

**Blackface and Pale Gaze:
Racialist Sentiment in Stowe, Melville, and London**

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Mary Partica, with love.

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SUMMARY

This dissertation examines the role of minstrelsy and romantic racialism in three American writers, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville, and Jack London. While Melville's fiction is critical of facile racial categories, Stowe's commitment to the abolition of slavery, and London's commitment to socialism are both vitiated by their racism. Both Stowe and London are deeply indebted to the liberatory tradition of the slave narrative, but ultimately select sentiment, the call of the mythic wild, and the call of the domestic cabin, rather than freedom.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphorical blood can dispense with the moving parts of natural blood and has always had everything to do with human groups. When nature made room for human society, human beings made room for nature in society. And blood made in society by human beings has properties that nature knows nothing about. It can consecrate and purify; it can profane and pollute. It can define a community and police the borders thereof. Natural blood never does that sort of thing: it only sustains biological functioning. If it is to perform metaphorical tasks, human beings must carry out those tasks on its behalf. –Barbara and Karen Fields, *Racecraft*

This dissertation is about blood. More specifically, it is about the embrace and critique of the metaphoric uses to which blood is put in the fiction of three American writers: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville, and Jack London. In nineteenth century antebellum culture blood functioned as a metonym for race. The ideological imperatives of dubious mid-century ethnographies sought to demonstrate the probity of a benign patriarchal slave regime by literalizing the metaphoric qualities of blood (the work of culture) as biological characteristics of persons. Thus, according to the lights of what George M. Fredrickson would later call romantic racialism, (101-2) blood codes for character. On this view “black” and “lowly” represent a tautology, as do “white” and “dominant.” Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields contend that “fitting actual humans to any such grid inevitably calls forth the busy repertoire of strange maneuvering that is part of ... *racecraft*. The nineteenth-century bio-racists’ ultimately vain search for traits with which to demarcate human groups regularly exhibited such maneuvering” (16-17).

It takes a considerable amount of “science” for phenotype to become race. As race cannot be found in nature, it must be produced by culture in order to maintain the inequitable hierarchies upon which slavery and the accumulation of capital more generally rely. Eric Lott summarizes Richard Dyer as follows:

The body ... becomes a central problem in justifying or legitimating a capitalist (or

indeed slave) economy. The rhetoric of these economies must insist either that capital has the magical power of multiplying itself or that slaves are contented, tuneful children in a plantation paradise; in reality, of course, it is *human labor* that must reproduce itself as well as create surplus value. In those societies the body is a potentially subversive site because to recognize it fully is to recognize the exploitative organization of labor that structures their economies. Cultural categories must be devised to occlude such a recognition ... In antebellum America it was minstrelsy that performed this crucial hegemonic function, involving the black male body as a powerful cultural sign of sexuality as well as a sign of the dangerous, guilt-inducing physical reality of slavery but relying on the category of race finally to dismiss both. (122-3)

My work is particularly concerned with the way that the cultural construct of racial biology is mobilized in the 19th century to occlude in the recognition of laboring bodies one's brothers and sisters, and thus the possibility of a working class consciousness grounded in cross-racial solidarity, what Lott identifies as the lost opportunity for a "labor abolitionism" (4).¹ Stowe, Melville, and London can all profitably be read as "remembering and denying the inescapability

¹ Lott notes that "one sees a marked class accent in most minstrel acts' racial representations. The dictates of autonomy readily enough produced blackface butts of derision for white men on the bottom; yet, perhaps as a result of minstrel figures' sexual or sentimental power, they were occasionally objects of white male envy as well, even figures of interracial identification, providing in imaginary ways the labor abolitionism that failed to materialize in the Northeast before the Civil War" (91). As David R. Roediger puts it, "in this slaveholding republic where independence was prized but where, especially among Northern artisans, it was also threatened, the bondage of Blacks served as a touchstone by which dependence and degradation were measured. Racial formation and class formation were thus bound to penetrate each other at every turn" (20). Theodore W. Allen calls the effort to mitigate the threat of cross-racial identification the "Great Safety Valve:" "the system of racial privileges conferred on laboring-class European-Americans, rural and urban, poor and exploited though they themselves were. That has been the main historical guarantee of the rule of the 'Titans,' damping down anti-capitalist pressures by making 'race and not class, the distinction in social life.' This, more than any other factor, has 'shaped the contours of American history'—from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to the Civil War, to the overthrow of Reconstruction, to the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights struggle and 'white backlash' of our own day" (258). Indeed, the system of social control Michelle Alexander calls "The New Jim Crow" (58) functions as precisely such a mechanism.

of the body in the economy” (Lott 123). This dialectic of conscious abnegation is frequently performed by characters in blackface. Minstrelsy is a *regular* feature of their work. Of interest is the manner in which each author variously scuttles and encourages a libidinous investment in the mask. Whereas Melville would thrust through the mask, Stowe is trying to take it off. London’s men in furs² enact the political limits of his racial imaginary. For each, minstrelsy performs the crucial and intolerable hegemonic function of race: to remember and deny the shared humanity of the working class. As Lott avers,

Many antiracist arguments ... were unfortunately not that far from the exoticism and hierarchical assumptions of the minstrel tradition. The ideological cement of such a seemingly outrageous yoking was of course nineteenth century sentimentalism—‘romantic racialism,’ ... —which underwrote the widespread and arguably radical attraction of an African-American people’s culture even as it postulated innate differences between the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘African’ races. (32)

The instability of attraction in difference is the ideological nucleus uniting the work of three very different American authors. Although, Stowe, Melville, and London are each indebted to the minstrel tradition, the “outrageous yoking” of romantic racialism is mobilized for different ends: the abolition of slavery for Stowe, the conceptual explosion of the category of “race” for Melville, and the sentimental containment of the revolutionary impulse animate in slave narratives for London.³

² I’m indebted to Mark Seltzer’s *Bodies and Machines* for this phrase, and to his Foucauldian reading of London more generally for corroborating the allegorical dimension of London’s work.

³ Minstrelsy is a potentially dangerous genre predicated upon subversive antecedents. Lott argues that “the minstrel types that began to emerge in the late 1820s ... should ... be placed at the intersection of slave culture and earlier blackface stage characters such as the harlequin of the commedia dell’arte, the clown of English pantomime and the clown of the American circus, the burlesque tramp, perhaps the ‘black-man’ of English folk drama. ... Clowns and harlequins are as often lovable butts of humor as devious producers of it; slave-tale tricksters are frequently (though not always) champions, heroes, backdoor victors for the weak over the strong. Early minstrel figures overlapped

For the white working class, the Panic of 1837⁴ and the major recession that followed provided ample reason to critique capital. Investment in the maneuverings of racecraft for this group is thus more ambiguous and potentially antagonistic to the ideological requirements for the reproduction of the dominant mode. Lott argues that, “it was cross-racial desire that coupled a nearly insupportable fascination and a self-protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices, and that made blackface minstrelsy less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure” (6-7). The wish-fulfillments of race were not merely the purview of petit-bourgeois ethnographers, nor panic, terror, and pleasure limited to minstrel entertainments for stage. Rather, as Lott avers, “without the minstrel show there would have been no *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (5). This crucial insight is the seed from which my dissertation grows.

The original title for the dissertation was *Wolves, Whales, and Rails*. I had planned to write about animal representations of class conflict in American literary naturalism. It quickly became apparent that the sentimental fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe was enormously important to Jack London. Given literary naturalism’s reputation for a hyper-masculine ethos, this came as something of a surprise. It shouldn’t have. Donna M. Campbell’s work in *Resisting Regionalism* demonstrates the deep indebtedness of figures like Frank Norris, who sneered at

with each tradition, tending more or less toward self-mockery on the one hand and subversion on the other. ... This contradictory lineage, the stage trickster overdetermined by the slave trickster, highlights some hint of danger in the earliest blackface types” (21-3).

⁴ “The Panic of 1837 was a financial crisis in the United States that touched off a major recession that lasted until the mid-1840s. Profits, prices, and wages went down while unemployment went up. Pessimism abounded during the time. The panic had both domestic and foreign origins. Speculative lending practices in western states, a sharp decline in cotton prices, a collapsing land bubble, international specie flows, and restrictive lending policies in Great Britain were all to blame. On May 10, 1837, banks in New York City suspended specie payments, meaning that they would no longer redeem commercial paper in specie at full face value. Despite a brief recovery in 1838, the recession persisted for approximately seven years. Banks collapsed, businesses failed, prices declined, and thousands of workers lost their jobs. Unemployment may have been as high as 25% in some locales. The years 1837 to 1844 were, generally speaking, years of deflation in wages and prices” (“Panic”).

what he identified as realism's "drama of a broken teacup," (Norris 215) and yet was himself deeply indebted to a tradition of regional sentimental fiction associated with women. It occurred to me that in Stowe a later generation of activist writers had a very influential matriarch to whom they variously felt it necessary to respond, and from whom, particularly in the case of Jack London's canine tales, they learned the narrative moves of sentimental containment. Such containment marries an ideological commitment to freedom, "lighting out for the territory," with the need to curtail that trajectory when its demands imperil white hegemony. Containment of such a threat usually takes one of two sentimental forms: mythic transcendence, or domestic tranquility. This tension between freedom and containment finds its most complex and sympathetic rendering in the antebellum fiction of Herman Melville, whom, like the latter London, is in dialogue with Stowe, but whose satirical urgency in works like *Benito Cereno* (1855) thoroughly indict a racialism from which the Stowe of *Dred* (1856) is attempting to extricate herself. What I identify as London's "calls of the wild and of the cabin" hearken back to the liberatory trajectory of the slave narrative while anticipating the latter 20th century's veiled means of discussing race in order to consolidate the gains of Jim Crow, Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy," Ronald Reagan's "welfare queen."⁵ Within varied minstrel masks, the fictional characters of Stowe, Melville, and London, perform the sentimental limits of racial transcendence. They see and do not in the cross-racial commons of our shared life, an escape from the nightmare of our collective past.

⁵ "To great effect, Reagan echoed white frustration in race-neutral terms through implicit racial appeals. His 'colorblind' rhetoric on crime, welfare, taxes, and states' rights was clearly understood by white (and black) voters as having a racial dimension, though claims to that effect were impossible to prove. The absence of explicitly racist rhetoric afforded the racial nature of his coded appeals a certain plausible deniability" (Alexander 48).

Stowe herself was deeply indebted to the contemporary tradition of the slave narrative from which she readily appropriated material.⁶ Rather than write up Harriet Jacobs' incidents as Jacobs' own narrative, Stowe desired to include them in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). Needless to say, Jacobs demurred.⁷ In chapter two I trace Stowe's embrace of romantic racial categories in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Through the trope of "Africa bound and bleeding," and the repeated blood-based characterization of African-Americans as the Christian lowly of whom Uncle Tom is an idealized type, Stowe appeals to a sentimental audience to intercede on behalf of those who, for purported racial reasons, cannot help themselves. Should readers fail to feel right and thus act right, they might expect a day of wrath in which mulatto slaves such as George Harris, with angry Anglo blood in their veins rise up to claim recognition and inheritance from their white fathers. By the time she writes *Dred*, (1856) Stowe is willing to countenance the possibility of a black revolutionary, but ultimately prefers reform to revolt while maintaining the presence of several minstrel types in characters like Tiff and Tomtit. *Dred* is Stowe's imperfect critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Her racial imaginary was in flux.

Herman Melville is more certain of the specious quality of romantic racial categories. In chapter three I read the critical deployment of what Eric Lott has identified as a minstrel "pale gaze"—"a ferocious investment in demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy by projecting vulgar black types as spectacular objects of white men's looking" (157-8)—in *Moby Dick*, *Benito Cereno*, and *The Confidence-Man*. I argue that *Moby Dick* demonstrates the limits of liberal multiculturalism by foregrounding the continuity between Ishmael's minstrel

⁶ Joan D. Hedrick suggests that "it is well known that for her plot [in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*] Stowe drew on the narratives of escaped slaves, particularly those of Josiah Henson and Henry Bibb, both of whose adventures took them to Cincinnati" (211).

⁷ In a letter to Amy Post dated October 9th, [1853?] Jacobs writes that "Mrs. Stowe never answered any of my letters after I refused to have my history in her key. Perhaps, it's for the best. At least I will try and think so" (Jacobs 172).

fixation with blackness and Ahab's obsession with whiteness. Both gaze on color as an obsessive obstacle to be thrust through in order to obtain democracy among men for Ishmael, and with the gods for Ahab. Carolyn Karcher rightly identifies "apocalyptic doom" as the upshot of "America's slavery-rocked ship of state" (61). However, I argue that rather than offering an alternative trajectory, Ishmael's democratic love is in keeping with Ahab's hate: both manage their manias without sufficient reference to that other metaphoric leviathan, the economy, whose turbid wake proves fatal to democratic commitments. For capital to accumulate citizens must be divided, sorted into worker and parasite, variously valued by race, gender, and class. Ishmael's ecstasies may anticipate an alternative mode of production, but it is the whale that is determining in the final instance. In *Benito Cereno*, Melville demonstrates the perils of a romantic racial gaze by placing an obtuse Yankee captain, Amasa Delano, aboard an insurrectionary vessel he perpetually mistakes for a minstrel entertainment. The short novel is a sharp critique of the racialism Stowe naturalized in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Finally, in *The Confidence Man*, (1857) I contend that the confidence-play of dubious racial sentiment and bad-faith on the *Fidèle*, is emblematic of a national faith in Afro-American inferiority, a belief that Melville's fiction will entertain to undermine. In the devil's hands, the confident national trajectory of the mid 1850s is a seriocomic minstrel production. The faith of founders in the biological distinction between races⁸ is a damned enterprise, a contradiction between independence declared and inferiority surmised. Melville's genius is to suggest that the tumbrils are of our own construction. Rather

⁸ "Inevitability of racial conflict stemmed, in Jefferson's argument, from physical difference 'fixed in nature' and 'as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us.' ... Jefferson's color comparison proceeded from the outside in, from appearance to essentials. Skin and hair texture led to sweat glands that disseminated a 'disagreeable odor', then to the sexual apparatus by which blacks became 'more ardent after their female' than whites, yet remained deficient in the 'tender delicate mixture of sentiment'. Arriving at the mental faculties, Jefferson concluded that blacks were equal to whites in memory, but inferior in reason" (Saxton 31). One wonders with what "tender delicate mixture of sentiment" he pursued Sally Hemings.

than through revelation as with Stowe, the terror of an incomplete revolution is what they portend.

In the fourth chapter I travel to the end of the long Nineteenth century to present the self-proclaimed “boy-socialist,” Jack London, as Stowe’s literary heir. Like Uncle Tom, Buck and White Fang are each variously sold down river to enact the trajectory of the sentimental slave narrative. In *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild* the threat of violent liberation by racially inflected protagonists is curtailed through sentimental containment: relegation to the call of the wild or the call of the cabin, mythic disappearance or elective enslavement as one’s proper place. In London’s work, the narrative limits of wolves prove the sentimental limits of men, relegation to a primeval periphery, or to the quiet comforts of home, each a species of risible invisibility. *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* might best be understood as blackface narratives of love and theft, a minstrel pageant of failed revolt by a white working-class author alive to the intertextual possibilities of miscegeny, terror, and pleasure—a contribution to the swinging body of Jim Crow.

“Natural blood never does that sort of thing,” Barbara and Karen Fields remind readers. This dissertation is steeped in the metaphorical blood of the Nineteenth century. It is an account of minstrel and romantic racialism in the work of three popular writers. To the extent that their symptomatic fictions fall victim to racist expectations, the narrative contours of their frustrated and frustrating texts participate in the dialectic of a problematic color line in Twentieth century literature and culture. It is to an emergent cohort of American writers that the urgency of ending the metaphorical tasks of blood remains.

CHAPTER II.

RISIBLE INVISIBILITY: ROMANTIC RACIALISM IN *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* AND *DRED*

Who is Africa? Who is African-American?

When an enlightened and Christianized community shall have, on the shores of Africa, laws, language and literature, drawn from among us, may then the scenes of the house of bondage be to them like the remembrance of Egypt to the Israelite,—a motive of thankfulness to Him who hath redeemed them!
—UTC

The Preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) is strange. Stowe begins by describing the features of “an exotic race” with “a character so essentially unlike the hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race, as for many years to have won from it only misunderstanding and contempt” (UTC xiii). This implies that had the characteristics of the “exotic” race, as Stowe identifies them, been different, perhaps a different dispensation would have been “won.” Put another way, because of their “character,” the “hard,” contemptuous “Anglo-Saxon” race enslaved them.

Fortunately, facilitated by “the poet, the painter, and the artist,” and “the allurements of fiction,” a “better day is dawning” under the auspices of art’s “breath,” “a humanizing and subduing influence favorable to the great principles of Christian brotherhood” (xiii). Who, a reader might ask, must be humanized, who subdued? The disembodied “hand of benevolence,” presumably the artist’s, “is everywhere stretched out, searching into abuses, righting wrongs, alleviating distresses, and bringing to the knowledge and sympathies of the world the lowly, the oppressed, and the forgotten,” sounding the “great master chord of Christianity” (xiii).

For whom? Africa, “who, for centuries, has lain bound and bleeding at the foot of civilized and Christianized humanity, imploring compassion in vain” (xiii).⁹ Through metonymic

⁹ It is interesting to compare Stowe’s image of bound and bleeding Africa with Martin Luther King Jr’s acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize over a century later, in 1964: “I believe that wounded justice, lying prostrate on the

prestidigitation the exotic race has become a continent. But the lowly are in the US. Stowe would call them Africans, regardless--eliciting sympathy while maintaining their difference. The focus, simply, is to soften “the heart of the dominant race, who have been her conquerors” (xiii). Africa “has lain bound and bleeding at the foot of civilized and Christianized humanity, imploring compassion in vain” (xiii). Imploring, not demanding, for “it has been seen how far nobler it is in nations to protect the feeble than to oppress them” (xiii). By whom, where? The passive voice, “it has been seen,” commends the fate of Stowe’s American Africans to the “sympathy and feeling” (xiii) elicited by her work, perceived by Stowe to embody the hand of God, ultimate arbiter of *manumission*. That *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did indeed prove a powerful stimulant to both abolitionist and slave-*holder* is not at issue. The crux of the matter is this: when God spoke to the heart through Harriet’s hand, it was to Africa, not America that his chosen people, “the lowly,” would be delivered from Uncle Tom’s cabin.

In this view, by 1851-2, Stowe was a bit behind the times. According to Ronald G. Walters,

A final plank in the post – 1830 abolitionist platform was its rejection of colonization. Immediatists denied that an end to slavery required expulsion of African Americans from the United States. On every point with the debatable exception of this one Stowe’s anti-slavery novels stood with the new more radical abolitionism. Even on colonization her position is not entirely clear. (176-7)

blood-flowing streets of our nations, can be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men” (Carson 260). Here it is “justice” everywhere “on the blood-flowing streets of our nations” “lying prostrate,” not merely bound and bleeding Africa as represented by slaves, or in King’s time “negroes,” that “can be lifted” “to reign supreme.” For Dr. King, the emphasis is always on unity; it is justice at home and abroad, not difference, that is at stake.

Whereas,

Prior to the 1830s, abolitionists ... often imagined an America without slavery as one without black people, a view promoted by the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816. A major part of its mission was to send all freed slaves to its African outpost, Liberia, to make that continent Christian and America white. (Walters 176)

As is true of Miss Ophelia in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mrs. Stowe evinces a certain discomfort with the proximity of African-Americans. "What she hoped for," according to Leslie Fiedler, "was the voluntary freeing of slaves by individual owners, the spread of education among those thus freed; and their consequent emigration to Africa, where they would take over Christianizing of that continent which White missionaries had begun" (34). On the other hand, "what she feared," and this anxiety is of the utmost importance to the discussion of her work in this chapter, "was a general slave uprising, like that in Haiti and San Domingo" (Fiedler 37). "After all," Fiedler informs readers, "Mrs. Stowe was not only a chiliastic Christian, but the child of a Revolutionary Age,¹⁰ in which the oppressed everywhere were turning against their masters" (37-8). He contends that the "movement" that "peaked in 1848," "inspired almost simultaneously two literary responses, one profoundly European, the other peculiarly American: Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* and [Stowe's] *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (38). The spectre haunting the former, according to Fiedler, was "Communism;" "the spectre haunting America was Black Revolt"

¹⁰ Hungary's failure to gain independence from Austria in 1848-49, for example, was on Stowe's mind. See her contrast between "a Hungarian youth" and George Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "If it had been only a Hungarian youth, now bravely defending in some mountain fastness the retreat of fugitives escaping from Austria into America, this would have been sublime heroism; but as it was a youth of African descent, defending the retreat of fugitives through America into Canada, of course we are too well instructed and patriotic to see any heroism in it" (180).

(38).¹¹ Fiedler argues that none of Stowe's characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* embody this threat: not Tom, nor George Harris, her "single Negro militant," whom, regardless, "is not permitted to fire the gun he raises against his White pursuers; and when the diabolical Sambo and Quimbo turn against their brutal master, it is to espouse Christianity rather than bloodshed, arson, murder and rape" (38). Stowe, readers learn, is partial to revelation, not revolution.¹² In her aversion to revolt, Stowe was far from alone. As Eric J. Sundquist notes:

The outbreak of revolution in [Haiti in] 1791 brought a flood of white planter refugees to the United States, some ten thousand in 1793 alone, most of them carrying both slaves and tales of terror to South and North alike. Thereafter, especially in the wake of Nat Turner's uprising in 1831 and the emancipation of slaves in British Jamaica in the same year, Haiti came to seem the fearful precursor of black rebellion throughout the New World, becoming an entrenched part of masterclass ideology in both Latin America and the United States. (32)

From the standpoint of the antebellum bourgeoisie, a bloody end had been near for some time; how best to contain the threat of black rebellion remained the perverse terrain of a sometimes unifying struggle in which various sectional interests were served by a common ideology of "African" agency coded as character. In other words, the racialism of which Uncle Tom is an exemplar, could be made to serve the interests of North and South in so far as his devout

¹¹ For Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and a generation of African-American activist-writers, communism would productively haunt their work and lives, informing and enabling varieties of revolt. See Barbara Foley's *Spectres of 1919: Class & Nation in the Making of the New Negro* for a discussion of this history. For a remarkable history of black communists in the American south, see Robin D. G. Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*.

¹² Fiedler quickly dismisses Stowe's second novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great and Dismal Swamp* (1856) as follows: "Mrs. Stowe attempted to tell a tale of Slave Rebellion, but the result was a failure—mythologically inert, structurally confused, moving to no one" (38). Fiedler is wrong on all counts. I discuss *Dred* at some length below.

submission represents both his peculiar fitness to serve, and his qualification for Christian intervention. It's bad faith both ways, of course, as Haiti's history demonstrates. On the plantation or the abolitionist stage, Tom is only of use if lowly—a minstrel dream, the ambivalent remnant of a scotomized nightmare.

Whether critics see Tom as “a white mother in blackface and drag,” “the Blessed Male Mother of a virgin Female Christ,” (Fiedler 33, 36), or not, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remains, as Elizabeth Ammons suggests, an activist text. Or at least the “hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race” is active (*UTC* xiii). In order “to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us” (*UTC* xiii), Stowe must keep slaves bound and bleeding, exemplary victims. Romantic racialism, the specious idea that blood codes character, allows her to suggest that slaves are particularly deserving of sympathy because “the instinctive sympathies of that race are peculiarly strong,” ... [African's are] “naturally patient, timid and unenterprising” (*UTC* 86).¹³ The racist and condescending sympathy Stowe would encourage holds African agency in abeyance. Incapable of helping themselves, it becomes the duty of Northern and Southern Christians to bear arms on slaves' behalf. “Stowe, for her part,” Sundquist explains, “was a racialist for whom considerations of black resistance could be imagined only as a heroic pacifism (as in the case of Uncle Tom), or as the upshot of white blood (as in the case of George Harris), or as a species of insanity (as in the case of her maroon rebel Dred, who is killed before his Turner-like revolt can be launched)” (79). By rendering African-Americans powerless, Stowe

¹³George M. Fredrickson identifies romantic racialism as “a doctrine which acknowledges permanent racial differences but rejected the notion of a clearly defined racial hierarchy” (107). He contends that “the image of the Negro as natural Christian received its fullest treatment and most influential expression in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This immensely popular novel, which more than any other published work served to crystallize antislavery feeling in the North in the 1850s, was also the classic expression of romantic racialism” (110).

disarms the potentially disquieting notion that they might seize their freedom and own their humanity without her or her readers' help.¹⁴

Better an armed southerner, than an armed slave. According to Stowe, "We have reason to know, in Kentucky, as in Mississippi, are noble and generous hearts, to whom never was tale of suffering told in vain" (*UTC* 81). Should our imagined southerner lack a wife or mother to exhort him in private, Stowe's apostrophe might suffice: "Ah, Good brother! Is it fair for you to expect of us services [returning slaves to the south in accord with the Fugitive Slave Act] which your own brave, honorable heart would not allow you to render, were you in our place?" (*UTC* 81). Stowe is at pains to distance herself from a Manichaean account of the South as a slough of iniquity, and the North a home for virtue. Rather, she identifies southern hearts as capable of sentiment, of right feeling and thus right action: "There is one thing that every individual can do,--they can see to it that *they feel right*" (*UTC* 404, Stowe's emphasis).

Stowe's description of John Van Trompe, to whom Eliza is delivered by Senator Bird, is a case in point: "'If there's anybody comes,' [to take Eliza] said the good man, stretching his tall, muscular form upward, 'why here I'm ready for him: and I've got seven sons, each six foot high, and they'll be ready for 'em'" (*UTC* 83).¹⁵ With his sons at ready, Van Trompe resembles nothing so much as a kind of John Brown figure *avant la lettre*. This is complicated by the fact that "Honest old John" "was once quite a considerable landholder and slave-owner in the state of

¹⁴ For comparison, consider Fredrick Douglass' pride in physically overcoming his master, Covey, and subsequent writing of himself into history, or Harriet Jacobs' angry response to the impudence, however well intended, when the second Mrs. Bruce purchases her freedom, as though the price she had paid "living" seven years in a garret above a shed were insufficient. Her purchase confirms her status as property, a condition against which her agency as illustrated throughout the incidents, had long transgressed. It is worth noting in this context that Jacobs wanted to end her narrative with a chapter on John Brown, but her white editor, Lydia Maria Child, asked her to remove it.

¹⁵ One recalls the passage in Whitman's "Song of Myself" where "The runaway slave came to my house and stopped outside ... He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and passed north, / I had him sit next me at table my firelock leaned in the corner" (8).

Kentucky” (*UTC* 83). As a result of his “great, honest, just heart, quite equal to his gigantic frame,” an organ that had “swelled altogether too big to wear *his bonds* any longer,” (*UTC* 83, my emphasis) John purchases a piece of land in Ohio for his slaves to inhabit and sets them free. He lives separately “on a snug, retired farm” (*UTC* 83).¹⁶ That he is ready “if there’s anybody comes” is clearly valorized by Stowe. It would be a very different novel were she to arm Uncle Tom. As Sundquist contends in a discussion of Douglass’ *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), “the language of revolutionary liberation and the rising language of sentiment,¹⁷ with its cultivation of the virtues of compassion and sympathetic identification with an inferior class or the oppressed, are virtually synonymous, not just in the best antislavery writing but in the whole era’s grappling with the problem of bondage” (107-8). Despite their “virtually synonymous” status in antebellum discourse, “Stowe was willing to grant African Americans the language of sentiment, but she withheld the language of liberty” (Sundquist 109). However sympathetic, Stowe’s true Christians, the lowly, stand in need of manly arms.¹⁸ That they themselves are denied them, is indicative of the limits of paternalism for emancipatory projects.

¹⁶ That Van Trompe will not live *with* the slaves he emancipates is perhaps reflective of Stowe’s commitment that freed slaves be settled in Liberia.

¹⁷ James Chandler suggests that “the sentimental revolution in literature ... dates from the mid-eighteenth century [and] is not just about new kinds and levels of feeling but also about new ways of ordering works and organizing the worlds represented in them” (xiv). For Chandler, “sentiment” “means something like distributive feeling. It is emotion that results from social circulation, passion that has been mediated by a sympathetic passage through a virtual point of view. It involves a structure of vicariousness” (12). Given Stowe’s limited exposure to the South, and tacit aversion to the company of African-Americans as witnessed by her commitment to colonization, her rendering of Tom, involves, to put it mildly, a structure of vicariousness in crossing both the Mason-Dixon and color lines. Chandler demurs from discussing Stowe at any length. At a higher level of abstraction, for a discussion of affect as a kind of irruptive mobile intensity across nodes see Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

¹⁸ It is possible to recognize in Uncle Tom the anticipation of what would later be called the politics of respectability. Randall Kennedy avers that “practitioners of the politics of respectability suggest focusing more on those whose victimization is clearest and likeliest to elicit the greatest sympathy from the general public” (26). For Stowe, Tom’s Christian perfection, his divine inhumanity, is indicative of his qualification to represent the race.

Regardless, Van Trompe, is made to disappear from the narrative. The reader next finds Eliza with Rachel Halliday and the Quakers; the text is silent on the transfer. Although Stowe is at pains to demonstrate the fortitude, and if it comes to it, bellicosity of John's "just heart," (83) and present for southern readers¹⁹ a model of manly conversion from slaveholder to guardian, she is less comfortable in this milieu and quickly transfers Eliza to Halliday, whose sentimental and religious suasion, her gentle "thee" and "thou," replace anger with sympathy. In Halliday, Stowe presents the maternal figure *par excellence*: "nothing but loving words and gentle moralities, and motherly loving kindness had come from that chair;--head-aches and heart-aches innumerable had been cured there,--difficulties spiritual and temporal solved there,--all by one good, loving woman" (*UTC* 122). "Gentle moralities" and "motherly loving kindness," sympathy, will cure the afflicted in body, the querulous in soul.

Readers might ask Stowe in whose interest such mollification serves. Consider the just indignation of George Harris: "My master! and who made him my master ... what right has he to me?" (*UTC* 14). This is a decidedly embodied resentment, for "flesh and blood can't bear [the abuse of his master] any longer" (*UTC* 14). According to Stowe's romantic racialism, it is the character of the "hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race" (*UTC* xiii) that so acutely resents the lash. The white blood in George's veins is the blood of the founding fathers: "I'll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for me!" (*UTC* 102). As Sundquist confirms,

¹⁹ That Stowe wrote to influence Southern readers is made clear in the concluding chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "To you, generous, noble-minded men and women, of the South,--you, whose virtue, and magnanimity, and purity of character, are the greater for the severer trial it has encountered,--to you is [the author's] appeal. Have you not, in your own secret souls, in your own private conversings, felt that there are woes and evils, in this accursed system, far beyond what are here shadowed, or can be shadowed?" (403). For southern literary ripostes to Stowe's appeal see Cindy Weinstein's *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*.

the slave rebel was par excellence a son of the Revolution; he belonged to the perverse family of the southern plantation but also, and more important, to the flawed family of liberty. In his rhetorical crusade against slavery (as in the case of Frederick Douglass) or even in his millenarian uprising against it (as in the case of Nat Turner), the slave rebel, one could say, became most American. To watch the spread of black rebellion in the New World, or to observe its potential in the United States, was to witness not necessarily the erosion of the ideology of the American Revolution, but rather its transfer across the color line. To embrace the ideals of the Revolution was not to capitulate to an evil order but instead to seek to purify and redeem it. (36)

Stowe deploys George less to purify and redeem the ideals of the Revolution, than to invoke an unstable hereditary contradiction between his white blood and his status as a slave. One hears Patrick Henry's liberty or death²⁰ in George's declaration that "all men are free and equal *in the grave*, if it comes to that" (*UTC* 103, Stowe's emphasis). And yet, under the auspices of Rachel Halliday's benevolent deportment, her abundant sympathy, her home, George is apparently mollified if not humbled:

This, indeed, was a home--*home*—a word that George had never yet known a meaning for; and a belief in God, and trust in his providence, began to encircle his heart, as, with a golden cloud of protection and confidence, dark, misanthropic, pining, atheistic doubts, and fierce despair, melted away before the light of a living Gospel, breathed in living

²⁰ According to Sundquist, "in the new account of his plotted rebellion in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass refers his readers simultaneously to Nat Turner and to Patrick Henry, whose sentiments are said to be 'incomparably more sublime' when 'asserted by men accustomed to the lash and chain'" (85).

faces, preached by a thousand unconscious acts of love and good will, which, like the cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, shall never lose their reward. (*UTC* 128)

Prior to this moment George has struggled with faith. Early in the novel he tells Eliza, “I an’t a Christian like you, ... my heart’s full of bitterness; I can’t trust in God. Why does he let things be so?” (*UTC* 15). Later, in an encounter with Mr. Wilson, the owner of a factory where George had worked, George questions how “There’s a God for [whites], but is there any for us?” (*UTC* 105). The answer, according to the “thousand unconscious acts” in Rachel Halliday’s home, would appear to be in the affirmative. It’s worth noting how George is positioned when he “melts before the light of a living Gospel.” He is unmanned. Nineteenth century readers would perhaps have noted that Stowe’s reference to the “cup of cold water” is from Matthew 10:42: “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (“Matthew 10”). George has become one of the little ones, one of Stowe’s lowly. This is in marked contrast to his prior aristocratic likeness: “He was very tall, with a dark Spanish complexion, fine, expressive black eyes ... his well-formed aquiline nose, straight thin lips, and the admirable contour of his finely formed limbs, impressed the whole company instantly with the idea of something uncommon” (97). Stowe has humbled her aristocratic militant. In fact, the citation from Matthew is more concerned with the disciple’s reward than with the “little ones” receiving the cold cup. George may have found “a belief in God, and trust in his providence,” but it is eminently to the white woman’s credit, rather than through his own agency that “the dark, misanthropic, pining, atheistic doubts” ... “melted away.” George by blood right may be a revolutionary son, but

Stowe remands him through the faith and the good offices of Rachel Halliday to “Africa bound and bleeding.” The Quaker will have her reward.²¹

As a result, George oscillates between a “subdued expression,” the solace of “words of holy trust” that “stole like sacred music over the harassed and chafed spirit” (*UTC* 175) when Simeon reads Psalm 73²², and spirited defense: “I’ll fight to the last breath before they shall take my wife and son” (*UTC* 172), as when threatened by Tom Loker’s posse, George declares his independence, with reference to the force by which he means to maintain it:

I am George Harris. A Mr. Harris, of Kentucky, did call me his property. But now I’m a free man, standing on God’s free soil; and my wife and my child I claim as mine. . . . We have arms to defend ourselves, and we mean to do it. You can come up, if you like; but the first one of you that comes within the range of our bullets is a dead man, and the next, and the next; and so on till the last. (*UTC* 179)

Rather than collective insurrection, violence for George is strictly a matter of familial defense. “I will attack no man,” he suggests, “all I ask of this country is to be let alone, and I will go out peaceably” (*UTC* 172). If possible, with the help of his nascent faith, George will quell the indignant Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins with the blood of the lamb, will “forget all the past, and put away every hard and bitter feeling, and read my Bible, and learn to be a good man”

²¹ Aunt Chloe’s anger is also mollified by a white woman’s sympathy. Following Tom’s sale, when Mrs. Shelby begins to cry, “they all wept in company. And in those tears they all shed together, the high and the lowly, melted away all the anger and heart-burnings of the oppressed” (*UTC* 88). Of course it doesn’t do Tom a lick of good, but no doubt redounds to Mrs. Shelby’s credit. Might not the potential for action have lingered in anger? In whose interest are the heart-burnings of the oppressed so efficiently vanquished? Contra Stowe, perhaps one must feel wrong before one can act right.

²² Is it too obvious in this context to recall Marx’s observation from the introduction to the proposed *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* that “religion is the opiate of the masses?”

(UTC 170). Any violence from George is reactive; if let alone, he will go out peaceably, but for Stowe, go out he must.

In Stowe's binary universe George mediates between faith and violence, aggressive Anglo-Saxon and bound African, masculine action and feminine sentiment. He represents Stowe's idealized antithesis of the "San Domingo hour," (UTC 246) the threat of revolution, Augustine St. Clare's *dies iræ*, (UTC 213)—a rejection of the education he has learned by the lash, for the comforts of a home abroad, the promise of a cabin to come. Contained by Christian quietude, it is to the textual periphery he must adjourn. This, for Stowe, is a best case scenario for former slaves.

The worst case is what transpires in the absence of faith, the absence of a Rachel Halliday or Evangeline with whom to sympathize, and who will instruct the oppressed remnants of "Africa bound and bleeding." When an education in slavery proves a total education, then "they [who] took *their* turn once, in France" (UTC 245, Stowe's emphasis) might rise again. St. Clare, acting as doomsayer for his class, conflates the sans-culottes with the revolutionaries of "St. Domingo" (UTC 245),²³ a nightmare amalgam of consanguineous fervor, the presentiment of an insurrectionary underclass of one blood. "I tell you," Augustine informs his brother Alfred, "if there is anything that is revealed with the strength of a divine law in our times, it is that the masses are to rise, and the under class become the upper one" (UTC 246). Why?

²³ As Sundquist notes, "Haiti, known as San Domingo (Saint-Domingue) before declaring its final independence from France in 1804 and adopting a native name, remained a strategic point of reference in debates over slavery in the United States" (140). "The large number of refugee planters from the island who came to the South in the wake of the revolution spread tales of terror that were reawakened with each newly discovered conspiracy or revolt—most notably, of course, those of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Turner—and the history of Haiti and its revolution became deeply ingrained in southern history" (140). Accordingly, "San Domingo thus offered both a distilled symbolic representation of the Rights of Man, and a fearful prophecy of black rebellion throughout the New World" (141).

“Well, there is a pretty fair infusion of Anglo Saxon blood among our slaves, now, said Augustine. “There are plenty among them who have only enough of the African to give a sort of tropical warmth and fervor to our calculating firmness and foresight. If ever the San Domingo hour comes, Anglo Saxon blood will lead on the day. Sons of white fathers, with all our haughty feelings burning in their veins, will not always be bought and sold and traded. They will rise, and raise with them their mother’s race” (*UTC* 246).

The logic of Stowe’s romantic racialism as announced by Augustine St. Clare suggests a blood telos of revolt. The “haughty feelings burning in their veins” will upend class and racial hierarchies unless, as with George Harris, the salvific balm of sympathetic Christian instruction replace an education in slavery. In this way, slaves are both determined by blood, and curiously plastic by sentiment. As it is the “Anglo Saxon blood” that “will lead,” so it is the Anglo Saxon culture that’s to blame for any slave deficiencies. Marie St. Clare contends that Augustine “says we have made them what they are, and ought to bear with them. He says their faults are all owing to us, and that it would be cruel to make the fault and punish it too” (*UTC* 158). If slaves revolt, it is due to Anglo Saxon blood; if they are found wanting, it is due to Anglo Saxon culture. The possibility of a self has been expropriated: rendered improbable by dubious biology, impracticable by antebellum culture, and inadvisable by Christian faith.²⁴

²⁴ “Cassy [no doubt due to the Anglo-Saxon blood in her veins] had often resolved in her soul an hour of retribution, when her hand should avenge on her oppressor all the injustice and cruelty to which she had been witness, or which *she* had in her own person suffered” (*UTC* 361, Stowe’s emphasis). Anticipating Dred, she avers that for her fellow slaves, in killing Legree, “we might set them all free, and go somewhere in the swamps, and find an island, and live by ourselves” (*UTC* 361). Tom’s response, “The Lord hasn’t called us to wrath. We must suffer, and wait his time,” (*UTC* 362) suggests that “The Victory,” the title of chapter XXXVIII, in which this conversation occurs, will be won through Christian forbearance, rather than militant action. “And this, oh Africa! Latest called of nations,—called to the crown of thorns, the scourge, the bloody sweat, the cross of agony,—this is to be *thy* victory” (*UTC* 362). Though

Insurrection, for Stowe, is really a white affair. An African-American revolutionary is a contradiction in terms. “A millennium that was coming, when Christ should reign, and all men should be free and happy” (*UTC* 213) will arrive through violence or sympathy, each a kind of education, both performed by “whites” coded slave and free. Thus, Augustine’s *dies iræ* is in fact a civil war, a contest of brothers for the imagined body of Africa bound and bleeding, a body that, curiously enough, happens to come entailed to the animate blood of potentially militant protagonists like George Harris. “African blood,” however notable for its purported “tropical warmth,” proves a kind of surplus—a problem of circulation. It must be disposed of in Canada or Liberia, or somehow put back into production.

Rather than as embodied voice, the last readers hear from George is by textual trace, in a letter “to one of his friends” (393). In it, George desires to “go and form part of a nation, which shall have a voice in the councils of nations ... a nation has the right to argue, remonstrate, implore, and present the cause of its race” (*UTC* 394). He clarifies that it is “with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot” (*UTC* 393). George has “no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them”; “if I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter” (*UTC* 393). However, in rejecting “Hayti” as a possible home for romantic racial reasons,—“The race that formed the character of the Haytiens was a worn-out, effeminate one; and, of course, the subject race will be centuries in rising to anything” (*UTC* 393)—George proves himself nothing so much as an American abroad. His impatience is that of a man on the make: for racial reasons, “of course,” oppressed Africans are a better bet than enervated Haitians. Thus, an entire history of revolutionary struggle and of Black agency is

sufficient to mollify Cassy, passages like the above presage Malcolm X’s frequent invocation of Christianity as a slave religion.

denigrated and dismissed. George discriminates among the deserving to bestow the benefice of his active blood on a “new enterprise,” “I go to *Liberia*, not as to an Elysium of romance, but as to a *field of work*.²⁵ I expect to work with both hands,—to work hard; to work against all sorts of difficulties and discouragements; and to work till I die” (*UTC* 394, 395, Stowe’s emphasis). A proud Protestant son, George demonstrates the virtue of labor unto death. Stowe grants him freedom to choose a kind of slavery, in effect confirming the plantation myth that a slave will choose bondage to freedom at the hands of a popular author.

To the question, “what do you owe to these poor unfortunates, oh Christians? (*UTC* 405), Stowe responds: enlightened bondage abroad,

Let the church of the North receive these poor sufferers in the spirit of Christ; receive them to the educating advantages of Christian republican society and schools, until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America. (*UTC* 405)

God forbid! as Uncle Tom might say. Those lessons, the attainment to *somewhat* of a moral and intellectual maturity, are less the habiliments of active justice than the chains of a quiescent thralldom. Passage for the slave is paid for the benefit of the sinner. “A mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world, as with an earthquake. And is America safe? Every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it the elements of this last

²⁵ Stowe devotes a significant portion of chapter XLV, her “Concluding Remarks,” to cataloguing the attainments of former slaves in Cincinnati who “have thus bravely succeeded in conquering for themselves comparative wealth and social position, in the face of every disadvantage and discouragement. . . . In all states of the Union we see men, but yesterday burst from the shackles of slavery, who, by a self-educating force, which cannot be too much admired, have risen to highly respectable stations in society” (407). So why, readers might ask, must characters like George and Topsy, who are embarked on similarly respectable protestant trajectories, leave?

convulsion” (*UTC* 408). Stowe closes not with the fellow-feeling of Matthew, and of Uncle Tom for that matter, but with the apocalyptic vision of a world surging and heaving, the advent of Revelation. “Save yourself, ship a somewhat educated African” is her cry. Present in revelation, in upheaval, is the threat that “he shall break in pieces the oppressor” (*UTC* 408). The “he” here referenced is not the former slave, but the white-depicted Lord, whose curiously Anglo-Saxon blood will lead on the day. Stowe’s romantic racialism denies agency and thus history to the oppressed, and sight to the oppressor. The slave remains an encumbrance to be leveraged against a “*day of vengeance*” (*UTC* 408, Stowe’s emphasis). Sympathy for the slave, in the final instance, stands revealed as sympathy for one’s self. Stowe mistakes “biology” for history, and in so doing consigns Uncle Tom to risible invisibility.

II

Who shall say that, in this world, where all things are symbolic, bound together by mystical resemblances, and where one event is the archetype of thousands, that there is not an eternal significance in these old prophecies? Do they not bring with them ‘*springing and germinant fulfillments*’ wherever there is a haughty and oppressive nation, and a ‘flock of the slaughter’?

—*Dred*

Stowe’s second antislavery novel, *Dred* (1856), is as committed to abolition as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, but is more equivocal about the means of emancipation. Whereas Uncle Tom’s Christian martyrdom was meant to solicit religious sympathy from an indignant white audience, Stowe’s racialism remanded “African” characters, those with predominantly “black blood,” to minstrel caricatures like Topsy, or child-like asexual martyrs like Tom. In both cases, a white intervention was needed to secure the freedom of the “lowly.” Although a day of wrath is envisioned in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, should slavery persist, such an insurrection would be led by

those with angry Anglo blood like George Harris. In all cases agency rests with those who passably inhabit Stowe's privileged side of the color line.

Dred is less settled on race and can be read, as I hope to demonstrate, as a multivalent work in which racialist categories both persist and are persistently undermined through the presentation of a racial spectrum. Comic minstrel types like Tiff are retained; however Stowe's racial imaginary will now, up to a point, countenance a "pure" African militant in the form of Dred, and countenance the tragic pathos of Milly, a character based on Sojourner Truth, whom Stowe had met,²⁶ and whose Christian fidelity resembles Uncle Tom's willingness to turn the other cheek, but the sufficiency of whose forbearance, in *Dred*, becomes a question. The plantation romance of Nina Gordon and Edward Clayton at Canema, the drama of a segment of the southern bourgeoisie, is ultimately of less interest to Stowe, who kills Nina to rid herself of a marriage plot and the plantation as a setting of principle interest. It is in the Dismal Swamp, a circumscribed realm of freedom that Dred can emerge, for a time, as a rugged frontier father. However, in granting Dred an early death and sacral burial, Stowe, with respect, forecloses the glimmer of elemental "African" agency Dred inaugurates, and instead opts for integration in Canada for Clayton's former slaves, and Milly's race-blind care for the orphans of New York. It is thus with the guarded optimism of reform that the novel concludes. Its closure, for a 549 page work, is both hasty and circumspect, as though Stowe had seen the potential in her eponymous hero for another revolution, but in the end settled on integration and domesticity.

²⁶ According to Carleton Mabee, Truth "visited Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1853" (95) and "in the years after Truth had visited her, [Stowe] based one of her major characters, Milly, on Truth (88) ... Milly, like Truth, is a majestic black slave woman who has spiritual depth. Like Truth, she influences both the blacks and whites around her. Like Truth, she overcame her earlier desire that God kill whites for holding slaves, and has learned to forgive them" (89).

Be that as it may, Stowe had another hit on her hands. According to Robert S. Levine, “*Dred* quickly emerged as one of the most popular novels of the time, selling upwards of 200,000 copies during the nineteenth century and earning the praise of many reviewers, including the British novelist George Eliot, who proclaimed in the October 10, 1856, *Westminster Review* that the novel was ‘inspired by a rare genius—rare both in intensity and in range of power’” (ix). Eliot’s review stands in marked contrast to Fiedler’s suggestion, as noted above, that *Dred* is “mythically inert.” Fiedler is partially correct: the novel is Stowe’s historically conscious mediation of the inert myth of the plantation romance. Whereas the plantation romance is a reactionary genre that privileges an idealized, if vanishing antebellum past in which a benevolent patriarchal institution best cares for the needs of its mixed racial “family,”²⁷ Levine contends that in *Dred*, “readers are linked with the plantation whites,” as part of a “canny narrative strategy,”

similar to Herman Melville’s slyly implicating narrative strategies in his 1855 novella of black revolt, *Benito Cereno*. With the introduction of Dred (as with the revelation of the black plot in *Benito Cereno*), what we experience is a moment of revelation: that Stowe in a deliberately implicating fashion has to this point encouraged a reading of blacks and the plantation that is partial and misleading, for she has left out of the picture the presence of black revolutionaries. Her subsequent detailed account of Dred’s background and activities significantly extends the reach of the plantation novel.

(xx)

²⁷ That banal corporate rhetoric would later regularly interpolate workers as “family” is indicative of both the hierarchy that this word masks and the connection between wage and chattel slavery as varieties of unfreedom.

I'd go further: Stowe's necessary inclusion of black revolutionaries reveals the plantation romance as a pernicious myth that the plantation novel refuses to countenance, to the extent that it demonstrates—as *Dred* does—the production of a class digging graves: for their masters, for the cotton economy, and for a country unable to manage the hypocrisy of eighteenth century claims to universal independence and the right of revolt despite men and women everywhere in chains.

Dred is Stowe's imperfect critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the debased vernacular of modern bourgeois politics, her views were "evolving." Levine notes that "*Dred* can be read as Stowe's thoughtful novelistic response to the changing political and cultural climate of the mid-1850s, and as her own highly mediated 'response' to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (x). In *Dred*, "Stowe tries out a number of different ways of addressing the problem of slavery, offers conflicting views on race, and shifts between romance and realism as if she were struggling to find the proper novelistic form that could tell the story both of the slave plantation mistress, Nina Gordon, and the black revolutionary, Dred" (Levine x). Less a fault than a virtue, the unevenness of Stowe's text reflects its author's struggle to reconcile the limits of contemporary abolitionist sentiment and Afro-American needs in a popular form. However imperfect, Levine contends that Stowe is "particularly attentive to what African American readers had to say about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and that in *Dred*, Stowe "revises her racialist representation, attempts new strategies of point of view that would allow for a fuller development of black revolutionary perspectives, and implicitly rejects African colonizationism" (x).²⁸ While not wholly free of racialist moments, if

²⁸ Levine notes that "the evidence suggests that Stowe did change her mind on colonization, perhaps in response to black debate in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, for she sent a letter to the May 1853 meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society declaring, in the paraphrased words of the proceedings, 'that if she were to write 'Uncle Tom' again, she would not send George Harris to Liberia.' In *Dred*, she chooses to send no black characters to Liberia" (xv-xvi).

you will, *Dred*'s heart is in the right place. That the novel fails, finally, to represent Dred's revolt is indicative of Stowe's preference for reform. Nevertheless, the invocation of insurrection, Dred's shadowy presence in the Dismal Swamp, suggests that while Revelation is not yet to hand, a reckoning will be had.

Stowe is conflicted about race in *Dred*. There is a clear contradiction between Dred's prophetic militance, and the suggestion by Stowe's narrative that "the negro race, with many of the faults of children, unite many of their most amiable qualities, in the simplicity and confidingness with which they yield themselves up in admiration of a superior friend" (306). That this utterance does not come from a character, and arrives relatively late in the novel, after Dred's introduction, suggests that Stowe is not intentionally baiting the reader; the passage smells of burnt cork. This citation is not anomalous. As though a catalog drawn from the conscience of Melville's Amasa Delano, the reader is confronted with a stock variety of racist vignettes: "The air was one of those inexpressibly odd ones whose sharp, metallic accuracy of rhythm seems to mark the delight which the negro race feel in that particular element of music" (323);²⁹ " 'O, I think,' said Clayton, 'the African race evidently are made to excel in that department which lies between the sensuous and the intellectual—what we call the elegant arts. These require rich and abundant animal nature, such as they possess' (328); and again, Clayton: "There is no use in trying to make the negroes into Anglo-Saxons, any more than making a grape-vine into a pear-tree. I train the grape-vine" (328). The strange fruit of Stowe's viticulture include the "cheerful undulations" (544) of Tiff, "an old child-man, in whose grotesque and fanciful nature there was treasured a believing sweetness," (337) and whose "black face seemed

²⁹ In the "sharp, metallic accuracy," one hears the clash of hatchets in *Benito Cereno*.

really to become unctuous with the oil of gladness,” (83) and Tomtit who resembles nothing so much as Topsy’s curtain call:

A constant ripple and eddy of drollery seemed to pervade his whole being; his large, saucy black eyes had always a laughing fire in them, that it was impossible to meet without a smile in return. Slave and property though he was, yet the first sentiment of reverence for any created thing seemed yet wholly unawakened in his curly pate. Breezy, idle, careless, flighty, as his woodland namesake, life to him seemed only a repressed and pent-up ebullition of animal enjoyment; and almost the only excitement of Mrs. Nesbit’s quiet life was her chronic controversy with Tomtit. Forty or fifty times a day did the old body assure him ‘that she was astounded at his conduct;’ and as many times would he reply by showing the whole set of his handsome teeth, on the broad grin...” (46)

Tomtit “Don’t know nothing at all—never can,” (48) but it’s not his fault. His ebullient animal enjoyment marks his status as minstrel entertainment, a textual residuum Stowe is reluctant to lose. Her racialism is a formula that fueled sales of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Its presence in *Dred*, however objectionable, might increase the reach of her abolitionist message. The possibility of a popular novel free of racist caricature, one might say, remained unawakened in Stowe’s pate because she believed, probably correctly, that minstrel tropes would lead to increased commercial success.

Similarly, the trope of the tragic mulatto remains animate in *Dred*. George Harris has become Harry Gordon. The latter “was the son of his master,” (38) Colonel Gordon, and is, unbeknown to the plantation heroine Nina Gordon, her brother. In accompanying his father/master as “valet during the tour of Europe,” “that tact by which those of the mixed blood seem so peculiarly fitted to appreciate all the finer aspects of conventional life, had been called

out and exercised; so that it would be difficult in any circle to meet with a more agreeable and gentlemanly person” (38). Harry’s mixed blood enables his appreciative tact, a qualification for his deportment as a gentleman, despite his status as a chattel. As is typical in Stowe, physiognomy tells the tale:

There was something marked and peculiar in the square, and the finely formed features, which indicated talent and ability; and the blue eyes had a depth and strength of color that might cause them at first glance to appear black. The face, with its strongly-marked expression of honesty and sense, had about it many careworn and thoughtful lines. (8)

The nobility of Harry’s “strongly-marked expression” is indicative of the “talent,” “ability,” “honesty,” and “sense” with which he manages the Gordon plantation, an estate to which, were he to share Nina’s mother, he would have claim as Colonel Gordon’s first son. Stowe foregrounds the contradiction between Harry’s legal status as a slave “under the foot of every white man that dares tread on me,” (146) and his character as a man of ability to demonstrate the inhumanity of an institution through which he identifies love of his sister as “the clasp upon my chain!” (146).

Harry’s hope of liberty through legal redress is dashed. Upon the death of Nina, the aforementioned clasp undone, he presents a paper signed by Colonel Gordon indicating that Harry might purchase his freedom, rather than become the property of his diabolic younger white brother, Tom. A Mr. Jekyl, Tom’s Dickensque lawyer, explains that “a slave, not being a person in the eye of the law, cannot have a contract made with him. The law, which is based in the old Roman code, holds him *pro nullis, pro mortuis*; which means ... that he’s held as nothing—as dead, inert substance” (385). Harry responds with biblical wrath: “I shall fight it out to the last! I’ve nothing to hope, and nothing to lose. Let him look out! They made sport of

Samson,--they put out his eyes,--but he pulled down the temple over their heads, after all. Look out!” (388). As he’s held as nothing, *pro nullis, pro mortuis*, Harry has nothing to hope and nothing to lose. His commitment to fight it out is the result of complete dispossession. The palpable injustice of law is sufficient to motivate revolt. It is as though by 1856 Stowe has recognized that an argument based on the racial qualities of blood remains the purview of peculiar jurisprudence. She can have Harry fight on the terrain of the bible, and of the founding fathers, as does George Harris, but to suggest that there is an essential quality to the blood is to cede too much to the ground of pro-slavery apology. *Dred* can be read at one level as Stowe’s incomplete rejection of racialism.

One indication of this rejection is marked by the shift from George Harris’ declaration that “I’ll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it. If it was right for them, it is right for me!” (*UTC* 102) to Harry Gordon’s assertion that “Denmark Vesey was a *man!* His history is just what George Washington’s would have been, if you had failed” (Stowe’s emphasis, 12). In other words, an accident of color is the difference between founding fathers. That the former failed is the distinction between Vesey and Washington. Of crucial importance is that Harry’s justification is not with “your fathers,” but rather Denmark Vesey as an equally founding father. In this moment Harry anticipates the incipient nationalism of Martin R. Delany’s *Blake* (1861-2), and articulates an American history for Afro-Americans resulting from their own agency. This is a striking departure from “Africa bound and bleeding.”

Unfortunately, Stowe’s radical vision of an alternate founding can’t last. Although Harry is defeated by the law, and promises to fight, following Dred’s death, Edward Clayton “talked with Harry, wisely and kindly, assuming nothing to himself on the ground either of birth or position; showing to him the undesirableness and hopelessness, under present circumstances, of

any attempt to right by force the wrongs under which his class were suffering, and opening to him and his associates a prospect of a safer way by flight to the Free States” (519). Rather than pulling down the temple, Samson lights out for the northern territory on the advice of a slaveholding reformer. Harry will integrate a community in Canada, “one of the headmen of the settlement, ... rapidly acquiring property and consideration” (544). It’s not Liberia, even if it is a bought colony settled by Clayton. Despite the presentiment of an alternate founding in the conspiracy of Denmark Vesey, and the prophetic potential of Dred’s retributive settlement in the Dismal Swamp, Harry’s righteous indignation in backwater America fades to the complacent rhythms of a geographic and textual periphery. He is free, perhaps.

A somewhat similar affective trajectory is marked by Stowe’s Sojourner Truth character, Milly. That Stowe respects this character is evident in her description not as a minstrel mammy, but as one whose “amount of being and force of character gave her ascendancy even over those who were nominally her superiors,” (51) that is, her superiors in form, if not in fact: “as her ways were commonly found to be the best ways, she was left in most cases, to pursue them without opposition or control” (51). In a novel everywhere concerned with bloodlines, be it Tiff’s identification as a Peyton, or Harry’s entailment as part of the Gordon estate, rather than its proprietor, or Dred’s connection to Denmark Vesey, Milly’s heritage commands respect; “she was a fine specimen of one of those warlike and splendid races, of whom, as they have seldom been reduced to slavery, there are but few and rare specimens among the slaves of the south” (50). Milly’s patent superiority is disruptive, “for no one could regard her, as a whole, and not feel their prejudice in favor of the exclusive comeliness of white races somewhat shaken,” (50) although Stowe mitigates the effect by suggesting that “placed among the gorgeous surroundings of African landscape and scenery, it might be doubted whether any one’s taste could have

desired as a completion to her appearance, to have blanching the glossy skin whose depth of coloring harmonizes so well with the intense and fiery glories of a tropical landscape” (50). Placed among her present surroundings in Virginia, are readers to infer that her beauty is somehow diminished? Nina suggests that “if Milly had been educated as we are, she would have made a most splendid woman—been a perfect Candace queen of Ethiopia” (153). Stowe’s description of Milly will endorse but qualify the latter’s superiority. She is a figure of some force in the novel, and despite Stowe’s residual racialism, as in her description of Milly’s “high turban, of those brilliant colored Madras handkerchiefs in which the instinctive taste of the dark races leads them to delight,” (50) the murder of Milly’s last son, Alfred, presents a pronounced objection to Fiedler’s claim that the novel is mythically inert.

One index of Milly’s superiority lies in the disparity between the faith she brings to her labor, and the manifest manner in which her mistress fails to keep faith by selling Milly’s children, including her son Alfred, whom she had promised Milly would retain. Milly is possessed of that high degree of self-respect which led her to be incorruptibly faithful and thorough in all she undertook; less, as it often seemed from any fealty or deference to those whom she served, than from a kind of native pride in well-doing, which led her to deem it beneath herself to slight or pass over the least thing which she had undertaken. Her promises were inviolable. Her owners always knew that what she once said would be done, if it were within the bounds of possibility (50).

The reward for such fidelity is to “have her children successively sold from her” (51). The repetition of the insult provides an opening for Christian faith such that whereas, “at first, she had met this doom with almost the ferocity of a lioness,” ... “the blow, oftentimes repeated, had brought with it a dull endurance, and Christianity, had entered, as it often does with the slave,

through the rents and fissures of a broken heart” (51). Stowe is aware that she’s walking a fine line here. On the one hand she is providing an argument for the existence among slaves of the powerful Christian faith of which Milly, like Uncle Tom before her, is an exemplar. On the other hand, she is at pains to suggest that the Christian influence of slavery is very much the exception, rather than the rule:

Those instances of piety which are sometimes, *though rarely*, found among slaves, and which transcend the ordinary development of the best-instructed, are generally the result of calamities and afflictions so utterly desolating as to force the soul to depend on God alone. But, where one soul is thus raised to higher piety, thousands are crushed in hopeless imbecility. (my emphasis, 51)

Milly’s faith, the product of “utterly desolating” “calamities and afflictions” will prove as exceptional as her character. Hers is an unsettling pathos that foregrounds the hypocrisy of Christian slaveholders by demonstrating the probity and power of her faith and grace in light of tragedy. As I’ll show, this mythic resonance provides the occasion for a textual layering in which Milly will forgive her mistress, but the Lord might not, suggesting that while Milly is intended to command reader’s admiration, God is with Dred in the debate on tactics between them.

A plank of Stowe’s abolitionist platform had long been that the word of a slaveholding master or mistress could not be relied upon. Despite being promised that she would keep her youngest son Alfred, Milly returns to find him sold. Having no standing in southern law, she is “going straight to de Lord with dis yer case. ... I’ll ask him to look on ‘t, ... I’ll pray de Lord to curse every cent of dat ar money to you and your chil’en!” (180). Milly subsequently learns that Alfred has been murdered on the plantation to which he was sent. She confronts and curses her mistress, Harriet, in tragic and *pace* Fiedler, mythic tones: “you see dat blood! Alfred’s killed!

You killed him; his blood be on you and your chil'en! O, Lord God in heaven, hear me, and *render unto her double!*” (Stowe's emphasis, 181). However, at a camp meeting Milly has a change of heart, experiences grace in language virtually indistinguishable from Uncle Tom's:

I saw how he loved us!—us *all*—all—every one on us!—we dat hated each other so! 'Peared like he was using his heart up for us, all de time—bleedin' for us like he did on Calvary, and willin' to bleed! O, chile, I saw what it was for me to be hatin' like I'd hated. 'O, Lord,' says I, 'I give up! O, Lord, I never see you afore! I didn't know. Lord, I's a poor sinner! I won't have no more! 'And O, chile, den dere come such a rush of love in my soul! Says I, 'Lord, I ken love even de white folks!' And den came another rush; and says I, 'Yes, Lord, I love poor Miss Harrit, dat's sole all my chil'en, and been de death of my poor Alfred! I loves her.' Chile, I overcome—I did so—I overcome by de blood of de *Lamb*—de Lamb!—Yes de Lamb, chile!—'cause if he'd been a lion I could a kept in; 't was de Lamb dat overcome. (183)

Milly is overcome with the Lamb, has transitioned from asking the Lord for vengeance, to identification with Harriet as “sisters in Jesus” (183). She provides a textual antipode to Dred's lion, going so far as to warn Harry to stay away from Dred, to “keep clear on him! He's in de wilderness of Sinai; he is with de blackness, and darkness, and tempest. He han't come to de heavenly Jerusalem. ... Jerusalem above is *free*—is *free*, honey; so don't you mind, now, what happens in *dis* yer time” (201). Milly, however unintentionally, is signifying. She seeks explicitly to undermine Dred's authority as a religious leader; at the same time that her placing him in the metaphoric wilderness of Sinai identifies him as Moses, who of course led his people out of Sinai. This textual double vision has the rhetorical effect of problematizing Milly's grace

by presenting the reader with a choice between deliverance of the lamb in death, or deliverance by the lion in life. Stowe's mixed theology in *Dred* is a question of tactics.

In fulfilling Milly's curse, the Lord appears to side with Dred. Milly suggests that "de Lord Jesus has got a pardon for both on us," with reference to Harriet and herself. Although Milly "felt like makin' scuses for her," (183) Harriet's son is "brought home a corpse; he shot hisself right through de heart, trying to load a gun when he was drunk" (183). The suggestion is that of an eye for an eye as Alfred's death is described in virtually identical terms: "de bullet went right through his heart" (181). Harriet "didn't live much longer," "dat ar took her down to de grave" (184). With Harriet's death, Milly's curse to render on to her double, made when Milly identified herself as "wandering in the wilderness of Sinai" (181) is fulfilled despite her subsequent change of heart. Following this change of heart, Milly may have "had a better mind den," (184) but it would appear that the Lord did not. Though Milly commands respect, and retains the faith of Uncle Tom, the Stowe of *Dred* recognizes that this is only one emancipatory vision, and can sympathize with Harry, who responds to Milly with some force that "it don't answer to go telling about a heavenly Jerusalem! We want something here. We'll have it too!" (201). Yet the text oscillates, if Stowe is reluctant to sacrifice her "Africans" to the blood of the lamb, she is equally reluctant to witness Dred's trajectory "through seas of blood" (202).

Dred marries the attributes of "one of the wild old warrior prophets of the heroic ages" in the "organs" "predominant in the head": "ideality, wonder, veneration, and firmness" (198). "His large eyes," readers learn, "had that peculiar and solemn effect of unfathomable blackness and darkness which is often a striking characteristic of the African eye. But there burned in them, like tongues of flame in a black pool of naphtha, a subtle and restless fire, that betokened habitual excitement to the verge of insanity" (198). The "unfathomable blackness and darkness" of his

“African eye” bespeaks the inscrutable agency, the satanic intensity of an “African” Christian militant whose “habitual excitement” carries him “to the verge of insanity” (198). To the verge: Dred is not insane. His presence in the swamp, and in Stowe’s text more generally, marks the advent of an alternate founding, the emergence of a rugged frontier father: “his nether garments, of course negro-cloth, were girded round the waist by a strip of scarlet flannel, in which was thrust a bowie-knife and hatchet. Over one shoulder he carried a rifle, and a shot-pouch was suspended to his belt. A rude game bag hung upon his arm” (198). There is nothing comic in Stowe’s description of Dred’s self-sufficiency. His spartan existence sharpens the contradiction between the presumed comfort of plantation romance and freedom in the swamp: “You eat the fat of the land. I have what the ravens bring me! But no man whips me!—no man touches *my* wife!—no man says to me, ‘Why do ye so?’ Go! *you* are a slave!—I am free!” (Stowe’s emphasis, 199-200). It would be hard to imagine a more American character. Gone are the varied minstrel trappings of Topsy and Tom, the solemn appeal to Christian benevolence on behalf of Africa bound and bleeding. Dred is the truth of slavery, a hard fact of history. Stowe attests his reality by presenting an excerpt of Nat Turner’s Confessions in an appendix to *Dred*. Revelation and revolution are conjoined in the foundation of a class for whom Dred is the sign.

As the son of Denmark Vesey, with a “great religious ardor,” the concomitant of his “power of reading” acquired through an “apparent instinctive faculty,” Stowe presents Dred as “his father’s particular favorite,” possibly responsible for Vesey’s conspiracy: “perhaps it was the yearning to acquire liberty for the development of such a mind which first led Denmark Vesey to reflect on the nature of slavery, and the terrible weights which it lays on the human intellect, and to conceive the project of liberating a race” (208). Dred grows from a remarkable boy to a powerful man who “labored with proud and silent assiduity, but, on the slightest rebuke

or threat, flashed up with a savage fierceness, which, supported by his immense bodily strength, made him an object of dread among overseers” (209). Thus, “like a fractious horse,” he “was sold from master to master” (209). In a “scuffle” Dred kills his last master, and “made his escape to the swamps” (209). Significantly, he “carried with him but one solitary companion—the Bible of his father. To him it was not the messenger of peace and good-will, but the herald of woe and wrath!” (210).

Rather than Uncle Tom, himself the blandishment and occasion for Christian intercession, the faith of Stowe’s second eponymous character is of a decidedly different order; “sometimes he would fast and pray for days; and then voices would seem to speak to him, and strange hieroglyphics would be written upon the leaves” (211). When the Bible, “this oriental seed, an exotic among us, is planted back in the fiery soil of a tropical heart, it bursts forth with an incalculable ardor of growth” (211). This ardor of growth, the ardor of religion, which “even in the soil of the cool Saxon heart ... has thrown out its roots with an all-pervading energy, so that the whole frame-work of society may be said to rest on soil held together by its fibers” (211) posits an identity of opposites such that upon the common faith of “Saxon” and “tropical” hearts, “the whole frame-work of society may be said to rest.” The difference between them is of degree, not of quality. Stowe is able to sympathize with Dred because she sees “the self-sacrificing order with which a father and his associates had met death at the call of freedom” as both an act of faith and an act of founding, “for none of us may deny that, wild and hopeless as [Vesey’s] scheme was,³⁰ it was still the same in kind with the more successful one which

³⁰ According to Herbert Aptheker, “Denmark Vesey (born, it is reported, in Africa, and serving for several years aboard a slave-trader) had succeeded in purchasing his freedom in 1800 and thus was a member of the free Negro group [in Charleston, South Carolina] ... Vesey seems ... to have been the only non-slave directly implicated in the plot. He and several other leaders, such as Peter Poyas and Mingo Harth, were urban artisans—carpenters, harness-makers, mechanics and blacksmiths; they were literate, and Vesey was master of several languages. He was the oldest of the plotters, being apparently in his late fifties. ... Appeals to the rights of man, couched in both theological

purchased for our fathers a national existence” (211). Dred is his father’s son; he will purchase in blood a national existence for his people. But the signs must be right.

The son of Denmark Vesey is an elemental character, something of a Romantic hero “whose savage familiarity with nature gave him agility and [the] stealthy adroitness of a wild animal” (264) “in the vast solitudes which he daily traversed” (211). His apocalyptic faith, that he will “go unto this people, and break before them the staff beauty and the staff bands and be a sign unto this people of the terror of the Lord,” (242) is residual in Raymond Williams’ sense of the word. Dred’s resistance to the dominant culture “has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution” (Williams 122). The meanings and values, Dred’s varied hieroglyphics and signs, his excitement to the verge of insanity, cannot be expressed or substantially verified by the dominant culture without risk to the ideological foundations of that

and secular terms were used by Vesey. Thus, he would read to the Negroes ‘from the bible how *the children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from Bondage,*’ or if his companion were to bow ‘to a white person he would rebuke him, and observe that all men were born equal, and that he was surprised that any one would degrade himself by such conduct’” (Aptheker’s emphasis, 268-70). The plot was betrayed by “a favorite slave of Colonel Prioleau;” “on May 30 [1822] the authorities took the first steps toward crushing the conspiracy” (Aptheker 271). Another informer “quickly led to complete exposure ... One hundred and thirty-one Negroes of Charleston were arrested and forty-nine were condemned to die. Twelve of these were pardoned and transported, while thirty-seven were hanged, the executions taking place from June 18 to August 9. Although the leaders had kept lists of their comrades, only one list and part of another were found. Moreover, most of them followed the admonition of Peter Poyas, ‘Die silent, as you shall see me do,’ and so it is difficult to say how many Negroes were involved. ... The preparations had been thorough. By the middle of June the Negroes had made about two hundred and fifty pike heads and bayonets and over three hundred daggers. They had noted every store containing any arms and had given instructions to all slaves who tended or could get horses as to when and where to bring the animals. Even a barber had assisted by making wigs and whiskers to hide the identities of the rebels. Vesey had also written twice to San Domingo telling of his plans and asking for aid. ... Following the arrests there was formulated a plan for the rescue of the prisoners, and on the day of Vesey’s execution, ... ‘another attempt at insurrection was made but the State troops held the slaves in check. So determined, however, were they to strike a blow for liberty that it was found necessary for the federal government to send soldiers to maintain order’” (Aptheker 271-3).

culture's hegemony. What's fascinating about *Dred* is Stowe's willingness, despite moments of unreconstructed racialism, to almost take that risk—to seemingly countenance Dred's residual faith as an historical agent. “*En rapport*” (274) with nature, behind his “somnambolic stare” (270) Dred precipitates Augustine St. Clare's day of wrath: “The horseman lifteth up the sword and glittering spear! And there is a multitude slain! There is no end of their corpses!—They are stumbling upon the corpses! For, Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord, and I will make thee utterly desolate!” (*Dred* 263). Or at least he precipitates a sermon to the camp meeting sounding like St. Clare's *dies iræ*.

Dred is killed before he can “avenge the innocent blood! Cast forth thine arrows, and slay them!” (276). Prior to his death, Stowe holds Dred back; “the vision is sealed up, and the token is not yet come! The Lamb still beareth the yoke of their iniquities; there be prayers in the golden censers which go up like a cloud! And there is silence in heaven for the space of half an hour! But hold yourselves in waiting, for the day cometh!” (460). Such inaction is consonant with Milly's prayer that “if dere must come a day of vengeance, pray not to be in it! It's de Lord's strange work” (461). To which Dred curiously responds, “Woman thy prayers have prevailed for this time! ... The hour is not yet come!” (462). Stowe seals up Dred's residual vision of Divine punishment. It is incorporated in Milly's “Lamb of God ... dat's been scourged and died in torments” (461). To secure Christ's victory over sin, Dred's victory over slavery must somehow fail. As Williams notes, “it is in the incorporation of the actively residual—by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion—that the work of the selective tradition is especially evident” (123). In a novel at pains to foreground the heel-dragging hypocrisy of Methodist and Episcopalian denominations more concerned with sectional unity than the abolition of slavery, Stowe prefers the blood of the Lamb to the Angel of Death. She

entertains for a time the “*springing and germinant* fulfillments” (Stowe’s emphasis, 461) of revolt, but cannot abide their fulfillment.

And yet, it is with the utmost respect that Stowe buries Dred. In a speech eerily and perhaps ironically reminiscent of Dr. King’s speech at Riverside church, Dred tells Harry, “It may be that I shall not lead the tribes over this Jordan; but that I shall lay my bones in the wilderness!” (501). Like Uncle Tom before him, Dred, attended by “He who is mightier than the kings of the earth ... was now to be resolved again into the eternal elements” (513). Despite the murder of his master, Dred is redeemed. As Stowe’s narrator opines, “It is melancholy to reflect, that among the children of one Father an event which excites in one class bitterness and lamentation should in another be cause of exultation and triumph. But the world has been thousands of years and not yet learned the first two words of the Lord’s prayer” (514-5). This invocation of a shared Father, in which race has lapsed into class, blurs the distinction Dred’s life meant to preserve and avenge. Stowe will honor in death a character whose agency she could not countenance in the life-world of her novel. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* an “African” militant was a contradiction in terms. He could not exist. In *Dred* he does, and must die or else destabilize Stowe’s preference for reform. Nevertheless, by invoking Toussaint, something of the ember still lights the pyre:

“But he who lies here so still and mournfully in this flickering torch-light had struggling within him the energies which make the patriot and the prophet. Crushed beneath a mountain of ignorance, they rose blind and distorted; yet had knowledge enlightened and success crowned them, his name might have been, with that of Toussaint celebrated in mournful sonnet by the deepest thinking poet of the age” (516)

As Levine notes, Stowe precedes to quote Wordsworth's "To Toussaint L'Ouverture" (1803):
"Thou has left behind / Powers that will work for thee; air earth and skies / There's not a breathing of the common wind / That will forget thee; thou hast great allies; / Thy friends are exaltations, agonies, / And love, and man's unconquerable mind" (Stowe's italics, 517). It's moving, after a fashion, but it is difficult to imagine a more profound misreading of Toussaint or Dred's material priorities, the latter's affinity for nature notwithstanding. By enjoining the Romantic theology of air, earth and skies and an idealist claim to friendship with abstract "exaltations, agonies, and love, and man's unconquerable mind," rather than a legacy of concrete commitments to material practice, Dred is "resolved again into the eternal elements."

But Stowe is uneasy, despite the guarded optimism of reforms in which Clayton lives *with* his former slaves in Canada, "where he and his sister live happily together, finding their enjoyment in the improvement of those by whom they are surrounded" (543). Similarly, Milly tends to the orphans of New York: "I don't make no distinctions of color,--I don't believe in them. White chil'en, when they 'haves themselves, is jest as good as black" (546). The novel concludes with Tiff caring for yet another generation, "de very sperit of de Peytons" (549). Despite Tiff's minstrel "undulations" (549) and a brief drama at sea, there is something irresolute in the coda. Modern readers know that it will be another hundred years before *Brown v. Board*. As significant to these characters, and to Stowe's conscience as her model communities may be, there is present in *Dred* the presentiment that more than a shared Father binds us.

It is the shared struggle of a multi-racial subordinate class that the novel cannot resolve. As Clayton's worldly friend Frank Russel opines: "the fact is that our republic, in these states, is like that of Venice; it's not a democracy, but an oligarchy, and the mob is its standing army. . . . We are free enough as long as our actions please them; when they don't we shall find their noose

around our necks” (534). Stowe has foreseen the iron heel, and is aware that racialism is of no use to resist it. Lynch law will extend to all who disobey. “Liberty” according to Russel, “has generally meant the liberty of me and my nation and my class to do what we please; which is a very pleasant thing, certainly, to those who are on the upper side of the wheel, and probably involving much that’s disagreeable to those who are under” (535). For those who are under, the solidarity of recognition must begin with the sincere apprehension not of a shared Father, but of a shared structure of feeling. In the end, a reckoning will be had. “As [Stowe] writes in ‘The Chimney-Corner,’ an essay published in the *Atlantic* several months before Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox: ‘The prophetic visions of Nat Turner, who saw the leaves drop blood and the land darkened, have been fulfilled. The work of justice which he predicted is being executed in the uttermost’” (Levine xxx).

At its best, *Dred* cracks the carapace of a hardened belief in race. Its opening, however temporary, provides the occasion for a closer look. Stowe stands at the head of an activist tradition in American fiction. Her imperfect work, marred by racism, anticipates the vexed politics of American literary naturalism by writers like Jack London, and according to James Baldwin, from a different direction, Richard Wright. In chapter three, I turn to the work of Stowe’s contemporary, Herman Melville, who had very little patience for the concept of race at all.

CHAPTER III.

MELVILLE'S MINSTRELS AT SEA

God goes 'mong the worlds blackberrying. Cook! Ho, cook! and cook us! Jenny! hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, Jenny, Jenny! and get your hoe-cake done. —Stubb singing “Old King Crow”³¹

For there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men. —*Moby Dick*

My purpose in chapter two was to demonstrate Harriet Beecher Stowe's gradually diminishing adherence to romantic racial categories in her fiction, her imperfect evolution. In chapter three I turn to three canonic works by Herman Melville concerned to problematize facile notions of race: *Moby Dick*, *Benito Cereno*, and *The Confidence-Man*. For Melville the narrative concomitants of romantic racial ideologies are deeply suspect, injurious to the collective well-being of a young democracy whose nominal investment in representative government stuck in the teeth of those called slave by those called free. At sea in a milieu of bad faith, Melville's turbulent fictions had the audacity to call antebellum society's bluff: the perception of race is a minstrel projection. It has no basis in fact, only in culture. Neither blood nor the bumps on one's skull, the accumulated ethnographic desiderata of the 1850s, could preserve the enormity of a union founded upon slavery. The grandson of revolutionary heroes on both sides of his family, but also of a bankrupt father, Melville's legacy would be to transcribe the deeper lessons learned at the mast, his Harvard, into the adventure of a Pagan-Christian-Cannibal ligature with which to dart the dominant culture.

³¹ Parker identifies the minstrel song in a footnote to *Moby Dick* (335).

In *Moby Dick* (1851) the shop-worn habiliments of minstrelsy abound. A set-piece of sorts occurs when the second mate, Stubb, exhorts Fleece (the cook) to deliver a sermon to the sharks currently devouring the corpse of a whale Stubb has killed. Fleece obliges:

Your voraciousness, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to govern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is nothing more dan de shark well governed. Now, look here, bred'ren, just try wonst to be cibil, a helping yourselbs from dat whale. Don't be tearin' de blubber out your neighbor's mout, I say. Is not one shark good right as toder to dat whale? And, by Gor, none of you has de right to dat whale; dat whale belong to someone else. I know some o' you has berry brig mout, bigger dan oders; but den de brig mouts sometimes has de small bellies; so dat de brigness ob de mout is not to swaller wid, but to bite of de blubber for de small fry ob sharks, dat can't get into de scrouge to help demselves. (238)

Clearly the scene is parodic, but not necessarily of Fleece. To be sure there is something absurd in the performance. Asking that sharks love one another in good Christian fashion, or at least share the blubber with “de small fry” whose mouths are less suited to the enterprise presents a satiric thrust (one of many) at evangelical pieties. In part the comedy is enabled by the sermon's refraction of some of the major concerns about democracy and Christianity in the novel. It is the presentation of those concerns in blackface, and not Fleece's performance as such, that provide a kind of ironic depth that may be lost on Stubb, (“that's Christianity; go on”) but not on the reader. Ahab, “with a crucifixion in his face” (109) cannot govern the shark that is in him. He is no angel. As I'll demonstrate below, Ishmael will perform a transcendent democratic civility, of which Fleece might approve, but his disembodiment, however erotic and ecstatic, presents no obstacle to Ahab. In fact, Ishmael's obsession with a democracy of blackness among men

mirrors Ahab's obsession with whiteness, a putative democracy between himself and the gods. At the level of allegory, then, while I find Carolyn Karcher's suggestion that the *Pequod* represents the American ship of State convincing, she is too sanguine when she identifies *Moby Dick* as "Melville's greatest statement of the democratic faith that animates all his early works" (Karcher 91). Rather, just as Fleece's minstrel sermon will fail to curb the shark's gluttony, so Ishmael's democratic faith will fail to save the *Pequod*, or the union for which it stands. Karcher and I differ on whether Ishmael offers a salvific alternative to Ahab's madness. Fleece gives the benediction: "Cussed fellow-critters! Kick up de damndest row as ever you can; fill your dam bellies 'till dey bust—and den die" (239).

Nineteenth century America was particularly concerned with taxonomies for sorting one's "cussed fellow-critters." Melville lightly satirizes this impulse when he divides whales in the "Cetology" chapter into "Folio," "Octavo," and "Duodecimo" (118). Equally ridiculous if more pernicious is the hierarchical valuation of humans based on the purported qualities of blood, and the related fascination in determining its precise quantity as evinced by terms such as "quadroon," "octaroon," "mulatto," and the like—each *typical*, in both senses, of romantic racialism as discussed in chapter two. In order to classify, one must look, and one must imagine. This creative activity establishes a minstrel imaginary where the imputed characteristics of blood, and of race, the ideological reading of type for phenotype, necessitates both vigilant surveillance and the construction of blackface for ambiguities of color. Because Ishmael inhabits and is in some ways exemplary of the minstrel imaginary, his obsession with color fails to offer an alternative to Ahab's monochromatic madness. Black Eros was always part of the fantasy. At the level of national allegory Ishmael offers no alternative to Ahab's death drive. Rather, as satisfying as Ishmael and Queequeg's marriage may be, it affirms Ahab's power. It is the

minstrel belief in race that provides a kind of *frisson*, a gratuity of pleasure when it, like Ishmael's self, might be transcended. As the novel proceeds, both Ishmael and Queequeg become less substantial, less present in the text. It is toward erasure, like the extermination of the Pequot Indians, that the minstrel imaginary tends. Minstrelsy fixes race in a possible dialectics of pleasurable transcendence while leaving the very real material conditions of collective exploitation intact.³²

Early in the novel, having just arrived at New Bedford, Ishmael inadvertently blacks up to hear a sermon. Upon entering an "invitingly open" door, "the first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch. Ha! thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from the destroyed city, Gomorrah?" (24). Ishmael associates the ashes with a city destroyed for its sexual license. His laughter upon blacking up is indicative of sexual anticipation consonant with the erotics of minstrelsy. As Eric Lott notes, "it was perhaps the good and proper 'vulgarity' of veiled homoerotic desire that was the jewel in minstrelsy's crown, ensuring crowded houses night after night" (169). In the event, upon entering the door, rather than racial burlesque, Ishmael witnesses

the great Black Parliament of Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!' (24)

³² I'm not suggesting that race be ignored; I'm suggesting that congratulatory liberal readings of Ishmael and Queequeg's love as the road less travelled continue to inhabit a minstrel imaginary whose very condition of possibility is the reconstruction of race. The milky wake of that other leviathan, the mode of production, goes unremarked.

Karcher contends that “this Negro preacher, whose message Ishmael heeds by backing out ... is the first of the black characters in *Moby Dick* who prophesy retribution overtaking their white oppressors” (77). Baptized in the ash “blackness of darkness,” Ishmael nevertheless rejects identification with the parishioners. He’s a marked man, sufficiently alert to the Angel’s message to recognize the scant remainder of *jouissance* in the presentiment of Doom. It’s a “Wretched entertainment,” but what he heeds by backing out is unclear; at minimum he rejects identification with the “hundred black faces.” For Ishmael, early in the novel, it is the blackness which promises delight, but at the sign of The Trap, in fact, offends.

Ishmael is as obsessed with blackness as Ahab will later be with whiteness. He is thoroughly enthralled by the “besmoked” “unaccountable masses of shades and shadows,” as though “some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched” in a “very large oil-painting” (26) at the Spouter Inn.

What most confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the center of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet there was a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what the marvelous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through (26).

Ishmael’s “involuntary oath” mirrors the subsequent oaths taken aboard the *Pequod* with this difference: here it is the “black mass” that confounds you. Having attended, however briefly, a literal black mass in blackface at the “Parliament of Tophet,” Ishmael is “fairly froze” and “dart[ed]” by the “indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity” before him, “that one

portentous something in the picture's midst" (26). It is in fact a nautical Calvary: "a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads" (26). The "unimaginable sublimity" Ishmael perceives in this dark iconography finds its complementary contrast in the "heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears" "hung all over" "the opposite wall" (27). Having satisfied himself with what the painting represents, if not what it foretells, Ishmael turns his attention to the secular and profane thrills of a shudder "as you gazed, and wondered what monstrous cannibal and savage could ever have gone a death-harvesting with such a hacking, horrifying implement" (27).

Ishmael's incipient marriage to Queequeg inaugurates a tonal shift to comedy, while continuing to operate within the thematic confines of Melville's larger minstrel imaginary. The humor at the "Spouter Inn" is magnified by the disparity between Ishmael's pretension to modesty, as when he avers that "if it so turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into bed before I did," (28) and his visual fascination, to the point of rudeness. Prim and prudish, Ishmael thinks it "fair to presume that being a harpooner, his linen or woolen, as the case might be, would not be of the tidiest, certainly none of the finest ... and any decent harpooner ought to be home" (30). The thought from "what vile hole he had been coming" sets the fastidious sailor "twitch[ing] all over" (30). Such heightened anticipation is perhaps the natural result of inhabiting the room and very bed where "Sal" and the landlord slept on the night they "were spliced" (32): "plenty room for two to kick about in that bed," (32) Ishmael learns.

Queequeg's appearance upon entering the room elicits the same scrutiny as the aforementioned painting:

But as that moment he chanced to turn his face so towards the light, that I plainly saw they could not be sticking-plasters at all, those black squares on his cheeks. They were stains of some sort or other. At first I knew not what to make of this; but soon an inkling of the truth occurred to me. I remembered a story of a white man—a whaleman too—who, falling among the cannibals, had been tattooed by them. I concluded that this harpooner, in the course of his distant voyages, must have met with a similar adventure. And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin. But then, what to make of his unearthly complexion, that part of the squares of tattooing. To be sure, it might be nothing but a good coat of tropical tanning; but I never heard of a hot sun's tanning a white man into a purplish yellow one. However, I had never been in the South Seas; and perhaps the sun there produced these extraordinary effects upon the skin. (33-4)

Putting aside Melville's autobiographical joke about a whaleman falling among the cannibals (and then writing *Typee* (1846) about his experiences) Ishmael attempts to determine whether Queequeg might not be a white whaleman with "a good coat of tropical tanning," a kind of blackface below the equatorial line. As with the painting of the whale, Ishmael attempts to read "the black squares," "the stains of some sort or other." For a time, again, he is puzzled. He has an "inkling"—Melville is having fun—of the truth, but gets it wrong, projecting a safer fantasy for the heathen reality. Ishmael allows that "a man can be honest in any sort of skin," but rather than this maxim satisfying his curiosity, he proceeds with renewed vigor to determine "what to make of his unearthly complexion." The tone of this passage is humorous, an establishing shot of the racial difference that once properly identified will render the relationship meaningful.

Ishmael's curious "pale gaze" preserves the scene from slapstick farce. His scopophilia might best be understood with reference to what Eric Lott, following Laura Mulvey, identifies as the "pale gaze," "a ferocious investment in demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy by projecting vulgar black types as spectacular objects of white men's looking. This looking always took place in relation to an objectified and sexualized black body, and it was often conjoined to a sense of terror" (Lott 157-8) It is not then surprising that having determined that Queequeg "must be some abominable savage," Ishmael "quaked to think of it" (35). He is now thoroughly aroused: "A peddler of heads too—perhaps the heads of his own brothers—he might take a fancy to mine—heavens! look at that tomahawk!" (34-5). The account of castration almost writes itself. Of particular interest is the logic of Ishmael's gaze, the distance it collapses: brothers all, there is a tacit equality in the assortment of Queequeg's heads. Ishmael already imagines himself one of the gang. Eros and Thanatos are conjoined in the threat and fulfillment of the tomahawk, itself the presentiment of threat and fulfillment aboard the *Pequod*. The demystification of cannibal as vulgar black type has commenced. It remains for Ishmael to set up housekeeping.

Upon careful further inspection, Ishmael finds Queequeg "on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal" (36). Waking to "Queequeg's arm thrown over [him] in the most loving and affectionate manner," Ishmael muses that "you had almost thought I had been his wife" (36). The subjunctive inclusion of "you," provides a nuptial witness, positions the reader as a participant observer before whom Ishmael might protest too much "on the unbecomingness of [Queequeg's] hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style" (38). Amidst the comedy of "sundry violent graspings and strainings" (38), the sophomoric reference to Queequeg's "beaver hat, a very tall one, by the by," (38) Ishmael can't stop staring: "I was guilty of great rudeness; staring

at him from the bed, and watching all his toilet motions ... he and his ways were well worth unusual regarding” (38); “with much interest I sat watching him” (55). And with much interest so too might the neighbors: “there were no curtains to the window, ... the street being very narrow, the house opposite commanded a plain view into the room” (39). In a travesty of conventional modesty and decorum Ishmael is solicitous that Queequeg “accelerate his toilet somewhat, and particularly get into his pantaloons” (39).³³ Who would not be curious to see “George Washington cannibalistically developed?” (59)

The match inaugurates “a melting” in Ishmael, “no more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it” (56). His nascent love of Queequeg results in a heart made whole, a mollified hand. This moment marks Ishmael’s perspectival departure from “cannibal old” (406) Ahab. Pagan matrimony can only follow: “he pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married” (56). It but remains to propitiate Queequeg’s “innocent little idol” (57) Yojo, to smoke in bed, and as “man and wife, they say [in bed] open the very bosom of their souls to each other ... thus, then, in our hearts’ honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg—a cosy, loving pair” (57). Ishmael melts into an ironically satisfactory match coming as he does, (and as Melville did) “from an established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or

³³ In his biography of Melville, Hershel Parker provides some context for homosocial/homosexual bonding: “much of the dissatisfaction the whalemens felt was, in the nature of things, sexual. Melville had lived in the forecabin with twenty or so sailors, mainly healthy men, and young—some as young as he—denied the space and privacy to touch even their own bodies with the likelihood of being observed, and, all of them, preoccupied with sex. In whalships, to be sure, men found a degree of provisional privacy sufficient for mutually desired sex acts. The diaries the marine drummer Philip C. Van Buskirk kept a few years later suggest that in the navy mutual masturbation was commonplace (sodomy much less so). The editor, B. R. Burg, gives Buskirk’s phrase for manual, nor oral, sex as going ‘chaw for chaw,’ perhaps a nautical corruption of ‘claw for claw,’ from the old phrase ‘claw me and I’ll claw thee.’ Such mutually desired erotic acts usually went undetected and almost always went unpunished when discovered. ... While undesired assaults sometimes were recorded in logs and journals of whalships, no one, apparently, bothered to write down observed instances of practical man-to-man relief” (231).

Hardicanutes" (20). On Queequeg's side, "his father was a High Chief, a King; his uncle a High Priest; and on the maternal side he boasted aunts who were the wives of unconquerable warriors" (59). As a party to the wedding, if not the very bed they share, this sequence presents to readers a lightly ironized delectation. It feels good because it *looks* subversive. What is naturalized, shared, is the minstrel pale gaze.

Queequeg's threat is demystified by a sexual denouement, a domestic kind of melting. The bond they share is later likened to an "elongated Siamese ligature," (255) literally a rope ("the monkey rope") attached between Ishmael and Queequeg with which the former jerks the latter from the jaws of the sharks savaging the whale on which Queequeg stands. Metaphorically the ligature suggests a kind of bodily fusion shared "one way or other ... with a plurality of other mortals" (255). The scene presages Ishmael's apotheosis, his pleasurable democratic dissolution squeezing spermaceti: "let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (323). To which Ahab might rejoin that "in the face of all the glad, hay-making suns, and soft-cymballing, round harvest-moons, we must needs give in to this: that the gods themselves are not for ever glad" (355). One hears the complement to Ishmael's ecstasy in the faint echo of Pip's tambourine, "Rig-a-dig, dig, dig!" (365). It's Ahab's ship. To counter his command requires not dissolution, but organization.

Ahab, himself, is conflicted. Like Ishmael's shared Siamese ligature with Queequeg, Ahab is bound to the tragic cabin-boy Pip, whose tambourine is synecdoche for a minstrel performance the humor of which, as with his sanity, has long departed. "Thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings, (392) the captain contends. For his part Pip would have the blacksmith Perth "rivet these two hands together; the black one with the white, for I will not let this go" (392). Unfortunately, the contradiction is too much. Pip's sentiment is a threat to Ahab's

monomania: “speakest thus to me much more, Ahab’s purpose keels up in him. I tell thee no; it cannot be!” (399). To which Pip immediately responds by dropping any pretense of equality for the hierarchy of a plantation: “Oh good master, master, master!” (399). Ahab confirms the relation in reply: “Weep so, and I will murder thee!” (18). Still, the heart-strings compel Ahab to issue a benediction as impotent as that of Fleece: “God for ever bless thee; and if it come to that—God for ever save thee, let what will befall” (399). Ahab’s “Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command” (405) must issue in tragedy.

Ishmael invests faith in his fellows and a benign God: “thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!” (103). For Ahab, by comparison, “all visible objects ... are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. ... That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate” (140). For Ishmael all men are equally pasteboard masks for divine equality. The mask signifies the absence of equality with the gods to Ahab. It is through the pale gaze that both perceive the mouldings of a parti-colored divinity they would variously demystify and domesticate, thus validating part of Pip’s “universal” verb conjugation: “I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look” (335).³⁴ Ishmael’s obsession with blackness finds its complement in Ahab’s obsession with Moby Dick. In the end,

they were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and

³⁴ I’m indebted to Chris Messenger for this insight regarding Pip.

hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man’s valor, that man’s fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab the one lord and keel did point to. (415)

This is the issue of Ishmael’s democracy, “one man, not thirty,” the “oak, and maple, and pine,” an “Anacharsis Cloutz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying Old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world’s grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever come back” (107). Ahab and Ishmael share a complementary view. Though “the whale fishery” may furnish “an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber,” (135) there is no outside, but to strike through the mask. This or that whale however monstrous, this or that ship wherever guided, in whoever’s arms, amid what joy might be possible—at a lower level, the true leviathan remains an economy predicated upon the maintenance of hierarchical distinctions between men, an investment in the simulacra of race.

Moby Dick demonstrates the limits of liberal multiculturalism through the minstrel apparatus of a shared pale gaze in which fascination with the color of man and the color of god obscures the futility of democracy where capitalism pertains. “Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me” (423).

II

If *Moby Dick* enacts the emancipatory limits of the pale gaze, in *Benito Cereno* (1855), Melville demonstrates the dangerous potency of the racialist gaze as an ideological minstrel filter distorting antebellum sight. Both Stowe and Melville envision a day of wrath in their fictions,

but for Melville it is the dubious preservation of sentimental difference that functions to occlude rather than enable republican solidarity. The *San Dominick* is an ironized plantation at sea, both minstrel stage and overgrown ruin, the ship “unreal,” “a shadowy tableau” replete with “strange costumes, gestures, and faces” (38). Amasa Delano’s faith in romantic racial categories, an obtuse figuration of desire, itself a species of confidence-play, proves wholly inadequate to the scene. To be sure, in *Benito Cereno*, the American captain’s pale gaze is a grim allegorical visage. As Eric J. Sundquist contends, “By reconfiguring the machinery of slavery as a masquerade, exposing its appeal to natural law as the utmost artifice, Melville suggested that there was *no future*, as it were, for the experiment of American democracy so long as the paralysis of inequality continued” (Sundquist’s emphasis, 139).

Eric Lott locates paralysis as an effect of minstrelsy on board the *San Dominick*:

We might indeed see [*Benito Cereno*] as Melville’s version of the minstrel show, in which he ingeniously brings together the narrative paradigm of slave insurrection with the ironies and conundrums of minstrel acts. The slaves-turned-mutineers disguised as slaves aboard the *San Dominick* are in virtual blackface, performing for the liberal northern visitor too blinkered to know better. The implication is that Captain Delano’s inadequate responses to the slaves in secret revolt have been so conditioned by forms such as minstrelsy that the blacks are reduced to instances of white fantasy about them, a fact the insurrectionaries use to their advantage. Yet Melville’s pessimism about the effects of white racial discourse is revealed in the way the rebelling slaves are, for most of the story, stuck in mid-drama, frozen in the midst of revolutionary activity. In Melville’s view there is apparently no possible emergence from behind the minstrel mask even in the act of revolt, which is to say that the mask itself, interrupts the attempt to

throw it off. (242-3)

Lott here provides something akin to an origin story for what he elsewhere identifies as the “pale gaze,” a visage of romantic racialism. Captain Delano has been “conditioned by forms such as minstrelsy” to reduce his immediate danger, and indeed the insurrectionaries arrayed before him “to instances of white fantasy,” a nervous theater of cruelty and pleasure. If no man is a hero to his (blackface) valet, it is because the latter, through his labor takes measure of the man, and perceiving his own superiority, because he is able to do that for which his master requires another, must perform his submission as a kind of epistemological farce. In this way all wage labor is akin to blackface because the hierarchy of boss and worker is on both sides a precarious performance, though for different ends. The boss as agent of Capital must naturalize an inhumane mode of production that the worker for her very existence must engage and contest. If, during the nineteenth century, minstrelsy issued in far more equivocal and frequently pernicious results, rather than a thoroughgoing labor abolitionism, it was according to Lott, “a prime example of the sometimes contestatory character of plebian culture, articulating class difference, intentionally or not, by calling on the insurrectionary resonances of black culture” (91). “What these narratives seem to have realized,” Lott contends, “is that the minstrel show flaunted as much as it hid the fact of expropriation and its subtexts, enslavement and intermixture. Such seemingly coherent and purposive accounts, in short, constituted part of a volatile discourse on ‘blackness’—examples in themselves of ‘racial’ production’s social unconscious” (65). The blackface mask is thus a highly ambiguous figure: it will hide and flaunt the fact of expropriation. In this equivocal aporia, the performance of race stands potentially revealed to be performance as such because the ideological fiction upon which it relies comes unbound through its sheer indeterminacy. If Lott is correct to suggest that for Melville there is no emergence from

behind the minstrel mask, it is because the mask covers all. The horizon of race—black and white—is a minstrel performance meant to obscure a potentially unifying identity in class. To get there, Melville must contend with the minstrel racecraft of his (and our) moment.

Melville is at pains to augur the presentiment of doom and danger at the outset of *Benito Cereno*, “shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come,” (35) somewhat reminiscent of the dark tone in the “Loomings” chapter of *Moby Dick*. “Flights of troubled gray fowl” complement “flights of troubled grey vapors,” “fitfully,” “as swallows over meadows before storms” (35). The birds fail to register on Amasa Delano, himself not unlike “a white noddy, a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, somnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea” (37). On descrying “a stranger,” a seeming vagabond ship that “showed no colors,” in disregard of “the custom of peaceful seamen of all nations,” Captain Delano registers “surprise,” (36) but not alarm. The ironized avatar of a young country, Delano’s “surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms” (35). Unwilling to heed ubiquitous warnings, his confidence is resolute, almost obdurately absolute, a qualified disposition for “*the mark of all eager tongues*” (38, my emphasis) on the *San Dominick*.

Set in 1799,³⁵ on the cusp of the Haitian revolution, Melville’s *San Dominick* resembles nothing so much as synecdoche for a decadent plantation: “the true character of the vessel was plain—A Spanish merchantman ... carrying negro slaves ... from one colonial port to another” (36). The flora of plantation romance, Spanish moss is invoked by “dark festoons of sea-grass,”

³⁵ Sundquist suggests that “in altering the date of Amasa Delano’s encounter with Benito Cereno from 1805 to 1799, ... Melville accentuated the fact that the tale belonged to the Age of Revolution, in particular the period of violent struggle leading to Haitian independence presided over by the heroic black general Toussaint L’Ouverture” (140).

which, “like mourning weeds,” “slimily swept to and from over the name, with every hearse-like roll of the hull” (37). A kind of nautical gothic, the name “SAN DOMINICK” fairly bleeds, with “each letter” of its name “streakingly corroded with tricklings of copper-spike rust,” (37) whose dominant note is the synaesthetic flavor of blood. With “slovenly neglect pervading her,” “battered and mouldy,” and “in sad disrepair,” (37) “like superannuated Italian palaces ... under a decline of masters” (36) our white nobby finds himself amidst the “ruinous aviaries” (37) of the *San Dominick*, where, “overhanging all was the balustrade ... which, partly stained with pitch and partly embossed with moss, seemed the charred-ruin of some summer-house in a grand garden long running to waste” (62).³⁶ “Though upon the wide sea,” Delano “seemed in some far inland country; prisoner in some deserted château, left to stare at empty grounds, and peer out at vague roads, where never wagon or wayfarer passed” (62). The shaving scene, redolent of torture and inquisition, spills Don Benito's blood not merely on Spain's ensign, but on all those inland countries, where the semblance of control remains the provenance of the obtuse. Should Stowe's Simon Legree pace the foredeck, no one, presumably, would be greatly surprised. Into this setting, as a Yankee visitor at “the South,” Melville deposits his credulous innocent as minstrel voyeur, the better to satirize the damaged and dangerous view of romantic racial eyes.

“Faithful fellow!” cries Captain Delano upon hearing from the insurrectionist leader Babo, that “what Babo has done was but duty” (45). The ambiguous and ironic invocation of “duty,” foregrounds Delano's ignorance: “Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him” (45). Although apparently a competent captain, Delano is rather dim. His “familiarily

³⁶ Sundquist reads *Benito Cereno* as a hemispheric allegory: “The aura of ruin and decay that links Benito Cereno and his ship to Charles V and his empire points forward as well to the contemporary demise of Spanish power in the New World and the role of slave unrest in its revolutionary decline” (137). In fact, “*Benito Cereno* does not prophesy a civil war but rather anticipates, just as plausibly an explosive heightening of the conflict between American democracy, Old World despotism, and Caribbean New World revolution” (Sundquist 143).

and humorously” “benign” “nature” complements an indulged pleasure in minstrel speculation: “At home he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door watching some free man of color at his work or play” (71). He “could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other” (45). Despite what for readers must register as ominous signs, as when “two and two they sideways clashed their hatchets together, like cymbals, with a barbarous din,” Delano in this moment recognizes “the peculiar love in negroes of uniting industry with pastime” (39). What follows is a catalogue of ironized romantic racist blindness:

performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust; less a servant than a devoted companion. (40)

Through the alchemy of race, the pale gaze, somehow, “menial” tasks imbued with “affectionate zeal” issue in something “filial or fraternal,” i.e., the production of an Uncle Tom, perhaps. Readers learn that “When to all this is added the docility arising from the un aspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors,” (71)

there is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one’s person. Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers; taking to the comb and brush congenially as to the castinets, and flourishing them apparently with almost equal satisfaction. There is, too, a smooth tact about them in this employment, with a marvelous, noiseless, gliding briskness, not ungraceful in its way, singularly pleasing to

behold, and still more so to be the manipulated subject of. And above all is the great gift of good humor. Not the mere grin or laugh is here meant. Those were unsuitable. But a certain easy cheerfulness, harmonious in every glance and gesture; as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune. (70-1)

Whereas this romantic racial vision is naturalized in Stowe, it is ironized in Melville by making it the limited, inadequate view of a “noddy” and imperiled protagonist; “Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (71).³⁷ “Of course,” Sundquist contends,

such a view of African American levity and docility, stock ingredients of the romantic racialism willfully played upon by Babo, was also but a thin cover for apprehensions that something more dangerous lurked beneath the façade. Like Delano’s consciousness, however, the racist argument, which was nothing less than the fundamental ideology of minstrelsy that would rule white America’s view of blacks long past the Civil War, bespoke a national mission in which political regulation and racial hierarchy were raised to such a pitch that calculated manipulation cannot be divorced from naiveté. (152-3)

Delano’s bad faith, an admixture of calculated manipulation and naiveté, is elsewhere identified by Sundquist as a “posture of innocence” and “contrived innocence” (137, 28). Romantic racialism, “the fundamental ideology of minstrelsy,” characteristic of a national mission of political regulation and racial terror is thus, for Melville, a damnable choice. As Sundquist notes, “Melville’s distillation of Delano’s racialism and his manic benevolence into tropes of minstrelsy

³⁷ Note that Black Guinea in *The Confidence-Man* is also likened to a Newfoundland dog, suggesting that faith on the *Fidèle* is of a romantic racial hue. As I demonstrate in chapter four, Jack London’s racism, despite his socialist commitments, is in part evidenced by his canine slave narratives, *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. In the work of literary naturalists like London and Sinclair, racist caricature was fairly common. The effects of such caricature, and of Jim Crow more generally, would be condemned by a later generation of naturalists, especially in the work of Richard Wright, although Stephen Crane’s “The Monster” anticipates this direction.

empties him of moral authority” (153). The cunning benevolence of Melville’s emblematic American, his “posture of innocence” at home and abroad, is revealed as a violent national ideology of naïve control. For Sundquist, “the character of Delano represents both the founding fathers, who sanctioned slavery even as they recognized its contradiction of the Rights of Man, and the contemporary northern accommodationists, who too much feared sectional strife and economic turmoil to bring to the surface of consciousness a full recognition of slavery’s ugliness in fact and in principle” (154).

That the fitting susceptibility of blacks to servitude is *not* Melville’s view is demonstrated by his ironic placement of a description of the possibly sexual pleasures of “being the manipulated subject of” (70) Babo’s ministrations in a scene redolent of inverse colonial torture and terror. In the “cuddy,” amidst “two long, sharp-ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age and uncomfortable to look at as inquisitors’ racks,” Benito Cereno is made to sit in a “large misshapen arm-chair, which, furnished with a rude barber’s crotch, working with a screw, seemed some grotesque engine of torment” (70). “Altogether,” the reader is told, “the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, nor, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white a man at the block. But this was one of those antic conceits, appearing and vanishing in a breath” (72). When Babo cuts Benito Cereno, it is on to “the flag of Spain” that the latter bleeds (72). Rather than heed the warning to complacent colonial powers, “turning towards the black,” Delano avers “it’s all one, I suppose, so the colors be gay” (72). Sundquist identifies the shaving scene, “Melville’s greatest moment of terrifying invention,” as “the revolutionary mind at odds with itself, impassioned for freedom but fearful of continuing revolution, energized by the ideals of paternalistic humanitarianism but blind to the recriminating violence they hold tenuously in check” (154).

Thus, rather than identifying “a nightmare pantomime symbolic of the revenge of New World slaves upon their masters,” Amasa Delano is “thoroughly beguil[ed]” (Sundquist 158, 154). The pitch of Babo’s performance is precisely calculated to elicit the American’s pleasure. Recalling that Delano “took to negroes ... just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (71), Babo, on first appearance, “turn[s] [his face] up into the Spaniard’s” “like a shepherd’s dog” (39). He knows his audience. That this *is* a performance, and that Babo controls it is evidenced by the facility with which it is modulated, as when “Babo, changing his previous grin of mere animal humor into an intelligent smile, not ungratefully eyed his master” (54). As he remarks when rapturously gazing upon “a slumbering negress” (60), “there’s naked nature, now; pure tenderness and love, through Captain Delano, well pleased” (61). The pale gaze is neither subtle nor acute.

For Delano, it is the romantic racial whiteness that doth offend, or that might harbor risk, for “the singular alternations of courtesy and ill-breeding in the Spanish captain were unaccountable, except on one of two suppositions—innocent lunacy or wicked imposture” (52). Indeed, “to think, that, under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched—those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs” (52).³⁸ Melville’s irony functions through a process of inversion whereby romantic racial roles are reversed. Delano believes that “the whites,” “by nature, were the shrewder race,” and that “the blacks” “were too stupid” (63) to be in league with Don Benito. Events suggest otherwise, and more, that “the blacks” stand not in league, but in charge of the *San Dominick*. Indeed, even in death, there is something resolute when, at the conclusion of *Benito Cereno*, Babo’s head, “that hive of

³⁸ Lott notes the potential for homosexual/homosocial bonding in a minstrel milieu: “For some, the mixing of minstrelsy apparently meant the eroticized return of Nat Turner. If only it had been the ‘young ladies’ who could not resist” (60). Here, on the *San Dominick*’s stage, the “silky paw and fangs” of the emasculated Spaniard become an object of speculative interest for the aroused American. “Like a childless married couple,” attending and participating in a minstrel performance, the captains bond “across the black’s body” (84).

subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites” (102).³⁹ It is the limitations of the racist gaze, Delano’s “knot in hand, and knot in head” (63)⁴⁰ by way of comparison with Babo’s “hive of subtlety,” that Melville critiques, the “tranquilizing,” if representative, “American’s thoughts” (57). “‘Tell me, Don Benito,’ [Delano] added with a smile—‘I should like to have your man here myself—what would you take for him? Would fifty doubloons be any object?’” (58). The cost of such stupidity, Melville avers, will be dear.

Babo’s sinister imperative to “*Follow your leader*” (86) is a bit redundant. None of the slaves on the *San Dominick* “wore fetters, because the owner [Benito Cereno’s] friend Aranda, told him that they were all tractable” (90). The credulous Amasa Delano *must* follow his precursor because the price of his belief in the tractable character of such a faithful servant in Babo, indeed such a faithful race, is a sentence to death: *follow your leader*. There is an irony, perhaps, in learning of the true course of events on the *San Dominick* from a deposition. The legal form suggests a kind of containment, the events will be mediated by Delano’s account in accord with Spanish law. In such a framework, Babo has no standing. As Sundquist notes, “while it explains the mystery, unlocks it, the deposition also publically and legally locks up the significance of the revolt in chains and sentences that are as immune to subversion and irony as Delano’s consciousness” (180). In fact, “the flawed and cold-blooded depositions recount the

³⁹ In discussing the white vigilante response to Nat Turner’s rebellion, Sundquist notes Melville’s appropriation of “the severed black head,” “a figure of warning, repeated often enough in the history of slave revolt,” or what in Jerusalem, Virginia was called “blackhead signpost,” as “an instance of suppressive terror, but it was also an admission that such terror was inadequate—that it was always, and in this case belatedly, *counterterror*” (71 Sundquist’s emphasis).

⁴⁰ The knot episode is accompanied by another inversion, as when “an elderly negro, in a clout like an infant’s ... and a kind of attorney air” informs Captain Delano “in tolerable Spanish, and with a good-natured, knowing wink ... “that the old [Spanish] knotter was simple-witted, but harmless; often playing his odd tricks” (64). Thus, a stock racist caricature typically applied to a negro is instead deployed by same to a Spaniard for the benefit of a gullible American. Though he may superficially wear “the clout of an infant,” his “attorney air” suggests that the prosecution will be anything but innocent.

rebellion selectively and retrospectively, and in so doing they reenact and respond to an escalating pressure to cure the disease aboard the *San Dominick*, restore regulation and order and suppress the rebellion by legally deposing the fallen black king Babo” (Sundquist 179). Melville implies that the restoration of regulation and order is unlikely given the racist expectations of the tribunal:

the tribunal inclined to the opinion that the deponent, not undisturbed in his mind by recent events, raved of some things *which could never have happened*. But subsequent depositions of the surviving sailors, bearing out the revelations of the captain in several of the strangest particulars, gave credence to the rest. So that the tribunal, in its final decision, rested its capital sentences upon statements which, had they lacked confirmation, it would have deemed it but duty to reject. (my emphasis, 89)

The refusal to countenance as plausible African agency—it’s “duty to reject”—suggests that the tribunal will be as competent to contain as Amasa Delano to conceive of the real state of affairs on the *San Dominick*. In any event, throughout, unbeknown to Delano, unanticipated by Aranda, Babo has already performed the offices of presiding judge, determining who will live and die: “*he had determined to kill his master*” (92). As on a southern plantation, the master might make an example of an errant slave, so “*to keep the seamen in subjection, he wanted to prepare a warning of what road they should be made to take did they or any of them oppose him*” (92). The inversion is complete. Babo has but to catechize the sailors in the belief that they must “*keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader*” (93).

No one is more haplessly faithful than Amasa Delano. Although, late in the narration, he is granted what appears to be a moment of insight, as when, “across the long-benighted mind of

Captain Delano, a flash of revelation swept, illuminating in unanticipated clearness, his host's whole mysterious demeanor, with every enigmatic event of the day, as well as the entire past voyage of the *San Dominick*" (85). Finally, the "scales dropped from his eyes" (85). However, Delano has learned nothing: "You generalize, Don Benito; and mournfully enough. But the past is passed; why moralize upon it?" (101). Melville's dark satire is predicated upon the tension between Amasa Delano's unwillingness to generalize humanity and the reader's ability to comprehend the dangerous inadequacy of romantic racial ideology; "the masquerade performed by Babo and Benito Cereno to beguile Delano tests both the American captain's posture of innocence and that of Melville's audience" (Sundquist 137). As minstrel connoisseur, Delano is highly amused:

He began to laugh at his former forbodings; and laugh at the strange ship for, in its aspect someway siding with them, as it were; and laugh, too, at the odd-looking blacks, particularly those old scissors-grinders, the Ashantees; and those bed-ridden old knitting women, the oakum-pickers; and at the dark Spaniard himself, the central hobgoblin of all.

(57)

Delano delights in Babo's monsters and spinsters, a variety show perhaps deserving of Barnum's American Museum.⁴¹ Of the late unpleasantries aboard the *San Dominick*, the blithe American

⁴¹ "In 1841 Barnum bought Scudder's American Museum across from St. Paul's at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street. He converted the five-story exterior into an advertisement lit with limelight. The museum opened on January 1, 1842. Its attractions made it a combination zoo, museum, lecture hall, wax museum, theater and freak show, that was, at the same time, a central site in the development of American popular culture. Barnum filled the American Museum with dioramas, panoramas, 'cosmoramas,' scientific instruments, modern appliances, a flea circus, a loom run by a dog, the trunk of a tree under which Jesus' disciples sat, an oyster bar, a rifle range, waxworks, glass blowers, taxidermists, phrenologists, pretty-baby contests, Ned the learned seal, the Feejee Mermaid (a mummified monkey's torso with a fish's tail), midgets, Chang and Eng the Siamese twins, a menagerie of exotic animals that included beluga whales in an aquarium, giants, Native Americans who performed traditional songs and dances, Grizzly Adams's trained bears and performances ranging from magicians, ventriloquists and blackface minstrels to adaptations of biblical tales and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'" ("Barnum's").

would prefer not to “generalize” (101). The shadow cast by “the negro” (101) fails to perturb Amasa Delano, “for when, after a long, sad voyage, you know, the anchor drops into the haven, all its vast weight seems lifted from the captain’s heart” (80-1). One concludes *Benito Cereno* with an appreciation for the inadequacy of minstrelsy to mediate “shadows to come.”

III

In *Benito Cereno* Melville demonstrates the African agency that the pale gaze occludes by redeploying the pleasurable expectations of minstrelsy for insurrectionary purposes.

Melville’s allegory in *The Confidence-Man* (1857) suggests that the ship of state has itself become unmoored, subject to diabolic caprice. As Carolyn Karcher argues,

The Confidence-Man dramatizes an apocalyptic judgment overtaking America in her slaveholding territorial hub, just as Americans fancy themselves overtaking the millennium. Symbolizing this irony, the steamer *Fidèle*, which has succeeded the *Pequod* as America’s allegorical ship of state, is headed not for the New Jerusalem, but for New Orleans, the financial capital of slavery and of the cotton kingdom that underpins northern industry. The biblical prophecies *The Confidence-Man* enacts are the very ones on which contemporary Americans based their expectations of a glorious national future. Yet belying those expectations, they foretell a fearful day of reckoning when Christ will return to earth “in such an hour as ye think not” (Matt. 24:44), to test his followers and to destroy the evil world forever, along with all those who prove false to him, before gathering the faithful into the heavenly kingdom he will establish on a new earth. (186-7)

Judgment is relevant to *The Confidence-Man* in at least two senses: to judge another as a potential repository for one’s confidence, i.e., to pronounce upon another a judgment; it is at the same time to have the capacity to judge. Lacking the capacity, judgment is violence to both

parties. Jonathan A. Cook suggests that the “novel can be read as a modern exemplar ... of the Menippean satire, named after a third century B.C.E. Greek Cynic philosopher who wrote free-wheeling seriocomic harangues on moral subjects in prose interspersed with verse” (346). I find this context useful, and “seriocomic harangues” largely apt as a description of Melville’s mode, but in light of the ubiquitous subtext of slavery and violence, the concerted manner of satire in which millennial delusions are parsed, and the invocation of Auto de Fe and revolutionary terror, despite the seemingly picaresque staging of encounters, “free-wheeling” *The Confidence-Man* is not. All of the dialogues are literally set on the *Fidèle*, predicated largely on a national faith in progress, a confidence that the devil abets in a variety of disguises. Rather than the Celestial City, the staged confluence of antebellum ideologies travels to New Orleans. All have metaphorically signed the Black Rapids Coal Company’s transfer book, Melville contends, and thus, the allegorical ship of state is headed “down.”

There are only “strangers still more strange” (15) in constant supply aboard the *Fidèle*. In an echo of *Moby Dick*, Melville likens passengers to “a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man” (16-17). The reader is early confronted with the presentiment of multi-racial doom. As Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer usefully note,

Anacharsis Cloots (1755-1794), the Prussian born, Paris-reared Baron Jean Baptiste de Cloots, self-styled “orator of the human race,” led a multiracial and multinational deputation in to the French National Assembly in 1790 to symbolize the support of the French Revolution by all mankind. . . . Ironically, Cloots was executed, in Paris, during the Reign of Terror. (17)

Such a congress constitutes the regular dramatis personae of Melville's oeuvre: the ship as piebald parliament, its outrageous lack of democracy an offense to the solidarity of the workers of all races variously toiling for confidence or spermicetti. By 1857 the die was cast for Melville's literary career; as a popular author he was doomed to commercial failure, "disastrous indebtedness" as a result of "his extreme poverty in the years after *Moby-Dick*" (Parker ix). His commitment to Truth, "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not," (Parker *MD* 537) as evinced in an 1851 letter to Hawthorne, a commitment to the Cloots congresses of diverse men he had known as a sailor, would prove in his fiction a popular death sentence. What unifies and animates Melville's work is an abiding sympathy. It is only possible to truly romance a cannibal if you first see the man. Melville readily identified with the misjudged; *The Confidence-Man* is dedicated to "victims of Auto da Fe." A country founded upon genocide, slavery, and the accumulation of capital—founded that is, upon misrecognition of one's brothers and sisters, upon inhumanity—lacks judgment, is unfit to judge, and stands accused and condemned as such. This is what Karcher identifies as Melville's "apocalyptic judgment overtaking America," the "glorious national future."

Early in *The Confidence-Man*, Melville's narrator proceeds to invoke judgment, sympathy, and terror by describing the rough treatment of an early incarnation of the Confidence-man, a slave called Black Guinea:

the rest, finding themselves left sole judges in the case, could not resist the opportunity of acting the part: not because it is a human weakness to take pleasure in sitting in judgment upon one in a box, as surely this unfortunate negro [Black Guinea] now was, but that it strangely sharpens human perceptions, when, instead of standing by and having

their fellow-feelings touched by the sight of an alleged culprit severely handled by some one justiciary, a crowd suddenly come to be all justiciaries in the same case themselves; as in Arkansas once, a man proved guilty, by law, of murder, but whose condemnation was deemed unjust by the people, so that they rescued him to try him themselves; whereupon, they, as it turned out, found him even guiltier than the court had done, and forthwith proceeded to execution; so that the gallows presented the truly warning spectacle of a man hanged by his friends. (20)

The opportunity to judge “one in a box” is perversely vivifying, it “strangely sharpens human perceptions.” Instead of recognizing a brother in “an alleged culprit,” of having “their fellow-feeling touched by the sight,” that is, instead of sympathizing with the “severely handled,” the “crowd suddenly come to be all justiciaries.” The result of such gratifying predilections is “the truly warning spectacle of a man hanged by his friends.” In the absence of fellow-feeling, terror. Given the choice between solidarity and esprit de corps, or fratricide, growing violence is the order of the 1850s, anticipating the civil war, “shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come” (*Benito Cereno* 35).

Far from a charge of murder, “owing to something wrong about his legs ... in effect, cut down to the stature of a Newfoundland dog,” (17) Black Guinea must somehow document his disability, must gain the confidence of his white audience. They ask for his papers, please: “had he any documentary proof, any plain paper about him, attesting that his case was not a spurious one” (21). He will be judged not by law, but by racist custom. Should he fail to produce the papers, or otherwise gain the confidence of his fellow travelers, a trip to New Orleans might be for his sale. Given the suggestion of gallows, and the invocation of doomed Anacharsis Cloots, that is, the ubiquity of terror at the hands of one’s peers as witnessed by the fate of the man in

Arkansas, Black Guinea (The Confidence-Man, Satan) is primed to reflect readers' expectations of violence toward African-Americans. Melville's subversive mode, however, will function to judge the accuser, and problematize the accused such that confidence in one's fellow American's ability to judge, their capacity for sympathy, appears profoundly dismayed and explicitly discouraged.⁴²

One satiric instance of suspect sympathy occurs with the Black Rapids Coal Companies' transfer agent (the man with the book) taking "to task" Mr. Roberts (the merchant) "for evincing . . . a somewhat jaundiced sentimentality" (65). The latter having inquired of Black Guinea, the transfer agent "suggested whether the alleged hardships of that alleged unfortunate [Guinea] might not exist more in the pity of the observer than the experience of the observed" (66). Thus the Confidence-Man questions the confidence placed by the merchant in a prior incarnation of himself. Instead, he suggests, that confidence be placed in a romantic racial stereotype: "negroes were by nature a singularly cheerful race . . . it was improbable, therefore, that a negro, however reduced to his stumps by fortune, could be ever thrown off the legs of a laughing philosophy" (66). Melville well knows the pernicious use of this belief by defenders of the peculiar institution. One sees in their affability that slaves are naturally suited to the paternalism of the plantation, apologists contended. The confidence-man is substituting racial sentiment for

⁴² Eric Lott avers that "we have no way of knowing that Black Guinea's 'secret emotions' are probably those of a white man pretending to be black, and so we are shocked, drawn in. His is an act of blackness as 'target and purse,' [spectators are encouraged to pitch coins into his mouth] object of derision and repository of market value. Only then does the accusation break up the illusion: 'got up for financial purposes.' But that, of course, is what Melville has himself been so careful to construct—a sham that works, if only to embarrass—and he has done it by commodifying the blazes out of Black Guinea. . . . The consciousness of black commodification which the writing forces on us works all the more to make blackness into a marketable object of white interest, this time for the reader" (64). Whether Guinea is in blackface, the minstrel markings of his performance are not in doubt. Of interest in Lott's account is the embarrassed pleasure readers derive from the commodification of race: "blackface here is one more con game" (64).

sympathy. Melville mobilizes this affective specie to impugn racist formulas as diabolic currency, a bad-faith confidence requiring the absence of thought.

In fact, following the merchant's sympathetic account of the man with the weed's lost wife, the confidence-man advises against excessive thought or feeling:

Therefore, he deemed it unadvisable in the good man, even in the privacy of his own mind, or in communion with a congenial one, to indulge in too much latitude of philosophizing, or, indeed, of compassionating, since this might beget an indiscreet habit of thinking and feeling which might unexpectedly betray him upon unsuitable occasions. Indeed, whether in private or public, there was nothing which a good man was more bound to guard himself against than, on some topics, the emotional unreserve of his natural heart; for, that the natural heart, in certain points, was not what it might be, men had been authoritatively admonished. (72-3)

From Stowe's perspective this passage might appear quixotic at best and heretical at worst. For Stowe, maternal sentiment persuades white middle-class readers to embrace abolition. They must feel right, before they can act right. Ironically, perhaps, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to some extent in *Dred*, Stowe embraces the romantic racial stereotypes that the Confidence-Man recommends. The difference is that Melville is at pains to demonstrate that the obtuse misrecognition inherent in racist clichés is in fact the devil's work. One sees in Melville's confidence-play a performative critique of sentimental ideology at its most pernicious.

"What is friendship, if it be not the helping hand and the feeling heart?" (206) the Cosmopolitan (another guise of the Confidence-Man) inquires? Later, to the barber, he declares "better cold lather ... than a cold heart" (227). A warm, feeling heart compliments the Cosmopolitan's faith in a "Committee of Safety, holding silent sessions over all, in an invisible

patrol, most alert when we soundest sleep, and whose beat lies as much through forests as towns, along rivers as streets” (249). Through the *Cosmopolitan*, Melville presents sentiment, the feeling heart, as in keeping with revolutionary terror through the conscious invocation of its French antecedent. If you will, sentiment functions as a kind of pasteboard mask, obscuring “the silent sessions over all,” a judgment against which there is no defense, and with jurisdiction over all. In *The Confidence-Man*, the confidence-play of dubious racial sentiment is the handmaiden of allegorical doom. Bad-faith on the *Fidèle* is emblematic of the national faith in Afro-American inferiority. Melville’s invocation of diabolic terror on what Karcher identifies as his ship of state (61), reflects the failure of a commitment to truth as he saw it, “the [mis]apprehension of the absolute condition of present things.”

Through various deployments of the pale gaze in *Moby Dick*, *Benito Cereno*, and *The Confidence-Man*, Melville’s minstrels suggest the affective limits of a racialist problematic. Unlike Stowe, who was gradually working toward the full humanity of her black characters, for Melville, their humanity is never in doubt. Rather, the accent is on showing that the deployment of race is always a confidence-play, for which only the house stands to profit. In chapter four I turn to the sentimental containment of Jack London’s dog whistles. Despite his socialist commitments, and a deep debt to the slave narrative tradition, his work is in keeping with Jim Crow.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK LONDON'S CABIN:

CALL OF THE WILD AND WHITE FANG AS SENTIMENTAL SLAVE NARRATIVES

One thing is certain,--that there is a mustering among the masses, the world over; and there is a *dies iræ* coming on, sooner or later.

---Augustine St. Clare, *UTC*

Again from its brumal sleep / Wakens the ferine strain.

---Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*

There were two kinds of slaves, the house Negro and the field Negro.

--- Malcolm X

Where do we place Jack London in the American tradition of committed writing? Lenin, two days prior to his death on 21 January 1924, asked Natasha Krupskaya, his wife, to read to him. She chose Jack London's "Love of Life," a tale "that greatly pleased Ilych." The next day he asked to be read more London. However, according to Krupskaya, "the next tale happened to be quite another type – saturated with bourgeois morals . . . Ilych smiled and dismissed it with a wave of the hand" (Kershaw 299). Lenin's wave dismisses London's work: the revolutionary impulse animate in London's texts is contained by "bourgeois morals," his sentiment rendered suspect.

At first blush, London appears very committed indeed. In the November 18, 1905 issue of the *Appeal to Reason*, soliciting subscriptions for Upton Sinclair's new book *The Jungle*, Jack London writes, "Here it is at last! The book we have been waiting for these many years! The 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of wage slavery! Comrade Sinclair's book, 'The Jungle!' and what 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' did for black slaves, 'The Jungle' has a large chance to do for the wage-slaves of today" (Foner 80-1). Of interest here is not simply London's invocation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as

an exemplary text, but the way in which its exemplary status is predicated upon what it “did for black slaves.” London fails to further qualify his understanding of Stowe’s accomplishment. Readers might infer, at minimum, that he has in mind the popularization and publication of slave struggles in the United States, and that by extension London identifies Sinclair’s text as an important tool to agitate for the abolition of wage slavery.

Yet despite his explicit identification of “black slaves” and “wage slaves,” London’s socialism, as comrades at the time, and critics today often rightly suggest, was vitiated by his racism,⁴³ his claim that “the comradeship of the revolutionists ... transcends race prejudice” in the essay entitled “Revolution” notwithstanding (Revolution 1148). In a recent biography, Alex Kershaw is able to diminish London’s racism and maintain an elegiac tone by deploying an apologia that enlists three rhetorical strategies. First, he blames London’s mother, Flora Wellman, about whom, Kershaw suggests, “typhoid fever left her permanently unhinged”:

always, she ranted about the racial purity of her ancestors. She raised Jack with the belief that ‘dark-skinned races are not to be trusted’. He will never be able to shake this monkey off his back. All his life, he will believe, like most of his generation, that the Anglo-Saxon is the superior breed. (11)

Why London should “all his life ... nurture a deep resentment of his mother” and yet unproblematically imbibe her racist beliefs is left unexamined. Second, Kershaw deploys the metaphor of a monkey on one’s back, typically associated with addiction, to suggest that much

⁴³ “Everywhere [London] went, Fiji, the Marquesas, Samoa, and Hawaii, wherever he could gather a group of white men together, he would lecture them on Revolution and expound the class struggle and the battle for socialism. Yet he took part in ‘blackbirding’ expeditions which recruited natives as slave laborers for the copra plantations” (Foner 98). Robert Peluso finds that “London’s *People of the Abyss*”, a non-fiction account of the urban proletariat inhabiting London’s East End, “offers a justification for an emerging imperialist *policy* that deployed both efficiency and racism as central values” (72). While Andrew Furer attempts to qualify London’s racism by suggesting that London “recognizes that exceptional individuals exist among other races, and [London] champions such figures as well,” (171) Clarice Stasz finds that *Adventure* “presents white racism without apology and indeed resolves in support of it” (137).

as one struggles with a monkey on one's back, London struggled with his racism. No evidence of struggle need be presented to support this tacit claim. The struggle is simply implied. In Kershaw's account, London's racism becomes an illness not unlike his alcoholism, a pathology for which he is not to be blamed, especially as the etiology rests with his mother. Not sure that he's yet garnered readers' sympathy, Kershaw suggests that in any event, London's racism is in line with the beliefs of "most of his generation." Thus, logically, London is as much to blame, but importantly for Kershaw, no more to blame than the rest of his generation. It is interesting to note that his mother's emotional negligence is somewhat ameliorated by maternal care from his step-sister, Eliza London, and his wet-nurse, Mammie Jennie, whom, according to Kershaw, "still treated him as her own son, providing the affection denied by his mother" (15). Mammie Jenny in fact "handed her 'white child' the \$300" he needed to buy the sloop *Razzle Dazzle* and leave his job at a cannery to embark on a dangerous career as an oyster pirate in San Francisco bay. As I demonstrate below, the need to find the right parents, with whom one belongs, is a hallmark of the sentimental novel and the problem that London's racialized canine protagonists negotiate variously. On why Flora Wellman's racism is more influential than the benevolence of Mammie Jennie, Kershaw is silent.

Racism figures regularly in London's fiction. In the posthumous short story "The Red One," (1918) about an object from space, the reader is confronted with offensive passages like the following: "What was the source of the wonderful sound? ... as bestial-conducted as the black and kinky-headed and monkey-like human beasts who worshipped it, and whose silver-sweet, bull-mouthed singing and commanding he had heard at the taboo distance for so long?" (Red One 978). Readers might hear in this "bull-mouthed singing" an echo "of the younger world, which is the song of the pack" (*Call of the Wild* 86). The opposite of London's racist caricatures

are his blond-beastly Nietzsche-inflected protagonists and antagonists, Martin Eden in the eponymous novel, Ernest Everhard in *The Iron Heel* (1908), and Wolf Larsen in *The Sea Wolf* (1904). Each, whether stumping for the revolution or sailing for seals, is deployed as an avatar of Anglo-Saxon supremacy.

Symptomatic of London's racist imaginary are views tendered by the late California pioneers that people his *Valley of the Moon* (1913). Billy and Saxon Roberts flee labor unrest in Oakland to settle in Sonoma, "an Indian word that means the Valley of the Moon," for "that was what the Indians called it for untold ages before the first white men came. We, who love it, still so call it" (394). In an exodus narrative at pains to articulate the plight of self-displaced Anglo-Saxons whose parents gained California at the cost of those who originally loved the land, the reader is encouraged through sympathetic proximity to Saxon and Billy to identify them as "the last of the Mohegans" (125). That last comes from Bert, a friend of Billy, who is murdered in the Oakland strike. The full quote: "D'ye know what we are?—we old white stock that fought in the wars, an' broke the land, an' made all this? I'll tell you. We're the last of the Mohegans" (125). In order to mythologize what late London casts as a lost struggle, embattled working class whites appropriate the name of a group for whose disappearance, they and theirs, are in part responsible. Identity theft becomes synonymous with finding one's proper place. The new "Mohegans" appropriate title and deeds to establish a claim to the valley on a new frontier footing. The novel concludes with Saxon pregnant. As fruitful as the valley, her race will multiply.

I raise the issue of London's racism because it complicates his identification of wage slave and African slave, and further his valorization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a particularly efficacious text. If for London, racial inferiority is synonymous with varieties of human

animality—what are we to make of the canid pathos of Buck or White Fang? In *Call of the Wild* it is precisely in literal and metaphoric traces that Buck finds himself passing from bondage to freedom, and in *White Fang*, conversely, the eponymous canine protagonist chooses to accept a state of bondage. In this chapter I'll argue that sentimental naturalism in *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* reproduces two varieties of the sympathetic journey from bondage to freedom found in Nineteenth century sentimental novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but differs from those novels by containing the explicit call that readers “feel right,” as Harriet Beecher Stowe famously put it at that novel's conclusion.

In the tradition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jack London's *White Fang* and *Call of the Wild* are both essentially sentimental narratives. A sentimental narrative locates as authentic the privileged site of one's self.⁴⁴ As Cindy Weinstein notes, “behind the scenes of many sentimental texts lie the traces of slave narratives...both narratives share a conceptual investment in the matter of eventual self-possession, a structural equivalence in their protagonist's journey from a state of bondage into one of freedom, and an affective concern for the condition of their reader's sympathies” (95).

Sentimental texts, and the sentiment of which they partake, have a varied and contentious critical history. Philip Fisher argues “that from roughly 1740 to 1860 sentimentality was a crucial tactic of politically radical representation throughout western culture,” (92) and that “the presence of sentimentality is most obvious at precisely those places where an essential extension of the subject matter of the novel itself is taking place. Just where new materials, new

⁴⁴ According to Cindy Weinstein, “sentimental fictions are about finding the right place where sympathy flourishes and understanding that place and those people as one's home and ‘family’. They tell the surprisingly pragmatic stories of the other ‘parents’ and their ability to have sympathy for children who are not, biologically speaking, theirs” (9). Both Buck and White Fang find the right place in sympathetic families that are not, biologically speaking, theirs. Weinstein explores the fluidity of elective and consanguineous familial sympathy in sentimental antebellum fictions.

components of the self, new subjects of mood and feeling occur: at exactly those places will the presence of sentimentality be most marked” (93). The form of the radical sentimental novel participates in “the active transformation of the present” (7) through

experimental, even dangerous extensions of the self of the reader. It is, therefore, not realistic. Unlike the modern form it draws on novel *objects* of feeling rather than novel feelings. As its center is the experimental extension of normality, that is, of normal states of primary feeling to people from whom they have been previously withheld. It involves the experimental lending out of normality rather than the experimental borrowing of abnormality as in the modern form. This experimental loaning out of normality—full human normality—is itself a prized possession and not yet an object of boredom and contempt, as normality is in the modern Romance of Consciousness. (98)

For Fisher, sentimentality is “a romance of the object rather than a romance of the subject” (99); the sentimental form extends normality to objects not yet coded fully human by a middle class audience. Thus, “the political content of sentimentality is democratic in that it experiments with the full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been socially withheld” (99). The membership of these “classes,” “the typical objects of sentimental compassion,” include “the prisoner, the madman, the child, the very old, the animal, and the slave” (99). “Each achieves,” according to Fisher, “the right to human regard by means of the reality of their suffering” (99). But one might ask, do not these same achieve the right to human regard by the reality of their humanity? The status of subaltern groups in Fisher’s account of sentimentality resembles a conversation between bourgeois types, novelist and reader. A problem with the extension of credit metaphor is that its vantage positions the sentimental reader as a liberal banker, whose “dangerous” extension of human credit, may, for market reasons, be better to withhold. Another way of putting this is to suggest that regard given is different from regard

taken, and that the meaning of “human” means something different when it’s no longer an investment option. Fisher’s account of sentiment is not, as he suggests, radical. Rather, it’s ideological: a way for the middle class to tell itself a comfortable story about change.

In a similar vein, Jane Tompkins encourages readers to recognize the sentimental novel “as a political enterprise, halfway between a sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time” (126). Moreover, “the sentimental novelists elaborated a myth that gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture” (125). For Tompkins, in fact, the “chief characteristic” of the antebellum sentimental novel “is that it is written by, for, and about women” (124-5). Tompkins notes that the power of one’s central position *vis-à-vis* the cult of domesticity is hard for modern readers to grasp. Regardless, “the pain of learning to conquer her own passions,” “the central fact of the sentimental heroine’s existence,” (Tompkins 172) I’ll argue, is animate half a century later in the representation of London’s Yukon protagonists.

Less sanguine about its emancipatory potential, James Baldwin declares that “sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty” (Baldwin 496). Baldwin’s reading of sentiment as cruel aversion to experience accords with the varieties of sentimental containment I designate the call of the wild and call of the cabin. Both calls, I’ll argue, demonstrate an aversion to the experience of revolution, a failure of London’s political imagination. They curtail critique prior to the point of violent creative resolution. Baldwin’s reading of sentiment characterizes the overt sentiment

of narrative moves Weinstein identifies as typical of the slave and sentimental genres, in particular the search for one's proper place.

Although London advocates socialist revolution in texts like *The Iron Heel*, the threat of revolution, present in London's sentimental wolf-dog narratives, is strategically contained by two varieties of sentiment: the call of the wild and the call of the cabin. Throughout, the point is not that London's animal protagonists are black or thinly disguised people, what Mark Seltzer calls men in furs (166). Rather, they represent a racially inflected appropriation of the narrative moves made by sentimental slave narratives. In this way, Buck and White Fang resemble nothing more than London's "last of the Mohegans."

As Weinstein observes, "If one were to take a sampling of sentimental texts from [the antebellum] period ... the nature of their unhappiness is rather uniform. Biological parents are missing in action, for a variety of reasons, which leaves children in a state of unattached affiliation, forcing them to develop their inner resources with the external assistance of a second (sometimes, third, fourth, and so on) set of parental figures" (27). For Weinstein "the sentimental novel and the slave narrative ... genres overlap in their commitment to seeing that their protagonists find a place and a person or community with whom they belong" (153). London's miscegenated wolf-dogs begin with stern, just masters, François and Perrault, and Gray Beaver, respectively, and are sold down the river, so to speak, to horrific unjust masters, Hal, Charles, and Mercedes in *Call*, and Beauty Smith in *White Fang*, and then wind up with love-masters: John Thornton and Weedon Scott.⁴⁵ The novels resolve variously. Buck heeds "the call" (74) and follows a "wild brother" (76) into the woods and "nigger-heads," (74) (a kind of plant, apparently) to attain his place at the head of the pack. White Fang, by way of comparison, enters

⁴⁵ This trajectory is similar to Stowe successively moving Uncle Tom from Mr. Shelby to Augustine St. Clare and finally Simon Legree.

into connubial felicity with a sheep-dog named “Collie”. So the wild results in the domestic sentiment of Uncle Tom’s “sobs, heavy, hoarse and loud” upon removal from the cabin, or results in the masculine sentiment of lighting out *over* the territory⁴⁶ literally at the head of the rest when leading the pack (*UTC* 34). Buck becomes the mythic “primordial beast” (24). White-Fang becomes a house dog. Both positions echo London’s racial suppositions about the possibility of an integrated America. The relegation of London’s racially inflected dogs to a wild periphery or domestic hearth disappears the possibility of the field slave, and thus the revolutionary field they possibly present.

Stowe herself has difficulty imagining an integrated United States. George Harris, “with a heart wholly given to [his] people,” decides to go to Liberia “as to *a field of work* ... and to work till I die” late in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Stowe’s emphasis, 376). In fact, Stowe’s colonizationist ideas sparked a debate between Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass in the pages of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. Defending Stowe, Douglass writes in the 6 May 1853 edition that “We shall not . . . allow the sentiments put in the brief letter of GEORGE HARRIS, at the close of Uncle Tom’s Cabin to vitiate forever Mrs. Stowe’s power to do us good. Who doubts that Mrs. Stowe is more of an abolitionist than when she wrote that chapter?” (qtd. in Levine, 536). It may be that Stowe’s views evolved, but, regardless, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, her most popular work, a free slave is still welcome to toil to death, just absent these shores.

A clue to Stowe’s anxiety occurs in the curious conversation between Alfred and his brother Augustine St. Clare. As in Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, the memory of Haitian revolt looms large. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Alfred, confronted with Augustine’s assessment that “the San

⁴⁶ Charles N. Watson notes that “structural and thematic parallels suggest that both *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Call* are sustained at least in part by a common vision. What they share is the perennial American dream of escape and freedom associated with the natural world” (40).

Domingo hour comes” and that “they took their turn once in France,” asserts that [slaves] “must be *kept* down, consistently, steadily . . . setting his foot hard down as if he were standing on somebody” (234, 233). In the potential for revolt, Augustine connects the French and Haitian revolutions, white wage slave and African slave. Stowe’s romantic racialism, the idea that blacks are innocent like children, if she is to maintain it, must somehow account for the threat of revolt without compromising the Christian purity of a character like Uncle Tom.⁴⁷ Indeed, according to Augustine, “Anglo Saxon blood will lead on the day. Sons of white fathers with all our haughty feelings burning in their veins, will not always be bought and sold and traded. They will rise, and raise with them their mother’s race” (234). In *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), Stowe informs readers that, “in regard to person, it must be remembered that the half-breeds often inherit, to a great degree, the traits of their white ancestors” (17). In sum, the white blood in black slaves is a threat. Slavery corrupts by putting the white blood there in the first place. As miscegenation is already rampant, and despite the fact that slavery must and may yet be abolished, the threat of revolt is in *their* veins. And thus they themselves must be moved, preferably by choice, as with George Harris. For the Stowe of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, abolition is not synonymous with home. In George Harris, Tom again loses his cabin. Harris is, if you will, Buck to Uncle Tom’s White Fang.

The eponymous black protagonist of Stowe’s *Dred* (1856), whose hallmark, she informs the reader, is a “savage familiarity with nature,” . . . “the agility and stealthy adroitness of a wild animal,” regardless, fails to realize his revolutionary ambition to “slay them utterly, and consume them from off the face of the earth!” (340, 575).⁴⁸ Prior to achieving his purpose, Dred is shot by

⁴⁷ Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas is around in 1851-2; it’s just that according to Stowe’s logic, a Bigger Thomas, or, presumably, a Nat Turner, isn’t all black.

⁴⁸ Dred also happens to have a dog named Buck.

a lynch mob, another casualty of Stowe's sentiment. The deaths of Uncle Tom and Dred unify the disparate trajectories of the house and field slave. In Stowe's fiction, slavery leads to Canada, Liberia, or a grave. The possibility of Dred's insurrection is curtailed prior to his death by the supplication of a house slave, Milly, who asks "if the Lord could bear all dat, and love us yet, shan't we?" (576). To which Dred, speaking to Milly, though equally apt if addressing Stowe, replies "Woman, thy prayers have prevailed for this time!" . . . "The hour is not yet come!" (577). In *Dred* the hour never arrives. As Stowe's biographer, Joan D. Hedrick, affirms, "in spite of the rich possibilities of this culture of resistance, *Dred* is neither an incendiary tract, nor a good novel" (259). The insurrectionary field slave, not mollified by the Lamb, is nevertheless put out to pasture.

The racist logic of slavery and Jim Crow understands as authentic the (en)forced relegation to house or field of selves coded non-white. In his speech from 9 November 1963, Malcolm X notes that the "house Negro loved his master, but that field Negro — remember, they were in the majority ... hated the master." Buck resembles a field slave when pulling the sled. Jonathan Auerbach observes that as he is "initially valued strictly for his potential for work (size, strength, and ferocity), Buck's 'worth' is measured in money in the marketplace (as is true in many slave narratives)" (33).⁴⁹ What London wants to perpetuate is the white mythology that what one needs is the right master. Malcolm X, however, says that every field slave hates his master.⁵⁰ In *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* London suggests that the house slave and the field

⁴⁹Auerbach finds that "*The Call of the Wild* thus strictly follows the dictates of the bildungsroman plot: transforming nature by work leads to self-transformation, leads up from slavery to freedom. For Buck and Jack [London], work initially becomes the source for identity, the means to make a name for themselves. Functioning as a path to self-transcendence, labor in London's narrative thus carries enormous philosophical import—Hegelian import, to be more specific" (32). Sadly, at the head of the pack, Buck runs right off the page. The danger implied by the master/slave dialectic is curtailed by the manner in which self-transcendence, in London's hands, results in disappearance.

⁵⁰ See Malcolm X's "Message to the Grass Roots" speech delivered on November 10, 1963 to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference in which he distinguishes between house and field slaves.

slave are essentially the same. Thus he attempts to create a coherent narrative that what is needed is kind and effective mastery. Yet the ending of *Call of the Wild* points to a sublimated awareness of the inadequacy of this narrative. London denies Buck the revolutionary impulse that Malcolm X discusses. Rather, his sympathy is accord with an elective family, and thus “feeling right,” Buck’s capacity for violence is projected onto an other whom he must kill instead of John Thornton, prior to himself vanishing into mythology. John Thornton’s death leaves “a great void” in Buck, whereas “when he paused to contemplate the carcasses of the Yeehats ... he was aware of a great pride in himself,—a greater pride than he had yet experienced” (83). Buck’s revolutionary impulse, that of the field slave, is re-written as an extension of his love for a good master, John Thornton. The sentimental narrative is thus strengthened by the transfer of revolutionary violence toward a non-privileged racial other as an extension of sympathy for one’s master. In heeding the call, Buck may lead the pack, but the violence of the sentimental narrative remains intact. Buck has simply acceded to mastery of his own wild brothers. London mixes extermination of the Yeehats and the call to new frontiers with the inertia of primordial repetition to maintain the affect of liberty within the safe narrative confines of an ahistorical myth that concludes by always placing Buck somewhere else, at the head of the pack. Coterminal with Buck’s arrival at the head of the pack is the real history of Native American genocide that the fictional Yeehats invoke.

In *Call of the Wild* the reader is encouraged to see that the Yeehats had it coming. In an historical inversion worthy of James Fenimore Cooper, the white man, John Thornton, gains the reader’s sympathy as an extension of the reader’s narrative concern for Buck. Readers are encouraged to naturalize Buck’s violence as the just rejoinder and natural response to Thornton’s murder. Only after Thornton’s death is Buck free to roam. At the head of the pack, and always

before the reader, Buck leads beyond what Philip Fisher identifies as the hard fact of Native American genocide by presenting his privileged individual accession to the head of the pack as a just compensation for his violent narrative career. Buck's freedom is contingent upon the realization of his individual merit; the call of the wild is a rather bourgeois call to one's self. And the privilege of one's absolute self, is contingent upon the absence of anyone else, the preemptive veto of competing claims. For Buck to heed the call London must clear the narrative. According to London, the field slave loves his master if kind, and will heed the call of his biological destiny in a manner complicit with posthumous expectations of filial duty. The threat that Thornton must die for Buck to be seated at the head of the pack is effectively neutered by substituting for the revolutionary potential to topple one's master, the potential to avenge one's master. The sentimental narrative suggests that you can move from family to family by choice, but you cannot choose, or rather, can only choose to discharge the obligations of each new alignment. Thus the sentimental narrative always performs a conservative ideological function by curtailing choice within rigid structures meant to avert a war of all against all by substituting the family, or, all against some. The identity of the family one has chosen or been chosen by is deeply irrelevant. What matters are the obligatory structures that curtail "the ferine strain"⁵¹ (5). Buck may attain his place at the wild summit of life, at the head of the pack, but his doing so fails to jeopardize the laws of club and fang, or trace and trail. Rather, his revolution is personal. He is compensated by finding his place in the hierarchy of life.

Buck's sentimental journey begins with labor. Prior to his ascension, in *Call of the Wild*, Buck is surprised to find

fastened upon him an arrangement of straps and buckles. It was a harness, such as

⁵¹ That is, the wild strain, as opposed to the domestic or domesticated.

he had seen the grooms put on the horses at home. And as he had seen horses work, so he was set to work, hauling François on a sled to the forest that fringed the valley, and returning with a load of firewood. Though his dignity was sorely hurt by thus being made a draught animal, he was too wise to rebel. He buckled down with a will and did his best, though it was all new and strange. François was stern, demanding instant obedience, and by virtue of his whip receiving instant obedience; while Dave, who was an experienced wheeler, nipped Buck's hind quarters whenever he was in error (CW 16).

An exacting master, a hierarchy replete with divisive internecine middle-management situates Buck, the name itself a racist epithet, a long way from the aristocratic origins that “enabled him to carry himself in right royal fashion” where “over this great demesne Buck ruled” (CW 5-6).

In fact Buck finds himself situated a long way from the stern but competent management of Perrault and François, laboring for Hal, Charles, and Mercedes. In this constellation he and his mates are likened to “perambulating skeletons...In their very great misery ... insensible to the bite of the lash or the bruise of the club ... not half living, or quarter living. They were simply so many bags of bones” (CW 54). The difference between the brutalization of Buck and his mates, and Simon Legree's murder of Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is that whereas Tom is freed by Christ-like death, forgiving Legree “with all [his] soul,” Buck is freed by another master (Stowe 359). Stowe and London contain the threat their respective field slaves represent by metaphorically crucifying the one, and transmogrifying the other. Buck does a stint with John Thornton just prior to claiming his mythic place at the head of the pack.

If the hallmark of the sentimental narrative is the sympathetic struggle to find one's proper place amongst one's proper, though possibly elective, parents, then John Thornton looks a lot like Buck's people.

This man had saved his life, which was something; but, further, he was the ideal master. Other men saw to the welfare of their dogs from a sense of duty and business expediency; he saw to the welfare of his as if they were his own children, because he could not help it. And he saw further. He never forgot a kindly greeting or a cheering word, and to sit down for a long talk with them ('gas' he called it) was as much his delight as theirs" (60).

John Thornton's paternalistic "gas" situates him in the tradition of Augustine St. Clare in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, who intends to manumit his slaves, but whose death and neurasthenic wife see to it that they are in fact sold down the river. Thornton in fact echoes the sentiments of a letter from a Virginia planter, cited in Stowe's *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose "servants" he "endeavors to render happy while [he] make[s] them profitable." Toward his slaves' happiness the planter "never turn[s] a deaf ear, but listen[s] patiently to their communications" and "chat[s] familiarly with those who have passed service or not yet begun to render it." Thus the planter identifies his relation to his slaves as "decidedly friendly" (*Key* 9-10). John Thornton "saw to the welfare of his [dogs] as if they were his own children." This is precisely how the South recommends critics see the relation between master and slave. Thornton's dog "Nig," should more evidence prove necessary, is a "huge black dog, half bloodhound and half deerhound, with eyes that laughed and a boundless good nature" (59), a regular Uncle Tom, apparently.

Prior to John Thornton's death, Buck spends greater periods of time following a "wild brother" in the woods. His love bond to Thornton is increasingly not relevant to survival, and his return to camp is in many ways, an afterthought.⁵² Unlike Hegel's

⁵² In *Male Call* Jonathan Auerbach suggests that "Thornton more and more plays the part of wife—and a badly treated one at that" (105). Auerbach reads *Call of the Wild* as an "autobiographical projection" (84) of London's struggle to get into print, to deliver the mail. On his reading Buck is a kind of allegorical proxy for Jack. If Auerbach is correct, then London's identification with Buck resembles his lifelong sympathy for the underdog. Such sympathy, however, has its limits.

bondsman however, it is not labor that sets Buck free, but the primordial and mythic call of the wild. Joining the pack, Buck is again with his people, “side by side with the wild brother” (85). He is last seen “at the head of the pack . . . leaping gigantic above his fellows,” singing “the song of the pack” (86). Our comfort with this naturalized narrative coda might well give us pause.

London writes in the January, 1909 *Syndney (Australia) Star* that, “it is illogical to think of capital absolutely owning labor. It would mean chattel slavery, a trend backward to primeval night out of which civilization has emerged” (Foner 415). Of Buck’s entry “into the primitive,” the title of the first chapter, the reader is told, “his development (or retrogression) was rapid” (CW 22). This developmental retrogression is Buck’s fictive relegation to the state of chattel slavery, a state that London’s racist imaginary equates with absolute possession. For London, a dog makes as good a slave as any colored person. Both, he suggests, have failed to develop to the full humanity of some of his Anglo-Saxon protagonists.

White Fang, by way of comparison, heeds the call of Weedon Scott’s cabin. Loyal to any extension of his “love-master,” whether private property or immediate family, *White Fang* fights a human-animal named Jim Hall, and in so doing earns his place in the family’s estimation. He’ll heal in the bosom of his new family with Collie and their puppies, a dutiful house slave in need of a rest. The division between North and South is echoed in London’s division of the warm “Southland” in California, site of domesticity and comfort, and the brutal Northland in the Yukon, site of mortality and labor.

White Fang ends differently than *Call of the Wild*. “The other puppies came sprawling toward him, to Collie’s great disgust; and he gravely permitted them to clamber and tumble over him. At first, amid the applause of the gods, he betrayed a trifle of his old self-consciousness and awkwardness. This passed away as the puppies’ antics and mauling continued, and he lay with

half-shut, patient eyes, drowsing in the sun” (284). This ending reprises One-eye and Kichés courtship in the woods, thus framing the novel and suggesting that as in the woods, so too in captivity. Whether answering the call of the wild or the call of the cabin, Buck and White Fang remain sentimental figures performing the possibilities of racial integration through the administration of Jack London’s “white gods”.

In the manner of London’s canid protagonists, southern slaves were reputed to enjoy the paternal favors of the peculiar institution. For example, in the 4 November 1860 edition of the “New Orleans Daily Picayune,” Amelia Stone is reputed to have “prefer[red] the liberty, security, and protection of slavery here, to the degradation of free niggerdom among the Abolitionists at the North, with whom she would be obliged to dwell, and in preference to which, she has sought the ‘chains’ of slavery” (in Li, 85).⁵³ In a chapter called “The Bondage,” London relates White Fang’s gradual acquiescence to Gray Beaver’s mastery:

He belonged to them as all dogs belonged to them. His actions were theirs to command. His body was theirs to maul, to stamp upon, to tolerate. Such was the lesson that was quickly born in upon him. It came hard, going as it did, counter to much that was strong and dominant in his own nature; and, while he disliked it in the learning of it, unknown to himself he was learning to like it. It was a placing of his destiny in another’s hands, a shifting of the responsibilities of existence. This in itself was compensation, for it is always easier to lean upon another than to stand alone. (166)

If one were to substitute “slaves” for “dogs” in the first sentence, the meaning would remain intact. Most insidious is the “shifting of the responsibilities of existence,” White Fang’s

⁵³ Freedom in slavery is also, of course, the theme of pro-slavery novels attempting to discredit *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Caroline Lee Hentz’s *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854) presents one salient example of the ideological struggle over whom is most deserving of sympathy, master or slave. See Weinstein: 66-94.

“compensation” because “it is easier to lean upon another than to stand alone.” London’s language echoes Southern claims about the virtue of slavery removing the burden of a slave’s need to care for herself. This relief, the result of transferring responsibility for one’s person, results in “learning to like it,” however “unknown.” In a virulent review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appearing in *The Southern Literary Messenger* 18 (October 1852), George F. Holmes opines

As for the comfort of their daily lives and the almost parental care taken of [slaves] on well-regulated plantations, we may say that the picture of the Shelby estate, drawn by Mrs. Stowe herself, is no bad representation. The world may safely be challenged to produce a laboring class, whose regular toil is rewarded with more of the substantial comforts of life than the negroes of the South. The “property interest” at which the authoress sneers so frequently in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” is quite sufficient to ensure for the negro a kindness and attention, which the day-laborer in New England might in vain endeavor to win from his employer. But we surely need not elaborate a point which has been settled so well by Southern writers before us. (Holmes 475)

The slave, or wolf-dog, may not prove competent to rationally choose the “almost parental” and “substantial comforts” of what indeed they will learn to enjoy as in their best interest: slavery. Seen in this light, it is possible to understand Gray Beaver’s “justice” as providing a rationale for London’s participation in “blackbirding” in the south seas. He may very well have believed he was doing the enslaved a favor, providing for what he identified as their “inferiority” by removing the burden of their personhood.

White Fang’s “giving over of himself, body and soul,” “did not all happen in a day” (169). Rather, like Buck, he yearns to answer the call of the wild, “that something calling to him out there in the open” (169), “something calling him far and away” (166). Kiche “heard it, too,” but she heeds the call of the cabin, “that other and louder call, the call of the fire and of man”

(169), such that the answer to White Fang's eager, questioning tongue" (166) is the call which London's narrator suggests "has been given alone of all the animals to the wolf to answer, to the wolf and the wild dog, who are brothers" (169). Yet to answer the call of the cabin was also attributed to human chattel as a choice. The proposed benevolence of the peculiar institution required narrative testimonials to the superiority of bondage over freedom, and in this way, one's slavery could be cast as a preference, a rational giving over of one's self that privileges choice over circumstance by erasing the fierce inequality of the parties entering into covenant instead of contract. The latter presumes equality, the former only choice. Thus London invokes the ideology of slavery when describing White Fang's bondage as a "covenant between dog and man" (190). This covenant further invokes the proposed religious sanction of slavery by perversely echoing the covenant between man and God.⁵⁴ And indeed to White Fang, Gray Beaver *is* a "man-animal" and "a god" (169).

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the sundered connection between " 'the house' as the negro *par excellence* designates his master's dwelling" and the "close adjoining" cabin constitutes an early and definite break of covenant with Tom and Chloe's family (Stowe's emphasis, 16). Such a rupture, for Stowe, characterizes the peculiar institution by suggesting that slavery sins against the home by canceling both familial bonds and any agreement whatsoever short of emancipation between master and slave. Tom's cabin "where, every summer, strawberries, raspberries, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, flourished under careful tending" is protected solely by covenant (16-7). The violence of the ensuing narrative argues that against a master's economic considerations, a slave's hearth, home, and family haven't a prayer.

⁵⁴ Unlike Abraham, there is no indication that White Fang need be circumcised to "show that" his "covenant is everlasting." (Good News 15). See Genesis 17.13.

In *White Fang*, the power with which Gray Beaver is invested provides the means for him to sunder White Fang's family and facilitate the sentimental narrative need to locate a new family. Gray Beaver is in debt to Three Eagles. The latter, the reader learns, is headed up the Mackenzie to the "Great Slave Lake" (169). London presents an instance analogous to the breaking up of the slave family as frequently found in abolitionist texts: "A strip of scarlet cloth, a bearskin, twenty cartridges, and Kiche, went to pay the debt. White Fang saw his mother taken aboard Three Eagles' canoe" (169). The sale of a family member and the attempt to reconstitute some semblance of family is the hallmark of the sentimental slave narrative. White Fang witnesses the sale of his mother and is savagely beaten when he ignores Gray Beaver and attempts to follow her departing canoe due to "the terror he was in of losing his mother" (169).

What follows is the most prolonged beating in the novel. Its suggestion of swinging is that of a lynching as White Fang is "swung back and forth like an erratic and jerky pendulum," "impelled by the blows that rained upon him, now from this side, now from that" (170). "Fear passed into terror" as White Fang's "yelps" at being "man-handled" "[are] voiced in unbroken succession" (170). "At last," when Gray Beaver "withhold[s] his hand," White Fang is left "hanging limply," a condition that "seem[s] to satisfy his master" (170). White Fang manages to bite Gray Beaver and the beating "that had gone before was as nothing compared with the beating he now received" (170). This time "not only the hand, but the hard wooden paddle was used upon him" as the narrative trucks in the erotics of hard wood and White Fang's "small" body. "Never," he learns, "no matter what the circumstance must he dare to bite the god who was lord and master over him" (70-1). White Fang's beating results in learning his place: "whimpering and motionless, waiting the will of Gray Beaver" (71). Indeed, White Fang becomes so acclimated to Gray Beaver's "justice" that when the latter kicks White Fang's rival,

Lip-lip, White Fang “experience[s] a little grateful thrill” (171). As a result of his lynch-like beating, White Fang comes to identify his master with the law of brute force, here understood, however crudely, as “justice.”

Thus “justice” becomes the hallmark of Gray Beaver’s rule. If the sentimental narrative is about finding one’s proper place, it is also about being orphaned and especially the loss of one’s mother. For a time it is the possibility of reunion with Kiche that keeps White Fang from heading the call of the wild. Rather, her memory and the idea that “she would come back to the village sometime” keeps him “in his bondage waiting for her” (171).

Gradually, White Fang “was learning how to get along with Gray Beaver” (171). As a slave, “obedience, rigid, undeviating obedience, was what was exacted of him” (171). It is in the “certain tie of attachment ... forming between him and his surly lord” (172) that White Fang resembles a house slave. Meat from Gray Beaver is “worth more, in some strange way, than a dozen pieces of meat from the hand of a squaw” (172). For White Fang the strange way refers to the mystery of his peculiar situation with the “gods”. Nothing is certain. Of his attachment to Gray Beaver, “perhaps it was the weight of his hand, perhaps his justice, perhaps the sheer power of him, and perhaps it was all these things” (172). Hated by his own kind for his part-wolf genetic inheritance, when White Fang is tossed a piece of meat, it is Gray Beaver who defends him in the eating of it.

Central to White Fang’s narrative is the contradictory desire to acquiesce and to escape. Despite his burgeoning respect for Gray Beaver, the process of “the shackles of White Fang’s bondage being riveted upon him” is described as “insidious” and “remote”, “as well as by the power of stick and stone and clout of hand” (172). One recalls the relation between dog and man in London’s “To Build a Fire,” (1908) in which “there was no keen intimacy between the dog

and the man. The one was the toil-slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whip-lash and of harsh and menacing throat-sounds that threatened the whip-lash” (468). Here London explicitly links slavery with a Yukon Wolf dog. I have been arguing that the parallel status of slave and dog informs and qualifies London’s work as a late instance of the sentimental slave narrative, whose politics is both aware of the threat of violence from an oppressed population and is tasked to curtail this threat by sentimental containment: relegation to the call of the wild or the call of the cabin, disappearance or enslavement as one’s proper place.

London, as much as his work is frequently understood as celebrating the individual, is more fruitfully understood in the light of his fierce paternalism. His essentialist racism understands that it is in part the mission of whites to civilize their inferiors. Also, as a corollary, these inferiors are best suited to adapt to their bondage. For them, according to London, slavery by whites is a certain coming up in the world. In the short story, “An Odyssey of the North,” (1900) two warring families are seemingly reconciled when Unga marries Naass, the son of a chief. On the evening of the wedding there is a feast and a white man who is later at length referred to as “a great man” (360), kidnaps Unga. Naass follows them around the world. Finally he is engaged as a servant, going unrecognized by Unga. He manages to hide a food stuff so that the white man dies and the satisfaction Naass receives for all his efforts is to be called “Dog!” and “Swine!” (363) by Unga, who “went back to her dead” and later manages to stab Naass twice. While the reader’s sympathy is with Naass, it is again the white man, whose mastery Unga identifies as preferable, that prevails.

For *White Fang* it is “the qualities of his kind that in the beginning made it possible for them to come in to the fires of men ... qualities capable of development” (172). Despite knowing

“only grief for the loss of Kiche, hope for her return, and a hungry yearning for the *free* life that had been his,” “the camp-life, replete with misery as it was, was secretly endearing itself to him all the time” (my italics, 172). His nascent satisfaction with his bondage remains a characteristic of his breed, a kind of species mystery made to naturalize London’s artificial hierarchy between his gods and everyone else.

White Fang determines to escape his bondage. The passage where he “slink[s] out of camp to the woods” (178) echoes the slave escapes into the swamp or woods to elude captivity. White Fang resists calls by Gray Beaver’s family to come out of hiding, much as Frederick Douglass “disregarded both [Covey’s] calls and his threats, and made [his] way to the woods as fast as [his] feeble state would allow” (Douglass 78-9). One also recalls Harriet Jacobs’ ordeal in the “Snaky Swamp” (Jacobs 170). For a while, White Fang “pleasur[es] in his freedom”, then “loneliness sets in” and the “silence of the forest” “perturbs” him (178). Why? Being alone in the forest has not formerly been a concern, and White Fang has already been described as quite fierce. London needs White Fang to choose bondage, to select slavery when presented with the option of freedom. In this way, the choice resembles southern accounts of slaves choosing to remain enslaved rather than face the perils of freedom in the north.

White Fang’s decision, however, lacks coherence. If White Fang represents a typically muscled London hero, why is he so scared? After all, “his development was in the direction of power” (176):

In order to face the constant danger of hurt and even of destruction, his predatory and protective faculties were unduly developed. He became quicker of movement than the other dogs, swifter of foot, craftier, deadlier, more lithe, more lean with ironlike muscle and sinew, more enduring, more cruel, more ferocious, and more intelligent. He had to become all these things, else he would not have held his own

nor survived the hostile environment in which he found himself. (177)

If White Fang's "predatory and protective faculties" are so highly developed, why then the terrified need to seek out Gray Beaver? Shortly after, "he knew an overpowering desire for the protection and companionship of man" (179). The reader is told that "his bondage had softened him," and that "his senses ... were appalled by inaction and by the feel of something terrible impending" (179). Was White Fang softened or made predatory by Gray Beaver's camp? London appears to need both to be possible. White Fang must be tough with his mates, but inadequate to the terrors beyond Lip-lip and the puppy pack. London needs fear to motivate White Fang's return to Gray Beaver. Given the choice, White Fang prefers subjection. Unlike Buck in *Call of the Wild*, for White Fang, the civilizing fires of man are preferable to the terrors of the wild periphery. Despite his explicit embrace of socialist radicalism,⁵⁵ London's sentimental slave narratives invoke the potential for revolutionary transformation codified by the master/slave binary in order to bury that potential in sentiment. My contention is that London's racism vitiates his radicalism by allying him with a sentimental tradition that resolves in favor of a possibly palatable conservatism called the family.

If *Call of the Wild* displaces Buck's revolutionary potential as a field slave onto the Yeehats, White Fang inverts the slave narrative by foregrounding the need to return to his master's family. Rather than answer the call of the wild, White Fang "would have been glad for the rattle of stones about him, flung by an angry squaw, glad for the hand of Gray Beaver descending on him in wrath" (179-80). An ordeal of escape becomes the struggle to return: "he

⁵⁵ In fact, London resigns from the Socialist Party in March of 1916, the year of his death, "because of its lack of fire and fight, and its loss of emphasis on the class struggle" (Call 994). London's concern that the bourgeoisie would fail to honor a socialist victory at the ballot is anticipated in *The Iron Heel* (1908).

had been running continuously for thirty hours ... he had not eaten in forty hours ... The broad pads of his feet were bruised and bleeding. He had begun to limp” (180-1). Upon his return to Gray Beaver, “White Fang crawled slowly, cringing and groveling in the abjectness of his abasement and submission ... at last he lay at the master’s feet, into whose possession he now surrendered himself, voluntarily, body and soul” (182). The surrender of body and soul not only invokes propagandistic southern accounts of a slave’s preference to live as a slave in the south, it throws White Fang’s soul into the transaction. He chooses, in the entirety of his being, to become the property of Gray Beaver. White Fang’s willing submission is not a reasoned choice. Rather, “there was something in the fibre of White Fang’s being that made his lordship a thing to be desired, else he would not have come back from the Wild when he did to tender his allegiance” (187). Slavery is his nature.

White Fang becomes an ideal slave; “he worked hard, learned discipline, and was obedient. Faithfulness and willingness characterized his toil” (185). White Fang is made to resemble an agent competent to enter into contract with Gray Beaver. Slaves of course had no legal status except as property, and White Fang “work[s] out the covenant for himself” (190). It has no standing as law. The terms, as he understands them, are as follows: “for the possession of a flesh-and-blood god, he exchanged his own liberty. Food and fire, protection and companionship, were some of the things he received from the god. In return, he guarded the god’s property, defended his body, worked for him, and obeyed him” (190). These are the terms White Fang works out to explain his return to the camps of men.

In order to find one’s proper place, the sentimental slave narrative invariably sells its protagonists down the river. White Fang’s subsequent master, Beauty Smith, is a monster. Like Simon Legree in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “Beauty Smith was cruel in the way that cowards are

cruel”: “he gloated over his victim, and his eyes flamed dully, as he swung the whip or club and listened to White Fang’s cries of pain and to his helpless bellows and snarls” (213). Regardless, White Fang “knew only that he must submit to the will of this new master, obey his every whim and fancy” (215). After all, “the lordship of man was a need of his nature” (242).

At the point of death in a dog fight, White Fang is saved by Weedon Scott, much the same way as Buck is saved by John Thornton. Scott is “especially kind to the Fighting Wolf” (243). Scott’s caresses replace Smith’s blows. As a result, for White Fang, “the evolution of like into love was accelerated ... this was a god indeed, a love-god, a warm and radiant god, in whose light White Fang’s nature expanded as a flower expands under the sun” (244). When Scott is away, he “ceased eating, lost heart, and allowed every dog of the team to thrash him” (247). With Scott, “his snuggling was the deliberate act of putting himself into a position of hopeless helplessness. It was an expression of perfect confidence, of absolute self-surrender, as though he said: ‘I put myself into thy hands. Work thou thy will with me’” (248). Commending himself to his lord and love-master, White Fang gradually “is qualifying himself for civilization” (269). It is on the terms of his submission that he is accepted “in the Southland of life” (271).

In the “Southland of life,” in heeding the call of the cabin, material claims for a new dispensation must be left at the door. Stowe argues that the efforts of the philanthropist is the *true* socialism, which comes from the spirit of Christ, and, without breaking down existing orders of society, *by love* makes the property and possessions of the higher class the property of the lower. Men are always seeking to begin their reforms with the *outward* and *physical*. Christ begins his reforms in the heart. Men would break up all ranks of society, and throw all property into a common stock; but Christ would inspire the higher class with the Divine Spirit by which all the wealth, and means, and advantages of their position are used for the good of the

lower. (*Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* 56)

Stowe's true socialism is concerned with neither necessity nor justice. Rather, it is an idealized account of the spirit of philanthropic transaction. Socialism becomes a sentimental option that maintains the class covenant between rich and poor. The boss will steal the products of the worker's labor, and in return, provide the material means for the latter to reproduce, and maybe get drunk on holidays. Wage slavery need remain in place so that the bourgeoisie can perform its Christian mission. Sentiment perpetuates suffering despite its affective allure. The proletariat is made to serve double duty, not only does it produce the material affluence of its masters, it provides the means for the bourgeoisie to congratulate itself for its philanthropic benevolence.

Both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* represent the sentimental struggle to find one's proper place. In London's hands, however, the call of the wild replaces the possibility of making one's place, a real material change, with mythical disappearance. The call of the cabin relegates one to identification in servitude, slavery by another name. Both calls thus imagine satisfying sentimental solutions to material social problems. Freedom in slavery. African-American literary naturalism has other ideas.

CHAPTER V.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I've been concerned to demonstrate how the fiction of three key American writers, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville, and Jack London, variously mobilize minstrel tropes associated with romantic racialism in order to garner sympathy by posing the problem of to whom, and more so where, slaves belong. In the second chapter I trace Stowe's evolution from a commitment to "Africa bound and bleeding" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the probability of an alternate founding in Dred's marronage in the Dismal Swamp. Stowe ultimately prefers integration (a significant departure from her prior commitment to colonizationist schemes in Liberia) and reform to apocalyptic revolt, but the presence of an insurrectionary character with black blood in *Dred* suggests that the successful revolt in Haiti must be understood as a compelling possibility in the antebellum states. The ideological task of maintaining the blood-based fiction that slaves were docile, child-like, and contented was increasingly untenable in light of a growing number of insurrections by figures like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. To paraphrase Malcolm X, Stowe saw the pigeons coming home to roost. What's more, she began to perceive and to articulate the shared grievance of wage and chattel slaves. Her Christian allergy to commerce, the legacy of a 1st century ecstatic and his apocalyptic Jewish sect, suggested that should slavery in both forms fail to be abolished, from among the blood spattered leaves of the lamb, a revolutionary lion, under divine aegis, would emerge. It's Stowe's carrot and stick: the love of Matthew or a sea of blood.

Herman Melville's remarkable demonstration of obtuse misrecognition in *Benito Cereno* presents a similar warning to complacent Yankees, a redeployed black-head signpost for those charmed by the pleasures of a minstrel pale-gaze. Race, for Melville, is a high-stakes confidence-

game in which the deck is stacked by history and blood is a bluff. Terror looms large on the *San Dominick*, but also in the pleasurable degradation of a character like Black Guinea in *The Confidence-Man*. Guinea, or Satan, as minstrel entrepreneur, suggests the damned trajectory of the *Fidèle*, where the promise of democratic faith is a filthy coin in every mouth. The fate of Anacharsis Cloots, a figure important to Melville—invoked in both *The Confidence Man* and *Moby Dick*—is emblematic of the cosmopolitan potential for fellow-feeling in a country founded upon capitalism and terror. To strike through the paste-board mask would be not to see God, but rather, the back of the bank, where corporate cadavers perform their ceaseless accounting. Melville's fiction reveals the sordid contradiction between a racial ideology in service to capital, and the bad-faith promise of democratic equality—a dream deferred, always, by structural necessity. Imperialism abroad extends slavery at home. Like the mariner in Coleridge's poem, there may be an occasional survivor, an Ishmael to button-hole wedding guests, but Melville suspects that it is too late to do any good.

Jack London's socialism is sadly vitiated by his racism. His canine house and field slaves invoke the emancipatory potential of the north star, the liberatory trajectory of the slave narrative, but any presentiment of freedom is buried in sentiment, the mythic call of the wild, or the domestic call of the cabin. Buck finds his proper place at the head of the pack, always somewhere else, on the periphery, the point of vanishing. White Fang disappears into the sentimental relations of his family. The violence invoked by each, the potential that their freedom might cost their masters life and limb is disappeared from the text, or projected onto racial others, as in the case of the fictional Yeehats in *Call of the Wild*. London's sentimental novels mark the territory of later 20th century Jim Crow politicians for whom it became politically expedient to discuss race by other means, and for whom the policing of Afro-

Americans became a fetish. London's narrow socialist revolution, should it come, would privilege the white working class.

Three white authors with varied political commitments, each working within and sometimes attempting to foreground and transcend the limits of minstrelsy. The commentary of James Baldwin is important to my argument here in its developmental lines. I've only briefly mentioned him in a survey of sentiment in the London chapter, but his reservations about what he calls the "'protest' novel" (Baldwin, *Notes* 18) are significant. Baldwin argues that "unless one's ideal of society is a race of neatly analyzed, hard-working ciphers, one can hardly claim for the protest novels the lofty purpose they claim for themselves or share the present optimism concerning them" (19). There is no life to be found in their pages. Rather than agitation, they reinscribe the status quo:

The "protest" novel, so far from being disturbing, is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene, ramifying that framework we believe to be so necessary. Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. (19)

While one doubts that the thrill spectators received was of virtue, the proximity of this account of the protest novel to the purported gratifications of minstrelsy might give readers pause. One might imagine a proponent of blackface declaiming the "accepted and comforting aspect" of "evanescent" and "titillating" thrills. For Baldwin the protest novel lacks humanity; though he doesn't put it in these terms, it performs the function of minstrelsy. In the "spurious emotion" of each, we might discern with Baldwin, "the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel," an

“aversion to experience” which is “the signal of secret and violent humanity, the *mask* of cruelty” (my emphasis, 14). “The failure of the protest novel,” for Baldwin, “lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended” (23). In other words, the sentimental protest novel relegates its characters to race, risible invisibility. On this reading the violence against Uncle Tom occurs long before he gets to Simon Legree. In fact, he is dead on arrival in his cabin.

This dissertation is the beginning of a search for the communist horizon⁵⁶ in American literature, for protest novels that somehow affirm the collective beauty, dread, and power of human beings—that deconstruct race as a meaningful biological category by attending to the question that Baldwin accuses Stowe of leaving unanswered: “what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds” (14). Baldwin is right that Wright’s *Bigger* in *Native Son* is “Uncle Tom’s descendant,” “so exactly opposite a portrait” “that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses” (22). However, where I part ways with Baldwin is this: I believe that deformed life is the condition par excellence of late capitalism. I worry that to become too interested in unique individuals might obscure the class interests they reflect. In order to be made whole, for any of us become human in the fullest sense, capitalism must go. And the tradition of the protest novel, a tradition that must include the deeply flawed fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe, is doing that work. Richard Wright is doing that work. They are locked together in a precisely historical battle, one that appears timeless only because its stakes remain contested, remain unresolved. Rather than tending to heighten clarity, the call for

⁵⁶ The phrase comes from Jodi Dean’s excellent *Communist Horizon*, in which she argues that “communism is again becoming a discourse and vocabulary for the expression of universal, egalitarian, and revolutionary ideals” (8).

more humanity potentially looks like a dodge. To slightly alter Stowe, if we already feel right because we look right, we need do nothing at all. That's not of course an argument for more minstrelsy; it's a suggestion that we take its afterlife seriously.

One way to do so is through careful attention to the tradition of Afro-American literary naturalism. John Dudley argues that in the fictive work of writers like Charles Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, W. E. B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson, "to some extent," "each ... seeks to redefine racial destiny as a cultural rather than biological concept and to critically examine the rigidly circumscribed lives of African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century" (139). "The crucial link," for Dudley,

between these texts and those of the canonical Anglo-American naturalists lies in the shared preoccupation with the pervasive rhetoric of masculinity endemic to this period, and the legacy established by these texts demonstrates their place among the naturalists as well as the unresolved tensions over gender present throughout the canon of African American literature. (139)

It would be interesting to see the extent to which the project to redefine racial destiny as cultural is a response to the biological racialism animate in Stowe's fiction. As I've attempted to demonstrate in the fourth chapter, the influence of her work on an author like Jack London is manifest in the mythic call of the wild, and the domestic call of the cabin. The female tradition of sentimental narrative based on the treatment of slaves and replete with Christian warning is in London's novels charged "with the pervasive rhetoric of masculinity endemic" to a later period. However, I'd like to see if the "unresolved tensions over gender" in Afro-American naturalism may in fact point beyond sentimental containment to other instructive possibilities. The end of such a project might be situated in a robust discussion of inclusion and invisibility, the potential

for class fulfillment and racial recognition in socialist and communist formations in the novels of mid-century authors like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Or not: one detects in the “battle royal” of the latter’s *Invisible Man* (1952) the lurid minstrel afterlife of Jim Crow. The novel is about what happens when white people only see Uncle Tom.

Ellison’s epigraph for his novel borrowed from Melville in *Benito Cereno* is perhaps an appropriate conclusion: “‘You are saved,’ cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; ‘you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?’” (xxiv). This dissertation has been concerned with the variously vexed and illuminating representation of blackface minstrelsy and romantic racialism in the work of three canonic white writers. Of the three, least problematic is the perspicuous pessimism of late Melvillean shadows. As frequently as freedom figures in the fiction of London and Stowe, the problem of the color line remains intact. Though activist in orientation, the pale gaze in their work tends to fix rather than transcend a sentimental ideology of race.

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