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SISTERS IN BONDS: MINNIE'S SACRIFICE

by

SHIRLEY WALKER MOORE

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Sisters In Bonds: Minnie's Sacrifice

by

Shirley Walker Moore

During the nineteenth century, both black women and white women were at the mercy of the white patriarchy, albeit at differing degrees to and natures in which they experienced bondage, marginality, and empowerment. In Minnie's Sacrifice, Frances E. W. Harper addresses the roles these women played in confronting and defeating the patriarchy.

We first encounter Camilla Le Croix, the daughter of a white slave owner. Her actions parallel and reflect the evolving role of the nineteenth-century female in America. Camilla moves from the domestic sphere into the public sphere, becoming the author of a new moral code. Bernard Le Croix, Camilla's father, tries to silence Camilla's voice when she pleads to place the young orphaned slave, Louis, in their home, but Camilla prevails. Because of her involvement in their world, she witnesses the slaves' survival techniques. Drawing strength from her experiences, Camilla creates a new world for herself and her two slaves, Miriam and her grandson Louis, who is actually Camilla's step-brother. Camilla and Miriam unite to forge a new society.

While Louis is being groomed by these two women for entrance into the public sphere, his future wife, Minnie, is being prepared for the same by her mother, Ellen. "the beautiful quadroon." Ellen begins her bid for empowerment when she presents her mulatto daughter, fathered by her master to visiting Northern guests. Fully aware of the physical similarities between Minnie and the slave owner's other daughter Marie, Ellen
places Minnie in a prominent position dressed so as to reveal the girls' likenesses. When the slave mistress demands that Minnie be sold, Ellen prevails in her appeals to the master. She gains freedom for Minnie, who is sent North to live as a white child, only to be reunited much later with her mother, at which time, Minnie sacrifices her rights as a white woman and embraces her black heritage. She later marries Louis, who has gained his freedom and rightful inheritance. Together, they represent a new order, one won by the works of two women, one white, one black.
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In memory of my grandparents
The Reverend Tolly and Mrs. Rebecca Hibbler
Thank you, Mama and Papa
--from the beginning
INTRODUCTION

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERARY

DEPICTIONS OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN

I am looking forward to a time when we can all become the persons we really are. Blacks and women are learning to tell the difference between pollution [the White Male System] and non-pollution. They are showing us that it is possible to stand back and say, "The White Male System is only a system. It is not reality. It is not the way the world is."

Anne Wilson Schaef

Growing up in the racially segregated South, specifically the Black Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas, I lived in a world that, as far as relations between blacks and whites were concerned, was undeniably polarized. Because I was not allowed access to public libraries and was forced to attend ill-equipped schools, although staffed by strong Black teachers, dedicated to educating their students, in spite of appalling circumstances, I later discovered, much to my hurt and dismay, that I was deprived in numerous areas. The deprivation that grieved me most was that I had been denied the opportunity to read the history of my people in this country. Had I been allowed to do so, I would have detected similarities and parallelisms between the two races, as it and the white race both contributed to the development of this country. Undoubtedly, as W. E. B. Du Bois says in "Of Sorrow Songs,"
Actively, we [The Negro] have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs . . . Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood brotherhood.¹

I assumed, based on my experiences, that the Black and White races historically had very little, if indeed anything, in common.

As time passed and my people finally gained opportunities, albeit limited, to attain higher education, I, caught in the desire to further my education by attending graduate school, learned, much to my surprise, that at one time common traits existed between the Black and White people of this country. I discovered that at least as far back as the nineteenth century, black and white women had similar and oft times shared life experiences, most if not all of which emanated from their assigned positions in this society. Ironically, these common traits existed at a time when this country was torn asunder by the Civil War, an event that was, according to both black and white scholars of that era in American history, caused by the "peculiar institution."²

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² The term "peculiar institution" refers to Black slavery in the Southern United States prior to the Civil War.
As a Black female aware of and a participant in the history, mores, and traditions of the South, I took the traditional position of viewing the white female from a distance. She and the culture she represented were enigmas to me, ones that should best be left alone. Consequently, there were no opportunities to interact with White females concerning what our respective grandmothers and great-grandmothers might have had in common. Because of our dissimilar stations in society, we never penetrated Du Bois's "veil." In point of fact, it is probably safe to say that neither one of us thought to attempt to do so.

The realization that these nineteenth-century women shared experiences, although sometimes unknowingly, led me to the topic of the present discussion: an investigation of how they gained their freedom and voice by working together. My readings reveal that the fabrics of their lives were woven by common threads, namely powerlessness and marginality followed by self-empowerment; these threads are especially evident in the women who lived during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. I use thread as a metaphor here not only to describe the superficial link between the two races, but also as a comment on their fragile positions in society, positions that could be and often were broken capriciously. Both women lived in a rigid White patriarchal system\(^3\),

\[^3\] Anne Wilson Schaeff identifies the system as the "White Male System," describing it as having four myths that feed, sustain,
controlled their destinies. Indeed, "white Southern women
found themselves enmeshed in an interracial web in which
wives, children, and slaves were all expected to obey the
patriarchal head of the household."4 Jacqueline Jones
observes that "in the female slave, the white woman saw the
source of her own misery, but she also saw herself—a woman
without rights or recourse, subject to the whims of an
egotistical man."5 Similarly, Joan Hedrick writes,
"Mistress and servant [black] shared the bonds of
womanhood." 6

Nevertheless, lest one assumes that by existing under
somewhat similar conditions that Euripedes's statement
"Woman is woman's natural ally" would be borne out in an
effort to ameliorate mutual sufferings, it is wise to
seriously consider Angela Davis' remarks. Writing from the
view point of a twentieth-century black woman, she
observes, "While [white] women made inestimable

4 Giddings, Paula. When and Where I Enter. New York: Bantam Books,
5 Jones, Jacqueline. Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow. New York:
contributions to the anti-slavery campaign, they often failed to grasp the complexity of the slave woman's condition. Black women were women, indeed, but their experiences during slavery--hard work with their men, equality within the family, resistance, floggings and rape--encouraged them to develop certain personality traits which set them apart from most white women.\(^7\)

Bearing in mind the observations made by Davis, with whom I agree, I still maintain that the similarities mentioned earlier in this study do exist. Black women and, quite frequently, white women were treated as mere "things" placed in the White patriarchal society. I deliberately use the term "placed" in this instance to emphasize that as "things" they had no autonomy; they were manipulated by an outside force that dictated their positions and actions as if they were mere puppets. Nineteenth-century women of America were, more often than not, at the mercy of and controlled by an outside force, the nineteenth-century male. Indeed, "the married woman was legally passive, powerless, and thoroughly dependent on her husband."\(^8\)

For accuracy, I use the term "nineteenth-century women of America" instead of "nineteenth-century American women" because the black female, even though she may have been born free, was not considered an American until the passage

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of the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America in 1868, which granted citizenship to Black people. In this sense, the black female lived a life of marginality far beyond even that experienced by the white female. Nevertheless, on occasion, she lived a productive life in this country, her entrepreneurship often contributing to its financial development. For example, Elizabeth Kleckley's seamstress skills allowed her to become the dressmaker for Mary Todd Lincoln, a position for which she received remuneration.

The novel under consideration in this study is Frances Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice*. Harper's short novel, along with two other works, was recently rediscovered by Professor Frances Smith Foster. As of this date, very little, if any, critical study has been done on it, although it and two other works that have received considerable work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Hagar's Daughter*, were all published in serial form within a twenty-year period of each other. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published between June 5, 1851 and April 1, 1852 in Washington, D.C., by the *National Era*. At the onset, the novel was scheduled to appear in about fourteen weekly installments; however, it ran for ten months. Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice* was published in twenty chapters over a six-month period in 1869 by *The Christian Recorder*, sponsored by the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter* was published serially between March 1901 and November 1903 by *Colored American Magazine*.

As their works share certain common traits, so do the lives of these three women, who may well have never met each other. For example, each woman was middle-aged when the novels under consideration in this study were published: Stowe was forty years old when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1851; Hopkins was forty-two when *Hagar's Daughter* was published in 1901, and Harper was forty-four when *Minnie's Sacrifice* was published in 1869. All three women were New Englanders: Stowe was born in Litchfield, Connecticut; Hopkins was born in Portland, Maine; and Harper was born free in the slave state of Maryland, but she lived most of her life in Boston. All three women had long life spans: Stowe died in 1869 at the age of eighty-five; Hopkins died in 1930 at the age of seventy-one; and Harper died in 1911 at the age of eighty-six.

Likewise, although they lived in a period in American history during which women were discouraged from speaking publicly, all three of these educated young women spoke out forcefully in lectures and at meetings devoted to readings and discussions of current events.

Of course, each woman, as a writer, had her own reasons for voicing her strongly-held beliefs and for writing in protest of the prevailing conditions of the era in which she lived—specifically, the events leading up to
and including the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction. Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in response to the Fugitive Slave Law passed by Congress and signed by President Millard Fillmore in September 1850. The Beecher and Stowe families, active anti-slavery advocates, were outraged by the passage of the law. Stowe's sister, Isabella Beecher, wrote to Stowe: "Now, Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is."\(^9\) Stowe answered the challenge with the response, "I will write something. I will if I live."\(^{10}\)

Harper and Hopkins, both black, wrote for different reasons. Whereas Stowe wrote to change the conscience of a nation by righting a wrong, Harper and Hopkins, being black, had more personal reasons for writing, and they brought to their works certain experiences and sensitivities that the well-intentioned Stowe did not have. Despite her good will, Stowe, "girded her loins,"\(^{11}\) took her pen and waged such a mighty battle that Abraham Lincoln, upon meeting her at the White House in 1862, supposedly said, "So, you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!"\(^{12}\) Yet, she was unable to establish the empathy with the Black race that permeates the works of Harper and Hopkins. In point of fact, Moira

\(^9\) Bedrick, p. 207.  
\(^{10}\) Ibid.  
\(^{11}\) I Peter 1:13  
\(^{12}\) Bedrick, p. vii
Davison Reynolds quotes John Anthony Scott as saying that Stowe showed a "lack of interest in exploring the psychological realities of oppression endured by the black people--the experience of fear, sorrow, and rage that was the daily torment of the slave."\(^{13}\)

Harper and Hopkins had intimate and sustained contact with other black people. Sisters, as they were, they shared the same pain caused by their being black in a white patriarchal world that rendered them practically powerless and, at best, offered them merely marginal roles in society. Harper sought to "uplift the race." Speaking through Iola in *Iola Leroy*, she agonized, "I wish I could do something more for our people than I am doing . . . . \(^{14}\) I would like to do something of lasting service for the race." By writing a "strong" book, as she was counseled to do by her friend and confidante, Dr. Latimer, she would "uplift the race," a goal held by many black middle-class women of her time. In the preface to *Contending Forces*, Hopkins states that the purpose of her novel is to "raise the stigma of degradation from my race,"\(^{15}\) a sensitivity that haunts many black writers to this day.


Considerable work has already addressed the lack of power of the nineteenth-century women of America, be they White, female slave, or free Black. However, for the most part, these studies focus on the White woman and very limited, if any, attention has been given to discussions of powerlessness as shown in these three novels, especially the recently "rediscovered" Minnie's Sacrifice.

As a point of reference, certain aspects of the better-known novels have similarities to Minnie's Sacrifice, and for that reason, some similarities among the three novels will be addressed herein before concentrating on Minnie's Sacrifice.

**Powerlessness in the Novels -- The "Silenced" Voices**

> The subordination of female children and of wives is lifelong . . . The basis of paternalism is an unwritten contract for exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for the subordination in all matters sexual service, and unpaid domestic service given by the female.
> Gerda Lerner

Aunt Chloe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is representative of the powerlessness of the female slave. Historian Elizabeth Fox Genovese writes, "Cooks were respected by the blacks as well as by the white folks."\(^{15}\) As head cook for her owners, the Shelby family, Aunt Chloe seems to occupy a position of considerable power. However, she is actually

powerless in that she is the property of her owners, who can sell or retain her as they so desire. Mrs. Shelby and Aunt Chloe seem to bond when both women cry as Tom takes leave of the plantation as a result of being sold to Haley, the slave trader. As Mrs. Shelby "covering her face with her handkerchief, began to sob, . . ."\footnote{Stowe, Harriet Beecher. \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin}. New York: Penguin Books, USA, Inc., 1966, p. 111.} Aunt Chloe, who also begins to cry, tries to comfort her, saying, "Lor now, Misis, don't-don't!"\footnote{Ibid.}

It seems unusual that Aunt Chloe would sympathize with Mrs. Shelby instead of Mrs. Shelby offering consolation to Aunt Chloe. Instead of comforting her fellow slaves, whose shared grief is evident in their tears, Aunt Chloe is more concerned with giving recognition to the seat of power, the slave mistress. Her doing so suggests that she realizes her own powerless position as compared to the power held by the mistress. Aunt Chloe shows relatively harmless manifestations of her pain and anger toward Mrs. Shelby: "Aunt Chloe set a chair for her in a manner decidedly gruff and crusty."\footnote{Ibid.} She never confronts nor protests to her mistress. What verbal statements she makes about her mistress she does so out of the mistress' hearing range. When "one of the boys called out, 'Thar's Missis a comin' in,'"\footnote{Ibid.} Aunt Chloe replies: "She can't do no good; what's
she coming for?" Aunt Chloe's constant awareness of her powerless position is reflected in her statement to her two sons, "Can't ye be decent when white folks come to see ye?" Her lack of power, as well as the lack of power of the female slave, is made evident in her recognition of the tragedies of not only the slave woman but also of the slave family:

Don't natur herself kinder cry out on 'em?

Don't dey [traders] tear der suckin' baby right off his mother's breast, and sell him, and der little children as is crying and holding on by her clothes,--don't dey pull 'em off and sells 'em? Don't dey tear wife and husband a part? Aunt Chloe directs her anger toward Haley, but she never voices it. As she "looked gruffly on the trader, her tears seemingly suddenly turned to sparks of fire." Still, she is voiceless--powerless. As Tom is carried away, Mrs. Shelby returns to the Big House, the seat of power in the private sphere. Aunt Chloe returns to her slave cabin, powerless and husbandless--and left to fend for herself and her three children.

Powerlessness on the part of women is also depicted in Hopkins' Hagar's Daughter, for which the Biblical allusion in the title is specifically relevant to this study.

21 Ibid.
22 Stowe, p. 37
23 Stowe, p. 66
24 Stowe, p. 111
Hagar, Abraham's concubine (and the mother of his first-born son), epitomizes the female servant's marginality, being an outcast because of Sarah's jealousy and being deprived of the status the latter enjoyed as his wife. Hagar and her son Ishmael were driven from the family to wander in the wilderness alone. Similarly, Hopkins' Hagar, a mulatto, is marginalized by both the Black and White communities, and accepted by neither. Like Hagar and Ishmael of the Old Testament, Hopkins' Hagar and child are objects of scorn and abuse.

Elsie Bradford, a young white woman who works for General Benson, succumbs to the General's wiles. He later poisons her in order to prevent her from disclosing their six-month affair that results in her giving birth to their son. Elsie, like many other women of the nineteenth century, is denied autonomy. She is controlled by the patriarchal society, as represented by General Benson. Elsie recalls, "He [General Benson] took advantage of my youth to mold me to his fancy, and make me like himself." Elsie is particularly vulnerable in that, like many women of her time, she was without advanced education that would have given her the leverage to establish and maintain financial independence. She recalls, "I had tasted poverty, I appreciated its effects on my future welfare,

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and I sickened at the thought." In order to maintain her position as secretary to General Benson and because she is impressed with his "genial ways, his distinguished air, and even his successes in his vices," she becomes "the chief's [Benson's] victim." She no longer lays claim to herself "in six months time" after meeting Benson.

Elsie, similar to the woman in the nineteenth-century private sphere, is forced to remain silent. She never asserts herself. She is expected to maintain her enforced silence. General Benson tells "the silent stenographer,"

Elsie, it is particularly necessary for my future plans that this affair of ours be kept secret. If you bury it in your heart, and seal your lips upon it, you shall be recompensed ... I will never lose sight of you and the boy, but direct that a large sum of money shall be paid to you yearly. If not, people have died for less offense than that.

Either way, the patriarch will have silence.

During Cuthbert Sumner's trial as the alleged murderer of Elsie Bradford, "The Attorney General arose and began the trial with a recapitulation of the circumstances

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Hopkins, Magazine Novels, p. 163
32 Ibid., p. 161
attending the murder of Elsie Bradford."\(^{33}\) Her destruction by the patriarchy is symbolic of the destruction of many Elsie Bradfords in both the private and public spheres. Much earlier, Elsie had told Cuthbert Sumner, "He [Benson] was stronger than I; I could do nothing at present."\(^{34}\) She attains only a brief hold on empowerment when she tells her story to Sumner. In voicing her concerns to him, she deliberately seeks to not only expose General Benson, but, as she tells Sumner, to "tell [him] certain things for [his] own welfare and the welfare of the girl you love."\(^{35}\) Although her story empowers Sumner to save himself and to marry the woman whom he loves, Elsie cannot save herself. She is denied empowerment, literally and symbolically. She tells Sumner, "I stood before him crushed for all eternity."\(^{36}\)

Her murder by General Benson is described by the slave Aunt Henny, as she testifies during Summer's trial: "I seed dat dar villyun drap somethin' white inter de glass an' then turn 'ron' and han' it to Miss Bradford."\(^{37}\) Ironically, although Elsie Bradford works and is murdered in an office--the public sphere--her destruction is caused by an affair of the heart, a domestic tragedy that has its roots in the private sphere.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 244  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 161  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 155  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 161  
\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 255
In Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice*, powerlessness of white women of this period is epitomized in Camilla's voiceless mother. She is imprisoned by her environment and never comes to realize "that to be free is to act, to open one's lips in noise and in hope."\(^{38}\) She is entrapped and crushed in her husband's baronial estate because he "manipulates and renders her powerless."\(^{39}\) Even the elegance of the home, supplied and supported by the patriarchy, gives evidence of her powerlessness, her enforced silence: "the velvet carpets hushed her tread."\(^{40}\) She makes no impact on her own life. She is weightless and of no substance. Even her footprints do not make indentions on the carpet. Her situation, like that of many nineteenth-century women, is that she has no presence, no being. She is silenced to the extent that she is, for all practical purposes, non-existent.

The powerlessness of the black women, as well as the emerging white and black women's voices, is addressed later in this work.

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Women's Marginality in the Novels: Betwixt and Between

"Whether I live in the North or South I cannot be counted for my full value, be that much or less."
Fannie Barrier Williams, 1900

Studies have also been done on nineteenth-century women of America who operate on the fringes of two worlds. Each of the three novels easily lends itself to a study of marginality.

Uncle Tom's Cabin offers bountiful examples of females who may accurately be considered as marginal; however, only two are pertinent at this point: Mrs. Shelby and Miss Ophelia, both of whom experience a form of marginal existence due to their respective Southern and Northern backgrounds. Mrs. Shelby, although sympathetic to the plight of her slaves, is bound by custom, tradition, and, perhaps, law, to remain passive. As historian Kori J. Winter notes, "Women were kept in a perpetual state of subjection to physical, emotional, and economic exploitation by men." 41 Hence, Mrs. Shelby does not vigorously pursue her feelings that slavery is "a bitter, bitter most accursed thing!—a curse to the master and a curse to the slave." 42 Her emotional and moral suspension between the slave and non-slave worlds, as well as her acknowledgment that she cannot effect a change, that her

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42 Stowe, p. 45
commitment to her beloved slaves must be subjugated to her loyalty to her husband are most pronounced when she says to Tom, "God help him [her husband], in his distress."\textsuperscript{43} This passive, resigned statement comes from the mistress of the plantation, a woman who proves to be better fit to assure the financial operation of the plantation than her husband, who had "speculated largely and quite loosely; had involved himself deeply and [whose] notes to a large amount had come into the hands of Haley."\textsuperscript{44}

Miss Ophelia, Augustine St. Clair's aunt, is also placed in a marginal position when she moves to the South with her nephew, in that her Northern upbringing leads her to oppose slavery. However, she cannot allow herself to touch the slave and questions the wisdom of allowing Eva to wander so freely among them. "In effect, her loathing of physical contact with slaves underscores the North's hypocrisy, its engagement with slavery on a theoretical level only."\textsuperscript{45} Topsy, at one time, says of Miss Ophelia, "No; she can't bar me 'cause I'm a nigger!—she'd's soon have a toad touch her."\textsuperscript{46}

In \textit{Hagar's Daughter}, Venus a young black female slave, hovers between two worlds. She is, of course, a

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 47
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 19
\textsuperscript{46} Stowe, p. 304
slave, but, in order to rescue her mistress, she dons male clothing and presents herself as Billy, a young male slave. The powerless, marginal Venus becomes the empowered. Although the overwhelming instances of marginality are shown to be products of a black slave mother and a white slave owner, there are also other examples of marginality. For instance, Aurelia Walker, in addition to being the daughter of a female black slave and her white owner, also has decidedly masculine traits. Benson, who is not only impressed with her beauty but also with her emotional strength that he describes as masculine, says of her, "It's a relief to be with a woman who can join a man in a social glass, have a cigar with him, or hold her own in winning or losing a game with no Sunday School nonsense about her."47

Marginality in Minnie's Sacrifice is made evident in the adult Camilla. She marries "a gentleman from the North;"48 however, she continues her ties with the South, in that she "is living very happily upon the old plantation."49 It is illuminating that Camilla's actions exemplify Angelina Grimké's 1836 advice to Southern women "who held slaves to take a greater risk, she proposes that they break the laws that prohibit emancipating slaves, paying them for their work and teaching them to read and write."50 Camilla

47 Hopkins, Magazine Novels, p. 78
48 Harper, p. 33
49 Ibid.
50 Yellin, p. 33
does not keep an overseer, and tries to do all in her power to ameliorate the conditions of her slaves; still she is not satisfied with the system, and is trying to prepare her slaves for freedom, by inducing them to form, as much as possible, habits of self-reliance, and self-restraint, which they will need in the freedom which she has determined they shall enjoy as soon as she can arrange her affairs to that effect. 51

However, she never feels comfortable regarding black people as her equals. "She had great kindness and compassion for the race, but as far as social equality was concerned, . . . yet, . . . neither custom nor education had reconciled her to the maintenance of any equal, social relation with them." 52

Of course, Minnie also has a marginal existence. Her father, St. Pierre Le Grange is white, and her mother Ellen is a slave. Minnie's marginality is based not only on her ethnicity, but also on her suspension between the world of slavery and the privileged White world. Minnie, unaware that she is the child of a slave woman, tells her white adoptive mother, Anna Carpenter, "Oh, it must be dreadful to be colored." 53 Once she is informed of her blackness, she

51 Harper, p. 33
52 Ibid., p. 69
53 Ibid., p. 46
indicates her acceptance with the statement to Ellen, "Mother, come and sit near me and let me hold your hand." 54 An instant bonding occurs between mother and daughter. In the course of the novel, Minnie marries Louis, a mulatto. Although they both could pass for white, they own their blackness and aid the newly-freed slaves. Minnie "had learned from Anna those womanly arts that give beauty, strength, and grace to the fireside, and [she earnestly desires] to teach them [the slaves] how to make their homes bright and happy." 55

An additional indication of Minnie's marginality is that, although she prizes and promotes domestic skills to the slave women, she also enters the public sphere with her open declaration of women's rights. She tells her husband, "But, Louis, is it not the negro woman's hour also? Has she not as many rights and claims as the negro man?" 56 In response to Louis's statement, "What elevates him helps her," 57 she responds

All that may be true, but I cannot recognize that the negro man is the only one who has pressing claims at this hour. To-day our government needs woman's conscience as well as man's judgment . . . . yet I do think that woman should have some power to defend herself from

54 Ibid., p. 53
55 Ibid., p. 74
56 Ibid., p. 78
57 Ibid.
oppression, and equal laws as if she were a man.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{Empowerment in the Novels - Making an Impact}

"Woman is now rising in her womanhood . . . ."
Angelina Grimké
"An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States", 1837

Instances of women moving from powerless to empowerment are especially strong in \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}. The slave Cassy defies Legree by taking advantage of his superstitions and fears and, thereby, becomes empowered. "Her [Cassy’s] irritability, at times, broke out into raving insanity, and this liability made her a sort of object of dread to Legree, who had that superstitious horror of insane persons which is common to coarse and uninstructed minds."\textsuperscript{59} Obviously, Cassy is in no position to physically subdue Legree, but she openly confronts and challenges him. Her strongest weapons are her ability to outthink Legree and, by giving voice to her thoughts, she makes them manifest in her actions. "She [Cassy] was, as he knew, wholly, and without any possibility of help or redress in his hands; and yet so it is, that the most brutal man cannot live in constant association with a strong female influence, and not be greatly controlled by

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Stowe, p. 396
it."60 By doing so, she gains the necessary power to reunite and reestablish her family. "By singular coincidence, on the very night that this vision a stern, white, inexorable figure, saying 'Come! Come! Come!'"61 appeared to Legree, the house-door was found open in the morning, and some of the Negroes had seen two white figures [Cassy and Emmeline] gliding down the avenue towards the high road."62 Earlier, Emmeline had told Cassy, "I'll be like a daughter to you. I know I'll never see my poor old mother again! I shall love you, Cassy, whether you love me or not!"63 After their escape, Cassy, as Madam de Thoux, realizes that Eliza is her daughter.64

Likewise, Hagar's Daughter demonstrates the empowerment of women. Hagar Bowen, an escaped mulatto slave who did not realize that her mother was a slave, marries a wealthy young slaveholder, Ellis Ensom. Ellis' younger brother and Walker, a slave trader, decide to sell Hagar and her daughter, Jewel, after their aborted attempt to murder Ellis. Hagar escapes with her daughter, and she eventually marries "Senator Zenas Bowen, newly elected senator from California, and many times a millionaire."65 Hagar becomes a powerful advisor to her husband; she "insisted upon his entering the arena of politics. Thanks

60 Ibid., p. 427
61 Ibid., p. 451
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p. 437-438
64 Ibid., p. 455
65 Hopkins, Magazine Novels, p. 79
to her cleverness, he made no mistakes and many hits which
no one thought of tracing to his wife's rare talents."66 She and her husband host balls that are popular with the
Washington elite. "The Bowens are in town." That meant a
vast deal to the important social sector of the Washington
world that constituted "society" for the splendid mansion.
.. would be added to the list of places where one could
dance, dine and flirt."67 Hagar's power is further
increased when, upon the death of Senator Bowen, she
chooses to remarry Ellis Ensom.

In the early chapters of Minnie's Sacrifice, Camilla
Le Croix is a noteworthy example of a female who attains
empowerment. A child and a female, Camilla is virtually
powerless, but through her manipulations, she becomes
empowered in that she attains her goal, that of
establishing a family, of which she, in effect, is the
head, much like the position held by the nineteenth-century
white male. Miriam, the aged female slave, by definition
politically, socially, and economically powerless, also
gains power. Working in tandem with Camilla, who because
of her youth and inexperience, is not aware of Miriam's
true motives--to save her grandson from a life of slavery
and to secure her position as his caretaker--Miriam guides
Camilla to the end that both females, one young, white, and

66 Ibid., p. 81-82
67 Ibid., p. 85
to the manor born and the other, aged and a slave, attain their common goal.

The "family" concept that existed between slaveholder and bondsman or woman was not altogether new. What makes the family unique for the purpose of this study is that Camilla, a female child, actually gains the power to establish and maintain a family of which she, in a very real sense, is the head. She makes and implements plans that assure the well-being of her mulatto half-brother, Louis. At that time, she does not realize their relationship to each other.

Conclusion

As this chapter notes, in the nineteenth century, women in America shared common traits of powerlessness, marginality, and, at least initial aspects of, empowerment. Granted, their experiences and their reactions to their experiences were different based, of course, on class and degree of freedom. As the nineteenth-century black woman and white woman interacted with each other, both women could accurately describe their symbiotic relationship as one observed by Angelina Grimke in her speech made in February 1838 before the Legislative Committee of the Massachusetts legislature. Grimke asserted that all women are "sisters in bonds." The major difference between the two dissimilar yet connected black and white nineteenth
century women in America lies in the degree to and nature in which they experience bondage, marginality, and empowerment. Nevertheless, as we will see in Minnie's Sacrifice, the road to freedom was a difficult one, but both strove to overcome the obstacles of powerlessness and marginality to achieve empowerment.
CHAPTER ONE

The Awakening Female: Shattering the Silence

"She had set her heart upon it."

Camilla Le Croix's actions and behavior simultaneously parallel and reflect the evolving role of the nineteenth century female in America. Camilla moves from the domestic sphere into the public sphere, as did many of her real-life contemporaries; that is to say, Camilla claims her right to the power zealously held and guarded by the white patriarchy. In doing so, she becomes the author of a new moral code. Angela Y. Davis, twentieth-century critic, historian, and philosopher sheds light on the shifting positions of the nineteenth-century American white woman caused by the onset of the Industrial Revolution. She explains that

while men had tilled the land (often aided by their wives), the women had been manufacturers, producing fabric, clothing, candles, soap and practically all the other family necessities. . . . When manufacturing moved out of the home and into the factory, the ideology of womanhood began to raise the wife and mother as ideals. As workers, women had at least enjoyed economic equality, but as wives, they were destined to
become appendages to their men, servants to their husbands. As mothers, they would be defined as passive vehicles for the replenishment of human life.  

Historian Moira Davison Reynolds' statement suggests her possible agreement with Davis' observations. Reynolds writes:

although she worked very hard at home, her labor was considered less productive than her husband's, presumably because she received no financial recompense. Such a woman was her husband's dependent rather than his partner, and in almost all families the husband's (or father or brother's) word was law.

Suzanne Lebsock observes that "the married woman was legally dependent on her husband," and Critic Marli F. Weiner provides perhaps the best summary of the powerlessness of the antebellum Southern white woman when she writes that "white men held the ultimate authority in the South, and that authority extended over their wives."

The women desired to escape from "a perpetual state of subjection to physical, emotional, and economic exploitation by men," 72 which prompted or, more fittingly, drove them to assert themselves by first giving voice, followed by appropriate actions that challenged and, in numerous instances, overcame the status quo. In other words, they sought and oftentimes were successful in empowering themselves. In efforts to gain empowerment, nineteenth-century black and white women temporarily joined forces. They recognized a mutual adversary and formed a symbiotic relationship that emanated from their similar oppressions.

Of course, not all white women participated in the "sisters' revolution," which had an undeniably strong impact on the economic, social, and political policies of a nation, as evidenced by moral and social reforms greatly exacerbated by such women as Sarah and Angelina Grimké and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Usually, their organizations were composed of middle-class and/or wealthy women "who were financially well off, because poor women without domestic help of their own, were too busy taking care of their families or earning a living." 73 Further, "they attempted

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to distinguish between the poor who were worthy and deserving of help and those who were not."74

Middle-class educated black women such as Ida B. Wells Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, and Margaret Murray Washington (Booker T. Washington's third wife) also played prominent roles in black women's reform movement. However, unlike the white women's organizations, theirs encompassed the illiterate, such as Sojourner Truth, as well as women who lived in poverty and who would certainly never have been considered members of the black elite. Black women, who held firmly to "uplifting the race," set class differences aside and recognized and vigorously responded to their common situation. The free educated black woman could certainly identify with the bondswoman or former bondswoman. After all, they were black women living in a time and world in which their blackness made them susceptible, indeed vulnerable, to forces that would and did, in many instances, effectively deny them to be partakers and recipients of the American dream. Indeed, "most [middle-class black women] were the daughters or granddaughters of slaves. They descended from women whom racist America had defined as the complete antithesis of the True Woman--the female, not as pure moral paragon, but as animal: woman as laborer and breeder."75 Certainly,

74 Ibid.
from the beginning, when the free black women of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1818 founded the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society, the primary goal was to offer assistance to one another. As those who had had intimate experience with poverty and racial prejudice, these women knew all too well that at anytime they could just as easily be on the receiving end of their group's mission. Thus, even very busy poor black women somehow managed to find time to devote to charitable societies.  

The church, especially the Baptist church, held the antipodal position of serving as a primary nurturing source for reform-minded black and white women while simultaneously serving as a theater of war. In some instances, because of its insularity—the preponderance of males in authoritative and powerful positions—it, the church, in this sense, functioned as a male-initiated crisis, rooted in centuries of deeply ingrained insularity, that presented formidable obstructions to the efforts of those women who not only needed but insisted that they be heard, considering that "'tis woman's strongest vindication for speaking that the world needs to hear her voice."  

these women marshaled their forces, planned and executed their strategies and attacks, and broke the silence inflicted upon them by deeply-entrenched forces that sought to, and oftentimes did, control these women's interior being by controlling their minds, which, if allowed to develop, would have led to voice and, as a matter of course, inevitably to action, a process that would evolve into an autonomous being--an empowered woman.

The patriarchy--their mutual adversary--based its Weltanschauung on two fronts: the sacred as manifested in carefully-selected Scriptures that, as interpreted by this group, severely limited and defined the role of the woman in the church, and the secular, which was based on customs and traditions that defined and, in this enclosed situation, circumscribed the position of the woman in the private sphere of the home. After all, "when a woman married, she [was expected to] give up her heart, feelings, fancies and opinions to her husband." 78 She was also severely restricted in the public sphere. As late as almost mid-way into the nineteenth century (1832), "women didn't speak in public, especially on serious issues like civil rights and, most especially, feminism." 79 Such attitudes, activated by corresponding actions, rendered the woman powerless and practically non-existent. Indeed, "the

exemplary woman [was] to move . . . through her life 'silent, gentle and often unperceived.'"80 Ironically, the woman forced the church to serve as a source for the ingredients of and as a site for the fusion of the secular and the sacred. In lectures and speeches drawn from Scriptures supportive of their messages delivered during church services, the messenger and the message hypostatized--the word (concept) became reality.

The word was a demand, a bid for empowerment. The messenger, who by the act of speaking in a male-dominated sphere, in terms of power and authority, became the empowered. Thus, the two components hypostatized, and the word became reality. The woman was further empowered in that she played out the role traditionally claimed by the male. She became the creator. By giving voice in public, she figuratively created herself. Her triumphant declaration of empowerment could well have been"I speak; therefore, I am." This declaration of independence was especially applicable to the black female, largely viewed "as a work-ox and a brood-sow"81 during her approximately two-hundred year sojourn in America. Anna Julia Cooper, a black woman, accurately describes the black woman's situation as

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the one mute and voiceless note has been the
sadly expectant Black Woman,
An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language--but a cry.82

With her voice, she not only established her humanity, she
established her identity—that of a thinking, articulate
being, defining her own space and sphere in both time and
location.

Both black and white women slowly but relentlessly
established and maintained a voice, initially quivery and
insistent, then bold and demanding. Following the act of
shattering silence, they, as admonished by the New
Testament writer James, became "doers of the Word."83 They
interpreted the Word as only they perceived, defined, and
practiced it, and by doing so, they strengthened and
intensified their empowerment, so that they were no longer
powerless, voiceless bodies controlled by stronger vocal
forces. Together, Southern black and northern white women
"spread the Gospel, supported one another's organizations,
financed black education and alleviated the plight of the
poor."84 Unfortunately, the association weakened. As
historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn explains, "Abhorrence of

82 Cooper, Anna Julia, quoted in Elizabeth Ammons. Conflicting
83 James 1:22.
84 Bigginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. Righteous Discontent: The Women's
Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. Cambridge:
slavery was no guarantee that white reformers would accept the Afro-Americans on equal terms."85 In heated debate concerning whether black men should be given the right to vote before the privilege was given to white women, Frances Harper stated at the 1869 meeting of the American Equal Rights Association, "The white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position."86 Further, Harper stressed, "Being black means that every white, including every white working class woman, can discriminate against you [black people]."87

The physical nearness of people related biologically and living in close quarters suggests that the biological bond impacted by the close proximity of occupants in narrow, confined quarters, such as a slave cabin, has the capacity to expand into an emotionally-based relationship that possesses the capacity to evolve into primary unit connected by not only a biological kinship but by emotional bonds, as well. Certainly, Camilla does not live in "the usually crowded and uncomfortable"88 slave quarters; however, she has emotional ties that allow her to feel quite comfortable with the black inhabitants of Miriam's slave cabin. Indeed, she has frequented the cabin belonging to Miriam, the maternal grandmother of Louis,

85 Wilson and Russell, P. 25
86 Giddings, p. 68
87 Ibid.
Camilla's half-brother. Her visit to the cabin upon hearing of Agnes' death suggests that she has been there on previous occasions. The mistress of the ante-bellum South plantation would, in many instances, visit slave cabins in times of sickness and death of slaves. "Some dedicated mistresses made daily rounds to the cabins of sick slaves or to the infirmaries set aside for the sick, the invalid, and the infant members of the slave community." 89

Although still a child and, therefore, not yet responsible for fulfilling the obligations of a plantation mistress, Camilla is, nevertheless, a potential caretaker of the physical well-being of the slaves, primarily because the slaveholder regarded the slave as a financial investment that the owner knew would reward him with sizable monetary return. 90 Camilla "lives" in a black world. "Without any female relatives to guide her, she had no other associates than the servants of her household, and


90 King, Wilma. Stolen Childhood Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995, p. 2. King writes: "In 1858, an unidentified author contributed 'Profits of Farming-Facts and Figures' to the Southern Cultivator, which explains his view about the value of reproduction: I own a woman who cost me $400 when a girl, in 1827. Admit she made me nothing—only worth her victuals and clothing. She now has three Children, worth over $3000 and have been fields hands say three years; in that time, making enough to pay their expenses before they were half hands, and then I have the profit of all half hands. She has only three boys and a girl out of a dozen; yet, with all her bad management, she has paid me ten per cent interest, for her work was to be an averae good, and I would not this night touch $700 for her. Her oldest boy is worth $1250 oahs, and I can get it."
the family of Mr. Le Grange. Her mother's nurse and
favorite servant had taken the charge of her after her
death, and Agnes had been her nurse and companion."91 Her
father, Bernard Le Croix, never remarried after his wife's
death, leaving Camilla, at age six, with no siblings. Le
Croix and Camilla live on a Louisiana plantation far
removed from neighboring plantations so that visits between
the inhabitants are not a daily occurrence; in fact, they
are more than likely infrequent. Her playmates were, for
the most part, black.

When Camilla enters a slave cabin, the inhabitants
know that she brings with her the power of being the
owner's daughter, "who would comply with almost any fancy
or request rather than see her unhappy or fretting,"92 and
they sense that she represents a force that they cannot
openly challenge. She carries with her the almost
indestructible power of a way of life, given license to and
supported by a system firmly anchored in the federal,
state, and local governments, sanctioned by the church, and
upheld by the customs and traditions of the community. As
the young Camilla, "knowing her power,"93 enters a slave
cabin, she brings with her centuries of European
patriarchal rule, a power inherent in the history of her

91 Harper, p. 10
92 Harper, p.10-11
93 Harper, p. 11
family. Her paternal grandfather and his brother were from France, and her paternal grandmother was from Spain.

Spain and France were active in the Atlantic slave trade; hence, the Spanish and French backgrounds of her family are reflective of Camilla's inheritance of power and, by extension due to her birthright, also her involvement with slavery. Her paternal grandparents, her great uncle, and her mother fled from Haiti during the revolution when slaves freed themselves from white dominion "and made Hayti an independent nation."^94 The Le Croixes fled Haiti a few months before the revolution began. Upon arriving in Louisiana, chosen because of "a climate similar to his own, [Le Croix] bought a plantation on Red Rive and largely stocked it with slaves."^95 Thus, the tradition of the enslavement of black men, women, and children continued as the Le Croixes sought to begin a new life on another continent. Bernard Le Croix is born into this social, economic, and political exploitation of human beings, and he, in turn, passes the practice and tradition of power over and ownership of human beings onto his daughter, Camilla. The New World, made even more attractive and compelling by the fertile sugar-producing land of Louisiana, becomes the recipient of the wealth and tradition of the Old World represented by the Le Croixes.

^94 Harper, p. 9
^95 Ibid.
Camilla's widowed great uncle, who is also her maternal grandfather, brings with him a new life, Camilla's mother, to his new home in the young life of a "new country," new and young as compared to the centuries-old civilizations of France and Spain. "Broken in spirits, feeble in health," his emotional and physical states weakened, foreshadowing the imminent demise of slavery in America, he dies shortly after reaching Louisiana. The death of Camilla's great uncle/grandfather, who dies in his brother's arms, makes plain a continuation of power on two fronts. His dying in his brother's arms suggests that the power will be nurtured and extended, for it will reside with his brother in his role as guardian, who by right of his birth as a white male, has not only the opportunity of keep vigilant over the power, but more importantly, the responsibility to do so. Their power is evidenced by their continuation of the enslavement of human beings who serve as the source of their wealth, which equates to power. The scene is also powerfully symbolic: not only does their physical position demonstrate the intensity of the love that exists between the two brothers, but it also attests to the zealous protection of power, a protection so intense that it is held near the heart and hoarded until the appropriate times arrives to pass it on to Camilla's mother. Moreover, the act symbolizes the acquisition of

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96 Ibid.
power by two people, Bernard Le Croix's father and Camilla's mother, who at this point is a mere child.

The two recipients represent the Old World and the New World, respectively. There is, of course, the major presence of power of the dominant male and a minor presence of the female. She is defined as a minor power not only because of her young age, "about ten years old," 97 but also because of her gender. Nevertheless, she does possess power, albeit limited, because she is white and to the manor born. All told, Louis Le Croix transfers his power to his brother, who serves as a conduit to pass it on, certainly in a diluted form, to his niece and, in turn, to his great-niece Camilla, who will live on the plantation "knowing her power." 98

Although Camilla's grandfather, Louis Le Croix, had very limited wealth, "leaving everything behind except the clothing upon their persons, and a few jewels they had hastily collected," 99 he leaves Camilla's mother in a financially secure position. Additionally, she is also the recipient of the power of another white male. She marries her uncle's sole heir and lives in "a large baronial estate [has access to] 500 slaves and a vast amount of money," 100 certainly, "a message that the master had tremendous

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., p. 11
99 Ibid., p. 9
100 Ibid.
power." Bernard Le Croix's marrying his first cousin, Camilla's mother, brings about the commingling of the bloodlines of two biologically-related families, which simultaneously cements and intensifies not only the intimacy of the bonding, but also the power generated from the union of two people who are the sole heirs of two powerful families.

Camilla's mother, by giving birth to Camilla, ensures a continuation of power, for she is the new life, positioned in a new environment, who, by definition of her gender, as its implications are defined for her, is at once a life-giver and a nurturer. Only through her is that power able to continue, for she is "defined as a passive vehicle(s) for the replenishment of human life." Traditionally, the female is the disseminator of the mores and customs of a culture; hence, the female has the assigned power and, concomitant with it, the inherent responsibility to interpret and pass on the dynamics of that culture, in this instance, a powerful male-dominated culture, to its heirs.

Camilla Le Croix' actions serve as a metaphor for the evolving role of the nineteenth-century white female in America. In the early chapters of Minnie's Sacrifice,

102 Davis, p. 32
Camilla is an example of empowerment attained by a female. Camilla, because she is a child and a female, is expected to adhere to the typical role assigned to the nineteenth-century female, that is, to "become as little children"\textsuperscript{103} which she is, and to "avoid a controversial spirit,"\textsuperscript{104} which she does not do. Although she is a female and a child, dual forces and sites of oppression, through her clear-sighted vision and determination, she becomes empowered. She attains her goal of establishing a family, of which she, in effect, is the head, similar to the position of power as head of the family held by the nineteenth-century white male. Indeed, "home is actually a masculine domain, subject to man's rule within and without."\textsuperscript{105} Operating under her own inclinations, her innocence and energy not yet contaminated nor stifled by the distorted angle of vision of the patriarchy ("Now Mammy," said she, throwing off her hat and looking soberly into the fire," if I had my way he should never be a slave")\textsuperscript{106} and her determination, for she knew "no law but her own will,"\textsuperscript{107} allow her to take appropriate action as she perceives it. After all, "she had set her heart upon it."\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Harper, p. 4-5
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 10
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 9
The domestic locus is the perfect setting for the making of a family. The bringing together of the members that comprise Camilla's "family" takes place in Miriam's "lowly cabin." In the afternoon, perhaps when the sun is in its full power, Camilla enters Miriam's cabin, bringing with her the hope that only a person of considerable power can both promise and fulfill. When the carefree Camilla enters Miriam's dark "lowly cabin"\(^{109}\) that houses Miriam's dark tragedy, she finds a grieving Miriam "sitting down hopelessly beneath the shadow of her mighty grief."\(^{110}\) She cannot dismiss the shadow, but its darkness is diminished by her presence and the promise of what her presence, her power, can accomplish for the infant Louis. She also helps ease Miriam's grief over the death of her daughter, Agnes, while Miriam sits "painfully rocking her body to and fro."\(^{111}\)

Camilla's immediate embrace of Miriam by "throwing her arms around her neck"\(^{112}\) implies that she is standing while the grief-stricken Miriam sits. Their different levels are symbolic of Camilla's dominion over Miriam, the dead Agnes, and the newly-born Louis, as well as all slaves on her plantation. Although the embrace is intended to demonstrate Camilla's sympathy for Miriam, to a greater degree it symbolizes her immense power, licensed by her

\(^{109}\) Ibid., p. 3
\(^{110}\) Ibid.
\(^{111}\) Ibid.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., p. 4
father and supported by the government, the church, and her community. Rather than lowering herself to Miriam's side and embracing her there, which would suggest equality, Camilla hugs Miriam's neck, the portion of one's body that is vulnerable to being choked or stifled, indeed, that portion of the body that is completely at the mercy of a more powerful individual. Hence, Camilla's embracing of Miriam's neck, despite the affection it shows, evokes the image of the stifling of a people—the slaves.

Camilla is the direct inheritor of a father's wealth and power. Bernard Le Croix, "wrapped in his literary pursuits," had left the entire control of his plantation to his overseers. They soon learned that if they offended Camilla, they would be "turned away." Her presence is a power that counters the destruction done by a power who practices his "rights" as a patriarch, even though it leads to "an introduction of a child of shame into a world of sin and suffering" and "an early grave" Agnes, whose name means clear and pure. The magnitude of the unquestionable and unquestioned power of the master is evidenced in that the clarity [Agnes] becomes clouded by his power, clouded to the extent that her [Agnes'] sun had gone down in darkness into the darkness of the "mazes of sin and

113 Ibid., p. 10
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., p. 3
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
sorrow"\textsuperscript{118} and ultimately to "an early grave."\textsuperscript{119} Miriam is alone in her grief. She knows, as do all slave mothers of females, that they have no recourse for the sexual exploitation of their daughters, who "could be raped, forced by their owners into illicit relationships with masters, overseers, and other slaves."\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, Miriam has no substantial help for her grandson.

Even her fellow slaves do not, indeed, cannot offer her succor or hope. They, like those in power, take only brief notice of her tragedy and move on with their lives. In effect, although unwilling to do so and motivated by different reasons—the slaves react from fear of the patriarch—they reflect the behavior of the powerful in that they, too, hurry on with their "appointed tasks,"\textsuperscript{121} with their lives. Granted, the slaves do "drop a word of pity for the weeping mother,"\textsuperscript{122} but there is no sustained period of mourning for the loss of a fellow slave. Into this scene of powerlessness, the powerful, young Camilla undertakes to partially right a wrong.

The enforced inability of the slaves to protect the female slave from becoming "entangled in mazes of sin and

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Harper, p. 4
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
sorrow" and "from the highest insults that brutality could offer to innocence" is evidenced in the expression "on the pale dead face" of Agnes in "an appeal from earth to heaven," a realization and acknowledgment that there is limited help on earth, so the slave reaches out to a source that supersedes the power of the master, a cry that is expressed through songs of lament, "the sorrow songs." Of course, there is no lament for Agnes. The slaves that would serve as the chorus in this tragedy are silenced: they must "hurry on to their appointed tasks." As the innocent Camilla comments that Agnes in death looks "as natural as life," she suggests that what happens to Agnes is representative of the plight of all female slaves, be they "fair, young and beautiful" or not, is as natural as life. The pure, clear, powerless Agnes loses her innocence and her life, while the innocent, but powerful Camilla lives to become an adult. As testimony to the patriarchal view that white women are to be kept

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123 Ibid., p. 3
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., p. 3-4
127 Du Bois, W. E. B. Souls of Black Folk. Greenwich: Fawcett Premier Book, 1953, p. 189: "Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurances of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometimes, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins."
128 Harper, p. 4
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., p. 3
separate from the world and are to live in naïveté and supposed innocence, Camilla does not learn that Agnes' son is her half-brother until she becomes an adult.

The nineteenth-century woman, in moving from the private sphere of the home into the public sphere, claimed her position of empowerment by giving voice to what Susan L. Roberson describes as her inner being, "the central core from which would emerge her own character and identity."\(^{131}\) While yet in the private sphere of Miriam's cabin before she ventures into the public sphere, Camilla gives voice to her position of power by speaking to Miriam before the latter, who is powerless, speaks to her. Miriam responds only to Camilla's direct questions. She makes no attempt to be a hospitable hostess in her cabin—her home. Such action could well be considered as an affront to the person in power. Miriam listens to Camilla's explanation of her absence from the plantation, and she responds to her question of "When did she die?"\(^{132}\) Clearly, Camilla is assertive, wanting to know the details of Agnes' death. Although she is very fond of Agnes, who "had been her nurse and companion,"\(^{133}\) as a person of power, she has the privilege to investigate any event that occurs on her plantation. Camilla acts. Miriam is passive in her mourning.

\(^{131}\) Roberson, p. 128
\(^{132}\) Harper, p. 4
\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 10
Camilla's statements range from explanations that are indicative of her sympathy for Miriam ("Oh! Mammy, I am so sorry I didn't know Agnes was dead. I've been on a visit to Mr. Le Grange's plantation, and I've just got back this afternoon, and as soon as I heard that Agnes was dead I hurried to see you I would not even wait for my dinner..."134) to questions concerning the events of Agnes' death ("When did she die?"135) to admission of ignorance ("Agnes baby? Why I did not know that Agnes had a baby."136). Finally, she gives a command, phrased in a question: "Do let me see it?"137 All are voices of the powerful. The most powerful statement is the last, "Do let me see it?" 138. This request--command--not only shows Camilla's curiosity and concern, more importantly, it shows her power and the rudimentary steps of attaining knowledge, which, of course, strengthen her power.

The statements made by Camilla in a practically one-sided exchange with Miriam are metaphors for the position and development of the nineteenth-century woman of America. First, there are explanations that are actually expressions of sympathy. Camilla, operating in the private sphere of her plantation, is the concerned plantation mistress who performs her assigned duties of caring for the well-being

134 Ibid., p. 4
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
of the slaves. Hence, the observation, "Man has a rugged heart—Woman a soft and tender one."139 Further, "woman [is] an angel of mercy . . . passive, domestic . . . nurturing."140

Camilla's ignorance of the events occurring among the slaves on her plantation ("I did not know that Agnes had a baby"141 and " . . . surely this can't be Agnes' baby"142) epitomizes the rampant denial by plantation mistresses of the paternity of the mulatto children on their plantations. "Any lady is ready to tell you the father of all the mulatto children on everybody's household but her own. These, she seems to think, drop from the clouds."143 Indeed, "the ladies were reticent, evasive, often willfully blind about what sometimes went on in their own backyards."144 Finally, the nineteenth-century woman moved toward emancipating herself from the constraints of her assigned position as a member of the cult of True Womanhood, which Barbara Welter defines as

The attributes . . . by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues -- piety, purity,

139 Pease and Pease, p. 7
140 Ibid., p. 8
141 Harper, p. 4
142 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.\textsuperscript{145}

Failure to adhere to the stifling demands of True Womanhood could cause a woman "to ruin her health, damage her family's well-being and tarnish the image of womanhood."\textsuperscript{146}

When Camilla commands, "Do let me see it?"\textsuperscript{147} she demonstrates the attainment of power by the nineteenth-century woman. Her command suggests a way of thinking, an attitude of readiness and capability of viewing her world with clarity and determination which removes her from the cult of True Womanhood. Her voice, power, is manifested in the tone of the statements she makes. Her statements are strong, confident, the voice of authority, couched, on occasions, in the socially-acceptable manner of a child, but powerful and insistent as was the movement of the nineteenth-century woman in giving voice to her inner being. She, the nineteenth-century woman, knows "that to be free is to act, to open one's lips in noise and in hope."\textsuperscript{148} Camilla makes a number of statements beginning

\textsuperscript{145} Welter, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{146} Pease and Pease, p. 8
\textsuperscript{147} Harper, p. 4
with "I want." She tells Miriam, "I want you to come to the house," and "I want you to come and be my Mammy," and "I want you to come and bring the baby to the house." Earlier, in a conversation with the overseer, she makes clear that she wants Miriam to be relieved of her duties in the field. She insists that Agnes' child be raised as a white child. Camilla is only temporarily thwarted when her plans are not readily accepted. She reads her position and her chances of success with a clear sight, realizing that "Pa does everything I wish him to do; but I don't know how I could manage about this." However, she, like the nineteenth-century woman, continues with her plans, with her movements, and she manages. When Miriam expresses her reservations about Camilla's plan to take Louis to live in her father's house and "bring him up like a white child," Camilla counters with a resolute statement that she will manage any objections that her father may raise.

The nineteenth-century female experienced difficulty in making her voice heard, even in her own home, as does Camilla. Critic Susan L. Roberson, in assessing the stance taken by nineteenth-century males who wrote manuals which

149 Harper, p. 8
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid., p. 5
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
gave advice to women concerning their role and behavior, determines that the writers "effectively disempower woman, erasing her presence from the kind of serious, intellectual debates that shape the politics of the family and the nation." 156 Further, "the valued work of woman . . . is limited to her sphere and erased or canceled whenever it interferes with the designs of the larger, masculine sphere." 157

Bernard Le Croix, Camilla's father, tries to silence Camilla's voice by his condescending manner as he listens to her arguments to place Louis in their home. The epitome of the nineteenth-century patriarch, Le Croix refers to her in terms that are designed to not only deflate her arguments, but to firmly yet gently remind her of her position in the power hierarchy and suggest that she remain stationary as the "submissive maiden." 158 Le Croix attempts to erase her seriousness by erasing her arguments, thereby diminishing her personhood, which further assigns her to a position of inferiority.

Camilla's position as a child is much like the position of the nineteenth-century woman who is admonished to "become as little children" 159 and to "avoid a controversial spirit." 160 However, Camilla's clear-sighted

156 Roberson, p. 123
157 Ibid., p. 122
159 Welter, p. 30
160 Ibid.
awareness of her world and her determination allow her to challenge and overcome the distorted view of the patriarch concerning woman's role and position. Clearly, Camilla is sovereign in her thinking. She identifies and achieves her goal, with considerably more ease than her nineteenth-century female contemporary, who was often hindered by the patriarchy. Frederick Douglass, a contemporary of Harper's and a feminist, aware of the nineteenth-century woman's struggle for empowerment notes: "She [in this case, Camilla] is a person and has all the attributes of personality that can be claimed by man and that her rights of person are equal to those of man."\(^{161}\)

Le Croix deliberately attempts to stifle Camilla's right of person by using affectionate but demeaning terms of endearments: "my princess,"\(^{162}\) "my little dewdrop,"\(^{163}\) "darling,"\(^{164}\) and "Birdie,"\(^{165}\), all of which remind her of her "place." The name "princess" indicates that as the implied "king," Le Croix has dominion over his kingdom and she, as his princess, moves in a subordinate light, always in his shadow and dependent upon him for her survival. By using a term that indicates a position that is dependent upon the king, the patriarch, Le Croix assigns her to a position that is the accepted one occupied by the


\(^{162}\) Harper, p. 6

\(^{163}\) Ibid., p. 7

\(^{164}\) Ibid., p. 14

\(^{165}\) Ibid., p. 13
nineteenth-century female. Her situation demonstrates that "women were not generally allowed to be responsible moral agents in the same sense as men; conventionally and legally, they were accountable not only to their Creator, but to fathers and husbands as well."\textsuperscript{166}

The appellations "dewdrop," "sunbeam," and "Birdie" are appropriate, for Camilla is, indeed, a child. Each term denotes not only her innocence, but also her powerlessness. None of them are capable of offending nor of inflicting pain. Granted, the bird is capable of aggression; however, the context in which Le Croix call Camilla "Birdie" is one of contriteness on his part. He fears that he has wounded her by introducing her to a harsher side of life, which she is too young and too innocent to process. At the "Antislavery Meeting," Le Croix, seeing "the deep emotion on his daughter's face and the nervous twitching of her lips, regretted that he had introduced her to such an exciting scene."\textsuperscript{167} In this context, the "bird" is fragile, innocent, and vulnerable, requiring shelter from the realities of slave life. Each pet name is non-threatening. Further, they are natural, not contrived nor artificial. The manipulation and distortion of the names are symbolic of the harnessing of the nineteenth-century woman, forcing her to deny her natural impulses and conform to roles that render her

\textsuperscript{166} Yellin, \textit{Women and Sisters}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{167} Harper, p. 12
docile. Thus, she becomes Dewdrop, Sunbeam, and Birdie, all appealing, non-threatening, and subject to being destroyed by a more powerful force.

In referring to Camilla by the aforementioned pet names, Le Croix simultaneously restricts her and by extension symbolically, as patriarch, also restricts the nineteenth-century woman to confinement in a narrowly-drawn, artificial sphere, ostensibly because of her her fragility and inability to survive in the harsh light of knowledge gained from entering the public sphere, in this instance, The Tremont Temple, "Antislavery Meeting." Le Croix's verbalization of his realization, of his power as patriarch, suggests he feels "that in whatever situation of life a woman is placed from her cradle to her grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required of her."\(^{168}\)

By assigning these names to Camilla, Le Croix indicates his goal to determine her thoughts and activities. His behavior strongly suggests that, like the patriarchy of which he is a part, he actively believes in "disempowering woman physically and psychically, to containing woman within the home and convincing her of her inferior position and ability."\(^{169}\) Camilla's thoughts and activities are expected to be reflective of the names that she bears. Le Croix never refers to her by her given name.

\(^{168}\) Welter, p. 28
\(^{169}\) Roberson, p. 123
To do so would be to recognize her identity as a being in her own right, a child, but, nevertheless, a being who has a serious statement to make, serious in keeping with the domestic, social, and political overtones and facets that lie within it. Additionally, Le Croix's using Camilla's name when speaking to her would indicate that she is no longer an extension of himself in a lesser light. Also, not using her name is an admission that he cannot define nor readily limit her activities nor her thoughts. When he condescendingly calls her "my little Abolitionist," he recognizes that she has begun to attain knowledge that will lead her to become empowered, yet he calls her "his," indicating that he possesses her as he does any other commodity. To him, such thinking and actions are potentially dangerous, not only because they run counter to the lifestyle which he enjoys and completely controls, but also because they are threatening. Unlike the adult Mrs. Bird of Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, the young "birdie" is a threat: Camilla's request alerts her father to the possibility that she has the potential to become "dangerously subversive." If her thoughts and activities are not erased (or silenced), they will cause him to "immediately lose caste among the planters in the neighborhood."

170 Harper, p. 6
171 Roberson, p. 124
172 Harper, p. 7
Again, Frederick Douglass speaks for the need of self-established autonomy for the nineteenth-century woman when he observes that

"woman is woman . . . . Her selfhood is as complete, perfect, and absolute as is the selfhood of man. She cannot part with her personality any more than she can part with her identity . . . . Woman belongs to herself, just as fully as a man belongs to himself."\(^{173}\)

At this juncture, Camilla is poised between the private and the public spheres. She is in the public sphere of the "Antislavery Meeting," where she encounters a world from which she has been sheltered and confronts information from sources outside her restricted private sphere. Heretofore, she has only heard of the troubles of the slaves Isaac, Jerry, Sam, and Miriam, all members of her private sphere. However, at the Antislavery Meeting, she listens to the ex-slave who "recounted in burning words the wrongs which had been heaped upon him."\(^{174}\) She has never before heard a slave or ex-slave give so open and graphic account of how his wife had been sold to "a trader . . . rich in sin-cursed gold."\(^{175}\) The prefix \textit{ex} suggests that he is outside of her private sphere. As she listens,

\(^{173}\) Martin, p. 144
\(^{174}\) Harper, p. 12
\(^{175}\) Ibid.
Camilla grows in a painful manner. The knowledge that she gains intensifies her inclinations against slavery.

In the conversation between Camilla and her father, held in the parlor of their private sphere, the little Dewdrop makes decided strides in becoming the public "little philosopher," and her doing so suggests that her behavior symbolically reflects the activities of some nineteenth-century women in the public crusades to abolish slavery. These women also made progress in extricating themselves from the smothering, rigid domination of the patriarchy. Jean Fagan Yellin writes that in her Letters to Catherine Beecher, nineteenth-century feminist Angelina Grimké suggests:

that those who cannot communicate freely are slaves; forbidden to articulate their ideas, or permitted to voice them only at another's whim, they lack direct access to an audience and are heard only insofar as their masters permit.\(^\text{176}\)

Yellin also writes that "Grimke's appearance before the Legislative Committee of the Massachusetts legislature in February 1838 marked the high point of her public life."\(^\text{177}\)

According to Yellin, during this speech, "she publicly announces herself a woman who, attempting to revolutionize an unjust world [slavery and the disempowerment of woman]"
achieves her own freedom in acting to end the oppression of others." 178

During the conversation between Le Croix and his daughter, the latter presses her point, searching for knowledge that will lead her to empowerment. She indicates that overcoming the breach does not come easily for her. She turns to her father for guidance, saying, "I can't understand it." 179 As Le Croix hands "her a necklace of the purest pearls," 180 she says, "Pa, I can't understand slavery; that man made me think it was something very bad. Do you think it can be right?" 181 Here, Camilla's statement "I can't understand it," 182 not only questions the moral rightness of slavery, but, more broadly and profoundly, also exemplifies her confusion in being placed between the two spheres. She is caught between the demands of her role as slaveowner in the private sphere and her shock at learning of the pain and cruelty of slavery, as she witnessed in the public sphere. Presently, she is in the private parlor of the private sphere. Moreover, she is in the company and protection of her father, the wealthy, powerful patriarch, who indulges her every whim; who asks of her "What is your wish, my princess? Tell me, if it is the half of my kingdom"; 183 who, when they visited New York,

178 Ibid., p. 41
179 Harper, p. 14
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid., p. 6
purchased for Camilla "two thousand dollars worth of jewelry."\textsuperscript{184} and who, while they were on an enjoyable trip to the North, also allowed her to visit "with him every place of amusement or interest they could find."\textsuperscript{185}

Pitted against the luxuries of the private sphere comes knowledge. Eden comes to an end. She hears first-hand of the brutality of slavery. She sees and hears the ex-slave who speaks of brutality and exploitation and is touched by the account; she clutches "her little hands nervously together."\textsuperscript{186} Her world is widened when she confronts knowledge and must assimilate it, even if that assimilation abruptly forces her onto a different, for her foreign, sphere. During her conversation later in the day with her father, Camilla, remembering her " conversations with the slave Isaac, asks Le Croix, "Do you think [slavery] can be right?"\textsuperscript{187} Le Croix's face flushed suddenly, and he bit his lip, but said nothing, and commenced reading the paper."

Camilla is not to be ignored. She presses: "Why don't you answer me, Pa?"\textsuperscript{188}

Her statement is much like the question-command that she had earlier expressed to Miriam ("Do let me see it?"\textsuperscript{189}). She similarly asserts herself with her father,

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p. 5
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., p. 11
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., p. 12
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p. 14
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., p. 4
demanding "Why don't you answer me, Pa?"\textsuperscript{190} She senses that his response is necessary for her advancement. It would affirm her objections to slavery. Le Croix's agreement that slavery was not right, that "it was something very bad,"\textsuperscript{191} accelerates her move into the public sphere. He cannot give her an affirmative answer, for to do so would diminish his power as patriarch, not only in his personal sphere, but also in his role as representative of the power of patriarchy in the South. Further, answering his "little philosopher" would be tantamount to recognizing that she has the power to be deliberate in her thoughts and to question the received moral code of that patriarchy. Le Croix, being the archtypal patriarch, knows that

the system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; education; deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., p. 14
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. 192

Camilla does not "talk ineffectively." 193 Also, by responding, Le Croix would be forced to consider her with a much less distorted vision than he has done previously. He has to see her as soon-to-be woman, one who knows her inner being and asserts herself. Camilla identifies her motivation for growth as "that man made me think it was something very bad." 194 The operative word is "think," the declaration of her mental sovereignty; she is making movements of the mind that allow her inner being to emerge, and, in that emergence, she is not only threatening to become empowered, a concept that evolves into reality, but in doing so, she is also questioning the established moral implications regarding slavery. Both moves toward empowerment are beyond Le Croix's power to control.

Le Croix's sovereignty is challenged by a force outside his private sphere, and that force is another male. Each man is vying for Camilla's support, but from opposite positions. The father tries to ingratiate himself to Camilla and, thereby, retain her in his private sphere. The ex-slave attempts to persuade her from his public sphere. The ex-slave is a member of the public sphere not only because he speaks publicly, but also because the public has

192 Lerner, p. 218
193 Roberson, p. 123
194 Harper, p. 14
access to his body, which may be probed and prodded by any white person. The public attempts to control his thoughts unless he decides to shelter them; thus, the public has access to his entire being. Further, the peculiar institution is a deeply ingrained way of life in the South, sanctioned by the government, church, and community. According to antebellum South Carolinian, William Henry Trescott, "Slavery . . . informs all our modes of life, all our habits of thoughts, lies as the basis of our social existence, and of our political faith." 195

As unlikely as it may seem, the two men both play paternal roles in Camilla's life. Le Croix plants the seed that gives her biological life, whereas the ex-slave is her spiritual father, who fosters in her a quickening of knowledge. His seed leads to her participation in the public world, ironically escorted there by her father when they attended The Tremont Temple, "Antislavery Meeting." The seed planted by the ex-slave grows in Camilla's fertile, receptive mind. Its growth is stimulated by her recall of previous knowledge that she has attained during the tour to the North, in the company of her father. She had

watched with curious eyes the intelligent faces of the operatives, as they plied with ready

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fingers their daily tasks. Sometimes, she would contrast their appearance with laborers [slaves] she had seen wending their way into their lowly huts; and then her face would grow sober even to sadness.\textsuperscript{196}

The ex-slave, "poor and weak,"\textsuperscript{197} wants the power to protect his family and a continuation of freedom for himself and, by extension, his black people. Le Croix, wealthy and powerful, wants not only to maintain but also to continue his unquestioned patriarchy. Both men want access to the fertile, receptive vessel. Camilla, who due in large part to her youth and accessibility, is a prime repository in which to plant their seed(s).

A subtle power struggle complicated by a love that borders on the incestuous takes place in the private parlor where Le Croix becomes his daughter's suitor. All the makings for a successful campaign are present to aid him in the successful seduction of his daughter. The opulent and private setting is erotic. Camilla has been recently exposed to the sexual element of the public world. Her senses have been aroused: the visual by seeing the worldly ex-slaves, the auditory by hearing "the coarse jests"\textsuperscript{198} of the potential male buyers, the emotions by having been moved by the stories she heard, and the tactile by having

\textsuperscript{196} Harper, p. 11
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 12
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
clutched "her little hands nervously together." Her father offers her pearls, an expensive gift that is often associated with sexuality: in paintings, the pearl is the customary adornment of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Further, Camilla is in the presence of a trusted protector, who introduces her to the public sphere. It is also Camilla's birthday, simultaneously a time of celebration and a realization on Le Croix's part that his daughter is becoming a woman. He must decidedly win her over before his opposition, the male ex-slave and all that he represents, can make any further gains. Le Croix is a successful practitioner of the art of seduction, having used his wiles and power as a means to seduce the young, the pure, and the unknowing. Camilla, the virgin, does not fully comprehend her position in the ritual of the courtship dance. She knows that she has been introduced to the sexual world, escorted there by a wealthy, powerful male. Certainly, she is primed to yield to seduction by Bernard Le Croix.

The match takes place in the morning, suitably so, for Camilla is yet in the morning of her life. Ironically, Agnes, who has fallen victim to the "wiles and power of the master" dies in the morning. Agnes' death also means the death of the hopes of her mother Miriam, who had wanted

199 Ibid.
200 Ibid., p. 3
201 Ibid., p. 4
to save one of her three children, for "two had died in
their infancy, and now her last, her loved and only child
was gone."202 Again, his "wiles and power"203 mean death
in association with a female. He wants to suffocate the
"dangerously subversive"204 thoughts of his little
abolitionist, whose thoughts will eventually demonstrate
the action prophesied in Angelina Grimké's 1838 declaration
that "We Abolition Women are turning the world upside-
down."205 The most effective manner by which to do so is to
successfully woo her. By penetrating her mind, he can
bring the death of such, for him, troubling thoughts. He
feels that Agnes, the female slave, and Camilla, his
daughter, should serve as ready receptacles for the
implantation of his seed: he implants Agnes with the semen
that produces his mulatto child, the slave Louis; he
attempts to implant his moral and cognitive seed into
Camilla's mind, thereby guaranteeing a continuity of his
beliefs.

As the father and daughter engage in the ritual of the
courtship dance, he advances and she counters. He refers
to her as "darling" on five occasions during their verbal
dance, which, in actuality, is a struggle for empowerment.
Initially, he asserts, "darling, ... the Negroes are
contented and wouldn't take their freedom, if you would

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202 Ibid., p. 3
203 Ibid.
204 Roberson, P. 124
205 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 42
give it to them." He offers this statement to abate any doubt that she may harbor about the moral rightness of enslaving another human being. She counters with a statement about the Le Granges' slaves, Peter and his wife, who, when the opportunity presented itself, remained free in the North. With each subsequent "darling," Le Croix accelerates the intensity of his pursuit, attempting to mollify Camilla's anxiety and to draw her closer to succumbing to his wishes. His concern is not fatherly, but instead like a suitor who wants to present himself and his cause in the most attractive light. He blames the abolitionists, thereby making his involvement with slavery appear not so heinous. Camilla has previously told him, "I should hate to belong to anybody, wouldn't you, Pa?" Le Croix's "but, darling, don't bother your brains about such matters" shows that he is not concerned with a cosmic view of the peculiar institution. He brings the discussion to a more personal, intimate level as the gender and power sparring continue in the opulent, private parlor. He knows that the veiled sexual references of the ex-slave's testimony are a serious concern for Camilla. So, when he soothingly says, "don't bother you brain about such matters," he identifies his quest: he wants her mind.

206 Harper, p. 14
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
Sensing his impending victory, he steps up his advances. He says, "Here, darling is a birthday present for you."211 He feels that he has effectively silenced any uncertainties that she has and that she will, undoubtedly, willingly submit her purity to his authority. The pearls that he offers are representative of her purity, for he is certainly aware of her physical and mental purity. His presentation of pearls to Camilla is a perverse attempt to destroy her purity. If he is successful in his seduction, he will reap the dual benefits of gaining Camilla's acceptance of slavery and his moral code and of her remaining perpetually, even as an adult, in the private sphere as his "little Dewdrop."212 Le Croix wants his "Birdie," Camilla, to relinquish her rights to her inner being, to her own moral code, and, like the patriarchal-enforced behavior of Mrs. Byrd in Uncle Tom's Cabin, to remain "contained, without a political voice within her [Le Croix's] home."213

Camilla's acceptance of the pearls would mean that she yields her virginity, her purity of mind to his moral standards and code. If he penetrates her strong stance against slavery, shown clearly in her fight against her half-brother, Louis, being brought up as a slave, then he has prevailed. In this crucial moment (the climax),

211 Ibid.
212 Ibid., p. 7
213 Roberson, p. 124
"Camilla took the necklace and gazing absently upon it said, 'I can't understand it.'"²¹⁴ Her "gazing absently upon it [the necklace]"²¹⁵ and yet maintaining her stance against slavery symbolizes that she has not capitulated to his attempt to penetrate her mind. She distances herself from him when she gazes absently at the necklace, the extension of Le Croix as a member of the patriarchy. She does not place the necklace around her neck, nor does her demeanor allow him to do so. Camilla remains steadfast and, by doing so, makes the deciding thrust in the dance. She has maintained her independence by refusing to allow him to place the necklace around her throat, an action that, had he succeeded, would have finalized his attempt to penetrate her mind and to choke her spirit to death.

²¹⁴ Harper, p. 14
²¹⁵ Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO

The Emerging Female: The New Conscience of a Nation

"and a little child shall lead them"

Isaiah 11:6

In her second role, Camilla is the nineteenth-century woman who serves as the conscience of the nation, as voiced in Catherine Beecher's argument that "by dominating domestic life, woman could redeem American culture."\(^6\) Whereas some nineteenth-century women did, indeed, restrict their reform activities to the domestic realm, other women carried out Angelina and Sarah Grimké's "doctrine of sexuality equality . . . that women should reform American life by acting within the public sphere as well as within the home."\(^7\)

For Camilla--the nineteenth-century woman--the abolition of slavery was the principal conduit for the attainment of equality. As noted earlier in this study, the sincerity of the white woman was questionable concerning the abolition of slavery and the subsequent rights of black people, such as the fifteenth amendment, which allowed black men to vote while not allowing black or white women to do so. Activities such as speaking before


\(^7\) Ibid.
"promiscuous audiences [audiences composed of both men and women]" allowed many white women to campaign publicly against slavery, and, in doing so, they gained the necessary knowledge, experience, and confidence needed to escape the binding, restrictive private sphere and move on the public one. "For whites . . . abolitionist activism was primarily a means of releasing their suppressed political energies—energies which they directed toward the goal not of black liberation, but of their own".218 In short, their involvement with the abolition of slavery and the subsequent granting of rights to black people be it sincere or self-serving, allowed them to literally and figuratively "come out of the house."

In the early part of Minnie's Sacrifice, Harper covertly pictures the role of the government in its relation to slavery. The government, of which Bernard Le Croix, the white patriarch, is the "conventional patriarchal symbol for the United States,"219 distanced itself from the enslavement of human beings—while, as a Christian nation, it profited from the peculiar institution; slavery in the antebellum United States was a system "very strongly rooted and grounded in the institutions of the land, and [had] entrenched itself in the


strongholds of Church and State, fashion, custom, and social life.\textsuperscript{220} Shedding additional light on the subject, Frederick Douglass writes

Revival of religion and revivals in the slave-trade go hand in hand together. The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church may be heard at the same time. The dealers in the bodies and souls of men erect their stand in the presence of the pulpit, and they mutually help each other. The dealer gives his blood-stained old to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity.\textsuperscript{221}

Bernard Le Croix, a profiteer from the enslavement of 500 slaves on his baronial estate in Louisiana, reaps from their labor, "a vast amount of money."\textsuperscript{222} Both he and the government, which he represents, exploit the slaves. Le Croix, as does the government, profits from the labor of the slave--male and female;\textsuperscript{223} additionally, he sexually

\textsuperscript{220} Harper, p. 30
\textsuperscript{222} Harper, p. 9
\textsuperscript{223} Jones, Jacqueline. Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985, p. 14: "If work is any activity that leads either directly or indirectly to the production of
exploits the female slave during his "visits" to the slave quarters that house the "fair, young and beautiful." 224 Jean Fagan Yellin quotes nineteenth-century abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, who observes that Southern women also "profit from the sexual exploitation of their female slaves." 225 Implicit in Child's condemnation is that the domestic locus of the white Southern structure, the principal site of the private sphere, is financially entangled in and profits from the female slaves' labor. The government also profits from her labor. Moreover, any child to whom she gives birth is legally a slave who will eventually contribute to the wealth of the owner, and, by extension, to the government. Historian Paula Giddings cites from A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr.'s In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process, The Colonial Period: "Children got by an Englishman upon a Negro woman shall be bond or free, according to the condition of the mother." 226 Historian Deborah Gray White, commenting on nineteenth-century slavery in America, writes that "[slave] marketable goods, then slave women did nothing but work. Even their efforts to care for themselves and their families helped to maintain the owner's workforce and to enhance its overall productivity. Even tasks performed within the family context—child care, cooking and washing clothes... Still, these forms of nurture contributed to the health and welfare of the slave population, thereby increasing the actual value of the master's property (that is, slaves as both strong workers, and 'marketable commodities')." 224 Harper, p. 3 225 Yellin, Jean Fagan, Women and Sisters. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989, p. 54. 226 Giddings, p. 37
women's lives were to a great extent structured by their responsibility to replenish the slave labor force." 227

Le Croix's apathy toward slavery is evidenced in his visit to the Tremont Temple "Antislavery Meeting." He visits because he was "impelled by a natural curiosity to hear what could be said against a system in which he had been involved from his earliest recollections, without taking pains to examine it." 228 Le Croix, the novel's representative of the government, "had been accustomed to slavery all his life, [and] felt a sense of guilt passing over him for his complicity in the system." 229 Camilla, at once herself and the nineteenth-century woman, reacted in a manner that suggests her accordance with Angelina Grimké's contention that slavery is "'a system of complicated crimes' as a material structure erected on and held together by the bodies of male slaves who are her countrymen and female slaves who are her 'sisters in bonds'." 230 Further, "she announces her intentions to overturn this system." 231 Similarly, Camilla tells Miriam, "If I had my way, he [Louis] should never be a slave." 232 Later, she thinks to herself, "I wonder if I couldn't save him from being a slave. Now I have it." 233 With that

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227 White, p. 104.
228 Harper, p. 12
229 Ibid.
230 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 41
231 Ibid.
232 Harper, p. 5
233 Ibid.
statement, she gives voice to her plans, a plan that leads to her empowerment and, ultimately to her involvement in redefining the moral code.

Camilla, representative of the new breed of nineteenth-century woman, frees herself from the domination of patriarchy. Angelina Grimké, a nineteenth-century new woman, triumphantly asserts in 1837:

Woman is now rising in her womanhood, to throw from her, with one hand, the paltry privileges with which man has invested her, . . . Whilst, with the other, she grasps the right of woman to unite, in holy copartnership with man, in the renovation of a fallen world. She . . . takes from the hand of her Creator, the Magna Charta of her high prerogatives as a moral, an intellectual, an accountable being, a woman who, though placed in subjection to the monarch of the world, is still the crown and "the glory of man."  

Camilla's mother neither makes nor lives by such an assertion. She is imprisoned by her environment and never comes to realize and prove by her lifestyle "that to be free is to act, to open one's lips in noise and in hope." When Le Croix marries Camilla's mother, he places her in a magnificent environment. She, however, is entrapped and

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234 Yellin, _Women and Sisters_, p. 36
235 Ibid., p. 35
crushed in her husband's baronial estate because the patriarchy "manipulates and renders powerless the white woman."236 The elegance of the home, supplied and supported by the patriarchy, gives evidence of her powerlessness, her enforced silence: "The velvet carpet hushed her tread."237 She makes no impact on her life. As noted in the introduction, she is weightless and of no substance. Even her footprints do not make indentations in the carpets. Like many early nineteenth-century women, she has no presence, no being. She is silenced to the extent that she is non-existent. She is not even given a name: we know only the name of her husband, Bernard (the resolute commander in the Teutonic interpretation of his name), and that she is Camilla's mother and Bernard Le Croix's wife.

The text provides only a brief, almost passing, description of her—less than a paragraph. She is mentioned as being approximately "ten years old,"238 followed by a statement that she died when Camilla was six years old.239 This brief, fragmented attention given to her life is representative of her life and its impact on the world. She serves a solitary purpose, to bring forth a new life, and having done so, she is dismissed. She lives a living death; even though she is physically alive, she is emotionally dead: her life becomes "a series of suppressed

236 Ammons, p. 82
237 Harper, p. 10
238 Ibid., p. 9
239 Ibid., p. 10
emotions."\textsuperscript{240} Like many women of her time, she remains a "little dewdrop," a "little sunbeam" that can exist only by permission of the environment. Hence, when placed in an environment not readily conducive to their survival, they dry up or fade away, as does Camilla's mother.

The land selected by Bernard Le Croix's father as the place to settle becomes the site of the emotional destruction and physical death of Camilla's mother; it represents the new world, where nineteenth-century women failed to realize that "to plead is to voice one's concerns, to authenticate and assert oneself -- that to speak for oneself is to express one's autonomy, one's power."\textsuperscript{241} Even the waters of the nearby Mississippi River and its tributaries do not possess the restorative powers to cleanse and redeem the inhabitants who live in near proximity to them. There can be no washing away of the sins of the patriarchy. Nature has been sullied in that it is put to sinister use by the patriarchy to transport slaves and the products of their labor to sources used for the continual enrichment of the patriarchy. The waterways that contribute to the makeup of the fertile soil and other favorable conditions for the sustained viability of crops have been employed to corrupted and perverted uses, all for the attainment and continued possession of material wealth and power. In a March 14, 1861 entry in her diary, Mary

\textsuperscript{240} Welter, p. 31
\textsuperscript{241} Yellin, \textit{Women and Sisters}, p. 38
Boykin Chestnut referring to slavery implored: "God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an iniquity."\(^{242}\)

The death of Camilla's mother also symbolically signals the emergence of a new woman who ensures the imminent passing away of the system that supplied and nurtured the wealth which greatly contributed to the patriarch's power, a power so pervasive that it extended its impact to the complete and heretofore unchallenged control of the private sphere of the home. The new woman realized that

She is God's moral creature who finally—despite congresses, legislators, churches, and ministers—is freeing herself of false ideologies, false religions, and a perverse interpretation of the Bible in learning her true nature, and is beginning to act on this knowledge.\(^{243}\)

The patriarchy places Camilla's mother on a pedestal, designed for her removal from reality, thus denying her an opportunity for full participation in life. Her position, confined to the private sphere, deprived her of the life forces, the ability to voice her inner being, and eventually, she "drooped and faded."\(^{244}\) Her enforced

\(^{242}\) Chestnut, p. 426.
\(^{243}\) Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, p. 43
\(^{244}\) Harper, 10
powerlessness is exacerbated "day by day"\textsuperscript{245} by the inattention of her husband, who "aesthetic in his tastes,. . . devoted himself to poetry and the ancient classics; filled his home with the finest paintings and the most beautiful statuary, and his gardens laid out into the most exquisite manner,"\textsuperscript{246} paid no attention to his wife. He filled his home with luxurious items (including his wife), all examples of his wealth and power. All is contrived, man-made, and testimony to the power of the past. The ancient classics, and even the gardens follow a man-made pattern. There is nothing fresh nor spontaneous about Bernard Le Croix; he is a man of the Old World.

He positions her into his sterile, lifeless environment another ornament, a "young and lovely bride,"\textsuperscript{247} who is ill-equipped to survive. Her enforced powerlessness is evidenced by her cheeks, which "grew paler; her footsteps slower, until she passed away like a thing of love and light."\textsuperscript{248} The loss of color in her cheeks suggests that the life forces that would tend to invigorate her, to show that, indeed, she is a physically and emotionally healthy woman, were under attack by forces--her husband, her community, and the government--which were beyond her comprehension to understand and her ability to withstand. Her footsteps, representative of those of the

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid., p. 9
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., p. 10
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid.
early nineteenth-century woman, were slowed. Like her, they were not allowed to make progress toward the fulfillment of their inner beings. They were expected to function only in the prescribed role defined for them by the patriarchy—and once they performed the duties of that role as "passive vehicles for the replenishment of human life," they figuratively and frequently literally "passed away."

Camilla's mother's passing away is symbolic of the severely limited power of the nineteenth-century woman: her passing away manifested itself in her being forced to remain perpetually a child, relinquishing any possibility of becoming an empowered woman. According to Grace Greenwood in Welter's Dimity Convictions, "True feminine genius . . . is ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent; a perpetual childhood."

As noted earlier, Camilla is suspended between two spheres, public and private. For instance, when her father refers to her as "my little abolitionist," she responds, "No Pa, I am not an Abolitionist. I heard some of them talk when I was in New York, and I think they are horrid creatures." Ironically, she, too, initially refuses the conduit, the abolition of slavery, that would have allowed her mother to escape to the public sphere, grow strong,

249 Davis, p. 32
250 Harper, p. 10
251 Welter, p. 29
252 Harper, p. 6
give voice, and thrive. Her mother failed to realize that her involvement in abolishing slavery would not only represent her fight "for the cause of the slave," but also "the cause of Woman as a responsible and moral being."\textsuperscript{253}

Camilla carries vestiges of her mother's stagnation. However, she becomes the New Woman, the usurper of the throne occupied by her father who has planted a biological seed that should have, according to his way of thinking, matured into another follower of True Womanhood: like mother, like daughter. Ironically, it is his seed that takes an active role in weakening his kingdom. By the time Le Croix calls her "little philosopher,\textsuperscript{254}" Camilla has declared her independence. Her mother dies before she can groom her to become mistress of a Southern plantation. She is left to her own resources as far as the manners of a Southern lady are concerned. In fact, "she . . . lived much among the slaves\textsuperscript{255}" and "without any female relatives to guide her, she had no other associates than the servants of her household and the family of Mr. Le Grange.\textsuperscript{256}"

Camilla lives among the slaves—not, of course, in their cabins but she is in and of their world; she thrives unhampered by the distorted vision of the patriarchy.

Camilla is saved by the slaves. Because of her involvement in their world, she witnesses their survival

\textsuperscript{253} Yellen Women and Sisters, p. 40. 
\textsuperscript{254} Harper, p. 14 
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., p. 15 
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., p. 10
techniques. She knows of their spirituality, of the
closeness of their families (extended and non-extended), of
their abilities to unite in resistance to bludgeoning on
all sides. She draws strength from what she has seen and
heard, supplemented by her natural instincts which give her
strength not to succumb to the patriarch's assault on her
inner being. Camilla's mother was not allowed to realize
that "the sooner and more thoroughly [her] child's mind is
disabused of the low-caste contempt of her womanhood the
happier for her, the more promising for the next
generation."\textsuperscript{257}

Unlike her mother, she fights and succeeds in widening
her world. Her sense of justice "[has] been awakened."\textsuperscript{258}
Having "seen the old system [slavery] under a new
light,"\textsuperscript{259} she does not allow her world to be enclosed by
the set codes of a world of the stifling Louisiana
plantation, her father, her community, nor the government
which invested itself with unlimited power that was
simultaneously given and maintained by the patriarchy.
Camilla, to the manor born, enters the world of the slave,
and from her involvement with that world, she is
strengthened. Indeed, her "mother's nurse and favorite
servant had taken the charge of her after her death, and

\textsuperscript{257} Kelly, Mary. Private Woman, Public State. New York: Oxford UP,
1984, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{258} Harper, p. 15
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
Agnes had been her nurse and companion." She has the run of the plantation, control of her world, a position sought by the nineteenth-century woman, reflected in her efforts to gain unlimited control of her world. She is beginning to reveal how "we Abolition women are turning the world upside-down." Indeed, "white abolitionist women transcended prevailing conventions regarding femininity and facilitated their own self-creation as autonomous individuals."

Camilla is also the new woman of the antebellum South who seeks revenge against the patriarchy because of the lifestyle that it imposed upon her. She realizes that the continual bondage of the female slave for purposes of sexual gratification of the patriarchy is one of the major causes of the patriarchy's fight to maintain the status quo. "The slaves had long known that their master took a black woman as quick as he did a white and he took any on his place he wanted and he took them often." In reference to the slave holders' vigorous opposition to the abolishment of slavery, one writer complained that one of the reasons why wicked men in the South uphold slavery is the facility which it affords for a licentious life. Negroes tell no tales in

260 Harper, p. 10
261 Yellin, quoting Angela Grimké, Women and Sisters, p. 42.
263 Joyner, p. 63
courts of law of the violation by white men of colored females.\textsuperscript{264}

Additionally, "William Gilmore Simms in Morals of Slavery (1838) . . . characterized slavery as a beneficial institution because it protected the purity of white women by allowing slaveholders to vent their lust 'harmlessly' upon slave women."\textsuperscript{265} Historian Paula Giddings writes

White men could impregnate a Black Woman with impunity, and she alone could give birth to a slave. Blacks constituted a permanent labor force and metaphor that were perpetuated in the Black woman's womb. And all of this was done within the context of the Church, the operating laws of capitalism, and the psychological needs of White males.\textsuperscript{266}

Her second realization, certainly of no less importance, is that the female slave produces the labor force that constitutes the financial foundation on which the system continued to flourish. Giddings contends that "a master could save the cost of buying new slaves by impregnating his own slave, or for that matter, having anyone else impregnate her."\textsuperscript{267}

The nineteenth-century woman, in her desire to seek revenge for domestic wrongs, struck a blow for the re-

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., p. 62
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{266} Giddings, p. 39
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., p. 37
attainment of her wholeness, a wholeness that had been
denied her by the patriarchy, which placed the white woman
on a pedestal that caused her to be rendered inactive in
the sexual component of her life. She was painfully aware
that she was "powerless to command his exclusive sexual
attention."268 Reports document that "slaveholding women
... found their men's relations with slave women almost
impossible to bear"; however, "they had little or no
recourse in bringing them to an end."269 Moreover, "the
white wife was on a pedestal so high that she was beyond
the sensual reach of her own husband."270 Of course, there
were additional reasons for her misery: she was not
allowed to control property; she was denied the use of the
ballot; her financial dependency on her husband was
intensified after the Industrial revolution, thus robbing
her of her previous leverage of being a financial
contributor to the home; she was not encouraged to attain
advanced education; in many instances, her husband had
legal control of the children of the marriage. These
conditions were ills that could not be readily cured in the
home. They emanated from and were vigorously enforced by
the church community and government, as well.

However, the one area that she could address and in
which she could bring about a change was the patriarchy's

268 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 73
269 Fox-Genovese, p. 325.
270 Giddings, p. 43
denial of her right to sexual fulfillment. By challenging one of the major bases on which the patriarchy was built, she would weaken it, perhaps destroy it, thus satisfying at once her need for revenge and supplying her with a decided thrust toward empowerment. She knew that "any change in the role of women or Blacks would contribute to the downfall not only of slavery, but of the family and society as well."271 Angelina Grimké, in her role as an outspoken new nineteenth-century woman, "announces her intention to overturn this system."272 Jean Fagan Yellin contends that "in its place, she [Grimké] implies she will substitute its opposite, a system of simple justice."273 On a more personal level, conscious of the necessity of maintaining the status quo, Le Croix, speaking from his private sphere, tells Camilla

I would grant you anything in reason, but this ["a Negro being palmed off on society as a white person"274] is not to be thought of. Were I to do so I would immediately lose caste among the planters in the neighborhood; I would be set down as an Abolitionist, and singled out for insult and injury.275

271 Ibid.
272 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 41
273 Ibid.
274 Harper, p. 7
275 Ibid.
Clearly, the new nineteenth-century woman planned to bring about changes that would shatter the artificial structures of class and assigned limitations of race and gender roles. She planned to begin by structuring and/or restructuring the family which would evolve into a new "system of simple justice" that would serve as a foundation for a new, more equitable way of life for all participants in nineteenth-century America, class, racial and gender roles aside, an idealistic goal but one that the new nineteenth-century woman strove to attain.

Camilla proceeds to establish a family, a privilege claimed exclusively by the patriarchy. One of the responsibilities zealously guarded by the patriarchy was the assignment of racial identity. Camilla decides the race of the child of her father and Agnes when she says "I am going to ask Pa to let me take him to the house, and have a nurse for him, and bring him up like a white child, and never let him know that he is colored." With this assertion, Camilla not only defines the race of the child, she also makes plans to manumit him. Her statement anticipates what the adult Camilla does later in the novel. More importantly, it parallels Angelina Grimké's 1836

276 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 41
278 Harper, p. 5
"Appeal to the Christian Women of the South," in which she proposes that "they break the laws that prohibit emancipating slaves, paying them for their work and teaching them to read and write."\textsuperscript{279}

Camilla, who feels "an unusual interest in the [slave] child,"\textsuperscript{280} says, "If I had my way, he should never be a slave."\textsuperscript{281} With that seemingly tentative statement, simultaneously reflective of her status as a child and as a female and of the tentative early efforts of the new nineteenth-century woman toward the attainment of power, Camilla makes her battle-cry, her statement of commitment. She has found a cause, and she gives voice to that cause. "I am going to ask Pa, to let me . . . bring him up like a white child . . . "\textsuperscript{282} Camilla, in her power, diverges "spatial boundaries between the mansion and the slave quarters."\textsuperscript{283} She relocates the child from Miriam's "lowly cabin"\textsuperscript{284} to "the mansion."\textsuperscript{285} She also diverges "temporal logic"\textsuperscript{286} as reflected in Miriam's accurate observation, "but after all he is only a slave."\textsuperscript{287} Camilla seeks to remove

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{279} Yellin, \textit{Women and Sisters}, p. 33
\bibitem{280} Harper, p. 7
\bibitem{281} Ibid., p. 5
\bibitem{282} Ibid.
\bibitem{284} Harper, p. 3
\bibitem{285} Garfield, p. 103
\bibitem{286} Ibid.
\bibitem{287} Harper 4
\end{thebibliography}
the child from his natural environment, the slave cabin and the world of slavery and place him in a larger sphere, the powerful world of the white patriarchy. She further intends to broaden and intensify his position by making him a member of an even broader sphere: "I am sure we could move him away from here to France." 288

Ironically, she plans to remove the slave child to a nation that was once an active participant in the Atlantic Slave Trade. It is illuminating that she plans to include herself in Louis' life: "we could move . . . to France." 289 She is the architect of this unit, and she feels that she has a vital role to play not only in its establishment, but also in its maintenance and well-being, much like the new nineteenth-century woman felt in her responsibility in the abolitionism of slavery, as she accelerated and strengthened her movement toward empowerment. To wit, in "Letters to Catherine Beecher" (1837), Angelina Grimké writes "I feel as if it is not the cause of the slave only which we plead but the cause of Woman as a responsible and moral being." 290

Similarly, critic Mary Kelley asserts

The abolitionist movement of the 1830s, particularly the Garisonian wing, with its emphasis on the absolute moral equality of all human beings, had planted in the consciousness

288 Ibid., p. 8
289 Ibid.
290 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 40
of a number of female abolitionists . . . the principle that women were essentially human and only secondarily female.291

Implementing the powers of the patriarchy, Camilla creates a world for herself, Miriam, and the baby Louis. She places him in a world which she will control. As the new nineteenth-century woman, she assumes the power traditionally claimed by the patriarchy; she and the nineteenth-century woman become "male proxies."292 In keeping with the role of a male, she carefully and deliberately lays plans for the imminent establishment of a family. In point of fact, she "proposes" to Miriam. Similar to a male, she promises and subsequently provides shelter: "I want you to come to the house."293 She assigns Miriam the role of nurturer: ". . . be my Mammy"294 and "I want you to come and bring the baby to the house."295 She provides clothing: "I am going to get him some beautiful dresses."296 Of course, the plantation has the labor force, 500 slaves, to provide unlimited amounts of food, all of which are accessible to Camilla. In her "proposal" to Miriam, she quickly dismisses any counter arguments that the coy Miriam might offer by pointing out that "your

291 Kelley, p. 317
292 Garfield, p. 104
293 Harper, p. 8
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
296 Ibid.
husband is gone."297 Out of death and desolation Camilla in less than twenty-four hours, becomes a Creator. She creates a family tailored to her specifications. In her power, she fills the empty slots, one caused by death, the other by possible forced abandonment. Into these voids, she establishes Miriam and herself as responsible members of the household, male proxy and older female.

There is no sexual tension in this relationship because Camilla is an "innocent" child "growing up with very little knowledge of the world."298 Miriam, the grandmother, is celibate; she is one of the many slave women whose "husband is gone."299 She, like the Miriam of the Old Testament, is to guard the new life, in this case Louis. The asexual union composed of Miriam and Camilla symbolically signals the eminent demise of slavery. From this union, there can be no new life, no children who will become slaves because of the enslavement of the mother, whose "present and future issue and increase"300 will also be slaves. Literally, the sexual act will not--indeed, cannot--take place. The duties of Miriam and Camilla will be two-fold: Miriam is to guard and nurture the new life. Camilla, in her role as male proxy, the head of the family, is to provide for the child and shepherd him onto life in

297 Ibid.
298 Harper, p. 10
299 Ibid., p. 8
yet another sphere—the public sphere where he is assured to be the recipient of and a participant in the life of the wealthy, powerful patriarchy.

When Camilla voices her plans and subsequently guides them to fulfillment, hypostasis occurs. She expresses--verbalizes--her inner being, and at that point the upward movement of the baby Louis to the Big House and his rise in the hierarchy as her brother--become one and the same. The idea becomes reality. Camilla's interest in the child conflates into voice: "Camilla went home and told her father what she had done"301 and "he . . . readily consented; and in a day or two the child and his grandmother were comfortably ensconced in their new quarters."302

Camilla instinctively knows that Louis is her half-brother; she says "I would like him for my brother and he looks like us anyhow."303 Her statement also suggests that she feels that he is a human being, worthy not only of inclusion into her family, but also into the family of humanity. Significant to this discussion is that Angelina and Sarah Grimké helped to pay for their nephew's (Archibald Grimké's) education through Harvard Law School, where he became one of the school's first black graduates. Grimké was the son of their brother, "Henry Grimké, a

301 Harper, p. 8
302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
planter and lawyer, and Nancy Weston, a slave of mixed ancestry who worked for the Grimké family."\textsuperscript{304}

The world of the slave, figuratively and literally, serves as a source of strength for Camilla, the new nineteenth-century woman. The slaves impart to Camilla the necessary strength to withstand her father's assault on her inner being. Also, fighting for the abolition of the slave allowed the white woman to free herself from the private sphere. Indeed, "in the cause of the slave, some women found themselves motivated to act, to write, and ultimately to speak out publicly."\textsuperscript{305} Camilla, in acknowledgment of her debt, repays it by saving Louis from enslavement; she subsequently establishes a family that ensures his placement in a sphere of security, wealth, and power. She also saves the black female slave who was constantly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by the white male, in both the private and the public spheres.

Actually, Miriam is a member of both spheres, which means that for her, the predicament is universal in that it encompasses her worlds, the private and the public. Although a female slave's primary worksite may be in the private sphere of the Big House, when additional workers were needed in the fields, Miriam was assigned duties in the open fields, which had public access. In this environment, she was increasingly vulnerable to sexual

\textsuperscript{304} Bruce, p. 1
\textsuperscript{305} Kellow, p. 109
exploitation not only by the master, but also by other males. By placing Miriam in the Big House, Camilla symbolically, though not always literally, affords her a degree of protection and a somewhat better life.

Camilla at once restricts and expands her world as family creator. She limits its membership to Miriam, Louis, her father, and herself, while she expands its scope so that it is firmly established in the public sphere, removed from the Louisiana plantation. Her expansion of her creation, consisting of a female slave, a mulatto child, a white patriarch, and herself, a strong-willed white female, intent on overthrowing the patriarchy, usurping his throne and consequently abolishing the system of slavery, symbolizes the all-encompassing involvement of the states and territories of the United States with the slavery issue. In referring to the national involvement in the peculiar institution, William Lloyd Garrison, an active feminist and editor of the abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator, spoke of the controversy in his Address to the American Colonization Society. In the speech that he delivered on July 4, 1829 at the Park Street Church in Boston, Garrison said

Slavery is strictly a national sin. New England money has been expended in buying human flesh; New England ships have been freighted with sable victims; New England men have assisted in
forging the fetters of those who groan in bondage.\textsuperscript{306} Garrison, who "boarded with free blacks and saw the horrors of slavery and the slave trade at first hand"\textsuperscript{307} said in the same address that Non-slave-holding States are constitutionally involved in the guilt of slavery, by adhering to a national compact that sanctions it; and in the danger, by liability to be called upon for aid in case of insurrection; they have the right to remonstrate against its continuance, and it is their duty to assist in its overthrow.\textsuperscript{308} Camilla is an abolitionist; her father, a slaveholder, feels that "the Negroes are contented, and wouldn't take their freedom if you would give it to them."\textsuperscript{309} Their opposing views are symbolic of the strife between the abolitionists and the slaveholders. The movement from South to North, although a brief stay, suggests the encompassing problem of slavery as it manifested itself in the polarized philosophies of the inhabitants of the North and South. Camilla moves from the provincial--the private world--into the wider world, as suggested by her involvement in her father's decision to educate Louis in

\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., p. 4
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., p. 63
\textsuperscript{309} Harper, p. 14
the North, at which time, he would acknowledge him as his son.

Actually, his acknowledgment of Louis as his son is a perverted imitation of the Biblical account of the Father's acknowledgment of His Son Christ given in Matthew 17:5. Le Croix's plan to take the child North to have him educated and then "adopt him as his son"\textsuperscript{310} suggests his acceptance of Louis as his "beloved son."\textsuperscript{311} The father takes three deliberate steps in acknowledging Louis as his son, each step having to be completed before the attempt at completion of each succeeding step. The entire process suggests the whites' prevailing perception of the slaves' humanity or the lack thereof. The process also attests to the whites' beliefs that they not only have the right and power to determine race, they also have the power to define humanity. Le Croix's first step is to remove the child from the South, a land of oppression for blacks and the site of the sins that gave birth to millions of Louises. Next, possibly the most important step is to "have him educated."\textsuperscript{312} At the completion of that step, he legitimizes Louis's humanity; he raises him from his assigned sub-human level.

Slaves, because they were, in most instances illiterate, were considered less than human. Literacy

\textsuperscript{310} Ibid., p. 11
\textsuperscript{311} Matthew 17:5
\textsuperscript{312} Harper, p. 11
meant humanity. The attainment of literacy signaled that the slave was capable of thinking and processing thought into the written word—usually literature. Some whites felt "if [the slaves] could not produce literature . . . they were not truly human." Hence, when Louis becomes literate, he simultaneously becomes human, and only then is he worthy of the father's declaration: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" He gives Louis voice. He is no longer among the voiceless, indicative of his powerless sub-human existence. Now human, he is thereby worthy of becoming the son; he has power and is a voice that must be recognized. He is now capable of sounding his voice written and orally.

Only after an act of self-redemption and cleansing suggested by his move to the North, which would symbolically cleanse him of the sins of the South, does Le Croix approach becoming free of the guilt of the patriarchy without which he can never become like the "Father in heaven" and legitimize his son. However, he never reaches redemption, for he only wants to adopt Louis. He never admits his paternity; therefore, he can never become sin-free. Further, he decides "he could care for him as a son without acknowledging the relationship." He cannot.

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313 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 25
314 Matthew 17:5
315 Luke 11:2
316 Harper, p. 11
317 Ibid.
move beyond the plane at which Camilla's references to the physical similarity between Louis, her father and herself—"and he looks like us anyhow"—cause him to feel uncomfortable to the extent that he "flushed deep." Louis, although recognized as a human, is never acclaimed as the patriarch's son. Never once does Le Croix declare, "Louis is my son." Further, he never shares his surname with Louis. Certainly, he provides for him and gives him voice, but for him, the white patriarchy, the voice is meaningless, a pale and painful imitation of the power that Louis, a human being, either free or bondsman, should possess. He has voice only in keeping with the race to which he is assigned.

As a mulatto, Louis does not appear to be a member of a despised race. "He was a beautiful babe, whose golden hair, bright blue eyes and fair complexion showed no trace of the outcast blood in his veins." His physical appearance attests not only to the vulnerability of the slave, but also to the arbitrariness of race. The slave, if he appears not to have "outcast blood in his veins," is regarded as human. However, if that outcast blood is made known, he again descends to the sub-human level of a slave. Le Croix knows of the social structure of his community concerning race. As noted, he demonstrates his

318 Ibid., p. 8
319 Ibid.
320 Ibid., p. 4
321 Ibid.
concern that it not be "tainted" by "a Negro being palmed upon society as a white person."\textsuperscript{322} Knowing the prevailing attitude of his community, he decides "to care for him as a son, without acknowledging the relationship."\textsuperscript{323} Consequently, he also does not allow himself to become the Father.

Camilla, the male proxy, does what Le Croix is incapable of doing. She shepherds Louis safely to another sphere, an upward movement. She accompanies her father and him to the North where Louis is "perfectly contented."\textsuperscript{324} He is left in "a very pleasant family school in New England . . . and . . . in the care of a matron, whose kindness and attention . . . soon won the child's heart."\textsuperscript{325} Only when Camilla is certain that Louis is "comfortably ensconced"\textsuperscript{326} with his new family does she rest. She has melded spatial boundaries between the mansion and the slave quarters and temporal logic in her efforts to ensure that he is a part of the powerful world of the "large baronial estate, 500 slaves and a vast amount of money."\textsuperscript{327} She has made certain that he becomes "human" by way of the attainment of an education.

The nineteenth-century woman addressed the issue of slavery as it manifested itself in both the North and the

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., p. 7
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., p. 11
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., p. 8
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., p. 9
South. In 1836, Angelina Grimké stated that Southern women should "make a series of appeals" to God to enable them to bear witness against the system; to the men in their families to act to end it; and to their slaves to remain quiescent while enduring it. Urging her readers who hold slaves to take a greater risk, she proposes that they break the laws that prohibit emancipating slaves, paying them for their work and teaching them to read and write.

In "The Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States," Grimké "urges the northerners to organize antislavery societies, to inform themselves and others about slavery, and to sign and circulate abolitionist petitions."

In her position as princess, Camilla uses the soon-to-be overthrown King as a conduit by which to give rise to the future King, whom she raises to power, a power which she will share with him, fulfilling the desire she stated earlier: "I would like him for my brother." Critic Margaret M. R. Kellow writes that the nineteenth-century feminist Lydia Marie Childs felt that "women must claim and exercise their place as fully developed coworkers in the antislavery struggle."

328 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 33
329 Ibid.
330 Ibid., p. 35
331 Harper, 8
332 Kellow, p. 111
century woman to share power with males is evidenced in "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society" written in 1838. Sarah Grimké asserts that "now women must join together and assume their rightful role (which they share with men) in renovating the fallen world." 333 One year earlier than Grimké's 1838 letter, her sister, Angelina, in her "public document" 334 titled "An Appeal to the Women of the nominally Free States," refers to the black male slave as "our brethren in bonds." 335 Camilla would not at all be reluctant to recognize Louis as her brother. Moreover, she will share equally in the power that she will invest in the new King, Louis, thus symbolically solidifying the relationship between the slave and the nineteenth-century woman.

Louis serves dual purposes in his relationship to Camilla, the nineteenth-century woman, who realizes that she is "enmeshed in an interracial web." 336 He is the embodiment of the sexuality she is denied. Further, to intensify her powerlessness and confusion, "she was made to feel that sensual involvement with the opposite sex burned bright and hot with unquenchable passion and at the same time that any such involvement was utterly repulsive." 337

333 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 42
334 Ibid.s, p. 34
335 Ibid., p. 35
336 Giddings, p. 42
337 Genovese, p. 427
Concurrently, she uses the "child of shame"\textsuperscript{338} to lift the veil of hypocrisy that shields the sins of the master from the view of the public sphere, similar to Miriam's unfolding "the wrappings."\textsuperscript{339} that covered Louis, shielding the result of the master's "wiles and power"\textsuperscript{340} from the private sphere. Mary Boykin Chestnut, a white Southerner, made the following entry into her diary, "The ladies were reticent, evasive, often willfully blind about what sometimes went on in their own backyards."\textsuperscript{341} Again, in a March 14, 1861 entry, she wrote:

God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an inequity! Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattos one sees in every family partly resemble the white children.\textsuperscript{342}

Driven, in part, by the previously-mentioned circumstances and situations, the nineteenth-century woman struck at the most vulnerable underpinning of the slaveocracy. Deborah M. Garfield, in referring to the actions of Harriet Jacobs of *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, makes an observation that also suggests the aims of Camilla. Garfield writes that

\textsuperscript{338} Harper, p. 3
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid., p. 4
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., p. 3
\textsuperscript{341} Genovese, p. 426
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
Jacobs suggests . . . compounded threat to the plantation hierarchy: The white girl's subversive usurpation . . . of generative authority from her duped father; and the appropriation of her father's economic impetus as she liberates this human property and delivers him from the state.\(^{343}\)

Camilla, in her strength as a male proxy, will depose the duped father and replace him with Louis, the unacknowledged heir to the throne. In making her bid to usurp the throne, she has the silent, but vigilant, support of the voiceless slaves who know that Le Croix is Louis' father. She will make certain "that they would never breathe a word about [Louis] being colored."\(^{344}\) Thus, the world she creates is inclusive of not only her mulatto half-brother but also the black world of Miriam and the silent 500 slaves from whom she draws strength. As she, the nineteenth-century woman, moves toward the completion of her plans, Camilla carries with her the slave, who is at once the conduit for her empowerment and the source of her strength, to identify and fulfill her inner being. They saw themselves "as chain-breaking liberators and as enchained slaves pleading for their own liberty, then asserting it and freeing themselves."\(^{345}\) Without question, "through

\(^{343}\) Garfield, p. 111
\(^{344}\) Harper, p. 6-7
\(^{345}\) Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 25
their antislavery activities they created new careers and identities for themselves."346 Further, Camilla overcomes one of the major obstacles impeding her attainment of empowerment. She recalls the biblical account of the dangers that threaten the infant Moses. She tells Miriam, "I mean to do something like that good princess."347 Her father refers to her as "my princess"; hence, she possesses the power granted to her by her duped father, the King; she is in the line of succession. Moreover, by invoking the Old Testament as the basis for her actions, she has symbolically attained the support of the Church, an arena in which she has waged war.

Camilla's (the nineteenth-century woman's) vision is clear. Indeed, "her gaze was . . . open."348 She says, "Negro, Pa, he is just as white as you are, and his eyes are as blue as mine";349 and "he is just as white as I am."350 Her comments are evidence that "she had learned to view [slavery] from [the slave's] standpoint of observation."351 She directs her gaze through the eyes of the slaves, thus intensifying her identity with them. Discussing the relationship between the nineteenth-century woman and the slave, Angela Y. Davis writes that the "white middle-class women felt a certain affinity with Black women

346 Kellow, p. 109
347 Harper, p. 5
348 Ibid., p. 8
349 Ibid., p. 7
350 Ibid., p. 4
351 Ibid., p. 15
and men, for whom slavery meant whips and chains."\textsuperscript{352} Symbolically, the ex-slave's eyes become Camilla's eyes. Their eyes become one, focused on the ex-slave's "wife and children standing on the auction block."\textsuperscript{353}

Camilla is able to read, comprehend, and respond with vigor to the system. Isaac, a slave on her father's plantation, receives a letter from his wife, which he cannot read. Camilla tells her father, "He said he had been trying to make it out, but somehow he could not get the hang of the words."\textsuperscript{354} On a larger scale, Isaac's illiteracy suggests the slaves' impotency in regard to gaining recognition of their humanity. The slaves certainly "had been trying to make it out," to wit, free themselves from bondage. Isaac identifies the key that would unlock the door that serves as a barrier to establishing their identity, their humanity, and, to a great extent, their freedom. He identifies that key as being the words.

Slaves knew that one of the keys to attaining their sovereignty was the attainment of literacy. The withholding of literacy from the black man or woman was, in Frederick Douglass' word "the white man's power to enslave the black man."\textsuperscript{355} Douglass explains that "from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom . . . . I

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{352} Davis, p. 34
\item\textsuperscript{353} Harper, p. 12
\item\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., p. 13
\item\textsuperscript{355} Douglass, \textit{Narrative}, p. 275
\end{itemize}
set out with high hope, and fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read."\footnote{356}{Ibid.} Camilla, whose "gaze was . . . open"\footnote{357}{Harper, p. 8} reads both literally and figuratively. She "read" the pain experienced by Isaac, the other plantation slaves, and the ex-slave, who is fittingly nameless because he is the Everyman slave. The woes that befall him testify to the vulnerabilities common to all male slaves. She says of Isaac's request, "and so I sat down and read it to him."\footnote{358}{Ibid., p. 13}

Implicit in her statement is not only that she recognizes a need and a duty to help the slave, she also gives evidence that she reads and understands the predicament of the slaves. In doing so, she acts not only from compassion for her "brethren in bonds,"\footnote{359}{Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 35} she is also aware that she simultaneously helps herself, which is made manifest in her debate with her father when he tries to entice her to remain in his private sphere. Recalling and referring to what she has witnessed she is strengthened to effectively counter his arguments. Camilla "had lived so much among the slaves"\footnote{360}{Harper, p. 15} that she had unconsciously imbibed their view of the matter."\footnote{361}{Ibid.} Kellow reports that Angela Grimke wrote, "The investigation of the rights of the slave..."
has led me to a better understanding of my own." 362 Angela Y. Davis gives an account of a nineteenth-century female abolitionist Prudence Crandall, "a teacher who defied her white townspeople in Canterbury, Connecticut, by accepting a Black girl into her school" 363:

Despite all threats, Prudence Crandall opened the school . . . . The storekeepers refused to sell supplies to Miss Crandall . . . . The village doctor would not attend ailing students. The druggist refused to give medicine. On top of such fierce inhumanity, rowdies smashed the school windows, threw manure in the well and started several fires in the building. 364

According to Davis, Crandall drew "her extraordinary strength and her astonishing ability to persevere in a dangerous situation of daily siege . . . probably through her bonds with . . . Black people." 365

Of the symbiotic relationship between the nineteenth-century woman and the slaves as they confronted their mutual adversary, the white patriarch, Davis reports:

As [the middle and upper class white women] worked within the abolitionist movement, white women learned about . . . their own subjugation.

362 Kellow, p. 108
363 Davis, p. 34
364 Ibid., p. 35
365 Ibid.
In asserting their right to oppose slavery, they protested—sometimes overtly, sometimes implicitly—their own exclusion from the political arena. If they did not yet know how to present their own grievances collectively, at least they could plead the cause of a people who were also oppressed.\(^{366}\)

The nineteenth-century woman openly assumed responsibility for her defense of the slave in the public sphere, as well as in the private sphere of the home, thereby escalating her bid for empowerment in both worlds. Angela Davis speaks of nineteenth-century women as "active organizers of the abolitionist campaign."\(^{367}\) Camilla, in the private sphere of the Louisiana plantation, defends her compassion for the slave, Isaac. She responds to her father, "Oh, Pa, don't get angry with Isaac. It wasn't his fault, it was mine."\(^{368}\) One reading of course, is that Camilla is aware that Isaac and his fellow slaves, indeed, all slaves, are victims. His victimization was not of his own making. The "fault" lies with the slaveholders of which she, by right of her birth, is a participant. A closer reading suggests that she could also mean that Isaac is not to be held at fault for exposing the sexual horror of slavery to the innocent, young white girl—the epitome

\(^{366}\) Ibid., p. 39  
\(^{367}\) Ibid., p. 37  
\(^{368}\) Harper, p. 13
of purity symbolized by the pearl, as discussed earlier in this study. Actually, the ex-slave's guiding Camilla to the acquisition of knowledge leads to the effectiveness of her potential empowerment. Davis writes, "White women who joined the abolitionist movement were especially outraged by the sexual assaults on Black women."

Again, Lydia Child speaks of her "sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them." Camilla will no longer be allowed to remain innocent, blind to the illicit sexual activities of the patriarch.

Camilla makes use of her power in both the private and public spheres. For instance, she sits, like one in power on a throne, while the supplicant Isaac stands, asking for help in acquiring the key--words--that would give him knowledge. In this scene, in which Isaac and Camilla are alone in the private sphere of the home, the plantation, Isaac introduces her to the knowledge found in the public sphere. He informs her of the sexual atrocities against his wife and the dissolution of his family, all components of slavery, a peculiar institution in which one individual did not, could not, own himself--a denial of Garrison's plea that "to proclaim liberty to the captives [slaves]."

Isaac and Camilla exchange knowledge. He shows her, by way

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369 Davis, p. 27
370 Kellow, p. 117
371 Cain, p. 69
of the written word, knowledge of the public sphere, and through her gaze, her reading of the words, she enters into his world and emerges with knowledge and power. In exchange, Camilla endows him with a step toward attaining his humanity. The auditory acquisition of knowledge was not held as a measurement of the acquisition of humanity; however, it was a start, given from a symbiotic source, the nineteenth-century woman.

At the public world of the "Anti-Slavery Meeting," Camilla is a spectator: she observes. However, in her private world, she is a participant, as evidenced by her interactions with Isaac and the other slaves. She gains knowledge in both worlds. Her entrance into the public sphere is intensified because the anti-slavery meeting at which she observes and listens to the ex-slave consists of a promiscuous audience, an achievement brought about by the nineteenth-century woman. The anti-slavery meeting suggests the involvement of abolitionists and slaveholders as to the admission to the Union of territories as either free or slave, which would affect the balance of political representation in Congress. Also, money played a vital part in the buying and selling of slaves. Moreover, the principal participant at the "Anti-Slavery Meeting" was public property, a being who before becoming an ex-slave was prohibited by church, state, and community to own even himself. The slave was property that could be bought and
sold to the public, in full view of the public, at the whim of the slaveholder, who had the support of these institutions, all of which were, in turn, composed of and controlled by the public. Politics and finances were two of numerous areas in which the nineteenth-century woman stands at the threshold of the public world represented in this instance by the "Anti-Slavery Meeting." Camilla stands, her auditory, visual, and tactile senses awakened, gathering and assimilating knowledge that would propel her and her "brethren in bonds"\textsuperscript{372} to empowerment.

Camilla, the nineteenth-century woman, if read in the context of her being symbolic of the audience at the anti-slavery meeting, shares a number of common attributes with the slaves and their world. Both the slaves and Camilla—the audience—are distanced from the events described by Isaac and the ex-slave. Both Camilla and the audience shirk first-person knowledge. Neither Camilla nor (likely) members of the audience were witnesses to the slave auction of which the ex-slave speaks. The audience, especially the women, was satisfied to gain knowledge of slavery by way of reading or listening to slave narratives, which allowed them to experience the horrors of slavery vicariously, while also providing a "safe" haven in which to be titillated by the accounts of sexual assaults. As she listens to the ex-slave's narrative, Camilla, twice removed

\textsuperscript{372} Yellin, p. 35
from the ex-slave's horror, having not been present at the auction and, as a female child, not likely to be in close physical proximity to the ex-slave, grows disturbed, and asks her father to take her home.

Camilla and the audience receive visual—sometimes the scarred backs of former slaves were shown as proof of the validity of their narratives—and auditory knowledge, which allows Camilla to use her imagination in identifying with the storytellers. They, the storytellers, spoke or wrote about their past experiences as slaves in order to stir the conscience of their audiences. They thereby strengthened the fight for the abolition of slavery. The narrators use time as a vehicle by which to transport the audience into their world. They first conflate past and present by recalling past horrors to a present day audience, the connective tissue being the continuing horrors inflicted on those slaves yet in bondage. The ex-slave brings the audience to a realization of the experiences of the slaves by encouraging them to use their imaginations. Once the narrator/ex-slave and the audience merge, the narrator then guides the audience, which is now for the most part sympathetic to their cause, into the slave's world so that the white world collapses into the world of the ex-slave narrator, if only temporarily. The audience, in its imagination, not only vicariously experiences the past pain suffered by the slave, but also the present pain of the
speaker as he or she relives his or her past, a past that becomes the present, as the present audience enters, usually willingly, into the world of the slave.

Camilla tells her father, "Isaac used to tell me just such a story as that [the ex-slave's story]. If I shut my eyes, I could have imagined that it was Isaac telling his story." Her statement suggests that she is aware of the cause of the shared sufferings of the male slaves and, perhaps more important, that she has entered further into the world of the slaves. Her deliberate imaginative use of the visual and auditory accounts of their tragedies is the conduit by which she, "who had lived so much among the slaves," delves even deeper into their world. Later in this study, I will explore the nineteenth-century abolitionist woman's use of the imagination in her identification with the slave.

Camilla is the audience for both Isaac and the ex-slave. She listens to the woes of Isaac as universal spokesperson for similar vulnerabilities of other "married" slaves. She reads a letter to Isaac, hence expanding her position as distanced audience to one of inclusiveness, in that in reading the letter, she actually becomes a participant in the letter. Her reading the letter also gives power to Isaac. He plans to re-establish his family

373 Harper, p. 13
374 Ibid., p. 15
"to see [his wife] when he went to New Orleans." As a spectator at the Tremont Temple "Anti-Slavery Meeting," although deeply moved by the ex-slave's narrative, Camilla plays an exclusionist role. She does not physically participate in the drama as she does with Isaac when she has a dialogue with him and reads his letter.

Camilla, in her distanced association with the ex-slave, as a nineteenth-century woman, escorts the personal sphere to the public sphere. The common bond between the two events is that Camilla, in both instances, uses her power. She reads a letter to Isaac from his wife. Additionally, she later defends him to her father. As a consequence of listening to and observing the ex-slave, she becomes further empowered to strengthen her firm stance against slavery. By listening and observing, the nineteenth-century woman becomes further empowered to defend her inner being. In this instance, she defends her opposition to slavery in the presence of the patriarch(y) in the private sphere of the home and into the public sphere, as evidenced by the female abolitionists who publicly took a stand against slavery. Angela Y. Davis quotes historian Eleanor Flexner who "insists, it was necessary":

\[\ldots\] for the average housewife, mother, or daughter to overstep the limits of decorum,

\[375\] Ibid., p. 14
\[376\] Davis, p. 40
disregard the frowns or jeers or outright commands of her menfolk and ... take her first petition and walk down an unfamiliar street, knocking on doors and asking for signatures to an unpopular plea. Not only would she be going out unattended by husband or brother; but she usually encountered hostility, if not outright abuse for her unwomanly behavior.\footnote{377}{Ibid.}

The slave, the ex-slave, and Camilla—the audience—are distanced from the events that Isaac and the ex-slave recall. Isaac is distanced from his wife, who resides in New Orleans. His only communication with her is by a letter read to him by Camilla positioned between him and his nameless wife; her namelessness is suggestive of her powerlessness. In reading the letter aloud, Camilla's voice gives Isaac's wife voice, thus the reading attests not only to the existence of his wife, but also that she, his wife, has an account to give of herself; she has a story that must be heard. As noted earlier in this study, her voice, inscribed in the written word, is her declaration that she is no longer the "mute and voiceless . . . sadly expectant Black woman . . . with no language."\footnote{378}{Cooper, Anna Julia. A Voice From the South. New York: Oxford UP, 1988, p. 1.} In other words, she affirms her own identity. Isaac's wife is deliberate in her public declaration, for she is fully
aware that her husband is illiterate, as is possibly most of the slave population on the Le Croix plantation. She knows that the letter will very likely be read by someone else and that the reader will more than likely broadcast the report that she has attained her "humanity" (as defined by the whites).

The letter belongs to both the private and public spheres. Although we are not privileged with a detailed account of its contents, it is domestic in its nature because it is a communication from a wife to her husband, a relationship that is the principal component of the private sphere. It belongs also to the public sphere because it publicly declares the writer's humanity and independence. Its point of origin, New Orleans, is removed from the plantation. The writer speaks of events and circumstances that are not in keeping with life on the plantation, indeed ones that could not occur on the Le Croix' or possibly any other plantation. Moreover, the miseries that precipitated the letter are caused by slavery, which is public in its inception and operation.

Camilla is situated between the slave and his wife, again providing evidence, similar to that of the letter, of her position between the private and public spheres. Her station in the private sphere is assigned to her by virtue of her being to the manor-born, the only acknowledged child of the wealthy, powerful white patriarch, Bernard Le Croix.
Simultaneously, she is on the fringes of the public world in her role as the translator, the messenger for someone outside the private sector. Although she does not indicate such in her letter, the writer has become strengthened, in part because of her experiences in the public world, such as earning an income and thereby attaining a somewhat limited economic independence. She also gains lodging and, possibly, stability with "a very nice woman."\(^{379}\) All these factors testify to her self-achieved and self-realized empowerment. The acquisition, both written and oral, of such knowledge of the sexual exploitation of the female slave, serves to escalate Camilla's entrance into the public sphere.

The letter is also symbolic of the empowerment of two females, Isaac's wife and Camilla. The newly empowered black woman initiates the letter. Isaac, upon listening to its context, is prompted to enlighten Camilla of the sexual exploitation of the female slave. Isaac's telling of the mistreatments heaped upon his wife, the quintessential female slave, publicly acknowledges their existence to someone in a position to remedy or at least ameliorate the female slave's condition—in this instance, Camilla, the nineteenth-century white woman. In Angelina Grimke's 1837 "Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States," she contends,

\(^{379}\) Harper, p. 13
[The female slaves] are our country women--they are our sisters; and to us, as women, they have a right to look for sympathy with their sorrows, and effort and prayer for their rescue.\textsuperscript{380}

Later, in a discussion with her father, she defends Isaac's revelations to her about his wife. Historian Paula Giddings reports of an address delivered by black activist Fannie Barrier Williams at the World Columbian exposition of 1893. According to Giddings, Williams vigorously issued a reprimand to the white women of the predominately white audience. Giddings states that Williams implied that "the onus of sexual immorality did not rest on Black Women but on the White men who continued to harass them."\textsuperscript{381} Giddings further states that Williams implied, "If White women were so concerned about morality, then they ought to take measures to help protect Black Women."\textsuperscript{382} Clearly, Williams' post-bellum remarks were also appropriate descriptions of the responsibilities of the nineteenth-century ante-bellum white woman as they related to their "sisters in bonds."\textsuperscript{383}

The unidentified nineteenth-century woman, mentioned by Isaac to Camilla, bonds with Isaac's wife. They share a symbiotic relationship. Both are exploited by the White patriarchy. When the White woman looked at the female

\textsuperscript{380} Davis, p. 44
\textsuperscript{381} Giddings, p. 86
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{383} Yellin, \textit{Women and Sisters}, p. 41
slave, she saw a reflection of herself. She saw "her own oppression as a woman." The woman removes Isaac's wife from the public sphere where she was considered property, liable to be sold at any time, to be put on public display, at which time her privacy, both psychological and physical, was violated. Since, as Isaac tells Camilla, the trader, whose death is symbolic of the imminent approach of the end of slavery, has died, it is possible that his wife has gained her freedom. She could possibly now belong to herself. The unidentified white woman empowers a nameless female slave and reunites her with her husband Isaac, thus providing the locus for Isaac and his wife to reconnect and re-establish their family.

According to Camilla, Isaac "hoped to see her when he went to New Orleans." It is illuminating that the nineteenth-century woman remains unidentified, just as Isaac's wife remains nameless. The nameless white woman is representative of the white women who, for whatever reasons, had a concern for their "sisters in bonds" and extended her hand to the female slave. Such ellipsis is fitting, for the two women are representative of the impact of the major movements made by the nineteenth-century white woman. Likewise, it is fitting that Isaac's wife remains

384 Ibid., p. 32
385 Harper, p. 13-14
386 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 41
nameless, for she, as stated earlier, is the voiceless quintessential female slave.

The nineteenth-century white woman was "encouraged to practice Mental Metempsychosis . . . [the free woman endeavored to suffer, through a heightened *imitatio*, the slave's afflictions]" and imagine themselves in chains." Abolitionist Abby Kelly provides the following account of her experience:

> When I come to sit down in the cool of the day alone with none but God to hold communion with . . . become myself the slave, that I may "remember him"—when at such moments, I feel the fetters wearing away at the flesh and grating on my ankle bone, when I feel the naked cords of my neck shrinking away from the rough edge of the iron collar, when my flesh quivers beneath the lash, till in anguish I feel portions of it cut from my back . . ."  

Angelina Grimke, whose father was a slaveholder in Charleston, South Carolina, recalls in a diary entry dated April 1829:

> Whilst returning from meeting this morning, I saw before me a colored woman who in much distress was vindicating herself to two white

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387 Garfield, p. 105  
388 Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, p. 29  
389 Ibid., p. 50
boys... The dreadful apprehension that they were leading her to the workhouse crossed my mind... As I approached, the younger said to her, "I will have you tied up."... As I passed them, she exclaimed, "Missis!" But I felt all I had to do was to suffer the pain of seeing her... 390

Yellin comments: "Throughout this passage, Grimke focuses on herself, describing her own transformation into a powerless slave." 391

Camilla's clear vision and her imagination allow her to experience mental metempsychosis. She mentally processes the visual and auditory knowledge with which she is presented. Initially, she does so with Isaac, who brings his narrative and letter to her attention, and the second time when she presents herself, accompanied by her father, at the "Anti-Slavery Meeting" where she is confronted with additional knowledge that is actually Isaac's story. Her metempsychosis ceases at this point. Certainly, she is sympathetic toward Isaac and the ex-slave as he recalls his wife and their "children standing on the auction block." 392 She feels the impotence of the ex-slave as he recounts his experience watching the liberties taken with and the insults directed toward his wife. 393 Perhaps

390 Ibid., p. 30
391 Ibid.
392 Harper, p. 12
393 Ibid.
she can even imagine the depth of degradation that will be
directed toward the female slave and her children.
However, she will not experience "sharing the defiled
female body."\textsuperscript{394} Hence, her imagination must be and is
restricted to the male slave.

As a major step toward attaining and maintaining her
empowerment, Camilla plans to overthrow the duped father
and replace him with the infant Louis, "who [while she was
listening to Miriam's account of Agnes' death] began to
stir."\textsuperscript{395} The ex-slave, Isaac, and Louis conflate. The
three males are symbolically beginning journeys,
individually and collectively, toward autonomy. The ex-
slave, as freed man and speaker, plants into the mind of
his audience "the good seed,"\textsuperscript{396} a seed that grows into an
increased awareness of the cruelties experienced by his
fellow bondsmen and women. Isaac will possibly re-
establish his family with his newly empowered wife. Louis
is the actuality of the emerging black male with whom
Camilla will overthrow the patriarchy as she simultaneously
empowers herself.

\textsuperscript{394} Garfield, p. 105
\textsuperscript{395} Harper, p. 4
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., p. 15
CHAPTER THREE

The Empowered Black Woman: A New Moral Code

"All silence has meaning."
Adrienne Rich

Ellen "the beautiful quadroon,"\textsuperscript{397} begins her bid for empowerment as a slave and attains it as a free woman. Her bid begins when, in carrying out her mistress' orders, she seizes the opportunity to covertly make a moral statement that brings the sins committed in the private sphere into the view of the public sphere. Historian Barbara Omolade writes that "white men used their power in the public sphere to construct a private sphere that would meet their needs and their desire for black women."\textsuperscript{398}

Sensing that she could attain only limited power in the private sphere of the Le Grange Plantation, Ellen resorts to making her statement to the public sphere. She shrewdly takes advantage of an occasion during which Georgiette Le Grange, wife of St. Pierre Le Grange, her owners, wants to present slavery in a favorable light to a visitor from the North. The group of visitors invited to dine with Georgiette at her plantation home consist of the Northern visitor, Mrs. King, Georgiette, and St. Pierre's

\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., p. 22
fellow plantation owners and slaveholders, the Le Fievres and the Le Counts. Georgiette wants to maintain the separation of the private sphere from the public sphere. Doing so would allow her to deceive her Northern visitor of the extent of the cruelty she inflicts on her slaves. Sally, "her waiting-maid,"\(^{399}\) says of her, "She's sich a mity piece. I spect some night the debil will come and fly away wid her. I hope so anyhow."\(^{400}\) In preparation for her visitors, Georgiette tells Ellen "to have the servants all cleaned up and looking as well as possible."\(^{401}\) In the guise of fulfilling her mistress's orders, Ellen forces the Northern visitor to witness the proof of the sexual exploitation of the female slave by making certain that her mulatto daughter, Minnie, fathered by her (Ellen's) owner, St. Pierre Le Grange, is plainly seen by the guests.

Describing the incident to her husband, Georgiette exclaims "and what should Ellen do but dress up her little minx in her best clothes, and curl her hair and let her run around in the front yard."\(^{402}\) Mrs. King, at once the Northern visitor and that segment of the North that is ignorant of the tragic life of ante-bellum Southern female slaves (or simply wishes to close its eyes to the horrors of that life) is forced to become aware of its existence. It is noteworthy that the disclosure takes place on the

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\(^{399}\) Harper, p. 17
\(^{400}\) Ibid., p. 18
\(^{401}\) Ibid., p. 15
\(^{402}\) Ibid., p. 16
plantation, the locus of the private sphere. Paternity relates to domesticity and family, which constitute the private sphere. The participants in and witnesses to the disclosure of Minnie's paternity also comprise a family. They are related biologically as are Minnie and Marie. Georgiette belongs to this family structure by virtue of her marriage to St. Pierre. The guests, with the exception of Mrs. King, who represents the public sphere, are related in principle, cause, and spirit, in that they are slaveholders who have financial, social, and moral interests in the domestic affairs of the private sphere.

Although the group is confronted with the proof of the sexual exploitation on the grounds of the private sphere, the plantation, the meeting is public in its nature because the assemblage that witnesses and participates in the meeting is composed of individuals from both the North and the South. The Southerners are amused by Georgiette's embarrassing position. In describing the incident, she says, "I saw the gentlemen exchange glances, and the young ladies screw their mouths to hide their merriment,"\(^{403}\) apparently caused by Mrs. Le Fevre's identification of Minnie as St. Pierre's daughter.

Although the group may well have been delighted in witnessing Georgiette's discomfort, they clearly do not condemn St. Pierre Le Grange's illicit sexual conduct that

\(^{403}\) Ibid.
is clearly evident by Minnie's serving as proof of his relationship with the female slave. To further underscore the public nature of the meeting, Georgiette wants Mrs. King "to see how much better and happier our negroes looked here than they do when they are free in the North,"\textsuperscript{404} Georgiette plans to use her Northern visitor as a messenger to convey her deliberate distortions of the reality of Southern slave life to the North, where they would be publicized. She wants Mrs. King "to see how much better and happier our negroes look here,"\textsuperscript{405} made visible by their temporarily being "cleaned up and looking as well as possible,"\textsuperscript{406} a decided departure from their everyday appearance. Georgiette wants Mrs. King to believe the facade. She is countered by Ellen's presentation of reality.

Ellen is fully aware of the physical similarities between Minnie and her half-sister Marie. She places Minnie in a prominent position and dresses her in a fashion by which the physical likenesses between the two girls cannot be ignored. She curls Minnie's hair, dresses her in her best clothes and allows her to "run around in the front yard,"\textsuperscript{407} a location in which the visitors (the public) would be certain to see her. Minnie's presence, unannounced, unexpected, but clearly acknowledged, shatters

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., p. 15-16  
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., p. 15  
\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., p. 16
the code of silence that shields the patriarch's sexual dominance over the female slave. Her presence demands attention. No one speaks to Minnie. No one attempts to restrict or correct her behavior. Minnie speaks by means of her silent presence, which is tacit declaration of the tragic plight of the female slave. Her silence testifies to the fact that she has no voice in determining what happens to her. She must accept; she cannot raise her voice in protest nor in defiance. Further, she has no voice in charting her future. Her past, from which she could draw strength, is erased by the awesome, impenetrable forces that confront, engulf, and silence her. Deliberately silenced, she nevertheless exists, and her existence makes a moral statement.

The absence of protest about her presence and her behavior indicates the group's acknowledgment, even acceptance, of the condemnation that her statement makes. Mrs. Le Fevre breaks the silence, while simultaneously and unknowingly adding credence to Minnie's statement with her observance, "Oh, how beautiful she [Minnie] is! The very image of her father."408 Minnie's running "around in the front yard,"409 also suggests that the sins committed stealthily in the concealment of the private world, supported by the enforced silence of the victim "who

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408 Ibid.
409 Ibid.
understood the value of silence and secrecy,\textsuperscript{410} and her fellow slaves, the patriarch’s wife silent denial of his activities and the silent acceptance and understood support by the community will no longer be hidden from the public.

The silence that precedes Georgiette’s dinner takes on a meaning of its own, one that encompasses not only those present during the disclosure of Minnie’s paternity, but additionally symbolizes the complicity of the silence of nature during the revelation. To begin with, there are no sounds made as Minnie runs around in the front yard, not even sounds made by the animals on the plantation. No account is given of the possible neighing of the horses that pull Mrs. Le Fevre’s carriage. There is not even the sound of a slight breeze blowing through the tree branches on a Louisiana plantation. The silence is reminiscent of the absence of sound that often precedes a violent act of nature, such as a storm or hurricane, common to the South. All is quiet, as if nature is setting the stage to present an event, in this instance a statement unleashing the truth, like the unleashing of nature, demands public and private attention.

The statement is so forceful and disruptive that in its wake, the child Minnie is presumably sold to be brought up "as a fancy girl."\textsuperscript{411} Historian Deborah Gray White

\textsuperscript{411} Harper, p. 21
defines the term as "light-skinned black women sold to white men for the exclusive purpose of prostitution and concubinage." She points out that "New Orleans seems to have been the center of the trade." Another reading suggests that the soundlessness of nature may also symbolize the strength and the depth of complicity of concealment of the suffering of the female slave at the hands of the master. Yet another reading implies that the absence of the sounds of nature indicates the deafness of the church, community, and state to the female slave as she pleads for help. All around her is silence that she "out of the profound desolation of her reality" must break.

Although not literally present at the naming of the man who fathered her child, Ellen is present by way of her daughter. Ellen makes a statement without voicing a word. She, through her daughter, reminds the group of both its complicity and its moral responsibility. Ellen, like the slave mother of postbellum black activist, Anna Julia Cooper, also bore the child of her master. According to historian Paula Giddings, "the pain of that reality was suffered in silence." Cooper wrote, "Her mother . . . had always been 'too shame-faced' to mention him."

412 White, *Arn't I a Woman?*, p. 37
413 Ibid.
415 Giddings, p. 87
416 Ibid.
Ellen, too, bears her shame in silence. She does, however, speak—by the actions of her daughter in the presence of not only their world of the private sphere, but in the public sphere as well.

St. Pierre Le Grange is the master who makes certain that the charge of sexual exploitation is not raised against him. He is not present at his wife's dinner, and when his wife complains to him about Ellen and Minnie, he says nothing. In the face of his wife's anger at Minnie's being mistaken as her daughter, "he thought that silence like discretion was the better part of valor, and hastily beat a retreat from her presence."\(^4\) After he left Georgiette's sitting room, Sally says to her fellow slave Minnie, "Massa never said beans."\(^5\) His absence and retreat suggest the practice of the patriarchy to distance itself from any situation that might bring attention to his illicit activities committed in the private sphere.

"Inattention from white fathers was generally the order of the day."\(^6\) Bernard Le Croix, who fathers a child by his slave mistress, does not view her dead body and is silent about the existence of his son, Louis. During conversations with his daughter Camilla about Louis' paternity or conversations about slavery as a moral issue, he absences himself [escapes from the situation] by

\(^4\) Harper, p. 17
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) King, p. 111.
silently turning his attention to reading his book. He tells Camilla when she presses him to make suitable arrangements for Louis to "let me finish reading this chapter." When Camilla refuses to accept his proposal for her to remain a member in philosophy and in deed of the private sphere, "he bit his lip, but said nothing, and commenced to reading his paper." Both Le Croix and Le Grange realize that they have the silent support of their slaves because the slaves fear the retributions of breaking their silence. Le Grange realizes that he has the silent support of his brethren slaveholders, indicated by the "exchange glances" at Mrs. Le Fevre's disclosure. Le Grange's wife, although temporarily angered, is easily placated and purchased with a string of "beautiful pearls" presented by Le Grange as a "peace offering."

The vulnerability and isolation of the female slave are also represented in Minnie's lack of company in the front yard. She is clearly an "Outsider." In her friendless position, situated before a group whose members

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420 Harper, p. 7
421 Ibid., p. 14
422 Ibid., p. 16
423 Ibid., p. 21
424 Ibid.
425 Wilson, Colin. The Outsider. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1982. Wilson explains that "The Outsider's case against society is very clear. All men and women have . . . dangerous, unnamable impulses, yet they keep up a pretense, to themselves, to others; their respectability, their philosophy, their relation, are all attempts to gloss over, to make look civilized and rational something that is savage, unorganized, irrational. He is an Outsider because he stands for Truth," p.13.
are representative of the forces who look upon her as a "form of commodity raped from Africa to be used as labor, capital, chattel and currency to build a nation for someone else," \(^{426}\) she is absolutely silent. However, her free spirit is not silenced: the members who comprise the power in her world cannot quench that spirit. Her resilient spirit allows her to overcome the amused contempt of the young, to-the-manor-born, white women who "screw up their mouths to hide their merriment" \(^{427}\) at Georgiette's chagrin and embarrassment and their distaste at Minnie's presence. The young white child, Marie, her half-sister, shows no filial concern for her "sister in bonds." \(^{428}\) Rather, she remonstrates, "She is not my sister." \(^{429}\) At this time, she seemingly gains no support from the white Southern plantation owner, Mrs. Le Fevre, who claims to be blind to her tragic plight when she announces "my poor old eyes are getting so good for nothing I can hardly tell one person from the other." \(^{430}\)

Historian Charles Joyner describes one actual account of a childless Virginia plantation mistress whose husband had fathered a son by one of his slaves, as reported by Henry Ford, a black man:

\(^{426}\) Worrell, Conrad. "We are Our Own Worst Enemy." *Houston News Page*, January 2-8, 1997, p. 20-21
\(^{427}\) Harper, p. 16
\(^{428}\) Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, p. 41
\(^{429}\) Harper, p. 16
\(^{430}\) Ibid.
Ole Mars John ain't never had no chillun by his wife. His wife was pow'ful jealous of Martha, an' never let her come near de big house, but she didn't need to 'cause Marsa was always goin' down to the shacks where she lived. Marse John used to treat Martha's boy, Jim, jus' like his own son, which he was. Him used to run all over de big house, an' Missus didn't like it, but she didn't have dare put him out. One day de Parson come to call. He knew Marse John but didn't know Misus Mamie. He come down de stairs to meet him. He took de little boy up in his arms an' rubbed his haid, an' when Missus come, tol' her how much de boy look like his father and mother. "Course it favor its father most," de preacher say, tryin' to be polite, but in de eyes, de lookin glass of de soul, I kin see dat he's his mother's boy."431

Joyner continues, "The mistress did not let on to the preacher that the boy was not hers, but she never again let the child come into the house."432

Novelist Margaret Walker, in Jubilee, gives a similar account of the mulatto child of a female slave and her master being mistaken for the child of the master and the plantation mistress. Vyry, as the child is called, is

431 Joyner, p. 64
432 Ibid.
actually the daughter of the slavemaster and Hetta, a female slave. Lillian is Vyry's half-sister, both having the same father. Big Missy, of course, is the plantation mistress. Walker writes

There was that time when Big Missy had company from Savannah and Vyry was at the Big House playing in the yard with Miss Lillian. She heard the lady ask Big Missy, "My, but these children look so much alike, are they twins?" Vyry jumped when she heard the question and dared not turn her burning face in Big Missy's direction. Big Missy's cold angry voice hastened to correct the mistake. "Of course not. Vyry's Lillian's nigger maid. John brought her here to be a playmate to Lillian because they're around the same age, and Lillian has nobody else to play with. I must say they're near the same size, but I never have seen where they look alike at all."433

Walker continues: "The woman must have realized what a terrible mistake she had made, for she fumbled with the ivory fan that hung around her neck, at the same time changing color and muttering incoherent phrases in half-apologetic and half-frightened tones."434

434 Ibid., p. 18
Minnie also suffers the knowing looks of the patriarchs, "brothers in sin" who "exchange glances."\textsuperscript{435} Moreover, she is neither accorded recognition nor offered succor by the Northern visitor, Mrs. King. She, the female slave, is alone, surviving by her own internal strength, which alone allows her to prevail in a society that perceives her female slaves as "field laborers, domestic servants and 'brood-sows.'"\textsuperscript{436} Indeed, "deep within the daughters' hearts and minds,"\textsuperscript{437} many generations later they would recall "the gifts of determination and freedom ... and the strength to have faith."\textsuperscript{438} They would remember her as "much of a woman."\textsuperscript{439}

Her spirit, as she runs around, continuously active, gains momentum. Minnie is not passively present in the front yard; rather, she deliberately calls attention to herself. The synergism of her presence itself coupled with her unbridled actions makes a powerful statement. Her silent movements deny any attempt to silence the circumstances of her conception: she is unquestionably the product of a powerful force, the patriarch, acting in his unproscribed power as a conqueror of the less strong. The other source of her conception is the black woman, rendered so powerless that her definition of herself is destroyed

\textsuperscript{435} Harper, p. 16
\textsuperscript{436} Jones, p. 13
\textsuperscript{437} Omolade, p. 19
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{439} Jones, p. 11
and replaced by one suitable to the needs and desires of the patriarchy.

The silence of the group, with the exception of Mrs. Le Fevre and Marie, who speak, also indicates the group's witnessing to and acceptance of the nearing demise of their lifestyles as slaveholders and the end of the noninvolvement of the North in the slavery issue. Ironically, Mrs. Le Fevre, a member of the group, calls "attention of the whole party to [Minnie]." Mrs. Le Fevre's actions seem to signal her awareness of the presence of a new bold force on the site of their power, the plantation. Minnie's presence fascinates the onlookers while she simultaneously beguiles them with her beauty. Appropriately, they, too, are temporarily rendered speechless in the presence of a movement that by its sheer force of movement and beauty draws them temporarily into her world in which they are made to realize that their world must confront the tentative beginning of the new world of the new black woman. This black woman is the precursor of the free black female unfettered by the prescribed and confined world of patriarchy.

Minnie's activities take place outdoors, suggesting the public world. Her position in that setting indicates that she is soon to become a member of a larger world in which she will hold considerable power, for it is in that

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440 Harper, p.16
world that she will make the charge against the sustained harassment of the black female by the white male. Although, admittedly, nineteenth-century black male feminists like Frederick Douglass spoke out forcefully during the post-bellum period against the continued sexual exploitation of the black female, it was a woman's fight, especially as black woman. Historian Beverly Guy-Shetfall writes of the resistance of the ante-bellum female slave:

It was the horrendous circumstances that enslaved African women endured since 1619 . . . that inspired their first yearnings for freedom and rebellious spirit. They resisted beatings, involuntary breeding, sexual exploitation by white masters, family separation, debilitating work schedules, bad living conditions and even bringing into the world children who would be slaves.\textsuperscript{441}

Hence, carrying on the fight, black feminist Ida Wells Barnett asserted that "the rape of helpless Negro girls and women, which began in slavery days still continued without reproof from church, state, or press."\textsuperscript{442} Historian Paula Giddings writes that black nineteenth-century Chicago activist Fannie Barrier Williams lamented

\textsuperscript{442} Ibid., p. 421
It is a significant and shameful fact that I am constantly in receipt of letters from still unprotected women in the South . . . begging me to find employment for their daughters . . . to save them from going into the homes of the South as servants as there is nothing to save them from dishonor and degradation.  

Giddings says Williams told her audience, "I do not want to disturb the serenity of this conference by suggesting why this protection is needed and the kind of man against whom it is needed." Little wonder that W. E. B. Du Bois could fittingly note, "I most sincerely doubt if any other race of women could have brought its fineness up through so devilish a fire."  

The spell is broken by Mrs. Le Fevre's verbal recognition of Minnie's beauty and her accurate identification of St. Pierre Le Grange as Minnie's father. Her statement breaks the silence about Minnie's paternity. The acknowledgment means that Ellen's plan in this stage of its development is successful. The identification of paternity--and its attendant moral implication--made by an adult fellow slaveholder in the presence of a perhaps neutral but definitely quiet observer who has liberty to

\[443\] Giddings, p. 86-87  
\[444\] Ibid., p. 86  
\[445\] Ibid., p. 33
broadcast the message to the North is a far cry from Georgiette's plan, but an affirmation of Ellen's.

The obligation of the nineteenth-century white middle-class female was to set and implement the moral standards of the home. Historian Darlene Clark Hines notes that "women were considered to be repositories of moral sensibility, purity, refinement and maternal affection in a male-dominated society."\(^{446}\) Further, Nancy Woloch, quoting from an 1828 article in Ladies Magazine writes that "women [were]more moral, modest, virtuous [than men] held superior status within the home. There, they could mold the character of their children and subtly, invisibly, uplift and improve the character of their husband."\(^{447}\) Giddings adds, "The true woman's executive role was as homemaker, mother, housewife and family tutor of the social and moral graces. Isolated within the home, women 'raised' men above lusty temptation while keeping themselves beyond its rapacious grasp."\(^{448}\) Unfortunately, in many instances, they failed to protect the female from exploitation by members of the patriarchy.

The slave Milly's observation that Mrs. Le Fevre "kissed the child and said it was the very image of its


\(^{448}\) Giddings, p. 47
father." suggests that Mrs. Le Fevre acknowledges the presence of the female who would fulfill the moral responsibilities from which she abdicated. That the act occurred in the presence of Milly also suggests a witness to the transference (at best, sharing) of moral responsibility. Added meaning is given to the act by the presence of the older slave Milly, representative of the sexual mistreatment of the female slave, who witnesses the moral responsibility, obligation to end their suffering being passed on to a young, vigorous black female who will demand a new, enforceable, and duly enforced morality. These younger women will speak, as did black female activist Addie Hunton, against "a system that made the black woman submit her body to a cruelty too diverse and appalling to mention." The new black woman is seen in individuals like Fannie Barrier Williams, who, at the World Columbian Exposition of 1893, said that "the onus of sexual immorality did not rest on black women but on the white men who continued to harass them."  

The embattled female slave, on occasion, sought out the plantation mistress in an attempt to gain her support as an ally who would rescue her from the sexual onslaught of the patriarch. Historian Wilma King writes

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449 Harper, p. 17  
450 Giddings, p. 87  
451 Ibid., p. 86
They [young single girls] had no legal or social recourse. The apparent hopelessness of their situations does not mean that they acquiesced. For example, when Robert Newsome, a sixty-year-old widower bought the fourteen-year-old girl, Celia, at an 1850 auction in Audrain County, Missouri, and raped her while en route home from the sale, she had no one to turn to for help. Newsome's daughter appeared oblivious to the continued exploitation. Besides, Celia was Newson's property without protection against sexual abuse.452

Melton A McLaurin, however, in Celia, A Slave, writes that Celia told the daughter that she would "hurt the old man if he did not quit forcing her [to have sexual intercourse] when she was sick."453 She was pregnant at the time she complained to the owner's daughters. Celia's entreaty was to no avail. According to McLaurin, "There is no evidence to indicate that either daughter acted to prevent her abuse by their father."454 Celia killed her owner when he continued to force her to have sexual intercourse with him. She was convicted of murder, and on December 21, 1855, "Celia was marched to the gallows. At

452 King, p. 109
454 Ibid.
2:30 on a Friday afternoon, the trap was sprung and Celia fell to her death." 455

Mrs. Le Fevre plays a major role in the evolution and subsequent completion of Ellen's moral statement. As noted earlier, Mrs. Le Fevre correctly attributes Minnie's paternity to St. Pierre. She pleads confusion because of blurred vision, but she does see quite clearly. As Mrs. LeFeure "alighted from her carriage," 456 she appears to serve as a messenger to aid Ellen in conveying her message. Mrs. Le Fevre's statement "I can hardly tell one person from another" 457 testifies to the emptiness and frequently crippling effect of artificial values assigned to humans, especially value designed to determine the bearer's place, function, and worth. Georgiette feels that by destroying the visible manifestations of Minnie's worth, assigned to her by Ellen, she will not only deny, but also cancel Minnie's right to live as St. Pierre's daughter--on an equal par with Marie, the daughter she and St. Pierre have together.

Mrs. Le Fevre's statement also demonstrates the vulnerability of the two young females. Both live in a patriarchal-controlled world. Historian Jacqueline Jones writes "in the female slave, the white woman saw the source of her own misery, but she also saw herself--a woman

455 McLaurin, P. 135
456 Harper, p. 16
457 Ibid.
without rights or recourse, subject to the whims of an egotistical man."\textsuperscript{458} Apparently in anticipation of Georgette's reference to Minnie as a little minx, a pejorative term used to refer to females who have lax sexual codes, Mrs. Le Fevre recognizes Minnie's humanity. She tells the vexed Georgiette, "I can hardly tell one person from another."\textsuperscript{459} Her statement raises Minnie from her assigned position of less than human and places her on par with Georgiette's daughter.

Mrs. Le Fevre's disclosure and observation, "She [Minnie] is the very image of her father,"\textsuperscript{460} places the plantation mistress in what Charles Sellers describes as "the fundamental moral anxiety"\textsuperscript{461} of slavery. The slave mistress is "forced to confront one of slavery's oldest and most painful dilemmas."\textsuperscript{462} She is confronted with "the fruits of his passion as well as the duplicity of his life."\textsuperscript{463} A former bondswoman recalls:

Just the other day we were talking about white people when they had slaves. You know when a man would marry, his father would give a woman for a cook and she would have children right in the house by him and his wife would have children too. Sometimes the cook's children

\textsuperscript{458} Jones, p. 25
\textsuperscript{459} Harper, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{460} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{461} McLaurin, p. 32
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{463} Omolade, p. 10
favored him so much that the wife would be mean to them and make him sell them.\textsuperscript{464}

The plantation mistress is forced to accept his licentious lifestyle because she is financially dependent upon him. Historian Bettina Aptheker describes the all-encompassing power of the patriarch:

Daughters and married women did not even receive their own wages; if they were employed, their earnings went to their fathers or husbands. Divorce could only be initiated by the husband, who retained all the family's property and custody of the children. Wife battery was legal, abortion and even the advocacy of contraception, illegal. Rape laws protected the rights of the male proprietor in his wife or daughter, infanticide among working class women and the organized murder of the illegitimate babies of middle-class women in orphanages through malnutrition and infection were common practices. As a group, women were civilly dead and without political rights.\textsuperscript{465}

Additionally, Mrs. Le Fevre's statement reminds Georgiette that the master's desire for and easy access to the female slave deprives her of a portion of her sexuality. "Many

\textsuperscript{464} Ibid., p. 9-10
felt stifled by the sexual straitjacket that they were forced to wear.\textsuperscript{466} Historian Barbara Omolade states, "White women . . . were prevented from enjoying sex because they were viewed as "pure women incapable of erotic feeling."\textsuperscript{467}

The "silent" Ellen and the outspoken Georgiette engage in war. Appropriately, their theater is the private sphere. Both women, whose raven hair suggests their sisterhood, find themselves pitted against each other. Georgiette tells St. Pierre, "I'll let Ellen know that I am mistress here . . ."\textsuperscript{468} Ellen wants to make a moral statement and to have her daughter's humanity recognized. Georgiette, "proud, imperious, and selfish,"\textsuperscript{469} knows that neither she nor her daughter will actually experience the life of the female slave. Ellen, however, is fully conscious of her and her daughter's vulnerability as female slaves. She tells St. Pierre, "Anything is better than slavery."\textsuperscript{470}

Ellen is clearly the victor. She, the "beautiful quadroon,"\textsuperscript{471} knows St. Pierre far better than does the blustery Georgiette. She can recall the difficulties he overcame to retain her as his mistress, notwithstanding his mother's strong objection to her presence on the

\textsuperscript{466} White, \textit{Arn't I a Woman?}, p. 39
\textsuperscript{467} Omolade, p. 9
\textsuperscript{468} Harper, p. 16
\textsuperscript{469} Ibid., p. 21
\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., p. 22
\textsuperscript{471} Ibid.
plantation. His mother, in his absence, "sent her down to Orleans to the nigger trader's." 472 St. Pierre purchased her from the trader, bought "a house for Ellen . . . installed [her] as his mistress." 473 On the other hand, she knows he is unreliable in taking up the cause of his slave mistress when confronting his wife's jealousy and rage. Historian Bell Hooks gives an account presented "in Once A Slave, a book which contains a condensed body of information gleaned from slave narratives" 474:

... the author Stanley Feldstein recounts an incident in which a white mistress returned home unexpectedly from an outing, opened the doors of her dressing room, and discovered her husband raping a thirteen-year-old slave girl. She responded by beating the girl and locking her in a smokehouse. The girl was whipped daily for several weeks. When older slaves pleaded on the child's behalf and dared to suggest that the white master was to blame, the mistress simply replied, "She'll know better in the future. After I've done with her, she'll never do the like again through ignorance." 475

Obviously, the patriarch went uncondemned.

472 Ibid., p. 23
473 Ibid., p. 25
475 Ibid., p. 36-37
The crafty Ellen sets in motion her plan to gain freedom for her child by making a moral statement, the impact of which will provoke the anger-filled Georgiette to dispose of the child. Further evidence of their struggle in the private sphere is that the battle takes place in the locus of domesticity. The confrontations between St. Pierre and Georgiette occur in her sitting room and her boudoir. Each time, she is made to feel that she is victorious in her plans to rid herself of Minnie. During their discussion in the sitting room, St. Pierre is non-committal, leaving Georgiette to feel that he is supportive of her plans to sell the child. In the boudoir, St. Pierre tells Georgiette "that he had found a trader, who thought the child so beautiful, and that he had bought her to raise as a fancy girl and had given him five hundred dollars for her." However, Ellen prevails in her meeting with St. Pierre. Immediately after lying to his wife, "He passing from the boudoir of his wife . . . sought the room where Ellen sat." In the workroom where Ellen sat sewing, St. Pierre shows possibly his only act of decency in his relations with women. His sense of morality, although deeply flawed, does not allow him to fulfill his promise to Georgiette. He does not sell his daughter.

476 Harper, p. 19
477 Ibid., p. 21
478 Ibid.
Ellen is master craftsperson. She is creator, mother, and excellent seamstress. Even Georgiette recognizes her skills. She tells St. Pierre, "I would have her mother [Ellen] sold, but we can't spare her; she is so handy with the needle and does all the cutting on the place." 479 Ellen, who is "busily cutting and arranging," 480 also arranges her daughter's life. Her initial undertaking, in creating a new life for Minnie, is to discard the slave child. Her success in doing so is affirmed by Mrs. Le Fevre. Using Minnie as a seamstress handles a piece of fabric, Ellen lays her original pattern that will give Minnie humanity and, therefore, freedom. She takes pains "to dress up her . . . in her best clothes, and curl her hair, and let her run around in the front yard." 481 Her next step in creating another life for her daughter is to thread together maneuvers that will allow Minnie's removal from the plantation onto a life of freedom.

She approaches the powerful but irresponsible St. Pierre in the workroom where she is accustomed to piecing together patterns, cutting, basting, and sewing until she achieves her desired goal, a completed product, tailored to her specifications. Here, she turns her skills to St. Pierre to employ him as a tool to implement her desire for freedom for her daughter. She approaches him as a

479 Ibid., p. 19-20
480 Ibid., p. 21
481 Ibid., p. 16
suppliant while simultaneously coyly evoking memories of the intimate relationship that existed, perhaps continues to exist, between the two of them. She implores, "Oh! Mr. St. Pierre, you would not sell that child when it is your own flesh and blood?" 482 Much to his credit, "Le Grange winced under these words." 483 As noted earlier, St. Pierre does have a sense of morality, evidenced by his interest and concern for Minnie. He tells Ellen, "I'll never consent to sell the child, but it won't do for her to stay here. I've made up my mind to send her North, and have her educated." 484

St. Pierre is unlike many white fathers who "did nothing for their colored children." 485 Indeed, he was one of those few, "the exceptional white father-master-love who ... would often free his black children and wife, hustle them out of town, educating and supporting them from afar." 486 St. Pierre, however, does not free Ellen to be with her daughter. Instead, he tells her, "I'd send you both ... but, to tell you the truth, the plantation is running down, and the crops are so short this year I can't afford it." 487 St. Pierre separates mother and daughter with the promise to reunite them in the future. However, Ellen's plan does not include attaining freedom for

482 Ibid., p. 19
483 Ibid.
484 Ibid.
485 Omolade, p. 10
486 Ibid.
487 Harper, p. 19
herself. She wanted, as stated earlier, to make a moral statement and ultimately achieve her daughter's freedom. She uses St. Pierre, the architect of her troubled life, to weave together a new life for her daughter. She realizes that she has finished this part of her work when St. Pierre tells her, "I have managed all right." Upon hearing his statements, she "resumed her needle." The battle for control--Georgiette wants Ellen to realize that she is "mistress here" (the plantation) and Ellen wants the freedom to control her daughter's life--is seemingly heavily weighted to one side, that of Georgiette in her position as slaveholder. On the other side are Ellen and her fellow female slaves, each of whom is painfully cognizant of the pain of the female slave. Georgiette apparently does not appreciate the cohesiveness of the female slaves as a group. She appears to have no concept of the strength that emanates from their shared sufferings nor does she realize that from the sharing of suffering comes a strength of community that served as "buffer enough against the depersonalizing regime of plantation work

488 Ibid., p. 22
489 Ibid.
490 Ibid., p. 16
and the general dehumanizing nature of slavery." 491

Georgiette cuts Minnie’s hair and says she will "have her dressed in domestic, like the other little niggers." 492 She further instructs Sally to "take these curls and throw them away." 493 She directs her to "move quick, and take this child into the kitchen and don’t let me see her in the front yard again." 494 Of course, Georgiette feels that she is shearing Minnie of all the trappings that would easily identify the child as her husband’s daughter. She feels that by taking such actions, she is stripping Minnie of her identity. Minnie is a disclosure of St. Pierre’s activities, which she would rather not face. Moreover, by dressing her and sending her to the kitchen, she feels that she is assigning to Minnie the identity which she, as a plantation owner, wants her to bear.

However, Georgiette’s banishment of Minnie to the kitchen, where she will be hidden from view, bodes ill for the completion of her plans to deny the child’s existence and to alter her identification. Ironically, she places the shorn curls in the hands of her waiting-maid Sally, who, as a female slave, will have no part in the destruction of Minnie’s identity. Rather, she and her fellow female slaves will assume a maternal role of

491 White, Arn’t I A Woman?, p. 131
492 Harper, p. 16
493 Ibid., p. 17
494 Ibid.
nurturer and provide for the shorn, domestically clothed Minnie. They will provide her with a strength that virtually assures not merely her survival, but also the means by which she will become equipped with the essential subtle mechanisms of interacting with her owner, made evident in her mother's clever manipulation of both Georgiette and St. Pierre.

It can be taken for granted that Ellen learned skills that were possibly originated and subsequently honed by generations of enslaved people who preceded her and were actively practiced by her and her fellow slaves. Certainly, in the case of Ellen and her fight for her daughter's freedom, the ends justified the means. Plantation mistresses would often take exception to the physical attractiveness of the female slave. In *Our Nig*, Nig's hair was shorn because the white woman for whom she worked and with whom she lived resented Nig's attractiveness, especially her hair. Historian Deborah Gray White writes, "The reaction of some mistresses to slave women with long straight hair was to have the hair cut short. Louisa Piquet's hair was cut when her mistress feared it put her own daughter to shame."495

Georgiette, unwittingly, banishes Minnie to the kitchen, the arena in which she will gain strength, learn how to fight for her identity and how to shield herself

495 White, *Ain't I A Woman?*, p. 42
from what Cornell West describes as the nihilistic threat to black people "that is loss of hope and absence of meaning." Georgiette has decided that Minnie as a human being is nonexistent. She has robbed her of any opportunity to be perceived as a human by referring to her as a little minx and declaring that she is just like the other niggers, none of whom are human in the perception of the slave owners. The slaves, among whom Minnie has been banished, will make certain that she will not "view herself through white lenses." Instinctively, they know, like James Baldwin, that "the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a delusion." As Deborah Gray White points out, "On Southern plantations, the female community made sure that no child was truly motherless." In this world of the kitchen, surrounded by older female slave, Minnie, who is symbolic of all slave children, is placed in an environment that will not allow her sense of her own being to be annihilated.

Observing, listening, completely immersing herself in the blackness of the black world that surrounds her, she can grow and learn to fend off the psychological assaults on her meaning. For her, although beset by impenetrable, awesome resistance to her humanity by church, state, and community, her life, as she perceives it, will have no

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497 Ibid., p. 96
498 Ibid., p. ix
499 White, *Ar'n't I A Woman*, p. 128.
absence of meaning. She will gather the strength and the knowledge to define her life, independent of the white world, in which she is considered less than human. For her, based on the strength imparted to her by the female slaves, there will not be a loss of hope, a belief that is expressed in the words of the black spiritual, "There's a Brighter Day Ahead." All told, Georgiette's attempted destruction of Minnie paradoxically brings into play the strengths of the slave world. Unknowingly, Georgiette pays homage to the strengths of cohesiveness, the ability to erect and maintain buffers against the horrors of slaver, refusal to accept assigned values from an outside world that are usually meaningless and frequently degrading, the ability to sustain hope in spite of a constant deprivation of all that contributes to the making and continual nurturing of a female whose descendants can salute and describe her as "much of a woman."\footnote{Jones, p. 11} Certainl, Ellen's destruction of the Minnie as defined by Georgiette on a broader scale is the denial of the role assigned to the female slave and the affirmation of not only her daughter's identity, but also the affirmation and celebration of the humanity and kinship of all female slaves.

Hidden away in the hindermost parts of the plantation, silently existing in the Big House, meeting in the brush arbors to worship their God, removed from the presence of
the master, Ellen, Minnie, and the other female slaves—sisters both physically and psychologically—forge among themselves an identity that is unique and unto themselves. Their special identity is created exclusively by them and passed on from generation to generation, sometimes by biologically-related females, sometimes by means of fictive kinship, but real kinship in the sense that the relationship may be described as "family." From this structure, they define themselves and firmly establish their own identity. As if in anticipation of the words of twentieth-century poet Nikki Giovanni, they, too seem to demand, "Let my world be defined by my skin and by the skin of my people for we/spirit to spirit/will embrace the world."  

These female slaves identify the means by which they survive and make their own world—spirit to spirit, reminiscent of the spirit (feelings) shared in black Baptist Churches that unite those present during worship service that lifts, them, strengthens them, nurtures them against the awesome, frequently destructive, forces that confront them because of the color of their skin. The female slaves define their world. Hence, they establish and maintain their own world view that will prevent them from viewing themselves through white lenses. The beauty of their self-created world is that it is a reflection,
indeed a melding, of their needs, their suffering, their triumphs--their lives--created by necessity because of their horrendous travails. In their world of sisterhood--spirit to spirit--Minnie could not lament the words of the black spiritual, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long ways from home" because of the presence the feeling of the spirit of their world of cohesiveness is all encompassing. Cornell West's contemporary observations aptly describe the female slave:

The psychic bouts with self-confidence, the existential agony over genuine desirability, and the social burden of bearing and usually nurturing black children . . . breeds a spiritual strength of black women unbeknownst to most black men and nearly all other Americans.502

Ellen, by her own efforts, reunites with Minnie, whom St. Pierre had sent to live with a Quaker family in order to prevent Georgiette from carrying out her threat to sell her. Ellen remained on the plantation until she was freed. When she meets her daughter, not having seen her for approximately ten years, she exclaims, "Heaven is merciful! I have found you at last, my dear, darling long-lost child."503 The close of the Civil War not only brings about physical freedom for the slave, it also provides implicit in that freedom the right to own and use voice, which they

502 West, p. 90
503 Harper, p. 50
had been irrevocably denied as slaves. The realization of being in possession of voice and the subsequent implementation of that voice often led to the slave's personal declaration of his or her independence. The verbalization of the recognition of the existence of a higher source of power beyond the reach and control of another mortal is evidenced in Ellen's first three words of greeting: "Heaven is merciful."

Inherent in that greeting is not only the acknowledgment of her faith in Christianity, but more importantly, her recognition and assertion that she is no longer under the domination of the slaveholder. Ellen's earlier reference of "Thank Heaven!" was made in the presence of her owner, St. Pierre, the controller of their world, the confining world of the workroom, suggestive of the inhibiting, stifling world of the private sphere, perpetually ensconced in the patriarchal-controlled world of slavery. She expresses her gratitude to him for saving their daughter from the slave trader. The slaves often reached out to a power beyond that of the slaveholder. They turned to a power, which they felt, according to Historian John B. Boles, "reached out to the lost and forlorn and provided deliverance." However, reality dictated that the slave also recognize and, accordingly,

504 Ibid., p. 22
respect the almost unlimited earthly power of the slaveholder. He was god, a zealous god, in control of the slave world that he created. The slave, of course, was universally aware of his or her vulnerability in that world. Consequently, as a matter of survival, in many instances, the slave wore the mask spoken of in Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask." This concept will be explored later in this discussion.

In this case, Ellen wears the mask of the humble supplicant, whose request has been fulfilled. Although the shrewd Ellen's tears are duly reflective of her grief at the loss of her daughter and her relief that she is living safely in the North, removed from the danger of becoming a fancy girl, she knows that in her role as supplicant, appropriate behavior dictates that she pay homage to the master. Ellen cries. Her tears ensure the slave-holder that she realizes and is respectful of his power and is grateful for the compassionate consideration he bestows on his slave. St. Pierre says, "I have managed all right," a self-congratulatory verbalization that not only has he completed his self-assigned obligation, but also a reminder to his slave of his power. Historian Kari J. Winter writes:

The male head holds all real power; the wife is both the victim and the mediator of his power;

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506 Harper, p. 22
children, servants, slaves, animals and all the riches of the earth are viewed as resources to be tamed and exploited for the patriarch's convenience and pleasure.\textsuperscript{507}

Certainly, one element in Ellen's behavior is, as defined by historian Albert J. Roboteau, the slave's practice of "hiding one's true feelings while simulating the opposite."\textsuperscript{508} Roboteau gives an example of "puttin' on ol' massa'" by way of the following account given by a former slave, "When white folks would die the slaves would all stand around and 'tend like they was crying but they would say 'They going on to hell like a damn barrel full of nails.'":\textsuperscript{509}

In a lengthier but equally-enlightening account of 'puttin' on ol' massa', Roboteau writes

former slave Jacob Stroyer recalled that when his former master's corpse was carried home, "all the slaves was allowed to stop at home that day to see the last of him, and to lament with mistress. After all the slaves who cared to do so had seen his face they gathered in groups around mistress to comfort her; they shed fake tears saying 'Never mind, missus, massa gone home to heaven' while some were saying this,

\textsuperscript{507} Winter, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{509} Ibid.
others said, 'Thank God, massa gone home to hell.'" 510

In reference to "We Wear the Mask," mentioned earlier in this discussion, Dunbar captured "the complex position of his fellow blacks, who had recently been freed from slavery [but] felt they had to maintain in order to survive in American society." 511 Granted, Ellen is yet a slave during this exchange with St. Pierre; nevertheless, blacks had learned long before the advent of the Civil War to shield their thoughts and behavior from slaveholders. "The Negroes are scrupulous on one point, they make common cause as servants in concealing their thoughts from their owners." 512 Dunbar laments:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes--
This debt we pay to human guile. 513

Indeed, Ellen's tears are suggestive of her ability, and quite possibly the ability of all slaves, to wear the mask, whether that mask be grins, lies, or tears in "puttin' on ol' massa' " in order to satisfy a "debt we [slaves and newly-released slaves] pay to human guile." Here, clearly, with Ellen, tears are the order of the day.

510 Ibid.
512 Raboteau, p. 297
513 Gentry, p. 55
Ellen's first three words of greeting to Minnie are not only an acknowledgment of her faith in Christianity, but more significantly, her verbal recognition that she is no longer under the domination of the slaveholder. St. Pierre is not present when she greets Minnie, as he was when she earlier expressed gratitude to heaven. In freely acknowledging a source of power more powerful than the slaveholder, she transcends the power the master holds. Moreover, her reference to heaven also suggests that now that she is a free woman and is reunited with her daughter, the parameters of her former world have collapsed. Historian Catherine Clinton observes:

Emancipation created few opportunities for Black women within the political economy. Nevertheless, many ex-slaves seized the opportunity to express themselves. This culture of articulation pioneered a new role for individual and collective African-American female identity. First, former slaveowners and most whites wanted to enforce "silence" to muzzle an increasingly outspoken Black female presence within the conquered South. In case after case, cited in the Freedmen's Bureau records, whites would threaten, beat, and, in
some cases, kill African-American women for their bold resistance to oppression.\textsuperscript{514}

In her new world, Ellen, as creator, wills herself to become the power in that world. The close of the Civil War not only brings about physical freedom for the slave, but implicit in that freedom is the right to use voice, which, as state earlier, they had been denied as slaves. Historian Kari J. Winters writes

\begin{quote}
Slaveholders often used savage force to silence the people they enslaved. In addition to beating, starving, and murdering slaves, masters sometimes placed a "bit" [an iron tongue] in slaves' mouths to enforce silence, a device that inflicted acute physical and psychological pain.\textsuperscript{515}
\end{quote}

Living a life independent of the world of the slaveholder is not altogether new for Ellen, nor for her fellow slaves. As noted previously, the slaves created a world of their own, the entrance to which they zealously guarded. Folklorist John Michael Vlach notes

\begin{quote}
Out in the quarters, particularly on large plantations, slaves created a social circle with its own schedule of appropriate behavior. Thus, while slaves were held captive on their
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{515} Winter, p. 32
plantations, they still managed to find certain measures of independence . . . They formulated their own sense of place— one that the master could hardly imagine.516

Further, historian Deborah Gray White notes that "it was almost impossible for slaveholders to penetrate the private world of female slaves."517 White continues, "... the female slave community schooled its members in survival, helped and protected them when possible, but most of all gave its women the opportunity to forge independent ideas about womanhood."518 Historian Charles Joyner asserts that "the slaves' lives were controlled from dawn to dusk, but from dusk to dawn the slave community created its own social and cultural life."519 Additionally, the work that the female slaves shared, removed from the watchful eyes of the slaveholders, contributed mightily toward their sense of togetherness and fostered immeasurably their independence of thought and action. Ellen is a product of such an environment. In the company of her fellow female slaves, she learns to think independently and becomes assured of her own sense of herself. Drawing from the nurturing provided by her sisters in slavery, she gathers strength to become creator-moralist. Once she attains freedom, she continues as creator of her own world.

516 Vlach, p. 47
517 White, Before Freedom Came, p. 114.
518 Ibid., p. 117
519 Joyner, p. 81
Minnie, having been figuratively murdered and twice recreated at the hands of her mother Ellen, has had other individuals assign her numerous identities, some of which are accurate and lasting. Mrs. Le Fevre identifies Minnie as human, placing her on a par with her white half-sister, Marie. Georgiette, contrariwise, denies Minnie's humanity by referring to her as a little minx. Marie gives Minnie an identity, while concurrently reassuring herself of her own place in the plantation hierarchy. The Carpenters, although valiantly attempting to provide Minnie with a true identity, are unable to do so. Carrie Wise selfishly tires to mold Minnie into an identity that would be acceptable and imitative of the white woman in nineteenth-century America.

Marie says, "She is not my sister, that is Ellen's child." Her statement is a refusal of biological kinship and a desperate denial of her own vulnerability as a female living in a patriarchal-controlled household. It is reasonable to assume that Marie is fully cognizant of the horrific life of the female slave. As bell hooks speculate, "Surely, it must have occurred to white women that were enslaved black women not available to bear the brunt of such intense ant-woman aggression, they themselves might have been the victims." Former slave Mary Prince recalls:

520 Harper, p. 16
521 hooks, p. 38
My old master often got drunk, and then he would get in a fury with his daughter, and beat her till she was not fit to be seen. I remember on one occasion I had gone to fetch water, and when I was coming up the hill I heard a great screaming; I ran as fast as I could to the house, put down the water, and went into the chamber, where I found my master beating Miss D-dreadfully. I strove with all my strength to get her away from him; for she was all black and blue with bruises. He had beat her with his fist, and almost killed her.522

In Minnie's case, another reading suggests that she is conscious of her pronounced physical resemblance to Minnie. Mrs. Le Fevre thought they were sisters and that Georgiette was the mother of both girls. Such an awareness on Marie's part could signal to her that she could be in a threatening disaster and if their positions were slightly altered, she, too, would be mistaken for a slave, subject without recourse to the cruel whims of a master. Her identification of Minnie as Ellen's daughter, the slave is a factual assessment of Minnie's position in the plantation hierarchy. However, ignored in her statement is in its

denial of sisterhood, she places the onus of guilt onto the
back of the victim, Ellen, who must verbally remain silent.

Marie's "coming to the door," suggests that by
doing so, she is the emerging young white woman who
recognizes her sister in distress and comes to her rescue;
in doing so, she shows her willingness to assist Ellen and
Marie's moral statement of bringing attention to the public
regarding the sins perpetrated in the private sphere.
Indeed, her "coming to the door," coming out of the house,
could indicate that she removes herself from the
slaveholders' deeply ingrained attitudes toward slavery, as
evidenced in the dynamics that occur in the predinner
gathering. If Marie opens the door, and she does so, she
certainly with her statement closes it resoundingly,
thereby symbolically sealing in the house, representative
of the private sphere, the pro-slavery attitudes of the
dinner guests.

Her denial of kinship with Minnie indicates that she
certainly will continue to be a member of their ranks and
remain in the house, in the private sphere. Marie, like
Mary Boykin Chestnut, a slaveholder in the South, is aware
of the sexual immorality of her father, the patriarch.
Chestnut writes, "I see ... like the patriarchs of old
our men live all in one house with their wives and their
concubines, and the mulattoes one sees in every family
exactly resemble the white children." 523 Unlike Chestnut, Marie will neither acknowledge what she sees nor join her mulatto sister, Minnie, in exposing the sins committed in the private sphere.

The kindly Carpenters also attempt to give Minnie an identity. She is forced to become part of, for her, an artificial world in that she is the replacement for their lost only child, a daughter who died "a few months" 524 before Minnie's arrival in their home. Her life with them is reflective of the lifestyle that the Quaker couple would have given their daughter. However, despite their being obviously well-intentioned, they are never able to provide Minnie with a true identity. They are unable to say, "Your mother is a black woman, a slave." Time after time, they approach the truth, but are unable to move from silence to the spoken word that would inform Minnie of her history. Genuinely concerned about her well-being, "they shrink from the effect the knowledge would have on her mind." 525 Indeed, the Carpenters are unable to lay a foundation on which Minnie could complete her womanhood, equipped with the knowledge of herself, including her background, on which she could make plans for her future. During a conversation between Thomas and Anna, Thomas says:

524 Harper, p. 29
525 Ibid., p. 31
But we must not forget that Minnie will soon be a young lady; that she is very beautiful, and even now she begins to attract admiration. I do not think it would be right for us to let her marry a white man without letting her know the prejudice of society, and giving her a chance to explain to him the conditions of things.  

Clearly, they love Minnie as if she were their daughter, but they cannot give her a true identity because they are unable to give her a history of herself. Indeed, the Carpenters make a moral statement in that they are active participants in the underground railroad and offer Minnie the love that they had for their deceased daughter; however, only Ellen, the creator—and the destroyer—is capable of bestowing that history, thereby her true identity, onto her daughter, her creation.

As mother-creator, Ellen yet creates another Minnie to whom she simultaneously gives history, voice, and identity. Both mother and daughter seek completion. Historian White says of the relationship between the slave mother and her child "that the mother-child relationship superseded that of husband and wife." Moreover, White continues, "women in their role as mothers were central figures in the nuclear slave family." The grieving Ellen knows that

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526 Ibid., p. 32
527 White, Before Freedom Came, p. 121
528 Ibid.
without the presence of her daughter, she is incomplete.
Also, Minnie feels the need to know the source of her
beginnings. "Silently as she walked by the side of the
stranger [Ellen], a thousand thoughts revolving in her
mind. Was this the solution of the mystery which
enshrouded her young life?" 529 In a discussion about
Minnie, a family friend of many years says, "there seems to
be some mystery about her history. About ten years ago, my
father brought her to Josiah Carpenter's but he's always
been reticent about her." 530

During their imprisonment on the Le Grange plantation,
Minnie and Ellen were silenced. Minnie never verbally
claims St. Pierre as her father. Her actions in the front
yard do so. Ellen is seen speaking only to St. Pierre, her
owner/lover/silencer. In speaking with him, she never uses
the word mother in reference to herself, nor does she use
the phrase "my child." She refers to Minnie as "that
child" 531 and "my darling." 532 She knows that Minnie is St.
Pierre's property and that she has very limited leverage to
assert herself as protector of her child. However, in the
North, the post-bellum Ellen, speaks openly.

In identifying herself as Minnie's mother, Ellen
"illuminates the centrality of language to human
development; those people whose words are heard and

529 Harper, p. 50-51
530 Ibid., p. 36
531 Ibid., p. 19
532 Ibid.
credited attain power both self-empowerment and power over others."533 Certainly, Ellen's identification of Minnie as her daughter in their initial meeting on the street and her later response to Anna Carpenter's concern about her impulsive behavior suggest her power. She tells Anna Carpenter, "But when I saw her and heard the young lady say, Minnie, wait a minute, I forgot everything but that this was my long-lost child."534 Her voice later convinces the morally-sound "Thomas [who] questioned the woman [Ellen] very closely, but her history and narrative corresponded so well with what he had heard of Minnie's mother that he could not for a moment doubt that this was she."535

Ellen does not meet Minnie in the private setting of the Carpenters' home, nor in any other enclosed dwelling that might suggest ownership or control by a superior, outside force. Their meeting takes place in the street, symbolic of the public world. The locus of the meeting gives credence to Ellen's announcement to the public that she lays claim to her daughter. The message to the public is even further intensified by the presence of one of Minnie's schoolmates. Unspoken in Ellen's statements, both to her daughter and later with the Carpenters, is that she claims that which is rightfully hers and, in doing so, she

533 Winter, p. 50
534 Harper, p. 52
535 Ibid., p. 51-52
bestows death on the denied and misplaced identities assigned to her daughter. Once again, as mother/creator/artist, she fashions a new identity for her daughter, based on history, for she alone possesses the history necessary to define Minnie's identity and concurrent in the art of defining, gives both Minnie and herself completion. The two women, Ellen and Minnie, one middle-aged, "about thirty five years old,"\textsuperscript{536} the other young, approximately fifteen,\textsuperscript{537} meet on the street. Ellen, older, wiser, and experienced, having, as historian Paula Giddings writes, "undergone a baptism of fire and emerged intact,"\textsuperscript{538} knows who she is. She carries her identity and history with her. She must give Minnie the history and identity of herself.

As the two women meet, not only is the blood kinship identified and acknowledged, a culture, a history, is simultaneously reborn and acknowledged. Neither Ellen, "the beautiful quadroon,"\textsuperscript{539} nor her daughter Minnie is entirely black. Minnie is fathered by Ellen's white owner, St. Pierre Le Grange. Both women have been wounded. Their African wholeness has been attacked and shattered figuratively and literally by the European male. The two women come to each other as remnants of a fragmented land and culture. The reunion of mother and daughter is the

\textsuperscript{536} Ibid., p. 49
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., p. 32
\textsuperscript{538} Giddings, p. 55
\textsuperscript{539} Harper, p. 22
first step of a process that in its completion will return its victims to a state of wholeness. Ellen's "pale, care-worn face" is the grieving face of Africa, enervated and made pale by the unrelenting attacks on its vitality and its culture. She seeks to reclaim her own. Ellen, the quadroon, represents the remains of a land whose culture has fallen victim to plunder, rapine, and death. The remains are whitened, made pale by the forced infusion of a foreign culture into its culture, so that the oneness becomes divided and polarized. The blackness is whitened, and its vitality is diminished, as is Ellen. The desolation, evidenced by "a sad and weary expression," results not only from the loss of a child, but also because of the loss of its wholeness.

The visible connection to Africa is suggested by Ellen's raven hair. Ironically, as stated previously, Georgiette the slave holder also has raven hair. They are "sisters in bonds." Ellen's raven hair not only suggests the establishment and continuation of the African culture in the United States, but it further represents the distancing of the African culture. It manifests itself in the dispossessed African female, as well as in the effects of the relentless attacks on the African culture, so that when Minnie, the daughter, becomes an adolescent, her hair

540 Ibid., p. 49
541 Harper, p. 50
542 Yellin, Women and Sisters, p. 41
is "golden brown," a decided departure from the color of her mother's hair. Minnie's hair is symbolic not only of the infusion of the seed of the European male into the African female, but also the forced changes in the culture, mores, and traditions of the Africans upon the arrival on American shores, where they were forced to embrace another culture from which they forge their own unique way of life.

It is significant that Carrie Wise, Minnie's white schoolmate at the exclusive girls' school decides to arrange Minnie's hair, the emblem of her beauty, as well as the alleged symbol of her ethnicity. Carrie is disturbed with Minnie's choice of hair styles. Consequently, she decides to rearrange her hair so that Minnie becomes more pleasing in the sight of this young, well-to-do white woman. Carrie's actions imitate the activities of nineteenth-century white feminists who were active in fighting for the liberation of their brothers and sisters in bonds, but who also wanted the black woman to adapt to her lifestyle. Carrie says to Minnie, "Oh, Minnie, do let me fix it [hair] for you!" She continues, "won't you, let me arrange your hair? You always wear it so plain, and I do believe it would curl beautifully." Shortly after, "she had beautifully arranged Minnie's hair with a profusion of curls."

543 Harper, p. 36
544 Ibid., p. 49
545 Ibid.
546 Ibid.
Only after Carrie has changed Minnie's hair to conform with what she deems to be acceptable is she ready to escort Minnie in the public world. Carrie's use of "fix" suggests that she, the nineteenth-century white woman, does not regard her black "sisters in bonds"547 as her equal, but one that must be improved upon and only she is in a position to improve her black sister. In doing so, she attempts to force the black woman to deny her own identity and to assume an artificial identity that she assigns her. Carrie escorts Minnie on the journey that leads to Minnie's identity. When Minnie turns her attentions to Ellen, who has just identified herself as her mother, Carrie responds, "Why Minnie, you are not going to walk down the street with that Nig-colored woman; if you are, please excuse me. My business calls me another way."

With that statement, Carrie, the self-appointed creator, removes herself from Minnie's life. Prompted by the sudden realization that Minnie is the daughter of a black woman, Carrie epitomizes the observation made by historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Abhorrence of slavery was not guarantee that White reformers would accept the Afro-American on equal terms."549

As Ellen and Minnie walk with each other, the healing process that leads to completion on the parts of both women begins. The walk allows Minnie in the company of her

547 Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, p. 41
548 Harper, p. 50
mother, her history, to explore the mystery that has surrounded her past life and the part her companion played in that life. Their walk culminates "at the house of relatives who knew Minnie's history,"\textsuperscript{550} where the Carpenters are visiting. It is significant that Thomas Carpenter informs Minnie of her history, whereas he had been unable to do so earlier. When pressed by Minnie, who is accompanied by Ellen, he says, "I believe there is a small portion of colored blood in thy veins."\textsuperscript{551} Thomas Carpenter, the white male, identifies and announces the sins of the patriarchy. His statement that there is "a small portion" could indicate his belief that Minnie is a child whom he and his wife love and that her ethnicity is of little or no concern to them.

A closer reading suggests that he feels that, unlike Georgiette and more in keeping with Mrs. Le Fevre, that Minnie is human and of equal standing with all other humans. Yet another reading shows that the sins committed in the private sphere are no longer hidden there. The initial step toward the exposure and elimination of these sins should be undertaken at the site on which they occurred, the private sphere. Moreover, they should be denounced by the patriarch, here, in the form of the morally-sound Thomas Carpenter. Situated in the North, he exposes the sins committed by his slaveholding brothers of

\textsuperscript{550} Harper, p. 51
\textsuperscript{551} Ibid.
the South. Again, the ex-slave mother and her mulatto child stand before the patriarch, awaiting his confirmation that not only do they exist and are a part of his life, but that he makes some move toward acceptance and atonement. Thomas Carpenter shows his concern for Ellen, the slave mother of his adopted daughter by being "willing to give her the shelter of his home, till he could make other arrangements."$^{552}$ Later, "on Monday morning Anna and Thomas left, . . . taking Minnie and her mother along."$^{553}$

As stated earlier, Ellen gives Minnie her true identity. History and identity are extended to and accepted by Minnie when she "turned her eyes tenderly towards Ellen and said, 'Mother...'."$^{554}$ The journey between mother and daughter is completed, suggestive of the forcible breach between Africa and her lost daughters, symbolized by the two estranged women, both born in America. However, one, because she is older and carries raven hair, her visible connection with Africa is more closely representative of the continent that mourns and seeks to reunite itself with her daughter, symbolized by Minnie, who has visibly been deprived of the closeness of the mother land, as evidenced by her "golden brown"$^{555}$ hair and her fair coloring.

$^{552}$ Ibid., p. 52  
$^{553}$ Ibid.  
$^{554}$ Ibid., p. 53  
$^{555}$ Ibid., p. 36
When the two meet, they merge to forge a new black woman, largely created by Ellen, who is strengthened by the knowledge of her history, nurtured by her fellow female slave sisters who shared her suffering and provided her with protection from the physical and psychological bettering from forces outside her culture, forces that attempted to deprive her of her humanity while simultaneously assigning her an identity that relegated her to the ranks of an animal. Emerging from these circumstances, she finds and uses her voice, one that rises from an independent black woman, as evidenced in Minnie's later stance on black women's rights. Her strength is acknowledged by her husband Louis, who says, "Why darling, . . . I shall begin to believe that you are a strong-minded woman."556

Minnie's hair had been a source of aggravation for Georgiette, who ordered that it be cropped so that Minnie and Ellen would realize Minnie is "like the other little niggers."557 Carrie Wise rearranges Minnie's hair in order to make her more in keeping with the image of the nineteenth-century white woman. All attempts are to no avail. Ellen, the historian and creator, makes the final adjustment to Minnie's hair558 while symbolically putting the finishing touches on her creation, thereby completing

556 Ibid., p. 79
557 Ibid., p. 16
558 Ibid., p. 53
her quest to not only free her daughter from slavery while making a moral statement in protest of the sins committed against the female slave in the private sphere, but also endow her daughter with completion, a history of herself that would grant to her a future upon which to build her life as a new black woman.
CONCLUSION

"Black women and white women were sisters under the oppression of white men in whose houses they both lived as servants."

Barbara Omolade

The nineteenth-century woman in America, be she white, bondswoman, or free black, faced obstacles that defined and controlled her from birth to death. These obstacles, designed and implemented by the patriarchy, invaded every aspect of her life. In the home, she was under the complete domination of the male. She was not allowed to express thought that might run counter to those held by members of the patriarchy. Ostensibly, such control was wielded in order to protect the allegedly fragile, childlike female, whom the patriarchy deemed incapable of fending for herself. Such protection, in many instances, reduced the female to a constant level of puppet-like mindless dependency on the patriarch, the puppeteer. She was consigned to live forever as the innocuous birdie or vapid dewdrop, existing only by permission of a superior force. The female, so overwhelmed by the pervasive power of the patriarch, on far too many occasions relinquished her rights to herself in terms of mind, body, and spirit. She either "dropped and faded away" or descended into

559 Ibid., p. 10
She either "dropped and faded away"\textsuperscript{559} or descended into madness, as did the hapless victim in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." They—like the blacks of that period with whom many of them eventually formed a sense of kinship, a symbiotic relationship, which allowed them to join forces against a common foe, the patriarchy—were denied the opportunity to gain political skills and pursue intellectual growth.

These forces, the patriarchy in all its myriad forms and degrees, felt that the attainment and practice of such activities would allow the female to gain knowledge that would challenge and, perhaps, dethrone the king of the castle, for indisputably the patriarch was king of all he surveyed. His posture toward the female asserting herself in matters other than those initiated and, subsequently, almost universally embraced by the patriarchy was that such activities were subversive challenges. Similarly, when Master Auld orders his wife to cease teaching his young slave Frederick Douglass how to read, saying "If you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell,"\textsuperscript{560} his censure also applied to the nineteenth-century woman's attempts to divorce herself from the dominance of the patriarchy in her attempts to establish her personhood politically, socially, intellectually, morally, and economically.

\textsuperscript{559} Ibid., p. 10
\textsuperscript{560} Douglass, \textit{Narrative}, p. 274
The male-controlled church offered her neither protection nor solace, for her roles in that institution were also defined by the formidable, well-entrenched patriarchy which used the Bible as justification for the inequitable treatment of the female, who they defined as God’s help-meet placed here to be in subjection to her husband in all matters\textsuperscript{561}. Certainly, she had negligible, if any, legal rights or recourses for the attainment of such rights, for the law was also established and dispensed by the patriarchy; once again, she was rendered powerless.

The female was regarded as being responsible for the morals of the home. The development and maintenance of a morally strong family was held to be tantamount to ensuring, by extension, a morally strong nation. However, even in this tenant of family life, the private sphere, she was allowed limited opportunity to establish and maintain a moral code that encompassed all aspects of life in the home, especially that part that concerned sexual behavior. In this respect, the patriarch adamantly maintained his unquestionable and unquestioned rights to behave as he so desired, notwithstanding the grief that subsequently resulted from his behavior.

Seeking an avenue by which to escape from such circumstances, the nineteenth-century white female recognized and seized the benefits of allying herself with

\textsuperscript{561} Genesis 3, I Peter 3
the cause of the slave. In part, she achieved her autonomy by joining the slave in his struggle for freedom, mainly mounting a campaign based on the moral ground that slavery and its attendant woes and horrors were wrong. In fighting for the freedom of the slave, both overtly and covertly, in both the private and public spheres, she moved toward gaining rights for herself, as well as rights for others. During the fight, she also established a new moral code.

The female slave also played a role in establishing a moral code. She, undoubtedly more so than her white "sisters in bonds," had the need to do so. For, not only was she dominated by the creator of her slave world, within that world of enforced silence on her part, she was assigned to the sub-human ranks of an animal, valued only for its labor and the ability to give birth to other slaves to be used for the continued financial gain of the slaveholder(s). Lydia Maria Child, an abolitionist mentioned earlier in this study, observes in "An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans" that

> The Negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame, no regard for the feelings of husband or parent; they must be

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562 Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, p. 41
entirely subservient to the will of their owner, on pain of being whipped as near unto death as will comport with his interests, or quite to death if it suit his pleasure.\textsuperscript{563}

Historian Barbara Omolade, in reflecting on the patriarch's all-consuming access to the body of the female slave writes that

for every part of the black woman was used by him. To him she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labor where she was forced to work with men and work like man. Her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family as a domestic servant whether she was technically enslaved or legally free. Her vagina, used for his sexual pleasure, was the gateway to the womb, which was his place of capital investment—the capital investment being the sex act, and the resulting child the accumulated surplus, worth money in the slave market.\textsuperscript{564}

\textsuperscript{563} Kellow, p. 107
with white women; however, as pointed out earlier in this study, racism eventually divided these sisters under siege. The black woman continued, oftentimes united with other black women who had also been at pharoah's beck and call. Together, these no longer silent black women developed voice and in doing so developed and practiced a moral code, the application of which protected them from being obtained by the men, both black and white, who would seek methods to control and/or exploit them.


18. Garfield, Deborah M. "Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."


