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The Metonym of Edenic Masculinity: Depictions of Male-Male Rape in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Property

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THE METONYM OF EDENIC MASCULINITY:
DEPICTIONS OF MALE-MALE RAPE IN
INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL AND PROPERTY

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by
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Abstract

Health advocate Michael Scarce describes the sexual abuse of men as “a crime without a history,” pointing to the treatment of raped men as shocking aberrations as an element in the stigma attached to the crime’s victims. The presentation of male-male rape as rare and shocking, he proposes, may be what engenders such silence on the subject, perpetuating the absence of such a history. Even in writing about American slavery, in which the sexual exploitation of women is more freely acknowledged, few historic attestations and fewer literary accounts of the rape of men exist. Those rare accounts which do exist, then, offer vital evidence of nineteenth-century ideologies about bodies and sexualities.

In this paper, I explore the complicated subject-positions within hierarchies of race, sexuality, and gender which two female authors – one a nineteenth-century escaped slave, one a twenty-first-century novelist – adopt for themselves and impose upon the men involved in forced sexual encounters between white slaveowners and black slaves in the American South. The authors of a well-known slave narrative, Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and a recent neo-slave novel speaking back to the slave narrative tradition, Valerie Martin’s *Property*, dismiss the figure of the rapacious black male that haunted the racist imagination. Each looks instead to tropes of romantic primitivism and proposes an alternate reading of the black male body oppressed by race and gender structures. Relying upon Hortense Spillers’ accounts of the metonymic figures which constitute the hegemonic paradigm of blackness under strictly categorized ethnic systems, I highlight a separate silencing in which anthropological concepts and

Biblical ones are appropriated to create a new metonym of black masculinity. In doing so, I explore Victorian concepts of the body in order to illuminate a moment in the ideological history of sexual exploitation.

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Introduction

American authors Harriet Jacobs and Valerie Martin write nearly a century and a half apart. Jacobs, an escaped African-American slave composing an autobiographical narrative, wrote a canonical piece of nonfiction in the tradition from which Valerie Martin, the white writer of a slim neo-slave novel, later drew her subject matter. Their work is altogether different in scope and plot, but each author portrays realities of the United States' grim traditions of enslavement and explores how gender impacts the institution's horrors. From this narrative and novel come the majority of the scant literature portraying homosexual encounters between white masters and black slaves. Such encounters have been historically attested, despite their rarity in first-person accounts and in the fictional narratives that operate in the same tradition. Though much more criticism has focused on "the extent to which American national consciousness depends upon the sexual violation of black women" and "that slavery, for women, must have entailed ... sexual exploitation" (V. Smith 172; S. Smith 193), historian Thomas A. Foster suggests that the rape of enslaved men and boys lies "hidden in plain sight" within the historical record (448). He notes primary document evidence from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth attesting to "sodomy" or "unnatural" relations between white men and black slaves, usually household servants (453, 446). Some evidence also lends itself to speculation that light-skinned black men in particular were later sexually prized, in a manner similar to the (presumably male) participation in a more established fetish market in lighter-skinned women (449). "Indeed," Foster notes, "the unlikelihood that such cases [involving male victims] would have been documented at all suggests that it

would be safe to say that, regardless of location and time period, no enslaved man would have been safe from sexual abuse,” a category in which he includes coerced encounters with enslaved women as well as the direct rape of men and boys by white men and women (448). Still, literary accounts of these assaults are almost as limited as historical ones.

In the literary tradition,¹ most such accounts are buried in subtext. Abdur-Rahman, for instance, finds allusions to the sexualized dominance of the white male body over the black male body in the autobiographical writings of Frederick Douglass (228). Jacobs, however, deals with the subject in language that, though oblique, in comparison borders on the explicit, and her autobiographical work’s fictional echo, unbound by the respectability politics which Jacobs had to navigate, is far blunter in presenting an ideologically similar account of the same unacknowledged historical fact. In Martin’s novel, *Property*, a scene of violation viewed through a telescope is horribly unsurprising to the narrator. Jacobs’ account of a rape in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is also viewed from a distance; metaphorical lenses of second-hand anecdote, coupled with a characteristic use of dialect that reinforces class distinction, permit the narrator to focus on an account of rape in order to further her account of moral degradation. Her distance

¹ Under “the literary tradition,” I include both the autobiographical form of the slave narrative and the fictional form of the neo-slave novel, represented by *Incidents* and *Property* respectively. I justify this odd pairing of sources because a.) I am tracing an ideology about a historical fact, not the historical fact itself, and each of these types of text makes a contribution to the same literary mode of knowing about black men, and b.) the slave narrative is possessed of more generic fluidity than the formalized nature of nineteenth-century contributions to the genre makes it appear, justifying a similar fluidity in criticism (see Phillip Gould, “The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative”). Similar parallels might be profitably drawn between, say, *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*.

from the situation, despite its similarities to her own sexual abuse, serves as a metaphorical telescope that lets her analyze the event from a relatively safer (though still threatened) position, much as Martin's narrator does.

Historical moments defined by exploitation based on gender and sexuality (categories which are not neatly separable in accounts of the nineteenth century) tend to result from or be affected by an intense social preoccupation with categories of race and ethnicity. The drive to categorize, to display, and to understand absorbed scientific attention in the second half of the century, including attention specifically to sexual behavior and the structures of genitalia thought to be common to particular racial "types." Even before the peak of sexual specimen-hunting at the end of the nineteenth century, knowledge of the erotic coexisted with an erotics of knowledge. To know bodies was to exert power over them, to stand in a position of sexualized dominance over the now-known body, and the sexologist and the colonialist worked hand in hand toward this goal. This may account for the centuries-old stereotype of black men having larger genitalia, which historian Thomas A. Foster points out was commonplace at least by the seventeenth century, among women as well as men; to know this "fact" was to exert power over the black body that compensated for perceived physical superiority. Gender and sexuality, then, were explicitly categorized as part of the impulse to understand and exploit the notion of race. As Hortense Spillers notes in her landmark study of assumptions about gender under the system of ethnic othering, these are moments in which "symbolic paradigms ... confirm the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements" (66). *Trans-Atlantic Anglophone*

literature of the mid-nineteenth century reflects a re-categorization of the social idea of the natural, particularly in terms of race and sexuality. Though Jacobs' narrative and Martin's novel are samples of technically different genres, they operate in a shared tradition of representing the racially marked body within the regime of slavery; moreover, both authors engage in a complex layering of the tropes used to understand gender, sex, and race, constructing the figures they describe within a network of archetypes and metonyms that speak societal beliefs about the nature of each category – and sometimes all three categories at once.

I argue that the encounters staged in Jacobs' and Martin's work, as rare examples of explicit or semi-explicit discussion of homosexual² encounters in this topical area of literature, invoke sufficiently similar tropes to offer an understanding of the developing nineteenth-century attitude toward queerness, as well as its relationship to race. That attitude figures queerness as a function of illicit knowledge, literalizing the delicate archaism which makes the verb “to know” a reference to sexual activity. I wish to shed light on the systems of classification of the body which developed in the nineteenth century by exploring moments where “to know” non-normatively – that is, to engage in or experience queered encounters between bodies – overlaps with the experience of “knowing” a body as racially othered. Loci of “heightened surveillance of bodies in a racially segregated culture,” as intersectional scholar Siobhan B. Somerville argues,

² In this discussion, I use the word “homosexual” advisedly to mean a sexual encounter between two people of the same binary gender, acknowledging that the word is problematic in this context, as it assumes categorizations which are identity-driven and historically anachronistic. I use the words “queer” and “queerness” in what is simultaneously the narrowest and the broadest sense, to mean a non-heteronormative position in a gender hierarchy or sexual encounter.

“demanded a specific kind of logic, which ... gave coherence to the new concepts of homo- and heterosexuality.” Under slavery, an extreme form of ethnic othering, sexual and cultural metonyms that purport to describe humanity come markedly into play.

Ways of representing blackness, manhood, and sexuality make certain assumptions based on those metonyms. The normative approach, supported by scientific racism and popular discourse, assumed the black male as rapacious, possessed of rampant sexual appetites and unable to control the urge to act upon them. The approach taken by Jacobs and re-adopted by Martin instead figures the “natural” state of a black male as fundamentally innocent and even sexually naïve, the native of an imagined Africa which bears an uncanny resemblance to the Christian conception of the garden of Eden and represents a more primal way of being human. Simultaneous with sexual innocence, black men are represented as the potential patriarchs of domestic nuclear family units, which are figured as the basic social units of that primal, Edenic childhood of humankind. The Victorian type of the “degenerate,” a sexually corrupt, sinfully syphilitic anathema unto the domestic, collides sharply with the figure of the innocent “primitive” who stands for a primal, undeveloped version of mankind. Each subject-position, then, is figured as an extreme case of the types assumed by the common nineteenth-century belief that civilization is a quality that progresses from an animalistic nadir to a pinnacle embodied in the ideal citizen of a nation in colonial power. Jacobs and Martin evade notions of the bestial “primitive,” but they acknowledge the narrative itself, substituting a romantic “primitive” which is equally Orientalizing but refuses to acknowledge the superiority of normative racial status on which the narrative using a bestial “primitive” insists.

Normative Primitivism: Black Men Represented as Rapacious

A sense that those figured as culturally “primitive” were also sexually naïve, sexually bestial, or both was quite explicit in nineteenth-century discourse. Sander L. Gilman notes that features of this narrative were common in travelogues as far back as the Middle Ages, when cultures were characterized in terms of incest and naïve depravity in the same breath as skin color, making the concept of “less-developed” peoples among whom rapaciousness was the norm a commonplace notion by the eighteenth century (81). Further, Gilman has convincingly illustrated that depictions of a certain undressed innocence in young women of color is powerfully associated with both normative sensuality and licentiousness of white figures in Western art traditions (83). In this atmosphere of speculation about “primitive” sexualities, Richard Burton could in 1886 theorize a “Sotadic zone in which climate is seen to facilitate pathological love,” an Orientalizing concept that figured the British understanding of homosexuality as integrally tied to “national and racial authenticity” (Hoad). Thus, by long tradition, the essentially racist viewpoint that gave rise to the idea of “undeveloped,” animalistic cultures is inextricable from the concept of “the sexual as the very ground or foundation of the subject's truth,” which Christopher Craft finds in autobiographical works of the 1890s (2). This conflation of the racial other and the sexual subaltern, well represented in the arts by 1800 and reiterated *ad infinitum* during the nineteenth century, sheds light on Victorian attitudes toward the marked body as a whole. Such confluences account for the habit of ascribing racially marked characteristics to queered bodies and non-normative sexual characteristics to racially othered bodies which would become definitive of the

nineteenth century's end (Gilman 123). Gilman makes it clear that such attitudes may be found before the *fin de siècle*, however – and I contend that they are found couched in language which is more romanticizing than many of the later examples. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, “The developmental fact that, as Freud among others has shown, even the naming of sexuality as such is always retroactive in relation to most of the sensations and emotions that constitute it, is *historically* important” (15, emphasis in original). In other words, the vitality of this process in the 1890s and 1920s need not obscure earlier authors’ similar, if less concrete, negotiations of cultural discourses. Indeed, one of the benefits of pairing *Incidents* with a fictional text that evokes these notions so self-consciously is to underline the importance of Jacobs’ narrative as a nuanced, even perhaps historically precocious, discussion of identities intersecting. The “sensations and emotions” that would constitute the birth of named and categorized sexualities in the memoirs published a few decades later already appear in the layered gender performativities of a slave narrative (and reappear in a neo-slave novel). These “sensations and emotions,” then, take shape amidst primitivist ideologies that begin the work of figuring bodies in disquieting sexual circumstances as bodies definitively queer.

The circumstances which Martin and Jacobs portray, however, queer the bodies involved in a way that markedly departs from familiar Victorian tropes of black bodies and black sexuality. The tendency of dominant cultural narratives in the United States to attribute male-male sexual aggression to men of color is well-documented. Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman has convincingly highlighted how the nineteenth-century development of categories of sexual difference coincided with the development of categories of racial

difference, identifying an important intellectual moment that solidified the myth of black men's rapaciousness and perversion (224). As societal concepts of queerness and race solidified, one kind of deviation from the (white, heterosexual) norm was conflated with another, and the hegemonic European conclusion was that "Africans were sexual savages who had not undergone the disciplining regulation that civilization entails" (Abdur-Rahman 224). The simultaneous codification of these areas of difference accounts in part for persistent racist beliefs about homosexuality, especially the idea that men of color are more likely to rape. These beliefs, it seems, are deeply seated; they led a New York Criminal Court judge in the 1980s to excuse convicted defendants from prison sentences on the grounds that whiteness ("color, and ethnic background") made them targets for assault by African American and Latino prisoners – even though the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that, where and when data is available, men of color are consistently about twice as likely to be sexually victimized in prisons (qtd. in Sargent 131-2; Beck et al. 6, 27). A hundred years earlier, the same rhetoric may be found in accounts of rape³ where no interracial component was present, though an inter-religious transgression was vital to the narrative and reflects a similar drive to categorize. The case of the Ganda martyrs of 1886, about thirty young men who were burned alive as a punishment for refusing to engage in sex with or at the command of their king, Mwanga, received rabid

³ Neville Hoad points out that narratives that posit the following example as rape or even as sex are invariably viewed through colonial eyes, which complicates a reading of the situation in ways he admirably deconstructs from various critical standpoints. Nonetheless, these events were ideologically perceived as the threat of male-male rape by the immediate descendants of those who built the atmosphere in which Harriet Jacobs wrote, and it is this perception which I claim developed in part from the attitude that Jacobs presents and Martin mirrors.

interest in newspapers bringing tales of missionaries in Africa to a British public. Neville Hoad has traced how a focus on Mwanga as “racially other, ornamented like a woman, and given over to unnameable sexual acts” characterized him as “either dandy or savage, the sexual proclivities of either being up for grabs at this historical juncture.” The blackness of all the players in the Ganda martyrs’ drama would have been assumed, but the racialized characteristics of Mwanga’s body received attention commensurate with the assumption that racialized characteristics and sexual perversion went “naturally” hand in hand. In short, a more racially othered body was assumed to be a more sexually “unnatural” one.

To employ these tropes of rapacious blackness would be fatal to either Martin's or Jacobs' point. In doing so, they would position themselves as apologists for slavery by portraying black men as creatures of appetite in need of control, a position which is self-evidently not tenable for either author. Instead, and correctly, these authors reject the myth of oversexed blackness and lay blame for a homosexual rape with the rape's perpetrator. However, each *speaker* is then placed in a difficult position. Martin's Manon and Jacobs' Linda are heavily invested in maintaining a position of normative femininity aligned with nineteenth-century ideals of chastity; to do otherwise would threaten their class status, with potentially devastating consequences. A large part of each book's rhetoric is dedicated to the maintenance of such status. Jacobs, through Linda, builds a damning case for slavery's corrosive effect on the morals of otherwise pure black women (and in doing so, auditions for the posthumous approval of the chaste grandmother who blamed her for her own assault). Manon, possessed of more standard

race and class privilege, dwells on the more refined upper-class sensibilities that make her husband's coarse behavior (including his rape of their slaves) so offensive to her. To be normatively sexed and gendered subject, each female speaker must embrace a narrative of homosexual behavior as aberrant, even unthinkable.

Once so much effort has been spent on establishing the avoidance of rape as a mark of successful normative gender performance, both authors are left without a means of representing black men who are victims of rape. Biologically-driven rapaciousness of the “primitive” man is not a tenable position because of its implications for black sexuality in general, which would destabilize Linda Brent's performance of genteel femininity (and, on an authorial level, undercut Martin's central point that Sarah, a black woman who is forced to reproduce with Gaudet, is not more culpable in her victimization than Manon, who has the resources to avoid it). On the other hand, normative participation in the gender-class system is impossible for the male victims due to their exploitation along both axes. Permanent objects of the gaze under the hegemony of ethnicity, black men are male but not masculine in a meaningful, self-determined sense; Spillers, while not insisting on a binary gender system as a reality or a goal, notes that such a system is simply not available to subjects who are forced into the sensual subjectivity of the Other (66). The authors, then, cannot present the black men they portray as normatively masculine while they are oppressed by a system of race-based domination. Furthermore, the *speakers* cannot acknowledge black men as fully realized masculine subjects without threatening the few loci of protection from subalternity that the system affords to Manon and Linda. With both normative and supernormative

paradigms of sexuality closed to them, a third option for the portrayal of black men and black male sexuality becomes necessary.

Romantic Primitivism: Black Men Represented as the Children of Paradise

Surprisingly, the nature of the third option available to the authors may be found as a narrative move in the account of a black man who *is* (contingently) afforded normative, patriarchal masculinity. The *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* provides a move from one overdetermined form of masculinity to an equally overdetermined one which is less normative – and, to narrators like Linda and Manon who are both victims of gender patriarchy and partial beneficiaries of class discourse, perhaps deeply appealing. At the beginning of the narrative which would become so well known in Britain, Henry “Box” Brown is stripped of his own paternal role within a heterosexual family unit – a wife and three children for whom he is the material provider, but who are sold to another owner in his absence. Being denied the ability to protect wives and female family members – or obliged to participate in the rape of female acquaintances – is one of the better-documented forms of sexual exploitation of male slaves, and also served as a trespass upon the patriarchal role which, it was felt, had been granted by nature to the male (Foster). After this violation of his paternity, Brown chooses to escape from slavery by packing and mailing himself to Philadelphia, an inventive method which he would earn

the censure of Frederick Douglass for publicizing. He is described by his amanuensis⁴, Charles Stearns, in the Preface to his narrative as a modern-day Lazarus:

How much more astonishing seemed the birth of Mr. Brown, as he “came forth” from a box ... and what greater joy thrilled through the wondering witnesses, as the lid was removed from the travelling carriage of our friend's electing, and straightway arose therefrom a living man, a being made in God's own image, a son of Jehovah, whom the piety and republicanism of this nation had doomed to pass through this terrible ordeal, before the wand of the goddess of liberty could complete his transformation from a slave to a free man! (Brown and Stearns viii)

After twenty-seven hours folded into the fetal position (and sometimes upside down) in the womb of the famously three-foot-long box, Brown is described as being born; as “a being made in God’s own image, a son of Jehovah,” he is issued a new patriarchal origin when he is delivered. Stearns thus renders the abolitionists of Philadelphia as the midwives of Brown’s rebirth into freedom, which restores him to a relatively uncorrupted masculinity by co-opting another discourse: the romantic primitivism that characterized Africa as an earthly Eden.

The romantic element of primitivist discourse gave a gloss of nostalgia to its language – a nostalgia appealing to the sentimentalist tradition in which nineteenth-century slave narratives came to operate (Gould 13) – without removing its

⁴ In the slave narrative tradition, the amanuensis is the (usually white) patron who provides editorial paratext affirming the truth of a first-person narrative and the reliability of the author. It was often necessary for the authors of slave narratives to locate such an amanuensis in order to secure publication. In the nineteenth century, notable white abolitionists often served in this role. For instance, Lydia Maria Child served the role of amanuensis for Jacobs.

fundamentally racist and infantilizing reliance on the idea of the “primitive” as such. For abolitionists in particular, “the allure of the exotic” was fused with the performativity of pity, mingling deeply-felt religious ideals of charity toward the oppressed with a veneration of the disrupted home (Gould 21). However, while the abolitionist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was fundamentally humanist, re-appropriating the ideals of John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers to reassert a universal right to non-enslavement, the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century was just as fundamentally Christian. To avoid a literal profession of Phillis Wheatley’s perhaps ironic piety in proclaiming, “’Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,” the evangelical motive for slavery had to be discounted amidst the exhaustive evidence of cruelty which was then so essential to the slave narrative genre. Fortunately for the abolitionist, the Christian narrative of salvation furnished another state of grace which could be ascribed to the African who had not been enslaved: that of the denizen of paradise, “unsaved,” but not in need of saving. Further, “the imperialist (and evolutionist) trope of identifying Africa as Europe’s childhood” was well established, furnishing an easy mental alliance between romantic concepts of the child and concepts of the “primal” state of man (Hoad). Africa, then, became romanticized in the abolitionist tradition. Ignorance was still a feature of the “Pagan land” in their conception, as it was in other notions of the “primitive,” but in these presentations the ignorance was that of the sinless child. Since individual resistance and “discursive attacks” against the structures of slavery by runaway slaves served as gestures allying enslaved people with an African nationalism (Scott 296), that nationalism became partly

defined by a discursive embrace of heteronormative and Edenic imagery, an embrace in which formerly enslaved people and white abolitionists collaborated. Africa became a rhetorically useful garden of paradise characterized by innocence and heterosexual love – then cruelly plundered.

Stories like Brown's speak to the power that this tale of corrupted innocence held over the abolitionist imagination, but though it was so useful to the nineteenth-century abolitionist, this tale did not originate there. The Edenic nature of Africa and, by extension, people of African descent, appears in some of the earliest surviving trans-Atlantic slave narratives. These presentations, interestingly enough, are also frequently grounded in the heteronormative nuclear family unit, adding the weight of a religious and mythic narrative to the social force of a black father like Brown's claim to normativity. In her 1783 petition to receive a pension from the estate of her owner, Belinda Royall described Africa as an uncultivated earthly paradise of “mountains Covered with spicy forests, the valleys loaded with the richest fruits, spontaneously produced” (Medford Historical Society). The Edenic trope of land that provides ample food in the absence of agricultural labor is introduced almost immediately in this brief but eloquent document. The narrative goes on to describe the child Belinda “in a sacred grove, with each hand in that of a tender Parent . . . paying her devotions to the great Orisa who made all things.” The document assumes an audience familiar with the idea of a worshipful family unit in a sacred garden, making a bid for the attention of a Christian reader with imagery whose centrality indicates that Belinda (and her probable amanuensis) were quite aware of the Edenic themes they were presenting. While, contrary to common interpretations, African

diasporic religions do tend to have a patriarchal ruling figure in their pantheons, Belinda allows the reader to assume a monotheism which was not in fact a feature of the Ghanaian culture to which Royall's description points (Medford Historical Society). Royall demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of world religions in her choices within this brief passage. She would have learned the Yoruban word "orisa" from slaves who had been taken in other parts of the continent, and as American historian Peter Kolchin points out, the presence of a patriarchal primary god who rules over the other spirits of a pantheon is a consistent feature of African religions which provided slaves with a point of common cultural background (42). Whether she had emerged with a syncretic understanding that the great Orisa and the Judeo-Christian God were one (a conceivable result), or is simply choosing the notes that will ring true to a Christian ear, Belinda exhibits her nuanced understanding of this religious mix and its ethical weight when she privileges the (rather culturally unlikely) church-like, place-based worship of a single god. This Christianized appeal is furthered by the presentation of young Belinda as the most precious result of a heteronormative union, placed proudly between her parents with a hand held by each. Her imagery conjures up a vision of uncorrupted normativity – a normativity which, until violence intrudes upon the grove, is removed from the wages of sin.

Philip Gould describes Belinda Royall's portrayal of her family as one of the earliest instances of abolitionist political writing's continuing focus on "the sentimental drama of the slave trade's disruption of the African home," a heterosexual and patriarchal institution within an earthly Eden (13). Gould further places such writings within the

nineteenth century's "pseudo-scientific theories about racial difference, which were related to the fields of natural history, ethnology, and phrenology ... [and] reveal racial condescension that often takes the form of romantic primitivism" (25). Olaudah Equiano provides another text exemplary of the family drama which sentimentally describes the theft of the young black male from a land in which orderly familial descent and harmony with nature are his ultimate origin. His homeland of Essaka, "a charming fruitful vale," is similarly portrayed in his 1789 trans-Atlantic narrative, as Equiano describes great penalties for infidelity due to the sacredness of marriage in his society and is careful to explain its hierarchies of gender (5-17). Like Royall's, "Equiano's description of home inevitably represents European concerns, thereby expressing the interconnectedness of African and Western destinies" (Sinanan 66). Among those concerns, again, are a sense that Africa is a place where simple, predictable families live simple, predictable lives amidst abundant groves – that is, paradise conveniently resembles the European familial ideal.⁵

The 1795 *Dying Confession of Pomp*, an example from the related genre of the criminal narrative, approaches the same idea somewhat differently. Pomp presents himself as an Edenic innocent because, after committing a murder, he "did not try to

⁵ Even narratives which were less charitable toward the African birthplace, often in service of a larger plot of spiritual awakening, display this tendency. See James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, whose 1770 slave narrative Gould calls "arguably the first narrative that directly addresses the evils of slavery" (15), but whose autobiography remains more of a spiritual Bildungsroman than a political text. Though he differs from Royall with the rather more unlikely implication that his people have no idea who their object of worship is (3-4), his similar worshippers are as without knowledge of good and evil as though the Fall of Man, a tenet of European Christian religion, had never occurred in Africa; here, too, heterosexuality and patriarchal reproduction are comfortably assured.

escape not knowing that there was any necessity of it.” Free at the time of the murder from the knowledge of evil, he afterward becomes a Christian, having discovered “the calm, but irrefutable ire ... of offended Justice, and of Heaven.” This portrayal of a state of innocence interrupted is also prefaced with imagery of the heteronormative family that preexists slavery: the *Dying Confession* begins with three-month-old Pomp’s arrival in Boston in the arms of both parents, a perfect expression of heterosexual affection and normative reproduction rooted in Africa until the institution of slavery dismantles the heteronormative paradise. As with Belinda, “universalizing rhetorics of desire and identity,” chiefly involving status within the nuclear family, are used to sublimate the reader’s consciousness of cultural difference into a sense of human commonality as children of an African Eden (Hoad). The child of “Europe’s childhood,” Pomp becomes the reader’s symbolic younger brother, taking on a metonymic position as the less knowledgeable because less developed and less matured – the definitive innocent of the romanticized “primitive” origin.

Martin and Jacobs find their third option for the portrayal of black men by appropriating these discourses of the romantic “primitive.” They position both the willing and the unwilling participants in sexual dissidence as subjects warped by a violation of the progression which primitivism portrays as the natural fate of humans: from an innocent, Edenic state to a wise, civilized state. Instead, they posit forced male-male encounters as a collision between the extreme of the primitive, a figure of total childlike innocence, and the extreme of the civilized, a figure on the brink of becoming the archetypal degenerate. It is this narrative which both authors provide as an alternative

to the myth of the rapacious black male, even when the bonds of patriarchy and paternity are unavailable as a safer role for a figure whose gender, under the hegemony of ethnicity, becomes Spillers' "metonymic figure" for a way of being a black man.

The Edenic Metonym in Literary Rapes

One of the most detailed anecdotes of a minor character in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* comes toward the end of the book, when Linda moves back in time to tell the tale of Luke. A great deal of unpleasant implication is packed into this simply-told tale. Luke is the property of a man with a son and a daughter; left to the son after his owner's death, he ends up as the (apparently sole) caretaker for a young man disabled by venereal disease. This new owner exhibits incredible physical cruelty. Luke is described as being whipped across his back ("for the most trivial occurrence, he would order his attendant to bare his back" [178]); however, Linda mentions in the next sentence that his owner requires him to wear nothing but a shirt for ease of punishment, indicating that it is Luke's lower body being subject to abuse. The contradiction is obvious, but probably intended to maintain plausible deniability as to the subject matter; given her autobiographical mouthpiece's self-presentation as a woman of natural delicacy obliged to speak of the abysmally inappropriate, this would not be uncharacteristic for Jacobs. When Linda leaves the South, the last she knows of Luke is that he remains "still chained to the bedside of this cruel and disgusting wretch" (179). However, he eventually escapes, and they briefly meet in the North.

Some of Linda's discomfort with this story, which is told in objectively vague but comparatively quite suggestive terms, seems to come from the troubled roles occasioned by the master's physical helplessness and by the unsettlingly liminal status of the corporeal relations it occasions. "The fact that he was entirely dependent on Luke's care, and was obliged to be tended like an infant," she reports, "instead of inspiring any gratitude or compassion towards his poor slave, seemed only to increase his irritability and cruelty" (179). The dynamic in which Luke is obliged to participate mimics the gender roles of the idealized domestic sphere, still-extant gender roles which Brian Phillip Harper nicely explicates in his interdisciplinary analysis of heterosexual, homosexual, and interracial kissing. According to Harper's analysis of Western ideology regarding normative romantic relationships, the male figure at the moment of the kiss is retroactively ascribed the power both to have protected his female partner and to have rendered her "utterly moved" (210). By instead "utterly moving" Luke – and doing so through pain, humiliation, distress, and total domination rather than through the meeting of mouths – while still requiring physical protection in the "wrong" gender arrangement, the master enacts a savage mockery of idealized heterosexual affection. Luke, feminized, cannot remove himself from the situation, as Abdur-Rahman remarks that he may be "chained to the bedside" figuratively, literally, or both, and Jacobs' intended meaning is ambiguous (233).

More implications of the Edenic metonym for black manhood emerge with the realization that the white owner who so utterly fails to inherit his father's status as patriarch is also, though in a different sense, "chained," confined by his disability to a

sphere in which only the innocent black male body is available to him. While Jacobs figures the owner as a dissolute sinner from the start, she also renders his intense association with Luke as a cause for the worsening of his vice; Linda's assertion that "he took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism" indicates that his ideas for subjecting Luke to degrading service were constantly refreshed. As an Edenic male, Luke's desexualized presence complicates and destroys the potential vestiges of normative sexuality in the white male.

Thomas A. Foster notes that the eighteenth-century development of American masculinity ideals defined the successful performance of manliness through three characteristics. These were "the establishment of a household, the securing of a calling or career, and the self-control over one's masculine comportment," tenets so central to the growing American norms that men who fulfilled them "have only relatively recently been examined as gendered subjects" (1). Achievement through successful gender performance according to these three conditions was a structure that this patriarchy posited as natural. Since romantic primitivism posts the "primitive" as the pure and natural state, absent the maturing qualities of civilization, these norms must therefore have been seen as developmentally important in Edenic gender as in American gender structures. It is already apparent that each of the three conditions was denied to black men in general, as the moments at which each possibility vanishes and is reinstated may be identified as important moments in the narratives of enslaved men. Brown loses the power to organize his household, but is restored to a normative family structure as a "son of Jehovah" when reborn from the box. Pomp cannot select his own career, but is denied

the chance to grow into one by the structure of slavery; yet by becoming a Christian, he may at least select a spiritual, if not a professional calling. Luke's control of his own "masculine comportment" is brutally unmade, and can only be reclaimed through escape to the North.

Yet white men in this presentation are not immune from the destructive effect of slavery on the principles of "natural" masculine subjectivity. The ability to serve as patriarch of a household is particularly devastated by racial oppression, even for those who are not oppressed. In the nineteenth century, the ideal of white society was

a coherent, domestic, middle-class world, where children know who their fathers are and husbands and wives know the make-up of one another's blood type. In the world the slaveholders made, where fathers would not acknowledge the children they had with the slaves, there were to be no such assurances.

(Weinstein 121)

Matt Brim ably illustrates the troubled stance of the patriarch when these black males are introduced, especially as concerns the reproduction of the heterosexual nuclear family:

Ironically, the master could not be both father and owner (though of course he often was), and the ability to deny fatherhood was predicated precisely upon the master's identity as property owner. Thus the 'mocking' presence of the master/father: the more present the master, the more absent the father. (174)

Analyzing twentieth-century texts concerned with race and fatherhood, Brim proposes an "unnerving reconciliation" in which the white patriarch is emasculated, robbed of his ability to reproduce himself heterosexually and be sure of a racially-consistent result, by

the black male. In the usual presentation of the black male as rapacious, the metonymic specter of blackness was ever close as an imagined threat to white womanhood because of the uncontrolled appetites ascribed by the white imagination, which made his presence necessary as a recursive ground for the definition of white reproductive roles (Brim 174-5; Abdur-Rahman 224). When the Edenic metonym is utilized, no recursive ground remains for reproductive roles in general – only a sentimental sense of loss which left both black and white men adrift from the structures of the patriarchal household enshrined as a natural legacy of paradise.

The household in Luke's story no longer functions as a space to reiterate masculinities, not only because of the "unmanly" helplessness in which both men are locked, but also because the privacy necessary to Weinstein's "coherent, domestic, middle-class world" is perpetually disabled by details of their interaction. This story which takes place in the private domesticity of the bedroom humiliatingly and continually draws in the legally-empowered public. Luke's is one of very few "bedroom scenes" in the book, which dwells on kitchens, dining rooms, streets, shopfronts, and other public spaces of the home and community as the settings for its interpersonal action; moments in private spaces like the attic and the childbed most often portray Linda alone. The implication is that Luke's service and punishment comprises moments of intense intimacy, taking place in what should, according to nineteenth-century ideals, be the privacy of the household. However, Luke's owner regularly calls for the constable to deliver the punishment which has been so thoroughly and appallingly eroticized: "The arm of his tyrant ... was finally palsied; and then the constable's services were in

constant requisition,” which causes Luke even greater pain. The public man is invited into the domestic sphere in order to enact part of the violation that takes place there. Indeed, yet another subtle indication of more explicit abuse may be intended here. Earlier in the book, Linda describes a woman who commits suicide to avoid being “stripped and whipped,” and it is worth recalling that in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the slaves in the St. Clare household is heavily implied to be sent to a public whipping-house, where the likelihood of her rape is part of the punishment to which she has been sentenced (Jacobs 111; Stowe 278-9). Jacobs and Stowe were contemporaries, working from a similar archive of abolitionist literature and escapees’ confessions to round out Jacobs’ autobiographical and Stowe’s fictional tale, and Jacobs indicates after describing the suicide that politicians “could not be ignorant of many such facts as these, for they are of frequent occurrence in every Southern State” (111). Accepting the implication of both authors that such sexual punishment was common for enslaved women and girls, Linda may be implying that Luke is also sexually assaulted by the constable – in this reading, enacting a violation of private family ideals under his own power as well as by the owner’s instigation. Harper has noted the twentieth-century sense that homosexuality complicates cultural notions of the privacy afforded to the heterosexual family unit (229); Luke’s presence as an object for his master’s despotism is a nineteenth-century expression of the same attitude. The destruction of the private domestic home is complete as the low-class constable and the dissolute master share in the dominant role which, under normative standards of masculinity, neither can occupy alone, together enacting a public-private sexual torture upon the helpless body of the innocent black

male. Thus, homosocial interaction between white and black men “undermined their [white men’s] insistent claims that they were ... entitled to all the rights and privileges” afforded by British-derived American manliness (Burnard 136) even as it destroyed the same rights and privileges in the black man. Normative masculinity could not survive when the patriarchal household turned inside-out.

Such complete destruction of culturally important paternal roles reinforces the vitality of the Edenic metonym of masculinity. Figuring black men in a naturally innocent state, this presentation roots complete social disorder – the sentimental home and family thoroughly unmade – in the trespass upon that innocence. Thus it bolsters the claim of black masculinity as a paradoxical occupation of both uncomplicated paternity, a firm place in the “natural” heterosexual nuclear family, and a sexual naïvete which becomes tragic upon contact with racialized systems of oppression which will exploit that fundamental innocence.

When Linda encounters Luke again in the North, he says almost nothing of his ordeal; his only remark is a cryptic allusion to “hard times down dar” that make him especially eager not to be caught. Linda further silences him by rendering his speech mired in difficult-to-parse phonetic dialect (Jacobs commonly employs this method to show class distinctions, sometimes synonymously with moral distinctions, among slaves). The vernacular places Luke at a distance from the reader, after which Linda uses his case to illustrate “how the moral sense is educated by slavery” (180). She cannot speak freely about Luke’s sexual abuse, and nor can he, but she gives a couple of pages to his experience, which she evidently finds particularly baroque and disturbing: “the strangest

freaks of despotism,” “freaks ... of a nature too filthy to be repeated.” These “freaks” are nameless, but nonetheless merit more space and detail than some of the later years she spends imprisoned in the attic (179). Since neither Luke nor Linda has agency to speak of the rapes, Linda co-opts the abuse into her moral treatise on the evil of slavery while alluding to the thieving ways that Luke learned from his captivity – namely, a clever confidence scheme to acquire his owner’s cash and fund his escape to Canada – in order to portray Luke as a natural innocent cruelly introduced to the knowledge of sin.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, like many (and in the nineteenth century, most) slave narratives, is primarily a piece of political writing drawing heavily on sentimental novels’ traditions and tropes to present its factual events persuasively. Its depiction of male-male sexual abuse is grounded in the deprivation of agency and voice, a preoccupation in slave narratives of the period:

The abolitionist forum provides a crucial rhetorical context – the limitations of voice, the bounds of propriety, the humility of self-presentation – for evaluating the slave narratives during this period. Important slave narratives from this period self-consciously stage scenes of speaking and wield tropes of utterance to counter the constant prospect of being silenced. (Gould 20)

Even freed, Luke is voiceless; it is Linda’s voice, layered over Jacobs’, that gives definition to the crimes committed against his agency and his body, in the process reiterating the overlaying of his speech with symbolic paradigms of dominance into which his personal story must fit. Though neo-slave novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are usually a bit more open in their intent when discussing homosexuality,

these are texts that “speak back to conventional practices of representing the lives of the enslaved,” and their treatments of same-sex assault reveal similar underlying narratives (V. Smith 180). These treatments include, sometimes, the suppression of enslaved men’s voices in favor of enslaved men’s participation in the staging of the Edenic metonym. It is the narrative, not the characters, that “speak[s] back.” Valerie Martin’s *Property* also features the sexual abuse of enslaved men and figures them within an Edenic drama, speaking back to the conventions of innocence.

Property opens in 1828 with a scene of explicit exploitation. Manon Gaudet, the first-person narrator, is looking on through a spyglass as her husband terrorizes a group of five young male slaves. (Their description as “boys” would not normally be a good indication of their age, given the inconsistently-applied custom of referring to all black men as “boy,” but since Manon also remarks that “he’s no match for this grown man with his stick,” it seems safe to conclude that these are adolescents.) The scene is ongoing as the text begins, a perhaps self-conscious correspondence to the Edenic ideology of gender which is still ongoing even in this novel written so many years after *Incidents*. Gaudet, the owner of a plantation, has devised a game which is designed to compel one of the boys to become visibly aroused despite his familiarity with his owner’s perverted amusements:

He gets them all gathered at the river’s edge and they are nervous. If they haven’t done this before, they’ve heard about it. First he reads to them from the Bible [...] Then they have to strip, which takes no time as they are wearing only linen pantaloons. One by one they must grasp the rope, swing over the water, and drop

in. It's brutally hot; the cool water is a relief, so they make the best of it. He encourages them to shout and slap at one another once they are in the water.

Then they have to come out and do it again, only this time they hang on the rope two at a time, which means one has to hold on to the other. [...] They have to keep doing this, their lithe young bodies displayed to him in various positions.

When he gets them up to three or four at a time, he watches closely. The boys rub against each other; they can't help it. Their limbs become entwined, they struggle to hand on, and it isn't long before one comes out of the water with his member raised. That's what the game is for. (3-4)

Gaudet uses the uncontrollable response to shame the first who responds with an erection. "This is what proves they are brutes, he says, and have not the power of reason," Manon offers with the familiarity of an oft-repeated speech. "A white man, knowing he would be beaten for it, would not be able to raise his member" (Martin 3). That boy is then brutally beaten with a stick which "is never far from him [Gaudet]"; Manon is referring to a cane, but the phallic reference is clear, as Gaudet rapidly achieves erection while beating the boy. Manon, her tone clinical but appalled, notes that her husband's arousal is usually spent with the mother of the boy he has beaten: "If he can find the boy's mother, and she's pretty, she will pay dearly for rearing an unnatural child." She further remarks: "This is only one of his games" (4). Another, simpler "game" observed by Manon a few pages later involves Gaudet forcing two male slaves (this time, their true age is hard to say) to fight each other until one can no longer stand, then whipping the unfortunate loser with the same stick.

The portrayal of the enslaved victims in *Property* is perhaps historically unusual in that it shows a systematic series of encounters between a white planter and slaves of multiple classes, including field hands; Foster notes that most recorded cases follow “a broader pattern that suggests the closer the proximity to whites, the more likely that sexual abuse was to occur” (454). However, the powerlessness of the male slave, particularly the very young men or boys who are victimized in these anecdotes, makes it likely that such cases could have occurred without any record, and Foster does note that women were said to prefer the more traumatized slaves of lower status for their own partners – coerced or consensual (462). This assertion is supported by anecdotal evidence in Jacobs: “She selected the most brutalized, over whom her authority could be exercised with less fear of exposure” (45). Given how limited the evidence remains and given the strict gendering which Jacobs was unwilling to unsettle, it seems probable that the division between males targeting domestic slaves and women targeting field slaves was not quite so rigid as Foster and Jacobs suggest. Further, Kolchin casts doubt on the notion that house slave and field slave distinctions served as an uncomplicated hierarchy from the perspective of the slaves, reinforcing a conclusion that the classic patterns of exploitation may not fall along the very precise lines that the precious little primary evidence seems to present (108). He also notes that a deep gulf and permanent stratification between the dwellers in the house and the dwellers in the slave quarters, though common in fiction, was a historical rarity (109). All in all, Gaudet’s fetishistic “freaks of despotism” do not seem at all historically unlikely, despite their appearance in

a fictional novel – nor do the nuanced gender positions which subjects occupy within the novel as a result.

Other historic realities of sexual oppression are interpreted to reinforce Gaudet's culpability and the innocence of his victims, as well as to highlight the ludicrousness of finding any symbolic integrity in gendered positions. Part of *Property's* literary work is to illustrate vast variability in feminine subjectivities throughout the society it portrays, undermining the idea of gendered "types" particularly through the interactions of Manon and Sarah. With men it does not question gendered categorization quite so thoroughly. Sometimes the narration's refusal to differentiate among most men is quite explicit: "He prides himself on being different from his neighbors," Manon says of Gaudet, "but his office looks like every other planter's office in the state: the good carpet, the leather-topped desk, the engravings of racehorses, the Bible with the ribbon marker that never moves, employed as a paperweight" (8). In turn, Manon sexualizes the abused young men's bodies, describing them in lingering language she never applies to the physical presence of her husband, who is instead sickly, paranoid, and headache-prone, a type of the degenerate. Her possible interest reflects historical fears that black sexuality could cause white gendered power to crumble when women exposed to the copious verbal descriptions of black male physical perfection – including genitals of ample size – could conceivably ascribe "power, strength, and mastery" to physical characteristics which black men were thought to possess in natural abundance (Foster 451-2). To connect masculine virility with beauty instead of with normative principles of masculine comportment was to further threaten patriarchal norms.

Further, Manon's privately frank, if well-hidden, agreement with her husband's assessment that young, enslaved bodies are well worth gazing upon situates her in a position that reinforces masculine positions within a structure of types, but undercuts normative femininity. Notably, Sarah, the young woman Gaudet exploits as his concubine (and arguably the novel's protagonist), disgustedly refuses to look through the telescope that Manon uses to survey the property (17). Sarah is not interested in viewing exploitation from a distance, a prerequisite to forming the metonymic roles that constitute Spillers' "rhetorical wealth" of externally defined subject-positions (65). Manon, however, is quite invested in that rhetoric – resisting belonging to a subjectivity that matches Sarah's until it suits her, at which point Sarah furiously rejects her attempts at convenient alliance. Because of Manon's persistent (and, in the end, largely accurate) belief that she can manipulate these subject-positions to her own advantage, Martin must engage in a further narrative move, since her view differs from that of Manon, an often unsympathetic narrator, in a way that Jacobs' view does not differ from Linda's. Manon is able to extract herself from the situation that Sarah is trapped in; Martin has to find ways other than Manon's first-person voice to emphasize that this is not a reflection of Manon's superiority but of Manon's privilege, or the narrative risks damning Sarah for the crime of being a sexually mature woman without ready access to abortifacients. Manon's primary objection to Sarah seems to be that she is unable to quell her sexual appeal to Gaudet, resulting in children who annoy Manon; the narrator herself avoids childbearing by drugging herself into insensibility to become sexually unappealing (56). Sarah she considers more available, even though she acknowledges that Sarah hates Gaudet "as

much as I do” (39), casting her as hypersexual. Manon is careful, for instance, to note when Sarah’s hair is unbound, sexualizing this situation even though she does not sexualize her contact with Sarah as hairdresser when Manon’s own hair is down (48).

As a means to resist typing Sarah, the narrative yields to typing Gaudet’s other victims. The young black men who are victimized by Manon's and Sarah's abuser become Edenic metonyms in order to serve as a stand-in for Sarah's lack of culpability in her own rape. By presenting other victims, as helpless to refuse to participate in their sexual abuse as Sarah is to refuse to participate in her sexual and reproductive abuse, the narrative refuses to repeat Manon's condemnation. That condemnation seems necessary, however, to Manon, who is preoccupied with finding and inscribing differences between Sarah and herself in order to distance herself from the subject-positions Gaudet – and the structure of slave-owning Louisiana overall – attempt to impose upon her.

One method by which Gaudet imposes subjectivities upon those in his power is by invoking religious authority to replace the paternal role in household organization which he cannot occupy. Notably, Gaudet begins each of his “games” by reading passages from the Bible to the slaves he will victimize. Manon says she knows which passages they are (perhaps those which the unmoving ribbon marks in her description of his office), but does not provide this information to the reader; in a sense, it doesn’t matter. Whatever the actual content, Gaudet is openly using these exploitations to drive home a primitivist message of white superiority. With his Bible in hand, he introduces youthful black males to the knowledge of good and evil, then chastises them for remaining in what he terms an animalistic state: “brutes [who] have not the power of

reason.” Their presence brings about a fetishistic arousal in the white patriarch, which he consummates with a caning – the implement of abuse, as it commonly is in slave narratives, made synonymous with the phallus in a torturous act of forced penetration (Abdur-Rahman 228).

Gaudet’s behavior hints at a highly conscious manipulation of his position on the patriarchy-undermining sliding scale of ownership and paternity. This appears particularly in the terms which Manon’s narration offers for the boys he is tormenting; even as Equiano’s owner ironically bestowed the name Gustavus Vassa, Gaudet rechristens his slaves, naming them as queer with the term “unnatural child” in order to reinforce his ownership over both the boys and their mothers (4). Indeed, since Gaudet has fathered multiple children with Sarah, there is nothing to indicate that none of his victims are his own biological sons. With Manon, however, he has no children; she has refused to bear them by means that her narration leaves unclear. Like the patriarchs of Brim’s discussion, Gaudet cannot act as both the master of his slaves’ bodies and their father. This interaction between Gaudet and his slaves, undertaken in an atmosphere that refuses to acknowledge his possible biological paternity, reinscribes the impossibility of an untroubled white paternity. Gaudet is physically capable of producing children – but he acknowledges them only when they are sexually uninteresting (as in the case of his disabled son with Sarah, Walter), and due to the Manon’s resistance, he cannot reproduce whiteness, which symbolically queers him within the structure of his homosocial interactions with black and white men.

An interesting element of this portrayal is that it offers the Edenic metonym almost in the absence of an explicit notion of the “primitive,” let alone romantic primitivism. The metonym has subversive staying power as an explanation for the destroyed normative masculinity of a black male, even if the underlying religious tension that once prompted this narrative is called into question when the novel “speaks back” to its evangelical tenets. This novel refuses to concede to Gaudet’s narrative of educating brutes, whether Gaudet himself believes it or not. The reader is led to horror at his behavior, whether he is acting because the structures of slavery have turned a pervert loose on helpless young men, or because of a twisted view that he is beating and raping the unnatural urges out of his slaves. And still, the Edenic presentation is not absent. Manon’s narration presents the abused boys with an infantilized innocence – even though they know what game they are being made to play, “they were laughing because they were slippery” (3), and one of the fighters later lies “facedown in the dirt, trying to lift himself up like a baby learning to walk” (18). Going unquestioned in a book that otherwise derives its power from causing its narrator to seem appallingly callous, these details are part of an overall motif in which men, black and white, are depicted as childlike, but risks reinforcing the concept that black males under slavery are without the capacity to form adult personae, instead trapped by a metonym which the narrative shows is perhaps as damaging as its more explicitly racist alternatives. Manon’s objectification of the young men’s forms, too – “like wounded black geese,” “their lithe young bodies displayed to him in various positions” (3) – contributes to a haunting and pervasive sense that each exploitative encounter is not an individual sexual assault, but an expression of a

universally-ascribed sexuality throughout the strata of a society in which domestic ideals have ceased to function.

Gaudet's first game involves compelling the adolescents to come into repeated contact while splashing in a pond; both the imagery and the position within the narrative allude to discourses of innocence and eroticism beyond those directly concerned with "racial authenticity" (Hoad). Its nature provides a twisted reflection of the exceedingly common nineteenth-century romantic motif of the bathing boy or (more commonly) boys, which Victorianist Julia F. Saville has identified as a discursive image for entering dissident male eroticism into popular art and literature: "the motif of bathing en plein air makes publicly possible a specifically male erotic pleasure in the nude male form" (253). Again, the first "game" invokes gendered subject-positions to impose narratives of dominance. Another telling element of placement, which subtly differs this portrayal from that found a century and a half earlier in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, comes from the positioning of the homosexual encounter within the plot. Like Jacobs, Martin uses one vivid moment to indicate an overall atmosphere of sexual exploitation of men. Jacobs, though, has Linda recall Luke toward the end of her narrative, in mid-chapter, while Martin chooses to open the book with Manon's distant observation of the abuse. If change has taken place in the Edenic ideology in the time between these two texts, the change has made it stronger. While Jacobs buries Luke's rape within a cushion of moralizing, lessening its individual impact and rendering it as a consequence of enslavement, Martin's historical fiction places the origin point of its narrative in a boyish, semi-unknowing sexual innocence, intruded upon and perverted by the failed white

patriarch. These abused young men, given no personal history and no sexual selfhood beyond what their owner exploits, are the Edenically metonym in stasis; even as Gaudet interrupts their innocence, the narrative acts to reinscribe their naïve vulnerability to his transgression, compellingly repeating the inscription of their sexual powerlessness that was first performed by slavery itself.

This, perhaps, is the only way that the narrators of *Property* and of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* can indicate how frequently the events they describe occur; Manon and Linda both make tantalizingly non-specific remarks that sexual violation of men occurs elsewhere (Martin 4; Jacobs 45), but each provides only one scene in which the abuse is dwelt upon. In *Property*, the bathing scene and its brief callback a few pages later constitute the only clear mentions of male-male homosexuality (Manon's later assault upon Sarah arguably operates within a different parameter of sexual difference). Both authors treat their scenes of male-male rape to some degree as an archetypal encounter instead of a violation of one individual by another. The result is that black men in general – not just the specific victims – do not have personal sexuality in this presentation, as their identity, sexual and otherwise, is sublimated into the Edenic metonym. With the generalization of the rape experiences in the text to male slaves as a class, enslaved men are rendered not as people subject to events of sexual violence, but as pawns in a clash between a “primitive” innocence and a poisonously degenerate patriarchy.

Thirty years before the figure of the homosexual – “either dandy or savage” – was inscribed on the normative sexual consciousness, or a hundred years after, the sexual

types which characterize *fin de siècle* discourse on sexual dissidence constitute shadowy figures in discourses that “speak back” to concepts of sexuality. While it is difficult but vital not to impose anachronistic categories of sexuality upon the incidents in the lives of individual African-American slaves, other discursive means of ascribing symbolic integrity to gendered subject-positions were at play when Jacobs wrote, and these discursive assignments of role are reflected in contemporary responses to the literary tradition in which she asserted her autobiographical voice. The Edenic black man, who stands metonymically for such complex concepts of sexual innocence and uncomplicated heteronormativity, introduces the discourses of romantic primitivism into unexpected facets of the literary tradition. While Martin and Jacobs find an alternative to enduring notions of hypersexed blackness in the romantic presentation of “primitive” Africa, this role still works – albeit more subtly – to erase the personal sexuality of black men. The Edenic black man is drawn into a drama in which his gendered subject-position must bear the burden of representing a centuries-spanning edifice of personal and sexual exploitation. Staged within a careful narrative of the “natural,” the Edenic metonym replaces familial and societal identity with a representation of the oppressed which sublimates selfhood into a subversive but still an overdetermined representation of black manhood. Such systems of classifying his body deprive him of the agency to self-determine the intersectional categories to which he belongs, instead representing him within categories of difference which ultimately serve to reinforce taxonomies of bodies with and bodies without power.

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