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“BID US RISE FROM SLAVERY AND LIVE”: ANTISLAVERY POETRY AND THE
SHARED LANGUAGE OF TRANSATLANTIC ABOLITION, 1770S-1830S

by

KATHLEEN CAMPBELL

Under the Direction of Robert Baker, PhD

ABSTRACT

The following analysis of antislavery poetry evidences the shared language of abolition that incorporated the societal dynamics of law, gender, and race through shared themes of family, the assumed expectation of freedom, and legal references. This thesis focuses upon four women antislavery poets and analyzes their poems and their individual experiences with their sociohistorical contexts. The poems of Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten show this shared transatlantic language of abolition.

INDEX WORDS: antislavery poetry, abolition, transatlantic, gender, modern slavery

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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2015

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my amazing family for encouraging me in every moment in my life and in this process and for showing me how to walk with an authentic faith.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The established (and protected) position of slavery within the Atlantic World required a variegated attack from those who viewed freedom and personhood of greater value and importance than property. Abolitionists aimed to reveal the inherent moral wrong of slavery through literature, legislation efforts, and freedom suits. Covering this broad range of strategy was a shared network of antislavery language that bolstered and connected abolitionists of diverse backgrounds and sociohistorical contexts. Antislavery poets incorporated this language into emotional verse in order to convince readers of the immorality of slavery through a particular set of themes. The separation of the family through the slave trade and enslavement process featured prominently in antislavery poetry and connected to understandings of the importance of family within natural law. Within this theme, gendered representations of the patriarchal family reflect the current of conservatism particularly within the late eighteenth century abolition movement. Another shared theme was the antislavery poet's assumption that every enslaved individual hoped for freedom. This theme similarly played out in certain freedom suits initiated by antislavery leaders or organizations, particularly the 1836 case of *Commonwealth v. Aves* in Massachusetts. A third theme is the use of legal references to courtroom style questioning or trial references to highlight the legal, criminal wrong of slavery.

To what extent did antislavery poetry connect to a shared abolitionist language? How antislavery literature intersected with the law? In order to answer these questions I have chosen four women poets that illustrate the scope of this shared language. Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten created antislavery poetry across social, geopolitical, and temporal boundaries that convey the use of these themes and the shared language of abolition. Their poetry interacted with their individual, sociohistorical contexts through gender, class, race,

and the law. Their poetry and experiences represent the body of antislavery literature as well as the diverse interactions between abolitionists and society. I argue that antislavery poetry, exemplified in works of these four poets, offers a unique and integrated perspective of late eighteenth to mid nineteenth, transatlantic abolitionism.

1.1 Historiography

Scholarship of the British and American abolition movements has ranged with incredible breadth from themes of politics, diplomatic effects, social conservatism, religion, to economic impact of abolition. While there has been a growth in recent scholarship upon antislavery poetry, analysis largely comes from literary scholars rather than historians of abolition. The connection between the role that women played in the transatlantic abolition movement has been analyzed by historians, particularly through the important scholarship of Vron Ware in *Beyond the Pale*, yet the significance of their antislavery poetry has been much less explored.¹ Seymour Drescher provided a comprehensive and important analysis of transatlantic abolition in *Abolition* that extends beyond the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. However, there is only a passing reference to Phillis Wheatley's poetry, and he gives no mention of Ann Yearsley, Hannah More, or Sarah Forten.² He does allude to the contributions of female poets amidst the British movement against the slave trade, but does not specify a particular poet.³ Due to his greater attention to the political implications of British abolitionism, many of his primary sources consist of political speeches, legislation, parliamentary minutes, letters between leaders, and opinion pieces from newspapers and magazines. Antislavery poetry is significantly missing from this list of sources.

¹ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), 50.

² Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 218

³ Drescher, *Abolition*, 217

Similarly, David Brion Davis, who greatly expanded the historiography of slavery, briefly mentions Hannah More in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Democracy* but not in reference to her poetry.⁴ In *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolutions* he highlights the ideological interactions between revolutionary ideals and issues surrounding slavery and emancipation. He focuses upon the United States and other British colonies in the Americas but demonstrates the interconnectedness of the Atlantic World in showing the international, political effects of the abolition of the slave trade. This political focus not only largely ignores antislavery poetry (particularly from Ann Yearsley), but also lacks significant discussion of the role of women in abolitionism. In his later work, *Inhuman Bondage*, Davis asserts that racism and Atlantic slavery reinforced one another and developed simultaneously, and that the enslavement of people from various places in Africa “became an intrinsic and indispensable part” of the Atlantic World.⁵ In this work, he reinvigorated the historiography of slavery in interacting with the issue of historical memory, which has important implications for understanding modern slavery in light of historical perception. Contributing to this issue of memory is the exclusion of antislavery poetry and characteristic themes that poets employed from the scholarship of abolitionism. These brilliant, and comprehensive, works on abolitionism from Drescher and Davis have informed the historiography of abolition and slavery. However, the lack of consideration of antislavery poetry (particularly from the poets whom I have studied) as a part of the language of abolition reveals the gap in which I place this thesis.

Patricia Demers and Anne Stott have contributed important works in biographical accounts of Hannah More. Their extensive research in her correspondence, literature, social

⁴ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 246, 248, 358, 572.

⁵ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102.

world, and relationship with Ann Yearsley has enriched historiography of eighteenth century British literature. Both also aimed to present More in a more complete light in contrast to somewhat disparaging analysis from some feminist historians.⁶ While these scholars include some discussion of *Slavery: A Poem* (More's antislavery poem that I will analyze) as a part of her literary endeavors and connection to the abolitionist movement (particularly through her friendship with William Wilberforce), they do not explore her inclusion of the family as a theme.⁷ Drawing upon the work of Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, who outlines the commitment to patriarchal family structure in More's literary career, I have adapted this analysis to *Slavery*. Kowaleski-Wallace used a later antislavery poem from More not as an example of the separated family but to illustrate the ideal of patriarchy against "female otherness," which I find far too severe of a critique.⁸ It is not a degraded, 'othered' state to which More places women within a conservative structure (surely her extensive career in writing illustrates her belief in the authenticity of female voice), rather her adherence to a father-mother family model (supported by natural law) places her within her particular sociohistorical context.

In contrast to a number of biographical accounts of Hannah More, there are few for Ann Yearsley. Kerri Andrews has broken the historical silence in the past few years with more detailed analysis not only of Yearsley's break with her former patron, Hannah More, but also of her poetry both under More's patronage and afterwards.⁹ Her work has provided an important contribution to scholarship of women authors and has benefitted this study. However, within

⁶ Patricia Demers, Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), Preface, 4 and Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), ix-x

⁷ Demers, *World of Hannah*, 57-60 and Anne Stott, *Hannah More*, 92-95

⁸ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34-35

⁹ Kerri Andrews, "'More's Polish'd Muse, or Yearsley's Muse of Fire': Bitter Enemies Write the Abolition Movement," *European Romantic Review* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 21-36 and "Ann Yearsley and the London Newspapers," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34 no. 1 (Spring 2015):107-124.

analysis of her poetry, there is an absence of connection to her historical context with regards to theories of natural law of family. Her use of gender, similar to analysis of More's use of gender, features prominently in the analysis of literary scholars, yet her use of legal references is also missing from historiography. While I do not aim to provide a biography of Yearsley or More, I do aim to add to analysis of Yearsley's *Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* the connections to legal references as well as her use of the separation of the family to illustrate her place within the language of abolition.

Phillis Wheatley, for all of her fame in her own context and in legacy, rarely appears in abolitionist historiography perhaps due to her unique situation as an enslaved author writing about freedom and slavery. In 2011, Vincent Carretta published his work, *Phillis Wheatley*, thereby contributing "the first full-length biography of her."¹⁰ His work is highly significant to scholarship of Wheatley, and I have used it as an important secondary from which to broaden Wheatley's connection to other antislavery poets.

Sarah Forten has been much less studied than the other three poets. However, Julie Winch has brought significant attention to her poetry within her biography of James Forten, Sarah Forten's father.¹¹ Her analysis of some of Forten's poems have contributed important interpretations to antislavery poetry as well as her discussion of Forten's interaction with abolitionists in America through her father.¹² However, my analysis provides more discussion of her use of the slave family as a structural theme that connects with a broader language of abolition. Indeed, my thesis uniquely places these four poets together in order to display a

¹⁰ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens, GA: the University of Georgia Press, 2011), ix.

¹¹ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 264-271.

¹² Julie Winch, "Sarah Forten's Anti-Slavery Networks," in *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Loc. 2260 and Loc. 2277 of 5644. Kindle edition.

transatlantic, shared language of abolition across sociohistorical contexts. Analyzing their poetry separately and in comparison with one another adds to the historiography of abolition not only in using antislavery poetry as the base of research, but also in the interaction with legal arguments against slavery. I seek to fill these historiographical gaps of antislavery poetry, particularly poems written by women, because this medium intersects with broader ideas of family, legal understandings of freedom, race, and gender.

1.2 Methodology

The primary source foundation for this thesis rests upon the antislavery poems from Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten. I have supplemented this source base with letters (from Hannah More's correspondence), newspaper articles, and literature produced by antislavery organizations in order to more fully understand the ideological and historical influences and settings for these poems. Analyzing poetry requires not only a discussion of the individual poem, but also its place within literary history and social context. Brycchan Carey describes how poets of "sensibility" held a "belief in the power of sympathy to raise awareness of suffering" and a goal to convince the audience that it was of utmost importance to alleviate that suffering.¹³ The poems from More, Yearsley, and Wheatley used in this thesis were published by commercial printers (More's poem cost half a crown); while Forten's poems were published predominantly in *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's antislavery newspaper, and written under a pseudonym, which allowed her to perhaps more boldly capture the evil of slavery.¹⁴ For More (commissioned by an antislavery organization) and Forten (writing for a specific antislavery newspaper) in particular their audiences were most

¹³ Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.

¹⁴ Stott, *Hannah More*, 92 and Winch, "Anti-Slavery Networks," Loc. 2285 of 5644.

likely sympathetic to the cause.¹⁵ A comparative approach to these poets not only illuminates their shared language but also indicates how they contributed to the body of antislavery literature. The fact that these poems were published and produced for a specific cause reveals the political nature of these works.

Thomas Menely outlines the structuring of British antislavery poetry in the late 1780s for political purposes. His assessment of Hannah More's *Slavery: A Poem* and Ann Yearsley's *The Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* focuses on the implications of sympathetic appeal in antislavery poetry and its attempts to "extend collective identification."¹⁶ He also outlines the temporal elements of antislavery poems that begin with the present wrong of slavery and end with a hopeful future of abolition.¹⁷ While he confines his analysis to British poems in the late 1780s, his descriptions of the performative nature and the formulaic framework of antislavery poetry apply to other moments in abolitionist poetry. His approach to ways in which this type of poetry aimed to create a sense of distanced identification with the enslaved and to "instigate political-judicial change" has informed my approach.

Antislavery organizations often commissioned poets in order to broaden public awareness, such as Hannah More's poem, *Slavery*.¹⁸ Regardless of specific commissioning, antislavery poets published these poems in support of the cause of abolition and have an inherent political purpose. The particular antislavery organizations that I have selected are the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (the first antislavery organization and organized amidst the discourse of the Revolution) and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (Sarah Forten

¹⁵ Brycchan Carey, "The Poetics of Radical Abolitionism: Ann Yearsley's Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34 no. 1 (Spring 2015): 90.

¹⁶ Thomas Menely, "Acts of Sympathy: Abolitionist Poetry and Transatlantic Identification," in *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770-1830*, ed. Stephen Ahern (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), 46.

¹⁷ Menely, "Acts of Sympathy," 60.

¹⁸ Moira Ferguson, "British Women Writers and an Emerging Abolitionist Discourse," *The Eighteenth Century* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 3-5.

was a founding member of this society), which was a female branch of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS).¹⁹ The AASS expressed intention to “awaken public sentiment” through “appeals to consciences,” as proposed in their founding constitution.²⁰ These societies have a rich base of literature and source material that facilitate analysis. I have chosen these societies in order to draw connections between the language of antislavery poetry and other forms of antislavery literature and strategy. While narrowing the scope to specific poets and societies obviously excludes others from my research, the smaller platform creates a space in which to discuss the sources with greater attention and detail.

The shared language of abolition extended beyond poems and publications from abolitionist societies into a broad literature that extended into legislation and freedom suits. Freedom suits provided transatlantic antislavery campaigns with an identifiable victory of individual emancipation thus incorporating freedom suits into the language and literature.²¹ As I seek to illustrate the connection between antislavery poetry and the law, I have also included analysis of emancipation legislation, legal texts on slavery and natural law, as well as the freedom suits *Somerset v. Stewart* and *Commonwealth v. Aves*. Jeannine DeLombard presented an important framework of legal culture through which to understand abolitionist literature in antebellum America. Adopting a cultural legal studies approach, she outlined in *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* how the “trial trope” and a culture of “legal spectatorship” of Jacksonian America (which can similarly be applied to the context for

¹⁹ Emily Hatcher, “The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Civil War,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, no. 4 (October 2011): 528-530.

²⁰ The American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society: With the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention at Philadelphia, December, 1833* (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 2.

²¹ Edlie L. Wong, “‘Freedom with a Vengeance’: Choosing Kin in Antislavery Literature and Law,” *American Literature* 81, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 8.

Wheatley, More, and Yearsley) greatly influenced abolitionist literature.²² A key element to her argument is how abolitionists in the late 1830s began to expressly decry slavery as a “crime,” thereby shifting the language from a more theoretical argument (in reference to natural law and morality) to a criminal argument.²³ DeLombard also analyzes the shift in slave narratives to include the rhetoric of the “adversarial criminal trial” to imagine the enslaved narrator as the witness to the crimes of the “defendant” or master.²⁴ Although the literature that she analyzes is outside the temporal scope of this thesis, her approach to the intersection of law and literature has influenced the analytical framework in order to highlight the legal references in antislavery poetry.

Andrea McArdle’s approach also draws upon the legal culture in antebellum America in describing antebellum black literature in Boston. She similarly links literature and the law through the use of lawyerly rhetoric that advanced “political and civil rights” through petitions, sermons, former slave narratives, and other published works.²⁵ The interaction between law and literature upholds the validity of the methodological framework exploring the links between antislavery poetry, legislation, and freedom suits. Reading legislation of emancipation recalls much of the rhetoric abolitionists employed both in poetry and society constitutions. For instance, the preamble 1780 Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Act draws heavily upon revolutionary rhetoric to question the contradiction of fighting for political freedom while continuing to enslave individuals based upon race.²⁶

²² Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16 and 19.

²³ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 12-15.

²⁴ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 1-2

²⁵ Andrea McArdle, “The Confluence of Law and Antebellum Black Literature: Lawyerly Discourse as a Rhetoric of Empowerment,” *Law and Literature* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 2005): 183.

²⁶ Pennsylvania, “Section 1”, *An Act for the Gradual Emancipation of Slavery* (March 1, 1780). http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pennst01.asp Accessed July 3, 2015.

Utilizing an Atlantic history approach creates a space for this thesis to portray a transatlantic interaction of abolitionism through poetic verse, organization, and the law. Jack Greene and Philip Morgan explain Atlantic history as “an analytic construct and an explicit category of historical analysis.”²⁷ This particular construction of analysis aids in noting the exchange and connections that I propose existed between the British and American antislavery movements. One of the objections that Greene and Morgan point out in regards to transatlantic approaches is the emphasis on “connections tied to the Atlantic” without acknowledging the immediate place area of an event or experience.²⁸ I avoid this objection by analyzing each poet within her social and geographical location to better compare the diversity of experience in relation to class, race, and place. For instance, Sarah Forten’s experience as a free African-American woman in the deeply prejudiced city of Philadelphia informs the language of her poetry in such a unique way that cannot be applied to the experiences of Yearsley and More (who were white women in Britain) nor to Phillis Wheatley (an enslaved woman in revolutionary Boston).²⁹ The diversity in this group represents the broader diversity of abolitionists within a transatlantic scope. Overall, there is a profound interconnectedness in the transatlantic antislavery movements that reveals diversity of participants. The interconnections of Atlantic history also appear in the interactions between society and the production of antislavery language. Allison Games questioned the link between Atlantic history and interdisciplinary methods (particularly literary scholarship) in a 2008 article in *Early American Literature*. She raised concerns that literary approaches limit historical analysis (particularly to literate portions

²⁷ Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene, editors, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2009), 3.

²⁸ Morgan and Greene, *Atlantic History*, 6

²⁹ Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 223.

of the population).³⁰ Although I incorporate a literary analysis in order to see the common themes in the poems, I have placed these poems within a historical context. The focus of my analysis is the shared language of antislavery literature and then how it reflects the cultural connections and productions in Atlantic history.³¹

1.3 Organization

The chapters for this thesis will reflect the connections through language across the geographical and chronological scope of my research. The first chapter will consist of two sections in order to compare Hannah More's poem, *Slavery, A Poem*, and Ann Yearsley's poem, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade*, as well as to discuss their difference in class through their patronage relationship. I present the interaction between the rhetoric of family in antislavery poetry with the ideology of family in natural law based upon Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication in the Rights of Women* and the interpretation of Enlightenment thought by John Witte Jr.³² The first section will analyze the language and historical context of *Slavery, A Poem*, and will discuss Hannah More and her place within the British conservative antislavery movement. The second section will center upon *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* since it followed More's poem and provides for a discussion of the broken patronage relationship between More and Yearsley.

Chapter two will shift to Phillis Wheatley and the beginnings of the American antislavery movement within the context of revolutionary discourse (Wheatley's poem, *To The Right*

³⁰ Alison Games, "Atlantic History and Interdisciplinary Approaches," *Early American Literature* 43, no. 1 (2008): 189.

³¹ Games, "Atlantic History," 187.

³² John Witte, Jr., "The Nature of Family, the Family of Nature: The Surprising Liberal Defense of the Traditional Family in the Enlightenment," *Emory Law Journal* 64, no.3 (2015): 596-597.

Honorable Earl of Dartmouth, was published in 1772).³³ It will combine and analyze the language of revolutionary rhetoric and its influence upon antislavery literature and legislation. Additionally, Wheatley's poem provides an appropriate background to move to a discussion of the 1780 Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Act and the early formation of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, which will be included within the chapter. This chapter will include a brief sketch of the legacy of *Somerset v. Stewart* and the interaction between the themes presented in Wheatley's poem and the legal texts of Granville Sharp and William Blackstone.

The third chapter will focus upon Sarah Forten's poetry and the rise of radical abolitionism in the 1830s in America. As a member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, I also discuss the founding and interracial character of this society to show Forten's role in abolition and the interaction between abolition and race. The themes of family and the assumed desire of freedom, presented in Forten's poetry, find a striking convergence in the freedom suit, *Commonwealth v. Aves* (1836) and close the analysis of the chapter. This chapter will serve as the closing chapter to the main focus of the paper; however, I will include an epilogue that investigates similar uses of language discussed in previous chapters that appear in the current abolition movement.

While the core and major focus of this thesis will concentrate on the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, I also seek to uncover the echoes of antislavery language in modern abolitionist literature and legislation. Modern abolitionist poetry, seen in two poems created for Love146 (an international antislavery organization formed in 2002 to combat exploitation and child trafficking), incorporates the themes outlined in the transatlantic movement of family,

³³ Anne K. Mellor, "The Female Poet and Poetess: Two Traditions of British Women's Poetry, 1780-1830," *Studies in Romanticism* (Summer 1997): 266-267 and Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 132.

gender, and the assumed expectation of freedom.³⁴ There has been recent scholarship regarding the use of slave narratives or survivor stories of human trafficking to understand the modern enslaved experience and to promote the cause of abolition. Kelli Lyon Johnson has contributed important analyses of the “new slave narrative,” that reference the theme of family from the transatlantic abolition movement, as a base from which to discuss the modern abolition movement.³⁵ Laura T. Murphy uses slave narratives collected from various NGOs, government initiatives, and researchers to illuminate the global and multifaceted range of modern slavery.³⁶ However, little to no connections have yet been made between abolitionist poetry of the Atlantic World and modern abolitionist poetry.

In contrast to the clear definition of Atlantic, race-based slavery, modern slavery (and its many forms) is far more difficult to legally define. All governments condemn the Atlantic definition of slavery, yet the various degrees of severity and form in forced, exploited labor complicate international (and domestic) legislation.³⁷ Language thus plays a highly significant role in the legal attack upon slavery today because it is so difficult to define. Jean Allain provides an excellent history of the development of the U.N.’s definition of slavery and human trafficking in the 2001 Palermo Protocol, which I have used to describe the language of this international agreement.³⁸ Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson provide an in-depth analysis of modern slavery that interacts with the legacy of the Atlantic system of slavery and abolition.

³⁴ Love146, “Mission & Vision,” <https://love146.org/mission-vision/> Accessed on June 28, 2015.

³⁵ Kelli Lyon Johnson, “The New Slave Narrative: Advocacy and Human Rights in Stories of Contemporary Slavery,” *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 2 (April 2013): 243.

³⁶ Laura T. Murphy, *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 1-2.

³⁷ Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 33 and 146.

³⁸ Jean Allain, “Trafficking and Human Exploitation in International Law, with Special Reference to Women and Children in Africa,” in *Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, ed. Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 145-148.

1.4 Terminology

I must also address a caveat in terminology when referencing women, men, and organizations working towards the end of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery itself. As David Brion Davis has proposed in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolutions*, there were different meanings to the terms “antislavery” and “abolition.”³⁹ Even search results will differ if you switch between these terms because of the variegated usage of them in the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries. Drawing on Davis’ term use, when appropriate, I will use the term by which individuals defined their work or organization. However, I have chosen for clarity’s sake to predominantly use “antislavery” in reference to poetry or poets and “abolitionist” in reference to individuals and societies, particularly when a source does not designate a specific term. Additionally, while many reference the current enslavement crisis as “human trafficking,” I will use “slavery” in reference to the whole crisis and experience, yet I will apply the term “human trafficking” to circumstances involving the actual trade or trafficking of individuals. In outlining these terms, I hope to clarify the remainder of this thesis as well as to purposefully address the current crisis as slavery and not an abstract idea of exploitation. This clarification also cements the link in legacy and language between these movements.

1.5 Conclusion

The cause of freedom persists, and informing perspective on the language and strategies, whether in literature or legal process, of abolitionism in the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries inspires and enhances modern abolitionism. Analyzing the shared network of language through antislavery poetry provides a lens through which to view social, legal, and historical interactions between abolitionists in the Atlantic World. The themes of family, assumed

³⁹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 21-22.

expectation and desire of freedom, and legal reference connect the poetry of Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten to the broader movement. I selected a line from Sarah Forten’s “The Slave Girl’s Address to Her Mother,” which appeared in *The Liberator* in 1831, as the title of this thesis because it captures the hope of abolitionism and exemplifies the goal of antislavery poetry to bring freedom (the assumed hope of every slave) to the enslaved individual and family and to end slavery.

2 “THEY STILL ARE MEN, AND MEN SHOU’D STILL BE FREE”

The power of poetry lies in its ability to encapsulate the language and context of the social, legal, and economic realms through stirring and bold language that can be memorable, inspiring, or haunting. For abolitionists seeking to fight slavery on a variety of fronts, poetry became a valuable avenue through which to illuminate the ways in which slavery affected multiple levels of society. Both Hannah More and Ann Yearsley incorporated the multifaceted wrongs of slavery in their respective antislavery poems, *Slavery: A Poem* and *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade*. These poems employed a shared antislavery language that incorporated conservative ideals of family, gender, and liberty. These ideals served to deepen the emotion in language and prove that slavery and the slave trade were unnatural and inhumane. More and Yearsley’s fractured patronage relationship reflects the interactions abolitionists navigated with class dynamics. Their popularity (and sometimes unpopularity) within the British literary world of the late eighteenth century allows for an analysis of the impact of their works upon the British movement to abolish the slave trade.⁴⁰

2.1 “Oppression’s fall’n, and Slavery is no more!”: Hannah More

She tears the banner stain’d with blood and tears,
And LIBERTY! Thy shining standard rears!

⁴⁰ Quote in Heading: Hannah More, *Slavery, A Poem* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1788) : Line 140. Accessed from www.brycchancarey.com/slavery/morepoems.

As the bright ensign's glory she displays,
 See pale OPPRESSION faints beneath the blaze!
 The giant dies! No more his frown appals,
 The chain untouch'd, drops off; the fetter falls.
 Astonish'd echo tells the vocal shore,
 Oppression's fall'n, and Slavery is no more!⁴¹

Slavery: A Poem ends with liberty gloriously triumphing over slavery. The forward-looking trust in the ultimate abolition of slavery conveys a sense that freedom must be natural and universal. To understand such a statement of trust and commitment to the cause, it is worth looking briefly into the experience of the poet herself. Hannah More has been treated with a variety of opinions from literature scholars and historians, beginning with the first biography of her life that William Roberts penned only a year after her death in 1834.⁴² Roberts revised and adapted certain letters, which, according to Anne Stott, began a trend of representation of More as strait-laced, which her goddaughter, Marianne Thornton a gross misrepresentation of “that *playful* woman.”⁴³ Additionally, her complicated (and eventually terminated) patronage of Ann Yearsley has led many historians to highlight her adherence to middle class values at the expense of Yearsley's rights and, to a broader extent, feminism. While it might be somewhat easy to classify More as a stuffy conservative or as haughty in her writing style, such classifications negate the reality that individuals embody unique layers of personality and belief that alter according to various influences. Much of the scholarship surrounding Hannah More has neglected to place her more fully within her historical environment. Much of the historiography trends towards a more literary analysis of her work and her social philanthropy towards the working class and the poor, yet often pays little attention to her role in the antislavery movement.

⁴¹ More, *Slavery*, Lines 283-290

⁴² Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), vii.

⁴³ Quoted in Stott, *Hannah More*, viii. – I have chosen to use some of the letters that Roberts included in his collection that do not reflect this misrepresentation. His bias against Ann Yearsley is evident and unnecessarily severe, yet the letters reproduced in his collection accurately convey Hannah More's response to their publicized fight.

Certainly her writing career featured conservative ideals that focused on morality and upheld standing social class hierarchies, yet her involvement in the British antislavery movement reveals her commitment to the British paradigm of freedom to all. Broad histories of abolition typically make only one or two references to her contributions, yet her personal connections to highly influential leaders in the movement, her commissioned antislavery poem, and her immense support of the movement indicates a much more involved position.⁴⁴ Many have discussed how female involvement in British abolitionism was limited and not clearly visible in its beginning organization in the late eighteenth century, yet More's public and influential position indicates that antislavery leaders were not dismissive of women's participation (at least in methods such as poetry and garnering support). In a letter to Mrs. Elizabeth Carter in 1787 amidst the movement to abolish the slave trade, she urged her to "be sure to canvass everybody who has a heart" to promote the cause. She also described to Mrs. Carter that the abolition of the slave trade was "the great object I have so much in heart [and that] it is the most interesting subject which was ever discussed in the annals of humanity."⁴⁵ Such impassioned descriptions of the cause undoubtedly point to commitment to and involvement in the movement.

She was a highly successful member of the bluestocking circle and her relationship with London actor David Garrick introduced her to highly influential men like Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson, and William Wilberforce.⁴⁶ The term "bluestocking" refers to a group of untitled women writers (also some men) who achieved significant popularity and success. Hannah More's inclusion in this group placed her in contact with important political leaders, yet

⁴⁴ Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 59-60.

⁴⁵ "From Miss H. More to Mrs. Carter," *Cowslip Green*, 1787, in William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More, vol. I* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), 266.

⁴⁶ Stott, *Hannah More*, 26-28 and "Adelphi Terrace," in *Survey of London: Volume 18, St Martin-in-The-Fields II: the Strand*, ed. G H Gater and E P Wheeler (London: London County Council, 1937) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol18/pt2/pp103-108> (accessed June 2, 2015): 103-108.

outside the political sphere as was fitting for such a conservative circle.⁴⁷ This was the paradoxical experience for British women in the middle and upper classes living in the nineteenth century. They could achieve connection and influence, but within the boundaries of gender and class. More's political commitments may have been progressive, but her social commitments were quite conservative, and she remained committed to "moral duty" within the established gender and class distinctions.⁴⁸ Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Frances Boscawen were "famous bluestocking hostesses" with whom More exchanged letters throughout her literary and later years thus revealing the level of community and ideals that they shared.⁴⁹ Harriet Guest, an important literary scholar, argues that the "cultural significance" that British literary circles attributed to these women was allowed because of "their reputation for conventional feminine skills," particularly in sentimental literature.⁵⁰ The feminine skills of sensibility and sentimentalism, both of which featured in antislavery poetry, found expression within Hannah More's antislavery poem, marking her place within the traditional literary culture.

Moral reform was a central focus in her Cheap Repository Tracts of 1795-1798, a collection of fictional tracts that were sold at low price to reach a wider audience and so spread reform ideals.⁵¹ More's works encouraged Christian, conservative morality and discouraged what she deemed destructive social practices (such as drunkenness, bad language, and idleness).⁵² These tracts were in reaction to the French Revolution, and More described in these works how social, moral reform would prevent the violent riots that were occurring in France from

⁴⁷ Harriet Guest, "Bluestocking Feminism," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65 no.1/2 (2002): 65-67.

⁴⁸ Karen Green, "A Moral Philosophy of Their Own? The Moral and Political Thought of Eighteenth-Century British Women," *The Monist* 98, no. 1 (January 2015): 97-98.

⁴⁹ Guest, "Bluestocking," 59-60 and Kathryn J. Ready, "Hannah More and the Bluestocking Salons: Commerce, Virtue, Sensibility, and Conversation," *The Age of Johnson* 15 (2004): 198.

⁵⁰ Guest, "Bluestocking," 61.

⁵¹ Stott, *Hannah More*, 170-175.

⁵² Kevin Gilmartin, "'Study to Be Quiet': Hannah More and the Invention of Conservative Culture in Britain," *ELH* 70, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 497-498.

happening in England.⁵³ John Newton wrote to More in 1798 that “religion [...] alone can save the state,” thereby resigning France to a “reproached and stigmatized” secularism.⁵⁴ More’s literary interactions with international issues like the French Revolution and slavery illustrates the ways in which antislavery authors referenced societal concerns from events within their writings. The subject matter of her literature reflected the more conservative politics of many bluestocking attendees, which reinforced separate sphere ideology.⁵⁵ However, her participation as a writer that crossed into political issues indicates that the gendered lines of conservatism could be blurred. More achieved high levels of influence and popularity in an environment that restricted the power of the female voice; however, her commitment to traditional reform and femininity separated her from radical feminists (like Mary Wollstonecraft). Instead, in the words of Anne Stott, she was “the first Victorian,” championing social morality, middle class domesticity, and evangelicalism.⁵⁶

Patricia Demers described her poems as “influenced by Augustan poetics and ethical considerations” that presented a course of morality for the reader complete with “a distinctive biblical consciousness.”⁵⁷ Augustan poetry sought to move the reader to adopt the argument through sympathy and heightened emotional language.⁵⁸ This coerciveness, an essential element in steering or altering public sentiment, characterized her poem on the slave trade, *Slavery, A Poem*, and similarly influenced other antislavery poems and literature. In this poem, commissioned by the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST), More directed her attack upon the slave trade and the unreasonable and immoral

⁵³ Gilmartin, “‘Study,’” 498-499.

⁵⁴ “From the Rev. J. Newton to Mrs. H. More,” in Roberts, *Memoirs*, vol. II, 26.

⁵⁵ Guest, “Bluestocking,” 63-64.

⁵⁶ Stott, *Hannah More*, xi.

⁵⁷ Demers, *The World of Hannah More*, 49.

⁵⁸ Russell Fraser, “What Is Augustan Poetry?” *The Sewanee Review* 98 no. 4 (Fall 1990): 620.

commodification of human beings.⁵⁹ Her poem covered many of the topics brought up in the slave trade debate and became formulaic for other poems, yet I will focus on the themes of family, freedom, and legal reference in the poem.⁶⁰

Slavery reached a wide audience, particularly in antislavery circles, and was reprinted indicating its popularity and influence.⁶¹ The language reaches deep emotional levels and recalls More's evangelical faith with Scripture references and elements of spiritual slavery, thus reinforcing More's evangelical pursuits.⁶² The opening page draws the reader's eyes to heaven and the source of freedom:

Thy light, O Liberty! to shine on all;
Bright intellectual Sun, why does thy ray [...] distribute only partial day?⁶³

The imagery of the sun bestowing liberty creates an intriguing metaphor. It makes freedom as natural as sunlight, the heavens (representing divine provision) its natural source, and the deprivation of it to any person unnatural. The natural want and expectation of freedom structured More's argument to establish the manifest wrong of slavery.

More illuminated her belief of how contradictory the enslavement of others was to reason, order, and law with language rife with indignation. She grounded the right to liberty for all upon the foundation of true reason underneath the banner of moral law.⁶⁴ To deny freedom to individuals because of their race is like denying them the light of the sun, leaving "Afric quenc'd in total night."⁶⁵ More admonished the reader to see slavery unnatural and impressed the necessity of seeing slaves as individuals with "heads to think, and hearts to feel, And souls to act,

⁵⁹ Brycchan Carey, "The Poetics of Radical Abolitionism: Ann Yearsley's Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 34 no. 1 (Spring 2015): 90.

⁶⁰ Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism*, 85.

⁶¹ Stott, *Hannah More*, 94-95.

⁶² Anne K. Mellor, "The Female Poet and the Poetess: Two Traditions of British Women's Poetry, 1780-1830," *Studies in Romanticism* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 266-267.

⁶³ More, *Slavery*, Lines 2-4.

⁶⁴ More, *Slavery*, 4.

⁶⁵ More, *Slavery*, 18.

with firm tho' erring zeal."⁶⁶ If Britain was "where the soul of freedom reigns," how could Parliament endorse the antithesis of freedom?⁶⁷ Therefore, the poem labels slavery as "the shame" of Britain for allowing the unnatural, and immoral system of slavery to continue.⁶⁸

This language of the unnatural and immoral shame of the slave trade upon Britain appeared in a letter that More received from James Stephen (a member of Parliament and an influential abolitionist lawyer) in 1807, twenty years after the first publication of *Slavery* thus showing the endurance of this language in antislavery discourse. Following the parliamentary abolition of the slave trade in 1807, James Stephen wrote to More in celebration of the event:

What a promise of happiness does it bear to millions, and hundreds of millions of our species! From what a load of *odious guilt and shame* does it deliver our country! [...] May God so influence the hearts of our new rulers, that the righteous principle of this measure may not be departed from, but followed up with those further efforts for the final deliverance of Africa on which the late ministry had resolved.⁶⁹

In the same way that More described the need to redeem Britain from moral shame, so Stephen also celebrated Britain's deliverance from the slave trade's "odious guilt." Even though these cases are between two personally connected individuals, it is certainly possible to use them as examples of commonality in language. The popularity of *Slavery* amongst influential antislavery leaders, such as John Newton who applauded both More's poetic verse and her commitment to writing for the cause with a "consecrated pen," substantiates the claim that it contributed significantly to the abolitionist lexicon.⁷⁰ Additionally, the great similarities between Stephen's letter and a number of others allow for the supposition that commonly used antislavery language existed and framed the public and private writings of abolitionists.

⁶⁶ More, *Slavery*, Lines 66-67.

⁶⁷ More, *Slavery*, Line 252.

⁶⁸ More, *Slavery*, 249.

⁶⁹ "From Mr. Stephen to Mrs. H. More" (April 7, 1807) in Roberts, *Memoirs*, 133 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁰ "From the Rev. John Newton to Miss H. More" (1787) in Roberts, *Memoirs*, 274.

In addition, the gendering of liberty as feminine does not necessarily implicate a stance on women's rights, but calls forth the place of a woman in representing it as a virtue of society. Kerri Andrews, a leading literary scholar of More and Yearsley, explains how feminine sensibility allowed women to be advocates of social reform (in this case abolitionism and freedom) and "guardians of morality."⁷¹ Although this reinforced gender rules and assumptions of women's role in society, the capacity for women to represent liberty through sentimental literature with the authority that "Liberty" holds in the poem.⁷² Not only did More feminize Liberty, she similarly presented "Muse" (or reason) and "Nature" in the feminine as an "outrag'd Goddess" who looks upon "MAN the traffic, SOULS the merchandize" in horror.⁷³ Rather than being actively involved in the situation, More granted these feminine personifications only the ability to be overcome with emotion and sympathetic identification with those trafficked into slavery. In maintaining such a conservative perspective of gender in this poem, Hannah More complicated the posturing of women's role in antislavery to uphold the established separate-sphere structuring of gender.⁷⁴ However, her own clear voice in the movement suggests how the British antislavery movement, led by many conservatives, negotiated the need for women's support while maintaining hesitance to challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

The theme of the slave family appears throughout the poem in order to strike a resonating emotional chord in a conservative society that highly esteemed the family as the source of affection and education in society. The ideal of the family remained an essential part of society, even for liberal thinkers in the Enlightenment, according to John Witte, Jr. Mary Wollstonecraft (whose support of the French Revolution was radically different from Hannah More), in

⁷¹ Kerri Andrews, "'More's Polish'd Muse, or Yearsley's Muse of Fire': Bitter Enemies Write the Abolition Movement," *European Romantic Review* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 23-24.

⁷² Mellor, "Female Poet," 267-268.

⁷³ More, *Slavery*, Lines 143-146.

⁷⁴ Stott, *Hannah More*, 36.

Vindication of the Rights of Woman, argued that the family was not something to be dismissed but reformed by placing men and women on equal educational standing.⁷⁵ The female character is described as the “agonizing wife” who is also a mother who must pass on the “sole sad heritage” of enslavement to her child.⁷⁶ More lamented the wrenching apart of families and kinship ties in telling the reader to “see the dire victim torn from social life.” In ensuring that this character was a “wife,” More carefully upheld ideals of domesticity to compound the wrongfulness or criminality of slavery as it would rend asunder that which held “social life” together: family.⁷⁷ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace outlines the influence of John Locke in placing the essential beginning and reinforcement of educational and political direction from the father and mother.⁷⁸

The family additionally represented the biblical structure of the church as the children of God; a metaphor that More utilized in her later work, *Strictures on a Modern System of Female Education*.⁷⁹ More’s committed evangelical faith would have made her familiar with these symbols and representations that established conservative societal ideals of the family. Breaking apart a family (what God had brought together) would then break down the foundations of society thereby compounding the wrong of slavery and slave trafficking.⁸⁰ The next stanza in

⁷⁵ John Witte, Jr., “The Nature of Family, the Family of Nature: The Surprising Liberal Defense of the Traditional Family in the Enlightenment,” *Emory Law Journal* vol. 64, no.3 (2015): 640 and Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (Philadelphia: 1794) In *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Georgia State University, <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=atla29738&tabID=T001&docId=CB3327323853&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE> (accessed June 17, 2015): 20 and 106.

⁷⁶ More, *Slavery*, Lines 100 and 104 (emphasis mine).

⁷⁷ More, *Slavery*, Line 99.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father’s Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 18-19.

⁷⁹ Ephesians 5:1 (King James Version) and Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father’s*, 60-61. There are also references in the Bible to the church or the city of Jerusalem as the bride of Christ as in Ephesians 5:24 (KJV) and Revelation 21:2 (KJV).

⁸⁰ Matthew 19:6 (King James Version) says, “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder,” thereby making separating slave families a moral wrong.

Slavery turns the attention back to the slave trader, who, even with a “ruthless hand,” still loves his children and “native land.”

Ev’ n you of ruffian heart, and ruthless hand,
 Love your own offspring, love your native land.
 Ah! leave them holy Freedom’s cheering smile,
 The *heav’n-taught* fondness for the parent soil [...]
 In every nature, every clime the same [...]
 In all the love of HOME and FREEDOM reign.⁸¹

Echoing natural law theory of family, particularly Lockean views of the marital contract, More granted the “HOME and FREEDOM” the same importance and that marriage (and liberty) was a natural right.⁸² The order of the stanzas fit the family within the love of the homeland and the love of freedom as these followed her descriptions of the “agonizing wife” separated from her husband and the security of home. These natural rights transcended national boundaries as they were “in *every nature, every clime the same.*”⁸³

Although she attributed natural rights (such as marriage and freedom) to all people, she did include racial distinctions between the British reader and the enslaved, African character. She differentiated Africans as “savage, ignorant, and blind,” thereby ensuring that identification with their suffering and plight would remain at a distance and with an awareness of the greater advantages awarded to British men and women in living in an environment steeped in moral Christianity and legal freedom. More countered the distinction in saying: “They still are men, and men shou’d still be free.”⁸⁴ She alluded to a unity of humankind in sharing personhood and the right to freedom yet distances herself, the narrator, and the British reader from the enslaved. She wrote with horror that slaves only “*stand convicted – of a darker skin!*”⁸⁵ In this way she

⁸¹ More, *Slavery*, Lines 113-116, 118, and 120 (emphasis mine).

⁸² Witte, “Nature of Family,” 638.

⁸³ More, *Slavery*, Line 118.

⁸⁴ More, *Slavery*, Lines 137 and 140.

⁸⁵ More, *Slavery*, Line 134. (emphasis mine)

applied a legal reference to highlight the absurdity of indicting someone simply because of her or his skin color. In the same way that the slave trader separating African families transgressed natural law, denying the inherent freedom of another was cause for trial.

The case of *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) secured international attention and validated a strategy for emancipation (at least individual emancipation) through the courts.⁸⁶ Newspapers across the Atlantic circulated the decision widely (although not always accurately – a newspaper in Boston claimed Mansfield’s decision had emancipated all slaves in England), thus adding to its fame and ensuring abolitionists’ continued use of the courts for freedom’s cause.⁸⁷ Lord Mansfield, in his opinion, applied a natural law argument to his reasoning for setting James Somerset free stating that: “The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political; but only positive law” could allow for it, which was not a part of British common law.⁸⁸ While this case focused on an instance of unlawful enslavement (more closely, an unlawful removal from England), Mansfield’s use of natural law suggested that personal liberty was a valued, inherent right and an infringement upon that right without cause (such as mere racial difference) was worthy of indictment and conviction. More’s representations offer a perspective of abolitionism that struggled with ideas of conservatism, difference, and freedom.

The struggle to achieve these goals required dutiful and reasonable action, such as British petition drives on behalf of the abolition of the slave trade.⁸⁹ Abolitionists utilized poetry and other literary forms to promote the abolitionist cause such as Mary Birkett’s *A Poem on the*

⁸⁶ Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4 and 9, and Patricia Bradley, “Slavery in Colonial Newspapers: The Somerset Case,” *Journalism History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-6.

⁸⁷ Jerome Nadelhaft, “The Somersett Case and Slavery: Myth, Reality, and Repercussions,” *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 3 (July 1, 1966): 194.

⁸⁸ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510

⁸⁹ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 72.

African Slave Trade (published in 1792) in addition to More's *Slavery* to boost support for these petition drives.⁹⁰ More's poem (which focused upon the slave trade) preceded campaigns for immediate emancipation in the 1820s, yet the forward-looking close of the poem in a sense embodied a shift towards full emancipation. While More may not have pictured immediate emancipation, she certainly expressed hope for a final victory of universal emancipation. She infused a stirring and rich affect into the conclusion of "Slavery" with hope in reason to bring about the termination of slavery:

She tears the banner stain'd with blood and tears,
And LIBERTY! Thy shining standard rears!
As the bright ensign's glory she displays,
See pale OPPRESSION faints beneath the blaze!
The giant dies! No more his frown appals,
The chain untouch'd, drops off; the fetter falls.
Astonish'd echo tells the vocal shore,
Oppression's fall'n, and Slavery is no more!⁹¹

More attached such powerful language to this final triumph over the giant of slavery, the hallmark of oppression.

As the narrator, More directed the reader's gaze, in authentic hope, to the day when slavery would be defeated and freedom would no longer partially enjoyed but globally realized. Antislavery poems, as seen with *Slavery*, ended with deep emotional hope that abolition was the natural direction and inevitable outcome.⁹² The "astonish'd echo" carrying the voice of freedom across the shore presupposes the complete abolition of slavery and the slave trade not just in the British empire, but throughout the transatlantic world. The fascinating setting in which this poem entered antislavery literature reveals the echoes of ideology, belief, and reform reverberating across physical and cultural boundaries.

⁹⁰ Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), 51.

⁹¹ More, *Slavery*, Lines 283-290.

⁹² Menely, "Acts of Sympathy," 57.

The commodification of enslaved individuals structured the dominant attack from both Hannah More and Ann Yearsley. The reduction of an individual's personhood to a price or a commodity to be sold outside his or her will conflicted deeply with understandings of freedom that valued personhood regardless of skin color as More described.⁹³ More blamed "wealth insatiate" and the "sordid lust of gold" as the controlling factors in slave trading.⁹⁴ Similarly, Yearsley attacked the "Christian" who eyes fill with "horrid joy [...] while he grasps the wish'd-for gold, purchase of human blood!"⁹⁵ Both poets attributed the cause and problem of the slave trade to inhumane and unfeeling economic purpose. According to David Eltis, the 1780s was the "peak export decade" of West African slaves to the Americas, thus an emphasis on the pursuit of fortune through the slave trade certainly makes sense as there would have been visible evidence to this for British readers.⁹⁶ Yet the attacks from More and Yearsley focus upon avarice that blinds the individual to the depravity of human commodification. There is the potential of anachronism if one reads these poems as early forms of anti-capitalism, so it is important to note that these poems do not abhor the economic system itself but rather the reduction of personhood to a mere price. Instead of attacking ideals of the free market, unchecked greed constituted the

⁹³ More, *Slavery*, Line 140.

⁹⁴ More, *Slavery*, Lines 233 and 127.

⁹⁵ Ann Yearsley, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade. Humbly inscribed to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend Frederick, Earl of Bristol, Bishop of Derry by Ann Yearsley* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row, 1788). In University of London's Goldsmith's Library, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Georgia State University
http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ecco/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=Author&tabID=T001&pr odId=ECCO&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=5& qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28A0%2CNone%2C12%29ann+yearsley%3AAnd%3ALQE %3D%28BA%2CNone%2C124%292NEF+Or+0LRH+Or+2NEK+Or+0LRL+Or+2NEI+Or+0LRI+Or+2NEJ+Or+ 0LRK+Or+2NEG+Or+0LRF+Or+2NEH+Or+0LRJ+Or+2NEM+Or+0LRN+Or+2NEL+Or+0LRM%24&retrieveFo rmat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=ECCOArticles&&docId =CB3326419074&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=CB332641907 4&relevancePageBatch=CB126419072&showLOI=&contentSet=&callistoContentSet=ECLL&docPage=article&hil ite=y (9 August 2014): 6-7.

⁹⁶ David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 14 and 34-35.

locus of shame in “a ruthlessly efficient commodity system.”⁹⁷ Rather than the evils of capitalism determining the expansion and continuation of the slave trade, the language of antislavery poems carried an indictment of individuals who engaged in the trade of human beings. The legal tension between person and property was intricately entwined with the economic realities of the slave system, as it was necessary for the law to allow commodification to occur. The relationship between economics, law, and identity constituted significant elements in antislavery literature, as evidenced in antislavery poetry.

More’s conservative philosophy allowed for a political voice for the abolition movement without dislodging social conceptions of gender and class. The Abolition Committee commissioned More (as an influential yet conservative choice) to write the poem to direct the “collective sentiment.”⁹⁸ Her status in the upper middle class in Britain certainly influenced her conservative, moralistic writing as well as directing her antislavery poetry. The separation between the reader and the slave of the poem allowed the poet to distance herself from the reader so that she could point out the reader’s flawed understanding of freedom.⁹⁹ In so doing, the poet would have an air of superiority over the reader, reflecting the hierarchy of social classes. In addition, her religious faith provides explanation into the way in which conservative, evangelical women entered the political conversation for reform and abolition.¹⁰⁰ Her stirring language found greater weight in laying charges against slave traders in Britain who reside in a nation that esteems and advances freedom. More emphasized contradiction of slavery within the realm of

⁹⁷ Menely, “Acts of Sympathy,” 55 - See Eltis, *Economic Growth*, 20-24 for further discussion on the importance of free-labor market thought from Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith in developing the economic arguments of abolition, particularly against the system of apprenticeship in the 1833 emancipation debates.

⁹⁸ Moira Ferguson, “British Women Writers and an Emerging Abolitionist Discourse,” *The Eighteenth Century* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 3-5.

⁹⁹ Menely, “Acts of Sympathy,” 57.

¹⁰⁰ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 79 and Midgley, *Feminism*, 50.

free Britain to push the reader (particularly the Members of Parliament) to forgo immoral and unreasonable pursuits of economic gain in exchange for a higher valuing of British liberty.

2.2 “Why gaze as thou wouldst fright me from my challenge”: Ann Yearsley

Around thy little ones, and loudly plead
Thou *canst not* sell thy children.—Yet, beware
Lest Luco's groan be heard; should *that* prevail,
Justice will scorn thee in her turn¹⁰¹

Ann Yearsley employed the themes of family, law, and gender that More utilized, yet in her own way. While these two women shared similar antislavery language, their personal relationship, through More's patronage of Yearsley, was later severed. Hannah More's prominent and established place as a woman writer in the British literary and antislavery worlds, as well as her middle class position, positioned her to act as a patron, which she extended to a milkwoman with natural talent, Ann Yearsley, in 1784.¹⁰² Eve Tavor Bannet argues that this kind of patronage differed from the more political aims of aristocratic women who supported specific candidates for political office, yet it still represented a form of philanthropy focused upon social reform.¹⁰³ More's patronage of Yearsley provided material support for Yearsley's family and domestic life through her poetic talents. Thereby centralizing the maintenance of traditional family structure even in introducing Yearsley to a public literary world.¹⁰⁴ However, More's charitable work crossed into the domestic scene of the Yearsley family that would spark a wave of bitterness and harshness on both sides.

More discovered Yearsley, who was working as a milkwoman, through her cook who told her of Yearsley's natural talent for poetry and her struggle to provide for her family in

¹⁰¹ Quote in Heading: Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 7. And Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 8.

¹⁰² Carolyn Williams, “‘Am I Not a Man and a Brother?’ ‘Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?’: The Transatlantic Crusade Against the Slave Trade and Slavery,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 56, no. ½ (March-June 2010): 119.

¹⁰³ Eve Tavor Bannett, “The Bluestocking Sisters: Women's Patronage, Millenium Hall, and ‘The Visible Providence of a Country,’” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30, no. 1 (2005): 26 and 31.

¹⁰⁴ Bannett, “Bluestocking Sisters,” 31 and Kowaleski-Wallace, *Fathers' Daughters*, 3-4.

1784.¹⁰⁵ She became Yearsley's patron and succeeded in securing the publication of her first volume, *Poems on Several Occasions*.¹⁰⁶ More edited the volume and garnered subscriptions from illustrious members of Britain's literary circles.¹⁰⁷ She promoted her to many of her influential friends, including fellow bluestocking writer, Elizabeth Montagu. Upon hearing of Yearsley's talent, Montagu described her as "one of nature's miracles," and later she offered her help in "promoting her prosperity."¹⁰⁸ She compared Yearsley to the "eloquence and poetry" of Job and the Psalmists and attributed the similarities to her lack of schooling – as if she wrote from poetry's state of nature.¹⁰⁹ The success of Yearsley's first volume proved her talents and rewarded her financially, except not in the way that she imagined.

Tensions mounted in their relationship when Hannah More, with the help of Elizabeth Montagu, set up a trust for the proceeds from Yearsley's poems rather than allowing Yearsley direct control.¹¹⁰ The reasoning offered by More for her actions was that the trust would be safe for the children, thus emphasizing Yearsley's place as a mother rather than as an earning poet.¹¹¹ The struggle over the trust dominated the fight between the two. In a letter to Eva Maria Garrick (the wife of David Garrick who was More's patron in her early career), More described the legal battle for the right to the money as a "vexatious affair," and expressed deep longing for the day when she be taken "out of this bondage [and regain her] liberty."¹¹² The control over this trust in

¹⁰⁵ Stott, *Hannah More*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Kerri Andrews, "Patronal Care and Maternal Feeling: New Correspondence between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More," *Romanticism* 16, no. 1 (April 2010): 43.

¹⁰⁷ Kerri Andrews, "Ann Yearsley and the London Newspapers," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 34 no. 1 (Spring 2015): 107-108.

¹⁰⁸ "From Mrs. Montagu to Miss H. More," (Sandleford, 1784) in Roberts, *Memoirs*, 206 and "From the same to the same," (Sandleford, 1784) in Roberts, *Memoirs*, 209.

¹⁰⁹ "From Mrs. Montagu," in *Memoirs*, 206.

¹¹⁰ Julie Cairnie, "The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley: Laboring and Writing, Submission and Resistance," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 27, no. 4 (December 2005): 136.

¹¹¹ Patricia Demers, "'For mine's a stubborn and savage will': 'Lactilla' (Ann Yearsley) and 'Stella' (Hannah More) Reconsidered," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 136, 139-140.

¹¹² Eva Maria Garrick, recipient, from Hannah More (November 8, 1785) in *The Hannah More Papers*, Houghton Library at Harvard University

a sense encapsulated the complexity conservative female abolitionists encountered in trying to maintain British class structure yet still assuring a place for their voices to be heard.¹¹³ The rift between did not remain a private affair, but circulated in literary reviews and letters. An article, which described Yearsley as the appellant and More as the respondent as in a lawsuit, stated on Yearsley's behalf that "surely a mother had reason to expect that some power would have been granted her."¹¹⁴ The trust (which saved the money for the children) infringed upon the Yearsleys natural right and duty as parents to care for their children, which echoes John Locke's understanding of the family.¹¹⁵ For Yearsley, the struggle for control of her own earnings (particularly with regard to caring for her children) represented the added complication of being from a lower class that More did not face. The formation and fracture of their relationship underscores the difficult layers that abolitionists, particularly women abolitionists, navigated and how even in difference they remained interconnected.

In Yearsley's second volume to *Poems on Various Subjects*, published in 1787, Yearsley brought to light the various, unjust charges laid against her thereby placing More in a n unflattering, and unfeminine, light.¹¹⁶ Yearsley had previously celebrated Hannah More as "Stella" in her first volume, yet in the next (following the break in their patronage) she publicly reduces "elevated Stella [...] to low scurrility."¹¹⁷ She also charged More with "boasting" about

¹¹³ Ferguson, 9-11.

¹¹⁴ "An Appeal: Ann Yearsley versus Hannah More," *The London Times*, no. 944 (London: Saturday, January 5, 1788) In *Times Digital Archive*, Georgia State University : http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ttda/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&abID=T003&prodId=TTDA&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=3&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C14%29%22ann+yearsley%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C8%29%22TTDA-1%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=CS50857509&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 23, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Witte, "Nature of Family," 634.

¹¹⁶ Claire Knowles, "Ann Yearsley, Biography and the 'Pow'rs of Sensibility Untaught!'" *Women's Writing* 17, no. 1 (May 2010): 167.

¹¹⁷ Demers, " 'For mine's a stubborn and savage will,'" 143.

her charity and disavowing Yearsley's career as a writer.¹¹⁸ The disintegration of their relationship grabbed public attention but did not prevent Yearsley's noteworthy poems from enriching the body of antislavery literature.¹¹⁹ Class difference permeated the landscape of social protest in Britain as seen in the patronage relationship between More and Yearsley. Their relationship represented the delicate class dynamic of late eighteenth century Britain revealing the differences and barriers British abolitionists had to navigate in order to ground their rhetoric and strategy upon a common path towards abolition.

Kerri Andrews presents an important analysis of Yearsley's attempts to recover her literary reputation following this affair. Both women's reputations sustained injuries as a result, with Yearsley's second volume missing nearly half of the subscribers to her first volume.¹²⁰ In concert with the publication of her second volume, Yearsley also published poems in London newspapers. Andrews argues that this move not only broadened her readership but also intentionally created a bridge for her to operate in multiple literary worlds.¹²¹ As a working-class woman, navigating the literary world of the upper classes required her to maintain hierarchical norms such as patronage (which she sought from the Earl of Bristol in 1787), yet publishing her poems in newspapers (which were associated with low literature) allowed a subtle form of resistance and self-assertion for Yearsley.¹²² Publishing her poems in a more readily accessible format with a more inclusive readership exemplifies strength in a social context still constraining the female voice. One of the poems, "Stanzas Written by Mrs. Yearsley on Her Leaving London," however, reveals both an intimate portrayal of Yearsley's experience but also the

¹¹⁸ Cairnie, "Ambivalence," 358.

¹¹⁹ Frank Felsenstein, "Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: "The Thorp Archive: Part I," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21, no. 2 (Autumn 2002): 350-352.

¹²⁰ Andrews, "London Newspapers," 107.

¹²¹ Andrews, "London Newspapers," 109.

¹²² Cairnie, "Ambivalence," 355 and Andrews, "London Newspapers," 109-111.

delicate negotiation she needed to make as a professional writer in a context that accepted domesticity as the higher calling for a woman.¹²³ She recognized the fragility of her profession in regards to her gender and to her class. Both constrained and problematized her pursuit of a career, especially after the publicized break with an established and supported female writer.

Shortly following *Slavery: A Poem*, Yearsley also produced an antislavery attack on the slave trade, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade*.¹²⁴ Unlike Hannah More, Yearsley was not commissioned to write this poem.¹²⁵ Some have inferred that perhaps she did so not only for moral purposes but also as a literary challenge to her former patron.¹²⁶ Yearsley's place in the lower class status, and limited material resources, restricted her advancement as a writer, and her poem against the slave trade required the patronage of Frederick Augustus Hervey, the Earl of Bristol.¹²⁷ Vron Ware, in her work on transatlantic women activism, refers to the problem of class and race difference between women involved in the antislavery movement as it prompted a need to define whether a common womanhood existed in the conservative environment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹²⁸ As a female poet of the lower class, Yearsley had to seek a patron for financial and upper class support of her volumes.¹²⁹ Having been denied control of the profits from her poetic labors (faintly echoing the far more dire situation of slaves), her break with More was a notable moment in which Yearsley sought independence from More's upper class, maternal direction and control. However, she still had to operate within the social hierarchy of late eighteenth century England (exemplified in the Earl of Bristol's patronage) that

¹²³ Andrews, "London Newspapers," 118-119.

¹²⁴ Felsenstein, "Politics of Patronage," 363.

¹²⁵ Cairnie, "Ambivalence," 359.

¹²⁶ Andrews, "'More's Polish'd Muse,'" 27.

¹²⁷ Felsenstein, "Politics of Patronage," 351.

¹²⁸ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 107-108.

¹²⁹ Felsenstein, "Politics of Patronage," 351.

dictated her literary efforts.¹³⁰ Noting the practice of patronage and the complication of class structure for the antislavery movement is important for viewing the transatlantic world as not entirely comprised of connection but also its disjuncture within society. In spite of this problem of class difference, Yearsley's antislavery poem significantly contributes to the body of literature to which others of different class and gender similarly added.

A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade begins with an impassioned condemnation of the city of Bristol for its role in perpetuating the commodification and trading of human beings.¹³¹ The port city dominated England's slaving in the 1720s and continued the process in the late eighteenth century, and thus identifying it with the slave trade.¹³² Since Yearsley's patron was the Earl of Bristol, she wrote a prefatory letter to him in order to separate the charges against the city from her patron. She acknowledged that he similarly upholds freedom and justice, thereby making her poem not one that will afflict his reputation but will support ideas of liberty. Yearsley also recognized that sympathy and feeling could lead to "anguish [which] powerless compassion ever gives," and required legal action (in this case through parliamentary law) to alter the trajectory of injustice.¹³³

She followed the pattern that More presents in *Slavery* in calling the reader to acknowledge the intended state of freedom (how the law should be) for all within nature by looking to the day when "Nature moves obedient to her voice" with the secured liberty of the enslaved.¹³⁴ In the same way that More personified liberty in the traditional feminine, Yearsley also utilized the conventional rhetoric of feminine sensibility to Nature. She applied deeply

¹³⁰ Felsenstein, "Politics of Patronage," 351.

¹³¹ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 1.

¹³² Madge Dresser, "Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol," *Slavery and Abolition* vol. 30 no. 2 (June 2009): 226.

¹³³ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 1.

¹³⁴ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 2.

personal and spiritual language by calling woe upon herself as the narrator if she should “scorn this gloomy wretch, and turn [her] tearful eye to more enlighten’d beings,” thus seeking to move the reader to conviction for neglecting a moral (and spiritual) responsibility to help the suffering slave.¹³⁵

In addition to stirring the reader to sympathy, Yearsley questioned the morality and efficacy of the law because it allowed such an inhumane trade to continue. She metaphorically placed custom and law on the stand asking “Custom, Law, ye blessings, and ye curses of mankind, what evils do ye cause?”¹³⁶ She also questioned whether or not this trade in human life could possibly be “English law” and why this law “bid Justice an eternal distance keep from England’s Great Tribunal.”¹³⁷ Why would “Justice” be kept from the law of England and the English courts? Yearsley deftly presented the veneration of law in contrast with a reality that lacks the essential determination of law: Justice. In the same way that More utilized legal reference to heighten the injustice and immorality of the slave trade, Yearsley adopted a similar framework and continues the theme of challenging custom thus creating a bridge between antislavery literature and the law.

Extending this connection to law and custom, Yearsley delved into another crime of slavery: the denial of a person’s inherent rights of “Nature.” She firmly stood her ground in what reads like a courtroom drama as she defends her attack on slavery:

Why gaze as thou wouldst fright me from my challenge
With look of anguish? Is it *Nature* strains
Thine heart-strings at the image? Yes, my charge
Is full against her, and she rends thy soul [...]
Fearing her rights are violated¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 4.

¹³⁶ Yearlsey, *Inhumanity*, 2.

¹³⁷ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 27.

¹³⁸ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 7.

“Nature,” represented in the feminine, senses that “her rights,” given to Luco (the character Yearsley created for the poem), and the slaves he represented, have been violated, which included the selling of children and breaking apart families. She charged the slave trader with acting illegally and asks “where are thy statutes? Whose the iron pen that gave thee precedent?”¹³⁹ As if the slave trader was on the stand, Yearsley fiercely challenged the slave trade’s corruption of justice and its operators for acting outside the law.

Yearsley continued the call to conviction and to act upon Christian duty by summoning the support of the “few who feel a more than cold, material essence” to aid the fight against slavery.¹⁴⁰ She laid a “curse on him who from a bending parent steals his dear support of age, his darling child; perhaps a son, or a *more tender* daughter.”¹⁴¹ She criminalized the separation of a family as stealing thereby adding to the natural rights argument. Jeanine DeLombard, in her work on abolitionist print culture in antebellum America, argues how “man stealing” was a part of “early Puritan legal reforms” of English criminal law. Yearsley similarly equated slave trading with stealing (or man stealing).¹⁴² The attention to family aligned Yearsley with the devotion of Luco to his family. Perhaps her own struggle with More for the right to control her children’s trust added a depth of experience to her defense of the family. In the poem, she primarily focused upon the Bristol seller in connection with the symbol of Luco and his family even calling the seller to consider placing his own daughter or wife upon the auction block.¹⁴³ She forced the seller to a point of identification with the slave in such a way that employs paradox as a powerful language tool. When faced with the horrific prospect of having to sell one’s own children, Yearsley reasoned that no one could still maintain support of the transatlantic slave trade.

¹³⁹ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 5-6.

¹⁴² DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 12-13.

¹⁴³ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 6-8.

In a particularly poignant accusatory questioning of the slave trader, Yearsley beseeches those who would sell another person to present their case before Justice and to endure “Luco’s groan”:

Speak, Astound the voice of Justice! Bid thy tears
Melt the unpitying pow’r, while thus *she* claims the pledges of thy love [...]
Yet beware, Lest Luco’s groan be heard [...] Justice will scorn thee in *her* turn.¹⁴⁴

The presentation of Nature and Justice recall the conservative understanding of feminine sensibility thus indicating the influence of the British social context upon Yearsley’s poetry as well as her connection to More’s poetic style through such a socially-influenced literary convention. Her words ring as a warning to those who would continue in capturing and enslaving people against “Justice.” Underneath these warnings was an understanding that freedom is what “Justice” upholds, and the removal of it leads her to “scorn” the one responsible. The assumption beneath Yearsley’s verse is that freedom is a natural, just right and that “Luco’s groans” come from the violent ripping away of that freedom. Abolitionists assumed and staunchly defended the idea that all enslaved individuals ultimately desire freedom and frequently made use of this theme in antislavery literature.

Returning to her use of gender, but she also distinguished between “a son, or a *more tender* daughter,” thereby reinforcing societal understanding of feminine sensibility and distinctive gentleness. She also placed a conventional femininity upon Nature and Justice, yet represented Luco, the slave figure in the poem, as a man. She used Luco to paint a portrait of a family torn apart, thus centering the family as the locus of sympathy and identification for the reader. Unlike More’s passing mention of the “agonizing wife,” Yearsley narrated an intricate story of Luco and his “maid” Incilanda.¹⁴⁵ She detailed his capture, enslavement, the despair of

¹⁴⁴ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 5-6 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁵ More, *Slavery*, 100 and Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 5.

Incilanda, his tortured suffering, and his ultimate begging for death. Such a tragedy hardly leaves room for a closing promise of hope that slavery would be abolished, yet Yearsley followed the formula of antislavery poetry with trust that such will be the case. Even in Luco's death, there is a sense of coming freedom when he thinks of Incilanda and when they will "both escape together" in death.¹⁴⁶

The prevalence of death in Atlantic slavery and the transatlantic slave trade prominently featured in antislavery argument and literature, and also prompted parliamentary committees to review conditions of the slave trade.¹⁴⁷ Vincent Brown outlined how the high mortality rates in Jamaica influenced debate (as well as social interactions in Jamaica) creating what he termed "mortuary politics."¹⁴⁸ Yearsley ended Luco's narrative with death in order to compound the inhumanity and utter devaluation of life inherent to slavery. Yet the maintenance of Luco's family in spirit, and even after death, highlights the importance of the family in antislavery literature and anticipates a coming freedom. In her closing, she assumed that the British trader will be so moved to compassion (most likely through reading her poem) that "the fetters of his mind" would be broken.¹⁴⁹ Thus not only does she have confidence in freedom for the enslaved but also for those whose minds have been so fettered by unjust economic impulse. Not only would the individual trader be set free, but also the city of Bristol itself would gain a new identity distinct from the shame of the slave trade:

And when thou hast to high perfection wrought,
This mighty work, say, 'such is Bristol's soul.'¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 21.

¹⁴⁷ Vincent Brown, *Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 50.

¹⁴⁸ Brown, *Reaper's Garden*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁹ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 30.

With the removal of the slave trade, Bristol's soul would be redeemed and restored to a "mighty work" instead of its inhumane work in trafficking human beings. Yearsley closes her poem with an acknowledgement of the tragedy of enslavement (as seen in Luco's death), but directs the reader's gaze to a coming future when slavery will end and freedom will be the true identity of England.

2.3 Conclusion

The balance and negotiation of the issues of gender and class complicated and dictated the nature of the transatlantic abolition movement. Despite their broken relationship, Hannah More and Ann Yearsley similarly adapted, challenged, and submitted to the various dynamics of British social structure. Their poems structured frameworks for later antislavery authors and exemplified a shared language of abolition both in reference to one another and to the multifaceted arguments of abolitionism. The legal references in both poems indicate that this common language drew upon the language of the law to highlight the incompatibility between slavery and justice. Although these poems contain racial and gender difference that blunts the edge of freedom, they still provide important insight into antislavery argument and language that reveals a complex interaction between abolitionists and their social realities.

3 "NO LONGER SHALL THOU DREAD THE IRON CHAIN"

Phillis Wheatley, like Hannah More and Ann Yearsley, faced the challenge of writing despite restrictive gender roles as a female poet. However, as an African-born slave living and writing in revolutionary Boston her experience differed from her white, British counterparts as she negotiated social understandings of race. American women abolitionists encountered the difficult determination of race in relating to one another and its wider impact upon the antislavery movement. She reached a wide and transatlantic audience challenging the deep-

seated racist ideologies surrounding enslaved African people. Her poems convey the paradox of her position in expressing the natural inclination towards freedom, yet also praising and showing deference to her mistress, Susannah Wheatley.¹⁵¹ This shifting language in her poetry resembled the struggle for abolitionists to control the discourse of liberty in revolutionary America and in Britain. As patriot authors and leaders compared the relationship between the American colonies and Britain to slavery, British antislavery leaders sought to use the law of England (with its supposed ideals of freedom) to solidify that slavery had no place in the mother country.

While the previous chapter outlined the key, formulaic themes in More and Yearsley's antislavery poems, *Slavery* and *The Inhumanity of the Slave Trade*, this chapter looks backwards to analyze the rising network of language in transatlantic antislavery movements with Phillis Wheatley's poem, "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth" as the base. Wheatley wrote with a crafted, political subtlety regarding slavery that is better seen in light of More and Yearsley's later arguments (but within the same generation). This chapter begins with a discussion of Phillis Wheatley's poem, "To the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth," to show the shared, transatlantic language of freedom in the revolutionary period. The second section focuses on the legacy and language of *Somerset v. Stewart* as well as its intersections with antislavery rhetoric in mid to late eighteenth century Britain and America. The third section returns to the American side of the Atlantic to show how the revolutionary discourse of freedom impacted the

¹⁵¹ Phillis Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America," in *Poems on Various Subjects, religious and moral. By Phillis Wheatley, Negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England* (London: Printed for A. Bell, bookseller, Aldgate; and sold by Messrs. Cox and Berry, King-Street, Boston, 1773) in *Early American Imprints, Series I*. Georgia State University http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbld=L58E5CGUMTQzNTk3NzU2My44NDQzMTA6MT0xMjoxMzEuOTYyMTIuNzQ&p_action=doc&p_queryname=3&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-1099AFDAA2A1D070@50065-11324B6E8DF6D440@72&f_mode=citation (accessed July 3, 2015): 73. And Karen Lerner Dovell, "The Interaction of the Classical Traditions of Literature and Politics in the Work of Phillis Wheatley," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley* ed. John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 38-39.

language of the Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Act and the organization of the first antislavery society in the world. Antislavery poetry, exemplified in Wheatley's work, thus interlocked with a transatlantic struggle over the discourse of freedom.

3.1 "Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung"

Phillis Wheatley traveled around Britain, largely through the influence of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and Lord Dartmouth, increased her popularity amongst British intellectual circles and secured the publication of her volume of poetry (*Poems on Various Subjects*).¹⁵² Wheatley earned great influence and acclaim in an international community, reaching beyond the limitations of her status as a slave. Her work greatly benefited the antislavery movement by exhibiting rich humanity and intelligence to a society that held perspective of inferiority of slaves.¹⁵³ Wheatley's enslavement during much of her writing career and travels not only restricted her movement (the Wheatley's son Nathanael traveled with her) but also required her to tread carefully in the midst of the revolutionary discourse in America.¹⁵⁴ However it by no means diminished her important contributions to antislavery literature, and her recognition and verse challenged the racism and moral wrong of slavery.

Born in West Africa and enslaved in Boston at seven, Wheatley demonstrated talent early on that the Wheatley family fostered through private tutelage on classical literature.¹⁵⁵ The language of intense separation for the slave from Africa and family in More's formulaic antislavery poem structure appears in Wheatley's poem she composed for Lord Dartmouth.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Quote in Heading: Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable," 74. And David Waldstreicher, "The Wheatleyan Moment," *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 527 and 537-538.

¹⁵³ Carolyn Williams, "'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' 'Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?': The Transatlantic Crusade Against the Slave Trade and Slavery," *Caribbean Quarterly* 56, no. ½ (March-June 2010): 117.

¹⁵⁴ Waldstreicher, "The Wheatleyan Moment," 537-539.

¹⁵⁵ Dovell, "Interaction," 35 and Williams, "'Am I Not,'" 116.

¹⁵⁶ Moira Ferguson, "British Women Writers and an Emerging Abolitionist Discourse," *The Eighteenth Century* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1992):3-4.

Wheatley wrote the poem at the request of Thomas Woolridge (Lord Dartmouth was his patron), a British merchant who was visiting Boston in 1772. Wheatley had already accrued a great deal of recognition in Boston from her eulogy of George Whitefield thus prompting Woolridge's visit to the Wheatley household to see the poet for himself.¹⁵⁷ The visit, and subsequent poem, also illuminates the interconnections between America and Britain and how this interconnection translated into the transatlantic antislavery movement.

Her mistress, Susanna Wheatley, granted her freedom in 1773 upon her return from her travels in England in the same year.¹⁵⁸ Wheatley's "Poems on Various Subjects," published in London in 1773 circulated the country at an important juncture in antislavery proceedings with the landmark case spearheaded by Granville Sharp, *Somerset v. Stewart*, occurring the year prior.¹⁵⁹ It is well known that she was the first published African-American woman, and therefore she legitimated a place for African American writers, especially women, to publish antislavery literature.¹⁶⁰ However, in the late eighteenth century, there were currents of racism challenging her place as a writer, evidenced by Woolridge's disbelief that Wheatley, a slave, could craft poetry.¹⁶¹ In 1845, an antislavery book published in Scotland called *Intelligent Negroes*, sought to highlight black men and women whose achievements contradicted notions that deemed African people as inferior or unworthy of education.¹⁶² While published years after

¹⁵⁷ Waldstreicher, "The Wheatleyan Moment," 522-523.

¹⁵⁸ James A. Levernier, "Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784)," *Legacy* 13, no. 1 (1996): 67.

¹⁵⁹ Louis Taylor Merrill, "The English Campaign for the Abolition of the Slave Trade," *The Journal of Negro History* 30, no. 4 (October 1945): 384.

¹⁶⁰ Dovell, "Interaction," 35-36.

¹⁶¹ Waldstreicher, "The Wheatleyan Moment," 522-523.

¹⁶² *Intelligent Negroes* (Edinburgh, Scotland, 1845) in *Slavery & Antislavery: A Transatlantic Archive*. Georgia State University

http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/sas/retrieve.do?qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28KE%2CNone%2C21%29%22intelligent+negroes%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C40%29%22SAS-1%22+OR+%22SAS-2%22+OR+%22SAS-3%22+OR+%22SAS-4%22%24&sort=DateAscend&docLevel=TEXT_GRAPHICS&inPS=true&prodId=SAS&userGroupName=atla29738&tabID=T001&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=

her death, and a decade after England had abolished slavery in its colonies, the suspicions of Wheatley's ability and prejudices against her race still remained, in addition to the persistence of slavery on the North and South American continents. The authors (unfortunately unknown) described Wheatley as humble, yet praised her natural talent, similar to the ways in which Hannah More praised Ann Yearsley.¹⁶³

Although Yearsley and Wheatley did not share the same social constraints of race, both occupied social positions restricted by class hierarchy that typically did not have access to upper class learning, which contributed to the distrust of their writing or an over-emphasis on the natural talent rather than a learned or developed skill. For Elizabeth Montagu (More's friend who had a partial role in creating the trust for Yearsley's earnings) the fact that Ann Yearsley could create such incredible poems despite her class made her "one of nature's miracles."¹⁶⁴ Charles Crawford, a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, published *Observations upon Negro-slavery* in 1784 (coinciding with the society's reorganization following the Revolutionary War) in order to combat judgments against the abilities of black men and women as well as to promote a cause for education.¹⁶⁵ Crawford, like the authors of *Intelligent Negroes*, referenced

1&contentSet=ECCO&totalCount=1&showLOI=Yes&showETOC=Yes&bookId=ASPC0001982400&type=Full%20Primary%20Document&relevancePageBatch=DS100179443 (accessed June 11, 2015): 1.

¹⁶³ *Intelligent Negroes*, 10.

¹⁶⁴ "From Mrs. Montagu to Miss H. More," (Sandleford, 1784) in *Memoirs*, 206 and Julie Cairnie, "The Ambivalence of Ann Yearsley: Laboring and Writing, Submission and Resistance," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 27, no. 4 (December 2005): 136.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Crawford, *Observations upon Negro-Slavery* (Philadelphia, 1784): 3-4 and *Centennial Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in bondage, and for improving the condition of the African race* (Philadelphia: Grant, Faire & Rodgers, 1875) In *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Georgia State University
http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/sas/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T001&prodId=SAS&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=1&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28KE%2CNone%2C18%29%22charles+crawford%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C40%29%22SAS-1%22+OR+%22SAS-2%22+OR+%22SAS-3%22+OR+%22SAS-4%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=ECCO&&docId=CB3327007056&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=CB3327007056&relevancePageBatch=CB127007056&showLOI=No&contentSet=&callistoContentSet=ETSS&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 11, 2015): 52.

Wheatley as perfect evidence to the artistic and educational abilities of African people.¹⁶⁶

Although these works still hold a paternalistic tone and in a way qualify Wheatley's poetry as evidence rather than true art, the employment of her work for these political purposes indicate her importance to the transatlantic abolition movement. Additionally, their focus on the language and phrasing of her poem to the Earl of Dartmouth highlights the influence that her life, words, and political subtleties had upon antislavery literature.

The Earl of Dartmouth was "the secretary of state for the colonies and president of the Board of Trade and Foreign Plantations" from August 1772 until November 1775.¹⁶⁷ At the time that Wheatley produced her poem in his honor in 1772 (published in 1773), most American colonists were not yet advocated complete independence from Britain. She used her poem to capture the hope of the colonists that Dartmouth would use his position to amend the colonial situation.¹⁶⁸ Wheatley incorporated the rhetoric of liberty into her poem by imagining freedom rising like the sun over New England under the leadership and influence of Lord Dartmouth:

Hail, happy day, when, smiling like the morn,
Fair *Freedom* rose *New England* to adorn [...]
Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,
Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns [...]
She shines supreme, [...]
No longer shall thou dread the iron chain
Which wanton *Tyranny* with lawless hand
Had made, and with it meant [to] enslave the land.¹⁶⁹

Wheatley equated freedom with the morning sun, which More echoed later in *Slavery*, thus connecting the two poets within the shared language of abolition. Additionally, both used the conventional feminine personification of the sun, and by extension, freedom. While More

¹⁶⁶ Crawford, *Observations*, 4 and *Intelligent Negroes*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens, GA: the University of Georgia Press, 2011), 130.

¹⁶⁸ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 130.

¹⁶⁹ Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable," 73-74.

used the metaphor of the sun to relate freedom to something natural, Wheatley applied it to something new, something expected. Wheatley anticipated a dawn of freedom that would shine “supreme” over the political slavery of revolutionary discourse and right the wrongs of the “lawless hand.” The morning of freedom fills “each soul” with gratitude and relief that America has been set free from “the iron chain [of] *Tyranny*.” Her choice of “each soul” assumed that all in New England wanted a restoration and protection of their liberty. Antislavery language, seen with More and Yearsley, similarly assumed that all enslaved individuals held a natural desire for freedom. Since the poem was published, she had to carefully word this section of the poem to honor the Earl of Dartmouth but include a current of her own agenda without offending an important supporter. Moving from this metaphorical enslavement of America, she turned the attention to chattel slavery.¹⁷⁰

Beginning with the expectation that Dartmouth would bring political liberty to the colonies, Wheatley then moved to another expectation of freedom – her own:

Should you, *my lord*, while you peruse my song,
 Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
 Whence from these wishes for the *common* good,
 By feeling hearts alone best understood,
 I [...] was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd seat:
 What pangs excruciating must molest,
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
 [...] Such, such was my case. And can I then but
 pray
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?¹⁷¹

The rise in revolutionary rhetoric illuminated the hypocrisy of slaveholders “protesting [the] metaphorical slavery” of Britain.¹⁷² Wheatley placed their natural expectation of freedom against her own natural desire for freedom, thus connecting her poetry within the shared theme

¹⁷⁰ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 131.

¹⁷¹ Wheatley, “To the Right Honorable,” 74 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷² Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 132.

of freedom in antislavery literature. Underneath her question of “from whence” her hope of freedom came is the theme used in antislavery literature that every enslaved individual longs for freedom. Her hope is that none would “feel [the] tyrannic sway” of slavery that she had felt in her capture, thereby making a subtle, yet striking antislavery argument. While Yearsley created a character, Luco, in order to heighten the sympathetic connection with the reader, Wheatley used her own experience in wanting freedom and also being separated from her family. She presented the story of her capture and separation from her family and home to stir “feeling hearts” to imagine the pain of this experience. The two questions Wheatley posed in the above selection reveal two, emotional arguments against slavery that antislavery poets employed. The first question related to the expectation of freedom, and the second related to the separation of family. The organization of the poem suggests that Wheatley based her want of freedom in the fact that she had once known freedom, and had a family and a homeland to which she still held a connection. Therefore, the reader could not question her understanding of or desire for freedom, because she had experienced it. Additionally, if the colonists wanted freedom from a metaphorical slavery, how much more would someone want freedom from actual slavery?

Abolitionist arguments, particularly those made in freedom suits such as *Somerset v. Stewart* (England, 1772), extended Wheatley’s question to assert that all enslaved individuals desired freedom. Vincent Carretta recounts in his comprehensive biography of Phillis Wheatley that this poem circulated in Britain and America following the ruling in *Somerset*.¹⁷³ Colonial newspapers from Massachusetts to Virginia to South Carolina detailed the case thereby highlighting its place in Wheatley’s context.¹⁷⁴ Not only would the contradiction in revolutionary rhetoric have been a part of societal discussion, but also the emancipation of James Somerset as

¹⁷³ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 132.

¹⁷⁴ Patricia Bradley, “Slavery in Colonial Newspapers: The Somerset Case,” *Journalism History* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 2-7.

readers came across Wheatley's poetry. Her challenge to the contradictory rhetoric held significant weight as it resonated with this particular sociohistorical moment. This case involved the efforts of antislavery activists and the language of a natural "love of Freedom" resonated in the arguments that England loved freedom and that every person desired that freedom.¹⁷⁵

3.2 "Where freedom is the grand object of the law": *Somerset v. Stewart*

Although *Somerset v. Stewart* was by no means the first freedom suit, with cases appearing in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (as well as similar cases in the American colonies), it garnered unprecedented international fame and captured the attention of abolitionists and slaveholders alike.¹⁷⁶ Granville Sharp had released a treatise on slavery, which showed that England had no law regarding slavery; therefore, slaves could claim their freedom.¹⁷⁷ He was involved in the case as one of Somerset's supporters, Sharp's treatise, published in 1769, structured much of the logic of the counsel's argument on behalf of Somerset. One of Sharp's claims asserted that there could be no slavery in England because there was no law allowing it (a point that would be essential to Lord Mansfield's decision):

But (God be thanked) there is neither law, nor even precedent, (at least I have not been able to find one) of a legal determination to justify a master in claiming or detaining any person whatsoever as a slave in England, who has not voluntarily bound himself as such by a contract in writing.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable," 74.

¹⁷⁶ Quote in Heading: *Somerset v. Stewart*, 501. And George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 18.

¹⁷⁷ Granville Sharp, *A Representation of the injustice and dangerous tendency of tolerating slavery; or of admitting the least claim of private property in the persons of men in England* (London, 1769). In *Slavery & Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*. Georgia State University http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/sas/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T001&prodId=SAS&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R4&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=5&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28TX%2CNone%2C17%29%22granville+sharp%22%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28TX%2CNone%2C16%29%22representation%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C40%29%22SAS-1%22+OR+%22SAS-2%22+OR+%22SAS-3%22+OR+%22SAS-4%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=ECOCCO&&docId=CB3330114768&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=CB3330114768&relevancePageBatch=CB130114767&showLOI=No&contentSet=&callistoContentSet=ETSS&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 12, 2015): 6.

¹⁷⁸ Sharp, *A Representation*, 5.

Sharp cited *Galway v. Caldee* (heard in 1750) in which Baron Thompson decided that the slave in the case (whom Galway represented) would be free by “his first setting foot on English ground.”¹⁷⁹ In a 1637 Star Chamber case, the court cited a case in 1569 regarding the punishment of a Russian slave in England, and determined that since that punishment was deemed intolerable in England, and that English air was “too pure” for slavery.¹⁸⁰ Despite wording that suggests that England had outlawed slavery, the holding of slaves purchased in the colonies in England remained an ambiguous legal position.¹⁸¹ Instead of maintaining the full reaches of chattel slavery (violent punishment), slaves held in England (purchased in other parts of the Atlantic world) were considered to be in “near slavery.”¹⁸² In this still loosely defined legal position, enslaved black men and women would be under the authority of their masters but protected from unnecessary bodily harm. However, as *Somerset v. Stewart* would test, there were perhaps more rights to which they were entitled outside the limits of colonial slave codes. Therefore leaving Sharp an opportunity to combat such fluidity with a more definitive argument against slavery in England.

Slavery’s ambiguity continued as a theme in the eighteenth century in the American colonies, particularly in the years leading up to the Revolution (when Wheatley herself occupied a rather complex position as a slave and published poet). Massachusetts had begun counting the “exact number” of enslaved men and women within the colony as enacted by the House of Representatives in the 1750s.¹⁸³ In 1765, Boston’s enslaved population stood at 811

¹⁷⁹ Sharp, *A Representation*, 5-6.

¹⁸⁰ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 501 and George Van Cleve, “Somerset’s Case and Its Antecedents in Imperial Perspective,” *Law and History Review* 24 no. 1 (2006) <http://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/faculty/567> (accessed June 12, 2015): 608-609, 616-617.

¹⁸¹ Van Cleve, *Slaveholder’s Union*, 18-19.

¹⁸² Van Cleve, “Somerset’s Case,” 604.

¹⁸³ Massachusetts General Assembly, *Upon Consideration of his Excellency’s Message of this Day*, November 19, 1754. In *Early American Imprints, Series I* (no. 40700). Georgia State University Library

approximately, with the total Boston population standing at 15, 520.¹⁸⁴ The total enslaved population of the colony stayed virtually fixed between 1764 and 1776, while, according to Chernoh Sesay, “the white population increased from 218,950 to 343,845” in the same period, creating a surplus of white labor. Perhaps due to the small population size (similar to England), enslaved individuals in Massachusetts utilized available legal and political avenues in order to assert both individual and collective emancipation through the courts and the legislature. These efforts vocalized a claim to a defined, concrete freedom in the early 1770s.¹⁸⁵

On April 20, 1773, a group of four men (who were enslaved) petitioned the their representative to the legislature to consider their “deplorable state” and to make “a noble stand against the designs of their fellow men” to perpetuate the institution of slavery.¹⁸⁶ This petition followed one signed by Felix Holbrook (who also signed the April petition) on January 6 of the same year, which sought the relief of the enslaved population and asserted that the legislature represented them in addition to the free population.¹⁸⁷ Both petitions featured cautious, rather subservient language, which alludes to the ambiguity of slavery in Massachusetts. Chernoh Sesay argued that most likely these petitions were a part of a larger “biracial campaign,” which he claims accounts for the “language and tone of the petition.”¹⁸⁸ Although the petitions most likely received backing (or possibly initiation) from a group of sympathetic white citizens, this

http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=L58E5CGUMTQzNTk3NzU2My44NDQzMtA6MT0xMjoxMzEuOTYyMTIuNzQ&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=5&p_doref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F82CD2774A988@40700-@1 (accessed June 10, 2015).

¹⁸⁴ Chernoh M. Sesay Jr., “The Revolutionary Black Roots of Slavery’s Abolition in Massachusetts,” *The New England Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (March 2014): 104.

¹⁸⁵ Sesay, “Revolutionary Roots,” 104.

¹⁸⁶ Committee of Correspondence, (April 20, 1773) *Sir, the Efforts made by the Legislature...* (Boston, 1773). In *Early American Imprints, Series I*. Georgia State University Library

http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=L58E5CGUMTQzNTk3NzU2My44NDQzMtA6MT0xMjoxMzEuOTYyMTIuNzQ&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=6&p_doref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F2F827A4E66A928@42416-@1 (accessed June 10, 2015).

¹⁸⁷ Sesay, “Revolutionary Roots,” 113.

¹⁸⁸ Sesay, “Revolutionary Roots,” 113.

should not negate the voice of the enslaved men who assigned their names to the documents. These men were able to publicly express their hope for freedom, but maintained a deferential position in order to avoid tones of rebellion or aggression. In the same way, Phillis Wheatley framed her poem to the Earl of Dartmouth with praise and esteem, yet also presented her want of freedom. The April petition praised the legislature (and the colony itself) for being “actuated by the principles of equity and justice” and that a “divine spirit of freedom [fired] every human breast on this continent.”¹⁸⁹ As the colonies moved closer to independence and the spirit of liberty continued to swell, these men certainly timed these petitions well to echo the rhetoric coursing through political debate.

The revolutionary rhetoric prevailing discourse in the colonies equated dependence upon England as slavery, with a broadside from New York in 1774 claiming it a time “when slavery [was] clanking her infernal chains, and tyranny stands ready with [...] whips to enforce obedience.”¹⁹⁰ The author, “Plain English,” employed vivid, forceful imagery of slavery to compound the call to prevent General Gage from taking the arms of the colonists. Unlike the anonymous writer of this broadside, Wheatley and the petitioners chose to sign their expressed hopes for freedom and then needed to tread carefully under the burden of race and enslavement. Wheatley also held the additional layer of gender restricting the influence and force of her language since her political voice was constrained. Further illuminating the ambiguity of slavery in late eighteenth century Massachusetts (echoing England), her recognized writing career in Britain and the American colonies occurred while she was still a slave. Despite the various social

¹⁸⁹ Committee, *Sir*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ “To the Inhabitants of New York...” (New York: Printed by John Holt, 1774). In *Early American Imprints, Series I*, no. 13658. Georgia State University http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=L58E5CGUMTQzNTk3NzU2My44NDQzMTA6MT0xMjoxMzEuOTYuMTIuNzQ&p_action=doc&p_docnum=13&p_queryname=7&p_doref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-0F3014ACE0190A80@13658-@1 (accessed on June 10, 2015).

expectations of her gender and race, Wheatley successfully navigated these dynamics and contributed to a common, transatlantic language of abolition.

The transatlantic nature of antislavery literature in the mid to late eighteenth century rests in the imperial connection between England and the American colonies still in place prior to the realization of 1776 in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Wheatley addressed the aforementioned poem to the Earl of Dartmouth, and her poetry volume was published in England in the same year as *Somerset v. Stewart*.¹⁹¹ Granville Sharp's *Representations* was necessary because of the connection between England, which he asserted as free (from chattel slavery specifically) with the colonies of slave societies operating under its flag. Extending the transatlantic connection, finding expression in a common language, *Somerset v. Stewart* dealt with an "imperial conflict of laws."¹⁹² At issue in the case was whether the law allowing slavery in Virginia would be upheld in England. James Somerset, the slave of Charles Steuart (or Stewart – continuing the theme of misspelled names) brought from Virginia to England, faced a removal from England to Jamaica in 1771.¹⁹³ Somerset had attempted to secure his freedom outside the legal structure by running away, but was captured and then held on board the ship bound for Jamaica in a state of virtual imprisonment. Sharp hypothesized about such a situation saying that imprisoning a slave would be outside of the master-slave contract and should be "esteemed absolutely illegal."¹⁹⁴ Rather than attempting to restore the original master-slave relationship, Steuart intended to sell Somerset in Jamaica, thus complicating whether or not their relationship would be honored in court. Perhaps if Steuart sought to bring Somerset back to America with him, his counsel would have succeeded in arguing that their relationship held as they were merely in transit in England.

¹⁹¹ Dovell, "Interaction," 36.

¹⁹² Van Cleve, "Somerset's Case," 603.

¹⁹³ Daniel J. Hulsebosch, "Nothing But Liberty: 'Somerset's Case' and the British Empire," *Law and History Review* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 650-651 and *Somerset v. Stewart*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Sharp, *Representations*, 10.

Instead, the Steuart counsel's return on the writ focused upon the master's authority to force the slave to follow commands – in this case to go to Jamaica – thereby making the court answer if a slave could be forced to leave England.¹⁹⁵ Several antislavery leaders, including Granville Sharp and Somerset's godparents, petitioned for a writ of *habeas corpus* against the commander of the ship, Mr. Knowles, on behalf of Somerset.¹⁹⁶ The involvement of Granville Sharp and other antislavery activists raises questions of why they assisted Somerset in his situation and what they hoped to accomplish with this particular case.

Francis Hargrave argued on behalf of Somerset and presented the issue that although slavery was recognized in the colonies, it had been abolished in England (he relied heavily upon Sharp's arguments to foreground his rationale) a point reiterated by another member of Somerset's legal team, a Serjeant Davy.¹⁹⁷ While the Steuart counsel, under Mr. Dunning, argued that since marriage contracts and hereditary rights made in foreign jurisdictions were honored in England, the local laws of Virginia regarding the establishment of racial slavery similarly should be honored in England.¹⁹⁸ Throughout the proceedings, the counsels wrestled with the issue of local law or "municipal relations" and whether or not local laws, specifically slavery, would be upheld on English soil.¹⁹⁹ Dunning proposed that since marriage (a "municipal relation") follows "a man everywhere" across different legal locales, the same should hold for the relation between a master and a slave.²⁰⁰ The counsel for Somerset did not attempt to turn the case into a massive emancipation of slaves in English colonies, but maintained the legal (not moral) validity of

¹⁹⁵ Andrew Fede, *Roadblocks to Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in the United States South* (New Orleans, LA: Quid Pro LLC, 2011), 291.

¹⁹⁶ Justin Buckley Dyer, "After the Revolution: *Somerset* and the Antislavery Tradition in Anglo-American Constitutional Development," *The Journal of Politics* 71, no. 4 (October 2009): 1426-1427 and *Somerset v. Stewart*, 1 and Fede, *Roadblocks*, 290.

¹⁹⁷ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 501 and 509.

¹⁹⁸ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 505-506.

¹⁹⁹ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 506.

²⁰⁰ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 506.

slavery in other locations. In response to Dunning, Davy transitioned the issue of the slave-master relation or contract to whether or not a moral contract would be maintained in England.

All contracts, I do not venture to assert are of a moral nature; but I know not any law to confirm an *immoral* contract, and execute it. The contract of marriage is a *moral* contract, established for moral purposes [...] In the case of master and slave, *being no moral obligation*, but founded on principles, and supported by practice, utterly foreign to the laws and customs of this country, the law cannot recognize such relation.²⁰¹

Here Davy counters Dunning's proposition to negate the relationship of master and slave because slave was contrary to natural law and morality. Placing morality as a central determinant in validating local laws shifted the perspective of the issue at hand. In essence, Davy's argument did not refute the basic principle of Dunning's argument, but rather it proposed that English law did not honor *immoral* contracts. Davy extended his argument to the issue of racial slavery saying that to "make a slave of a negro, who is one, by his complexion; is a cruelty and absurdity that I trust will never take place here."²⁰² Claiming that, within English common law, enslavement was immoral provided a guiding principle and important argument for later cases, particularly cases involving forced movement from a place of freedom back to a place of slavery. Interestingly, Dunning similarly outlined a belief that slavery was immoral and that he "would not be understood to intimate a wish in favor of slavery," yet his duty was to defend Knowles first, which necessitated an argument that protected the enslaved relationship.²⁰³

Mr. Wallace, counsel for Knowles, manipulated the relative ambiguity of slavery in England by referencing the legality of "villenage," which for all intents and purposes was the closest in resembling the chattel slave system of the colonies. In *Chamberline v. Harvey* in 1697 (in which a slave from Barbados who sought freedom once brought to England) the lawyers

²⁰¹ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 508 (emphasis mine).

²⁰² *Somerset v. Stewart*, 508.

²⁰³ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 504.

arguing for the slave's freedom attached villenage to an ancestral "place and time" distinct from the laws governing slavery in Barbados.²⁰⁴ In addition to this case, another appeared during the reign of Queen Anne, *Smith v. Brown*, in which a slave was sold in England from Virginia. The court further confirmed the distinction between slave and villein saying that a person could be a villein but not a slave as there was not a law regarding slavery in England. However, the case upheld the sale of the slave since it originally occurred in Virginia, which had its own law that allowed slavery.²⁰⁵ Unlike Caribbean slaves, who were considered full property in the law, villeins occupied a legal position "between free laborers and unfree chattel slaves."²⁰⁶ Thus villeins held a degree of freedom that Atlantic slaves could claim once in England, yet Wallace attempted to argue that the proof of villenage in England warranted the control that Steuart held over Somerset to force him to leave England. However, villeinage essentially no longer existed in England and therefore could not apply to the case.²⁰⁷ Granville Sharp referenced how proponents of slavery in England used the law and customs surrounding this system as legal justification, yet he diminished the impact of this argument in the same way as in Somerset's case saying that it was "obsolete" and reviving it had not "the least justification."²⁰⁸ It was then up to Lord Mansfield to decide whether such obsolete customs could compel the court to allow Steuart to force Stewart (his slave/villein) to leave England and be sold to Jamaica.

Lord Mansfield ruled that Somerset should be discharged because Steuart could not force him to leave.²⁰⁹ His ruling in this case would gain international recognition both on the part of

²⁰⁴ Dana Rabin, " 'In a Country of Liberty?': Slavery, Villeinage, and the Making of Whiteness in the Somerset Case (1772)," *History Workshop Journal* 72, no. 1 (Autumn 2011): 12.

²⁰⁵ Rabin, " 'In a Country,'" 16.

²⁰⁶ Rabin, " 'In a Country,'" 11.

²⁰⁷ Van Cleve, "Somerset's Case," 611.

²⁰⁸ Sharp, *A Representation*, 108.

²⁰⁹ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510.

abolitionists and proslavery supporters, as he reasoned that natural law prohibited slavery in England except through positive law.²¹⁰ He declared that:

“The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political; but *only positive law*, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory: it’s so *odious*, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged.”²¹¹

Such a statement held the potential to extend this argument utilizing natural law to attack slavery in remaining British colonies. Regardless of its potential, a point which abolitionists such as Anthony Benezet celebrated, the decision did prevent “chattel slavery” from becoming an accepted contract in England.²¹² Such reasoning begs the question of what is natural law? Certainly Enlightenment thinkers (and many philosophers, lawyers, and scholars before and since) have sought to understand the essential, incontrovertible rights of each individual and the greater collective state. An individual’s identity as a person certainly cannot be removed and must therefore be included in natural (or inalienable) rights. Even enslavement cannot fully extricate personhood from an individual before the law, especially with regard to culpability. Mansfield’s reasoning drew heavily upon Hargrave’s argument, which echoed principles outlined by William Blackstone.

Blackstone wrote in 1758 that, “pure and proper slavery does not, nay cannot, subsist in England [...] indeed it is repugnant to reason, and the principles of *natural law*.”²¹³ While this

²¹⁰ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510.

²¹¹ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510 (emphasis mine).

²¹² Hulsebosch, “Nothing But Liberty,” 648.

²¹³ William Blackstone, *The American students’ Blackstone: Commentaries on the laws of England, in four books: so abridged as to retain all portions of the original work which are of historical or practical value, with notes, and references to American decisions; for the use of American students by George Chase* (New York: Banks & Bros., 1877) in *The Making of Modern Law*. Georgia State University <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/servlet/MOML?dd=0&locID=atla48845&k=A1&d1=19007595800&srchtp=t&c=4&SU=ALL&s1=slavery&docNum=F106025368&vrsn=1.0&m=Blackstone%2C+William%2C+Sir&mx=Blackstone&seg=0&ste=11&dc=flc&stp=Author&d4=0.33&tiPG=1> (accessed July 3, 2015): 127.

quote does not explain the meaning of natural law, it has significant implications for freedom suits interacting with the issue of municipal laws. Blackstone equated the law of nature (or natural law) with the divine law (or revealed law) and argued that natural law was “superior in obligation to any other – It is binding over all the globe in all countries.”²¹⁴ He denounced slavery because it gave “an absolute and unlimited power [to] the master over the life and fortune of the slave.”²¹⁵ This absolute power attempted to reduce a person to mere property – a thing to be moved, sold, and used at the owner’s pursuit of happiness. The reduction of a person to simply an instrument of labor without right or voice within the law (unlike terms outlined for hired or wage laborers, servants, or even indentured servants) inherent to chattel slavery make it outside the reach of English law as well as natural law. Hannah More’s poem, *Slavery*, echoes Blackstone’s theorizing of a natural law in questioning the reader about whether the “immortal principle within [would] change with the casual colour of a skin?”²¹⁶ The “immortal principle” that signified a person’s right to freedom and designated her or his identity created a powerful rhetorical device for abolitionists. If slavery existed outside of reason and natural law, something “binding over all the globe,” then abolitionists could soundly condemn it as unnatural and therefore unallowable.²¹⁷ The natural desire for freedom, upheld by theories of natural law, also characterized Wheatley’s poem to the Earl of Dartmouth as well as the 1773 Massachusetts petitions, all of which were published after *Somerset v. Stewart*.

When Mansfield declared that slavery was “so odious, that nothing could be suffered to support it, but positive law” in England, it had the potential, under Blackstone’s principle of

²¹⁴ William Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 5.

²¹⁵ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 128.

²¹⁶ More, *Slavery*, Lines 63-64.

²¹⁷ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 5 and *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510.

universality, to abolish slavery around the globe.²¹⁸ However, he avoided such an immediate impact by cautioning against setting “14,000-15,000” slaves free who were residing or England. Despite his explicit cautioning against such an occurrence, there were instances in which American slaves attempted to flee to England in the hope of achieving freedom, as some runaway slave advertisements recounted.²¹⁹ Additionally, a Boston newspaper heralded that the case had freed all slaves in England.²²⁰ The narrow reading of the holding indicates that Mansfield emancipated James Somerset because he could not be forcibly removed from England to Jamaica. Yet Lord Mansfield’s decision also affirmed that enslaved individuals residing in England held access to “core legal freedoms” like petitioning for a writ of *habeas corpus* or other methods of emancipation through the courts.²²¹ Beyond its legal precedent, the *Somerset* case set a precedent in abolitionist strategy. Supported by antislavery leaders and writers, the case (although limited in its actual legal impact) validated the use of the courts as a means of emancipation, albeit on an individual basis. The successful implementation of many of Granville Sharp’s arguments from *Representations* indicates that printed literature similarly proved to be an effective strategy for abolitionists.

3.3 “We are enabled this day to add one more step”

In the 1770s in Boston, the intensifying revolutionary rhetoric tinged with the threat of war utilized the provocative language of slavery and liberty, which may not have seemed contradictory to slaveholding men like Thomas Jefferson (or even John Wheatley) but to abolitionists such a paradox implemented a way for antislavery literature to illuminate the

²¹⁸ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510.

²¹⁹ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 130.

²²⁰ Jerome Nadelhaft, “The Somersett Case and Slavery: Myth, Reality, and Repercussions,” *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 3 (July 1, 1966): 194.

²²¹ Van Cleve, “Somerset’s Case,” 606.

aberrant nature of slavery.²²² The existence of this contradictory language provided an important rhetorical tool for American abolitionists, like the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Additionally, this rhetoric also aided the language of Pennsylvania's Act for the Gradual Emancipation of Slavery in 1780. In the preamble to this act (the first of its kind in the world), the assembly directly connects its decision to set a plan for gradual emancipation with their own fight for independence from Great Britain:

When we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition to which the arms and tyranny of Great Britain were exerted to reduce us [...] we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is in our power to extend a portion of that freedom to others, which hath been extended to us; and a release from that state of thralldom to which we ourselves were tyrannically doomed [...] We esteem it a peculiar blessing granted to us, that we are enabled this day to add one more step to universal civilization, by removing as much as possible the sorrows of those who have lived in undeserved bondage.²²³

This excerpt indicates the striking rhetorical links between the language of the Revolution and the language of emancipation, even if very gradual. Additionally, the Pennsylvania assembly utilizes in its prose the sympathetic identification Menely referenced as integral to antislavery poetry. As a legislative body, the assembly has the ability for direct political action (unlike a poet) yet they similarly sought to connect their situation with that of enslaved individuals. The appearance and employment of antislavery language in structuring law foregrounds its influence within society. This connection between law and antislavery poetry reveal that these works of abolitionist literature did not remain in isolation but interacted with their broader social contexts. The preamble itself holds an air of poetic verse that recalls Wheatley's address of the contradictory revolutionary rhetoric, which preceded the passage of this act by several years. Writing in 1773, she preceded this groundbreaking legislative act by several years. Placed in

²²² Quote in Heading: Pennsylvania General Assembly, *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1780* (March 1, 1780) *Avalon Project*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pennst01.asp (accessed March 23, 2015). And Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 144-145.

²²³ Pennsylvania, *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1780*.

such an environment of contradiction, her own personal situation somewhat mirrors the larger social context expressed in her poetry. She described deep longing for freedom but also a dedication to John and Susannah Wheatley, who claimed ownership of her, in the same way that the Massachusetts petitioners in April 1773 called for emancipation but in a highly deferential tone with respect for their representatives and their individual masters.

In the midst of this struggle for control of freedom discourse, a group of white men in Philadelphia took it upon themselves to protect against the unlawful enslavement of black men and women in Pennsylvania. Following the successful *Somerset* case, certainly in its accruing fame and central position in the antislavery debate, this organization sought to use the law to gain freedom for those who had been wrongfully enslaved. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society organized on three separate occasions. The first organization of the society occurred in 1775 whose membership consisted mostly of Quaker men from Philadelphia, making it the first organized antislavery society.²²⁴ However, the group's activities and purposes became overshadowed and halted due to the Revolutionary War. Following the war, the society reorganized again in 1784 with highly influential members such as Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush. The society printed and published a document outlining their adherence to and veneration of the Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Act as the foundation for which they would take up the cause of those who had been freed and those who, according to the law, should also be free. In a preamble of sorts before the list of rules and regulations, the members drafted a purpose statement and named their society:

Therefore, being desirous, as much as in us lies, to contribute towards obtaining relief for all such as are kept thus unjustly in thralldom, have agreed to inspect and take charge of all the particular cases which may hereafter come to our

²²⁴ Richard S. Newman, "The PAS and American Abolitionism: A Century of Activism from the American Revolutionary Era to the Civil War," In *The Historical Society of Pennsylvania* hsp.org/sites/default/legacy_files/migrated/newmanpasessay.pdf (accessed July 3, 2015): 1.

knowledge, and that our good intentions may operate the more successfully and be of general utility to such as stand in need of our assistance, have judged it expedient to form ourselves into a regular society, by the name of THE SOCIETY FOR THE RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES, UNLAWFULLY KEPT IN BONDAGE.²²⁵

The above purpose statement of what would later become the Pennsylvania Abolition Society placed the protection and enforcement of the Pennsylvania gradual emancipation act as the top priority. Rather than outlining a specific plan for effecting universal abolition, the society sought to address those who were unlawfully enslaved. The society printed this document in 1784, a time preceding the U.S. Constitution as well as the rise of radical abolitionism in America, occurring mostly during the 1830s.²²⁶ Reading the purpose statement as well as the rules or constitution for the society lacks the bold language that would come with this rise in radicalism. While the society's founding may not have attached its plan for the protection and promotion of free African-Americans to immediate and universal emancipation, the founders certainly adhered to an understanding that freedom and liberty could be maintained within the state.

The focus upon the issue of individual enslavement still asserted an opposition to slavery in a broader sense yet mirrored the gradual emancipation plan set forth in Pennsylvania in 1780. Pennsylvania's plan was the first legislative act by a state that emancipated slavery both in America and around the world.²²⁷ The act outlined that children born to slaves following the passage of the act would be free and similarly provided for a system of indenture for those under

²²⁵ The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, *The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, (1784). In *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Georgia State University.
<http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.gsu.edu/Contents/ImageViewerPage.aspx?documentid=634686§ionid=647728&imageid=660140&vpath=mylightbox> (accessed July 4, 2015): 13.

²²⁶ Dee Andrews, "Reconsidering the First Emancipation: Evidence from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Correspondence, 1785-1810," *Pennsylvania History* vol. 64 (Summer 1997): 231.

²²⁷ Drescher, *Abolition*, 127.

the age of 21.²²⁸ Although the plan ensured for a truly gradual process, with the full realization of emancipation in 1850, its precedent is unavoidable. The PAS recognized the viability of protecting freedom for African Americans by employing the plan's outline for emancipation. The act's opening statement utilizes the revolutionary rhetoric that described the tyranny of Britain and the enslavement of the colonies. The language of the purpose statement of the 1784 society closely mirrors the language of this preamble. Both express a sense of duty or obligation as free citizens to ensure and protect the freedom of others, which may indicate that the PAS intentionally utilized the language of the emancipation act but could also signify the pervading rhetoric of the revolutionary period. However, the preamble to the 1780 act crafted the language to center upon "a portion" of those who would gain freedom by the act. As a state document it protected individuals who resided within the borders of its legislative authority, so the inclusion of the phrase fits within the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania assembly. Yet the PAS similarly confines the scope of its attention to those who were unlawfully enslaved rather than general, universal emancipation. Despite the restraints of the act and the selective nature of the 1784 PAS, both challenged the contradictory language of the Revolution by asserting that freedom should be extended to many more than a select few, which would level the ground in order to build a bolder abolitionist platform.

The rhetoric of liberty persisted in the debates over the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, and in several states delegates to the conventions argued against the 3/5 Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Clause. The PAS had advised Benjamin Franklin as he went to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia to propose for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, but unfortunately no such effort was secured, and Congress would be prevented from

²²⁸ Pennsylvania, *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, 1780*.

passing such an act until 1808.²²⁹ At the Pennsylvania ratification convention, opponents of the Constitution argued that the slave trade should be abolished immediately rather than twenty years from ratification.²³⁰ In Massachusetts, the Constitution's opponents argued that the clause about restricting the slave trade perpetuated the institution of slavery, while its supporters, such as Thomas Dawes, Jr., believed that the provision provided Congress with an opportunity to abolish it.²³¹ For the Virginia Convention, a state with an immense slave population, constitutional opponents like George Mason expressed that the slave trade was "diabolical" yet also lamented that the Constitution did not expressly protect the rights of slaveholders to own slaves.²³² Such strong language, although coming from a position that upholds domestic slavery in America, recalls the deep emotion of More and Yearsley in their poems against the slave trade. At this moment across the Atlantic, parliamentary debate over the abolition of the slave trade was increasing in strength. Hannah More and Ann Yearsley published their poems in the following year as British petition campaigns grew and the ratification debates in the states continued. Many abolitionists believed that the abolition of the slave trade would reduce the enslaved populations and direct plantation owners and slaveholders to fulfill labor needs with wage labor. Additionally, it would serve as an important step towards universal emancipation, particularly in England as concerted diplomatic efforts were made to bring other countries into the cause of ending the transatlantic slave trade.²³³

Article I, Section 2 also stirred responses from delegates wary of the growth or perpetuation of slavery. The clause counted slaves as three-fifths of a person for representation in

²²⁹ Drescher, *Abolition*, 132 and U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 9.

²³⁰ Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2010): 110.

²³¹ Maier, *Ratification*, 175 and 188.

²³² Maier, *Ratification*, 283.

²³³ Drescher, *Abolition*, 228

Congress raised defenses against ratification from Melancton Smith, a delegate at the New York Convention. Smith argued that such a provision would protect and advance those “who were so wicked as to keep slaves.”²³⁴ The goal of this thesis is not to debate whether or not the Constitution was a proslavery document but to see the connections of language within the transatlantic abolitionist movement and with the historical world in which it operated. Slavery was a frequent point of discussion and debate in a developing nation fixed upon liberty and ensuring that its recent chains would not be laid upon them again. The reformulated nation would seek to “secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”²³⁵ Abolitionists utilized literature and other forms of discourse to illuminate the contradiction between a celebration of liberty and a continuation of slavery.

3.4 Conclusion

Wheatley’s travels in England in 1773 illuminate the international connections within the transatlantic world in which she took part in spite of the decline in her career followed by her death in 1784.²³⁶ She met several abolitionists in traveling the transatlantic literary circuit, and those who visited the Wheatley household, who viewed her impressive talent as ammunition to antislavery discourse regarding the humanity of slaves.²³⁷ While a current perspective witnessed the treatment of Wheatley as more of an exhibition of the abilities of African people rather than a genuine celebration of her work, her importance and her talent is not diminished because her work endured and greatly impacted later antislavery poetry.²³⁸ The timing of her poetry within the contradictory revolutionary atmosphere in America and prior to the rise of British

²³⁴ Maier, *Ratification*, 351.

²³⁵ U.S. Constitution, Preamble.

²³⁶ Williams, “‘Am I Not?’” 118.

²³⁷ James A. Levernier, “Phillis Wheatley and the New England Clergy,” *Early American Literature* 26, no. 1 (March 1991): 24.

²³⁸ Williams, “‘Am I Not?’” 118.

abolitionism against the slave trade serves to illuminate the layered junctures characterizing the transatlantic world. The interaction between her personal life, the political climates of Britain and America, and the way in which race affected the treatment of her work presents a complex portrait of transatlantic history that is at times connected and at other times disjointed. The intersection of language between Wheatley's poetry, antislavery literature in America, legal questioning of slavery, and in the formation of a new nation illuminates the interconnectivity of the abolition movement and the reality of a transatlantic antislavery language.

4 "OH! MOTHER, WEEP NOT, THOUGH OUR LOT BE HARD"

In the 1830s, American abolitionism faced increasing opposition from proslavery supporters as well as racist ideologies in northern cities like Philadelphia. Radical abolitionists heightened the emotional depth of language in order to stir "public sentiment" to support the cause of freedom and racial equality as opposed to the views of colonization.²³⁹ They responded to the dynamics of race and gender through literature and interracial and female societies, such as the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS). Sarah Forten, a free black woman in Philadelphia and a founding member of the PFASS, was significantly involved in the moment of radical abolitionism in the 1830s. Her poetry incorporated the sociohistorical dynamics surrounding this moment. Her verse encapsulated the themes of the separated slave family and the natural expectation of freedom that characterized the poetry of Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, and Phillis Wheatley. She also was a founding

²³⁹ Quote in Heading: Sarah Forten as 'Ada,' "The Slave Girl's Address to Her Mother," *The Liberator* (Boston: Saturday, January 29, 1831) In *19th Century U.S. Newspaper*. Georgia State University http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sort=DateAscend&docLevel=FA SCIMILE&prodId=NCNP&tabID=T003&bookId=&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1¤tPosition=2&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&bucketSubId=&inPS=true&userGroupName=atla29738&hilite=y&docPage=article&nav=next&docId=GT3005832704&searchTypeName=AdvancedSearchForm&contentSet=LTO: 18 (accessed June 21, 2015 - emphasis mine). And Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 37-39.

member of the Female Literary Association, which was a group of African-American women writing against slavery and racial prejudice.²⁴⁰ Although Forten's active involvement in radical abolitionism was short-lived (within the decade of the 1830s), her poetry significantly contributed to the shared language of the transatlantic abolitionist movement.

4.1 “And death, to the captive, is freedom and rest”: Sarah Forten

Writing more than forty years after *Slavery: A Poem* and *The Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* and nearly fifty years since Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* appeared in print, Sarah Forten's sociohistorical environment facilitated adaptations in abolitionism. Immediate, universal emancipation characterized the movement and attention had moved from the international slave trade (since both Britain and America had abolished the practice) to focus solely upon eliminating the institution of slavery.²⁴¹ Elizabeth Heyrick, who played an incredibly significant role in the British antislavery movement, moved immediate emancipation of slaves to the forefront of British antislavery thought with her pamphlet published in 1824 that challenged the London Anti-Slavery Committee's promotion of gradual emancipation.²⁴² The petition campaigns of the 1830s also witnessed a massive response of women signers, with women

²⁴⁰ Mary Kelley, “‘Talents Committed to Your Care’: Reading and Writing Radical Abolitionism in Antebellum America,” *The New England Quarterly*, 88 no. 1 (March 2015): 38.

²⁴¹ Quote in Heading: Sarah Forten as ‘Ada,’ “The Grave of the Slave,” *The Liberator*, no. 4 (Boston: Saturday, January 22, 1831): 14. In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=7&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C7%29%22grave%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C19%291%2F1%2F1831+-+2%2F5%2F1831%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832668&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed July 5, 2015). And Drescher, *Abolition*, 148.

²⁴² Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, 71-72.

constituting 30 percent of signers of the 1833 petitions, thus signaling an important expansion of collective involvement in the British movement.²⁴³

Sarah Forten, whose family was intricately connected to many leading British abolitionists, would have been aware of these petition drives and rhetoric of immediate abolition.²⁴⁴ The immediatist language and strategy rising to prominence in the 1830s stood in contrast to the slow or unmoving progress towards abolition in the United States. Although Forten's family was free and privileged, freedom for enslaved residents in Pennsylvania was not immediate. The process of gradual emancipation implemented in the 1780 Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Act did not reach completion until 1847, almost ten years after Britain had ended its apprenticeship system in the colonies in 1838.²⁴⁵ The drawn out emancipation process in Pennsylvania was coupled with increasing prejudice (especially in the 1820s and 1830s) against the free black population, particularly in Philadelphia.²⁴⁶ Slavery persisted throughout the South and in Northern states like New Jersey and New York (which had also adopted gradual emancipation plans), and abolitionists' frustration with lawmakers regarding abolition found expression in Forten's poetry.

She submitted numerous poems to *The Liberator* under the pseudonym "Ada," producing her first poem at age seventeen in 1831 and writing until 1839.²⁴⁷ She also submitted works of prose under the name of "Magawisca," which was the name of the Native American heroine of

²⁴³ Drescher, *Abolition*, 250.

²⁴⁴ Julie Winch, "Sarah Forten's Anti-Slavery Networks," in *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, Kindle edition, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), Loc. 2260 and Loc. 2277 of 5644.

²⁴⁵ Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1988), 63 and Drescher, *Abolition*, 248.

²⁴⁶ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 231-235.

²⁴⁷ Kelley, "'Talents'," 44.

Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, published in 1827.²⁴⁸ Forten's mother was of African and Native American descent, so perhaps she sought to connect the plight of slaves with the experience of her ancestors.²⁴⁹ Using a pseudonym was rather commonplace, particularly for submissions to *The Liberator*. Even Forten's father often submitted works of prose or letters to newspapers under the titles of "A Man of Colour" or "A Colored Philadelphian."²⁵⁰ With such an influential father, perhaps she sought to have her poems read for their own merit rather than under the banner of her father's accomplishments.²⁵¹ Another explanation would be that adopting another name created a space for Forten to boldly present the plight of slaves and challenge those who were not actively promoting their cause. The name "Ada," a name used by slaves in the *Atlantic World*, in Igbo (a Nigerian language) means "daughter."²⁵² Although she herself was not the firstborn of James and Charlotte Forten, holding the title of first daughter would lend more authority to her words and in identifying with enslaved individuals taken from Africa. This remains a supposition, but since many of her poems feature a daughter or slave girl as the narrator (including, "The Slave Girl's Address to Her Mother") it is possible that she knew of the name's meaning and chose it for this purpose.

Garrison published least twenty-five of her poems between January 1831 and October 1839.²⁵³ Readers responded well to her poems, and in one such instance a reader named "S"

²⁴⁸ Kelley, "Talents," 43 and David Watson, "Under the Government of Sympathy: Sentimental History in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts*," *Journal of Literary Studies* 29, no. 2 (July 2013): 8.

²⁴⁹ Winch, "Anti-Slavery Networks," Loc. 2301 of 5644.

²⁵⁰ Winch, *A Gentleman*, 7.

²⁵¹ Winch, "Anti-Slavery Networks," Loc. 2285 of 5644.

²⁵² Brian Schwimmer, "Igbo Kin Terms," (University of Manitoba, April 2002) http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/kinterms/igbo_terms.html (accessed June 22, 2015); Guillaume Durand, "The Survival of Names of African Origin in Martinique After Emancipation," *Dialectical Anthropology*, 26 no. ¾ (2001): 203 and UNESCO, *African Ethnonyms and Toponyms: the General History of Africa, Studies and Documents*, 6 (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1984) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0005/000598/059800eo.pdf>. (accessed June 22, 2015):164.

²⁵³ Winch, "Anti-Slavery Networks," Loc. 2293 of 5644. – The number of published poems by "Ada" that I have been able to find in *The Liberator* is twenty-five, but there is the potential that more were published

wrote to Garrison and praised the paper for its “glorious” aim and celebrated “the feeling poetry of Ada.”²⁵⁴ The editor of the *Liberator* similarly attached gratitude to “the anonymous writer” and encouraged her to continue to submit her poetry.²⁵⁵ Born into a prominent free African-American family, Forten did not hold the added burden of enslavement that Wheatley carried throughout much of her life. Forten’s family was integral in the abolitionist movement, and her father (James Forten) corresponded considerably with his British antislavery counterparts. Her father, along with other free African American men, also set out to further finance publication of some of Wheatley’s poems.²⁵⁶ An artistic connection between Wheatley and Forten was thus forged, constituting yet another indication of how a transatlantic community of letters and literary exchange could be forged even when physical contact was impossible.

Forten answered Garrison’s call for authors writing against slavery with “The Grave of the Slave,” on January 22, 1831.²⁵⁷ The poem garnered such attention that Francis Johnson set it

particularly since some were originally printed in other newspapers like *The Massachusetts Spy* and *The Pennsylvania Freeman*.

²⁵⁴ ‘S,’ “Sir,” *The Liberator*, no. 17 (Boston: Saturday, April 23, 1831) In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University
http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R3&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=16&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C15%29%22to+the+editor%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C23%2904%2F01%2F1831+-+04%2F30%2F1831%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832243&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 20, 2015): 66.

²⁵⁵ “To the anonymous writer...” *The Liberator*, no. 4 (Boston: Saturday, January 22, 1831) In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University.
http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R4&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C23%2901%2F01%2F1831+-+01%2F25%2F1831%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832668&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 20, 2015): 14.

²⁵⁶ Winch, “Anti-Slavery Networks,” Loc. 2278 of 5644.

²⁵⁷ Forten, “The Grave of the Slave,” 14.

to music and brought it to England in 1837.²⁵⁸ As Yearsley used Luco's death as both tragic and triumphant, Forten mourned the anonymous passing of a slave with "Not a tear, not a sigh to embalm his cold tomb," yet also marks his passing into freedom:

Where [...] Not his master can rouse him with voice of command;
He knows not, he hears not, his cruel demand [...]
Poor slave! shall we sorrow that death was thy friend,
The last, and the kindest, that heaven could send?
The grave to the weary is welcomed and blest;
And death, to the captive, is *freedom* and rest.²⁵⁹

The death of the "poor slave" closes the poem in "freedom and rest," symbolizing a time when slavery itself will be sent to the grave. Although Forten closed the poem with a glimmer of hope, the rest of the poem held a haunting, somewhat defeatist tone. The "poor slave is laid all unheeded and lone [...] no friend to lament him, no child to bemoan," thus signifying the isolation of slavery and the total separation from family.²⁶⁰ Orlando Patterson's term of "social death" eerily fits with the unknown, unlamented death of the man in "The Grave of the Slave."²⁶¹ The poem has an undercurrent of family importance because the tragedy of his death is not death itself, but that there is no one to bury him or grieve for him. The slave family appeared frequently as a structural theme or as a character in 'Ada's' poems.

Her next poem, "The Slave Girl's Address to her Mother," appeared the following week. Forten infused the power of experience, even fictional experience, to heighten the emotion of the poem and to challenge those living in freedom to recognize the contradiction of slavery in a democracy. This recalls Hannah More's challenge to the British who claimed to uphold the love of liberty, yet Forten took the voice of the slaves rather than a distant figure like More:

²⁵⁸ Winch, "Anti-Slavery Networks," Loc. 2301 of 5644.

²⁵⁹ Forten, "The Grave of the Slave," 14 (emphasis mine).

²⁶⁰ Forten, "The Grave of the Slave," 14.

²⁶¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5-8.

Torn from *our* home, *our* kindred, and *our* friends,
 [...] No heart feels for the poor, the bleeding slave;
 No arm is stretched to rescue and to save.
 Oh! ye who boast of Freedom's sacred claims,
 Do ye not blush to see *our* galling chains;
 To hear that sounding word – 'that all are free' –
 When thousands groan in helpless slavery?²⁶²

Placing herself in the poem lent greater authority to Forten's recounting of being "torn from *our* home" and to her impassioned questioning of the reader who might be apathetic to the abolitionist cause. In contrast, More laid her accusations from the position of the narrator outside of (yet still emotionally invested in) the actual experience of the slave. In a way More established her authority to speak by taking the voice of one looking down (in objective justice) upon the scene in horror at the unnatural, moral wrong of slavery.²⁶³ Instead of proclaiming injustice from a removed point of view, Forten authenticated her accusations against slavery and those who let it continue by taking the voice of someone experiencing its wrongs firsthand. Forten referenced the violence of slavery ("the bleeding slave") to heighten the absurdity of supporting slavery or remaining silent about it, thereby further substantiating her accusations.

Jeannine DeLombard analyzes the use of "the trope of the trial" in antebellum abolitionist literature and how this rhetorical tool demonstrated the "legal spectatorship" of the Jacksonian era.²⁶⁴ While the poem does not overtly refer to a courtroom model, Forten halted the address to the mother to accuse those who idly sit by while "thousands groan in helpless slavery."²⁶⁵ DeLombard bases her analysis on examples such as Frederick Douglass's second narrative, *My Bondage, My Freedom*, in which he set himself as the witness testifying against slaveholders as

²⁶² Forten, "The Slave Girl's Address," 18 (emphasis mine).

²⁶³ Kerri Andrews, "'More's polish'd Muse or Yearsley's muse of fire': bitter enemies write the Abolition Movement," *European Romantic Review* 20, no. 1 (January 2009): 30.

²⁶⁴ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 3 and 7.

²⁶⁵ Forten, "The Slave Girl's Address," 18.

the defendants.²⁶⁶ Instead of taking the role as witness, the narrator (the slave girl) becomes the prosecutor (like Yearsley) accusing not simply the slaveholder but those who claim to love freedom. The questioning follows the pattern established in Yearsley, More, and Wheatley, yet Forten's forcefulness more closely resembled Yearsley's style. Yearsley inserted her own voice in the poem narrative as the prosecutor daring the defendant (the slave trader) to "speak, astound the voice of justice!"²⁶⁷ She continued with taunting the slave trader to "bid thy tears to melt the un pitying power" (perhaps the jury) knowing that it would be to no avail. She called him to recognize his guilt as if delivering the key evidence condemning him.

Yearsley's questioning perhaps had a sharper edge than Forten's verse, but the figure on the stand in Forten's poem was not the slave trader, but the one who had passively stood by and let slavery continue. Therefore, while the tone is less severe, the accusation is still of notable strength especially since the defendant is not the slaveholder. She similarly employed Yearsley's tactic of placing the guilt and shame before the accused in declaring that she or he should "blush to see [the] galling chains" of slavery.²⁶⁸

Antislavery poetry provided a way for abolitionists to hold a mirror to the reader regarding the contradiction of loving personal freedom yet ignoring the enslavement of a race of people. She intensifies the subtler questioning that Wheatley employed in her poem "To the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth." Perhaps the safety (and imagined authenticity) of a pseudonym emboldened Forten to challenge the reader into sympathetic action. Although she attributes the coming emancipation to God's deliverance, the poem also stirs the reader (most likely already sympathetic to the abolitionist cause) to feel and identify with the separation of enslavement in such a way as to hope for abolition and, more importantly, support its cause.

²⁶⁶ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 3 and 27.

²⁶⁷ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 3.

²⁶⁸ Forten, "The Slave Girl's Address," 18.

While “The Grave of the Slave” lamented the death of “the poor slave” from a distanced perspective, Forten narrated the poem as the slave girl, thus taking the poem to a greater emotional depth. The girl tells her mother not to weep, “though [their] lot be hard and [they] are helpless,” because “God will be [their] guard” and will bring them to freedom.²⁶⁹ The sadness and pain of the poem resides in the separation of the family from their homeland and from their kin. However, she echoed the formulaic structure of More and Yearsley in carrying a persevering hope that God will “Bid us rise from slavery and live.”²⁷⁰ The emphasis on the separated slave family recalls the shared poetic tools employed by More, Yearsley, and Wheatley.²⁷¹ Forten’s verse also referenced Wheatley’s poetic telling of being taken from her African homeland in order to intensify the experience of being ripped from not only from her birthplace, but also from the humanity that having a homeland yields.

A few months passed before Forten’s third poem graced the pages of *The Liberator*, and it employed the same tools of placing the separated slave family at the center of the emotional focus of the poem. Key to this symbolism was the lone slave figure trapped in slavery. In “Past Joys” and “The Grave of the Slave” she presented the isolation of a slave as the tragedy and wrong of slavery. The importance of kin networks has been discussed widely in the historiography of slavery, and here in Forten’s poetry is evidence to how abolitionists used symbols of kin for their cause.²⁷² Similarly to Yearsley’s connections between Luco (the male head of the family) and his bride, Incilanda, Forten created a family (although the characters are unnamed) that becomes separated yet somehow bound together in spirit.²⁷³ The poem moves the

²⁶⁹ Forten, “The Slave Girl’s Address,” 18.

²⁷⁰ Forten, “The Slave Girl’s Address,” 18.

²⁷¹ Forten, “The Grave of the Slave,” 14 and Forten, “The Slave Girl’s Address,” 18.

²⁷² David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200.

²⁷³ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 5 and Sarah Forten as ‘Ada,’ “Past Joys,” *The Liberator*, no. 12 (Boston: Saturday, March 19, 1831) in *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University

reader to identify with the grief and pain of the slave and how “he must feel – How hard it is to part from all he lov’d.” The reader must imagine the depth of sorrow he must endure knowing that “the mother, wife, or child he loved, he ne’er shall see again.”²⁷⁴ Unlike the somewhat hopeful end in the “Grave of the Slave,” and certainly in contrast with the promise of freedom in Yearsley and More, “Past Joys” has a haunting, unfinished closing stanza:

His home – ah! that lov’d name recalls
All that was dear to him;
But *these* were scenes he’ll know no more, -
He only *feels* they’ve been.²⁷⁵

The man in this poem resigns himself to the reality that he will never return to his homeland, and he will only see his family in his memories. The despairing incompleteness of this poem reflects the growing animosity against abolitionism and persistence of the institution of slavery contributing to a growing sense of the difficult and long road to freedom.

“Past Joys” indicates a shift in antislavery poetry from Yearsley and More. Forten’s poems focused upon the slave experience while the others dedicated many of their lines to the slave trader and the act of trafficking. Although Yearsley and More created much longer works of poetry that were published as a single volume as opposed to Forten’s newspaper poems, they gave far greater emphasis to the illogical nature of slavery than to the emotional experience. Sarah Forten also charged the reader with idly supporting slavery while defending her or his own liberty thus making use of logical reasoning, yet the emotional separation of family and the isolated state of slavery received more attention in her poems. Granted, all four poets (More,

http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=RI&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=5&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832930&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y
(accessed July 3, 2015).

²⁷⁴ Forten, “Past Joys.”

²⁷⁵ Forten, “Past Joys.”

Yearsley, Wheatley, and Forten) employ similar tools of the enslaved experience (thus confirming a shared resource of language and rhetoric), yet Forten uses this tool as the foundation of her attack upon slavery.

In April 1831, Forten wrote “The Slave,” which would have resonated deeply with the free African American community as well as recalling the language of liberty from the American Revolution. She challenged those who have neglected to take up the cause of the slave, having forgotten that “bondage had once been their lot,” despite having “bled and died” for freedom.²⁷⁶ Having a heritage of enslavement, yet being born into freedom, Forten wrote with felt experience in this poem, calling upon an understanding of oneness based on race as well as American patriotism in order to connect her audience to the slave. Her father had fought in the Revolutionary War, not as a slave but as a patriot, and so there was a generation still living who had fought in the name of freedom against the slavery of Britain (as well as those who had fought in the War of 1812).²⁷⁷ While she would not have been laying a charge against her father (who was highly involved in the radical abolitionist movement), her poem addresses those who ignore the plight of the slave and the continued contradiction of American freedom coexisting with slavery.

The poem ends with a direct question of the country, not just those who had been in bondage: “For oh! My country, must it be? That they still find a foe in thee?”²⁷⁸ The question did

²⁷⁶ Sarah Forten as ‘Ada,’ “The Slave,” *The Liberator* (Boston: Saturday, April 16, 1831) in *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*. Georgia State University
http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=8&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832219&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y
 (accessed 13 August 2014).

²⁷⁷ Winch, *A Gentleman*, 37 and Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 214.

²⁷⁸ Forten, “The Slave,” (April 16, 1831).

not hold a tone of disloyalty but one of patriotism in recognizing that her countrymen had won freedom and achieved “deeds of glory” worthy of praise. With sectional crises and legal cases, like *Commonwealth v. Aves*, revealing tensions between free states and slave states, for Forten (as expressed in the poem), the threat to the country was the continuance and spread of the institution of slavery. So her closing question (the answer left unresolved until the country rids itself of the “foe” of slavery) utilized the rhetorical tools established in antislavery literature that highlights the illogic of allowing the enslavement of others yet demanding freedom for oneself.

The love of freedom that Americans shared Echoing Wheatley (as well as More and Yearsley) in placing the love of freedom and the reality of enslavement side by side, Forten’s poem fits well within a transatlantic network of antislavery language. This poem relies heavily upon the established tools of antislavery poetry consistent with the late eighteenth century thus showing the endurance of abolitionist language and poetic strategy. Forten alluded to the expectation of abolitionists that all enslaved individuals held a natural desire for freedom. The slave in this poem remains unnamed and locked in the darkness of slavery, despairing that “he can ne’er be free; to feel that *his* is doomed to be a life, and death, of slavery.”²⁷⁹ Forten assumed that freedom was “dearest to his heart,” and therefore those who knew “the sweets of freedom” had to care and fight for the slave to be in his or her natural state. The natural state of freedom contrasting with the unnatural state of slavery featured prominently throughout antislavery literature as well as in legal arguments against slavery.

4.2 “No evil [...] so great as the abuse of man’s liberty”: Philadelphia and Inequality

For the free black population in Philadelphia (of which Sarah Forten was a highly connected member), the sweet hope and realization of freedom became embittered by racial

²⁷⁹ Forten, “The Slave,” (April 16, 1831).

prejudice and inequality. In 1837, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society released a report of data that its agents had gathered on the state of free African Americans living in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas.²⁸⁰ The society estimated, by the findings of the agents as well as the 1830 census, that there were 18,768 black men and women living in Philadelphia and in the districts around the city.²⁸¹ The 1830 U.S. Census counted 15,624 people in the “nonwhite” population, so the number that the agents determined factored in the population increase in seven years.²⁸² In the 1840 Census, the number had risen to 19,833. Therefore, the report’s estimates were very close to the government’s determinations and point to the commitment to accuracy that the PAS held.²⁸³ The report illuminated certain inequalities in employment for these individuals. Although James Forten was highly successful and respected by both the black and white communities for his effective and respectable business dealings, his position was quite rare.²⁸⁴

For most African-Americans in Philadelphia, employment was limited to “the most menial

²⁸⁰ Quote in Heading: Sarah Forten as ‘Magawisca,’ “The Abuses of Liberty,” in *The Liberator*, no.13 (Boston: Saturday, March 26, 1831) In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University [http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/sas/retrieve.do?qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28TX%2CNone%2C29%29%22present+state+and+condition%22%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%28TX%2CNone%2C12%29pennsylvania%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C40%29%22SAS-1%22+OR+%22SAS-2%22+OR+%22SAS-3%22+OR+%22SAS-4%22%24&sort=DateAscend&docLevel=TEXT_GRAPHICS&inPS=true&prodId=SAS&userGroupName=atla29738&doDirectDocNumSearch=false&tabID=T001&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R3¤tPosition=6&contentSet=ECCO&showLOI=Yes&totalCount=24&bookId=ASPC0005075900&collectionId=CTRG01-B2360&relevancePageBatch=FZ100251675](http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=4&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C23%2903%2F01%2F1831+-+03%2F31%2F1831%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005832965&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y: 50. And Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, <i>The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, as Exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c.</i> (Philadelphia: Published by the Society, Merrihew and Gunn, Printers, 1838) In <i>Slavery & Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive</i>. Georgia State University <a href=) (accessed June 18, 2015): 1.

²⁸¹ PAS, *Present State*, 6.

²⁸² U.S. Census of 1830 for Philadelphia, “Nonwhite Population,” In *Social Explorer Database*, <http://www.socialexplorer.com/6f4cdab7a0/explore>, Georgia State University (accessed June 23, 2015).

²⁸³ U.S. Census of 1840 for Philadelphia, “Nonwhite Population,” *Social Explorer*.

²⁸⁴ Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 5-6 and 85.

services and severest labors,” yet, according to those polled by the PAS agents, racial prejudice stood in the way for black men to secure an apprenticeship to learn a higher trade.²⁸⁵ The low-paying jobs that they were able to secure often did not cover the costs of living in the city resulted in high levels of poverty, particularly amongst black women acting as the heads of households.²⁸⁶

For free people of color, their place in American society was restrained at numerous levels, and although the Fortens were financially successful and stable, they would have witnessed and experienced the legal restrictions that William Yates recounts in his book of the status of free African Americans published in Philadelphia in 1838, such as the barring of African Americans from public schooling and voting.²⁸⁷ The black population of Philadelphia not only faced economic hardship, limited social capital, and disenfranchisement, but also attacks in political cartoons exaggerating and parodying the dress and speech of the black middle class.²⁸⁸ Edward Clay’s series of cartoons in the late 1820s, “Life in Philadelphia,” used dialect and flashy clothing for his caricatures to show that they did not belong in white society and insinuated an intellectual (or at least linguistic) inferiority.²⁸⁹ The PAS worked to improve the condition of the black population (both free and enslaved) and to condemn with evidence such prejudices.²⁹⁰ Abolitionists also created volumes demonstrating individual talent to challenge

²⁸⁵ PAS, *Present State*, 10.

²⁸⁶ PAS, *Present State*, 41.

²⁸⁷ William Yates, *Rights of Colored Men to Suffrage, Citizenship, and Trial by Jury: being a book of facts, arguments, and authorities, historical notices and sketches of debates, with notes* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838) In *The Making of Modern Law*. Georgia State University <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F101807160&srchtp=a&ste=14> (accessed August 13, 2014): 5.

²⁸⁸ Nash, *Forging Freedoms*, 254-259.

²⁸⁹ Edward Clay, “Morgan’s Deductions,” in Nash, *Forging Freedoms*, 257.

²⁹⁰ PAS, *Second Report of the Committee to Visit the Colored People, &c. &c. To the Society. Read Fourth month 4th, 1838*, in *Present State*, 4.

the root of racism against black people, as in the case of Phillis Wheatley.²⁹¹ Fighting against the reality of inequality and race-based slavery required both the statistical, scientific data that the PAS pursued as well as sympathetic literature that sought to strike an emotional chord to inspire action.

Sarah Forten, well-aware of these prejudices as an informed free black woman in Philadelphia, not only used poetry to combat slavery and inequality, but she also created prose under the name of “Magawisca.” Her work, “The Abuses of Liberty,” appeared in *The Liberator* on March 26, 1831.²⁹² She spoke of the appalling inequality between white and black, and included in her attack on slavery the withholding of liberty from the free black population as well. She clearly stated in this piece why she specified white and black, and not slave and free:

I know no evil under [...] Heaven, so great as the abuse of man’s liberty; and no where has this vice a more extensive sway, than in this boasted land of Philanthropy, that offers to every *white* man the right to enjoy life, liberty, and happiness. I say every white man, because those who cannot shew a fair exterior, (no matter what be the noble qualities of their mind,) are to be robbed of the rights by which they were endowed by an all-wise and merciful Creator [...]²⁹³

She outlined similar arguments regarding the cruelty of family separation that features strongly in her poetry as well as contrasting the “land of Philanthropy” and generous liberty with the reality of the deprivation of assumed rights of black people. The piece’s closing calls the free, white population to “awake from [their] lethargy” and “cast off the yoke from the oppressed.” She grounded her reasoning for full liberty for all in natural law or inherent rights as well as in her belief that God will “send freedom” and who “created all men free and equal [...] who made the sun to shine on the black man as well as the white.”²⁹⁴ The allusion to the sun’s rays echoes Hannah More’s lines in *Slavery: A Poem*, yet More’s reference questions why the “bright

²⁹¹ Crawford, *Observations upon Negro-Slavery*, 3-4 and *Intelligent Negroes*, 1.

²⁹² Forten, “The Abuses,” 50.

²⁹³ Forten, “The Abuses,” 50 (emphasis mine).

²⁹⁴ Forten, “The Abuses,” 50.

intellectual Sun” does not shine the light of freedom on all, an inequality that Forten describes throughout this piece.²⁹⁵

4.3 “Dare to be good”: Women and Abolition

In addition to her literary contributions against slavery and racial inequality, Sarah Forten also served as a founding member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS). The group formed in December 1833 as the female branch of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and they continued to fight for rights of freedmen until the passage of the Fifteenth amendment.²⁹⁶ Coming out of the sectional crisis regarding slavery leading to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, radical abolitionists who promoted immediate emancipation and full equality for black people faced mounting opposition from slavery’s defenders (and racism in the North).²⁹⁷ Not only did resistance grow against American abolitionists but also in response to the British emancipation act, which many slaveholders viewed as a conspiracy.²⁹⁸ The racial tensions in the North The PFASS entered the abolitionist arena in an entirely different context than the early period of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society discussed in the previous chapter.²⁹⁹

Transatlantic abolitionism held an established place in public discourse in the 1820s and 1830s; however, this stage yielded determined opposition. Seymour Drescher explains that the 1830s revealed stark contrasts in the reception of antislavery discourse between the British

²⁹⁵ More, *Slavery: A Poem*, Lines 3-4.

²⁹⁶ Emily Hatcher, “The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Civil War,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, no. 4 (October 2011): 528-530.

²⁹⁷ McDaniel, *Problem of Democracy*, 5-6.

²⁹⁸ McDaniel, *Problem of Democracy*, 50.

Quote in Heading: Sarah Forten as ‘Ada,’ “An Appeal to Woman,” in *The Liberator* no. 5 (Boston: Saturday, February 1, 1834) In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=23&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C5%29%22ada%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005836728&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed June 20, 2015): 20.

movement, in which abolitionists enjoyed a role "as the voice of the British people," and the American movement, in which abolitionists came to be "linked to everything that was subversive of their nation and their society."³⁰⁰ Although British abolitionism had secured important milestones in hastening immediate emancipation, the antislavery fight in America had to strengthen its language and obtain popular support in the midst of fierce opposition. Although organizations were rapidly forming in the U.S., the voices in defense of slavery rose in increasing number and strength, which cast a daunting shadow over the hopes and strategies of radical abolitionists, particularly in the 1820s and 1830s.

The PFASS featured an interracial membership of influential women in Philadelphia, including Sarah Forten's sisters and mother and Lucretia Mott, a prominent Quaker and family friend of the Fortens. The interracial composition of the PFASS became a point of serious contention between Philadelphian society and abolitionists. In May 1838, a riotous mob surrounded the meeting hall where the PFASS (and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society) met and then burned it. The mob reacted to the "amalgamation" or mixing of black and white abolitionists, thereby revealing the difficult negotiations of race that abolitionists navigated.³⁰¹ Even before the fire, more "timid Philadelphia abolitionists," (according to Lucretia Mott) were resistant to holding public, interracial meetings when William Lloyd Garrison visited in 1834. Mott however attended an event at the Forten's home and hoped that the cause was "certainly making rapid progress."³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Drescher, *Abolition*, 305.

³⁰¹ Margaret Hope Bacon, "The Motts and the Purvises: A Study in Interracial History," *Quaker History* 92, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 4.

³⁰² Lucretia Mott to J.M. McKim (May 5, 1834) in *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters*, edited by Anna Davis Hallowell (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884) In *The Gerritsen Collection of Aletta H. Jacobs*. Georgia State University
<http://gerritsen.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/?jsessionid=C1C557EE7A09F137A9D86DE7432024D7fulltext/fulltext.do?area=documents&id=Gerritsen->

Following the events of May 1838, the more conservative president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (which was not an interracial group until the 1840s) encouraged the PFASS to segregate rather than risk further violence from broader society.³⁰³ Lucretia Mott, the society's president, decided to host a tea for her fellow abolitionists – both white and black – as a way of ignoring that suggestion.³⁰⁴ The PFASS faced these challenges against interracial cooperation not only from Philadelphian society but also from within the broader antislavery network. While radical abolitionists like the Fortens and the Motts saw the benefit and necessity of removing race from the activist equation, other abolitionists did not hold the same view. This point of contention not only illuminates the difficulty facing black abolitionists to assert their place in promoting freedom, but also highlights the wide spectrum of viewpoints represented in the transatlantic abolition movement.

As the female branch of the American Anti-Slavery Society, it is fitting to include the language of this society's printed constitution. The constitution's preamble quotes the Declaration of Independence and also echoes the revolutionary rhetoric characteristic of the late eighteenth century antislavery (as with the , thus solidifying the importance that abolitionists placed on this rhetoric:

Whereas our national existence is based upon this principle, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence, 'that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights' [...] nearly one-sixth of the nation are held in bondage by their *fellow* citizens [...] we believe it the duty and interest of masters [to] immediately emancipate their slaves [...] and whereas we believe that it is practicable through appeals to the consciences [of the] people, to awaken a public

[G1160.1&pagenum=130&queryId=&resultNum=&entries=&source=&fromPage=fullRec&browseType=&expandt olevel=&expandId=&zoom=100](#) (accessed July 4, 2015): 119.

³⁰³ Richard S. Newman, "The PAS and American Abolitionism: A Century of Activism from the American Revolutionary Era to the Civil War," *The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*. hsp.org/sites/default/legacy_files/migrated/newmanpasessay.pdf (accessed June 22, 2015): 7.

³⁰⁴ Bacon, "The Motts and The Purvises," 4.

sentiment throughout the nation, that will be opposed to the continuance of slavery in any part of the republic.³⁰⁵

The American Anti-Slavery Society promised to secure equality for "fellow citizens" in contrast to those whom Sarah Forten challenged in "The Slave" that celebrated their own achievement of freedom yet neglected the slave. As an interracial society, they also sought the equality of the black population (both free and enslaved). Resolving to "awaken public sentiment" echoes Forten's wake-up call in "The Abuses of Liberty" for the public to "cast off the yoke from the oppressed" and to defend the principle that "all men [are] free and equal."³⁰⁶

At their founding meeting, the women of the PFASS similarly determined that creating a society would "more effectively aid in relieving the oppression of our fellow creatures."³⁰⁷ As a group of women in an age of separate sphere ideology, creating a society of women with a political goal as the basis, they would need to tread carefully so as to establish their right to form. They established such a justification by citing two men, Samuel May (from New York) and Nathaniel Southard (from Boston), who declared that the society would give "important assistance [in] removing the evil of slavery" that would be appropriate for their gender.³⁰⁸ Other such societies of women continued to form throughout the 1830s, thereby confirming that such activities (according to abolitionists) were beneficial to the movement and a proper way for women to become involved. In Massachusetts, there were 41 antislavery associations of women

³⁰⁵ The American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society: With the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention at Philadelphia, December, 1833* (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838) digitized by Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection. <https://archive.org/details/constitutionofan00amer> (accessed July 4, 2015): 2.

³⁰⁶ Forten, "The Abuses," 50.

³⁰⁷ PAS Papers Series V, Minutes of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society, Section 1 (1833-1870) in *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Georgia State University <http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.gsu.edu/Contents/ImageViewerPage.aspx?imageid=282796&pi=1&previous=2&searchmode=true&prevpos=263040&vpath=searchresults> (accessed July 4, 2015): 3.

³⁰⁸ PAS Papers Series V, Minutes of the PFASS, Section 1: 3.

out of 183 groups between 1838 and 1841.³⁰⁹ In the minutes of the PFASS, the women reference letters from other female societies, such as from their counterparts in Brooklyn and Boston in 1836.³¹⁰ Instances such as these indicate that the female involvement in abolitionism was not rare but rather widespread and interconnected.

Female abolitionists negotiated the balance in entering the political sphere through the cause of abolition while having to operate in the limits of separate sphere ideology. Lucretia Mott, one of the founding members of the PFASS, addressed the right of women to participate in social reform and promoting causes of justice on December 17, 1849, saying that "women as well as men are interested in these works of justice and mercy [...] Why should not woman seek to be a reformer?"³¹¹ In this rhetorical question, Mott illuminates a poignant truth of women abolitionists: that in order to fight for the rights and freedom of others, women first had to establish their right to do so. Mott's sermon echoes a poem that Sarah Forten wrote in 1834 (again published in *The Liberator* but originally printed in *The Lowell Observer*), which called women to stand up for one another regardless of race and to "dare to be good [...] despite the taunts of envy, scorn, and hate."³¹² The editor's brief introduction to the poem does not reveal Forten's identity, but does applaud the "young and intelligent lady of color [who has] forced the respect even of those who would wish to crush the people of color" and expressed hope that "her appeal may not be in vain!"³¹³ She describes how moral, Christian action "befits a lovely

³⁰⁹ Drescher, *Abolition*, 304.

³¹⁰ PFASS Minutes, Section 1: 4.

³¹¹ Lucretia Mott, in *Life and Letters*, 491.

³¹² Forten, "An Appeal to Woman," 20.

³¹³ "The following lines were written [...]" in *The Liberator* no. 5 (Boston: Saturday, February 1, 1834) In *19th Century Newspapers*. Georgia State University http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ncnp/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=NCNP&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=2&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C21%29%22the+following+lines%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28JN%2CNone%2C6%29%225DUR%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C19%291%2F1%2F1834+-

woman's heart," which Mott later reasoned in her address. Both Mott and Forten took a conservative, evangelical position towards women's involvement yet still fought for the right to take part the cause of abolition.

The reaction of abolitionist men to women's involvement in the transatlantic abolition movement varied but saw particular difference between Britain and America. In 1840, at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, the women who had traveled to attend (including Lucretia Mott) were removed from the floor of the convention hall and had to listen behind a curtain to the proceedings.³¹⁴ One of the British delegates, Daniel O'Connell responded in a letter to Lucretia Mott's questioning of why the women were excluded. Although he lamented their exclusion (mostly because they made such a long trip when they should have just stayed in America), he explained that allowing women to sit as delegates would have been foreign and highly unusual in England.³¹⁵ He intimates that it was common for women to participate in abolition conventions in America thus revealing a clear line of distinction between the British and American movements. Additionally, his letter illuminates the hesitancy that more conservative abolitionists held with regards to women abolitionists. He cites a "peaceable struggle to abolish slavery," that he felt could not be achieved by challenging all societal limitations of rights.³¹⁶ The convention in London and the sentiments echoed by O'Connell reveal the barriers and restricted social constructions women abolitionists navigated to fight oppression of others and later of themselves. The inclusion of women in the abolitionist movement would not lead automatically to the complete removal of the spheres, and the

+2%2F8%2F1834%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=GT3005836728&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed July 4, 2015): 20.

³¹⁴ Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 7.

³¹⁵ Daniel O'Connell to Lucretia Mott (June 20, 1840) in *Life and Letters*, 471-472.

³¹⁶ O'Connell to Mott in *Life and Letters*, 478.

women's rights movement would struggle against this ideology for decades to come. However, their place in the abolition movement represented an important step in the development of a political voice for women.

While some men resisted efforts to include women who asserted their place in the movement, others (particularly African American men) defended women in their right to participate. In 1836, James Forten Jr. (Sarah's brother) addressed the society and encouraged them to continue their work despite resistance to their involvement as well as general resistance to abolitionism: "Cease not to do as you are now doing, notwithstanding the invidious frowns that may be cast upon your efforts; regard not these - for bear in mind that the future of the prosperity of the nation rests upon the successful labors of Abolitionists."³¹⁷ The PFASS certainly agreed with his statement and decided to print and distribute his speech to the public to assert their right to speak on behalf of the oppressed and to promote the cause of abolition.³¹⁸ Frederick Douglass similarly joined in praising the women of Philadelphia who fought for abolition in his newspaper *The North Star*. In an article from the June 15, 1849 issue, Douglass celebrated the society for "devoting their energies to improve the condition and character of the oppressed at the North, as well as to the freedom of the enslaved at the South."³¹⁹

The American Anti-Slavery Society and the PFASS sought to combine their efforts to reconfigure the hostile sentiment towards abolition. In light of the massive resistance to American abolitionism, employing such a strategy held great importance. The PFASS employed this strategy through publishing materials, as with James Forten's speech, as well as putting on the Philadelphia Fair, which served a dual purpose in bringing the abolitionist cause to the public

³¹⁷ Glen, McClish. "'Pardon Me for the Digression': Robert Forten and James Forten Jr. Address the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 15, no. 2 (October 2012): 129–58.

³¹⁸ Minutes of the PFASS Section 1: 4.

³¹⁹ Frederick Douglass, "The Women's Association of Philadelphia," *The North Star* (June 15, 1849) in *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights*, 51-52.

and raising money for the various abolitionist societies.³²⁰ In 1836, the society voted to appoint Mary Moore and Sarah Pugh to host a "public sale" that would advance "the interests of the society."³²¹ Fundraising efforts by female antislavery societies contributed a great deal to the American abolitionist movement, even funding Frederick Douglass's newspaper.³²² The society put forward advertising campaigns in newspapers and printed notices to encourage women to sell products and to attract people to the fair.³²³ As Julie Roy Jeffrey has outlined, the women combined abolitionist rhetoric against slavery with promises of beautiful items to buy.³²⁴ Through these fairs, which proved to be quite successful and important sources of vital financial support to abolitionist societies, the PFASS (along with other female societies) established itself as a vital component to abolitionism. Yet these fairs were not without their trials. Since the PFASS was an interracial group, the women often met with resistance for having black members. Frederick Douglass published an account in *The North Star* of the fair in 1849 of how the proprietor of the building where the fair would be held tried to stop them from having the fair upon seeing the black members. It was only when he knew that white members were also hosting the fair that he agreed to let it proceed.³²⁵

4.4 Family or Freedom?: Commonwealth v. Aves

As abolitionist societies continued to fight to sway public opinion through printed literature and public fairs, freedom suits still remained an integral part of abolitionist strategy. With the potential for an immediate emancipation, freedom through the courts bolstered

³²⁰ Julie Roy Jeffrey, " 'Stranger, Buy...Lest Our Mission Fail': The Complex Culture of Women's Abolitionist Fairs," *American Nineteenth Century History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 2.

³²¹ Minutes of the PFASS, Section 1: 5.

³²² Jeffrey, " 'Stranger,'" 2.

³²³ Jeffrey, " 'Stranger,'" 5.

³²⁴ Jeffrey, " 'Stranger,'" 5-6.

³²⁵ Frederick Douglass, "Our Colored Sisters," *The North Star* (November 16, 1849) in *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights*, 52-53.

antislavery literary efforts in providing moments of victory to spread to the public. The growing number of Northern free states raised serious questions of how southern slave relationships would be treated in the North. Even with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 (which provided for the return of fugitives upon authorization of a magistrate) and the fugitive slave clause in Article IV Section 2, there still remained a degree of ambiguity regarding respect of the laws between free and slave states. The contextual ambiguity in Jacksonian America with regard to comity of laws recalls the ambiguity of the slave in England surrounding the *Somerset* case. Massachusetts had already established that its citizens could not hold slaves through an interpretation of the state's 1780 constitution in the case of Quock Walker in 1783.³²⁶ Article I of the 1780 Constitution stated that "all men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights;" language that became the vehicle for Walker's freedom and led to the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts.³²⁷ The establishment of Massachusetts as a free state still left unresolved the question of how a slave-master relationship of a southern citizen would be treated in Massachusetts - the issue at hand in 1836 in *Commonwealth v. Aves*.

In a similar way that antislavery leaders took up the cause of James Somerset, Boston abolitionists (initiated largely by the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society) learned of the situation of Med, a six year old slave girl, was held presumably against her will by Thomas

³²⁶ Emily Blanck, "Seventeen Eighty-Three: The Turning Point in the Law of Slavery and Freedom in Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 24

³²⁷ Massachusetts, *A Constitution or Frame of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, Article I. (March 2, 1780) In *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Georgia State University. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/ecco/retrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=Author&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=2&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%280X%2CNone%2C37%29%22constitution+or+frame+of+government%22%3AAnd%3AFQE%3D%280X%2CNone%2C13%29massachusetts%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28BA%2CNone%2C28%292NEF+Or+0LRH+Or+2NEH+Or+0LRJ%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=atla29738&inPS=true&contentSet=ECCOArticles&&docId=CB3332206455&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=CB3332206455&relevancePageBatch=CB132206455&showLOI=&contentSet=&callistoContentSet=ECLL&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed July 4, 2015) and Emily Blanck, *Tyrannicide: Forging an American Law of Slavery in Revolutionary South Carolina and Massachusetts* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 119, 122-123.

Aves.³²⁸ Unlike Somerset, however, Med had never attempted to escape and most likely had not expressed with adequate conviction that she wanted to be free. Regardless, Levin Harris petitioned for a writ of *habeas corpus* against Thomas Aves to “shew the cause of the taking and detaining of the said Med.”³²⁹ The actions of these abolitionists recall the language of antislavery poets (particularly Forten’s “The Slave”) who similarly believed that all enslaved individuals (even if only six years old) held a *natural* desire for freedom. Yet petitioning for Med’s freedom would mean separation from her mother, a situation that abolitionists frequently described as one of the great wrongs of slavery. In taking up Med’s case, the abolitionists involved in a way chose the natural assumption of freedom over family as the more important element of the language and argument of abolition.

Thomas Aves was not Med’s owner, but the father of her owner’s wife. Her owner was a man named Samuel Slater from Louisiana, whose wife, Mary Slater, had brought Med to Boston and left her in Aves’ care while she took a side trip to Roxbury.³³⁰ As a citizen of Louisiana, and Slater’s ownership of Med was recognized and protected in Louisiana law, but Aves was a citizen of the free state of Massachusetts, and therefore could not hold a slave. Recalling the issue in *Somerset v. Stewart*, there arose a conflict of laws between a place that protected slavery

³²⁸ Edlie L. Wong, “‘Freedom With a Vengeance’: Choosing Kin in Antislavery Literature and Law,” *American Literature* 81 no. 1 (March 2009): 8.

³²⁹ *Case of the Slave-child, Med: Report of the Arguments of Counsel, and of the Opinion of the Court, in the case of Commonwealth v. Aves; Tried and determined in the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts* (Boston, MA: Isaac Knapp, 1836) In *Slavery & Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive*. Georgia State University http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/sas/retrieve.do?qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28KE%2CNone%2C36%29%22report+of+the+arguments+of+counsel%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28MB%2CNone%2C40%29%22SAS-1%22+OR+%22SAS-2%22+OR+%22SAS-3%22+OR+%22SAS-4%22%24&sort=DateAscend&inPS=true&prodId=SAS&userGroupName=atla29738&tabID=T001&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=2&contentSet=ECCO&docId=CY3801170103&showLOI=&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=CY3801170103&relevancePageBatch=CY101170103&showLOI=No&contentSet=&callistoContentSet=SABC&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed July 4, 2015) : 3.

³³⁰ *Commonwealth v. Aves*, 4.

and a place that had abolished it.³³¹ A key fact in the Med case, in contrast to *Somerset*, was that Slater intended to return to Louisiana with Med in continuance of their established relationship. Additionally, since Med's mother (still in Louisiana) was also Slater's slave, Slater was also her "legal guardian," giving him more authority over her.³³² Aves' return on the writ argued that Aves acted as Slater's agent and therefore had the same guardianship over Med. The fact that Med was not a fugitive supported this extension of lawful guardianship, yet it also presented a problem for Aves.

Since Massachusetts lacked specific statutes protecting traveling slave owners, the only provision for honoring the master-slave relationship was the Fugitive Slave clause.³³³ Therefore, Benjamin Curtis, counsel for Aves, relied heavily upon the theory of comity to justify Aves' holding of Med. Curtis, who would later become a Supreme Court Justice (for only six terms), maintained a position of opposition to slavery, yet not at the expense of comity.³³⁴ Essentially, the principle of comity honors moral contracts made in another state (or foreign nation) as long as that contract is indeed moral and in no way damaging to the citizenry.³³⁵ Curtis proposed that as property, slaves "had no locality" because they were "moveable property."³³⁶ Therefore, the laws of Louisiana allowing slavery had to be upheld in this case because Med's status as a slave remained attached to her original relationship to Slater, unaffected by her no locale in

³³¹ Christine MacDonald, "Judging Jurisdictions: Geography and Race in Slave Law and Literature of the 1830s," *American Literature* 71, no. 4 (December 1999): 633.

³³² *Commonwealth v. Aves*, 4.

³³³ Andrew Fede, *Roadblocks to Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in the United States South* (New Orleans, LA: Quid Pro LLC, 2011), 293.

³³⁴ The Honorable Frank J. Williams and William D. Bader, Esq., "Benjamin R. Curtis: Maverick Lawyer and Independent Jurist," *Roger Williams University Law Review* 17 (2012): 379-382.

³³⁵ William Selwyn, *An abridgement of the law of nisi prius, Volume 1*, ed. Henry Wheaton (Albany: E.F. Backus, 1823) In *Making of Modern Law*. Georgia State University <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/servlet/MOML?dd=0&locID=atla48845&d1=19005786001&srchtp=a&aa=AND&c=6&SU=ALL&l2=GE&a0=%22william+selwyn%22&d2=1&docNum=F3704633980&h2=1&vrsn=1.0&af=RN&a5=0X&d6=1&ste=10&d4=0.33&dc=tiPG&stp=DateAscend&n=10&d5=d6> (accessed July 4, 2015):

54.

³³⁶ *Commonwealth v. Aves*, 6.

Massachusetts. This opposed the language of abolition that asserted full personhood and denounced slavery's attempts to turn a person into a price.

Ellis Gray Loring, counsel for Harris, challenged Curtis' argument of comity by pointing out the lack of reciprocity of respect that southern states had for northern laws. Comity also upholds a system of reciprocity, meaning that if one state honors the laws of the other state, the latter state should extend the same treatment to the former. He argued that free black citizens of Massachusetts were not protected in southern states (especially after the passage of the Negro Seaman Act), and therefore slaveholders' view of comity was not reciprocal.

We have no slaves in Massachusetts in regard to whom we can ask the exercise of the same comity which is claimed of us for the South. Nay, the comity which *is* due to freemen is not extended to us by the slaveholding states [...] Throughout the slave states color furnishes a presumption of slavery, and a free colored citizen of Massachusetts, if found at the South, may be called on to prove affirmatively his freedom or be sold into slavery.³³⁷

Not only did Loring's argument attempt to diminish the validity of Curtis' claims to comity of law, but it also upholds a language of rights echoing antislavery poetry. In contrast to abolitionists' view that every individual holds a natural expectation of freedom and therefore should receive it, slaveholding states held "a presumption of slavery" of black men and women. Loring's argument affirms free black citizenship in Massachusetts and rights "due to freemen" that connects with Forten's assertions of liberty in "The Abuses of Liberty" (as well as Article I of the 1780 Massachusetts constitution).

Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw's decision, delivered on August 27, 1836, ruled that Massachusetts' law could not support the existence of slavery "because it is contrary to *natural* right, and repugnant to numerous provisions of the constitution and laws."³³⁸ Such a local law could not "be exercised or recognized" in Massachusetts, and therefore the slave girl Med would

³³⁷

Commonwealth v. Aves, 14.

³³⁸

Commonwealth v. Aves, 38 (emphasis mine).

be henceforth free. Additionally, Massachusetts did not have a safe transit law for slaveholders, which gave further justification to his rationale that slavery was illegal in the state.³³⁹ In response to the issue of the fugitive slave clause, Shaw reasoned that only in cases involving fugitive slaves would Massachusetts uphold the slave-master relationship, which still left a degree of ambiguity as to whether or not an enslaved individual was a fugitive.³⁴⁰ He similarly upheld the legacy of *Somerset* in determining that the law of Massachusetts was “analogous to the law of England” and therefore Lord Mansfield’s opinion regarding positive law would hold in this case. Based on Shaw’s connection to *Somerset*, this individual case fits within a transatlantic pursuit of freedom. Both cases involved the activism of abolitionists and to the language of abolition. In *Commonwealth v. Aves*, the themes of the slave family and a natural desire or expectation of freedom found in antislavery literature were weighed against one another. Med’s emancipation and the arguments made on her behalf indicates that freedom held greater importance and weight than family. While abolitionists, expressed in antislavery poetry, listed many wrongs of slavery, overall their primary concern was freedom itself.

4.5 Conclusion

Although Forten seemed poised to achieve more recognition and acclaim as an antislavery activist, her marriage to Joseph Purvis and resignation to the domestic sphere in 1838 brought her career to a sudden stop.³⁴¹ Julie Winch designates this screeching halt to the limitations of gender in the 1830s, reminiscent of the conservatism within Hannah More’s and Ann Yearsley’s presentation of feminine sensibility in the poems several decades earlier. Despite the short length of her career, she wrote prolifically in that timeframe and captured the emotion

³³⁹ Fede, *Roadblocks*, 293.

³⁴⁰ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 8.

³⁴¹ Winch, Loc. 2375-Loc. 2393 of 5644.

and shared language of transatlantic abolitionism. The language of her poetry traversed radical abolitionist strategies of sentiment and law that reveals the scope of abolitionist strategy. Her experience as a free African-American woman in Philadelphia influenced her verse and prose indicating how abolitionist literature interacted with the social dynamics of race and gender. The recurrence of separation from family and the natural hope of freedom connects her work to Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, and Phillis Wheatley, thus portraying a transatlantic network of antislavery language.

5 “HAVE I BEEN FORGOTTEN”

Have I been forgotten
 In this hole [...]

Paying the price,
 enslaved submission [...]

In an effort to survive
 I try to believe
 that maybe you
 remember me.³⁴²

The haunting question in this poem highlights the continued reality that slavery is “social death,” meaning that slavery reduces the personhood of an individual and forcibly removes any familial or social attachment she or he once held.³⁴³ There has not been a break in the existence of slavery since the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, as public memory might suggest. Rather, slaveholders (now called traffickers) have adopted different forms of exploitation and uncompensated, forced labor.³⁴⁴ Amber Morris, author of this 2014 poem (“Sold”), encapsulated the theme of freedom characteristic to antislavery poetry of the Atlantic

³⁴² Amber Morris, “Sold,” in *146: A Collection of Love Stories*, compiled and edited by Amber Morris (Middletown, DE: Amber Morris, 2014): 75. – this book is printed upon request and benefits the antislavery organization, Love146.

³⁴³ Patterson, *Slavery and Social*, 5-8.

³⁴⁴ Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 27.

World. The poem is included in a collection of poetry, prose, and art to benefit the international antislavery organization, Love146 (formed in 2002).³⁴⁵ Created for the specific purpose of promoting and benefitting this work through antislavery poetry, “Sold” adds to contributions of preceding poets to the cause of abolition. Recalling Sarah Forten’s tragic representation of the separation from all relationship and the slave’s assumed desire for freedom in “The Grave of the Slave,” Morris imagined herself as a forgotten slave longing for the day of rescue.³⁴⁶ Although the legal system of Atlantic slavery differs widely from the underground, global forms of modern slavery, antislavery language allows for a comparative connection between the two.

The ambiguous and illicit nature of modern slavery as opposed to the Atlantic slave system, which was legally sanctioned and maintained, has catalyzed a wealth of awareness campaigns and government initiatives dedicated to showing that “slavery still exists.”³⁴⁷ The language of the transatlantic abolition movement focused on themes of family and a natural expectation of freedom based in moral and natural law in order to establish the inherent wrong of slavery. For modern abolitionists, this language and thought has become the reigning mindset with global condemnation of slavery.³⁴⁸ The challenge that faced antislavery poets like Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten to stir sentiment to agree that the commodification of a race of people was morally wrong and should be illegal no longer features as an obstacle for modern abolition and abolitionist literature. However, unlike the clearly defined system of slavery in the Atlantic World, the global and indiscriminate scope of slavery (or human trafficking) creates a seemingly insurmountable task of prosecution and emancipation. Additionally, the multiplicity of forms of modern-day slavery and forced labor has

³⁴⁵ Love146, “Mission & Vision,” <https://love146.org/mission-vision/> (accessed on June 28, 2015).

³⁴⁶ Forten “The Slave Girl’s Address,” 18.

³⁴⁷ End-It Movement, “Learn,” <https://secure.enditmovement.com/learn> (accessed on June 30, 2015).

³⁴⁸ Bales, et. al, *Modern Slavery*, 207.

problematized the definition of slavery and forced labor. This epilogue will begin with a brief analysis of the definition of modern slavery and statistical data exploring its global scope. Then I will further discuss the connections in language between antislavery movements.

In 2000, the United Nations created the Palermo Protocol to “prevent and combat” trafficking on a global scale, “paying particular attention to women and children.”³⁴⁹ The Protocol amended the 1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations to expand its definition and alter the language to be more inclusive and representative of the conditions of forced labor.

The Slavery Convention defined “slavery” as:

[...] the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of *ownership* are exercised. – The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to *slavery*; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him.³⁵⁰

In this definition, which is still a part of international law, the language suggests that slavery is the removal of an individual’s “right” to self-ownership and identity. It also implies that enslavement and the trade in slaves involve the alteration of an individual’s identity to a commodity. The issue of ownership recalls William Blackstone’s argument against slavery because it gave “an absolute and unlimited power [to] the master over the life and fortune of the slave.”³⁵¹ The language in the 1926 definition uses the exertion of “any or all of the powers” thereby recalling Blackstone’s description of “absolute and unlimited power.”

The convention agreed to condemn and prevent the reduction of a person to a thing to be exchanged or sold, which echoes Hannah More’s language that the sight of “MAN the traffic,

³⁴⁹ Palermo Protocol Article II - the official title being *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (November 15, 2000)

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>. (accessed June 27, 2015).

³⁵⁰ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, *Slavery Convention*, Article I, Section 1 Slavery Convention (Geneva: 25 September, 1926)

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SlaveryConvention.aspx> – emphasis mine.

³⁵¹ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 215.

SOULS the merchandize” offended natural right.³⁵² The language of the convention lacks the emotional argument in More’s poem simply because it is an international agreement, but the inclusion of the “intent to *reduce* him to slavery” suggests that the slave trade’s crime is the alteration of a person to “merchandize.” There are more immediate roots of the 1926 convention (such as international agreements in the Berlin Declaration of 1885 and the Brussels Act of 1890 to condemn the slave trade), but its connection to Blackstone and natural law reveals the success of the transatlantic abolition movement in arguing that slavery was contrary to natural law or inherent rights.³⁵³

The Palermo Protocol broadened the language of the 1926 convention to suppress all forms of exploitation, forced labor, and slavery. In the preamble, the protocol states that despite efforts to prevent exploitation, there was no “no universal instrument [addressing] all aspects of trafficking in persons.”³⁵⁴ The ambiguity surrounding modern-day slavery or human trafficking illustrates not only the enduring existence of slavery, but also references various forms of involuntary or indentured servitude. In *Somerset v. Stewart*, the counselors argued as to whether villeinage counted as a precedent for slavery, which (if it did) could have placed for Atlantic chattel slavery within English common law and denied Somerset’s claim to freedom.³⁵⁵ However, Lord Mansfield’s decision (echoing William Blackstone) asserted that only positive law could allow for chattel slavery, thereby denying claims to such a connection between types of forced labor.³⁵⁶ Though the historical context between *Somerset v. Stewart* and the current

³⁵² More, *Slavery: A Poem*, Line 146.

³⁵³ *Slavery Convention* (Geneva: 25 September, 1926) and Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, “Introduction: Contextualizing Trafficking in Women and Children in Africa,” in *Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa* edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012): 7.

³⁵⁴ Preamble, Palermo Protocol (November 15, 2000).

³⁵⁵ Van Cleve, “Somerset’s Case,” 603.

³⁵⁶ *Somerset v. Stewart*, 510.

legal issue of defining and suppressing slavery, the struggle to understand the definition of slavery remains.

International (and domestic) law has had to define and clarify the meaning of labor. The problem of defining forms of forced labor presents the question for abolitionists and international leaders as to whether the language of the definition should use “slavery” to encompass forced labor, exploitation, slave-like conditions, debt bondage, and human trafficking.³⁵⁷ The 2001 Palermo Protocol uses the term “trafficking in persons” to describe the movement into or channel by which an individual becomes enslaved into forced labor.³⁵⁸ “Exploitation” serves to incorporate a variety of illicit, coerced labor practices that violate individual human rights.

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person *having control* over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, *slavery* or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.³⁵⁹

The definition not only enumerates forms of trafficking under the 1926 determination of slavery, but also expands the issues of the ownership of another person. Rather than having to prove that a person took or attempted to take “ownership” of an individual, this protocol asserted that “having control over another person” rather than ownership broadens the range of circumstances of forced labor. In a 2005 case heard before the European Court of Human Rights (*Siliadin v. France*), the court ruled that the phrase of “right of ownership” was necessary in determining an instance of slavery was meant for the traditional, chattel sense (meaning an

³⁵⁷ Jean Allain, “Property and the Definition of Slavery,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 61 (October 2012): 916-917, 922.

³⁵⁸ Bales, et. al., *Modern*, 35.

³⁵⁹ Article III Section 1, Palermo Protocol (emphasis mine).

expressed or legal ownership).³⁶⁰ Chattel slavery persists, particularly in Northern and Western Africa, and is characterized by a “permanent servitude” rather than the frequently more temporary situations of forced labor.³⁶¹ Therefore, reducing the definition to the exertion of “control” rather than an expressed ownership allows for more protection for victims of trafficking.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) argues that the term “modern slavery” to define all types of what the Palermo Protocol calls “trafficking in persons,” problematizes an understanding of the levels of severity in forced labor. The ILO uses the term “forced labor,” which includes instances of true slavery.³⁶² The reorientation in language from a singular definition of slavery to that of trafficking and forced labor does not deny the existence of actual conditions of slavery. Rather this more specific application of language aims to criminalize more types exploitative labor making prosecution of human trafficking, forced labor, and slavery possible when necessary. Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson in their book, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People*, prefer the term “modern slavery” and place forced labor under this banner. These authors also distinguish “human trafficking” as the process of enslavement rather than a type of slavery; however, the Polaris Project (which operates by a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) uses the term “human trafficking” as a form of slavery.³⁶³ Additionally the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (signed into law in 2000 and a part of U.S. Code) defines “trafficking” as “a modern form of slavery” and as “a contemporary manifestation [of] the degrading institution of

³⁶⁰ Allain, “Property,” 921.

³⁶¹ Bales et. al, *Modern Slavery*, 33 and International Labor Organization, *Profits and Poverty: the Economics of Forced Labour* (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2014). http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_243391.pdf. (accessed June 27, 2015): 9.

³⁶² ILO, *Profits*, 3.

³⁶³ National Human Trafficking Resource Center (for Polaris Project), “What is Human Trafficking?” <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/type-trafficking/human-trafficking> Accessed June 27, 2015.

slavery,” which the Thirteenth Amendment abolished.³⁶⁴ The inconsistency in appropriate terminology impacts the way in which researchers study and document slavery and how domestic and international governments suppress it.³⁶⁵

This variegated application of language appears in antislavery (or anti-trafficking) organizations’ literature, which creates gaps in the network of abolitionist language. For abolitionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the singular use of the term “slavery” in reference to the Atlantic system of African bondage did not necessitate further definition in literature. When abolitionists argued against the moral wrong of slavery and the slave trade, those reading their literature or hearing their arguments did not wonder about what type of slavery to which they referred. As seen in the poetry of More, Yearsley, Wheatley, and Forten, clearly describe African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade from the West African coast to the Americas. Kelli Lyon Johnson has analyzed the predominant use of the slave narrative in abolitionist literature against modern slavery in contrast to the traditional slave narrative. One of the key distinguishing features is the diversity of narrators for contemporary slave narratives.³⁶⁶ The range of audience has also broadened, aided by increased accessibility through internet access, with international organizations and publications.³⁶⁷ The 2014 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report structured the theme of its report to include narratives of victims of human trafficking and began the report with a purpose statement entitled, “The Journey from Victim to Survivor,” thus solidifying Johnson’s assertion of the predominance of the slave narrative.³⁶⁸ The

³⁶⁴ Public Law 106-308, Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, Section 102 (October 28, 2000) <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2015).

³⁶⁵ Kelli Lyon Johnson, “The New Slave Narrative: Advocacy and Human Rights in Stories of Contemporary Slavery,” *Journal of Human Rights* vol. 12 (2013): 244.

³⁶⁶ Johnson, “New Slave Narrative,” 245.

³⁶⁷ Johnson, “New Slave Narrative,” 246.

³⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State, *2014 Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2014) <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226844.pdf> (June 27, 2015): 7-13..

importance of voice and identity inherent to a slave narrative finds particular meaning amidst the ambiguity of terminology and the global prevalence of slavery.

In addition to the task of defining slavery, there exists the need to determine the quantifiable reality of slavery. In 2012, the ILO estimated that 20.9 million people were “in forced labor [...] trafficked for labor or sexual exploitation or held in slavery-like conditions.”³⁶⁹ Estimates for the number of people held in slavery or bonded labor globally ranges from lower estimates of 20.9 million (the ILO’s determination) to as high as 27 million.³⁷⁰ The report found that women constituted 55% of this staggering statistic (about 11.4 million), hence international focus on the enslavement of women. The higher rates of trafficking in women and girls have focused the language of abolitionist literature toward the effects on women. Jean Allain argues that Palermo Protocol combines the legacy of abolition of the transatlantic slave trade with the “white slavery” movement of the early twentieth century.³⁷¹ The movement against the “white slave trade” aimed to eliminate the selling and trading of prostitutes in Europe, and culminated in an agreement at the International Convention for the Suppression of White Traffic that criminalized prostitution and the “transborder” trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation.³⁷² The protocol explicitly focuses (though not exclusively) upon the trafficking and exploitation of women and children.

According to an ILO report in May 2014, *Profits and Poverty: the Economics of Forced Labor*, profits generated from forced labor stand at an estimated \$150.2 billion, with \$99 billion sourced from forced sexual exploitation and \$51.2 billion from other forms of forced labor.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ ILO, *Profits*, 7.

³⁷⁰ ILO, *Profits*, 1 and A21 Campaign, “Human Trafficking,” <http://www.a21.org/content/human-trafficking/g10ryw> (accessed June 30, 2015).

³⁷¹ Jean Allain, “Trafficking and Human Exploitation,” in *Trafficking in Slavery’s Wake*, 159.

³⁷² Allain, “Trafficking and Human Exploitation,” 147.

³⁷³ ILO, *Profits*, 13.

For 2013, the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report) estimated that there were 44,758 enslaved individuals identified in specific trafficking cases. The TIP Report investigates not only the rate of individual trafficking cases, but also tracks the governmental policies of countries regarding protection, prevention, and prosecution. The Report ranks countries according to their adherence to minimum standards of trafficking legislation as well as the rate of prosecutions.³⁷⁴ The global scale of slavery becomes clearer in this report and how the reported rank of every country begins with the country being either a source of and/or destination for human trafficking.³⁷⁵ The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC), operated and initiated by the Polaris Project, counts the number of reported tips to the U.S. national hotline, which assists victims of or witnesses to trafficking to receive help. In 2014, there were 21,431 calls and 5,042 actual reported cases of trafficking.³⁷⁶ Of the 5,042 reported cases of trafficking, 4,155 involved female victims. Begun as a non-profit organization, the Polaris Project and the NHTRC provide the statistics of trafficking used by the U.S. government at the federal and state level. This number is significantly lower than estimates of a global enslaved population because it merely counts instances of identified victims in reported cases.³⁷⁷ Both the TIP Report and the results from the NHTRC hotline aim to understand the prevalence and scope of human trafficking in order to outline the most effective means to eliminate this global problem.

While many antislavery organizations and government initiatives have focused attention upon understanding the quantifiable characteristics of modern slavery, antislavery literature has employed rhetorical themes reminiscent of prior abolition movement to understand and imagine the enslaved experience. The separation of families was a predominant theme in Atlantic

³⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State, *TIP Report*, 40.

³⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, *TIP Report*, 40.

³⁷⁶ NHTRC, "Hotline Statistics: 2015," <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/states> (accessed June 27, 2015).

³⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, *TIP Report*, 7-8.

antislavery poetry in order to highlight the moral wrong of slavery, yet in modern-day antislavery poetry, family has been increasingly feminized largely due to the majority of women and girls held in bondage. However, antislavery poetry commonly featured female slave characters (as well as feminine ideals of liberty, reason, and nature) in order to stir sentiment particularly in representations of wives, mothers, and daughters. In “The Slave Girl’s Address to Her Mother,” Sarah Forten as the daughter describes to her mother the heartbreaking fate that awaits them:

Torn from our home, our kindred, and our friends,
And in a stranger’s land, our days to end [...]
No arm is stretched to rescue and to save.³⁷⁸

While the last line recalls the issue of silence and being forgotten in Amber Morris’ poem, Forten also highlights the intense, emotional suffering in being separated from family and home. Echoing Forten’s characterization in this poem, the focus of modern abolitionist literature often centers upon the girl (the sister or the daughter) or the mother enslaved or forced into the sex industry.

Abet Lardizabal, in a collection benefitting the abolitionist organization, Love146, wrote a poem entitled, “Lost Innocence,” which explains why human trafficking (mostly of women) makes her “so weak.”³⁷⁹ She highlights the problem of information for those who “could’ve been my MOMS, my LOLA, [...] our COUSINS, their SONS, their DAUGHTERS.”³⁸⁰ Both Forten and Lardizabal place themselves in their poems, yet while Forten focuses on the separation from family and homeland, Lardizabal reimagines the unknown slave as a family member.³⁸¹ Ann Yearsley called the slave trader to “bring on thy daughter to this market! bring thy wife,” forcing

³⁷⁸ Forten, “Slave Girl’s Address,” 18.

³⁷⁹ Abet Lardizabal, “Lost Innocence,” in *146: A Collection of Love Stories*, 60.

³⁸⁰ Lardizabal, “Lost Innocence,” 61.

³⁸¹ Forten, “Slave Girl’s Address,” 18 and Lardizabal, “Lost Innocence,” 61.

the unnamed trader to imagine the enslavement of his own family member.³⁸² These three poems, written by three women separated by geopolitical and sociohistorical boundaries, still share characteristics of antislavery language. Although the definition and scope of slavery (both geographically and demographically) has changed, the rhetorical tools employed by abolitionists of Atlantic slavery serve as a resource and foundation for antislavery literature against modern slavery.

The theme of family has also persisted in modern slave narratives in detailing familial attachment and physical separation, yet it has been adapted to include distortions of the family structure in the process of enslavement. Kelli Lyon Johnson, in her analysis of modern slave narratives, illustrates that the narrator will often begin with a description of his or her family background prior to becoming enslaved.³⁸³ This recalls Phillis Wheatley's poem, "To the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth," in which she recounts her family life prior to her capture and enslavement: "I, young in life, was snatch'd from Afric's happy seat [...] what sorrows labour in my parents' breast?"³⁸⁴ Indeed, recounting a previous family situation was common in antislavery poetry, particularly against the slave trade, in order to emphasize the immorality of slavery. Thus, although a different literary form than poetry, modern slave narratives draw upon the a shared antislavery network of language, utilized in abolitionists efforts against Atlantic World slavery, and adapt it to the contemporary context.

Laura T. Murphy collected slave narratives from victims of various forms of slavery and forced labor, some of which involve the rhetoric of family. In contrast to a positive reference or upholding of the ideal of family, there are instances of a reversal of familial attachment in which the slaveholder (or trafficker) creates a system of familial language in order to control the

³⁸² Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 7.

³⁸³ Johnson, "New Slave Narrative," 249.

³⁸⁴ Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable," 74.

enslaved individual. This is particularly prevalent in sex slavery in which a pimp will give himself the title of “daddy” or a female trafficker will give herself the title of “aunty.”³⁸⁵

Although there are cases in which family members will sell an individual into slavery (sometimes intentionally but also unknowingly), traffickers have also used an individual’s family as leverage in order to force her or him into slavery.³⁸⁶

A girl from Cambodia called “Sopheap” (a pseudonym used to protect her privacy and identity) recounts her enslaved experience in which she was forced to beg in Vietnam (her own aunt had sent her to work for the trafficker).³⁸⁷ In this begging system “Sopheap” had to account for the other trafficked children in groups of “families,” and if her “family” was unsuccessful in bringing in money, her “minders” would beat her. The perversion of the family and the rhetoric of family in this case diverge sharply from the rhetoric of true family in abolitionist literature. Yet traffickers will also threaten to harm an individual’s family as in the case of a woman called “F” from Albania whose enslavers threatened to kill her family or kidnap her sisters if she did not work as a prostitute in Italy.³⁸⁸ In her case, traffickers manipulated her true attachment to her family to force her to do what they wanted. Both “Sopheap” and “F” were taken into “a stranger’s land” seemingly without an “arm [...] stretched out to rescue and to save.”³⁸⁹ The differences in the rhetoric of family, with “Sopheap’s” narrative featuring a distortion of familial structure and “F’s” detailing her desire to protect her family, illustrate the broad range of enslaved experiences, yet also provides a language framework to distinguish between experiences through a shared perspective.

³⁸⁵ Laura T. Murphy, *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 42-43.

³⁸⁶ Murphy, *Survivors*, 44.

³⁸⁷ Murphy, *Survivors*, 54.

³⁸⁸ Murphy, *Survivors*, 56-57.

³⁸⁹ Forten, “Slave Girl’s Address” 18.

Antislavery literature against the transatlantic slave trade (like in the poetry of More and Yearsley) used the separation of families to highlight the moral wrong of slavery and to lead the reader to imagine the tearing apart of her or his own familial attachments. Applying the language of transatlantic abolitionism of family separation and the protection of the family in natural (or human rights) law to this process of enslavement would generate a powerful statement. Even in cases of perverted familial structures, the comparison to genuine familial attachment presents a haunting contrast that would inspire action. Incorporating a language framework based upon the theme of family would also encapsulate various enslaved experiences, as the narratives collected by Laura T. Murphy have illustrated.

The challenge of defining slavery and navigating the immensity of its scope across geopolitical boundaries and a various manifestations of slavery creates a need for abolitionists to utilize a shared framework of language. Modern antislavery poetry and slave narratives have incorporated the themes of freedom and family employed by Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten, thereby showing the connections in language across temporal boundaries. Although the challenges between these antislavery movements are radically different, their shared goal to eliminate slavery remains unchanged. These echoes of family and freedom convey a unity both with the transatlantic abolition movement but also in the current movement. Illuminating the shared language of transatlantic abolition will hopefully create greater unity in argument and language for the global, modern abolition movement. In closing, I must state my own commitment to seeing the end of slavery in all of its forms. While policing efforts, preventative education, and alleviation of global poverty serve far more direct and essential action, I hope to offer my research as a means for creating more effective and cohesive language through the example of poets who used words to fight slavery.

6 “AND WHEN THOU HAST TO HIGH PERFECTION WROUGHT THIS MIGHTY WORK”

“[...] say, ‘*such is Bristol’s soul.*’ FINIS.”³⁹⁰ Ann Yearsley closing lines signify the end of the “mighty work” of abolition and the new identity of freedom attached to Bristol. The success of the transatlantic abolition movement in changing the moral and legal understanding of slavery is evidenced by the international condemnation of chattel slavery.³⁹¹ Antislavery poetry greatly contributed to this alteration in the “soul” or perception of freedom in utilizing emotional verse to powerfully outline the moral wrong of slavery. Essential to the impact of antislavery poetry (and other forms of literature) was a shared network of language that connected the arguments and works of abolitionists across the Atlantic. The connections that this shared abolitionist language created presented a more cohesive and substantial (in number and content) attack on slavery. From the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries in Britain and America, antislavery literature interacted with the sociohistorical contexts in which abolitionists produced their works. Antislavery poets incorporated in their poetry societal dynamics of law, gender, and race through shared themes of family, the assumed expectation of freedom, and legal references. These themes reflect the ways in which abolitionists claimed slavery violated natural, moral law and how these arguments reflected broader societal ideals. Antislavery poetry authenticates a shared language of transatlantic antislavery movements and proves to be an important source base from which to understand these movements.

Exemplifying this shared language are four women poets of diverse social and temporal experiences within the Atlantic World. Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Forten employed, adapted, and reinforced the shared language between antislavery literature and

³⁹⁰ Yearsley, *Inhumanity*, 30.

³⁹¹ Bales, et. al, *Modern Slavery*, 146.

the law. Their poetry and individual experiences within their sociohistorical settings seen together have shown an inclusive portrait of transatlantic abolitionism. The historiography of abolition and slavery has for the most part neglected to use antislavery poetry as an important and reinforcing component of antislavery literature. Analysis of antislavery poetry has focused on the literary elements within the text but downplayed (or ignored) the connections to other forms of antislavery literature and the broader movement. While recent scholarship has revived attention to these four poets individually, they have not been analyzed together. Combining the analysis of their poetry together more sufficiently illustrates the important contributions that antislavery poetry offered to the transatlantic antislavery movement. Additionally, this comparative analysis indicates the interactions between literature and the law (seen in freedom suits, legislation, and legal texts) in effectively substantiating claims of the inherent legal and moral wrong of slavery.

Including the study of antislavery poetry (particularly across geopolitical and temporal boundaries) enhances the historiography of abolition in signifying the language of transatlantic antislavery literature and revealing the interactions between abolitionists and social themes. Analysis of the shared language of abolition additionally allows for connections between the abolition movements against Atlantic, chattel slavery and modern movements against slavery in its many forms around the world. The themes of family, the assumed expectation of freedom, and the law offer points of connection in modern antislavery poetry and modern slave narratives. The endurance of these themes employed by More, Yearsley, Wheatley, and Forten solidifies the significance and importance of their poetry and antislavery language to the strategy and legacy of transatlantic abolitionism.

Antislavery poetry, as highly significant to the language and scope of the transatlantic abolitionist movement requires further study to continue to understand the momentous history of abolition. I limited the foundational scope of this thesis to four women, antislavery poets in order to more sufficiently and effectively analyze their rhetorical themes and societal interactions, yet there is much room for further research into the experiences and works of female and male antislavery poets. The temporal framework of this thesis, from the 1770s to the 1830s, made the research far more feasible, yet it necessitates further research into abolitionist literature closer to emancipation in America. Abolitionist movements also extended to other parts of the Atlantic and created unique literature in Latin America and Africa that also deserve increased scholarly attention.

Approaching global modern abolitionist movements in light of the shared language of the Atlantic abolition movements not only illustrates the legacy of this language but also informs how to structure and adapt this language for the cause of abolition. Understanding the significance of language in the definition of modern slavery and human trafficking will also improve the language of abolition to more effectively explain the forms of slavery and the experiences of enslaved and exploited individuals. Continuing the study of abolitionist language into the current context more fully evaluates the effectiveness of language and the way in which abolitionists interact with social dynamics of gender, freedom, race, and the law. The hope in adapting this shared language of abolition to modern social environments is to restore, through language, a person's natural rights and their invaluable personhood. The success of transatlantic abolition was to firmly establish in moral and legal argument the essential personhood of each individual that can never be reduced to a mere price.

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