

42. A muted version of the irruption of the "Ladies" in Book 7 of *The Prelude*.

43. William Wordsworth, ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford Authors Series (1984; reprint with corrections, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 264.

44. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Pages 55–56 allude to the role of Wordsworth, particularly in Christian schools (as opposed to secular government schools). Indications of Wordsworth's dissemination throughout the Empire are abundant. For example, sales of Wordsworth editions (including school texts) were evidently considerable. The editions were often printed from the plates obtained from publishers in Great Britain; some were sheets from Great Britain with cancelled local title pages; some were export copies. I am grateful to Mark Reed for providing me with a summary of these findings in advance of the publication of his Wordsworth bibliography (personal communication, June 29, 1994).

45. Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. David Wright (New York: Penguin, 1970), 144. Carlyle in 1840 makes even greater claims for Shakespeare: "England, before long, this Island of ours, will hold but a small fraction of the English: in America, in New Holland, east and west to the very Antipodes, there will be a Saxondom covering great spaces of the Globe. And now, what is it that can keep all these together into virtually one Nation . . . ? This King Shakspeare, does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rally-signs . . . ? We can fancy him as radiant aloft over all the Nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence" (*On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* [1897; New York: AMS Press, 1969], 113–14).

46. See *A Guide*, in which Wordsworth imagines the vales as a "pure Commonwealth," an "almost visionary mountain republic" in the midst of a "mighty empire" (*Prose Works*, 2:206–207).

47. Elizabeth Bishop, *Collected Poems, 1927–1979* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), 164.

48. De Quincey, 144.

49. The system is elaborated in many places, including C. K. Ogden, *The System of Basic English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934); and I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), 196–211, and *Basic English and Its Uses* (New York: Norton, 1943). Also of interest is William Empson's "Basic English and Wordsworth," a radio talk originally published in *Kenyon Review*, 2 (Autumn 1940), reprinted in Empson, *Arguing: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. John Haffenden (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 228–38.

50. Richards, *Basic English and Its Uses*, 11.

51. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 124–33.

## Twelve

ANNE K. MELLOR

### "Am I Not a Woman, and a Sister?": Slavery, Romanticism, and Gender

THE ATTEMPT TO end the British involvement in the slave trade and to emancipate the slaves in the British crown colonies in the West Indies was perhaps second only to the French Revolution in its impact on the social consciousness of writers, especially women, in England between 1780 and 1830. On May 14, 1772, the famous judgment of William Murray, Lord Mansfield, presiding on the King's Bench, had ruled in the case of James Somerset, a black slave who had been brought to England, versus his master, Mr. Stewart of Virginia, that slavery was not lawful in England; Lord Mansfield maintained that England was by nature "a soil whose air is deemed too pure for slaves to breathe in."<sup>1</sup> Somerset thereby gained his freedom, making England a mecca for slaves in the British West Indies. Significantly, in that case, Mr. Dunning, the lawyer defending the slave owner, Mr. Stewart, argued that slavery, like marriage, was a "municipal" rather than a "natural" relationship. Both slavery and marriage were therefore constructed by legal custom, were similar to the feudal villenage still recognized in British common-law, and were thus not subject to "natural" law. The implied parallel between wives and slaves in this argument—and Lord Mansfield's refusal to rule against the "municipal" servitude of wives—did not escape the attention of the women writers of the period.

The legal abolition of slavery in England itself in 1772 ended neither the slave trade nor the institution of slavery in the colonies. By 1775 the triangular slave trade had reached its peak: typically, British merchants sent "trappers" and ships to the Gold Coast of Africa where they

kidnapped or bought 38,000 to 42,000 Africans annually, at a maximum of 15 pounds per head. These Africans were then shipped under appalling conditions on "the Middle Passage." During this sea-passage 13 percent typically died; another 33 percent died later during the "seasoning" or breaking-in period at the other end. They were shipped to the West Indies to work in the tobacco and sugar-cane fields, where they were sold at an average of 35 pounds each. The profits from this sale were then used to buy sugar and tobacco that was sold again, at much higher prices, in England and Europe; total profits ranged from 600,000 to over one million pounds annually. Bristol and Liverpool were the center of the British slave-trade; their merchants argued persuasively in the Houses of Parliament that the British economy, and the ability to gratify the national addiction to refined sugar and its products, depended on the continuance of the slave trade. In addition, the lobby of the extremely wealthy West Indian planters, the British owners of the slave plantations who lived either in England (as does Sir Thomas Bertram in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*)<sup>2</sup> or abroad, on their plantations (as does Mr. Vincent in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*), exerted an enormous influence on British politics.

Between 1778, when Prime Minister William Pitt introduced the first bill attempting to regulate the slave trade, and 1807, when the slave trade was legally abolished, debate raged in England concerning the slave trade. The powerful Standing Committee of Planters and Merchants argued that both the slave trade and the institution of slavery in the West Indian colonies were necessary to Britain's economic survival (especially since France and Holland had recently begun to make serious inroads into the slave trade). Moreover, both were morally justified on the grounds that many of the Africans had been slaves in their own countries and, further, were savages or heathen incapable of rational thought or moral feeling and hence unfit for freedom. African slaves should be regarded as "children" who required a "benevolent" master to teach them the civilizing benefits of Christian doctrine and the Protestant work ethic. Thomas Bellamy's influential play *The Benevolent Planters*, which was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, in 1789, makes this pro-West Indian lobby argument in a particularly compelling form, even though Bellamy's planters acknowledge that slave masters who abuse their slaves do not deserve their loyalty. In the final scene of Bellamy's play, the slave Oran, having been reunited with his beloved Selima by his generous owner, Goodwin, who has purchased her for Oran, fervently concludes:

Lost in admiration, gratitude, and love, Oran has no words, but can only in silence own the hand of Heaven . . . O my masters! . . . let my re-

stored partner and myself bend to such exalted worth; while for ourselves, and for our surrounding brethren, we declare, that you have proved yourselves *The Benevolent Planters*, and that under subjection like yours, SLAVERY IS BUT A NAME.<sup>3</sup>

In direct rebuttal, the abolitionists who wished to end not only the slave trade but the very institution of slavery in the colonies argued first, that the institution of slavery itself was immoral and violated both the natural rights of man and Christian doctrine; and second, that the actual conditions imposed on Africans both during the middle passage and on the slave plantations were far more barbaric and uncivilized than anything they had experienced in Africa, and called into question the morality of England itself as a Christian nation. The infamous legal case of the *Zong*—a slave ship whose captain, Luke Collingwood, in 1781 threw 132 plague-infected Africans to the sharks in order to collect insurance on this jettisoned "cargo"—raised widespread horror at the cruelty of the slave trade. This event was so shocking and memorable to the British public that even fifty years later it inspired both J. M. W. Turner's brilliant painting "The Slave Ship" and John Ruskin's passionate moral denunciation of British imperialism in his essay "Of Water, as Painted by Turner."

The leading voices in the attempt to end the slave-trade were Granville Sharp, who brought the Somerset case to trial, and Thomas Clarkson, the son of an Anglican head-master and an outstanding student at Cambridge University, who found his life's work when in 1785 he wrote a prize Latin essay on the assigned topic: "is it right to make men slaves against their wills?" Arguing in abstract terms that slavery is immoral and drawing his examples from the Quaker Anthony Benezet's powerful descriptions of the inhumane conditions of slavery in the West Indies, Clarkson became obsessed with the evil he had discovered. On his return from collecting his prize in London, he recalls, ". . . all my pleasure was damped by the facts which were now continually before me. It was but one gloomy subject from morning to night. In the daytime, I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief . . . I frequently tried to persuade myself in these intervals that the contents of my essay could not be true. . . . Coming in sight of Wades Mill in Hertfordshire, I sat down disconsolate on the turf. . . . Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end."<sup>4</sup>

Pedantic, thorough, and absolutely convinced of the rectitude of his cause, Clarkson never wavered in his commitment to end slavery. In 1786 he published his prize essay *On the Slavery and Commerce of the Hu-*

man Species, Particularly the African and in 1787 joined the Quaker committee founded by Granville Sharp to abolish the slave trade. He was sent to Bristol and Liverpool by the Committee to determine the actual conditions aboard the slave ships; his indefatigable research, based on numerous interviews with captains, sailors, ships' surgeons, and escaped slaves formed the backbone of the abolitionists' attacks for years to come. Armed only with pencil and paper, Clarkson crawled through the holds of ships, haunted the waterfront pubs where drunken, rowdy sailors talked most freely, and risked his life to gain access to crewmen forbidden to speak with him. He uncovered not only the appalling treatment of the Africans aboard the slave ships and the difference between "loose" and "tight" packing (allowing chained men, women, and children room to turn over or not), but also the brutal floggings, starvings, and even murder of the British sailors unlucky enough to sign up for these voyages.

After he presented this documentary evidence to the Parliamentary Privy Council Committee assigned to investigate the slave trade in 1789, Clarkson spent six months in France in an unsuccessful effort to persuade the leaders of the French Revolution to abolish their slave trade and slavery in the French colonies. For the next five years, Clarkson rode thousands of miles, scouring the ports and seagoing vessels of England for witnesses willing to testify to Parliament about the actual practices in the slave trade (so vehemently denied by the shipowners and planters); in 1794, his health completely gave way and he was forced to retire from this work.

Clarkson's authoritative *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade, by the British Parliament* was not published until 1808, but he had made the results of his research available to the Privy Council Committee assigned to investigate the slave trade in 1789. This committee was chaired by William Wilberforce, the member of Parliament from Hull who headed the efforts to introduce bills abolishing the slave trade and slavery in Parliament between 1788 and 1807. The largest and most sustained outcry against both the slave trade and the institution of slavery was organized by the Quakers, who established antislavery societies throughout England between 1780 and 1830.

Women were major participants in these societies—the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 submitted a petition with 187,000 names demanding immediate emancipation of all slaves—and they became the leading figures in the social protests against the slave trade between 1788 and 1792.<sup>5</sup> They organized boycotts of sugar (advocating the use of honey or "free" grown East Indian sugar instead) and wrote numerous poems, novels, and tracts condemning the slave trade. Hannah

More's fierce attack on the slave trade in her poem "Slavery," first published in 1787, is representative of similar work by Ann Yearsley, Helen Maria Williams, and Anna Barbauld, and was widely circulated. Hannah More insisted on the common humanity that Africans shared with Europeans—"Respect His sacred image which they bear. / . . . Let malice strip them of each other plea, / They still are men, and men should still be free."<sup>6</sup> At the same time she denounced the "white savage" who, ruled by "lust of gold / Or lust of conquest," forfeited any legitimate claim Europe might make to being either civilized or Christian.

Gender played a significant role in the arguments for the abolition of slavery. The most prominent male abolitionist writers, such as Clarkson, Wilberforce, Thomas Day, and William Cowper, tended to attack slavery as a violation of "natural law," the argument that all men are born equal and have certain inalienable "rights." As a man, the black African belongs to the same species as the white European, and is entitled to the same "liberty, equality and fraternity." This is the doctrine that underlay the revolutionary movements in America and France and that produced the widely copied Wedgewood medallion. As the black speaker in William Cowper's widely reprinted poem "The Negro's Complaint" (1788) asserts, "Still in thought as free as ever, / What are England's rights, I ask, / Me from my delights to sever, / Me to torture, me to task? // Fleecy locks and black complexion / Cannot forfeit Nature's claim."<sup>7</sup> And this is the position asserted by the recaptured West Indian slave in Thomas Day's famous poem *The Dying Negro* (1773) who, bidding farewell to his white fiancée, prefers to commit suicide rather than return to the slave plantations of the West Indies. As he denounces his white master,

And thou, whose impious avarice and pride  
Thy God's blest symbol to my brows denied,  
Forbade me or the rights of man to claim,  
Or share with thee a Christian's hallowed name,  
Thou too farewell!—for not beyond the grave,  
Thy power extends, nor is my dust thy slave.  
Go bribe thy kindred ruffians with thy gold,  
But dream not nature's rights are bought and sold.<sup>8</sup>

Women writers such as Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Helen Maria Williams, and Anna Barbauld, on the other hand, tended to condemn slavery because it violated the domestic affections, separating mothers from their children, husbands from their wives, and subjecting black women to sexual abuse from their white masters. In Hannah More's words, again from her poem "Slavery,"



Figure 1  
The Wedgewood Medallion: "Am I not a man  
and a brother?" (Wedgewood & Sons, Ltd.)

Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,  
Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;  
I see, by more than fancy's mirror shown,  
The burning village and the blazing town:  
See the dire victim torn from social life,  
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife;  
She, wretch forlorn! is dragg'd by hostile hands,  
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!  
Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,  
The sole sad heritage her child obtains!  
E'en this last wretched boon their foes deny,  
To weep together, or together die.  
By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,  
See the fond links of feeling nature broke!  
The fibres twisting round a parent's heart,  
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.<sup>9</sup>

By focusing on the violation of familial relationships as the fundamental evil of slavery and the slave trade, these women writers implicitly appealed to a different system of morality. The male writers grounded their condemnation of slavery on an ethic of justice, on the argument that under a just system of law, all individuals should be treated the same. The female writers appealed instead to what Carol Gilligan has

taught us to call an ethic of care,<sup>10</sup> the argument that under a moral government, all legal and social institutions should function so as to ensure that, in the resolution of social conflict, no one is irreparably hurt and the needs of all are taken into account.

By focusing on the ways in which slavery and the slave trade violated domestic relationships, women writers implicitly and often explicitly drew parallels between the female African slave subjected to the sexual abuse of her white master and the white British wife subjected to the same abuse. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft had argued that British wives were no different from slaves: "When, therefore, I call women slaves, I mean in a political and civil sense."<sup>11</sup> She based her argument on both legal and psychological grounds. Lord Mansfield's 1772 antislavery judgment had left intact the legal definition of marriage as a "municipal" relationship, a legal institution derived from feudal villeinage, in which the wife exists under the "coverture" of the husband. In other words, a wife is not a "person" in law: she cannot own property, have custody of children, bring legal suits—although she is held individually responsible for any crimes she might commit. Psychologically, this legal construction of the wife as "covered" by her husband produces an economic and emotional dependence, what Wollstonecraft calls a "slavish dependence,"<sup>12</sup> of the wife upon her husband or male relatives. Such dependence corrupts both partners, Wollstonecraft insists, for women "may be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the abject dependent."<sup>13</sup>

It is important to recognize that Wollstonecraft uses the term "slavery" in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. She believes that the institution of marriage in England in 1792 is legal slavery, no different in kind from that imposed on Africans in the British West Indies. Commenting on the arguments of the male conduct-book writers that British women must be subjected to the "severe restraint" of propriety or social morality, she asks,

Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man?<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Wollstonecraft frequently uses the terms "slave" or "slavery" figuratively, to underline her attack on female psychological dependence, either on men or on social mores. In the very next paragraph she condemns women for becoming "slaves to their persons," for

setting too high a value on personal appearance. And a few pages later she attacks "a slavish bondage to parents," for those daughters "taught slavishly to submit to their parents . . . are prepared for the slavery of marriage." But she is careful immediately to qualify this rhetorical usage, "I do not dream of insinuating that boys or girls are always slaves, I only insist that when they are obliged to submit to authority blindly, their faculties are weakened, and their tempers rendered imperious or abject."<sup>15</sup>

Even though Wollstonecraft distinguishes between the literal and figurative construction of slavery in her text, she nonetheless insists that if British women are kept in a state of ignorance or "perpetual childhood," uneducated, and trained only to be pleasing to their masters and "cunning, mean and selfish" to everyone else, they are no different in *character* or *nature* from a sycophantic slave. Her program for the emancipation of women is equally clear: a rational education that teaches women the value and practice of honesty, compassion, affection, modesty, and useful work, an education that leads to what she would call *rational love* and an egalitarian marriage based on "companionship" rather than sexual desire.

The recognition of the female abolitionist writers that the female African slave and the European wife are both confined to legal slavery produced in the early 1830's an alternative, and equally widely distributed, medallion: "Am I not a Woman and a Sister?" By including the figure of the white woman as well as the black woman on a single roundel, this medallion implicitly asserted both their common humanity and their common sexual slavery, since the question is addressed both to white women and to white men.

At the same time, this roundel points to the implicit religious and class biases that everywhere informed the abolitionist debates. As Moira Ferguson has reminded us, both male and female abolitionist writers, however much they advocated an end to the slave trade and the institution of slavery, participated in a colonial discourse we now call Christian "Anglo-Africanism." They shared the assumption, in Winthrop Jordan's summary, that "to be Christian was to be civilized rather than barbarous, English rather than African, white rather than black."<sup>16</sup>

In Hannah More's revealing lines, which I omitted earlier, "Barbarians, hold! th'opprobrious commerce spare, / Respect His sacred usage which they bear, / *Though dark and savage, ignorant and blind, / They claim the common privilege of kind; / Let malice strip them of each other plea, / They still are men, and men should still be free*"<sup>17</sup> (my italics). As the women's abolitionist medallion illustrates, the black slave woman *kneels* to the white European woman. Within their common slavery, the European woman assumes a superior position, standing rather



Figure 2  
Abolitionist Roundel: "Am I not a woman and a sister?"  
(Wilberforce House, Hull City Museums and Art Gallery)

than kneeling. She is implicitly equated with the power of both Justice (she carries the scales of Justitia) and Christian scripture: "Let us break *their* bands asunder and cast away *their* cords" (my italics). In dramatic tension with Wollstonecraft's argument that European women are slaves, as Barbara Bush and Deirdre Coleman have recently reminded us, female abolitionists wished to affirm their *difference from* and *superiority to* the black slave woman.<sup>18</sup> The roundel clearly suggests that slave women are dependent on European women for their freedom; European women are here portrayed as having both the political ability and the moral responsibility to help their less fortunate sisters; white female Justice thus extends her helping hand to the grateful black female slave.

Although the British female abolitionist writers did not contest the assumption that a white, Christian, European woman is superior in degree if not in kind to a black, non-Christian, African woman, these writers on many occasions gave a voice of moral authority to the black slave that does not occur in the writings of the canonical male Romantic writers. This may have been caused, as Mary Jacobus has suggested, by the commitment of "masculine Romanticism" or male Romantic humanism to the construction of a potentially transcendent mind or subjectivity, an enduring self-consciousness that necessarily involves the erasure of the body and the material limitations of history.<sup>19</sup> Black characters occur far more frequently in literary texts by female than by male

writers in this period. Moreover, they typically demonstrate a moral integrity that functions to reveal and implicitly denounce the hypocrisy and corruption of male-dominated European society. At the same time, their morality is explicitly defined as a naive innocence that remains dependent on wiser European men and women for its proper development. Examples from the writings of Joanna Baillie, Maria Edgeworth, and Amelia Opie will illustrate this pattern.

In two plays by Joanna Baillie, black males play pivotal roles in the moral resolution of the action. In *Rayner* (1804), the unjustly imprisoned Rayner is guarded by Ohio, a freed American slave, who is initially presented to the viewer as a skulking, foul-mouthed figure, a man degraded by "many hardships" to "the base thing that he is," a "curs'd, spite-venom'd toad," in the words of the prison-master, Hardibrand. Yet even the hardened, cruel, prison-master is able to feel some sympathy for Ohio, and his reluctant sympathy uncovers Baillie's own condemnation of the slave trade. As Hardibrand describes Ohio, he is

Of royal line; born to command, and dignified  
By sufferings and angers past, which makes  
The meanest man ennobled: yet behold him;  
How by the way he sidelong straddles on  
With his base tankard! — O, the sneaking varlet!  
It makes me weep to hear his piteous tale,  
Yet my blood boils to run and cudgel him.<sup>20</sup>

At the moment when the executioner lifts his axe to decapitate the unjustly condemned Rayner, the gallows stand collapses, its wooden supports having been sawed through, wounding the executioner and delaying the execution just long enough for Rayner's pardon to arrive, Ohio, whom Rayner has befriended and to whom he has given his coat, then exults: "I did it! / He offer'd me his cloak: he pitied me; / And I have paid him back."<sup>21</sup> Ohio here functions as the "deus ex machina," the blessed savior of the wrongly accused hero and the voice of moral justice in the play. But even as Baillie grants to the freed black slave this position of moral authority, she reinscribes him within an Anglo-African discourse of dependency. Moved by Ohio's loyalty to Rayner, Hardibrand promises Ohio, "I'll take thee home, and make a man of thee. / . . . Thou has a gen'rous mind, altho' debas'd / With vile oppression and unmanly scorn."<sup>22</sup> "Make a man of thee": is Hardibrand offering to make Ohio into a gentleman, a man of a higher class or status than he currently enjoys? Or is he offering to make Ohio "human," as opposed to the "toad" he has been? Both readings are possible, and Baillie's text does not allow us to dismiss the latter, more uncomfortable

suggestion that she too subscribes to Hardibrand's explicit assumption of European superiority over the "royal" African.

This same tension between black moral authority and black cultural inferiority recurs in Baillie's comedy, *The Alienated Manor* (1836). The young freed slave Sancho, whose mentally retarded master has been cheated out of his life savings in a game of dice by Charleville and then thrown in jail for debt, passionately and persuasively attacks this miscarriage of justice to Charleville's servant:

Ay, my massa be poor, and everybody be angry wit him. — Your massa not angry, your massa very fond of him when he shake a te dice, and tak all te money from him. Te tevil will shake him over te great fire for tat.<sup>23</sup>

The dramatic authority of Sancho's moral outrage is undermined in this play, however, by his use of West African Pidgin English, a language which in the early nineteenth century was viewed as a simplified, "baby-talk" form of Standard English spoken by people with inferior linguistic or cognitive abilities.<sup>24</sup> Sancho's moral authority is further undercut by his eagerness to kill the man who cheated his master and by his excessive gratitude to Crafton, the man who promises to free his master: "O good Massa Crafton! me tank you, me embrace you, me kneel to you." Nonetheless, Baillie gives Sancho the last word, a final reaffirmation of his natural and legal rights. When Crafton raises him from his knees, saying, "Let no man be upon his knees but when he is at his prayers. Come with us and fear nothing; though this was a desperate attempt, a very wicked attempt against the laws of the land," Sancho defiantly asserts, "Me care for te laws when te laws care for me."<sup>25</sup>

Maria Edgeworth engages in a similarly contradictory effort both to grant the black voice absolute moral authority and at the same time to contain it within a social discourse of racial inferiority. In her play *The Two Guardians* (1817), St. Albans, a wealthy young West Indian planter, comes to England with his black slave, Quaco. As soon as he arrives in London, St. Albans informs Quaco that he is "free": "From the moment that you touched English ground, Quaco, you ceased to be a slave." St. Albans then pays him for all his previous labor. Quaco, however, insists that he will never leave: "me will be Massa's slave alway" or if not his slave, then his servant who will "do / Twice the work of slave for you; / Fight for Massa twice as long; / Love for Massa twice as strong."<sup>26</sup>

As St. Albans is exposed to the hypocrisies, cruelties, and deceitfulness of fashionable English society, Quaco becomes the voice of moral honesty and sincere love: he gives his earnings to the starving widow cheated of her pay by St. Albans's selfish hostess; he sees through the duplicities of the lovely Juliana, whom St. Albans is courting, a girl

whom Quaco "can't love";<sup>27</sup> and he is on hand to rescue St. Albans when he is almost killed by a fall from a bad horse sold to him by a false friend. By constantly contrasting Quaco's loyalty, compassion, and rectitude to the cruel duplicities of the young lords and ladies "of fashion," Edgeworth insists on the moral superiority of the "childlike" black to the self-indulgent cruelties of the spoiled European youths, Juliana and Beauchamp Courtington. At the same time, she defines Quaco as *only* a child, one who eagerly seeks to sustain his dependence upon his superior white master.

The most radical attempt to construct the black woman as the moral superior of the British white woman occurs in Amelia Opie's first novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), significantly subtitled "The Mother and Daughter." Here Opie suggests that her heroine's true mother is not the Mrs. Mowbray who cruelly vows never to see her daughter again until she has suffered as much as her mother (Adeline has innocently attracted and then violently repulsed the sexual attentions of her mother's new husband, the libertine Sir Patrick O'Carroll). Even after Adeline's devoted lover and Godwinian disciple Glenmurray has died, reducing her to insanity for six months, even after she has been deserted by her husband, Berrendale, Mrs. Mowbray refuses to see her daughter and granddaughter Editha.

Only the escaped black slave woman and domestic servant, Savanna, whose husband, William, has been saved from imprisonment for debt by Adeline, remains loyal to Adeline through all her trials and sufferings, nursing her through her insanity and grief, declaring "war" on the unfaithful Berrendale and exposing his lies both at home in England and abroad in Jamaica, and using her own meager wages to buy food and medicine for Adeline when her husband refuses to let her share his meals and then abandons her. Despite Adeline's deathbed reconciliation with her biological mother, it is in the arms of this "true" mother Savanna that Adeline dies. Throughout this novel, Savanna represents the virtue of an enduring and passionate maternal love, caring as much for Adeline as she does for her own child, the Tawny Boy. She is "the only person now in the world, perhaps, who loves me with sincere and faithful affection" (189), Adeline tells her faithless husband, and on her deathbed she proclaims to her doctor, "She is my nurse, my consoler, and my friend" (272).<sup>28</sup>

Even as Opie makes this radical claim for the superior maternal love and faithful care of the black woman, she locates Savanna within an economic and social condition of dependency. The dying Adeline continues to regard Savanna as one of her possessions: as she writes to her mother, "I owe [Savanna], my mother, a world of obligation! She will make my last moments easy, and you must reward her. From her you

will receive this letter when I am no more, and to your care and protection I bequeath her" (266). The text further emphasizes Savanna's limited economic resources. As food and medicine are brought to the dying Adeline, "This it be to have money,' said Savanna, as she saw the various things prepared and made to tempt Adeline's weak appetite:—'poor Savanna mean as well—her heart make all these, but her hand want power' " (272). The novel ends with Adeline's return to her mother's house, where Savanna will once again be a paid servant, assigned to the "care" of Mrs. Mowbray. "I will love her as my child" (270), pledges Mrs. Mowbray; "Savanna shall be our joint care" (274), she further affirms, assigning the responsibility for Savanna's well-being to herself and the Quaker Rachel Pemberton.

Despite such markers of economic and social inferiority—Savanna consistently speaks Black English while her educated son speaks Standard English, and she is prone to extreme and violent outbursts of emotion deemed "improper" by the Quaker Rachel Pemberton—Opie establishes Savanna as the embodiment of moral virtue and domestic affection. Only when Adeline is alone with Savanna and their two children does she experience complete happiness. Watching Tawny Boy building card-houses for the infant Editha, listening to Savanna's "rapturous praises," Adeline, "alive only to the maternal feeling, at this moment had forgotten all her cares; she saw nothing but the happy group around her, and her countenance wore the expression of recovered serenity" (192). While this idyll is immediately interrupted, it opens up the utopian possibility with which the novel closes, the possibility that Editha might be raised by a female-dominated community which includes a woman of color. As Roxanne Eberle has observed, Adeline's dying letter "elaborates a complex system of duty and debt which will ensure that Savanna remains free; she will be protected by other women" who have the economic power to do so.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Savanna will be a recognized and fully accepted member of this family of choice constructed by the dying Adeline for her daughter Editha, a family that includes Adeline's mother, the Quaker Mrs. Pemberton, and Savanna. In this all-female community, a feminotopia that includes a woman of the landed gentry, a middle-class white woman and a black working-class woman residing in the fortified pastoral arcadia of Rosevalley, Savanna functions simultaneously if contradictorily as both servant and co-mother, indeed as the only mother who yet deserves that title, of the infant Editha. The last line of the novel further identifies Savanna with the bosom of the lord within which the troubled Adeline Mowbray finally comes to rest: "in imperfect accents exclaiming 'I thank thee, blessed Lord!' she [Adeline] laid her head on Savanna's bosom and expired" (275).

Again, in her powerful antislavery poem for children, "The Black Man's Lament" (1826), Amelia Opie grants both social equality and moral authority to the black slave. She allows him to speak in his own voice without narrative framing; she represents his speech in Standard, if grammatically incorrect, English; and she permits him to refute with cogency the argument that Negro slaves are better off than the English peasant:

Who dares an English peasant flog,  
Or buy, or sell, or steal away?  
Who sheds his blood? treats him like dog,  
Or fetters him like beasts of prey?

He has a cottage, he a wife;  
If child he has, that child is free.  
I am depriv'd of married life,  
And my poor child were *slave* like *me*.<sup>30</sup>

Opie authorizes the black man's claim to social and legal equality with the free Englishman and undercuts the pro-planter argument for the improvement of slavery under more benevolent masters ("There are, I'm told, upon some isles, / Masters who gentle deign to be; / And there, perhaps, the Negro *smiles*, / But *smiling* Negroes *few* can see."). But now, following her conversion to the Society of Friends in 1825, Amelia Opie insists that Christianity offers the African slave a lasting comfort he cannot gain at home in Africa:

Well, I must learn to bear my pain;  
And, lately, I am grown more calm;  
For Christian men come o'er the main,  
To pour in Negro souls a balm.

The Christianity that the Quaker Opie invokes demands that the slave both repress his anger at the injustice he experiences and reaffirm a position of inferiority to the more "civilized" white man:

They tell us there is one above  
Who died to save both bond and free;  
And who, with eyes of equal love,  
Beholds White man, and *humble me*.

They tell me if, with patient heart,  
I bear my wrongs from day to day,  
I shall, at death, to realms depart,  
Where God wipes every tear away!

Yet still, at times, with fear I shrink;  
For, when with sense of injury prest,  
I burn with rage! and *then* I think  
I ne'er can *gain* that place of rest.<sup>31</sup>

Opie's rendering of the black slave's language in ungrammatical Standard English rather than Pidgin or Black English implicitly endorses the Anglo-African view that Standard English is a superior language.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Opie ends her poem by giving authorial vindication to her black narrator, with whom she also expresses sympathetic identification: "it rends my heart to know / He only told a *tale of truth*."

Even those female writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Robinson, who resist the Anglo-African construction of the Christianized slave as superior in kind to the free non-Christian African, slip into the assumption that the literacy and rationality of European culture render it superior to an oral, superstitious African culture. As Zelma, Mary Robinson's protagonist in "The Negroe Girl" (1800), proclaims,

The tyrant white man taught my mind  
The letter'd page to trace;  
He taught me in the soul to find  
No tint, as in the face:  
He bade my reason blossom like the tree—  
But fond affection gave the ripen'd fruits to thee.

Here Robinson implies that the enlightened Zelma will have "fruits" to give her black lover Draco superior to those she would have borne without the benefit of a European education; and the foremost among these "fruits" is the conviction that her soul is *without color*, as pure or white as that of an Englishman.

By allowing black men and women to speak for themselves, by giving their voices moral authority, and by insisting on the sympathetic identification with them felt both by other characters in the text and by the author herself, British women writers in this period introduced a new dimension into the discourse of abolition. Moving away from the abstract rhetoric of the rights of man engaged in by Clarkson, Wilberforce, Cowper, Day, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, they developed a rhetoric of sympathy grounded in the celebration and preservation of the domestic affections, a sympathy that incorporated the black man and woman into their own political family.

From our current perspective, however, we can see that the abolitionist discourse employed by both male and female writers in the Romantic period only translated one form of slavery, legal slavery, into an-



other form, the "slavery" of assimilation. Black men and women could be welcomed into the European "family of man" only insofar as they could be seen as participating in the same domestic affections, the same familial relationships and loyalties, as those which governed European emotions, however much the specter of miscegenation and interracial marriage haunted this utopian discourse. "Am I not a Brother?" "Am I not a Sister?" The suggestion that the black man or woman might not feel kinship with the white European colonizer is one that none of the abolitionist writers could directly confront. Such arguments were left to the pro-slavery lobby, who insisted on the essential racial difference of Africans, on their innate "savagery," as the basis of their enslavement. This is the pernicious legacy of the Enlightenment discourse of emancipation with which we are still wrestling: how can we develop a discourse of racial—and sexual—difference that values difference for its own sake without granting political, legal, or cultural priority to one of these differences?

## NOTES

1. *The English Reports* 98 (King's Bench Division 27): "Somerset against Stewart, May 14, 1772, Lord Mansfield Presiding," Lofft 1 (London: Stevens and Sons; Edinburgh: William Green & Sons, 1909), 500.
2. For the most insightful discussion of the function of slavery in Austen's *Mansfield Park* to date, and of Fanny Price as the stereotypical "grateful Negro," see Moira Ferguson, "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender," *The Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991), 118–39. Also see Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1983), 116–19; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 80–96; Frank Gibbon, "The Antigua Connection: Some New Light on Mansfield Park," *Cambridge Quarterly* 11 (1982), 298–305; and Meenakshe Mukharjee, "To Hear My Uncle Talk of the West Indies," in *Women Writers: Jane Austen* (New York, 1991), 49–69.
3. Thomas Bellamy, *The Benevolent Planters* (London, 1789), 13.
4. Thomas Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade, by the British Parliament* (London, 1808), vol. I, 170–71.
5. On the involvement of British women in the abolitionist and other social movements between 1775 and 1825, see Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery—The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 1–120, and Linda Colley, *Britons—Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 273–81.
6. Hannah More, *Slavery: A Poem* (London, 1788), 10, lines 136–40.
7. William Cowper, *The Negro's Complaint* (London, 1788; repr. 1896), 4–5.
8. Thomas Day, *The Dying Negro* (London, 1773), 6.
9. Hannah More, *Slavery*, 7–8, lines 95–110.

10. Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice—Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). For an analysis of the ethic of care as fundamental to women's writing in the Romantic period, see my *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993). Gary Kelly further argues that this ethic, an ideology of sympathy and domesticity or of "reason" and "virtue," was fundamental to the emergence of a middle or professional class identity in this period in his *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790–1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), chap. 1.
  11. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London, 1792), ed. Carol Poston (New York: Norton, 1975), 167.
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. *Ibid.*, 5.
  14. *Ibid.*, 144–45.
  15. *Ibid.*, 155.
  16. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1500–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 94. For an extended discussion of the role played by Anglo-African attitudes in the writing of female British writers in this period, see Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others—British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
  17. Hannah More, *Slavery*, 10.
  18. See Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650–1838* (Kingston: Heinemann; Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: James Currey, 1990), chap. 2; and Dierdre Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s," *ELH* 61 (1994), 341–62.
- I wish to correct the ahistorical and partial account of the rhetorical relationship of British marriage to African slavery presented by Coleman in this essay. Focusing on Coleridge's evasive essay on the slave-trade and Benjamin Flower's *The French Constitution* (1792), both of which construct the white Lady as the worst abuser of slaves, and relying on an inadequate reading of John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796/1988), Coleman rhetorically identifies the British female abolitionist or wife with the (totalized) West Indian planter's wife. She portrays them both as insensitive to the literal sufferings of African slaves and, worse, as sexual rivals for the attentions of the white man who in their jealousy tortured, killed, and even figuratively drank the blood of their black female competitors.
- Coleman rightly wishes to contest the too-easy analogy Wollstonecraft and other feminist writers drew between marriage and slavery, an analogy she calls "obscene" (354), but in so doing she goes too far in the other direction, suggesting that all white English women were racists incapable of understanding the African slave's suffering as anything more than an occasion for either the display of sensibility or a reflection upon the brutality of their own marriages. Coleman significantly eliminates from her account of Stedman's *Narrative* the generosity of Elizabeth Godefroy, who bought Stedman's beloved house-slave Joanna and gave her to Stedman so that she

might, if she chose, accompany him to England (Stedman, *Narrative*, 1796, vol. 2, 82–83).

19. Mary Jacobus has analyzed Wordsworth's necessary erasure of the slave trade from *The Prelude* in her *Romanticism Writing and Sexual Difference—Essays on The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), chap. 3. Also see my discussion of the erasure of the body from Romantic male autobiography more generally, in my *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), chap. 7.

20. Joanna Baillie, *Rayner*, in *Miscellaneous Plays* (London, 1804), 68.

21. *Ibid.*, 135.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Joanna Baillie, *The Alienated Manor*, in *Dramas*, 3 vols. (London, 1836), vol. I, Act IV, scene i, 206.

24. West African Pidgin English was constructed by African slaves and traders to communicate with British slave traders, sailors, and merchants along the West Coast of Africa during the 17th and 18th centuries, and combines a largely English vocabulary with African phonological and syntactical structures. It then became "creolized" (a mother-tongue) in the West Indies, where it developed a richer vocabulary and more complex grammatical forms. On the structure of West African Pidgin English, a language here accurately represented by Joanna Baillie, Maria Edgeworth, and Amelia Opie, and the transformation (or "decreolization") of West African Pidgin English into what is now known as Black English, see *inter alia* the following: Elizabeth Closs Traugott, "Pidgins, Creoles, and the Origins of Vernacular Black English," in *Black English—A Seminar*, ed. Deborah Sears Harrison and Tom Trabasso (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1976), 57–94; J. L. Dillard, *Black English—Its History and Usage in the United States* (New York: Random House, 1972), 39–138; David Dalby, *Black through White: Patterns of Communication* (Bloomington: Indiana University African Studies Program, 1969); and Peter Muhlhauer, *Pidgin & Creole Linguistics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

On the erroneous nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century assumption that Pidgin and Creole languages were simplified versions of complex European languages (or "baby-talk") spoken by people with inferior cognitive or linguistic abilities, rather than independent contact-zone languages with unique and ascertainable historical developments, see Dell Hymes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 3–11. Those wishing to pursue these issues further should consult *A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of American Black English*, compiled by Ila Wales Brasch and Walter Milton Brasch (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974).

25. Baillie, *Alienated Manor*, Act V, scene ii, 238.

26. Maria Edgeworth, *The Two Guardians*, in *Comic Dramas*, in *Three Acts* (London, 1817), 160, 163.

27. *Ibid.*, 183.

28. Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray—The Mother and Daughter* (London, 1804; Pandora Press, 1986). All further references to this edition will be cited in the text.

29. Roxanne Eberle, "Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*: Diverting the Libertine Gaze; or, The Vindication of a Fallen Woman," *Studies in the Novel* 26 (1994) 145.

30. Amelia Opie, *The Black Man's Lament* (London, 1826), 22.

31. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

32. For a Marxist analysis of the politics of vulgar (non-grammatical) versus refined (grammatical) English in the Romantic period, see Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), chap. 1, 2, 6.