baby Suggs' bounty and generosity which leads them to spitefulness. Nobody warns Baby Suggs about the arrival of the slave-catchers, and it is their arrival which leads Sethe to butcher her children:

Nobody warned them and [Stamp Paid] always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging [at Baby Suggs' house] that dulled them, but some other thing-- like, well, like meanness-- that let them stand aside, or not pay attention, or tell themselves somebody else was probably bearing the news already to the house

on Bluestone Road where a pretty woman [Sethe] had been living for almost a month. Young and deft with four children. . . and who now had the full benefit of Baby Suggs' bounty and her big old

heart. Maybe they just wanted to know if Baby really was special, blessed in some way they were not.

(Morrison Beloved 157)

7. "Eight-rock" refers to the pure African blood lines preserved in the town of Ruby-- "eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them" (Morrison Paradise 193).

8. "Consolata" is the active past participle of the Latin verb "consolor." The verb is deponent-- that is, it has an active meaning, but is represented in a passive form. Significantly, Consolata, the catalyst for the Convent women's healing, was brought to America as a tractable orphan by Sister Mary Magna: "she had fallen in love with Consolata. The green eyes? the tea-colored hair? maybe her docility?" (Paradise 223).

9. Barbara Walker describes the ancient religious practice of eating a god-sacrifice, which may be traced at least as far back as the Greek cult of Dionysus:

[D]arker legends show Dionysis's typical "savior" pattern: first and most primitive, a king killed and cannibalized to provide both the earth and women's wombs with fructifying blood; then a surrogate for the king, a condemned criminal or a young man chosen by lot; then an animal substitute for the man; and finally, "flesh" and "blood" devoured in the form of bread and wine, the classical Dionysan sacrament at Eleusis.

(Barbara Walker 237)

10. In a novel which echoes loudly with Greek and Latin history, language and myth, I suggest that Morrison's *Piedade* recalls the Pleiades-- a system of stars, the mythology of which suggests "an extremely archaic tradition" (Barbara Walker 802). Barbara Walker traces the Pleiades to Mexican, Pre-Vedic Indian and ancient Greek myth where the stars represented seven sisters who judged men, and on the last night of the year, stood prominently in the sky, demanding a sacrifice. Greek myth, in an effort to domesticate the powerful sisters, figures them as follows:

One story insisted they were all virgins. Orion the Hunter tried to rape them, but Zeus protected them by turning them into doves and placing them in the heavens. The story was obviously absurd, as all the Pleiades had lovers or husbands, and three of them had mated with Zeus himself. In earlier myths, Orion the Hunter was their victim, not their attacker.

(Barbara Walker 804)

Robert Graves connects the Pleiades with the sea; their leader, Alcyone (a name derived from "halcyon," a sea bird related to the kingfisher) was daughter of Pleione ("sailing queen"). The rising of the Pleiades marked the beginning of the navigational year, and their setting its end (Graves 165). The convent women of Paradise, hunted and shot by the men of Ruby and presumably killed, are rumoured to have "[taken] other shapes and disappeared into thin air" (296).

The final passage of the novel describes a strange seaside scene, in which Consolata, her head in the lap of Piedade, await ships coming in to shore:

When the ocean heaves sending rhythms of water ashore, Piedade looks to see what has come. Another ship, perhaps, but different, heading to port, crew and passengers, lost and saved, atremble, for they have been disconsolate for some time. Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise.

(318)

11. Tropes of ablution also occur in The Women of Brewster Place, The Color Purple and The Salt Eaters. Washing becomes a baptism of the spirit, but where in the texts of the evangelists, it was performed by Christ, the novels of twentieth-century black women recount ablutions performed by black women for other black women. In The Women of Brewster Place, Mattie bathes Celie back to life. In the case of Celie and Shug, washing becomes a kind of sensual sacrament which directly precedes Celie's discovery of her sexuality under Shug's tutelage (Walker 51). In The Salt Eaters, other women attempt to wash Velma, "reeking of wasted blood and rage" (34) after she is ejected from a hotel lobby during a political march turned gruelling and sour (40-1).

12. Gates observes (195) that in Their Eyes, another word for "signifyin(g)" is "play." For example, the courtship rituals enacted by Sam Watson, Lige Moss and Charlie Jones are described in Their Eyes as not being courtship, but a playful dramatization of courtship: "They know it's not courtship. It's acting out courtship and everybody is in the play" (Hurston 63). Gates quotes Hurston in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression": "'an audience is a necessary part of any drama,' [and] these Signifyin(g) rituals tend to occur outdoors, at the communal scene of oral instruction, on the porches of homes and stores" (Gates 199).

13. Spin in the sense of: "The silvery tendrils that fluttered between her fingers, extending out like tiny webs of invisible thread. The strands that flowed from her to Minnie Ransom. . ." (267); spin in the sense of: "spinning in the music. . . . Spinning and something very much the matter. . . ." (114-5); spin in the sense of: "the pottery wheel" (115); and finally to finish spinning and (per)forming, in the sense of the closing lines of the text: "No need of Minnie's hands now so the healer withdraws them, drops them in her lap just as Velma, rising on steady legs, throws off the shawl that drops down on the stool a burst cocoon" (295).

14. The mirror figures importantly in the novel as a site of recognition for Velma. It is in the mirror that Velma sees the mud mothers, ancient reminders of her past history, of her self:

She'd been asking it aloud one morning combing her hair, and the answer had almost come tumbling out of the mirror naked and tattooed with serrated teeth and hair alive, birds and insects peeping out at her from the mud-heavy hanks of the ancient mothers' hair.

(259)

Karla Holloway, in Moorings and Metaphors discusses the importance of the mirror as trope of recognition in the novels of black women.

15. Walker, too, in The Color Purple presents Nettie's letters as a crucial centering force of her novel. The letters are located at roughly the center of this text. It is the presence of these long-deferred letters in Celie's life which prompts Celie to reassess her existence, and the events of her history completely:

. . . I feels daze.

My daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not pa.

You must be sleep.

(183)

Conclusion/ Bone by Bone

African American women's acknowledgement in letters of "leadings of the spirit" (Baker Workings 38) began with the 1797 petition of Belinda, continued throughout the eighteen-hundreds in the spiritual autobiographies of eight black preacher women, and can be identified today in some of the most powerful fictional works of contemporary black women writers in America. While theorists and critics such as Foster, Braxton and Carby delineate a line of literary development from Jarena Lee, through secular sentimental writers such as Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper and Nella Larsen to contemporary female novelists, important connections exist between the contemporary writers and the entire group of nineteenth-century black female spiritual autobiographers whose work as a body, has been heretofore unexamined. Those autobiographies demonstrate the manner in which African American women uniquely inscribed themselves in the American literary consciousness. Challenging the collective brotherhood of black men which purported to speak for all black people, or the sacred tenets of the cult of true (white) womanhood, the black evangelist women accomplished their own self-definition. They publicly questioned the nature of white/male "truth", problematized the value of literacy, reconfigured the black female body, employed black sermonality and song, and (per)formed astounding feats of self fashioning and community-formation in the face of virulent resistance and an alienation so profound that they often stood strangely apart from the very communities in which they ministered. Theirs was a setting down of spiritual experience which

began with Belinda's strong Africentricity, and ended as the twentieth century dawned, with the genteel Victorian sentimentality of Virginia Broughton's missionary narrative. Yet, if the seeds of the mothers gardens were dispersed upon the winds of a Christian Eurocentricity which exerts its influence in varying degrees (according to class, chronology and religious denomination) over all the narratives, those seeds were never lost. The texts of the black mothers were not forgotten. The contemporary daughters re-call the mothers in some of the very same themes, figurations and narrative strategies which had their origins in the nineteenth-century works-- themes of spiritual and communal trial; figurations of the "unnatural woman"; multi-voiced narrative strategies of recursion and revision which describe the cultural negotiations and profound spiritual transformations which all these women experienced. What became of Belinda, or of all the nineteenth-century evangelist women with the exception of Sojourner Truth, we will never know; their existences, in a white/male hegemonic system which failed to honor them, were ephemeral. But their texts remain, and bone by bone, we may recover their works. That task is as necessary as ever. For black women in America continue to struggle to be heard above a cacophony of discourses which speak about, but are often not produced by them. In the literary works of black women the resolutely articulate power of the ancestral spirit has been, and perhaps always will be present in some form; as in the case of Belinda, she stands before a jury of her peers-- "and she will ever pray."

APPENDIX 1: BIOGRAPHIES
Women in AME, AME Zion, Baptist and Shaker Organizations

On May 20, 1894 Julia Foote was made a deacon in the African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) Zion Church. She was seventy-one, and the first woman to be ordained in a black American religious denomination. The AME church did not officialize full ordination for women until 1948, but all during the nineteenth century, black Methodist women struggled for the right to preach officially as men did. Because of their continued efforts--written letters to governing bodies, group appearances at church conferences, repeated disregard of church injunctions against women preaching without official church sanction-- the AME General Conference of 1868, in an effort to control these women, grudgingly created the "Board of Stewardesses" which would "look after the females. . . [and] assist the stewards, class leaders and pastor" of congregations (Dodson xxxii). In 1884, further concessions had to be made; women were granted license to preach as evangelists. This did not mean that they could receive full ordination, however. As Dodson comments: "so many successful preaching women existed in African Methodism that the 1884 General Conference felt compelled to bring their work under denominational authority. There was no intent to alter Church polity to include women, only to exert control over their preaching" (xxxv).

In the three black Baptist denominations (National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; National Baptist Convention of America, Unic.; and Progressive National Baptist Convention) women's attempts to attain official ordination were more difficult. While black women held formal positions as deaconesses, served on committees, and attended Convention meetings during the 18th century First Awakening, such freedom was curtailed in the 19th century, and eventually, in both black and white Baptist churches, leadership became "almost exclusively male" (Lincoln and Mamiya 287). As late as 1990, no black Baptist conventions had taken a formal, collective stand either in favor of or against female ordination. Lincoln and Mamiya observe that a strong correlation exists between denomination, and approval of women in the clergy, with AME and AME Zion tending to demonstrate the most and Baptist the least approval (Lincoln & Mamiya 293). In their 1990 nation-wide survey of the clergy in 2,150 black churches, only sixty-six, or 3.7 per cent, were women (Lincoln and Mamiya 289).

Shaker communities were strictly divided along gender lines in which "men's work" and "women's work" was dictated according to divine plan. That plan delineated traditional activities for men-- woodworking, blacksmithing, merchandising-- and for women-- cooking, spinning, dyeing. However, because of the division of the sexes within the community, women were also enabled to advance to positions of considerable authority over other women. On the other hand, Shaker Ministry was open to men only. Elders-- not Eldresses-- addressed and exhorted Shaker worshippers, indicated the commencement of ritual dancing, and signaled the end of

meetings (Procter-Smith 140). Only during designated periods of free testimony were women allowed to exercise their "gifts"-- inspirations given them by the spirit, in which they might speak aloud publicly. Interestingly, from 1837 to 1847 a large number of women prophesied and spoke out of gifts of the spirit, in a period of revival called "Mother Ann's Work." "Mother" Ann Lee was the original founder of Shakerism, leaving England for America in 1774 to found a Shaker colony there. After her death Shaker leadership passed into the hands of males (although ostensibly there were always Elders *and* Eldresses), and became over time more and more formal and structured in its ritual exercises.

Belinda (? - ?)
(petition submitted to Massachusetts Legislature 1774)

From Belinda's petition, we glean only very basic knowledge about her life. Born somewhere in West Africa, she seems to have enjoyed an idyllic childhood there until she was captured by white slave catchers, separated from her entire family, and brought to America on a slave ship. The horrors of that voyage are summed up in Belinda's assertion that all of the strange and wondrous sights of the New World could not divert her attention from "three hundred Africans in chains, suffering the most excruciating torment; and some of them rejoicing that the pangs of death came like a balm to their wounds."

Belinda was never to give up the religion of her ancestors. She refers in her document to her childhood familial worship of the Orisas in West Africa, and has nothing but criticism to level at the white followers of Christianity who enslaved her.

Belinda seems to have received no formal education in America, and it is unknown who the father of her surviving daughter was. It is for herself and this daughter that she petitions the court for money owed her by her master for her services rendered him.

Jarena Lee (1783 - ?)

Born in Cape May, New Jersey, Lee was parted from her parents at age seven, when she was hired out to work as a servant for a white family, the Sharps. Lee writes that her parents were "wholly ignorant of the knowledge of God" (27). All we know of her childhood is that she struggled continually to find divine grace and to cure herself of her propensity for lying, moodiness, and suicidal depression until the age of twenty-one when she was converted. During 1804, the restless year of her conversion, she moved from the home of the Sharps, took up residence with a Roman Catholic family near Philadelphia, and finally moved to Philadelphia proper in order to attend "the English Church" there. However, Lee decided that "*this is not the people for you*" (28), and seeking out the Methodists, heard the Reverend Richard Allen, the future founder of the AME church speak. It was then that she decided that "this is the people to which my heart unites" (29), and three weeks after she joined the Philadelphia AME church, Lee's soul was "gloriously converted to God" (29). In that moment, she leapt to her feet and first spoke in public: "For a few moments I had the power to exhort sinners. . ." (29). For four years afterward, Lee struggled with bouts of suicidal depression in which "I was strangely buffeted by that enemy of all righteousness--the devil" (29). Around 1808, Lee met "a certain coloured man, by name William Scott" (33) who introduced her to the notion of sanctification. She shortly thereafter attained this state of grace, and around 1811 received a call from God to preach the gospel. She was initially rebuffed by Richard Allen, who informed her that "our Discipline. . . did not call for women preachers" (36). At this same time, Jarena married Joseph Lee, pastor of a black church in Snow Hill several miles out of Philadelphia. Living with Joseph in Snow Hill, away from the Philadelphia congregation, Lee struggled with loneliness, ill health, and finally, with the death through illness of five family members-- her husband among them. Six years after her marriage, she was "left alone in the world, with two infant children, one of the age of about two years, the other six months" (41). At this time (1818) Lee returned to Philadelphia and petitioned Richard Allen again-- this time, for the permission to hold prayer meetings in her home. Allen endorsed this request on the part of Lee. A year later, Lee, moved by the text of a preaching minister, "sprang, as by an altogether supernatural impulse to my feet" (44) and began to exhort in church. Her fears of expulsion from the church never materialized; Bishop Allen remarked that "he now as much believed that I was called to [preaching] as any of the preachers present" (45). While this did not constitute an official licence to preach, it seems that thereafter, Lee was able to travel the countryside as "an official traveling exhorter" sanctioned by the AME church (Andrews Sisters 6). Lee left her sickly son (there is no mention of the other child) with friends, "breaking up housekeeping, and forsaking all to preach the everlasting Gospel" (46). Andrews notes that Lee preached in Philadelphia, in the Mid Atlantic and Northeastern states, "from Baltimore, Maryland, to Rochester, New York, and as far west at Dayton, Ohio" (Andrews Sisters 6). In 1835 alone she traveled above seven hundred miles and preached about seven hundred sermons; in 1839 she met sister evangelist Zilpha Elaw while both were preaching in western

Pennsylvania. In 1840 she joined the American Antislavery Society, in the hope that abolition would allow the gospel to "have free course to every nation" (Lee in Andrews Sisters 6).

Lee's first autobiography appears in 1836, printed at the request of the author for a cost of thirty-eight dollars. Three years earlier, in 1833, she had paid an unidentified editor to prepare her manuscript for publication. 1839 saw a second printing of her Life, and in 1844 she sought the support of the AME Book Committee for the publication of an expanded version. The committee refused Lee, declaring that her manuscript was "written in such a manner that it is impossible to decipher much of the meaning contained in it." Ignoring their injunction that traveling preachers not publish any material without formal church approval, Lee paid for the printing of the new Life herself in 1849. This is the last we know of her activities.

Zilpha Elaw (1790 - ?)

Elaw was born near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Christian parents whose denominational affiliation is unknown. The middle child of three siblings (a brother six years older than Elaw, and a younger sister), Elaw saw her brother taken to live with maternal grandparents "in the interior of America, at a distance of many hundred miles" (Elaw 53) when she was six, and lost her mother to death in childbirth (the mother was delivering her twenty-second child) by the time Elaw was twelve years old. At that time the girl's father put her to service in a Quaker family, the Mitchels, where she lived until she was twenty-one. We are not told what education Elaw managed to receive, but the style of her autobiography suggests that, among her sister autobiographers, she managed to attain a relatively advanced level of literacy, and knowledge of literary style and discourse. In her midteens, Elaw was attracted to the (white) Methodists "who had made their first appearance in that part of the country" (55). She was allowed by her Quaker mistress to attend Methodist meetings, and in 1808, at age eighteen, she was converted and joined a Methodist society in an outlying region of Philadelphia. In this society-- which she calls her "happy home"-- she remained for nearly seven years. In 1810, Zilpha married Joseph Elaw, a fuller, and "a very respectable young man, in the general acceptation of the term, but he was not a Christian" (61). The following year the couple moved to Burlington, New Jersey where Joseph could find work, and by 1812, Zilpha had given birth to their only child, a daughter.

In 1817, Elaw attended her first camp meeting; in a trance-like state, she received sanctification and first spoke publicly, "open[ing] my mouth in public prayer" (67). Two years later, at another camp meeting, she began to exhort the congregation, again in a trance-like state. She was encouraged to preach by other (white) women and (white) ministers of the Methodist Society, but "some of the members of our class soon began to betray a little jealousy. . . . I became so unpopular, that all our coloured class abandoned me excepting three. . . . [B]ut the number of white brethren and sisters who flocked to my ministry increased daily" (83). Elaw's preaching became a source of deep embarrassment for her husband Joseph: "he advised me to decline the work altogether, and proceed no further" (84). After his death of consumption in 1823, Zilpha was forced to work as a domestic, and to hire her daughter out also. Elaw opened a school for black children in Burlington, a city where no schools for blacks existed; but shortly thereafter, commissioned by God, she closed the school, left her daughter with a relative, and began her preaching career. From 1825 to 1828 she preached independently, under no denomination, supporting herself upon hospitalities extended by members of congregations gathered to hear her. From 1828 to 1830, she preached in the Southern States, in spite of "the very real danger of being arrested or kidnapped and sold as a slave" there (Andrews *Sisters* 8). During the next ten years, Elaw traveled and preached to what seems to be predominantly white audiences in various locations across the United States, including the Mid Atlantic and the Northeastern states. Elaw was preoccupied by the notion of preaching abroad, many years before she actually booked a passage to England in the summer of 1840. She preached and traveled mainly to Methodist audiences in England until 1845, at which time she planned to

return home. Here her autobiography ends, and nothing subsequent is known of her.

Sojourner Truth (1797 - 1883)

Sojourner Truth, born Isabella Bomefree, was the ninth child of slave parents who were owned by a Dutch family in Hurley, Ulster County, New York. As a child Truth spoke only Dutch. In her autobiography she recalls receiving religious instruction from her mother, a Christian. That instruction was borne out of her mother's simple, non-church-affiliated belief system in which a "God who hears and sees you" and who "lives in the sky" (Truth 17) watched over all family members. Truth's family was fractured when she was eleven and various members were sold in a slave auction. Between the ages of eleven and thirteen Isabella herself was sold three times. She eventually became the property of a Mr. Dumont, residing in New Paltz, New York. The date of her "marriage" to a fellow slave named Thomas is unknown; it was most probably a union arranged by Dumont, out of which Truth bore five children.

In 1826, when Truth was twenty-nine, she ran away from Dumont and found haven with a nearby Quaker family, the van Wagners. It was during her stay with the van Wagners-- a time when she struggled with the intense loneliness of separation from her family and friends on the Dumont estate-- that she experienced religious conversion. The incident which precipitated her departure from the Dumonts was Mr. Dumont's failure to honor his promise to grant Truth her freedom after she had fulfilled a specified amount of work and time in his service. While staying at the van Wagners, Truth discovered that Dumont had allowed her five-year-old son Peter to be sold South-- an illegal action, since the selling of slaves out of state was prohibited. Truth took a suit against the new owners of the boy and, astoundingly, won custody of her son. As a woman of scant means herself, she could only see that Peter-- badly traumatized by his Southern ordeal-- was procured a "place. . . as a tender of locks, at a place called Wahnkendall, near Greenkills" (55). Around 1829 she moved from Ulster County to New York City with Peter (73), but the troubled boy's propensity to "abuse his privileges, and to involve himself in repeated difficulties" (75) led Truth to make arrangements with a "colored barber" who "sometimes helped young culprits out of their troubles and sent them from city dangers, by shipping them on board of whaling vessels" (76). Peter sailed in the summer of 1839, and Truth after receiving several letters from her son, never heard from or saw him again. He was not more than thirteen.

While staying in Kingston during court proceedings, Truth had joined the Methodist Church there. That church provided Truth with introductions to a (white) Methodist congregation in New York City, and helped place her as a servant with a white family in New York, the Latourettes. Although she continued to attend religious meetings at the home of the Latourettes, and to perform a great deal of benevolent missionary work in the company of their friends, Truth independently located the Methodist "Zion Church in Church street, composed entirely of colored people" (80) and began attendance there. Olive Gilbert writes that James Latourette was Methodist, but he came to believe "that he had outgrown ordinances, and advocated free meetings. . . at his own dwelling-house. . ." (86). It was at one of these "free meetings" that Truth first met a Mr. Pierson, a man "characterized by a strong devotional spirit, which finally became highly fanatical" (88). Through Pierson, Truth was

introduced to Robert Matthews, whose Kingdom of Matthias Truth eventually joined, donating all of her savings to the Matthias undertaking. Around 1833, the "Kingdom" eventually located itself at the farm residence of a Mr. Folger in Sing Sing, New York. However, in 1835 the mysterious death of Mr. Pierson resulted in a public scandal in which Matthias (Robert Matthews) was accused of murder and the Kingdom was disbanded. Truth, then working as a servant and member of the Kingdom, was implicated in the murder by Folger's wife. But after court proceedings in which her name was cleared, she returned to New York and resumed her life there.

By 1843, Truth, depressed and convinced that "every thing she had undertaken in the city of New York had finally proved a failure" (98), decided to change her name to "Sojourner" and travel east where "'The Spirit calls me. . .'" (100). Relying on the kindness of strangers and lodging where she could, she attended religious gatherings as she heard about them. She eventually began "advertis[ing] meetings of her own, and held forth to large audiences, having, as she said, 'a good time'" (101). In Hartford, Connecticut, she became involved with the "Second Advent" or "Millerites", a religious group headed by William Miller, a Vermont farmer who believed the world would end in 1843. Nell Irving Painter ("Difference, Slavery and Memory: Sojourner Truth in Feminist Abolitionism" 146) suggests that Truth may have left New York City under the influence of Millerism, or the wave of Second Adventism then sweeping the area. Truth also visited a Quaker settlement, and for a short period, contemplated a Shaker lifestyle, but she was diverted from this course by the family at whose home she resided at the time. That family introduced Truth to the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Florence, Massachusetts, "one of the most equalitarian and fervently abolitionist of all the Utopian communities at that time" (Terry 441). Truth resided the winter of 1843 there. It was in the spring of 1844 that she first met Frederick Douglass, who was then visiting the Northampton Association. Douglass wrote:

David Ruggles [black publisher] was not the only colored person who found refuge in this Community. I met here for the first time that strange compound of wit and wisdom, of wild enthusiasm and flint-like common sense, who seemed to feel it her duty to trip me up in my speeches and to ridicule my efforts to speak and act like a person of cultivation and refinement. I allude to Sojourner Truth.

(Douglass in Terry 440-1)

Truth also met her amanuensis, Olive Gilbert at Northampton. Gilbert, a friend of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, heard of Truth through Garrison and went to Northampton to meet her. The Narrative of Sojourner Truth was published in 1850, with the help of Garrison, who "arranged for the private printing of the book in Boston" (Mabee 53). Truth lived upon the kindness of friends, and on the income generated from the sale of her books which she herself accomplished during lectures and traveling tours. As Frances Titus attests in her Introduction to the later Narrative however, that income was minimal, and decreased as Sojourner's age prevented her from being as active as she had been in her younger days: "The second and most important reason for offering

this book to the public is, that by its sale she may be kept from want in these her last days" (Truth viii). In 1851 Truth left Northampton on an abolitionist lecturing circuit which took her to Western New York in the company of other abolitionists. It was during this year that she gave her famous "Arn't I a Woman" speech at an Akron, Ohio women's rights convention. 1857 found her settled in a house of her own purchasing in Harmonia, Michigan, a small Spiritualist community, where she met Frances Titus, a friend who would eventually publish the expanded version of Truth's autobiography in 1875. Truth was to spend the rest of her life lecturing, selling her books and daguerreotypes, and campaigning in the cause of Christianity, abolition, and women's rights. She moved to Battle Creek in 1867, and there she remained, close to abolitionist and Spiritualist friends who also lived in the vicinity, until her death in 1883. Mabee comments upon Truth's lifelong search for community:

In choosing to settle in Harmonia she was for the third time choosing to live in an intentional community, the first having been the Matthias community in New York, the second having been the Northampton Association. Evidently she felt a need. . . to live in a community whose ideals she shared, and from which she could hope to secure at least emotional support"

(Mabee 98)

Interestingly, although Truth spent a great deal of time during and after the Civil war in black soldier camps and Free Colored refugee enclaves, lecturing to and working among black Americans, it was with predominantly white Americans that she choose to settle. Her choice of a Spiritualist community in Harmonia reflects a life-long willingness on the part of Truth to experiment with many different religious denominations. She was most often introduced as a Methodist (Mabee 240), but in later life, she explained that "'she had been a Methodist till that church outgrew her; it had changed and not she'" (Mabee 240). Writes Mabee: "This suggests that she continued to identify herself with Methodists' old-time emphasis on experiential religion, which encouraged individuals to testify on their own personal experience of God, and their own colloquial language, but that if Methodists became more formal or doctrinaire, she grew uncomfortable" (240). Indeed, in the course of her life Truth lived among the followers of Matthias, the Quakers, considered joining the Shakers, was a Millerite, a Spiritualist, and spoke regularly in Battle Creek Michigan among the Seventh Day Adventists. At her funeral two white male ministers spoke, one a Presbyterian, and the other an ex-Unitarian-turned-liberal writer and lecturer. Mabee comments: "Perhaps it hints at the breadth that Truth had attained that this advocate of blacks could choose two whites to speak at her funeral, this advocate of women could choose two men, and this still evangelical Christian could choose two religious liberals" (245).

Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795 - 1871)

Rebecca Cox Jackson was the daughter of a woman who was married perhaps three times. The girl Rebecca, born just outside Philadelphia, lived with her grandmother from infancy until age three or four. By age six she was again living with her mother, Jane Wisson who had remarried since Rebecca's birth. Rebecca's grandmother died when the girl was seven. By age ten, she was living in a Philadelphia apartment with her mother, younger sister and infant brother (offspring of a third marriage). Rebecca cared for these children while her mother worked outside their home. At death of her mother in 1808 she was probably taken into the home of her older brother Joseph Cox, a minister in the AME church. Nothing is known of Rebecca from age thirteen until her autobiography opens in 1830 when she is thirty-five. At that time, she was living in relative comfort with her brother in a free black Philadelphia community, working as a seamstress and taking care of her widowed brother's four children.

That autobiography opens with a gripping account of Jackson's conversion experience, and goes on to recount her sanctification during a neighbourhood revival the following year. It is around this time that Jackson learned to read.

The date of her marriage to a man named Samuel Jackson is unknown, but by 1831 they were already married. The marriage produced no children. Rebecca ceased to have sexual relations with Samuel after her sanctification in 1831. Celibacy is a tenet of Shaker belief, but in her autobiography Jackson writes that even before she became acquainted with the Shakers she was unknowingly engaging in many of the same practices that her future religious community did.

Shortly after her sanctification, Jackson began to assume a role of leadership in Holiness "Covenant" (Humez 20) meetings attended by fellow AME members. Jackson began to hold weekly meetings of her own, where she sought to establish a more supportive setting for two shy sisters from the community, as well as her husband Samuel, then seeking his own conversion. Her meetings attracted large crowds, as well as Philadelphia AME Bishop Morris Brown who came to investigate claims that a woman was "leading the men", and that Rebecca was not a formal member of any church (20). Brown left the gathering, finding nothing amiss.

By 1833 Jackson was preaching in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania to religiously diverse crowds of whites and blacks, her sermons igniting responsive waves of revivalistic fervor in the area.

Between 1833 and 1835, she made an extensive tour of many towns and villages west and south of Philadelphia, traveling outside the auspices of any church, and in fact receiving the disapprobation of the AME church. Jackson preached celibacy during her travels, "by far the most threatening aspect of [her] ministry in the 1830's" (Humez 21). Eventually, accused of heresy by various representatives of AME and Presbyterian churches in 1837, she demanded a trial at her home in Philadelphia. In her autobiography, Jackson specifies requesting "mothers of the church" at her trial, as well as spiritual men. Jackson was refused a trial. It was at this time that she broke with African Methodism and with her minister brother Joseph Cox. Humez suggests that in 1836, Jackson, standing abandoned by her family and alone, put herself under the spiritual

authority of an imaginary white guardian in Shaker-like garb, who in a vision showed her three books and promised to instruct her in them (Humez 22).

During the years 1841-1843 Jackson lived with the "Little Band", a group of mostly white Perfectionists in the Albany area. Jackson met this group at the end of an 1840 preaching tour which took her to New York, southern New England, and finally Albany. In 1843, after two visits to the nearby Shaker community at Watervliet, sixteen of the Albany Perfectionists, including Jackson, decided to join the Shakers. Rebecca was extremely impressed with the Shakers during her three-day visit there, but did not join their community immediately; from 1843 - 1847, she lived with another black woman, Rebecca Perot in Philadelphia, making occasional visits to the Shaker community at Watervliet.

Jackson was to live the rest of her life with Perot. In 1847 the two women began to live at Watervliet. There, Jackson clashed with Shaker authorities over her adherence to her own inner voice concerning confession and preaching-- it seems that during her mandatory public confession, Jackson said something which caused the Shaker leaders to hurry her into a private room where she could continue her confession "with only sisters present" (27). At that time, Jackson's "inner voice had fallen silent" and her confession was not completed. Regarding preaching, Jackson preached in spite of the Shaker injunction against such activity for women. In addition to her disagreements with Shaker authorities, Jackson was concerned to start a ministry to blacks in "the world", and eventually left Watervliet with Rebecca Perot in 1851 for this purpose. This too caused disapproval on the part of Shaker eldress Paulina Bates who adhered to the Shaker belief that Shakers should not mingle with the "world's people" (Humez 31-32). Jackson and Perot lived six years in Philadelphia. During that time, they attended seance spiritualistic circles, training themselves to act as mediums. Jackson claimed that her husband's and brother's spirits appear to her, first at Watervliet and later in Philadelphia (33). Shaker belief in the Era of Manifestations, a period when dead souls had the opportunity to follow the dead Ann Lee's (founder of Shakerism) guidance, seems to have affected Jackson at this point in her life. The Rebeccas returned to Watervliet in 1857, and stayed only one year. During that time, Jackson suffered from a mysterious eye ailment, and her dreams, "Dream at Ten Years of Age" and "Dream of Home and Search for Eldress Paulina" suggest that she sought desperately to resolve the vexed issues of community and race which continually troubled her (Humez 34-35). Around this time, Holy Mother Wisdom, one of Jackson's vision figures, advised Jackson to relinquish her obedience to her inner voice solely. Jackson informed Eldress Paulina of her decision, and subsequently received the Eldress' blessing on her return mission to Philadelphia to help her people. From 1858 - 1864 Jackson and Perot performed Shaker missionary work in Philadelphia. June 4, 1864 marks Jackson's last journal entry. She died seven years later in 1871. Nothing is known of the Shaker community in Philadelphia during that time.

After 1871 the Philadelphia Shaker community was led by Rebecca Perot. The Shaker "family" there consisted of twelve to twenty women, mostly black. Shaker records indicate that the Philadelphia Shaker family was a successful combination of Shakerism and female praying band traditions developed in Methodism. References made in Shaker records to

the Philadelphian Shakers reported that the women "shake, they get right down. . . and strip off pride and bondage" (Humez 40). Allusions are also made to their music: "Their singing is peculiar, but it is given with force of spirit that impresses one they are under its power. . . ." (Humez 41).

Rebecca Perot and three other aging Philadelphia Shaker sisters moved to the Watervliet Shaker community in 1896. Perot died there five years later. Alonzo Hollister, Jackson's compiler, wrote that with Perot's move to Watervliet, the Philadelphia colony ended. But W.E.B. DuBois observes in his book Philadelphia Negro that there were still two Shaker households in Philadelphia in 1908 (Humez 41)

1. In her discussion of Rebecca Cox Jackson's twenty-eight-year relationship with Rebecca Perot, Jean Humez suggests the possibility that theirs may have been a "homosocial" relationship (Smith-Rosenberg in Humez 9). Julia Foote also lived with a close female companion for a period of about six years, during which she lost her desire to preach and travel. For further exploration of such black female relations, Humez cites the work of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America", as well as Blanche Wiesen Cook "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination': Lesbianism and the Cultural Traditions", and Bethel and Smith's Conditions: Five. The Black Women's Issue 2, 2 (1979).

Julia Foote (1823 - 1900)

Born in Schenectady, New York, Foote was the daughter of former slaves who had bought their freedom, and who adhered strongly to the Christian faith. As members of a white Methodist congregation, they "were not treated as Christian believers, but as poor lepers" (Foote 167), a situation which Foote later felt impacted adversely on her parents' ability to know "the power of Christ to save; for their spiritual guides were as blind as those they led" (Foote 167).

Foote could not attend Schenectady's segregated schools. Her parents therefore sent her to work as a maid for a white family the Primes, whose influence allowed the girl to attend a country school outside Schenectady. She stayed here for two years, between the ages of ten and twelve, eventually returning home to care for her four younger siblings, in order that her mother could work outside the family household. Except for these two years of schooling, Foote was otherwise self-educated. Her lack of formal education seems due to continuing race prejudice in public schools, as well as her family's own economic restrictions.

When Foote was about twelve, her family moved to Albany, New York. There she experienced conversion at age fifteen, in 1838. Soon after, she joined the AME Church in Albany. At about age sixteen or seventeen, she became sanctified, despite her parents' and pastors' scepticism about sanctification.

At age 18, around 1841 she married a sailor, George Foote, and subsequently moved with him to Boston, where she joined the AME Zion Church. They had no children. It was in the Zion church that she first began to spread the doctrine of sanctification, praying and exhorting in the homes of other believers. Her husband George Foote was a religious man, but Foote writes that their marriage suffered because of his refusal to accept her belief in sanctification, as well as her persistent efforts to convince him that he too should become sanctified. It seems that from the inception of their marriage, George spent large amounts of time away from Julia; after their move to Boston, he worked in Cheslea, "and could not come to look after my welfare but once a week" (Foote 192). Soon after a quarrel about sanctification in which "there was an indescribable something between us-- something dark and high" (196), George Foote departed for the sea for a six-month period. Not long after this, Julia received her call to preach. She never lived with her husband again.

Between 1841 when she arrived in Boston, and 1845 when she began her itinerant ministry, Foote encountered resistance in the AME Zion Church over her public advocacy of sanctification. Sometime during that period she was read out of AME Zion as a schismatic by minister of the Boston church, Jehiel C. Beman. Foote appealed his decision, taking a letter to the Zion Conference in Philadelphia, but her letter "was slightly noticed, and then thrown under the table" (207). During that Conference, Foote met with other preaching women, hired a hall and held a series of religious meetings there, over which she presided. Subsequent to these women's meetings, Foote traveled to Binghamton, NY, where her parents had moved from Albany. From Binghamton, she traveled west through upstate New York to Cincinnati, Ohio, preaching in AME and Methodist churches that invited her, or preaching in the company of other traveling ministers. It was around this time, in 1849 that she received

news of her husband's death at sea. Soon after, she returned to Binghamton to nurse her ailing father, and after his death in that same year, she returned to her itinerancy, this time in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. It was during this period of travel that she met Sister Ann M. Johnson "who became my traveling companion" (219). By 1850, together with Sister Johnson, she was preaching in Ohio again, continuing on to Detroit and Canada, and eventually settling with Sister Johnson in Cleveland in 1851. From this point, until 1869, Foote remained in Cleveland, beset with "throat difficulty" and forced to curtail her preaching activity. How Foote supported herself during this sedentary time in Cleveland is unclear (Andrews *Sisters* 10). Foote offers no details, but only writes in a general and vague manner that she was "tried and tempted over this affliction" (224). A few equally vague paragraphs follow, concerning the manner in which God "suffers the wicked to go a great way, and the ungodly to triumph over us, that he may prove our steadfastness and make manifest his power in upholding us" (225). After the death of Sister Johnson in 1856, Foote's mother lived with her for several years, eventually leaving to visit Foote's sisters in Albany and Boston. In 1869 Foote again began to preach, joining the "glorious wave of holiness, which has been rolling through Ohio during the past few years, [and] has swept every hindrance out of my way" (226). In 1879 she published her autobiography. She subsequently became a missionary for the AME Zion Church, and by 1894, was ordained as a deacon in the Church. Between 1894 and her death in 1900, she was ordained an elder in AME Zion, the second woman to hold that high office in her denomination.

1. See fn. 1 in Jackson (above) for a discussion of black women and "homosocial" relationships in the nineteenth-century.

Elizabeth (1766 - 1866)

Elizabeth's brief autobiography was published in 1889 by the Quaker Tract Association of Friends. It seems that her autobiography came into the possession of Quakers as a result of her association in later life with the Friends. Elizabeth writes: "I may here remark, that while journeying through the different States of the union, I met with many of the Quaker Friends, and visited them in their families. I received much kindness and sympathy, and no opposition from them, in the prosecution of my labors" (11). A description of Elizabeth's death is recorded at the end of her autobiography by an unknown writer.

Elizabeth was born a slave in Maryland in 1766. Her parents were Methodists. At the age of eleven, the girl was separated from her parents and siblings and sent to work on a farm several miles away, "which was a great trouble to me" (2). Between the ages of eleven and thirteen, struggling with acute loneliness and depression "in a place where there was no preaching, and no religious instruction" (4-5), Elizabeth experienced conversion and justification. As a young teenager, she had visions of her future calling as preacher, but these visions were not to be realized until she was forty-two years of age. After struggling for some time with her own sense of inadequacy to preach as an uneducated black woman, she was directed by "the Spirit" to visit a "poor widow, and ask her if I might have a meeting at her house, which was situated in one of the lowest and worst streets in Baltimore" (6). Thus, Elizabeth's first public engagement was "there among a few colored sisters" (6). In the face of virulent opposition from church elders, Elizabeth continued to hold prayer meetings, struggling continually with feelings of internalized "shame" and inadequacy about her preaching. It is unclear when Elizabeth began an itinerant preaching ministry. Such a ministry would have been undertaken independently, and, like many other black preaching women, Elizabeth's source of income would have been derived from the contributions of those who came to hear her speak. Traveling in Maryland, Virginia, Michigan, and other States as well as in Canada, Elizabeth risked imprisonment in slave states "because I spoke against slavery" (11). At the age of eighty-three, she settled in Michigan for four years, finding "a wide field of labor amongst my own color" (11). There she established a school for colored orphans, and having obtained white teachers, "met with much encouragement" (12). In 1853, suffering from intense "bodily anguish, occasioned by gangrenous sores upon one of her feet, which extended from the toes to the knee" (14), she moved from Michigan to Philadelphia, and remained there working and preaching among the blacks of that city until she died.

Amanda Berry Smith (1837 - 1915)

Smith was born in Long Green, Maryland, the eldest daughter of thirteen children born to slaves, Samuel and Mariam Berry. When Smith was still a small child, her father, through hard labor, managed to purchase his own liberty. Shortly thereafter, one of the daughters of their master was converted to Methodism, and convinced her father to allow Samuel Berry to purchase his wife and children. Thus, the Berry family gained its freedom. Smith was eight when she first began to attend a small private school, operated by the daughter of a Methodist minister. The school, attended by both black and white children, provided Smith with about six weeks of school in the summertime, during which "[a]ll the white children had to have their full lessons, and if time was left the colored children had a chance" (27). Over a period of about five years, Smith obtained "in all about three months' schooling" (27). At the age of thirteen, living as a servant with a widow Mrs. Latimer and her five children in Strausburg, Maryland, Smith attended a Methodist church service where she "resolved [to] be the Lord's and live for him" (28). In 1854 Smith married her first husband, a "C. Devine" (42), at which time, she moved to Columbia, Pennsylvania. With this man, she had two children, one of whom died, and the other, Mazie, who grew to adulthood. In 1855 she was close to death, probably as a result of the birth of her first child (one of four children who would die in infancy). It was at that time that she had a vision of herself preaching at a camp meeting to a congregation of thousands. Soon after this she was converted. Smith's first husband died in the civil war, and several years later she married James Smith, a preacher and ordained deacon in the AME Church-- a marriage which proved "very unsatisfactory" (57), partly because of James' hostility toward Amanda's evangelical calling. Although their employment situations as butler and washerwoman respectively often necessitated that the couple live apart, it was due to this husband's "unkindness" that Smith sought sanctification, and, having received the gift of holiness, she began to attend a number of different churches-- some white, but mainly black (132)-- testifying and speaking out publicly at religious class and prayer meetings. In 1869, she was called by God to leave New York where she then lived "and go out" (132) to Salem, New Jersey to preach. Smith was beset by financial worries-- "two little attic rooms" (175), the rent for which she "wanted to pay two months [in advance] before I went" (133); and a pressing need for new shoes (133). But given a small sum of money by the pastor of one of the churches she attended, Smith was encouraged to embark on her preaching mission. She stayed in Salem from November 1869 until June 1870. Smith's daughter Mazie, then not more than fourteen, had already been living in Philadelphia "with a very nice family" (137) for some time. Mazie would live by turns as a servant with white families, with her maternal grandfather, and with her mother. By October of 1870, Smith had left New York again (152), preaching in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Vermont and Tennessee during the 1870's. In 1878, having placed Mazie in a Baltimore school, Smith left for Africa as an independent missionary and did not return to America until 1890. During that time she preached in England, served two years in India, and eight in Liberia. Her return to America was fraught with economic difficulty; Smith received no funding from any official source either at

home or abroad, and her preaching activities along the Eastern seaboard were curtailed by poverty and illness (Dodson xxxvii). She moved to Chicago in 1892 and published her autobiography in 1893. With the funds gained from the sale of her book; wealthy donors; and a monthly newspaper, The Helper, which she produced, Smith opened the Amanda Smith Industrial Orphan Home for black children in Harvey, Illinois. The school struggled to remain open, in spite of a lack of subsequent funding, and was eventually destroyed by fire in 1918. Smith settled in Sebring, Florida, in a house provided for her by a wealthy realtor, and there she died.

Virginia Broughton (1850? - ?)

Virginia Broughton, born of free parents in the state of Virginia, attended a Southern "private school" (Broughton 7) before the Civil War, and was "reading in the fourth reader" as "the new day of freedom dawned" for blacks in America in 1865. That same year, she began to attend Fisk University from which she graduated ten years later in 1875. We may surmise that at graduation, Broughton would have been around twenty-five, which would tentatively establish her date of birth somewhere in the vicinity of 1850. For twelve years after her graduation she taught in black public schools in Memphis, advancing eventually to the position of principal. In 1887, she was invited to attend an all-female Baptist missionary meeting, at which the women organized a "Bible Band" (9). Broughton does not specify the racial composition of these "Band" meetings, but they were probably all-black events, encouraged by white Baptist missionaries "who visited us in those early days" (13). After a serious illness around that same time, she began to speak publicly at the Bible Band meetings, gaining the attention of the white missionaries, who "were not slow in discerning Virginia's adaptability and ability to help in advancing the work" (13). Thus began Broughton's missionary endeavours "up the Mississippi River" into Arkansas, Missouri, "and a few other points in that immediate vicinity" (15). Financed by the W.B.H.M.S. (Western Baptist Home Missionary Society), Broughton was ensured that her travel expenses were covered on that trip; she returned to Memphis where she taught school five days a week and "gave the other two to missionary work in the rural districts as far as fifty miles away" (18). Broughton's is an account of her racial uplift efforts to Christianize, "help" and "train" (22) black settlements in the South after the Civil War. She made such a positive example of herself that the (white) Baptist Missionary society decided to provide for the missionary training of other black women, opening three schools for this purpose (23). Broughton's involvement in "this woman's work" (26) took her away from a disapproving husband, and several children (43-7), to numerous women's district association meetings throughout the South, and gained her the approval of "[l]arge numbers of the white citizens" (27). At times, however, she was forced to contend with a "large majority of men [who] really believed the work unlawful and forbidden by the Scriptures" (29), to such an extent that she suffered physical illness as a result. Such opposition included threats and actual incidents of violence against the missionary women.

In 1897, influenced by a wave of holiness moving throughout the Memphis area, Broughton was sanctified. By 1899 she had returned to Virginia, where she worked as secretary in a white-Baptist-operated home and school establishment for black women. Three years later, she was engaged in traveling missionary work once again, moving East as she

1. In the late nineteenth-century, black Baptist groups were seeking independence from white ones, due to the discrimination and paternalism blacks experienced. However, this movement competed with another prevailing school of thought which favored a cooperative approach between the races within existing (white-run) Baptist organizations. It seems that Broughton works in predominantly black settings, but positions herself as a home missionary in the hierarchy of the white Baptist church.

helped to organize women's missionary societies, spoke in churches (probably always under the auspices of a minister-- 95) and encouraged "our women to join our great organized effort for evangelizing the world" (89). Invited by a Baptist superintendent, she again traveled West to Tennessee. During this mission, Broughton refers repeatedly to the missionaries' lack of funds-- a situation which reflected the "dearth and hardships" of the locale they visited (96). Why she was forced to rely upon impoverished local church congregations for finances, and was not funded by the W. B. H. M. S. as in previous earlier endeavors is unclear.

During the 1890's Broughton was also involved in efforts to establish a "woman's separate and distinctive" convention at annual National Baptist conventions in Kentucky, Missouri, Virginia, and Illinois. These annual conventions were an opportunity to "[make] a goodly number of friends for the race" (103)-- white and black Baptists seem to have met together "without disturbances of any kind" (103). However, a sense of the inequality of their relationship is evident as Broughton enthusiastically describes "the African exhibit", a musical concert "illustrative of native African and American Negroes" and a white missionary's "motherly" testimony concerning "the faithfulness and purity of Negro womanhood, as she knew it from forty years personal contact, as perhaps no other white woman in the world had had. . ." (105). 1906 - 1907 found Broughton again teaching, this time in the Agricultural & Mechanical College, Normal, Alabama. The teachers and students of this black school donated "a large percent" of Broughton's expenses to take a trip "abroad" as the Women's Convention Auxillary representative to the national Baptist Convention. Broughton's position at the College was to be filled by her daughter in her absence. Here her autobiography ends. Broughton would then have been about fifty or sixty years of age.

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