



Incidents in the Life of a White Woman: Economies of Race and Gender in the Antebellum Nation

Russ Castronovo

American Literary History, Vol. 10, No. 2. (Summer, 1998), pp. 239-265.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0896-7148%28199822%2910%3A2%3C239%3AIIITLOA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

American Literary History is currently published by Oxford University Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/oup.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Incidents in the Life of a White Woman: Economies of Race and Gender in the Antebellum Nation

Russ Castronovo

This essay reconstructs the title of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in order to intervene in accounts of American literary history that view nineteenth-century African-American writing as resisting, and thus deriving from, already-in-place models of white discourse. By uncovering within Southern—yet still national—discourses of domesticity and sentimentality a countertradition that predates US literary history, I want to offer a critical genealogy of the antebellum plantation novel that revises the dependent relationship of African-American narrative to dominant literary models by suggesting that socially and commercially validated literature arises as a reaction to black autobiography and fiction. Yet this substitution of “white woman” for “slave girl” seems to dismiss attention given to minority writers over the past two decades and return to a canon of American literature that historically displaced and discounted black narrative expression. My argument seeks to recall and question this creation of a prototypical literary canon by examining how antebellum Southern writers subdued black narrative as part of the formation of a self-consciously national literature.

Just as slave labor sustained the class privilege of white landowners, African-American literary discourse was necessary to clean the national house of fiction. With repeated scenes of family separation, sexual harassment, and outraged motherhood, a text like *Incidents* certainly troubles the quaint domesticity of that house; however, as a muted presence whose stolen articulations are subsumed by feminist complaints of Southern belles, the warped slave narrative that is held hostage by the plantation novel ransoms an embattled and conflicted American national identity by appealing to white womanhood. African-American texts launch severe critiques that give evidence of a house divided, but once repressed and transfigured by an ideol-

ogy of white womanhood, the slave narrative—now spoken as the white heroine’s story—engenders a fiction that hides the intertwinings of racial commodification and class hierarchy. What is ironic as well as strategic about this obfuscation is that a racialized economy at once provides the impetus for the slave’s protest against US institutions and enables white womanhood to shore up and consolidate exploitative American social structures.

Prior to the reign of sentimental melodrama in the 1840s–60s lies a history of expropriation and erasure in which Southern women writers seized both the body and the narrative forms of the fugitive slave in order to conserve and then ignore the class position of the white woman. Plantation novels by Eliza Ann Dupuy, Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz, and Marion Harland, to name just a few of the many women who found success in this genre, follow the structure of the slave narrative by focusing on white heroines who, like fugitive slaves, oppose the tyranny of patriarchal control. Although *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* might seem the prototype of the apologist novel, the racialized employment of white womanhood was well established before the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel in 1852. Indeed, even the most propagandistic responses to this book such as J. W. Page’s *Uncle Robin in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston* (1853) continued to usurp the slave narrative, so that the Southern refutation of Stowe was itself indebted to black articulations, especially in its narrativization of gender. The peculiar hegemonic genius of plantation sentiment was not to discount but rather to adopt African-American textuality. The fiction of white womanhood written to heal the antebellum nation began with the assiduously forgotten absorption of nonnational autobiographies and memories.

A countertradition that acknowledges this assimilation of the fugitive’s narrative by proslavery discourse would shift the way American literary history describes the relationship between dominant and marginalized expression in the US. Literary critics have long shown how African-American cultural productions countered racist representations, but this argument also suggests that African-American writers are influenced but do not influence, that African-American writers respond but do not provoke response. Early groundbreaking studies of African-American literature have demonstrated how authors work within and against accepted literary forms to communicate their own concerns and issues, revealing both the limitations and resourcefulness of writers in an environment dominated by white models of melodrama, sentimental novel, and adventure story. Work by Robert Bone (*The Negro Novel in America* [1958]), Vernon Loggins (*The Negro*

Author: His Development to 1900 [1931]), and Arlene Elder (*The "Hindered Hand": The Cultural Implications of Early African-American Fiction* [1978]) places African-American literary production within this highly mediated and ambivalent cultural context, but, at the same time, their arguments unintentionally cast black authors as passively influenced by white authors. More recent criticism repeats this somewhat static story. For example, according to Valerie Smith, *Incidents* simultaneously inhabits, opposes, and escapes the limitations of the sentimental melodrama to propose its own agenda of maternal freedom. Frances Smith Foster argues, along the same lines, that Jacobs's narrative seeks to respond to "attitudes and assumptions of the Anglo-American literary establishment" (99). William Andrews finds a similar logic at work in William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), which commandeers material from Southern newspapers as well as from Lydia Maria Child's short story, "The Quadroons" (1847). Critical studies do not suggest, however, that the exchange flows the other way, that white writers manipulated the fugitive slave's story so that it read not as a tale of liberation but as a novel that apologized for slavery by centering on moments of supposedly uncompromised gender identity and transcendent womanhood. While Jacobs, Brown, and others racialized adventure and sentimental novels, popular Southern writing responded to black cultural critique by sentimentalizing and deracializing the slave narrative as the plantation romance of the white woman.¹

Conflicts, protests, and narrative structures made popular by the slave narrative were reproduced and redirected by more established, more institutionalized genres. As Toni Morrison states, the national and self-referential literature of America resounds with "a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17). Jacobs's *Incidents* exposes this "choking" by documenting an instance in which a slaveholder rewrites slave narrative. Dr. Flint intercepts Linda's letter to her grandmother, and once having usurped her position, substitutes his own letter as though it were Linda's, literally inscribing his voice over the slave's. Displaced by the slaveholder, Linda's understanding of freedom, resistance to slavery, and concern for her children are perverted and minimized. While Flint's manipulation registers his fear and hypocrisy, it also reveals the stakes of writing back and forth across a discursive border. This adulteration of Linda's letter suggests a broader cultural interchange in which slavery's supporters seized the frame of the fugitive, emptied out its specific content, and manipulated a new story of white interests.² Following the

strategy of Dr. Flint, Southern novelists paid close attention to slave expression, not so they could better remember the protests or desires of those who labored for them, but so they could profit from that labor, in this case the labor of representation, for their own purposes.

Yet the practice of discursively exploiting people who were denied legal access to public speech or writing hardly comes across as callous. Instead the white woman manages her version of the slave's trials with gentility. The proslavery novel plunders the slave narrative in pursuit of a soothing, conciliatory story that has all the backing of American nationalism. It elaborates an ideology as graceful as the white heroine herself: antebellum Southern fiction "merely" preys upon African-American expression to construct an idea of womanhood free of any considerations of race or class. Unfettered by history or material constraints, white womanhood represses its own miscegenated genealogy to tell a story that quiets the slavery question and reaffirms national identity. Forgetful of its debts to black articulations, white womanhood can selflessly provide a stable allegorical site for national representation—the heroine's body—impervious to class antagonism and racial anxiety.

1. Stealing the Slave Narrative

"I wish I were the poorest girl in the south-west, if I must be bought and sold like a negro slave," declares the heroine of Hentz's *Linda* (1848) as she resists exchange within a patriarchal economy in the form of an arranged marriage (104).³ Grace Leigh of Harland's *Moss-Side* (1857) similarly chafes under a father's desire to govern the disposition of her body in matters of courtship, and asks, "Am I a chattel to be bargained for—to be sold or withheld without reference to my will or pleasure?" (152). This linkage of women and slaves, sustained at length in plots that witness these victims of patriarchy beaten, separated from family, and forced to become fugitives, typifies the textual traffic of plantation novels.⁴ Such comparisons undergird the triangular trade of Southern fiction: in this discursive commerce, race facilitates a gender identification that hides the extent to which class-based notions of privileged womanhood originate in ruthless plantation production. A series of misrecognitions and displacements allows the antebellum Southern white woman to write a deracialized slave narrative in which the simultaneous invocation and suppression of race secure not only her social independence

but also her discursive independence from African and lower-class contexts.

Analysis of the popular sentimental novel illustrates that whiteness, an apparently unmarked racial category, emerges from discourses marked by gender and class anxiety and that the genre itself reacts to African-American narrative in order to constitute whiteness as a seemingly noncontingent, nonsocial identity. As critics of nineteenth-century American women's writing over the last decade have noted, the stereotyped characters and conventional plots of popular melodramas and sentimental novels are charged with complex ideological duties.⁵ Accompanying the romance of the Southern belle and the dashing planter is a social context whose very representation entails participation in a rhetorical economy that forces the slave narrative to labor for genteel configurations of transcendent whiteness and womanhood. Within this economy literature apologizes for slavery, excusing expropriations of African-American material without recognizing the degree to which white womanhood is underwritten by the slave's alienation from labor, family, and even his or her own oppression. Critical attention to these novels combining displays of feminism and romantic pictures of slavery could restore the erased context of class anxiety that allows the plantation heroine to translate African-American enslavement into a melodramatic expression of her own gender identity.

This displacement of the slave narrator by the white heroine corresponds to a larger system of exchange—the slave economy—that produced a gentry who wanted to ignore the racial basis of its wealth even as it manipulated the associations of race to remind others, namely lower-class whites and potential interlopers, of their shameful, “black” class origins. In a study of the placement of women within proslavery ideology, Eugene Genovese claims that “racial subordination [is] derived from class subordination, which [is] derived from gender subordination” (127). While suggesting the links among salient social categories, his schema depends upon a *linearity* that does not allow for the entanglements that cause race, gender, and class to displace and find articulation in one another. In order to complicate this account, I contend that white womanhood is an economic identity always infused by other, seemingly noneconomic configurations already equipped with a regulatory grammar (e.g., slave codes and gender conventions). This genealogy of white womanhood, however, does not entail a straightforward causality; instead, it acknowledges how the putative absence of race and class within antebellum gender identity can be recovered by tracing the sei-

Accompanying the romance of the Southern belle and the dashing planter is a social context whose very representation entails participation in a rhetorical economy that forces the slave narrative to labor for genteel configurations of transcendent whiteness and womanhood.

zure and dislocation of the slave narrative from its African-American contexts. As a source for a best-selling fictional genre,⁶ the stolen slave narrative interarticulates race, class, and gender to produce ideals of whiteness and femininity; through this literary occlusion, whiteness and womanhood sidestep the rapacious economic system on which these privileged registers of identity rest.

By obsessively placing the white woman in the position of people she enslaves, these stories tacitly admit guilt, not just over their appropriation of the slave narrative but also over the power accorded to their authors' gender and class to appropriate the slave narrative in the first place. Through what Étienne Balibar calls "class racism," poor whites are kept in their place, leaving aristocratic heroines the freedom to describe social constraints with the rhetoric of slavery and yet remain insulated from its dealings (204).⁷ Those who lack financial independence—poor whites and white women at the mercy of ruthless fathers and husbands—become "like a negro slave" and suffer economic injustice naturalized as a racial identification. Just as only the rich can own slaves, only rich wives and daughters can parallel their trials to the slave's. Feminism—at least antebellum Southern versions—is a racialized narrative, a luxury reserved for women who relied on a father's or husband's slaveowning privilege to force not only slaves, but also the story of slavery, to attend to their wants and respond to their protests.

The title character of Hentz's *Eoline* (1852) voices a sentiment common to plantation heroines when she speaks of "a traffic unsanctioned by God or man!" not with reference to the sale and separation of black families, but to the arranged marriages within white families (29). The financial considerations of courtship satisfied creditors, consolidated capital, and displayed wealth in ways Southern women found not unlike slave auctions. Within such plots the Southern belle only becomes reconciled to life in the patriarchal household via events suitable to her station, usually a marriage founded upon love. Such melodramatic closure recognizes the importance of women's desires in the face of economic contingencies. Love conquers all—especially the contextual and social factors that bear upon gender. The pervasive backdrop of slavery ministers to a "feminist" foreground⁸ that portrays race as little more than an incident—rather than a determinant—of the white woman's embattled positionality. To shame fathers and husbands even as she denies that a racial context in any way constitutes her gender identity, the white heroine parallels the economic desires that motivate regulation of her courtship with those that motivate the purchase of female slaves

designated as “breeders.” Thus, one literary critic, in spite of a concern for women’s independence, explains away slavery as the inconsequential detail of regional fiction that has led to belittling assessments of antebellum melodrama as “vapid plantation romances” (Wimsatt 173). In its search for an “enlightened revisionist reading” that centers exclusively on women’s issues, however, this interpretation eclipses race and slavery. Such an approach repeats the displacements of the plantation novel, using and then discarding slavery as a rhetorical impetus to discuss gender as though it were an isolated social category.

Consumed with worries about becoming slaves themselves, white characters have little time to worry about the tyranny that rules over black members of the plantation family. This selective vision of oppression emerges from an inability to imagine society without the patriarchal underpinnings integral to its customs, privilege, and class hierarchy. As Nina Baym comments, “Hentz recognizes that patriarchy is an institution affecting women as well as slaves; but since she is defending it for the slave, she must defend it for women as well” (*Woman’s* 136). Despite this ultimate obeisance to father, husband, and master, as Baym and other critics note, undercurrents of feminism are at work in the sentimental romance as deployed by Hentz. Mary Ann Wimsatt contends: “What is not immediately obvious upon a first reading of Hentz’s books is the degree to which she enables several of her young heroines to attain before marriage a nineteenth-century type of feminism involving independence, maturity, self-control, and influence over others” (172). But as Karen Sánchez-Eppler and Carolyn Karcher demonstrate, feminism is often exclusively a white feminism that silences black voices and preserves racial inequality. From this perspective, one critic’s suggestion that plantation feminism “incit[ed] young girls to rebellion to try to free themselves from cultural enslavement to male authority” smacks of the same displacement as the complaint about being an item of domestic traffic (Shillingsburg 132). Literary analysis can be as romantic as apologist fiction: both refigure the discourse of slavery to ennoble white women.⁹

Beginning, as Wimsatt does, with the caveat that a prolific writer like Hentz “deserves to be remembered for more than her romantic defenses of slavery,” a critical enterprise inadvertently accepts uncritical and evasive presuppositions (162). The Southern heroine does not experience her gender in isolation—indeed, this contingency is the source of her protest. To her, independence means that gender identity stands apart from considerations of race and class. Yet her gender imbricates with other social categories and functions as an index of economic privilege

that has its origins in racial exploitation.¹⁰ The white woman's resistance to patriarchy lies firmly embedded in what Cornel West calls a "complex articulated totality" (81): feminist subjectivity agitates for independence, but as a discourse, this resolve is not independent. The sensational use of racial cosmetics—a "mulatto dye"—by one proslavery heroine dramatically points to the social debts of transcendent womanhood (Hentz, *Marcus Warland* [*MW*] 254). She calls upon her servant: "Here, Letty, *mulattofy* me again," so that she can escape the prohibition of displaying active sexual desire, and yet this ruse also testifies to her dependence (*MW* 275). By granting temporary social freedoms, the "mulatto dye" graphically betrays how racial representations labor for white women's independence. This "mulattofied" heroine stands amidst a "complex cluster of structured social practices" that makes attention to single, rarefied determinants—such as race, class, or gender—inadequate (West 85). To produce readings in which these social categories are *not* articulated and experienced at the complex site of their intersection is to be seduced by the plantation belle into believing that her gender is unsullied—discursively, that is—and owes nothing to the people whose place in the social hierarchy she strategically usurps.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (1988) suggests why delicate heroines would temporarily identify with those people whom the social order marked as their inferiors. Although the rigid nature of class hierarchy in the South prevented genteel women from forming alliances with white women from less distinguished backgrounds, the plantation environment often fostered close associations between the mistress and the black women whom her father or husband owned. "There is almost no evidence to suggest that slaveholding women envisioned themselves as the 'sisters' of yeoman women. . . . In contrast, there is reason to believe that some slaveholding women felt minimal kinship with their female slaves, with whom they might have intimate, if tension-fraught, relations in everyday life," writes Fox-Genovese (43). This complex social world echoes the imaginative world of the plantation novel, for in both class mediated comparisons of gender and race. When Adele, the heroine of Eliza Follen's *The Planter's Daughter* (1858), admits that arranged marriages can force a woman to "be made too much the slave of a worthless or unprincipled husband," she identifies with another race because she cannot conceive of an unseemly sisterhood with "women among the medium and lower walks of life" who share her dependence upon a patriarchal economy (210, 223). The

shifting alliances among gender, race, and class that appear in Dupuy's novel not only support Fox-Genovese's thesis but also indicate how white women invoke slaves not to talk about race but to explore the class accents of gender without scrutinizing the basis for their own privilege. In contrast to lower-class whites, slaves will never move in next door, though they may live in the quarters. Adele thus takes few risks when she says that her father's creditor "makes me the price of freedom from the galling bondage of debt," converting herself into another item of collateral along with the estate and its slaves (245). Racialized commodification is hardly as dangerous as becoming poor. Adele would rather compare herself to a black slave because such a conjunction remains impossible, whereas the idea of poverty, of being reduced to a lower-class white woman without servants, she understands as real, even imminent, when she surveys her father's heavily mortgaged plantation and slaves. The immutable line separating free and slave was thus mapped onto class relations to construct another impermeable boundary between the planter class and nonslaveholders.

2. Unpenetrated Womanhood

Even as she adopts the rhetoric of slavery to describe her oppression, the plantation heroine reaffirms the structure of patriarchal economy. Like the master she challenges, she too benefits from labor that she has not produced. Her narrative sidles up to patriarchal power, becoming complicit in a rhetorical negotiation that explores a gendered subjectivity on the back of a racial context. Affording her the indulgence of temporarily occupying and strategically appropriating the slave's position, her critique questions the abuse of patriarchal power while reconfirming its use. Her adoption of the slave's protest reiterates the "benevolent" conditions of paternal guardianship: the planter's daughter takes custody of African-American narrative, clothing the slave's degradation in the romantic tones of her own biography. Adoption is not only a maneuver of textual containment, however; it is also a literal episode that recurs in proslavery fiction wherein white orphans are rescued from the alarming contingencies of slavelike drudgery and poverty. Adoption is the patriarchal act par excellence; it makes others dependent by declaring them in need of the surplus wisdom, wealth, and care of the father's household. Discursive adoption of the slave's oppression and literal adoption of white orphans both confirm a patriarchal system that desires dependents (African-American narrative and

white orphans) who provide negative examples of the need to transcend social actualities.

Scenes of rich planters rescuing wayward yet inherently noble children are not just the melodramatic twists of apologist fiction; common practice found childless couples and maiden aunts adopting children away from their natal families. If, as Michael Grossberg argues, adoption “provided a legal mechanism for completely severing the bonds created by birth,” then the repeated episodes of adoption in apologist novels redeem the separation of African-American families by rewriting that trauma as the sentimental rescue of the white orphan (268).¹¹ But even as adoption encourages a kindly traffic in women, it also effaces the economic underpinnings of that traffic by removing women from West’s “complex articulated totality” in which other discourses compromise the sanctity of white womanhood. The plight of a rare unadopted white orphan in proslavery literature exhibits the troubling persistence of combined social contingencies when judicious paternal influence is not present to tidy up the ideological frame. In Mary Henderson Eastman’s *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* (1852), a young master traveling in the North encounters a female worker who explains the causes of her victimization, “I’m an orphan, and poor; that’s why I’m scolded and cuffed about” (73). Her employer puts the case this way, “They’re nothing but white niggers, after all, these Irish” (73). Because she labors and because gender is not the single feature of her identity, this white woman is mired in the contexts of race and class. In this sectionalist defense, terms of racial degradation are no longer discrete or exclusive: instead, “nigger” and the economics of orphanhood constitute subjectivity as much as gender.

The fate of this Northern working girl argues for the goodwill of Southern paternal custody, which first forcibly intersects with and then purifies the racial institutions that accrue wealth for a select group of property owners. The proslavery indictment of the Northern factory owner who amasses capital through ruthless exploitation threatens to backfire upon the plantation owner if not for fatherless and motherless babes who give the Southern patriarch the opportunity to act magnanimously and reinvent surplus capital as a stockpile of virtue. Because these orphaned children are discursively innocent—in contrast to the working girl in *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*, branded by both race and class as a “white nigger”—their contact with the master’s pocket-book is a sanitized textual arrangement that ignores the material conditions that underlie the patriarch’s gentility. The issues surrounding adoption— orphanhood, natal alienation, genealogical isolation, and ruptured family ties—recall the trials of slave nar-

natives, but only to a point. Lamenting the plight of orphans, broken families, and cast-off children, proslavery fiction allows economic transactions to overlay racial contexts and then discreetly disappear. Only white womanhood has the ideological poise to make such a graceful exit because this gendered discourse transcends class as though class were only a concern for people who are compromised by material considerations of labor and exploitation.

Once vilified in the abolitionist press as indifferent to ties of kinship, the slaveholder in Hentz's novels now becomes a kind husband who detaches girls from their natal families, ushering them into the leisure of plantation life. In *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854), the disparagingly named abolitionist, Mr. Hastings, is quick to argue with the Southern planter, Moreland; yet anxiety over his daughter's proposed marriage to a slaveowner silences Hastings's concerns about African slavery. He initially rejects Moreland's suit with the very rhetoric used to depict the sufferings of the slave: his daughter's marriage would mean her removal to the South, and "she would be to us just as if she were dead, for the places that now know her would no more be gladdened by her presence" (*PNB* 115). Alienated from family and community, she would experience "social death," an absence of kin relations that, for Orlando Patterson, marks a primary condition of slavery (334). Apologist fiction does not deny that planters divide families, but it sublimates the racial context of separation by supplanting the slave family with the abolitionist and his daughter. Hastings's indictment of the lovesick planter affords the slaveowner the chance to exonerate himself from charges of being the cause of family division without ever referring to race or slavery. Any touchiness Moreland experiences about the slave trade is quelled by an enlightened masculinity attuned to the white woman's trial as she is exchanged from father to husband: "He began to realize all that Eulalia was resigning for him; the strength of the ties she was severing; the dear and holy associations she was rending asunder" (*PNB* 153). Separation is for the best in this case: "rending" family "asunder" has little to do with the cruelty of race-based economics and instead entails a rhetorical transaction that brings Eulalia to the plantation not as human capital but as its owner. With the comforts enjoyed by the white woman in mind, neither abolitionist nor planter has to confront the condition of the slaves who produce, both materially and rhetorically, her story.

Adoption enables transcendence of economic factors and elision of racial associations in Hentz's previous novel, *Marcus Warland* (1852), which tells the story of white children who must

separate from a father plummeting down the social ladder. Enter the aristocratic slaveholder and his wife to rectify this heartrending situation. Imperiled by a profligate and abusive father, Marcus and Katy are saved by the plantation master and mistress who have the financial means to provide for them. The slavemaster also “adopts” Marcus’s father, taking him on as plantation overseer. With his father’s welfare tied to racially marked bodies he does not even own, Marcus needs little encouragement to accept a history unfettered by the economics of race: “It was Mr. Bellamy’s wish . . . that he [Marcus] should never allude to his father’s past history; that he should be considered his adopted son; and Marcus had scrupulously obeyed him” (*MW* 117). Once sublimated through misrecognition, Marcus’s paternal “racial” history of a father engaged in the lower-class employment of slave management no longer poses a threat, though the stain of poverty remains. Schemers envious of Marcus’s success in gaining the heroine’s affections capitalize on his social origins by dredging up his ignoble birth. Miscegenation ceases to be an issue of race, and instead involves the embarrassing peccadilloes of noble poverty. Saying he will never permit “an ill-assorted marriage” between his niece and Marcus, the heroine’s uncle explains to her his objection (*MW* 179): “But if *you* have suffered yourself to be infatuated by the mere beauty of one so immeasurably your inferior in rank; if your *brother* blindly permits what it is his duty strenuously to guard against, *I* shall certainly exert my authority to the utmost, and forbid this young man all farther intercourse with one who, I am sorry to say, seems utterly unconscious what is due to herself” (*MW* 176). The special charge of every adult male, as he sees it, is to protect the white woman, as critics beginning with Barbara Welter (“The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860” [1966]) have noted.¹² Yet this obligation is still more specific: patriarchs want to defend the honor of their women, but even more so their concern is to defend a transcendent notion of white womanhood, unstained by “intercourse” with other social contaminants. Miscegenation is not only a sexual matter, but also a discursive problem that threatens to taint the class status, the “rank,” that is the unacknowledged foundation of the white woman’s gender. The distinction between protecting women and protecting womanhood is pivotal, revealing that the preoccupations of the planter extend beyond the body of his wife or white daughter to an unsullied image of womanhood, one that remained bound to the patriarchy but free of a racialized economy. Safeguarding women’s purity thus demanded an innocent view of the material conditions underlying the master’s status. In the fiction authored by white women and the fiction that *is* the white

woman, the slaveholder believes that his social station, like his wife and daughter, remains unpenetrated by his own unscrupulous and profit-seeking motivations, which are attributed to a racially stigmatized lower-class population.

Plantation “feminism” authorizes the exercise of patriarchal privilege through sentimental renditions of family separation and orphanhood. Whether as heroine or author, the white woman undertakes adoptions less for the benefit of lost children than to represent her America as invulnerable to the messy materiality of gender. The apologist novel’s concern for abandoned fugitives of the plantation household stitches together two potentially mismatched patterns within the national fabric: on the one hand, accession to fatherly intervention legitimates the racialized economy that sustains American commercial and institutional life; on the other, this economy, which at the same time unsettles national imagining, is rendered docile when the planter’s wealth allows the orphan to transcend the contingencies of race and class. Adoption figures as a typically contradictory instance of American memory, encouraging the white woman to invoke a patriarchal prerogative that she is enjoined to overlook and forget.

When adoption fails, however, lower-class tendencies reassert themselves, compromising the plantation novel’s ability to transcend the ideological miscegenation of race and class. In other words, class is shamelessly racialized, condemning those it touches. During the period of her disinheritance, the title character of *Eoline* teaches music at a girls’ seminary where, much to her repugnance, she must take charge of an ill-bred student named Jerusha Spots. Happily, Eoline’s marriage and familial reconciliation soon rescue her from mean financial self-reliance and from noxious proximity to Jerusha’s tobacco smoking, poor grammar, and taste for coarse food. Later, when Eoline’s carriage breaks down, she encounters Jerusha at her rude cabin. No longer at the finishing school, Jerusha’s bad habits and “not at all genteel” manner reappear, now strikingly represented in racial terms: when Eoline objects to the tobacco smoke in the cabin, the elder Aunt Jerusha agrees with uncomfortable familiarity, “It’s a mighty bad habit, I know. You don’t smoke, honey? . . . ’twould spoil your pretty skin. You’ve got a powerful fair skin” (*Eoline* 225). Tobacco smoke is doubly dangerous: on the one hand, it recalls Eoline to her uncomfortable interlude with poverty; on the other, it imperils her complexion, poisoning her on the brink of a social gulf that is maintained by an inexorable racial ideology. When class no longer indicates a transcendent “natural” aristocracy but points to the meager economy of the

commons, race reenters the picture. Even a novel like Harland's *Miriam* (1862), notable for its sympathetic attitude toward the aspiring son of a washerwoman, refers to interclass marriage as "amalgamation," a term more commonly used to describe the "horrors" of racial mixture (93). Certainly whites like Jerusha and her family had limited social mobility, as her stint at finishing school makes clear, but the novel revokes this mobility by associating poor whites with those whose racial identification precludes any class advancement. *Arrivistes* will never arrive at the big house; a family marked with a telling name like Spots will never settle down alongside Eoline and other members of the social hierarchy entrenched above them. Jerusha will never socially mature into a white woman, situated as she is among the markers—tobacco smoke, poor grammar, unregulated consumption—of race and class.

Wealthier planters avoided lower classes because poverty would remind them of the racial oppression they sought to ignore. Poverty lacks the gentility to rise above the not-so-genteel practices that were the mainstays of Southern privilege. Aunt Jerusha reveals the fragile covering that class prejudice provides for racial exploitation: "I can't make Jerusha keep her bonnet on, now how in the world, and she gets as black as a nigger. She did whiten up mightily while she was at the sinimenary, and improved wonderfully" (*Eoline* 225). Jerusha's downward mobility destroys the sublimity of the romance and its ability to segregate gender from other social discourses. Sidetracked from its romance of a Southern belle and a haughty planter, Hentz's novel finds itself in the crass surroundings of Jerusha's cabin, where women smoke and racial markings, encoded in lower-class habits, comes into contact with gender. Miscegenation—as a discursive feature—is uncomfortably immanent. In this atmosphere romance loses its charm, and the melodramatic feminism that adopts, absorbs, and eventually erases an Africanist presence ceases to function with grace and assurance. Fortunately, the alabaster lady is rescued by her carriage, but not before her "white trash" former student hurls after her the challenge that she will soon own a piano—dangerous words, indeed, since Eoline's task at the seminary was to instruct the slaveholder's white daughters in the graces of music, refining their tastes and ennobling their characters. In Jerusha's hands, the piano figures as a transgressive device, an icon of social mobility that will "whiten up" her family's vulgar, newfound capital. A few moments later the reassuring appearance of Eoline's slave, "her teeth gleaming large and white as the ivory keys of a piano" (*Eoline* 227), contains the threat of class insurrection. The fluid class boundaries

suggested in Jerusha's taunt, "I've got a piano coming," are made rigid through racial displacement (*Eoline* 226). No matter how much Jerusha practices the piano, no matter how much she realizes its symbolic capital, she will remain for Eoline no better than a slave. In the same way that the role of the slave is to wait upon Eoline, so too race and class ideologies are to serve, always at a respectable and self-effacing distance, white womanhood.¹³

3. Nationalizing Domestic Institutions

In the plantation novel, feminism abets white womanhood in a very specific independence that extends beyond the happy resolution of melodrama. For characters like Eoline this autonomy means freedom from the duties of filial obedience and the necessities of economic self-support. At the level of discourse, however, independence matters most: white womanhood, not necessarily the white woman, is the successful heroine of popular romance, shimmering above considerations of race and class. Yet this independence is as fictive as the Greek Revival mansions, cavalier honor, and complacent "sable retainers" of apologist novels (Harland, *Miriam* 177). The displacement of African-American labor and narrative forms that stand behind white women's independence suggests that popular literary production in the South depended upon African contexts. Recurring elements in the apologist novel—resistance to plantation patriarchy, complaints about commodification in the marriage market, sketches of the indignities of labor—betray how Southern literary form has its antecedents not only in recognized sources such as the sentimental novel but in the slave narrative as well.

Just as the white woman's protest adopts the slave's position, the white woman's novel apprehends the slave's narrative. The circumstances recall the structure of slavery: Southern writers ignored the slave's person and expropriated the product of his/her labor—in this case, a narrative form—for the genteel white woman. Despite injunctions against the circulation of abolitionist material below the Mason-Dixon line, historical evidence reveals that Southern audiences, especially writers who saw themselves at the forefront of the proslavery crusade, were acquainted with slave narratives. One of the foremost theorists of the "peculiar institution," J. H. Hammond, censured "learned old maids, like Miss Martineau" for spreading "scandalous stories" but nonetheless saw it as his political duty to read radical Northern publications and went so far as to write abolitionists requesting antislavery material so that he could better refute its

arguments (644). As one historian notes, “proslavery and anti-slavery writers wrote for a common, generally well-read and civically engaged public, North *and* South” (Wyatt-Brown 333). Though Southern ideologues may have read slave narratives, there is no doubt that these narratives suffered revision and dislocation in the proslavery context. One of the first speeches of Frederick Douglass to be published as a pamphlet appeared not in Boston but in Baltimore, under the title *Abolition Fanaticism in New York: Speech of a Runaway Slave* (1847). Illustrated with racist caricature and undercut by a brief editor’s introduction, *Abolition Fanaticism* exemplifies how Southern presses could pirate and defuse the fugitive slave’s story. Often seen as an impermeable border, the Mason-Dixon line allowed a certain amount of fluidity that allowed slaveholders to recapture and distort the slave’s story. George Fitzhugh, perhaps the most prominent apologist for slavery, sounded the call for a defensive literary strategy: “We must meet agitation by counter-agitation” (qtd. in Wyatt-Brown 325).¹⁴

The popularity of ex-slaves lecturing in the North was thus countered by making African-American storytelling suitable for repetition by white women. While this delicacy forces the narrator of Caroline Gilman’s *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (1853) to “ask the indulgence of general readers for mingling so much of the peculiarities of negroes with . . . [her] details,” her portrait of a stately South Carolina family continually usurps and appropriates black narrative (106). From the outset *Recollections* marks the African genealogies of both white womanhood and Southern fiction. Cornelia, the narrator, thus commences her tale by remembering an avuncular storytelling slave: “Good old Jacque! How often have I climbed his knees to hear his stories of the past. I even love to recall the peculiar accent with which he beguiled our evenings. . . . Rarely could he resist our Southern entreaty of, *Do, if you please, daddy Jacque, tell us about grandpapa’s locket, and how he died*” (7). Even as Cornelia publishes the African origins of white romantic narrative, she reserves scorn for one martyred white mother who indecorously boasts of the racialized sources of her daughter’s refinement: “I have toiled night and day, I’ve worked like a nigger, and more than a nigger, I’ve been up early and abed late, to get that girl a genteel education” (218). These encounters with two forms of African labor—one narratival and the other agricultural—invite speculation as to why one moment of interarticulation is represented with saccharine nostalgia and the other with an unsympathetic snub. The difference stems from the gendered aspects of race: whereas the narratival labor of “daddy Jacque” remains

both loyal to patriarchal memory and paternalistically indulgent of his young auditors, the mother's physical labor reveals that when feminine gentility is freighted with racial associations accomplishment and grace disappear. What vanishes as well is the surety that white women will never be misrecognized and marked as vessels of real and symbolic capital. Unlike the mother's occupation of the slave's role, the narrator's seizure of the slave's story seems like a noncontingent intervention, unconnected to anxious concerns about status or the lingering guilt that prompts obsessive invocations of slavery by analogy.

Northern printing houses participated in this subversion of the slave narrative:¹⁵ most apologist novels, like *Recollections*, were brought out by New York and Philadelphia publishers. In 1860, D. Appleton of New York published G. M. Flanders's *The Ebony Idol*, an antiabolitionist novel that portrays the stir caused in a quaint New England village when unprincipled reformers trump up a slave narrative for a black visitor named Caesar. Much as Dr. Flint suppresses Linda's letter in *Incidents*, those with social power seize the slave's narrative to protect womanhood from base material schemes. The resulting text of inauthentic black expression serves the white woman, in this instance a foundling named Mary, by spelling out the threats to gender posed by racially inflected class contexts. The idea to produce "an outline of Caesar's life and sufferings, and have him go round and deliver it" comes from Mary's suitor, who is anxious to rescue his sweetheart from greedy Yankees who see profit in having Mary wed a fugitive slave (196). Even though Caesar's amanuensis concedes, "I suppose we must stick to his [Caesar's] old version," the new fabrication safeguards the white woman (199). Following a rehearsed cue, Caesar introduces Mary to his slave narrative when he thanks his benefactors who have "intrusted the happiness of their daughter to my keeping!" (207). Outraged by this scheme of miscegenation, shocked by the amalgamation of womanhood to race for economic gain, the townspeople contemptuously reject Caesar and his abolitionist supporters. In place of this scandalous marriage plan, *The Ebony Idol* finds melodramatic closure in the story of the orphan Mary who, years earlier, was "stolen in a spirit of wickedness and revenge by a very bad negro fellow" (256). Legalized commerce in black children is displaced by the illegal abduction of white girls; this sentimental version of the social world can only be narrated by re-writing African-American experience.

"We must hear the negro's story. The climax is to come," says a listener at the abolitionist meeting in *The Planter's Northern Bride* (561). But, like Caesar's narrative, this tale is a falsified

product of abolitionist humbug. Nevertheless, it has stirring effects: "The audience was becoming painfully excited. Ladies were passing little bottles containing the spirits of ammonia from one to the other, and covering their faces with their white handkerchiefs; men groaned audibly" (*PNB* 560). The planter Moreland stills this commotion when he mounts the stage to expose the storied sufferings of his ex-slave as a forgery and then regales the audience with his own account of the abolitionist oppression of Southern households. Popular reviews celebrated this subsumption of African-American protest and praised the apologist novel for its soothing pictures of plantation life. Hentz viewed her own work as much-needed "counter-agitation" and described herself as a national allegory: "[I am] a native of the North, and a dweller of the South, with affections clinging to both of the beautiful divisions of our common country" (*MW* 7). Master Moreland's speech in the abolitionist pulpit displaces any volatile comments his slave might voice, but the most effective usurpation of the slave narrative comes in the trials of the white child Effie, a proslavery counterpart to Stowe's Little Eva. When Effie is kidnapped, neither the master's resources nor his wife's sympathy are spared in the search. Occupying the textual position of the fugitive slave, Effie becomes the subject of "advertisements inserted in every paper, with offers of munificent reward; placards were put up in the most conspicuous parts of the city" (*PNB* 432). As Effie replaces the runaway in a fugitive slave bill, so the apologist novel locates the white child at the center of a narrative that had been the slave's intellectual property. Slaves who protest the conditions of their bondage and run off do not exist when white children are abducted from their father's estates. The slave narrative is dislocated by the ahistorical, innocent, and emphatically unsocial body of the white child. In short, the "negro's story" is purified of its critical presentation of the South by its absorption into the melodramatic plot of white domesticity.

White women's discursive adoption of the slave narrative finds support in proslavery constructions of the black family as an unstable group sorely in need of domestic influence. A specious sociology justified the plantation mistress's intervention in the slave community. Digging among his "boy-knowledge of the negro," Edward Pollard in *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (1859) presents a series of vignettes that represent the putative lack of familial bonds amongst his parents' slaves (viii). Remembering the animosity that existed between two slaves, a "father and son" vying for "supremacy in the kitchen," Pollard's narrator concludes that among slaves, the "parental relation is completely ignored" (75). He juxtaposes this

indifference to family and hierarchy with a pathetic portrait of his own “dear mother, who covered me with embraces and kisses, and wept over me with happy, forgiving tears” upon his return after a fit of childish pique when he ran away from the plantation home (80). The white mother not only supplants the black slave lamenting her children’s sale, but she also absorbs all the maternal and caregiving qualities of the women who, as common practice dictated, nursed and raised the mistress’s children. Pollard well understands the political import of such accounts; in fact, he prefaces his intimate look at Southern society with an editorial from the New Orleans *Delta* that asks, “Who wants to read a novel designed to illustrate the beauties of free trade or a protective tariff?” (vii). Protesting his sensitivity to disciplinary boundaries, Pollard nevertheless believes that the extraordinary times created by the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and “a frightful procession of books of a similar order” demand extraordinary measures, namely, the infusion of politics into literature (vii). His apology excuses both his own volume and an onslaught of texts that used sentimentality to resolve questions of political economy. His examination of “instances at the auction-block of . . . humanity . . . on the part of the masters” counters abolitionist charges and places white families, particularly aristocratic women and children, at the center of the South’s “free trade” (29).

Divested of their opportunity to nurture, slave parents needed white womanhood more than ever. In an impeccable functioning of ideology, Southern patriarchy divided slave families, effaced its agency and economic interest in such operations, and then, in the guise of the white woman, intervened once again as an agent of order, security, and benevolence. J. H. Hammond’s *Slavery in the Light of Political Science* (1845) exemplifies this pattern: “It is, and it always has been, an object of prime consideration with our slaveholders, to keep families together. Negroes are themselves both perverse and comparatively indifferent about this matter. It is a singular trait, that they almost invariably prefer forming connection with slaves belonging to other masters, and at some distance. . . . Sometimes it happens that a negro prefers to give up his family rather than separate from his master” (655–56). The slave’s nonchalance toward family—created by the slaveholder’s domestic management including debt, auctions, profit, and traders—justifies the planters’ “humanitarian” intervention. In the proslavery argument the white woman shines forth as heroine, for she dispenses love and care in the otherwise insensitive atmosphere of the slave quarters. As she does in the plantation novel, the mistress interacts with slaves only to stabi-

In an impeccable functioning of ideology, Southern patriarchy divided slave families, effaced its agency and economic interest in such operations, and then, in the guise of the white woman, intervened once again as an agent of order, security, and benevolence.

lize and expand her husband's dominion. S. A. Cartwright's *Slavery in the Light of Ethnology* (1852) extols her virtues:

Whenever the white woman superintends the nursery, whether the climate be hot or cold, they [slaves] increase faster than any other people on the globe; but on large plantations, remote from her influence, the negro population diminishes. . . . She often sits up at night with sick children and administers to their wants, when their own mothers are nodding by them, and would be sound asleep if it were not for her presence. The care that white women bestow on the nursery, is one of the principal causes why three hundred thousand Africans, originally imported into the territory of the United States have increased to four millions. (727–28)

Amid slave auctions and family separation, Southern fiction, whether the product of the novelist or political scientist, authorizes the white woman to adopt the entire African-American population. The white woman has little rhetorical distance to travel to becoming a slave herself: “[T]he greatest slave on a plantation is the mistress. She is like the mother of an immense family of some fifty up to five or six hundred children,” writes Caroline Rush in *The North and South* (1852) (226). The revival of the slave trade as “domestic commerce” required the Southern matron to shift emphasis away from the harsh associations of “commerce” toward the soothing control of “domestic.” Her presence sentimentalizes the economic language of slavery; her gentle graces protect the system from abolitionist condemnation, rendering it less a system and more a home. Her ministrations convert slaves into objects of material enhancement without racializing the planter's wealth. Overlooking race and seeing only children's sufferings, she transforms slave breeding into a genteel, motherly endeavor. Traditional gender attributes such as sympathy, devotion, and healing graces make African-American servitude a stage for the white woman's display of a softened patriarchal management, freeing slavery from the complicating economics of racial exchange. In short, the prominence of the white woman in this “sociological” perspective distorts and simplifies West's “complex articulated totality” so that it reads as a fable purified of both race and class.

Socially transcendent and discursively spotless, the white woman's identity articulated through stolen rhetorical labor embodies a national fiction. The plantation novel ministered to an anguished nation by replacing the slave's tormented condition with the travails of the white woman. Whereas factory workers,

mill owners, cotton merchants, feminists, and apprentices, not to mention slaveholders and abolitionists, all heard different agendas within tales of slaves' alienated labor and physical abuse, readers of sentimental fiction could agree that the white woman's oppression was a matter beyond debate. Standards of gentility and ideals of courtship ironically dictated a consensual space; after all, any respectable person with bourgeois aspirations would agree that white women should not be beaten or bartered like the heroines of the plantation novel are. Proslavery novels acted as national literature not because they displayed traits of the entire country but because fictions of white womanhood imparted a national allegory of domestic bliss.¹⁶ A review printed in the New York *Mirror* praised one of the most popular Southern romances precisely for its ability to restore accord to the national home: "The 'Planter's Northern Bride' should be as welcome as the dove of peace to every fireside in the Union. It cannot be read without a moistening of the eyes, a softening of the heart, and a mitigation of sectional and most unchristian prejudices" (qtd. in *MW* v).

To offer an ungentle reminder, however, this domestic bliss requires money. A cozy fireside—at least as imagined in the proslavery novel—is an emblem of privilege produced and guaranteed by an economy driven by the most politically inflammatory merchandise of the day: slaves. A counterhistory of literary tradition that looks to the precursors of the antebellum novel uncovers a discursive tangle that removed race from contention and constructed a genteel womanhood materially and rhetorically financed by black bodies and slave articulations. The "white woman" replaced the "slave girl," providing a haven from the divisiveness of race slavery, even though class elevation, which makes the female body transcendent, remained bound to African-American narrative. The persistent inclusion of race in seemingly nonracial discourse overturns histories of literary influence by disclosing the generative role of African-American narrative in the constitution of nationally popular literature. This assertion stakes more of a claim than the argument that continual displacements among race, class, and gender in proslavery fiction expose the indebtedness of American literature to black culture; it contends that the constellations of texts and traditions that retrospectively produce canons are formed by predations upon African-American narrative.

To render the slave's story compatible with whatever mixture of gothic, romance, adventure, or sentimental narrative she employed, the antebellum Southern novelist had to come armed with what Michel Foucault calls "procedures of intervention"

(58). Apologist writers deployed an arsenal of literary strategies to purify a world that their intervention only made more replete with economic domination and racial conflict. Discursive intervention is always underwritten by another more primal story, a story, as Foucault states, of “hierarchy and subordination” (59).¹⁷ These practices wrested statements from one discursive field to another, adopting and absorbing them so that they appear natural to their new context. As the affluence of the plantation depended on slavery, so the roseate world of the plantation novel depended on the silent appropriation of the slave narrative. The ease and refinement imagined in Southern fiction demanded a set of textual labors, rhetorical exchanges, and racial displacements that insulated the representation of plantation wives and daughters from less glamorous social factors. Although Southern writers could forget that their productions were always hybrid, mingled with the stories of those narrators whom both law and custom denied writing, reading, and, in many instances, speech, this amnesia was yet another privilege. Persistent African-American inflections in this literature, however, suggest how privilege, whether the privilege accorded the white woman’s gender or the privilege to pilfer the slave narrative, rests upon the subjugation of interlocking social contingencies so that race, class, and gender seem unconnected and unimportant in the representation of the social world.

Notes

1. I do not intend to dismiss the influence of nineteenth-century melodrama and other genres upon proslavery fiction. William Taylor, for example, has demonstrated the British antecedents of the plantation novel (180–81). To be sure, generic conventions of melodrama influenced both plantation romances and slave narratives; however, the argument I am making is not so much about generic overlap as it is about mutual interaction and ideological containment. Nor do I intend to discount the importance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in producing apologist fiction. See Gosset for a survey of anti-*Uncle Tom* literature (212–38). Moss also examines Southern literary reactions to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, noting Stowe’s novel as the most important antecedent of the plantation romance (105–36). Yet several of the novels that I survey here were published before Stowe’s, suggesting that these causal links established by literary history do not account for the broader discursive influences of African-American narrative. Northern abolitionists, of course, also made use of the slave’s narrative: the most famous instances are Richard Hildreth’s *Archy Moore, the White Slave; or, Memoirs of a Fugitive* (1852) and Stowe’s incorporation and adaptation of Josiah Henson’s autobiography.

2. As part of this seizure of black discourse, slave narratives and speeches by fugitive slaves in rare instances were published in cities below the Mason-Dixon

line. In these more unabashed examples of the appropriation of African-American discourse, the protests and ideological content of black expression were reframed to support the “humanity” of slaveholding hegemony. See Castronovo 204–16.

3. Linda’s patriarchal oppression is directed not by her father but by her masculinized stepmother, who, guided by crude financial considerations, tries to force Linda to marry her stepbrother so that he can annex her wealth. Within this perverted household, Linda’s father is feminized, and he, too, becomes subject to “domestic bondage” (107). In addition to other titles by Hentz that I do not discuss in this essay, such as *The Lost Daughter* (1857) and *The Banished Son* (1852), the position of the African-American slave is usurped in numerous other texts, including Mary Bradley’s *Douglas Farm* (1856), Eliza Ann Dupuy’s *The Planter’s Daughter* (1858), Mary Henderson Eastman’s *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* (1852), Marian Harland’s *Miriam* (1862), and J. W. Page’s *Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston* (1853). For additional sources, see Gossett 430–31, Tandy, and Moss.

4. Karen Sánchez-Eppler examines the conjunction of white women and slaves in Northern reformist rhetoric (14–49). Unsympathetic invocations of the slave’s body are also noted by David Roediger in protests against “white slavery” (68). Proslavery thinkers also linked women and slaves, though their intentions were markedly different from those of women novelists: men like George Fitzhugh deployed women’s subjection in the patriarchal order as an argument for the naturalness of subordination. See McCurry 1251–52.

5. See most notably Tompkins and Baym, *Woman’s Fiction*.

6. Nina Baym discusses the wide readership of Southern antebellum women’s novels (*Feminism* 188). See also Moss and James D. Hart, who reports that Hentz’s “various novels sold 93,000 copies in three years” (97).

7. Balibar has used the idea of “class racism” to discuss “caste closure” (204–16). Roediger discusses “the impossibility of avoiding race in constructing a class identity” (55), and Eric Lott examines how “popular racism aid[ed] the formation of the white working class” (156). See also Hall et al. 333–95.

8. I identify these plots of wives’ and daughters’ resistance to husbands and fathers as “feminist” with some reservation. Not only do the heroines of plantation romances practice a “feminism” that excludes black and lower-class white women, but, as I will argue, their protest works to reconfirm patriarchal privilege.

9. In the preface to the second edition of *Woman’s Fiction*, Baym recognizes how the constraints of racial ideology pervade antebellum women’s writing (xxxii). See also Catherine Clinton, whose analysis of the mistress’s subjugation within Southern patriarchy never forgets the very different enslavement of white women and blacks.

10. My thinking on the contingency of gender has been informed by several critics. As Rey Chow writes, “‘gender’ is not only ‘gender’” but is a subject position produced by class as well as race (114). See also Dimock 76, Bhabha 219, and Lang 130.

11. Although Grossberg writes that adoption “was the greatest extension of republican family law’s antipatriarchalism and child-nurture policies since it assumed that parental authority could be irrevocably transferred,” it is important to note that in the institutional context of the South, this destabilization assumed a racial logic, allowing whites to intervene in the black family and extend white patriarchy (268). Of course, slaves were not legally adopted, but their legal sale suggests that authorized tampering with family structure did not always carry an antipatriarchal import. Moreover, as Clinton states, Southern adoption was a highly gendered transaction: “This ‘giving away’ of a child was restricted, however, to female offspring. A son was thought too valuable to part with under any circumstances” (53).

12. Though Marcus is at odds with this uncle, he nevertheless safeguards the discourse of white womanhood. He decides to make a name for himself by becoming a lawyer, and his first case is to avenge the rape and murder of a white woman at the hands of a black man. Marcus uses white womanhood to propel himself to fame even as he protects the purity of her body. Sanctified by this theme, he can ascend the class ladder without appearing to have selfish, money-grubbing motivations.

13. J. Wilson Harris (40–91) and Michael Wayne (840–41), in their respective examinations of the tensions between slaveholders and nonslaveholders, suggest the historical conditions that cause Eoline’s slave to mark a class position.

14. Although Clement Eaton asserts that “a virtual censorship of the mails crossing the Mason and Dixon line was established after 1835,” he does note instances of antislavery sympathizers who circulated abolitionist material in the South (197, 140–41). Drew Gilpin Faust (78) and Baym (*Feminism* 184) stress the nonsectional character of the proslavery argument. Hentz’s work demonstrates the extensive transectional appeal of proslavery fiction. Her substantial readership, both North and South, made volumes like *The Planter’s Northern Bride*, according to the introduction of the 1970 reprint edition, an “overnight” success (vii). Her novels sold into “the hundreds of thousands” (Gaines 51). Announcements from a Philadelphia publisher found “Mrs. Hentz’s Works” listed alongside those of Dickens and Dumas. According to fly-leaf advertisements that followed many of Hentz’s novels printed by T. B. Peterson of Philadelphia, Dickens and Hentz exercised the same popular appeal of democratic distribution: each writer’s works, “printed for the ‘Million,’ at very cheap rates,” seemed to transcend divisions of class or region, and would be sent “to any person.” Some of her most complimentary reviews appeared in Northern newspapers: the fly-leaf reports that the New York *Mirror* welcomed her work with “the strongest words of praise that our vocabulary affords.”

15. While the Northeast dominated book distribution, it did not advance exclusively anti-Southern themes and ideas. Although Ronald J. Zboray argues that publishing houses of the Northeast “could afford to ignore the South altogether,” indicating that “‘American’ literature could get along very well without the South,” the production and circulation of apologist fiction by publishers such as T. B. Peterson and Charles Scribner suggest a very different story: Northern publishers consented to Southern plots, making slavery and its ideology national to a certain extent (192). Moss discusses the popularity of the plantation romance in the North (11).

16. On the idea of national allegory see Jameson.

17. Hortense Spillers also uses Foucault's notion of interaction between discourses to discuss the intertextuality of African-American and white texts (31-32).

Works Cited

- Andrews, William L. "The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative." *PMLA* 105 (January 1990): 23-34.
- Balibar, Étienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Trans. Chris Turner. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Baym, Nina. *Feminism and American Literary History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.
- . *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70*. 2nd. ed. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Cartwright, S. A. *Slavery in the Light of Ethnology. Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*. 1860. Ed. E. N. Elliot. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968.
- Castronovo, Russ. "Compromised Narratives along the Border: The Mason-Dixon Line, Resistance, and Hegemony." *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. Ed. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 195-220.
- Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Clinton, Catherine. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon, 1982.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. "Class, Gender, and a History of Metonymy." *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*. Ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Dupuy, Eliza Ann. *The Planter's Daughter: A Tale of Louisiana*. Philadelphia: Peterson, 1858.
- Eastman, Mary Henderson. *Aunt Phillis's Cabin, or, Southern Life as It Is*. 1852. New York: Negro Universities, 1968.
- Eaton, Clement. *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*. New York: Harper, 1964.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. "A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument." *American Quarterly* 31 (1979): 63-80.
- Flanders, G. M. *The Ebony Idol*. New York: Appleton, 1860.
- Foster, Frances Smith. "Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents* and the 'Careless Daughters' (and Sons) Who Read It." *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*. Ed. Joyce W. Warren. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993. 92-107.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper, 1972.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.

- Gaines, Francis Pendleton. *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of Tradition*. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1952.
- Genovese, Eugene D. "Toward a Kinder and Gentler America: The Southern Lady in the Greening of the Politics of the Old South." In *Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830–1900*. Ed. Carol Blesser. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Gilman, Caroline Howard. *Recollections of a Southern Matron and a New England Bride*. 1853. Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1859.
- Gossett, Thomas F. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1985.
- Grossberg, Michael. *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985.
- Hall, Stuart, et al. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes, 1978.
- Hammond, J. H. *Slavery in the Light of Political Science. Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*. Ed. E. N. Elliot. 1860. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968.
- Harland, Marion. [Mary Virginia Terhune]. *Miriam*. 1862. New York: Sheldon, 1866.
- . *Moss-Side*. New York: Derby and Jackson, 1857.
- Harris, J. Wilson. *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1985.
- Hart, James D. *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste*. New York: Oxford UP, 1950.
- Hentz, Caroline Lee Whiting. *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*. 1852. Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971.
- . *Linda; or, The Young Pilot of the Belle Creole*. 1848. New York, 1881.
- . *Marcus Warland; or, The Long Moss Spring: A Tale of the South*. Philadelphia: Peterson, 1852.
- . *The Planter's Northern Bride*. 1854. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1970.
- Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. 1861. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88.
- Karcher, Carolyn L. "Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic*: An Abolitionist's Vision of America's Racial Destiny." *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. Ed. Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersad. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. 81–103.
- Lang, Amy Schrager. "Class and the Strategies of Sympathy." *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*. Ed. Shirley Samuels. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- McCurry, Stephanie. "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina." *Journal of American History* 78 (1992): 1245–64.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

- Moss, Elizabeth. *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Pollard, Edward A. *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*. 1859. New York: Negro Universities, 1969.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Rush, Caroline E. *The North and South; or, Slavery and Its Contrasts*. 1852. New York: Negro Universities, 1968.
- Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Shillingsburg, Miriam J. "The Ascent of Woman, Southern Style: Hentz, King, Chopin." *Southern Literature in Transition: Heritage and Promise*. Ed. Phillip Castille and William Osborne. Memphis: Memphis State UP, 1983.
- Smith, Valerie. Introduction. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. xxvii–xl.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Changing the Letter: The Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Reed." *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. Ed. Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. 25–61.
- Tandy, Jeanette Reid. "Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 21 (1922): 41–50, 170–78.
- Taylor, William. *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*. New York: Braziller, 1961.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Wayne, Michael. "An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of Proslavery Ideology." *Journal of American History* 77 (1990): 838–63.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151–74.
- West, Cornel. "Race and Social Theory: Towards a Genealogical Materialist Analysis." *The Year Left 2: An American Socialist Yearbook*. Ed. Mike Davis, Manning Marable, Fred Pfeil, and Michael Sprinkler. London: Verso, 1987.
- Wimsatt, Mary Ann. "Caroline Lee Hentz's Balancing Act." *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*. Ed. Carol S. Manning. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993. 161–75.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "Proslavery and Antislavery Intellectuals: Class Concepts and Polemical Struggle." *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*. Ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. 308–36.
- Zboray, Ronald J. "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation." *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 1 of 2 -



You have printed the following article:

Incidents in the Life of a White Woman: Economies of Race and Gender in the Antebellum Nation

Russ Castronovo

American Literary History, Vol. 10, No. 2. (Summer, 1998), pp. 239-265.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0896-7148%28199822%2910%3A2%3C239%3AITLOA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

This article references the following linked citations. If you are trying to access articles from an off-campus location, you may be required to first logon via your library web site to access JSTOR. Please visit your library's website or contact a librarian to learn about options for remote access to JSTOR.

Notes

⁴ **The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina**

Stephanie McCurry

The Journal of American History, Vol. 78, No. 4. (Mar., 1992), pp. 1245-1264.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199203%2978%3A4%3C1245%3ATTFORG%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Works Cited

The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative

William L. Andrews

PMLA, Vol. 105, No. 1, Special Topic: African and African American Literature. (Jan., 1990), pp. 23-34.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129%28199001%29105%3A1%3C23%3ATNOVIE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7>

A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument

Drew Gilpin Faust

American Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 1. (Spring, 1979), pp. 63-80.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0678%28197921%2931%3A1%3C63%3AASSTIA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>

NOTE: *The reference numbering from the original has been maintained in this citation list.*

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 2 of 2 -



Works Cited

Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism

Fredric Jameson

Social Text, No. 15. (Autumn, 1986), pp. 65-88.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0164-2472%28198623%290%3A15%3C65%3ATLITEO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>

The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina

Stephanie McCurry

The Journal of American History, Vol. 78, No. 4. (Mar., 1992), pp. 1245-1264.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199203%2978%3A4%3C1245%3ATTFORG%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>

Works Cited

An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of the Proslavery Ideology

Michael Wayne

The Journal of American History, Vol. 77, No. 3. (Dec., 1990), pp. 838-863.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199012%2977%3A3%3C838%3AAOSMPR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>

The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860

Barbara Welter

American Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1. (Summer, 1966), pp. 151-174.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0678%28196622%2918%3A2%3C151%3ATCOTW1%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>