

**‘Slavery, Literacy and Power’  
and  
*When We Were Nobody*  
By  
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## Summary

This PhD thesis comprises two sections: the critical commentary, ‘Slavery, Literacy and Power’ and the young adult novel, *When We Were Nobody*. The critical commentary considers the research behind the novel and furthers discussions regarding modern-day enslavement, the development of eighteenth-century children’s literature as well as literacy, enslavement, and freedom. It consists of two chapters: Chapter One, which has two sections: *Dynamic Developments of Children’s Literature in the Long Eighteenth Century* and *Liminality in Slave Literacy, Resistance and Revolution in the American Colonies* and Chapter Two, which examines *The Interrelationship Between the Critical and Creative Components*. *When We Were Nobody* is speculative fiction young adult novel about two fifteen-year-old girls who are enslaved as domestic servants: an eighteenth-century Black girl transported from Saint-Domingue to 1793 Philadelphia and a contemporary white girl trafficked from Poland to London. The novel explores the impact of literacy on their respective journeys from enslavement to freedom, where they achieve agency and voice through a series of time shifts. The girls eventually cross paths and encourage each other to gain freedom within their own time.

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This thesis is dedicated  
to my parents, Harold and Rita  
and to my children, Anna and Cameron

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## Part 1: Critical Commentary

### *Slavery, Literacy and Power*

#### Introduction

This PhD thesis is composed of the critical component entitled: ‘Slavery, Literacy and Power’ and the creative component, a speculative fiction young adult novel entitled: *When We Were Nobody*. The critical component comprises two chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the critical research for the novel and consists of two parts: *Dynamic Developments of Children’s Literature in the Long Eighteenth Century in England and the American Colonies* and *Liminality in Slave Literacy, Religion and Enslavement in Colonial America*. The section on *Dynamic Developments of Children’s Literature* considers the development of children’s literature and literacy during the eighteenth-century as a dynamic transition in writing for children rather than revolving around a particular pivotal turning point. It also examines the connection between printing, children’s literature and literacy which drives advancements in all three areas over the eighteenth century. The section on *Liminality in Slave Literacy, Religion and Enslavement* explores the space that exists in Runaway Slave Advertisements; the space between reading and writing as encouraged by religious teaching; how this space was closed through close reading of the writings of Ignatius Sancho; investigation of the layered poems and typography of the poems of Phillis Wheatley; connecting literacy to personal empowerment in the writing of Olaudah Equiano and achieving personal empowerment and agency in writing one’s own narrative as with Frederick Douglass rather than having it transcribed like Mary Prince. In the novel, *When We Were Nobody*, the use of the timeslip device enables the exploration and connection between historic and modern-day enslavement; it also includes the themes of literacy, friendship, family and time. The novel draws on true stories of historic and contemporary girls enslaved in domestic servitude and revolves around their journey from enslavement to freedom.

The relationship between the research for the critical component and the influence on the creative novel, *When We Were Nobody*, is discussed in Chapter 2, *The Interrelationship between the Critical and Creative Components*. Chapter 2 considers: the purpose and inspiration for the novel, the time slip and time travel genre; literary allusions and relationship with the research of dynamic developments in children's literature in the long-eighteenth century; historical allusions and relationship with the research for liminality in slave literacy, religion and enslavement in the American Colonies; the evolution of my research and finally why the research into the development of children's literature, liminality in slave literacy, religion and enslavement is important and ultimately, why holding the book equals having the power.

This PhD was galvanized by the BBC 2018 exposé 'The college cleaner no-one knew was slave' revealing that a 'UK helpline for reporting modern slavery dealt with cases involving 5,000 potential victims in its first year'.<sup>1</sup> The revelation that 'Sara' could work in 'full view of teachers, students and staff members' but not 'say anything' for fear that her 'children would be killed' highlights the extreme emotional manipulation of modern enslaved people and is just one example of approximately '13,000 victims living in Britain'.<sup>2</sup> It was also inspired by the 2019 BBC exposé on 400 people who were trafficked from Poland to England. Since the commencement of this PhD, there have been significant changes in society and how we live – from the development of Black Lives Matter, which was 'founded in 2013 response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer', to Covid-19.<sup>3</sup> I, like my colleagues, have engaged in new dialogues and evolved our ways of working and researching.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Collinson, 'The college cleaner no-one knew was a slave', *Victoria Derbyshire Program*. BBC News Online (16 April 2019) < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43743579> > [accessed April 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Collinson, *Victoria Derbyshire Program*.

<sup>3</sup> Black Lives Matter, <<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>> [accessed: 24 May 2022].



The aim of this PhD is to expand the discourse on modern-day enslavement and the relationship between literacy and liberty through both the critical component and the creative young adult novel, *When We Were Nobody*. Through this exploration of enslaved people, specifically girls, in domestic servitude, in both 1793 Philadelphia and contemporary London, the young adult novel has the potential to raise awareness and be used for the further education of young people about modern-day enslavement.

Freedom United, an anti-slavery non-profit organisation, asserts that ‘slavery is illegal everywhere’, however, the non-profit organisation, Anti-Slavery International highlighted, at the commencement of this PhD in 2018, that there were an ‘estimated 40.3 million people in modern slavery around the world...10 million of them children’.<sup>4</sup> The situation has not improved since because of ‘the pandemic, armed conflicts and climate change’ which have disrupted employment, education and increased migration and poverty.<sup>5</sup> In September 2022, the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, estimate that there are now 50 million people who live in modern slavery. This equates to ‘one of every 150 [people] in the world’.<sup>6</sup> The enormity of modern slavery, its various guises and hidden nature make it difficult to define enslavement in a contemporary context.

David Lewis explores the difficulties with defining enslavement as it can be considered as ‘ownership’, ‘people who are treated as property in law or practice’, ‘an extreme form of exclusion’ or in relation to its ‘antonym, freedom’.<sup>7</sup> Modern slavery, Lewis

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<sup>4</sup> Freedom United, ‘Let’s End Modern Slavery Together’ <[https://www.freedomunited.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAtrnuBRDXARIsABiN-7DHL\\_Yly-m7LsRiRZ6DrLx9K0HyWWU8cyfG7PNadLIIdkl8fQUQnxngaAvAIEALw\\_wcB](https://www.freedomunited.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAtrnuBRDXARIsABiN-7DHL_Yly-m7LsRiRZ6DrLx9K0HyWWU8cyfG7PNadLIIdkl8fQUQnxngaAvAIEALw_wcB)> [accessed November 2019]; Anti-Slavery Today’s Fight for tomorrow’s Freedom, *What is Modern Slavery?* (2019) <<https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>> [accessed: November 2019].

<sup>5</sup> ‘Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage’ (2022) <[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ippec/documents/publication/wcms\\_854733.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ippec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf)> [accessed: 20 September 2022], p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Global Estimates of Modern Slavery’, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> David Lewis, ‘Defining slavery in global perspective’, in *Writing the History of Slavery*, ed. by David Stefan Doddington and Enrico Dal Lago (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2022), pp. 19-40, p. 20 and 23.

asserts, could include ‘violence over the individual’, ‘controlling the individual’ or ‘economically exploiting the individual’.<sup>8</sup> He furthers that these definitions are vague and returns to the 1926 League of Nations definition: ‘the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised’.<sup>9</sup> With difficulty in finding a ‘workable definition’, Lewis concedes that the ‘traditional ownership’ definition of slavery’ remains.<sup>10</sup>

While the difficulties of defining modern-day enslavement remain, a significant difference is that historic enslavement was not only legal, but it was socially and culturally sanctioned, whereas today, slavery is not legal anywhere, yet remains all around us, and often out of sight. Antislavery International identify that enslavement today is ‘more about being exploited and completely controlled by someone else, without being able to leave’ or the ‘severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain’ and most importantly, ‘it is all around us, but often out of sight’.<sup>11</sup> Enslaved people in our society seem to have ‘a normal job’ – ‘making our clothes, serving our food, picking our crops, working in factories, or working in houses as cooks, cleaners or nannies’.<sup>12</sup> People in these situations are controlled, manipulated, threatened or treated violently, and hence, are not in a position to leave their situation. Exploitation and control of individuals is not gender specific. John Thornton states that with the Atlantic slaveries specifically, ‘the slave trade carried more men than women to the Americas, about two to three men for every woman’.<sup>13</sup> However, Antislavery International highlight that three quarters of those in modern-day enslavement

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, ‘Defining slavery in global perspective’, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, ‘Defining slavery in global perspective’, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, ‘Defining slavery in global perspective’, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Antislavery International, ‘What is Modern Slavery?’ <<https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>> [accessed: 24 May 2022].

<sup>12</sup> Antislavery International, ‘What is Modern Slavery?’

<sup>13</sup> John Thornton, ‘The Impact of the Slave Trade on Family Structure’, in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Cline (Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 1997), pp. 39-48, p. 39.

are women and girls, the difference potentially reflecting the work expected of those enslaved.<sup>14</sup> Modern-day enslavement takes many forms. *When We Were Nobody* specifically explores domestic servitude and the enslavement of children, in particular girls, where exploitation and control is reflected in the characters of Beatrycza ‘Birdie’ Murza from Poland who is enslaved in a domestic servitude setting in contemporary London and Mary ‘Ouli’ Willmont from Saint-Domingue, enslaved in a domestic setting in 1793 Philadelphia.

While the above statistics were influential factors in the development of *When We Were Nobody*, the fact that domestic servitude is not something that occurs far away in the developing south, I believe, means that it is of the utmost importance to engage in and continue conversations. It is essential for academics to share research as well as raise awareness with large and small businesses and consumers, endeavouring to humanising the invisible modern-day slave worker for both businesses and private individuals. To this end, the Modern Slavery and Supply Chains Conference of 2022 concluded that strong evidence-based research, that is practical and effective, is needed.<sup>15</sup> However, in light of the lack of this due diligence, raising awareness and engaging in conversations at all ages is essential in the journey to eradicate modern-day slavery. *When We Were Nobody* endeavours to raise awareness and start conversations, specifically in relation to a young adult audience, who are the consumers and business owners of tomorrow.

Human trafficking to the United Kingdom originates from many countries, I have chosen to focus on vulnerable people from Poland in response to the BBC report on 5 July 2019, exposing that a UK slavery network had ‘400 victims’ where ‘they tricked vulnerable people from Poland into England with the promise of work and a better life.’<sup>16</sup> The European

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<sup>14</sup> Antislavery International, ‘What is Modern Slavery?’

<sup>15</sup> Jo Meehan, Nathan Davis and Oliver Kennedy, ‘Conference on Modern slavery and supply chains: The intersection of policy, practice, and research’, University of Liverpool, The Tate Liverpool, 12-13 September 2022. Panel discussion.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News Online, *UK slavery network ‘had 400 victims’* (5 July 2019) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48881327>> [accessed: November 2019].

Commission on Poland Online states that it is a ‘source, transit, and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour’.<sup>17</sup> More recently, as of May 2022, The Modern Slavery Research Consortium has highlighted that the ‘European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations, is looking for experts to map human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, specifically the trafficking in human beings in Poland and Ukraine’.<sup>18</sup> This need for experts to map human trafficking in these countries emphasises the continued and constantly evolving nature of modern-day enslavement, especially, in this case, due to the war.

The *Modern Slavery Act of 2015* allows the enforcement and punishment for those perpetuating modern-day slavery while aiming to support and protect survivors.<sup>19</sup> While Anti-Slavery International describes the *Modern Slavery Act 2015* as ‘a step in the right direction’ for policy, it ‘doesn’t provide [enough] protection for the victims’ and despite this, slavery still persists illegally.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, The Independent Online report of 2017 highlights that ‘women and girls make up more than seven in 10 of the world’s modern slavery victims’.<sup>21</sup> These shocking statistics on the disproportionate percentage of girls and women enslaved in our modern society make it imperative that this PhD accentuates the domestic servitude of girls exploring the context of both historic and contemporary servitude, thereby providing a unique contribution to the canon of young adult literature. This is furthered in the critical context through the exploration of eighteenth-century literacy in relation to race and religion and the significance of the development of children’s literature

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings’, *Poland*, European Commission Online <[https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/member-states/poland\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/member-states/poland_en)> [accessed November 2019].

<sup>18</sup> Gary Craig, ‘Modern Slavery Research Consortium’, 25 May 2022. Personal Correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, Gov.uk (Published 10 June 2014, Last updated 30 July 2018) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/modern-slavery-bill>> [accessed: September 2022].

<sup>20</sup> Anti-Slavery Today’s Fight for Tomorrow’s Freedom, *What is Modern Slavery?*

<sup>21</sup> Mary Bulman, The Independent Online, *Women and girls make up ‘nearly three quarters’ of modern slavery victims*, (19 September 2017) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/modern-slavery-victims-women-girls-majority-world-report-a7954066.html>> [accessed: November 2019].

during this time. It aims to further dialogues and explorations on whether literacy is an assumed source of freedom both in the eighteenth-century and in our modern times as well as the necessity for education of all in the aim to eradicate enslavement in our contemporary society. By educating young people, consumers and business owners to question, monitor and address modern-day slavery and the issues that surround modern-day slavery such as: low pay, labour shortages, minority rights and women's rights, slavery and exploitation can be more effectively addressed.<sup>22</sup> Focusing *When We Were Nobody* specifically towards a young adult audience enables the younger generation to consider these ideas and to question and influence business and government decisions from the ground up. This examination of literacy and development of children's literature is explored in relation to the two streams, both historic and contemporary, of the enslaved girls, Birdie and Mary, within the creative context. The motif of literature and literacy, in relation to the enslaved girls, in the creative context and the exploration of its relationship in the critical context, also provide a unique contribution to this discourse.

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<sup>22</sup> Meehan, Davis and Kennedy, 'Modern slavery and supply chains'.

## Chapter 1: Critical Research for the Creative Novel

### *Dynamic Developments of Children's Literature in the Long Eighteenth Century in England and the American Colonies*

John Newbery's publication of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1774) is often highlighted as the first book for children and a significant publication point in eighteenth-century books and children's literature in England.<sup>23</sup> In the first part of Chapter 1, I argue that it was not one book, year or turning point that established children's literature as a genre and a powerful force. Rather, it was a dynamic trend throughout the long eighteenth century that saw a transition from didactic books for children to those designed to educate and delight. The trend towards entertainment in children's literature shifted the focus from an adult-centric mode and empowered the child. Visually represented in literature by children holding the book, rather than an adult, this discernible shift in power is indicated and children gained agency.<sup>24</sup> The visual representation of the power of literacy is demonstrated through the illustrations in Newbery's *A Pretty Little Pocket-Book* and William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) which exemplify the changing attitudes towards children at the time. The cover illustration of Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* is an engraving of woman seated in the front room of a well-to-do family. It is a formal setting where a woman has one hand resting on the book in her lap and the other raised, indicating authority and instruction. The two children stand in front of her, physically distant and passive, with the young girl in similar dress to the woman. Alternatively, the title page of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, is set outside, a more informal setting. While the woman is similarly seated, she is passive and the children are physically close to her and hold the book, actively engaged in reading with their heads close together bent over the book. The shift from passively listening to actively reading

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<sup>23</sup> M.O. Grenby, *The Child Reader 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 1.

and holding the book is symbolic of the changing attitudes towards children and the dynamic transition from purely didactic books to those that entertain and instruct in the long eighteenth century. These illustrations reinforce the power associated with literacy. While the cover illustration of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* is passive, there is evidence through the woodcut illustrations in the text of the shift to entertain the child reader with active games showing the children taking part in outdoor activities such as: cricket, base-ball, fishing and marbles.<sup>25</sup> The mix of passive and active illustrations have the potential to appeal to both the adult as an instructor with a didactic intention and the child entertained as a listening learner.

Delighting children does have a long history in oral storytelling and fairy tales, such as the *Fables of Aesop* and *Reynard the Fox*.<sup>26</sup> Bruno Bettelheim argues that ‘for a story truly to hold the child’s attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity’ and that ‘nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to a child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale’: a melding of the traditional ‘folk’ cultural tale and the otherworldly magical fairy tale.<sup>27</sup> The universal appeal of this story-telling is evident in the enslaved folktales relating to Br’er Rabbit in the US South. The folk cultural tales of Br’er Rabbit were told using ‘rhythm and meter’ with inspirational content of shrewdness to overcome hardship as well as retribution on the slave holders.<sup>28</sup> Through these retellings, Andrew Levine, states that the slave tales ‘evoke the past and make it part of the living present’ as well as using the message for their ‘present situation’.<sup>29</sup> The traditional folk cultural tale, Rebecca Griffin asserts, is a ‘primary illustration of the values and deals of the enslaved’.<sup>30</sup> This universal appeal of the folk fairy tale, Katherine Rundell maintains, is that ‘they are determinedly, pugnaciously for

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<sup>25</sup> John Newbery, *A Pretty Little Pocket-Book* (Lightning Source UK, 1744).

<sup>26</sup> Mary Thwaite, *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading* (London: The Library Association, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Levine, Lawrence W., *Black Culture and Black Consciousness, Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 81 and 89. EBook.

<sup>29</sup> Levine, *Black Culture*, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> Griffin, Rebecca, ‘Courtship Contests and the meaning of Conflict in the folklore of Slaves’, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71.4 (2005), 769-802, p. 771.

everyone’.<sup>31</sup> Bettelheim furthers that in relation to children, the folk fairy tale educates the child in ‘dealing with universal human problems’ and coping with ‘existential dilemma’.<sup>32</sup> The universality of these existential dilemmas means that folk fairy tales cross cultures and borders; Rundell explains that fairy tales are ‘a way of tracing our cultural evolution’ and cites Cinderella as an ‘oral tale’ dating from ‘around 7 BC’.<sup>33</sup> The longevity and evolution of the folk fairy tale with its capacity to entertain and enlighten is clear and rises above the didactic moral narratives with wild, spirited, imaginative yarns that speak to young and old alike. The ability for folk fairy tales to connect everyone with common denominators of an archetypical characters, injustice, optimism and human desire creates a ‘witch-like’ spell and potentially a greater ability to entertain than any other form.<sup>34</sup>

The oral tradition of folk fairy tales in non-literate societies means that images were not initially part of the folk fairy tale narrative. While illustrations were established in illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, it was not until 1658 that the first children’s picture book, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by John Amos Comenius was printed. The use of illustrations prior to the eighteenth-century in *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* and prior to John Locke’s philosophies on education, suggest that moving from solely didactic texts to those that aimed to educate and entertain, with illustrations, was an evolving trend that commenced before the turn of the century. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* provided ‘visual matter...to decorate a text’ as ‘a source of immediate sensual pleasure in and for themselves’.<sup>35</sup> Covering a vast range of topics, the book is presented in the form of an encyclopaedia type text, with groundbreaking illustrations for the education and pleasure of children.<sup>36</sup> This is specifically

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<sup>31</sup> Katherine Rundell, *Why You Should Read Children’s Books, Even Though You Are So Old and So Wise* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>33</sup> Rundell, *Why You Should Read Children’s Books*, pp.18, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Rundell, *Why You Should Read Children’s Books*, pp.18, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Perry Nodelman, *Words About Pictures* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Johann Amos Comenius, *Orbis Pictus* (Syracuse, NY: C.W. Bardeen, 1887[1658]).



addressed as part of the pedagogic technique applied. Comenius states in his introduction that ‘it is apparent, that children are delighted with Pictures and willingly please their eyes with these sights’.<sup>37</sup> He furthers that ‘this same little Book will serve to stir up the Attention’ and focuses on ‘the Senses’ that are ‘the main guide of childhood’ and that ‘when objects are present, they grow merry’.<sup>38</sup> Comenius stresses the importance of learning through the senses and its associated delight. Margaret Crawford Maloney asserts that ‘although didactic in purpose, the attractive format of this illustrated encyclopaedia set a pattern for the future’ signifying the importance of copperplate illustrations in the entertainment of children.<sup>39</sup> Jane Doonan further argues that entertaining the child reader resides in an ‘aesthetic experience where we are engaged in play of the most enjoyable and demanding kind’.<sup>40</sup> For children, the addition of illustrations to words is a ‘sensuous pleasure for the eye’ and an ‘aid to literacy and language development’.<sup>41</sup> Perry Nodelman agrees, that while pictures can provide elucidation, they ‘attract attention to themselves [...] they can be a source of pleasure in and for themselves’.<sup>42</sup>

Furthering this idea of illustrations as a means of engaging children, examples of woodcut illustrations can be seen in the 1709 version of James Janeway’s *A Token for Children, Being an Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths, of Several Young Children* and the 1744 version of Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. Although these books were not necessarily advertised as ‘children’s literature’ at the time, it was however, a concept that these books with illustrations would appeal to children.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Comenius, *Orbis Pictus*, p. xv.

<sup>38</sup> Comenius, *Orbis Pictus*, p. xv.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Crawford Maloney, *English Illustrated Books for Children* (Tokyo: Holp Shuppan Publishers, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Jane Doonan, *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (UK: Thimble Press, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Doonan, *Looking at Pictures*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Nodelman, *Words About Pictures*, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, pp. 3-4.

Janeway's *A Token for Children* chronicles the 'joyful deaths' of thirteen children. With a religious message intending to spare children an eternity in Hell, the text instructs its readers on how reach their heavenly home. In the 1709 version held by the British Library, each example is adorned with an engaging woodcut illustration at the beginning of each child's story as in Example VIII, where a child, 'twelve Years and three Weeks old' is presented in a coffin with two adults to the right and two adults to the left, and what appears to be a child standing by the coffin of the dead child.<sup>44</sup> While the 1795 version consists mostly of text; there is a small amount of illustration for Example I with a woodcut banner at the top of the page and a decorated initial (drop cap) letter 'M' as well as section dividers of various patterns.<sup>45</sup> Maintaining a didactic approach, in this version, 'Example III: Of a little girl that was wrought upon, when she was between four and five years old with some account of her holy life, and triumphant death' demonstrates that by denying Satan and accepting Christ upon her death achieves eternal salvation.<sup>46</sup> This recount of the dying girl shows a 'great conflict with Satan, and [she] cried out, I am none of his...Satan did trouble me, but now I thank God all is well, I know I am not his, but Christ's'.<sup>47</sup> This exploration of ultimate salvation from Hell for children exemplifies the religious and moralistic purpose of the early books for children. The popularity of the text for both parents and children can be seen in its continued publication ranging from 1672 to 1825; the lack of more detailed illustrations in the later version could be due to its popularity where the woodcut blocks were overused and potentially not recut.

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<sup>44</sup> Janeway, James, *A Token for Children: The Second Part*, The British Library (London: Lookingglass and Red Lion, 1709) <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-token-for-children>> [accessed: 24 May 2022], p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Janeway, *A Token for Children, Being an Exact Account*, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> James Janeway, *A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths, of Several YOUNG CHILDREN* (Massachusetts: James R. Hutchins, 1795), p. 31. Kindle Edition, Hardpress.

<sup>47</sup> Janeway, *A Token for Children, Bring an Exact Account*, p. 42.

The nature of childhood, addressed in John Locke's late seventeenth-century text, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) led to an increased production of educational and entertaining books for children in both public and private spheres, empowering children with a greater choice of books. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke considers a new vision of the child emphasising the importance of education in the complete development of a person. In Part 1:1 he states: 'all of the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.'<sup>48</sup> He furthers that the education of children should revolve around play emphasising the importance of delighting the child. In Part VIII: 118.1 he states that 'they would have taken more pleasure in learning, and improving their knowledge, wherein there would still be newness and variety, which is what they are delighted with'.<sup>49</sup> This new mode of thinking was adopted by many parents in the long eighteenth century where they were a prime market for the new books produced for children.

The use of illustration for enjoyment as well as illumination in the long eighteenth century extends beyond encyclopaedia content. Similar to Comenius, T.W. (Thomas White) featured the duality of instruction and entertainment in his 1702 publication of *A Little Book for Little Children: wherein are set down in a plain and pleasant way, directions for spelling and other remarkable matters*. The use of the lexis 'pleasant' conveys that the child reader should enjoy the instructional materials. This is furthered by the extended title 'Youths Delight: A pleasant Way to teach Children to Read' with the emphasis on the words 'Delight' and repetition of 'Pleasant' and woodcut illustrations of the alphabet followed in the vein of Comenius' *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*.<sup>50</sup> T.W.'s publications for children are a precursor to

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<sup>48</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Anodos Books: Dumfries & Galloway, 2017[1693]), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> *A Little Book for Little Children*, London British Library, General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store Ch.700/1. <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/a-little-book-for-little-children>> [accessed 22 January 2021].

John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* and form part of the dynamic transition of books for children during the long eighteenth-century.

Newbery is noteworthy among the eighteenth-century publishers who produced books for children because he made a 'permanent and profitable market for them'.<sup>51</sup> Aiming for both delight and instruction, Newbery advertised his children's books as 'Books published for the Instruction and Amusement of Children...and for Young Gentlemen and Ladies'.<sup>52</sup> Engaging the child reader from the outset in *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, Newbery specifically includes a letter from folktale hero, 'Jack the Giant Killer':

I have sent you here A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, which will teach you to play all those innocent Games that good Boys and Girls divert themselves with [...] I have also sent you a Ball: the one Side of which is Red, the other Black, and with it ten Pins; [...] for every good Action you do, a Pin shall be struck on the Red Side, and for every bad Action a Pin shall be struck on the Black Side.<sup>53</sup>

Newbery's claimed dual purpose, to morally educate and entertain children was accompanied by his desire to make profit, exemplified by including 'an accompanying ball or pincushion for an additional two pence'.<sup>54</sup> This commodification of children's books demonstrates an early version of 'pester power' where add on products would perhaps incentivise children to pressurise their parents to purchase the product. David Buckingham describes 'pester power' in terms of marketers, like Newbery, as 'children's increasing autonomy and their greater say in family decision making' and, on the whole a positive notion, despite the possibility of 'unwarranted intrusion[s] of commercial forces'.<sup>55</sup> Parents purchasing Newbery's books would be encouraged to use the ball and pincushion as part of behaviour modification for

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<sup>51</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> Heather Klemann, 'The Matter of Moral Education: Locke, Newbery, and the Didactic Book-Toy Hybrid', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 44.2 (2011), 223-244, (p. 223).

<sup>55</sup> David Buckingham, *The Material Child, Growing Up in Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 152.

their children. This behaviour modification is exemplified in the way Newbery combined games such as marbles with morals:

MORAL  
Time rolls like a Marble,  
And awes ev'ry State :  
Then improves each Moment,  
Before 'tis too late.<sup>56</sup>

Newbery harnessed the desire of aspiring middle-class parents to provide more for their children. Following Locke's idea of a 'toy library', he tied the text, imagination and play to a child's moral development.<sup>57</sup>

For Newbery, middle-class parents in England were a 'receptive audience [...] who had the money and ambition to invest in their child's future.'<sup>58</sup> Their demand for books reflected the desire for self-improvement and the improvement of their children. The 'expanding trade and ever greater urban wealth' as well as a 'new leisure culture' propelled the keen middle class into higher social circles where the education of their children elevated their own standing.<sup>59</sup> Jane Mullin highlights the importance of the 'social whirl' of gatherings with 'games' and 'card play' that enhanced the social situations of the middle classes.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Newbery marketed his books at a time in the long eighteenth century, as Peter Hunt notes, when there was an 'increasing number of children as a proportion of the population'.<sup>61</sup> Because more children survived and learned to read, the market for books and the need for education increased.

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<sup>56</sup> Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Sylvia W. Patterson, 'Eighteenth-Century Children's Literature in England: A Mirror of Its Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture* 13.1 (1979), 38-43, (p. 38).

<sup>58</sup> Maureen Waller, *1700 Scenes from London Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000), p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Janet E. Mullin, 'We Had Carding: Hospitable Card Play and Polite Domestic Sociability among the Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History* 42.4 (2009), 989-1008, (p. 989).

<sup>60</sup> Mullin, *We Had Carding*, p. 989.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 29.

Percy Muir has argued that there is a ‘disproportionate regard for Newbery’s importance as an inventor’ of children’s literature, but it is important to acknowledge the role he played in promoting the genre.<sup>62</sup> Roger Davis accepts that ‘John Newbery...was not the only, or even the first, children’s publisher, but there is no doubt that he was one of the most successful of his time’.<sup>63</sup> Sydney Roscoe likewise presents the growth of children’s literature in relation to Newbery with his ability to popularise children’s literature as a profitable genre.<sup>64</sup> Margaret Crawford Maloney further asserts that Newbery’s publications heralded the way for the commercial success of future children’s authors and that his publications stand out as being perceived as a ‘pivotal’ point in children’s literature.<sup>65</sup> While there are disputes over the degree to which Newbery’s books played a part in the genre of children’s literature, there is general agreement that he established an identifiable, profitable market for children’s literature which allowed for the further development of the genre and an expansion of titles.

While Newbery embarked on public printing and marketing campaigns in London in the 1740s, he was far from alone. Jane Johnson from Buckinghamshire, for example, was aware of the need to instruct and delight her children (Barbara and George), and privately produced a nursery library of ‘reading cards...and little books used as primers’ during the same time period.<sup>66</sup> Johnson wrote a similarly titled book, *A Very Pretty Story* in 1744. Newbery’s public awareness of marketing books towards a child audience and the private trend of how parents perceived the education of their children, like Johnson, is significant in the dialogue of the changing nature of children’s literature in the long eighteenth-century. In

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<sup>62</sup> Percy Muir, *The English Children’s Books 1600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1985[1954]), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Roger Davis, *Kendrew of York and His Chapbooks for Children* (England: The Elmet Press, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Sydney Roscoe, *John Newbery and His Successors: A Bibliography* (Hertfordshire: Five Owl Press, 1973), p. vii.

<sup>65</sup> Maloney, *English Illustrated Books for Children*, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles, ‘Love to learn your book: children’s experiences of text in the eighteenth century’, *History of Education* 33.3 (2004), 337-352, (p. 340).

a similar way to Newbery, Johnson included elements of entertainment as well as moral and religious instruction interwoven within her educational materials, but unlike Newbery, she included fairy tale elements for Barbara and George, harking back to the entertainment value of folk fairy tales. In *A Very Pretty Story*, Johnson describes ‘a fine chariot all over gold and diamonds; and it was driven by six fine white lambs’ to ‘fetch them to the Castle of Pleasure and Delights’.<sup>67</sup> Johnson’s reference to a fairy tale in 1744 dates before the publication of Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess* in 1749 which included the ‘Princess Hebe’ fairy tale.<sup>68</sup> Gillian Avery observes that the ‘long fairy episode [...] is what makes Jane Johnson’s story so unusual’ as ‘fairies and magical happenings would not become an accepted ingredient of children’s books until well into the Victorian period’.<sup>69</sup> Johnson also differed from traditional fairy tales in that she named her main protagonists Bab and George after her children.

Johnson’s name, as the author, is inscribed at the end of the manuscript of *A Very Pretty Story*:

This story was made in the year 1744 in purpose to tell Miss Barbara-Johnson and her brother Master George-William-Johnson who took vast Delight in hearing it told over and over again a vast may times by Jane Johnson.<sup>70</sup>

Repeating the adjective ‘vast’ and emphasising ‘delight’, Johnson identifies the entertaining nature of her story for her children which is amplified by their desire to hear it retold numerous times. This reflects the call and response element of storytelling, especially in folk fairy tales repeating themes and ideas. This type of storytelling is also reflected in enslaved culture where the ‘call and response pattern’ was ‘brought with them from Africa’ enabling ‘individual and communal expression’ through music and folktales.<sup>71</sup> For Johnson, storytelling, with the inclusion of fairy tales, enabled her to instruct and entertain her children

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<sup>67</sup> Jane Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, Intro by Gillian Avery (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> Levine, *Black Culture*, p. 33.

in a similar way to Newbery's commercial publications suggesting a wider trend towards entertainment in the education of children and the connection between the public and private forms of education.

Like Newbery, Johnson's teaching methods reflect contemporaneous views on childhood where, 'children might more easily learn the alphabet from playthings such as an ivory ball with 24 sides and a letter on each'.<sup>72</sup> In addition, Johnson was aware of the changing learning needs of children as they grew older, evidenced through the deliberate modification in her letter writing to her son George while he was at boarding school and is recorded in *The Papers of Jane Johnson*.<sup>73</sup> In the first letter, dated 1750 to George age ten, Jane wrote in large font with three hand drawn lines for each sentence similar to modern handwriting practice.<sup>74</sup> Encouraging George, she wrote: 'I don't doubt your improving in everything at such a charming school as Rugby' and closes with, 'I hope you have a good journey home'.<sup>75</sup> Johnson includes a detailed illustration of a schoolhouse and several children leaving on horseback with the note: 'Master Cromy, Master Nicoll and Master Johnson coming from Rugby' signifying her understanding of engaging children through illustration.<sup>76</sup> The second letter, dated 1755 when George was fifteen, was written using small font and devoid of lines or illustrations.<sup>77</sup> She expresses her understanding that her son was a young man rather than a child, stating 'I wish you may be the very best young man in England' and this is reflected in the style of the letter.<sup>78</sup> These two letters denote Johnson's understanding of the changing literacy abilities of a growing child with attention to font size, lines, illustrations and form. In addition, Johnson's awareness of texts that instruct and

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Jane Johnson, *The Papers of Jane Johnson*, Bodleian Library. MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>74</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.



delight is noted in her personal collection of handwritten quotations from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *The Bible* and *Pythagoras*.<sup>79</sup> It is under the quotation from *Arabian Nights*, 'Do you sit on this hand, and you on that, and then let me turn my eyes in which side they will meet with an agreeable object' that Johnson wrote in parenthesis 'Entertainment', a recognition of the relationship between didactic and entertaining texts.<sup>80</sup>

Johnson's Nursery Collection is unique in having survived, Victor Watson, however, questions how 'exceptional' the library was and asks if there 'were hundreds of forgotten mothers creating a living nursery culture like hers'.<sup>81</sup> The query is difficult to answer and the Nursery Library thus is 'recognised as a distinctive contribution to English social history of the eighteenth century, to the studies of children learning to read, and to children's literature'.<sup>82</sup> It provides a small window into the modes of teaching and the connections between education and entertainment found among the middle-class in eighteenth-century British families. While Newbery achieved public praise for his publications for children, he was far from alone with Johnson's distinctive contribution and Watson's suggestion that other mothers could have privately created similar nursery libraries. Therefore, Newbery, a man, is lauded as a pioneer in the genre of children's literature because of public display, while Johnson, a woman, and countless other mothers, pioneered their own materials in private, with few left to posterity.

The transition from instructional books to education and entertainment is further exemplified through the work of Sarah Fielding who introduced continuous prose fiction for children with her narrative novel, *The Governess; or, The Little Female Academy* (1749) and

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<sup>79</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, MS. Don. C 190.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson, *Opening the Nursery Door. Reading, Writing and Childhood 1600-1900* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 45.

<sup>82</sup> James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor, *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 7.

is identified as ‘the first novel in English written for children’.<sup>83</sup> Fielding is the first author to ‘establish a distinct contemporary social environment’ in the girls’ boarding school run by Mrs Teachum.<sup>84</sup> Although Mrs Teachum ‘embodies Lockean principles’ she digresses by allowing her students to read fairy tales ‘as long as they are with discernment.’<sup>85</sup> In the text, Fielding’s fairy story of ‘Princess Hebe’ is described as ‘these Fairies are intended only to amuse you’.<sup>86</sup> Fielding’s desire to combine delight with instruction is embodied in the extended title: *The Little Female Academy. Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Ladies in their Education*. By placing the word ‘Entertainment’ before ‘Instruction’, Fielding implies that learning should be first and foremost a pleasure.<sup>87</sup> The increase in publications for children led eighteenth-century bookseller, Matthew Allison in Falmouth, to promote ‘children’s books of all sorts’ and for bookseller, J. Dowse, to create an independent category in 1755 ‘listing books for children’.<sup>88</sup>

Ellenor Fenn, in a similar way to Jane Johnson, (1744-1813) produced ‘over fifty children’s books, games and teaching schemes’ and recognised the different reading ages and skill levels of children.<sup>89</sup> Fenn published under the pseudonyms Mrs Teachwell, Mrs. Lovechild or Solomon Lovechild. It is unlikely that the words ‘teach’ and ‘well’ in Fenn’s pseudonym are accidental, instead they signify that by using her books, parents would be enabled to successfully teach their children. This is furthered with the image of ‘loving’ the ‘child’ forming the connection that by teaching their children well, parents are exemplifying their love for them.

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<sup>83</sup> Candice Ward, ‘Introduction’, in Sarah Fielding, *The Governess*, ed. by Candice Ward (UK: Broadview Press Ltd, 2005), pp. 7-37, (p. 21).

<sup>84</sup> Ward, ‘Introduction’, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Ward, ‘Introduction’, p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Fielding, *The Governess*, ed. by Candice Ward (UK: Broadview Press Ltd, 2005), pp. 142-143.

<sup>87</sup> Fielding, *The Governess*, p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, *A Pretty Little Story*, p. 69.

Fenn published the ‘first system of graded reading’ children’s books in 1783.<sup>90</sup> *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences, adapted to children from the age of three to eight years, In two volumes... Volume 1 of 2 and 2 of 2* offers ‘advice about behaviour’ through its characters.<sup>91</sup> It includes not only dialogues but ‘twenty-six elegant oval relief illustrations presumably drawn by’ Fenn and is described as a key ‘attraction’ for children.<sup>92</sup> In Fenn’s dedication to ‘Mrs. E\*\*\*\*d F\*\*\*\*’, she states that ‘I please myself with the idea of your infant son imbibing his first ideas from the same books which afforded so much pleasure to his cousin’.<sup>93</sup> Fenn stresses the developmental importance of the instruction of the ‘infant son’ as well as the ‘pleasure’ of the book in a similar way to Johnson.

Referring directly to Locke’s theory of children being a blank slate, Fenn closes the dedication with ‘If the human mind be a *rasa tabula*, - you to whom it is intrusted, should be cautious what is written upon it’.<sup>94</sup> Fenn’s views on childhood and moral instruction reflects the educational trends of the long eighteenth-century. In her letter of invitation, she encourages her child readers to be ‘good and happy’ and to see the connection between their behaviour and their state of happiness:

My Dears, Do not imagine that, like a great spider, I will give you a hard gripe, and infuse venom to blow you up. – No – I mean to catch you gently, whisper in your ear, Be good, and you will be beloved, Be good, and you will be happy;<sup>95</sup>

Like Johnson, Fenn was aware of the differing needs of the child reader. This recognition is key in the dynamic transition of children’s literature in the eighteenth century. Capitalising on Newbery’s advertising toys or games along with his texts and, following in the silent

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<sup>90</sup> Thwaite, *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading*, p. 73.

<sup>91</sup> Thwaite, *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading*, p. 72.

<sup>92</sup> David Stoker, ‘Ellenor Fenn as “Mrs. Teachwell and Mrs. Lovechild” A Pioneer Late Eighteenth-Century Children’s Writer, Educator, and Philanthropist’, *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 68.3 (2007), pp. 817-850 (p. 826).

<sup>93</sup> Mrs. Lovechild, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies Volume 1 of 2* Facsimile of British Library (London: John Marshall and Co, 1783), p. v-vi.

<sup>94</sup> Lovechild, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, p. ix.

<sup>95</sup> Lovechild, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, p. 2-3, B.

footsteps of Johnson, Fenn produced and marketed a wooden box of 730 cards that were advertised and sold as an additional purchase to *Cobwebs to catch flies*, ‘*A Set of toys for Enabling Ladies to Instil the Rudiments of Spelling, Reading, Grammar, and Arithmetic, under the Idea of Amusement*’.<sup>96</sup> Apart from the wide range of pedagogical material ‘The Grammar Box’ provided, Fenn was aware that learning was dynamic and subsequently produced additional instructional material to maintain the child’s interest: for example she writes that a: ‘new set of verbs would tend to enliven the sport’.<sup>97</sup>

By 1796, the growing demand for children’s books led to H. Turpin’s altering his catalogue to contain a third of the books ‘for the instruction and amusement of children’.<sup>98</sup> As more books for children were produced in England, a greater understanding of children’s reading needs developed throughout the long eighteenth century combining education, entertainment and illustrations. This recognition of children’s reading needs highlights the shift in perception of the child reader during this time.

The first children’s picture book by Comenius, Newbery publications, Johnson’s Nursery Library, Fielding’s novel and Fenn’s children’s books are a few of the examples the growing transition in writing for children that combined didactic teaching with entertainment. The dynamic growth of children’s literature throughout the long eighteenth century set the stage for more imaginative books for children in the nineteenth century. It was not one book, year or turning point that established children’s literature as a genre but rather a dynamic trend that saw a transition from didactic books to those with illustrations and imaginative fairy tale stories that were specifically designed to educate and delight. This expansion of children’s literature as a genre demonstrates an increased interest in providing children with

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<sup>96</sup> Stoker, ‘Ellenor Fenn’, p. 828.

<sup>97</sup> Stoker, ‘Ellenor Fenn’, p. 829.

<sup>98</sup> Grenby, *The Child Reader*, p. 5.

the books, learning materials and the ability to harness their own learning discovering enjoyment by empowerment through literacy and education.

The increase of book production and ownership in England and the availability of books to the American colonies led to an increase in literacy with access to both religious texts and children's literature. Book production in the England increased from 89,259 in the first half of the eighteenth century to 138,355.<sup>99</sup> From the outset, the American Colonies imported books from England with the colonists onboard the Mayflower bringing books in their personal belongings.<sup>100</sup> Amongst the many groups that colonised the American colonies: the English Puritans, the English Catholics, the Quakers and Mennonites 'were quick to import them [books] from overseas' because they relied on them to 'sustain their religious practice'.<sup>101</sup> The increase in eighteenth-century book production matched the increase literacy levels of the colonists. Lockridge explains that in 'old England, literacy was intimately connected with sex, wealth and occupation', but this altered in the run up to the American Revolution as almost 'all men were literate' because more men attended school, particularly in the New England area.<sup>102</sup> The expansion of printing in the American Colonies provided American children with 'a wider variety of reading material' in addition to the books imported.<sup>103</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan cites that the growth of both domestic production and importation of books 'was such that from roughly 1750 – 1755 the increase of books was

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<sup>99</sup> Eltjo Bruinhg and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, 'Charting the Rise of the West: Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, a Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of Economic History* 69.2 (2009), 409-445, (p. 417).

<sup>100</sup> Peggy M. Baker, *Books for Colonial Children*. Pilgrim Hall Museum, p.1, <[http://www.pilgrimhallmuseum.org/pdf/Books\\_for\\_Colonial\\_Children.pdf](http://www.pilgrimhallmuseum.org/pdf/Books_for_Colonial_Children.pdf)> [accessed 3 February 2021]

<sup>101</sup> Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1; The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (American Antiquarian Society, 2007), p. 3. EBook.

<sup>102</sup> Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (USA: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1974), p. 57-58.

<sup>103</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 302.

larger than the increase in the American population' reflecting the demand for reading material and desire for literacy.<sup>104</sup>

The importance of the need to read and write for Colonial children was highlighted by the Puritan Minister, Cotton Mather (1663-1728): 'they should Read, and Write, and Cyphar...and not only our Sons, but our Daughters also should be taught such Things, as will afterwards make them Useful in their places'.<sup>105</sup> Mather himself owned over 3,000 texts which exemplifies his dedication to literacy, education and catechism.<sup>106</sup> His philosophy is further revealed in his diaries from 1681- 1724 which offer a window into Colonial literacy and documents the interactions with and instruction of his children; this included reading scripture in the morning and evening along with recitation of the catechism, reading and singing of Psalms, and prayers.<sup>107</sup> He describes in his diary his 'daily Course of Duties' to 'pray at least thrice, for the most part of every day...to meditate once a day' and furthers his diary was a way in which he 'may do something towards the teaching of my children...by Way of Salvation by Jesus Christ'.<sup>108</sup>

Mather sets out the connection between the reproductions of children's books from England, religion and literary. He describes Janeway's books as 'Excellent' and indicates the value he placed on his children's book by crediting Janeway with his being able to 'charm' his children into morally good behaviour indicating Mather's awareness of the significance of enjoyment to children's education. This may seem at odds with Mather's own approach to reading where he regularly listened to his 'children recite part of the catechism, read Psalms and prayed daily' which indicates a more didactic approach than one aimed at

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<sup>104</sup> Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write*, p. 303.

<sup>105</sup> Cotton Mather, *A Family Well Ordered, or, An essay to render parents and children happy in one another* (Boston: B. Green, & J. Allen, for Michael Perry, 1699), p. 18.

<sup>106</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, 'Family Literacy in Early 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Boston: Cotton Mather and His Children', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26.4 (1991), 342-370, (p. 348).

<sup>107</sup> Monaghan, 'Family Literacy', p. 354.

<sup>108</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Diaries of Cotton Mather: 1681-1708* (USA: HardPress, 2017), Location 309 of 13406. Kindle.

entertainment.<sup>109</sup> Such examples, however, convey Mather's awareness of the significance of enjoyment to children's education. Mather's reference to Janeway speaks to the link between printing, children's literature and literacy in the eighteenth century emphasising the importance of the printing houses to children's literature and the link between religious education and literacy.

Monaghan observes that reading was inseparable from religion in the teaching of literacy in the American colonies.<sup>110</sup> Mather himself contributed to the bank of books available for children with his publication of *Good Lessons for Children or, Instructions, provided for a little Son to learn at School, when learning to read*, which no longer survives today. In his diary, Mather commented on the reproductions for children from England with reference to Janeway 'About this time, our Booksellers reprinting the Excellent Janeway's Token for Children, I was willing to charm the children of new England unto to the Fear of God, with Examples of some children that were exemplary'.<sup>111</sup>

America, as a new republic, adapted the content and styles of newly published books to greater reflect life in the new county. Monica Kiefer identified the first half of the eighteenth-century as an 'era of stern pietism' where 'fear and repression...dominated every phase of Colonial childhood' emphasising the instructive and moral nature of the literature.<sup>112</sup> She explained that 'mothers were entrusted with the care and well-being of their children's souls'.<sup>113</sup> However, she also identifies that the second half of the eighteenth-century demonstrated 'the trend that stressed industry and wisdom' and that the child was allowed 'a

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<sup>109</sup> Monaghan, 'Family Literacy', p. 354.

<sup>110</sup> Monaghan, 'Family Literacy', pp. 364-365.

<sup>111</sup> Mather, *The Diaries of Cotton Mather*, Location 8549 of 13406.

<sup>112</sup> Sister Monica Kiefer, O.P., *American Children Though Their Books 1700-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> American Antiquarian Society, *A Place of Reading: The Colonial Home* (2010) <<https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Reading/colonial.htm>> [accessed:11 February 2021].

certain amount of legitimate pleasure en route to his heavenly home'.<sup>114</sup> This shift in the perception of the child is reflected in the expanding collection of books for children available in the American colonies and in England, and is exemplified in Mather's own approach to learning.

Colonial reading for children in New England revolved around five key religious and instructional materials that took the child through reading stages: hornbooks, primers, Psalters – The Book of Psalms, The New Testament and finally, the Bible as a whole.<sup>115</sup> While religious texts dominated the Colonial home, The American Antiquarian Society argued that it 'would be a mistake to assume that reading in the Colonies was restricted to religious texts.'<sup>116</sup> Secular texts were popular with children and adults, including 'newspapers, almanacs, chapbooks, novels and books on proper conduct'.<sup>117</sup>

*The New England Primer* was used to teach children to read and reinforced Christian ideals through prayers, dialogues, questions and answers such as:

Quest. What is the chief end of man?

Ans. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.<sup>118</sup>

Cathy N. Davidson cites this as one of the most influential texts of the era. Having been 'published first in 1690, its sales up to 1830 were between six and eight million'.<sup>119</sup> *The Primer* introduced reading with words of one to five syllables with an illustrated alphabet based on the Bible, such as 'A – In Adam's Fall We sinned all' and 'N – Noah did view the old world and new.' The success of the *New England Primer* was perhaps related to its adaptability with the text changing over time to greater reflect the "new" America, including

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<sup>114</sup> American Antiquarian Society, *A Place of Reading*.

<sup>115</sup> Cathy N. Davidson, *Reading in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 55-57.

<sup>116</sup> American Antiquarian Society, *A Place of Reading*.

<sup>117</sup> American Antiquarian Society, *A Place of Reading*.

<sup>118</sup> *The New England Primer* (Boston: Printed by Edward Draper, 1777), 'The Shorter Catechism', first page.

<sup>119</sup> Davidson, *Reading in America*, p. 56.



an alteration of the religious lexis to more a secular version as the 1791 version states that ‘Kings should be good, Not men of Blood’ and the 1797 version states that ‘The British King Lost States Thirteen’.<sup>120</sup>

*The Psalter or The Book of Psalms*, provided a stepping-stone as well as religious instruction for children spanning concepts of faith, perseverance and hope such as Psalm 16:8 ‘I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken’.<sup>121</sup> Published in America with and without educational lessons in spelling and grammar, *The Psalter* was a curriculum pathway to reading the whole Bible signifying literacy accomplishment.

The shift from moralistic religious books for children to those that were entertaining is evident with the publisher Isaiah Thomas (1785) who reproduced the ‘first U.S. edition of fairy tales entitled ‘Mother Goose’s Melody’ for the delight of Colonial children.<sup>122</sup> In John Ely’s, *The Child’s Instructor* (1814), the Preface opens with: ‘The books which we first put into the hands of children, are generally dry and unentertaining. They are unentertaining to a child, because he cannot understand them...Books for little children should be printed on good paper, with a fair letter. The lessons should be short and easy’.<sup>123</sup> Ely clearly outlines how eighteenth-century writers increasingly understood how different literary styles and conventions would appeal to children of different ages. Ely also links the lack of entertainment to the difficulty of the text. He aimed to produce a text that was digestible and therefore, entertaining. Like Jane Johnson and Ellenor Fenn, Ely’s text focused on the

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<sup>120</sup> William P. Trent and Benjamin W. Wells, eds., ‘Vol.III. The Growth of the National Spirit: 1710-1755, The New England Primer’, in *Colonial Prose and Poetry* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co, 1901; Bartleby.com, 2010) <<https://www.bartleby.com/163/304.html>> [accessed: 11 February 2021].

<sup>121</sup> Psalms, 16:8.

<sup>122</sup> Jeri Studebaker. *Breaking the Mother Goose Code: How a Fairy-Tale Character Fooled the World for 300 Years*, (UK: John Hunt Publishing Ltd., 2015), Appendix B. Google ebook.

<sup>123</sup> John Ely, *The Child’s Instructor: Consisting of Easy Lessons for Children, on Subjects Which are Familiar to Them* (1818). Google ebook.

repetition of the alphabet and spelling, commencing with monosyllables such as: ‘Make, bake, deer, fear, bent and dent’.<sup>124</sup> These are interspersed with moral and religious questions with monosyllabic words such as: ‘George, do you know who made you? Yes sir; God made me, and takes care of me. He loves good boys and girls, and we must love him’.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Samuel Griswold Goodrich maintained the dual focus of entertainment and education but broke with moral tradition in producing an instructional secular text, *The Tales of Peter Parley About America* (1827) stating in the Preface, ‘the design of this little work is to convey to children, under the guise of amusement, the first ideas of Geography and History’.<sup>126</sup> The American characteristics are exemplified from the outset; the first chapter is entitled *Parley tells about himself, about Boston, and about the Indians* where he explains:

The Indians go nearly naked, except in the winter. Their skin is not white, like ours, but reddish, or the colour of copper...they lived in little huts or houses called Wigwams. Here is a picture of a Wigwam.<sup>127</sup>

Goodrich further conveys American history describing ‘The place which Columbus landed upon, was an island called St. Salvador. He found many kinds of fruits, which he had never seen before’.<sup>128</sup> Additionally, the origins of Jamestown, Virginia is exemplified in the description: ‘About two hundred and twenty years ago, that is, in the year 1607, some English people, about one hundred in number, came to Virginia, and made a settlement on James River’.<sup>129</sup> These secular stories on the founding of America and observations of the new world established Goodrich as a key writer in American children’s literature and

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<sup>124</sup> Ely, *The Child’s Instructor*, p. 9.

<sup>125</sup> Ely, *The Child’s Instructor*, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> Samuel Goodrich Griswold, *The Tales of Peter Parley About America*, (Library of Congress, 1837) p.7. <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/rbc/rbc0001/2015/2015juv13090/2015juv13090.pdf>> [accessed: 11 February 2021]

<sup>127</sup> Griswold, *The Tales of Peter Parley*, p. 7.

<sup>128</sup> Griswold, *The Tales of Peter Parley*, p. 67.

<sup>129</sup> Griswold, *The Tales of Peter Parley*, p. 76.

demonstrate how books for children were adapted to include life in the Colonies and the new republic.

This secular influence suggests that ‘morality was independent of Christianity or any other religion’ and could be considered to have shaped publications to more accurately reflect the experiences of the new land for Colonial children.<sup>130</sup> However, there was a more complex link between religion and the new nation, for children in the new republic, literacy and catechism were clearly intertwined. Existing texts were altered, and new books produced with content that reflected the new American lifestyle. The importance of education and literacy, both secular and religious, for colonial children was evident and is reflected in the expansion of printing in the new republic.

#### *Liminality in Slave Literacy, Religion and Enslavement in Colonial America*

Disempowerment and enslavement in Colonial America are evidenced through the liminal space between what is written and not written, the literacy gap between reading and writing and enslavement and freedom. This section will initially focus on the liminal space in written Runaway Slave Advertisements and the narrative that is not written. Building on what is and is not written, the work of Ignatius Sancho will consider what is written in relation to religious teachings that encourage reading but discourage writing, highlighting the literacy gap. When the literacy gap is closed, layered meanings and use of typography can be employed, as in the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, to convey underlying ideas that lie between the text. This is furthered in examining how reading and religion intersect and will be explored in the writing of Olaudah Equiano. Continuing to examine the ability to read and

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<sup>130</sup> Frank Lambert, ‘Providential and Secular America: Founding the Republic’, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (2008), p. 25. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7s5zp>> [accessed: 11 February 2021].

write one's own narrative, as opposed to having it transcribed, as in the Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass, personal power and agency is demonstrated.

While Runaway Slave Advertisements represent the space between enslavement (disempowerment) and freedom (empowerment), the silence in these advertisements – that is, what is not written – can be layered with meanings that reveal the narratives of the life, struggles, hopes and dreams of runaway slaves thereby conveying a sense of agency, voice and power in what is not written. Antonio T. Bly explains that these ‘complex living pictures or *tableau vivants*...conceal as much as they reveal’.<sup>131</sup> It is what is *not* written that communicates intention, resistance and agency and Bly indicates that in this way, runaway slaves ‘co-authored runaway slave advertisements’.<sup>132</sup> The advertisements provide not only a description of the runaway slave but also reveal the complex relationship between the enslaver and enslaved.<sup>133</sup> The co-authored element is evident in that the act of running away by the enslaved led to the enslaver writing and placing the advertisement.<sup>134</sup> This action-reaction event is a type of shared authorship. In the reading of these slave advertisements, we can only read the voice of the enslaver in the document as written by the enslaver. However, within these words and between these words, slave advertisements revealed the life of the enslaved in relation to physical suffering while enslaved, family life and work.

Bly highlights an advertisement for a slave ‘named Pompey’ who was “‘about eighteen Years old [and] five Feet three Inches high’” and who had ‘been bred to the Sea’.<sup>135</sup> These lines do not explicitly state information regarding Pompey’s escape, but we can read between the lines, that is, against the grain, to consider the broader ‘maritime culture’ where

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<sup>131</sup> Antonio T. Bly, ‘Indubitable signs’: reading silence as *text* in New England runaway slave advertisements. *Slavery & Abolition, A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* (2020), 1-29, (p. 1), DOI: 10.1080/0144039X.2020.1801069 [accessed: 16 March 2021].

<sup>132</sup> Bly, ‘Indubitable signs’, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> Bly, ‘Indubitable signs’, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Bly, ‘Indubitable signs’, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, p. 3.

‘slaves worked as sailors and pilots before and during the American Revolution’ and this might have enabled Pompey’s flight.<sup>136</sup>

Apart from documenting an enslaved individual’s escape, runaway advertisements also demonstrated political awareness of enslaved individuals where ‘some in fact adopted the revolutionary rhetoric of the day’ and were galvanised by the Declaration of Independence and the pursuit of ‘Life and liberty’.<sup>137</sup> Bly cites the example of ““4 negro men”” who ‘ran and joined “Dunmore’s service in 1776”’, a result of Dunmore’s Proclamation of 1775, which promised freedom to those enslaved if they fought on the British side.<sup>138</sup> The awareness of the political conflict and the associated search for freedom is apparent in this advertisement and we are able to read against the grain to consider motive in the absence of a direct testimony of the enslaved individual.

The Runaway Slave Advertisement for Isaac Bee placed in the Virginia Gazette by Lewis Burwell in 1774 states: ‘RUN away from Subscriber, about two Months ago’.<sup>139</sup> This act of slave resistance reveals Isaac Bee’s ownership of himself for at least the period of two months. He is described as ‘a likely Mulatto Lad named ISAAC BEE formerly of Williamsburg’.<sup>140</sup> This brief description provides a lens on Bee’s mixed heritage and his identity through his name signifying that at some point either he or his parents were ‘stripped of their former identity’, as Bly describes, ‘a symbolic act’ of killing the enslaved person’s former self and with an Anglicized name, the ‘transformation of a human being into a thing’.<sup>141</sup> The advertisement furthers that ‘he has been several Times seen since his Elopement. He is between eighteen and nineteen Years of Age, low of Stature, and thinks he

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<sup>136</sup> Antonio T. Bly, *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 3. Ebook.

<sup>137</sup> Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Antonio T. Bly, ‘In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 51.4, 429-459, (p. 447).

<sup>140</sup> Bly, ‘In Pursuit of Letters’, p. 447.

<sup>141</sup> Bly, ‘Indubitable signs’, p. 9.

has a Right to his Freedom, because his father was a Freeman; and I suppose he will endeavour to pass for one.’<sup>142</sup> The reference to age, stature and specifically his demeanour in his presumption of freedom communicates clearly that Bee challenged authority with his assumed right to freedom. This is furthered when Burwell states that ‘He can read, but I do not know that he can write; however, he may easily get some One to forge a Pass for him’.<sup>143</sup> In these words, Burwell has warned the readers of Bee’s education and his own assumption of Bee’s determination to be free, another challenge to his authority. Burwell’s description conveys a sense of Bee’s resistance and identity, especially the reference to being able to read that might have led him to believe himself to be a free individual rather than a slave. Bee clearly understands the power of the written word as Burwell states that ‘he may easily get some One to forge a Pass for him’.<sup>144</sup> Burwell’s concern regarding Bee’s ability to procure written papers raises the question about what is hidden from the eyes of the enslaver. Frederick Douglass describes the secretive process he went through when learning to write in his narrative. He explains that when ‘little Master Thomas had gone to school’ and had finished with his copy-books, and when the mistress was out and he was left ‘to take care of the house’, he would ‘spend time writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas’s copy-book, copying what he had written’.<sup>145</sup> This secretive effort Douglass cites as a ‘long, tedious effort for years’ but he ‘finally succeeded in learning how to write’.<sup>146</sup> In considering what is hidden from the eyes of the enslaver, is it possible that Bee had the ability to write and concealed this from Burwell? Additionally, Burwell makes reference to Bee’s clothes in that ‘he cannot undertake to describe his Apparel, as he has a Variety, and it is probable that he

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<sup>142</sup> Bly, ‘In Pursuit of Letters’, p. 447.

<sup>143</sup> Bly, ‘In Pursuit of Letters’, p. 447.

<sup>144</sup> Bly, ‘In Pursuit of Letters’, p. 447.

<sup>145</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself*, ed. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, Inc., 2017), p. 37.

<sup>146</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 37.

may have changed them'.<sup>147</sup> The reference to the fact that Bee had a choice of clothes or potentially stole them, not only signifies the relationship between Burwell and Bee if the clothes were given to him but also reveals how Bee understood the utility of dress and demeanour in attempting to 'pass' for a freeman. While Bee had a sufficient amount of clothes from which to choose as Burwell describes with the noun 'Variety', other enslaved individuals would potentially have had very little or no choice.<sup>148</sup>

In the absence of words and through reading between the lines, a sense of co-authorship in runaway advertisements becomes apparent. It is the 'short vignettes hidden in the advertisements [that] revealed the tales of courageous slaves who dreamt of freedom and ran away to realize those dreams'.<sup>149</sup> These silent, liminal spaces allows the reader to pass through the slave advertisement to the unwritten slave narrative and hence, conveys a sense of voice, agency and text.

For enslaved people in eighteenth-century Colonial America, Bible literacy, especially passages that upheld slavery's righteousness, was encouraged by many enslavers. However, while religious reading was encouraged, enslavers were aware that literacy had the potential to lead to intellectual and potentially physical freedom and simultaneously, sought to restrict enslaved individuals from developing writing skills. The liminal space between encouraging selective Bible reading and discouraging writing skills highlights the disempowering and controlling nature of literacy.

Some white contemporaries actively argued for education in the form of reading for enslaved and free black people. In New England, Cotton Mather (1663-1728) demanded education for enslaved people stating that 'masters train their slaves and furnish them with

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<sup>147</sup> Bly, 'In Pursuit of Letters', p. 447.

<sup>148</sup> Bly, 'Indubitable signs', p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> Bly, *Escaping Bondage*, p. 9.

Bibles and other religious books for which they should be given to time to read'.<sup>150</sup> Mather furthers in his essay, 'The Negro Christianized', 'that *Slaves* of his *Household* should *Know the Way of the Lord*' and that 'If the *Negros* might Learn to *Read* the Sacred Scriptures, which make *Wise unto Salvation*, Vast would be the Advantage thereof unto them'.<sup>151</sup>

Although Mather actively promoted education in the form of reading for enslaved people, the gap between reading and writing perpetuated a means of social control. However, some enslaved people were able to employ loopholes and inconsistencies in the law to serve their own interests using the religious framework against their enslavers.

In considering enslaved individuals using a religious framework against their enslavers, Monaghan explores the complex relationship 'between reading and religion and writing and control' through an anonymous letter (1723) written by an enslaved individual to The Right Reverend Edmund Gibson, archbishop of London.<sup>152</sup> The enslaved individual requests to be released from slavery and for the writer's children to be educated:

Release us out of theis Cruell Bondegg [...] that our children may be broatt up in the way of the Christtian faith and our desire is that they may be Larnd the Lords prayer...wee desire that our Children be putt in Schooll and and Larnd to Read the Bybell...<sup>153</sup>

This enslaved individual 'dared not subscribe any mans name to this' letter as the 'gallows tree' was feared.<sup>154</sup> The letter reveals the broader concerns about the relationship between literacy and power. The fear of repercussions of antislavery writing in punishment or death is evident in the writer's unwillingness to sign the letter demonstrating how the enslaved

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<sup>150</sup> Janet Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear* (USA: University of South Carolina, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>151</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized. An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity* (1760), <<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/28/>> [accessed: 21 May 2022], pp. 6, 29.

<sup>152</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Reading for the Enslaved*, The American Antiquarian Society, 2000, available at: <<https://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44525153.pdf>> [accessed: 8 May 2022], p. 323.

<sup>153</sup> Anonymous, Fulham Papers XVII, Volume XVII: General Correspondence, 1661-1793 Bermuda: 167-8, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

<sup>154</sup> Anonymous, Fulham Papers XVII, Volume XVII: General Correspondence.



understood the power of literacy. The religious literacy is evident in the comparison of the severity of the masters as being ‘hard as Egyptians as with the children of Israel’; the reference to Exodus uses a shared religious framework that subverts the enslaver’s religious righteousness creating a sense of spiritual equality. In this example, the simile of the enslavers in relation to an Egyptian Pharaoh positions white American and British enslavers as biblical villains.<sup>155</sup> Taking several weeks to compose the letter between July 4<sup>th</sup> and September 8<sup>th</sup>, fear, suffering and hope are interlaced with religion, literacy and liberty with the unnamed individual conveying the significance and power of having literate children. The liminality between literacy and power is evident in this letter and highlights the way enslaved people used religious knowledge to reveal the unjustness of slavery but also to assert their identity and humanity.

In further examining the relationship between literacy and power, Janet Cornelius argues that the ‘value of literacy and education was instilled in the African American consciousness during slavery as a form of resistance to oppression and maintenance of psychological freedom’.<sup>156</sup> Enslavers made a significant effort to restrict literacy demonstrating how far they understood the power of the written word. In 1740, for example, South Carolina enslavers successfully amended the ‘Negro Act’ to include restrictions on literacy for enslaved people:

that all and every Person and Persons whatsoever who shall hereafter teach or cause any Slave or Slaves to be taught to write or shall use or employ any Slave as a Scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever hereafter taught to write Every such Person and Persons shall for every such Offence forfeit the Sume of One hundred pounds.<sup>157</sup>

The severe monetary penalties, as indicated here, for the ‘Sume of One hundred pounds’, clearly demonstrates enslavers’ fear of a literate enslaved community. Enslavers understood

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<sup>155</sup> Anonymous, Fulham Papers XVII, Volume XVII: General Correspondence.

<sup>156</sup> Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, p. 150.

<sup>157</sup> Birgit Brander Rasmussen, ‘Attend with Great inconveniences’: Slave Literacy and the 1740 South Carolina Negro Act, *PMLA*, 125.1, pp. 201-203, (p. 201).

the ability to read and write was a means to empowerment and resistance, with literate slaves potentially able to move about more freely, distribute antislavery information, write falsified ‘free’ passes or even manumission papers. Beyond the practical elements of literate resistance, Cornelius furthers that literacy for enslaved people was a means of ‘survival’, as ‘mechanism for forming identity’ and a way to ‘reinforce an image of self-worth’.<sup>158</sup>

Jennifer Monaghan highlights that, unlike today, in Colonial America ‘reading and writing’ were two clearly defined skills.<sup>159</sup> The distinctions between reading and writing can be read as the distinction between being controlled or unrestricted, enslaved or free, disempowered or empowered. Cornelius identifies this as the distinction between ‘Bible literacy’ and ‘liberating literacy’, hence the difference between ‘conservation of piety’ and ‘diversity and mobility’.<sup>160</sup>

However, some sympathetic white Americans endeavoured to work around the laws and restrictions, specifically those in New England, which is of particular importance to this study. In addition to Benjamin Franklin, Dr Benjamin Rush, in his address of 1793, argued that a ‘Christian Slave is a contradiction in terms’; he compared the ‘motive for importing and keeping slaves’ with the requirement that they become ‘acquainted with’ Christianity to ‘justifying a highway robbery because part of the money acquired in this manner was appropriated to some religious use’.<sup>161</sup> While Dr Rush expounded on the contradiction of enslavement and Christianity, The Associates of Dr Thomas Bray endeavoured support literacy in the form of reading (but not penmanship) for black enslaved and free children, establishing the ‘Charity Negro Schools’ at Philadelphia, New York City, Williamsburg,

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<sup>158</sup> Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> Monaghan, *Reading for the Enslaved*, p. 310.

<sup>160</sup> Janet Cornelius, “We Slipped and Learned to Read.” *Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865*, *Phylon*, 44.3, 171-186, (p. 171).

<sup>161</sup> Benjamin Rush, ‘An address to the inhabitants of the British settlements, on the slavery of the Negroes in America’, *Evans Early American Imprint Collection* (1743), available at: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/n10229.0001.001/17:2?page=root;size=100;view=text>> [accessed 24 September 2022], p. 14.

Virginia and Newport in 1758 and 1762 – instruction consisted of Scriptures and Christian teachings and was delivered by enslaved people or schoolmistresses (who also taught ‘sewing, knitting and embroidery’).<sup>162</sup> This is exemplified in the sampler made by Mary D’Silver, at the ‘Negro School’, Philadelphia in 1793 which is embroidered with the words, ‘The well-taught philosophic mind, To all compassion gives; Casts round the world and equal eye, And feels for each that lives’.<sup>163</sup>

Closing the liminal space between being able to read and write is demonstrated in many of the slave narratives which I shall now explore in greater depth. Charles Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780), a prominent black English activist, recorded his thoughts on eighteenth-century British Empire, politics, culture and slavery; as a social reformer, he was an active participant in abolitionist struggles. Sancho was born on the Middle Passage ‘on board a ship in the Slave-trade’ and lost his parents at around the age of two: ‘a disease of the new climate put an early period to his mother’s existence; and his father defeated the miseries of slavery by an act of suicide’.<sup>164</sup> Sancho ‘rarely used his first name’ as an act of defying his replaced identity and described his self-taught literacy education (reading and writing) as a way to assert his autonomy and equality with his white contemporaries and affirm his identity.<sup>165</sup>

Sancho’s letters reflect on the British Empire, slavery and his personal experience as an educated African who lived in London. Published two years after his death, the letters reveal Sancho’s broad range of self-taught education. The editor’s preface explicitly emphasises this education and the ‘motives for laying them before the publick were, the

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<sup>162</sup> Monaghan, *Reading for the Enslaved*, pp. 320-321.

<sup>163</sup> Kelli Rancine Coles, ‘School Embroideries & Black Girlhood in Antebellum Philadelphia’, *Textile Society of America* (2020), available at: <<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2148&context=tsaconf>> [accessed: 5 November 2022].

<sup>164</sup> J. Nicolas, Forward in *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2015[1782]), pp. 49-56, (p. 49).

<sup>165</sup> Vincent Carretta, Intro, in Ignatius Sancho, *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2015[1782]), pp. 13-35, (p. 13).

desire of shewing that an untutored African may possess ability equal to an European; and the still superior motive, of wishing to serve his worthy family'.<sup>166</sup> The editor proceeds to write that 'she is happy in thus publicly acknowledging she has not found the world inattentive to the voice of obscure merit'. As an epistolary writer, Sancho used his education and literacy to assert his voice, power and equality with his white contemporaries. Sancho's exposure to books came in the 1740's through John, The Second Duke of Montague, who he knew as his neighbour and a promoter of education for African people. These letters demonstrate Sancho's broad range of knowledge and correspondents, as revealed in Letter VIII on July 16, 1770 where he comments, 'So you do not like Eloisa (a French epistolary novel by Rousseau) [...] read it till you do like it. – I am glad you have seen Cymon (comic opera by David Garrick) – that you like it'.<sup>167</sup> Sancho challenges racist stereotypes by demonstrating knowledge and having opinions on European culture. Henry Louis Gates, Jr argues that 'while the Enlightenment is famous for [...] man's ability to reason, it simultaneously used the absence and presence of reason to delimit [...] the very humanity of the cultures and people of colour'.<sup>168</sup> Sancho's epistolary serve as a political statement that educational ability should not be based on race with the lack of literacy as a sign of inferiority and an argument to justify enslavement.

Sancho was successful in these challenges as he 'was so celebrated in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that he was the only writer of African descent whose work Thomas Jefferson took seriously enough to discuss at length'.<sup>169</sup> In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIV, Jefferson compares Sancho 'with the writers of the race among whom he lived,

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<sup>166</sup> Vincent Carretta, ed., *The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2015[1782]), p. 47.

<sup>167</sup> Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. By Vincent Carretta (Canada: Broadview Editions, 2015[1782]), pp. 90-91.

<sup>168</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey A Theory of African American Literacy Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 142.

<sup>169</sup> Carretta, Intro, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, p. 13.

and particularly the epistolary class, in which he has taken his own stand'.<sup>170</sup> Here, Jefferson 'begrudgingly acknowledges that Sancho merits being enrolled the epistolary class of writers'.<sup>171</sup>

Throughout the letters, Sancho employs the semantic field of religion and references to God with such phrases as 'God Speed your labours!', 'and leave God in his own time to reward you', 'Great God, in thy mercy' and 'God bless them'.<sup>172</sup> Trust and faith in God is signified in Letter XII 1772 to Mr B[rowne], Sancho writes 'and may the God of all Mercy give you grace to follow his [Mr Garrick's] friendly dictates [...] wisdom and health are immediately the gift of God – but it is on your own breast to be good [...] make only the right election – be good, and trust the rest to God'.<sup>173</sup> The religious semantic field resonates with his self-taught Christian learning; this forms the foundation of his literacy skills which he employed to denounce slavery and highlight independence, closing the gap between being able to read and write through religious study.

Commenting on the horrors of slavery, in Letter XIII to Mr. S[oubis]E in 1772, Sancho writes, 'Look round upon the miserable fate of almost all of our unfortunate colour – superadded to ignorance, -- see slavery' making his point with the emphatic language of 'miserable' and 'unfortunate' and furthering this with the addition of 'ignorance'.<sup>174</sup> In his letter to Mr Sterne on 21 July 1766, Sancho further raises awareness of extent of suffering endured by those enslaved, asking his reader to 'Consider slavery – what it is – how bitter a draught – and how many millions are made to drink it!'<sup>175</sup> Sancho further repudiates slavery in 1778 in Letter LVII to Mr F[isher] where upon thanking Mr F[isher] for the books, he

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<sup>170</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIV, 1781, p. 150.  
<<https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>> [accessed: 26 March 2021].

<sup>171</sup> Carretta, Intro, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup> Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, pp. 197, 207, 217 and 222.

<sup>173</sup> Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, p. 97.

<sup>174</sup> Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>175</sup> Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, p. 128.

states, ‘that upon the unchristian and most diabolical usage of my brother Negroes – the illegality – the horrid wickedness of the traffic – the cruel carnage and depopulation of the human species – is painted in such strong colours’.<sup>176</sup> The strong emotive adjectives ‘diabolical’, ‘horrid’, ‘wickedness’ and ‘cruel’ further enhances the power of his argument, education and desire to end slavery. Sancho closes the liminal space between reading and writing, asserts his autonomy and affirms his identity through his epistolary writings.

Phillis Wheatley’s (c. 1753 – 1784) ability to read and write enabled her to express the space in which she was trapped; as a slave – her ‘humanity had been denied because of her race’ and as a poet – her art ‘demanded of her a certain degree of freedom to express herself’.<sup>177</sup> Wheatley’s unique position, between enslavement and freedom, is reflected in her poems where her subjects are placed in trapped states, caught between ‘heaven and earth’.<sup>178</sup> It is in this state where Wheatley has voice in eighteenth-century America.

Sold into slavery around seven or eight years, Wheatley arrived in Boston in 1761 and was bought by John Wheatley; his daughter Mary instructed Phillis where she ‘gained an extraordinary education for a woman of the time, and an unprecedented one for a female slave [...] learning English, Classical literature, geography, history, as well as the Bible, some Latin, and Christianity’.<sup>179</sup> In a little over a decade, Wheatley gained a ‘growing transatlantic reputation’ and secured the ‘patronage of the Countess of Huntingdon’ (who also supported James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw).<sup>180</sup> Arriving in London to meet her patron and promote her book, which was about to be published, Wheatley was called back to Boston to nurse her mistress. However, in London, Wheatley, arrived on the ‘eve of the first

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<sup>176</sup> Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, p. 165.

<sup>177</sup> Antonio T. Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain Intent I Fix My Eyes’: Text, Context and Subtext in the Elegies of Phillis Wheatley, *Early American Literature*, 53.2, 317-341, (p. 329).

<sup>178</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain’, p. 329.

<sup>179</sup> Vincent Carretta, Intro, in Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings* ed. by Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Group, 2001[1773]), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>180</sup> Carretta, Intro, in Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, p. xvii.

anniversary’ of the equivalent of the ‘emancipation proclamation for English slaves’ (the Mansfield decision in the Somerset case on June 22, 1772)’.<sup>181</sup> She describes how she was received in a letter she wrote to David Worcester in Connecticut stating that she ‘had been treated as a touring celebrity, visiting Westminster Abbey and the British Museum’ as well as meeting Benjamin Franklin and the Earl of Dartmouth’.<sup>182</sup> The representation of Wheatley as enslaved in eighteenth-century America and free to promote her books in England is indicative in the dichotomy of her life lived and the liminal space between enslavement and freedom reflected in her poetry. Wheatley, emancipated in America in 1773, moves from ‘being the beneficiary of agency’ to ‘being the agent of her own’ in the creation and publication of her book in 1744.<sup>183</sup> This dichotomy in Wheatley’s poetry is exemplified not only in the layered nature of her poems, but in how Wheatley presented the typography of the poems; there is power and self-expression through the typographical choices and underlying meanings despite being enslaved.

Wheatley refers to her ‘*Pagan Land*’ in her poem ‘On being Brought from AFRICA to AMERICA’.<sup>184</sup> It is in her ‘*Pagan Land*’ where Bly conjectures that she ‘learned the rudiments of reading and writing’.<sup>185</sup> However, the phrase ‘*Pagan Land*’ implies more than the surface reference to her homeland as one devoid of worshiping a singular god. By italicising ‘*Pagan*’, a greater emphasis is placed on the lexis with perhaps a sense of mockery and conveying Wheatley’s understanding of not only of her own culture, but that of her enslavers. This subtext forms the spaces between the layers of the poem where Wheatley is, through what is not said and with the use of typography, able to achieve a greater voice and agency within the poems.

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<sup>181</sup> Carretta, Intro, in Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, p. xxiii.

<sup>182</sup> Carretta, Intro, in Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>183</sup> Carretta, Intro, in Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. xxvi and xxxiii.

<sup>184</sup> Phillis Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Group, 2001[1773]), p. 13.

<sup>185</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain’, p. 317.

Throughout Wheatley's poems, the use of italics as a literary device to create multiple meanings is evident, as in the elegiac poem, 'On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD. 1770'. Here, Wheatley writes, 'There *Whitefield* wings with rapid course his way, / And sails to *Zion* through vast seas of day'.<sup>186</sup> Through the use of italics and alliteration of the gliding /w/ sound in '*Whitefield* wings' and 'way' an airy image is created of Whitefield's flight to his new heavenly home. Similarly, the use of italics with the noun '*Zion*' and the sibilance throughout the two lines of 'wings', 'course', 'sails', '*Zion*', 'vast' and 'seas' creates a reverential wind-like movement with the /s/ and /z/ sounds conveying one from earth to the kingdom of heaven, '*Zion*'. While Wheatley conveys the space and journey between heaven and earth for Whitefield, on another level, she conveys her own imagined journey from enslavement to freedom in her own homeland of Africa.<sup>187</sup> By layering meanings with italics, Wheatley conveys the liminal space of her entrapment while simultaneously using her literacy to give voice to her experience. Additionally, Wheatley highlights in italics '*Americans*', '*ye Africans*' and '*Impartial Saviour*' layering meaning and questioning the impartiality of '*Americans*' in the same way as the '*Saviour*'. In this space, she offers a criticism of enslavement asking Christians to consider what Christ would have done.<sup>188</sup>

In the poem 'On the Death of a young Lady of Five Years of Age', Wheatley italicises the young girl's name: '*Nancy*' and uses the literary device of sibilance in the line 'Freed from a world of sin, and snares, and pain'.<sup>189</sup> With emphasis on the proper noun '*Nancy*' and the Biblical sibilant serpent /s/ sound in 'sin, and snares', Wheatley achieves a

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<sup>186</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>187</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, p. 15.

<sup>188</sup> Bly, 'On Death's Domain', p. 330.

<sup>189</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. 16-17.



duality of a lament for ‘*Nancy*’ with sinister undertone that protests institutionalised enslavement and she envisions freedom.

Furthermore, Wheatley makes use of capital letters and italics in the poem ‘To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.’ In the opening lines, ‘HAIL, happy day, when , smiling like the morn, / Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn;’, Wheatley’s use of capital letters in the salutation ‘HAIL’ is a greeting to the day, and in conjunction with the personification of the ‘happy day’ and the simile ‘smiling like the morn’ and alliteration of the voiceless fricative /f/ sound in ‘Fair *Freedom*’, emphasises an optimism and welcome for the EARL of DARTMOUTH.<sup>190</sup> Wheatley layers contrasts within the poem, italicising the joyful arrival of the ‘*Goddess*’ who is ‘sick at the view’, a veiled reference to enslavement. Throughout the poem, the noun ‘*Freedom*’ is repeated contrasting the free and enslaved as well as Wheatley’s own anguish of being separated from her family, referenced by the italicised ‘*Afric*’s’ in the line ‘Was snatch’d from *Afric*’s fancy’d happy seat’.<sup>191</sup>

Wheatley further creates space for her subject and herself in a poem offering solace to parents of a year-old child in ‘A POEM ON THE DEATH OF CHARLES ELIOT, AGED 12 MONTHS’. While ‘CHARLES’ is identified in capital letters part of the way through the poem, Wheatley describes the world he left behind, appearing to liken it to herself and having to leave her own world behind.<sup>192</sup> Oddly, for an infant, the world is described as, ‘Ere yet the rod for horrid crimes I knew’. Here Wheatley seems to write not only for the loss of Charles but also as an extended metaphor of her own life, an allusion to the ‘rod’ and ‘horrid crimes’ of her own past and the past lives of other slaves.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, the use of caesuras in the form

<sup>190</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>191</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>192</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, p. 125.

<sup>193</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death*’s Domain’, p. 333.

of hyphens and commas creates pauses to assimilate the autobiographical allusions. The end-stopped lines with rhetorical questions create an uncertainty regarding voice. This use of typography and layered allusions gives Wheatley a voice and her poems power.

Bly notes that ‘Wheatley’s contemporaries celebrated her achievement all while paying no attention to how she composed her verses.’ Many admired the fact that Wheatley could write at all and many ‘acknowledged her genius’.<sup>194</sup> However, Thomas Jefferson was not so inclined, and in opposition to his view on Sancho, states, ‘Among blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry [...] Religion indeed had produced a Phyllis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism’.<sup>195</sup> Contrary to Jefferson’s views, Wheatley’s poems successfully convey a sense of ‘being trapped briefly between worlds’, ‘trapped between heaven and earth’ and ‘caught between being neither fully slave nor free’.<sup>196</sup> Within these liminal states, Wheatley’s layered poems and use of typography convey how ‘she claimed ownership of herself, not so much in the act of writing [...] but in what she wrote’.<sup>197</sup>

Unlike Wheatley, who conveyed empowerment through the exploration of the states between, Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 1797), formerly Gustavus Vassa, established a strong sense of personal identity through bridging the space between literacy, religious study and identity.

In *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written by Himself*, an abolitionist text, Equiano’s narrative on slavery is wide ranging and based on his own experiences in Africa, the Americas and Europe. Equiano ‘becomes an expert on the institution of slavery as well as on the effects of the African slave

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<sup>194</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain’, p. 320.

<sup>195</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, p. 150.

<sup>196</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain’, p. 329.

<sup>197</sup> Bly, ‘On *Death’s* Domain’, p. 336.

trade'.<sup>198</sup> Carretta explains that 'Equiano can identify and qualify different types of slavery, from the most brutal to the least'. From being enslaved by fellow Africans to 'forced labour in gangs in large-scale agricultural economies' of Georgia and the West Indies to domestic and artesian slaves in Philadelphia, England and Africa, Equiano challenges all forms of slavery, even those in 'Italy and the Levant, where whites enslave whites'.<sup>199</sup>

To this end, Equiano purposefully directs his narrative in 1792 'To the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain' who were debating antislavery measures: 'PERMIT me with the greatest deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine Narrative; the chief design of which is to excite you in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave Trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen'.<sup>200</sup> Significantly, Equiano emphasises that he had 'obtained the knowledge of the Christian religion', but in a self-deprecating manner asks forgiveness for 'addressing to you a work so wholly devoid of literary merit'.<sup>201</sup> This humble reference somewhat disguises his political agenda where he states:

I trust such a man, pleading such a cause, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption. May the god of Heaven inspire your hearts with peculiar benevolence on that important day when the question of Abolition is to be discussed, when thousands, in consequence of your determination, are to look for Happiness or Misery.<sup>202</sup>

While Equiano presents the Narrative as 'devoid of literary merit' he appeals to the hearts of the decision makers calling on the 'god of Heaven' to guide them; the ability to create the Narrative and make such a plea indicates Equiano's understanding of literacy as a form of power.<sup>203</sup> Recognising this power of literacy, Equiano 'had long wished to be able to

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<sup>198</sup> Vincent Carretta, Intro, in Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. xxii.

<sup>199</sup> Carretta, Intro, in Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. xxiii.

<sup>200</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>201</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 7.

<sup>202</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 7-8.

<sup>203</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 7.

read and write; and for this purpose I took every opportunity to gain instruction'.<sup>204</sup> Looking on Europeans as 'men superior' and reflecting enlightenment philosophy of the time, Equiano had a strong 'desire to resemble them, to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners'.<sup>205</sup> Equiano not only closes the space between literacy and religious studies but creates a bridge between his African and British identities, 'African by birth, he is British by acculturation and choice' assimilating cultural, political, religious and social values' illustrated in the image of Equiano, an African, in eighteenth-century European dress on the cover of *The Interesting Narrative*.<sup>206</sup>

Equiano identifies the relationship between literacy and religious instruction, explaining how his master and patroness 'used often to teach me to read, and took great pains to instruct me in principles of religion, and the knowledge of God'.<sup>207</sup> He further describes that 'While I was in the Ætna particularly, the captain's clerk taught me to write'.<sup>208</sup> He states that while on board he had become the 'captain's steward' where he had 'leisure to improve myself in reading and writing'.<sup>209</sup> Equiano's perseverance to improve his literacy skills through religious instruction led to 'frequent contests about religion with the reverend father, in which he took great pains to make a proselyte of me to his church; and I no less to convert him to mine'.<sup>210</sup> It is within these 'contests' that Equiano was able to develop a positive personal identity and empowerment where he was able to keenly debate the faith with the white captain, noting that 'On these occasions I used to produce my bible, and shewed him in what points his church erred'. Claiming that the captain was wrong, Equiano asserts not only his identity and power, but engages in intellectual arguments of enlightenment thinking of the

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<sup>204</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 78.

<sup>205</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 78.

<sup>206</sup> Carretta, in Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. xviii.

<sup>207</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 79.

<sup>208</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 91.

<sup>209</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>210</sup> Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, p. 200.

time. The tag in the title '*Written by Himself*', emphasises the significance of being not only able to read but to write as a form of independence and freedom. Furthermore, the linking of religion and reading as a foundation of literacy skills, which could potentially be used against enslavers, empowered Equiano and closed the gap between his African and European identities. This personal empowerment of being able to write his own narrative was significant in Equiano forming his identity as an individual and, as a way to promote his political beliefs. The words, '*Written by Himself*', was a statement that envelopes not only the political power of literacy but Equiano's personal empowerment.

To conclude this section on liminality in slave literacy, religion and enslavement in Colonial America, I shall examine one of the most famous black activists of the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass (c. 1817 – 1895). The significance of literacy to Douglass's life and actions is clear throughout the narrative. The title, 'THE NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AN AMERICAN SLAVE, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF' immediately conveys the connection between literacy and empowerment.<sup>211</sup> In a similar way to Equiano, Douglass did not want or need his story to be transcribed; being able to write his own story was significant to his identity, empowerment and ultimately freedom. The tag, 'WRITTEN BY HIMSELF', contrasts with other slave narratives around the turn of the century, such as Mary Prince (1788 – 1833). T. Pringle, 'editor of The History of Mary Prince, Scottish poet and secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society from 1827 until his death in 1834', explains in the Preface that the 'narrative was taken down from Mary's own lips by a lady who happened to be residing in my family as a visitor'.<sup>212</sup> The recording of Prince's narrative by a 'lady who happened to be' a 'visitor' accentuates how the transcribing of slave

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<sup>211</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, ed. by William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017[1845]).

<sup>212</sup> Tho. Pringle, Preface, in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, ed. by Sarah Salih (London: Penguin Books, 2004[1831]), pp. 3 and 72.

narratives could be subject to the randomness of who was at hand to write down the story. In contrast, for Douglass, James Olney asserts that the tag, 'WRITTEN BY HIMSELF' was neither 'incidental' nor an 'insignificant addition to the title' and instead is fundamental to the meaning.<sup>213</sup> It is more than 'a proud claim'.<sup>214</sup> When read in context with the title, Olney explains, it is 'an act of linguistic assertion and aggression, in the language and literary mode of the oppressor'.<sup>215</sup>

While Pringle asserts that Prince's 'was written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities' it was edited afterwards, 'pruned into its present shape; retaining, as far as was practicable, Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology'.<sup>216</sup> There is subjectivity in the editing process described here, and although Pringle reassures that 'No fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added, it is in stark contrast to Douglass' assertion of literacy and personal empowerment in the tag, 'WRITTEN BY HIMSELF'.<sup>217</sup> Douglass further affirms his autonomy and liberty through literacy with the juxtaposition of the lexis in the title, 'An American Slave' and 'Written by Himself'. This juxtaposition combines, how, for Douglass, literacy was central to his concept of liberty where a 'slave is a chattel' and 'a chattel is incapable of a narrative' that would be 'written by himself'.<sup>218</sup> Douglass 'authored his own existence', creating a sense of power and identity and he cemented this in the final line of his narrative, when he wrote '- I subscribe myself, Frederick Douglass'.<sup>219</sup> This type of liberatory statement, as David Blight, the preeminent author on Douglass notes, underscores the empowering nature of literacy for

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<sup>213</sup> James Olney, 'The Founding Fathers – Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington', *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp.1-24, (p.5).

<sup>214</sup> Olney, 'The Founding Fathers', p. 5.

<sup>215</sup> Olney, 'The Founding Fathers,' p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> Pringle, Preface, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 3.

<sup>217</sup> Pringle, Preface, *The History of Mary Prince*, p. 3.

<sup>218</sup> Olney, 'The Founding Fathers', p. 6.

<sup>219</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 5 and 84.

Douglass. As Blight explains: ‘Douglass was a man of words; spoken and written language was the only major weapon of protest, persuasion, or power that he ever possessed’.<sup>220</sup>

Within the narrative, Douglass describes the beginning of his literacy journey where he states, in Chapter VI that Mrs Auld, ‘very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three and four letters.’<sup>221</sup> However, this instruction was short lived as Mr Auld prohibited further education citing it being ‘unlawful’ and ‘unsafe’.<sup>222</sup> Douglass’ recounts the conversation with Mr Auld saying, ‘A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master [...] learning would spoil the best nigger in the world [...] there would be no keeping him [...] he would become unmanageable [...] it would make him discontent and unhappy’.<sup>223</sup> The power exemplified by Mr Auld within these comments, especially the use of the strong verbs ‘obey’, ‘spoil’, ‘keeping’ and the adjectives ‘unmanageable’, ‘discontent’ and ‘unhappy’ led to a realisation for Douglass as to the power of literacy. Indeed, he ‘understood the pathway from slavery to freedom’ and ‘set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read’.<sup>224</sup>

Douglass continued his literacy journey describing that he then ‘lived in Master Hugh’s family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write.’<sup>225</sup> However, although his mistress began instruction, as per her husband’s request, she terminated the instruction and forbid Douglass to be instructed by anyone else. Describing this as a ‘mental darkness’, Douglass recounts how she became ‘more violent in her opposition than her husband himself’ where ‘Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to

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<sup>220</sup> David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass, Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), p. xvii.

<sup>221</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 30.

<sup>222</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 30.

<sup>223</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 31.

<sup>224</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 31.

<sup>225</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 32.

see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger'.<sup>226</sup> Douglass here conveys the relationship between literacy and freedom as the 'angry' response of his mistress attests that the ability to read the newspaper equalled empowerment and potential liberty.

Restricted by his enslavers, Douglass found ways to achieve literacy and resistance regardless. Douglass recalls how, in learning to read, he was 'compelled to resort to various stratagems' devoid of a regular teacher where he made 'friends with all the little white boys' and 'converted them into teachers' exchanging bread as sustenance for the 'bread of knowledge'.<sup>227</sup>

Douglass underscored the importance of not only learning to read, but learning to write, bridging the space between controlling religious teachings and empowering literacy that could lead to freedom, stating 'I wished to learn to how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass'.<sup>228</sup> Learning the names of the letters in a shipyard, Douglass tricked boys who could write with challenges of word writing games and used 'the board fence, brick wall, and pavement' as a paper and chalk as his 'pen and ink'.<sup>229</sup> The journey was arduous with Douglass describing his 'long, tedious effort for years' but he 'finally succeeded in learning how to write'.<sup>230</sup> This literacy accomplishment did, in fact, enable Douglass to forge passes for his resistant 'band of brothers'.<sup>231</sup> Although they were thwarted in their bid for freedom, Douglass did eventually escape and 'on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind'.<sup>232</sup> Douglass left unexplained in his initial narrative, the specifics of his escape – 'what means I adopted, - what direction I travelled, and by what mode of conveyance'

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<sup>226</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 32-33.

<sup>227</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 33.

<sup>228</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 36.

<sup>229</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 36.

<sup>230</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 37.

<sup>231</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 73.

<sup>232</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 73.



protecting those who assisted him enabling plausible deniability and concealing the means from the authorities to empower further bids for freedom.<sup>233</sup> That Douglass was cognisant of the fact that his words and actions would be carefully scrutinized by both enslavers and enslaved – and the need to thus write with caution – underscores the power of literacy in slavery and in freedom. Douglass, being able read and write his own narrative, rather than having it transcribed, conveys that closing the liminal space between the two is crucial to achieve personal empowerment. This agency gained with literacy is fundamental to Douglass' concept of liberty, as penned in his narrative.

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<sup>233</sup> Douglass, *The Narrative Life*, p. 73.

## Chapter 2: Interrelationship between the Critical and Creative Components

In this section, I shall expand on the interrelationship between the critical and creative components. While many interesting explorations could be made regarding all the literary, historical, cultural, and religious allusions, the limited space within this critical commentary makes it necessary to focus on a few select areas, therefore, I shall examine four areas specifically. Initially, and most crucially, the purpose of *When We Were Nobody* in aiming to raise awareness of modern-day enslavement for a young adult audience who have consumer power and are the business leaders of tomorrow. Further to the purpose, the importance of the choice of the speculative fiction genre – specifically the historic time slip/time travel novel followed by the eighteenth-century literary influences, which form layers to the narrative and connections to historic enslavement. Finally, I will examine the evolution of the research and development of *When We Were Nobody* and consider the strategies for creating empathy, education and entertainment within the novel and the evolution of the plot which amalgamates the critical research with creative novel to successfully convey its purpose.

### *Purpose of When We Were Nobody*

Racial inequality and slavery still exist in our modern society with the repercussions of historic slavery still apparent. While exploring modern-day and historic enslavement, cultural appropriation is a justifiable worry, I have endeavoured to successfully write across boundaries, completing thorough research, with respect, in ‘envisioning voices for the enslaved (not giving voices to, because they *had* voices)’ characters in *When We Were Nobody*, where they are ‘actors rather than acted upon’ and where ‘slavery is a condition rather than a definition of the character’s lives’.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Katy Simpson Smith, *Who Can Fictionalize Slavery? On Writing Across Time and Race*, Literary Hub (March 30, 2016) <<https://lithub.com/who-can-fictionalize-slavery/>> [accessed: 8 May 2022].

Slavery today continues to ‘thrive globally’ despite being ‘prohibited in both international and domestic law’.<sup>235</sup> Unlike historic enslavement based in law, Garbers explains that there is ‘no definitive definition of modern slavery, although the United Nations aims to define modern slavery as ‘an umbrella term covering practices such as forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, and human trafficking’ where a person cannot leave because of ‘threats, violence, coercion, and/or abuse of power’.<sup>236</sup> She furthers that ‘trafficking is defined in international and regional frameworks but modern slavery is not’ and asserts that ‘identifying victims can be hard’ as each enslaved individual will have a different experience.<sup>237</sup> There is a wide variety of modern slavery and some situations are better understood than others; Garbers stresses that for those enslaved today, the denial of freedom is paramount in the definition. Kevin Bales further underscores that the struggle to define slavery in a modern context ‘in a large part because of the popular misconception that since “slavery” had been abolished, then the crime under consideration must be something else’.<sup>238</sup> The UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (ratified in 2000) exemplifies new laws that define slavery as a component of the crime of human trafficking, not actually defining slavery itself but rather the overarching term ‘trafficking’ as ‘the movement of a person into a situation of control and exploitation’, therefore trafficking is the crime and slavery a result of the crime.<sup>239</sup>

The hidden nature of modern slavery and its shifting nature makes it difficult to identify and support victims as well as prosecute those responsible. Despite these statistics

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<sup>235</sup> Kate Garbers, *Unseen Lives: The Hidden World of Modern Slavery* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2022), p. 40.

<sup>236</sup> ‘Slavery is not merely a historical relic’, United Nations <<https://www.un.org/en/observances/slavery-abolition-day>> [accessed: 21 March 2021].

<sup>237</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 50.

<sup>238</sup> Bales, Kevin, ‘Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices – Slavery today’, in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. by David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 655-678, p. 656.

<sup>239</sup> Bales, ‘Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices’, p. 656.

and ubiquitous nature of modern-day slavery, End Slavery Now highlights that people have difficulty in ‘responding empathetically to enslavement today’ because it is ‘all but unrecognizable’ to what we consider historic enslavement. Despite modern-day slavery being illegal, people are unable to empathise and recognise modern-day enslavement.

Considering historic enslavement, legal challenges to enslavement developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the General Act of the Brussels Conference of 1889-90 which ‘declared that they were equally animated by the firm intention of putting an end to the traffic in African slaves’.<sup>240</sup> While the 1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations defined slavery in Article 1 as ‘the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaining to the right of ownership are exercised’.<sup>241</sup> The 1926 Slavery Convention endeavoured to define the legal parameters of slavery in relation to ‘the slave and the slaveholder(s)’, that is the ‘reality of enslavement’ and ‘ownership’ in the ‘context of property rights’ forming a link to legally ‘address this crime’.<sup>242</sup> Subsequent to the 1926 Slavery Convention, the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where Article 4 states: “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”.<sup>243</sup> Despite this international focus on fighting slavery and agreed declarations over decades, Bales highlights the difficulties that still exist in combating modern slavery, specifically in identifying the extent and prevalence with as recently as 2013, where the ‘estimates of people

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<sup>240</sup> ‘United Nations of Human Rights. Slavery Convention’, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/slaveryconvention.aspx>> [accessed: 16 December 2021].

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

<sup>241</sup> United Nations, ‘1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations’, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/slavery-convention>> [accessed: 10 October 2022].

<sup>242</sup> Bales, ‘Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices’, p. 657.

<sup>243</sup> ‘United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>> [accessed: 16 December 2021].

enslaved were based almost exclusively on secondary sources' of criminal activity, making a 'reliable estimate extremely difficult'. The continued international criminal activity of human trafficking means that in addition to international declarations, individual countries are combating modern slavery with their own legislation, such as the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act of 2015 which enables 'law enforcement the tools to fight modern slavery' with the Act stating that it is 'to make provision about slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and about human trafficking, including provision for the protection of victims; to make provision for an Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner; and for connected purposes'.<sup>244</sup> This country specific legislation is significant as it goes further than the previous international declarations and provides 'provision for the protection of victims'. While the laws change, both internationally and nationally to combat modern slavery, Bales indicates that the 'criminals who operate slave-based illicit enterprises adapt quickly to the changes in law enforcement and international economics'; this emphasises the changing and elusive nature of modern slavery and the difficulties in eradicating it.<sup>245</sup>

In the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, slavery was a 'capital asset' with profits a part of a broader capitalistic economy with the open buying, selling and/or marketing of enslaved people and slave-goods. Whereas today, enslaved people are not openly bought or sold, but the impact on the economy reflected in the concern regarding enslavement in supply chains.<sup>246</sup> The hidden nature of modern slavery and the 'dark figure' associated with the crime, that is, the actual number, makes eradicating modern slavery difficult.<sup>247</sup> The racialized structure to slavery in the Americas meant enslaved people were 'easy to identify',

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<sup>244</sup> Modern Slavery Act 2015, GOV.UK < <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/modern-slavery-bill> > [accessed: 21 March 2021].

<sup>245</sup> Bales, 'Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices', p. 677.

<sup>246</sup> James Stewart, *Connecting Slavery Then with Slavery Now: Part 1*, End Slavery Now, (20 April 2015) <<https://www.endslaverynow.org/blog/articles/connecting-slavery-then-with-slavery-now-part-1>> [accessed: 21 March 2021].

<sup>247</sup> Bales, 'Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices', p. 661.

today, but modern slavery involves a wide range of races and ethnicities, thereby adds to the complexity of identifying enslaved people today.<sup>248</sup> The far reaching nature of modern slavery across gender, borders, races and ethnicities adds to the struggle in identifying victims. Additionally, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, enslaved people rebelled and became ‘formidable abolitionists’, today, End Slavery Now highlights that enslaved people are ‘isolated’.<sup>249</sup> Again, it is this isolation that enables traffickers to proliferate and elude law enforcement. Finally, Antebellum abolitionists fought ‘geographically defined’ enslavers, unlike today, where there are ‘no boundaries’ for modern-day slavery and traffickers can easily hide.<sup>250</sup> With traffickers easily hiding, and those in modern-day slavery in plain sight, I believe that writing the young adult novel, *When We Were Nobody*, is an essential contribution to the conversations and understanding of modern-day slavery through encouraging dialogues, engagement with local government representatives and government ministers, support for anti-slavery organisations and educating consumers of all ages.<sup>251</sup> While men, women and children are enslaved in our society, I have chosen to highlight the enslavement of the young female characters in domestic servitude in 1793 Philadelphia and contemporary London as there are a disproportionate percentage of girls and women enslaved in our modern society (seven in ten of those enslaved are female).

### *Reflecting on the Genre*

*When We Were Nobody* is a young adult speculative fiction novel; it employs both time slip and time travel plot devices; time slip being where the character travels accidentally through time by an unidentified means and time travel, a more deliberate happening where the

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<sup>248</sup> Stewart, End Slavery Now, *Connecting Slavery Then with Slavery Now, Part 1*.

<sup>249</sup> Stewart, End Slavery Now, *Connecting Slavery Then with Slavery Now, Part 1*.

<sup>250</sup> Stewart, End Slavery Now, *Connecting Slavery Then with Slavery Now, Part 1*.

<sup>251</sup> Antislavery International < <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/> [accessed: 15 December 2021].

character has some control over and understands the shift in time. In this consideration, the nature of time is central to *When We Were Nobody*.

The poem, 'Burnt Norton' by T.S. Eliot, contemplates the concept of time – past, present, and future – and its relation to deliverance with the past and the future contained within the present.

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.

Burnt Norton (No. 1 of *Four. Quartets*)  
by T. S. Eliot

In this temporal exploration, only the present can be influenced by humans. Here, the reader is encouraged to focus on 'time present' to know and understand the universe, thereby transcending time, achieving a sense of the everlasting. This mechanism of time and the consideration of the past, present and future is significant to the plot of the novel where the lives of the main protagonists, Birdie and Mary, are intertwined across space and time through their enslavement in domestic servitude. Drawing these parallels aims to raise awareness of modern-day enslavement, its relationship with historic enslavement, as well as exploring the underlying the themes of literacy and liberty.

Birdie, a Polish girl enslaved in contemporary London and Mary, from Saint-Domingue and enslaved in 1793 Philadelphia, slip into each other's times. When the time slips initially occur, neither protagonist understands what initiated the time slip nor how to control it. As the novel progresses, it becomes a time travel novel as Birdie and Mary begin to understand and can control their movement to the past or future with a three-fold mechanism: the river, the poems of William Wordsworth or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and the twilight, or the blue hour. Rivers, symbolic of a journey, have a magical quality to the way they ebb and flow, symbolising freedom as echoed in the continuous free

flowing of the water. Rivers can also be considered a liminal space between the boundaries of the banks or the space between the beginning and end of a journey. As a means of a time shift alone, the river was not a strong enough image in instigating the time shift for Birdie and Mary. There is power in three, a number of perfection and completion echoed in the Bible: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit or in considering our human form: the body, spirit and soul. I felt that by adding two further components to the time shift, literature (words) and the time of day, its power would be complete. Literature and words, that is – literacy – and hence, freedom for Birdie and Mary are representative of enabling the characters to grow and develop a voice and agency in achieving their freedom. The time of day, twilight – the blue hour – or the nautical term, 8 degrees below the horizon (the original title of the novel), is considered not only the best time to paint or photograph but the blue soft light is a magical time where it is neither completely light nor completely dark. The blue hour for this novel was inspired by James Abbott McNeill Whistler's painting 'Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea' (1871).<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, the twilight has associations with witches and the supernatural adding a layer to the speculative genre nature of the novel. The supernatural connection between the twilight and witches is inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where, in the opening scene the witches plan to meet with Macbeth at 'the set of sun'.<sup>253</sup> This trifold mechanism has significant power to transport Birdie and Mary in time, initiated by the sense of isolation both Birdie and Mary experience because of their respective enslavements.

The purpose of the time slip and time travel plot devices is to focus on the dual narratives and their relationships to address the contemporary issue of modern-day slavery. It is through this distance and cross-over that enables me to address the preconceived notions of enslavement of 'then' and 'now', such as legal vs illegal; high impact on the economy vs low

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<sup>252</sup> James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 'Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea' (1871), Tate, London.

<sup>253</sup> Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, Oxford School Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004[1977]), p. 1.



impact on the economy; being easy to identify vs hard to identify; rebelling vs isolated and geographically defined vs without boundaries.<sup>254</sup> Highlighting these contrasts enables a social commentary on the invisibility of modern-day slavery as exemplified by the article by End Slavery Now on ‘Connecting Slavery Then and Now: Part 1’.

There are many young adult books about historic slavery, the most notable being Laurie Halse Anderson’s *The Seeds of America Trilogy: Chains, Forge and Ashes* (2017); there are also many examples of young adult novels that employ a time slip device set in the eighteenth century, such as Jennifer Donnelly’s *Revolution* (2011), while Octavia Butler combines historic enslavement with time travel in *Kindred*. Additionally, there are books on modern-day slavery such as Kim Purcell’s *Trafficked* and Jesse Sage’s non-fiction, *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern-Day Slavery*. There is, however, a significant gap for a book that addresses domestic servitude in modern-day slavery and its invisibility framed in relation to known notions of historic enslavement. Therefore, this young adult novel exists in the form of a time slip and time travel to link modern-day slavery with historic enslavement and aims to raise awareness about the prevalence of modern-day slavery across our society and of those ‘hiding in plain sight’.<sup>255</sup>

In researching fantasy - time slip and time travel - genre, I read a variety of texts written in the nineteenth century. Two of the earliest time travel stories: *The Clock that Went Backwards* (1881) by Edward Page Mitchel and *The Time Machine* (1895) by H.G. Wells both employ the mechanism of a machine as a time travel device. In *The Clock that Went Backwards*, Aunt Gertrude’s 16<sup>th</sup> century clock reverses time – ‘The hands of the clock were moving; they were moving backwards’ and the two boys time travel to 1574, ‘the fall of

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<sup>254</sup> Stewart, *Connecting Slavery Then with Slavery Now, Part 1*.

<sup>255</sup> Human trafficking: Modern-day slaves ‘within plain sight’, BBC, 25 February 2018 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-43153226>> [accessed: 22 March 2021].

Leyden'.<sup>256</sup> Similarly, In *The Time Machine*, a Victorian scientist travels, via a mechanism, into the future; this mechanism the Time Traveller holds is described as having 'a glittering metallic framework, scarcely larger than a small clock, and very delicately made. There was ivory in it, and some transparent crystalline substance.'<sup>257</sup> Influenced by Charles Darwin's 1859 book, *On the Origin of Species* and his Theory of Evolution as well as the vast number of Victorian inventions, Wells provides a social commentary on Victorian society suggesting that while rapid technological progress can be beneficial, it can also have negative ramifications. I decided to employ the three-fold mechanism for the time travel without using an actual 'machine', to signify the merging of worlds, time and words. This string of time represents the ever-present thread of slavery that runs through society across time and space as well as the elusive nature of estimating 'the extent of slavery within a population'.<sup>258</sup> In this way, I have endeavoured to raise consciousness of modern-day slavery and the elusiveness of the 'dark figure' or 'the number of actual instances' of enslavement which exists in our everyday lives.<sup>259</sup>

In exploring the use of the time slip, I read many young adult novels that make use of this mechanism. Due to the limited space within this critical commentary, I shall focus specifically on the influence of six novels: *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) by Edith Nesbit; *A Traveller in Time* (1939) by Allison Uttley; *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) by Philippa Pearce; *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) by Madeleine L'Engle; *Charlotte Sometimes* (1969) by Penelope Farmer; and *Kindred* (1979) by Octavia Butler. A common thread that runs through the novels is that the main characters are lonely, homesick, isolated or searching for family. However, what differs is the trigger in each for the time travel or time slip.

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<sup>256</sup> Edward Page Mitchell, 'The Clock that Went Backwards', *The Clock that Went Backwards and other Stories* (Dua Fondajo, Eldonejo, 2020 First Digital Edition), p. 102, 105. Kindle.

<sup>257</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, (Arcadian Press, 1895), p. 91. Kindle.

<sup>258</sup> Bales, 'Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices', p. 661.

<sup>259</sup> Bales, 'Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices', p. 661.

In *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) by E. Nesbit, the children (Robert, Anthea, Cyril and Jane) time travel using the mechanism of an Egyptian Amulet which ‘has the power to take you anywhere you like’ and powerful words where ‘you must hold me up, and speak the word of power, and one by one, beginning with the first-born, you shall pass into the past’ or future to seek their ‘heart’s desire’.<sup>260</sup> I adopted a similar mechanism where the object, a book, combined with ‘powerful words of prose or poetry’ were two of the three enabling keys for the time shift as with the words: ‘I flipped to the page I had read just before...before I was here: HAIL Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour!’<sup>261</sup> Additionally, in *The Story of the Amulet*, it is noted that, ‘By the power of the Amulet, they seemed to spend hours and hours, only to find when they got back to London that the whole thing had been briefer than a lightning flash’.<sup>262</sup> I also employed the concept of time standing still during the time slip, where Birdie observes, ‘How long was I gone? [...] it seemed to be around the same time as when I left. The blues and greys of the twilight merged with the river and the barge had hardly moved and the fisherman was still packing up’ (p. 142, this volume).

Like *When We Were Nobody*, *Charlotte Sometimes* (1969) by Penelope Farmer is a time swap story. In *Charlotte Sometimes*, the mechanism for the time slip is the bed and, similarly, Charlotte’s loneliness. Charlotte time slips from 1960s to 1918 to the same location in her dormitory at school. The language associated with the time slip ‘It must have been a dream’, ‘she dreamed a most vivid dream’ and ‘It meant that Emily was no dream but real’ all convey a sense of the trance-like magical event.<sup>263</sup> In the same way, dreams feature in *When We Were Nobody*, ‘It was as if a strange silent dream had consumed me’ and ‘I felt the calmness wash over me like a dream’ to create the mystical tone of time slipping (p. 117 and

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<sup>260</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Psammead Series: The Story of the Amulet* (Read Books Ltd, 2019[1906]), pp. 368, 384, 373.

<sup>261</sup> Pamela Price, *When We Were Nobody*, 2022, any quotations from my creative piece will be given as intext references with references to the page numbers of this PhD, p. 121.

<sup>262</sup> Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet*, p. 462.

<sup>263</sup> Penelope Farmer, *Charlotte Sometimes* (London: Vintage, 2013[1969]), p. 13, 28, 29.

127, this volume). Furthermore, Charlotte questions her time slip, seeking answers: ‘Would she and Clara continue to change?’, ‘What would happen if she stayed awake all night and did not sleep? Would the magic, could it, happen then?’<sup>264</sup> In *When We Were Nobody*, Mary also questions: ‘How did I get to this strange land? This London?’ and Birdie asks: ‘Did I really travel back to 1793 Philadelphia? How could that have even been possible?’ as they try to make sense of their experiences (p.133 and 140 this volume).

*A Traveller in Time* (1939) by Alison Uttley, follows Penelope who time slips via the mechanism of opening a door in her aunt’s house (in rural England) in 1934 and shifts to the same location in 16<sup>th</sup> century where she becomes entwined in a failed plot to free Mary Queen of Scots from her fate. The mechanism of the using the house and door is identified in the description, ‘I looked at the closed doors and did not know which was Aunt Tissie’s, for there was something strange and unfamiliar about them. I hesitated and opened a door then stopped short, for in the room before me, down a couple of steps, were four ladies playing a game with ivory counters’.<sup>265</sup> I chose not to use the physical mechanism of ‘the door’, or the idea of travelling to the exact same location several hundred years earlier, I did adopt the language of ‘strange’ and ‘unfamiliar’ within the transitions ‘I knelt down on my hands and knees by the edge of the dock and looked up and down the river. Nothing was familiar.’ and ‘a strange silent dream’ to convey a similar sense of mystery and the unnerving nature of the time slip (p. 117, this volume).

In *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), Philippa Pearce introduces the reader to Tom Long who is quarantined at his Aunt Gwen and Uncle Alan’s apartment, away from his brother who has measles. The apartment is in a large house, that has had the grounds developed, and in the entrance way a grandfather clock that ‘belongs to old Mrs

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<sup>264</sup> Farmer, *Charlotte Sometimes*, p. 36, 206.

<sup>265</sup> Alison Uttley, *A Traveller in Time* (Puffin Books, 1939), p. 46. Kindle edition.

Bartholomew upstairs, and she's rather particular about it.'<sup>266</sup> Immediately, themes of loneliness (especially the title of the first chapter: Exile) and time are omnipresent; Tom's inclination to touch the clock is thwarted by his aunt, but he resolves to investigate gently foreshadowing the link between Tom, the clock and Mrs Bartholomew. The time slip is activated by the clock striking thirteen – 'Thirteen! Proclaimed the clock, and then stopped striking.'<sup>267</sup> With link between the clock, the house and Tom established, the time slip is activated and the door to the carpark at the back of the apartments opens on to the memories of Mrs Bartholomew where there was 'a great lawn where flower-beds bloomed; a towering fir-tree, and thick, beetle-browed yews' and ultimately a little girl, Hatty.<sup>268</sup> This time slip is not only a transition into the past but into the memories of an older Hatty. The time slip experience for Tom becomes a journey through the growth of Hatty, until he ultimately realises that she is in fact Mrs Bartholomew. It is the passage of time in the past that is interesting and has been employed to a lesser extent in *When We Were Nobody* where the sequence of events in the past take place from August to October in 1793. Additionally, while neither Birdie nor Mary time slip into the memories of one another, the link between the mechanisms of Tom, the house, the garden, the clock, and Mrs Bartholomew, inspired the trifold link between the texts, the river and the twilight for both Birdie and Mary.

Madeleine L'Engle presents the concept of the tesseract, in *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), a portal or the fifth dimension (length, width, depth and time being the other four). The mechanism is what Meg needs to travel the universe to save her father. L'Engle sets up the dimensions with the first dimension being a line, the second is a square, the third is a cube and the fourth is time. Including the fifth dimension of the tesseract, Meg can take a short cut

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<sup>266</sup> Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958[2015]), p. 5. Online edition.

<sup>267</sup> Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, p. 15.

<sup>268</sup> Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, pp. 19-20.

through time – through a wrinkle in time. While geometrically speaking, a tesseract is a four-dimensional cube, L'Engle presents time as the fourth dimension and the tesseract as a portal – the fifth dimension. Science and maths aside, L'Engle uses time travel to reveal how saving her father enabled Meg to develop on her journey from being reserved and doubtful to being strong and independent. It also allows for a social commentary that a 'planet can become dark because of totalitarianism' and 'a planet can also become dark because of a too strong desire for security'.<sup>269</sup> I did not directly employ the mechanism of the tesseract but rather hint a 'wrinkle in time' in the description of what Kit sees when Mary and Birdie time slip '*I watched Mary disappear. [...] It was as if the air split open and inhaled her. And then, just as quickly as Mary disappeared, Birdie appeared, released from the darkening evening sky. No one would believe it. There were two spirits that walked through the twilight air.*' (p. 167, this volume). In a similar way to L'Engle, Birdie and Mary's experience journeying enable them to realise that they are stronger than they think and when faced with the difficult decision to seek their freedom in their own times, they are eventually able to do so.

*Kindred* (1979) by Octavia Butler, follows Dana as she time slips from 1976 Los Angeles to pre-Civil War Maryland where she meets her ancestors. This type of time travelling is a kind of temporal paradox – a Grandfather Paradox – where if an individual travelled back in time before their grandfather had children and kills them, it would make their own existence impossible. Hence, Dana is called back two hundred years to save her ancestor to ensure her family and her own existence to maintain the balance of the universe where she must save her relative, a white boy. The mechanism that initiates the time travel is one when her ancestor's life is in danger. While the subject matter of historic slavery is similar to my novel, the mechanism for time travel in *Kindred* is about heritage and

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<sup>269</sup> Charlotte Jones Voiklis, *Afterward*, Madeline L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time* (UK: Puffin Books, 2018).

‘epigenetics where the links between the enslaved people of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and people of today are connected by an inherited trauma’.<sup>270</sup> The fact that Dana loses her arm at the end, indicates that she ‘inherited scars of past traumas that are potentially too damaged to repair’.<sup>271</sup> While Mary becomes ill with Yellow Fever, neither she nor Birdie are permanently physically damaged by the time travel, however, they do experience increasingly painful time shifts that make them wonder how much longer they could continue to pass to each other’s time. Birdie contemplates ‘I lost my body through the remains of the twilight as though it was being pulled through the eye of a needle, peeling off a layer of skin as I went through’ and Mary observes ‘My head as though there were tiny cannon explosions going off in all corners of my mind’ (p. 138 and 178, this volume). This pain is a physical representation of the pain of their respective enslavement that is only eased by their ultimate decisions to remain in their own times and seek their freedom.

Additional aspects of time travel and time slip that I employed from *The Story of the Amulet* were the use of light and dark as well as identifying how much or little time passed during the time travel. Within the time travel event Nesbit describes: ‘The world outside was dark – darker than the darkest night that ever was. And all the sounds went out too, so there was a silence deeper than any silence’. In this liminal space of the time slip transition, I adopted a similar sensory deprivation experience for Birdie: ‘It was in the half-light that I ceased to be. Momentarily, neither here nor there. A nothingness.’ and ‘It was as if a strange silent dream had consumed me and I had crossed a threshold, a threshold that maybe I shouldn’t have been crossed’ (p. 117, this volume).

By researching the time slip and time travel genre, I was able to examine why the characters time slipped or travelled, how this occurred and what were the character’s

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<sup>270</sup> Dr Josie Gill, *Kindred in Relation to Epigenetics*, Cardiff Book Talk, 3 March 2021.

<sup>271</sup> Gill, *Kindred in Relation to Epigenetics*.

reactions to the strange events. Through understanding the genre and plot devices, I was able to successfully realise this within *When We Were Nobody*.

### *Eighteenth Century Literary Influences*

Research into the context of the eighteenth century enabled me to form historic layers within the novel, *When We Were Nobody*. This included enslavement in Saint-Domingue where the island ‘received roughly 800,000 slaves (about 70 percent of the total to the French Americas) and ranked in the 1780’s as the world’s most valuable colony’ with the ‘North Province, known as the colony’s center of sugar production.’.<sup>272</sup> This was furthered with research into the Haitian Revolution where, in ‘August 1791 [...] the enslaved majority rebelled’ and ‘thousands of residents, white and nonwhite, fled to other Caribbean islands, Europe, and North America’ and ‘in the summer of 1793, [...] boatloads of refugees were disembarking on American shores’.<sup>273</sup> I also researched the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia and prominent figures of the time including Dr Rush and Dr Deveze. While Philadelphia experienced many epidemics ‘few exacted a greater toll in lives and suffering than the yellow fever’ with ‘death rates as high as one of every ten inhabitants in the 1793 epidemic’.<sup>274</sup> While Dr Rush opposed slavery, this ‘did not necessarily mean that he viewed Black and White people’s bodies physiologically equal’.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> John Garrigus, ‘French Caribbean’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, ed. by Mark M. Smith and Robert L. Paquette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 173-200. Online.

<sup>273</sup> Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution, Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>274</sup> Anita DeClue and Billy G. Smith, ‘Wrestling the “Pale Faced messenger”: The Diary of Edward Garrigues During the 1798 Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic’, *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 65, (1998), 243-268, p. 243.

<sup>275</sup> Rana Asali Hogarth, ‘The Myth of Innate Racial Differences Between White and Black People’s Bodies: Lessons from the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’, *American Journal of Public Health*, 109.10 (2019), 1339-1341, p. 1340.



In addition to the historical context research, my research on the development of eighteenth-century children's literature formed the basis for many of the literary allusions within the novel. Because of the limited space within this critical component, I shall examine a select few literary allusions to exemplify the interrelationship between the critical research and the creative novel. I will initially examine the text James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671-72), Jane Johnson's *A Very Pretty Story* and the Manuscript Nursery Library (1744) and Ellenor Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies, Volume 1*, *The Spelling Box* and *The Grammar Box* (1783) and influence on the text in Chapter 18. I will then explore the impact of the poems of Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) on the original poems that form the start of each of the five parts of the novel. Finally, I shall examine the inclusion of brief quotations from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Wordsworth's poems (1770-1850), one of the instigating forces instigating the time travel (the river and the twilight being the other two).

In Janeway's *A Token For Children being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives and joyful deaths, of several young children*, thirteen children die within the pages. This reflects the high mortality rate of children at the time, religious beliefs in original sin and that for the child to achieve eternal salvation, they had to live a devout life believing in God. The fact that the title identifies the deaths of the children as 'joyful' underscores the moral message of salvation through faith. Example III opens with: 'Of a little girl that was wrought upon, when she was between four and five years old, with some account of her holy life, and triumphant death.'<sup>276</sup> The high mortality rate of children is reflected within the novel in relation to the yellow fever epidemic and the loss Mary's youngest sister Rachel and two of the five Clarkson children: Miss Anne and Miss Carolina.

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<sup>276</sup> James Janeway, *A Token For Children* (1795) Printed at Worcester, Massachusetts, for L. Thomas, by James R. Hutchins <<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021449/00001/37j>> [accessed: 25 October 2022].

Johnson's *A Very Pretty Story* ends with Johnson identifying herself as the author and the date 'in the year 1744, on purpose to tell Miss Barbara Johnson and her brother Master George William Johnson.'<sup>277</sup> The fact that Johnson wrote the story specifically for her children is echoed within the creative where Kit's Aunt Charlotte Clarkson wrote a book for her daughter Hettie entitled, *A Very Little Story about a Good Girl and A Good Boy about the Good but Short Life of Samuel and Sarah Moor and written by Charlotte Clarkson for her dear good child in the year 1785*. This exemplifies the role of the mother as an educator in both morals and literacy. I combined information from Janeway and Johnson in the identification of the children as 'Good' emphasising the moralistic messaging that would be included within the fictional story as well as connecting with the fact that there was a high mortality rate for children of the time within the content of the story in 'the Good but Short Life of Samuel and Sarah Moor'.<sup>278</sup> I further included references to Fenn's *Cobwebs to Catch Flies* echoing her dedication 'As a mother, you will accept this trifle with satisfaction – Maternal affection doubtless already anticipates the hour when your sweet boy will enjoy the perusal of a dialogue which is perfectly adapted to his comprehension: - when he will smile with pleasure over his book'.<sup>279</sup> In this dedication, Fenn highlights her role as well as the reader's role as a mother and educator. Fenn conveys the importance of being good in the Address 'To My Little Reader' encouraging them to 'Be good, and you will be happy', as well as reinforcing the pleasure of reading in the 'Address to all Good Children' with lexis such as, 'pleasure' and 'amusements' in the line, 'Reading is not the most pleasuring of your

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<sup>277</sup> Jane Johnson, *A Very Pretty Story*. p. 67.

<sup>278</sup> Peter Razzell and Christine Spence highlight that in London 'mortality peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century at a very high level, with nearly two-thirds of all children – rich and poor – dying by their fifth birthday.' 'The History of Infant, Child and Adult Mortality in London, 1550-1850'. *The London Journal*, 32.3 (2007), 271-292, p. 2 <<https://www.tandfonline-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1179/174963207X227578?needAccess=true>> [accessed 16 December 2021].

<sup>279</sup> Lovechild, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, p. vi.

amusements’.<sup>280</sup> I echoed this preface in the form of a letter from Aunt Charlotte to her daughter. This letter contains the moral message of being good and identifies the lessons within the story as being agreeable and amusing. Aunt Charlotte highlights the need for a balance of education and entertainment to be both morally good and happy in the line: ‘I combine here both instruction and delight for you to be both good and happy’ (p. 195, this volume). The letter also identifies Aunt Charlotte’s understanding of the changing attitudes in how children were perceived in the later part of the eighteenth-century as a ‘blank slate’ to be educated by their mother in the line: ‘You are a new blank life waiting to be drawn upon and with this little book I begin the lessons that you will not learn from servants or slaves’ (p. 195, this volume). However, the letter also reminds her daughter of the need to be good and holy to achieve eternal salvation when Aunt Charlotte writes: ‘Be good and be happy little pebble. As you grow remember that although life brings great grief, you will forever be good and happy in your great heavenly life’ (p. 195, this volume).

In addition, my research into Johnson’s Nursery Collection and Fenn’s *The Spelling Box* and *The Grammar Box* is realized in the description of the learning materials Aunt Charlotte made for Hettie. Based on Johnson’s Manuscript Nursery Collection, I describe ‘a small decorated box with flowered paper’ (p. 195, this volume). It contained ‘cards with the alphabet, and small words and big words, cards with Bible verses and some with stories. All had drawings to show the words and verses’ (p. 195, this volume). Imagining this description was possible through being able to view the digital archive of the over four hundred handmade learning materials containing alphabet cards, lessons and story cards. The detailed colour illustrations on the cards convey not only Johnson’s understanding of educating her children but also the time, effort and love to create such an extensive collection. I conveyed a similar sense of the love Aunt Charlotte had for Hettie and her understanding of educating her

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<sup>280</sup> Lovechild, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies*, p. vi and xxiii.

child by how much the materials were used by Hettie in the description, ‘Hettie had used them all so much that the coloured illustrations had started rubbing off and fading so she kept them in the box all the time, unless she was using them’ (p. 196, this volume).

In my earlier discussion of Phillis Wheatley, I explored how the use of typography, specifically capital letters and italics, was used as a means of self-expression that enabled her to explore the liminality in which she was trapped. While opening lines of texts of the time were capitalized for decorative purposes, the use of typography, with the capitalization of whole words, created a layered effect within the poems where Wheatley could not only write about her subject but also herself. I adopted a similar approach to the short poems that begin each of the five parts of the novel. I shall discuss specifically the first poem and the fifth poem. In Part One of the creative novel, I chose to capitalize ‘CAGED’ and ‘OUT’ in the poem ‘CAGED Canaries’ to create a juxtaposition between the themes of enslavement (the cage) and freedom (the birds). This is furthered by the symbolic representation of the protagonists, Birdie and Mary, in the form of the canary. Inspired by Wheatley’s capitalisation of proper nouns (‘WILLIAM’ and ‘DARTSMOUTH’) and common nouns (‘GENTLEMAN’ and ‘LADY’), emphasising the individual, I chose to capitalise the verb ‘CAGED’ in the title of the first poem to form a direct contrast with the capitalized preposition ‘OUT’ of the first line. This capitalization of the first word followed Wheatley’s opening line examples, such as in ‘On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD. 1770: ‘HAIL, happy saint,’.<sup>281</sup> I further the juxtaposition by italicising the verb ‘*Shut*’ and the abstract noun ‘*Freedom*’ to echo the liminal space between entrapment and liberty. This poem is a single verse quintain with an AABCC rhyming pattern. The rhyme of ‘tight’ and ‘might’ as well as ‘long’ and ‘song’ surround the single unrhymed line, ‘*Freedom*, surely is just around the bend?’, creating a sense of entrapment around the single unrhymed line.

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<sup>281</sup> Wheatley, *Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings*, pp. 15, 39 and 45.

Additionally, the iambic pentameter of each line creates a highly structured poem layering the effect of entrapment.

In opposition to the structure of the first poem ‘CAGED Canaries’, the fifth and final poem of the novel, ‘RISING’ is a free verse poem implying liberty through the seven unstructured lines of the single verse septet. I chose to capitalise only the title ‘RISING’ and reemphasised the theme of freedom with the repetition and italics of the final three single word lines: ‘*rising*’. The capital letters of the title and the use of italics within the poem are inspired by Wheatley’s use of the typography throughout her poems. By using the verb ‘rising’ as a title and as an end to the poem, I create a sense of continual movement with a song like quality foreshadowing the end of the novel where Birdie and Mary eventually gain their freedom. The theme of freedom is echoed not only through the lexis ‘flying’ within the final poem, but also with the symbolic reference to birds in both the first and last poem as well as Birdie’s name itself. In addition, contrast is created through the lexis in the final poem ‘opposite’, ‘day’ and ‘night’ signifying the two time periods of the novel as well as a layered meaning of escaping enslavement.

In researching the time slip and time travel genre mentioned earlier, I decided that literary texts would form a key component of one of the three mechanisms for triggering the time slip and the subsequent time travel. Whilst including several literary allusions throughout the novel, I opted to use two main literary allusions from the long eighteenth century for the time slip mechanism: *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift and *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* by William Wordsworth. There are a number of examples from the novel, I shall focus specifically on two references from each text.

*Gulliver’s Travels* embodies a wide variety of themes: a satire on the governments, religious differences, corruption and the corruptible, progressive modernism, morality, truth, the individual, inequality, and the loss of liberty. The way in which Gulliver was treated

reflects enslavement on a wider scale at the time and today. By being exploited, entrapped in labour, separated from others in both Lilliput and the country of the Houyhnhnms and Brobdingnag, Gulliver experiences a loss of liberty that echoes the protagonists, Birdie and Mary, in the creative novel. Mary perceives *Gulliver's Travels* as one of 'voyages to far off lands' and as 'fantastical adventures' but also as an exploration on how humanity could 'amend our flaws'. (p. 127, this volume) In Chapter 3, Mary reads from *Gulliver's Travels*: 'He is shipwrecked, and swims for his life, gets safe on shore in the country of Lilliput; and is made a prisoner'. The sense of isolation, peril and enslavement are underscored with the lexis: 'shipwrecked', 'swim for his life' and 'prisoner' and all resonate with Mary's situation as an enslaved individual in the eighteenth-century. This link is significant as it forms an added layer within the novel as part of the trifold mechanism that enacts the time-slip.

In Chapter 10, Mary reenacts the time slip and in an effort to time travel to the future reading from *Gulliver's Travels*:

During this storm, which was followed by a strong  
wind west-south-west, we were carried, by my  
computation, about five hundred leagues to the east,  
so that the oldest sailor on board could not tell in  
what part of the world we were.

In this chapter of the novel, the Yellow Fever epidemic has just started to take hold and Mary has returned from the initial time slip, her confusion and journey paralleled by the description of the storm and being blown off course in *Gulliver's Travels*. The reference to the 'storm', being 'carried' and the distance of 'five hundred leagues to the east' are all reflective of the time slip journey that Mary experiences. Her confusion is echoed in the words 'the oldest sailor on board could not tell what part of the world we were'. This theme of journey is reflected in Mary's physical journey through time but also layers her movement from enslavement to physical freedom, from illiteracy to literacy and intellectual freedom as well as the journey she experiences with the undulating relationships with the other characters,

such as: Birdie, Kit, Clemmie, Master and Mistress.

Birdie refers to the poems of William Wordsworth as part of the trifold mechanism that enables her to time slip. Wordsworth's poetry embodies a secular spiritual experience with the interconnection of humanity and the natural world, creating a sense of being overwhelmed by nature at times, and juxtaposing enormous delight with enormous sorrow. Wordsworth's lyrical description of the enlightening of experience is reflective of Birdie's journey from modern-day slavery to the enlightenment of freedom.

In Chapter 2, Birdie is connected to her past with the book of Wordsworth's poetry as it is a gift from her mother who inscribed the words '...reach for the future, but don't forget the past'. The reference to the 'future' and 'past' is a foreshadow to the time travel that Birdie experiences and a reminder to not become lost in her adventures. The verse from Wordsworth furthers the sense of adventure, nature and power with the lexis 'Twilight', 'peaceful hour', 'Night' and 'Ancient Power':

*HAIL Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour!  
Not dull art Thou as undiscerning Night;  
But studious only to remove from sight  
Day's mutable distinctions – Ancient Power!*

The twilight or blue hour is the liminal time between day and night, and it is in this time that Birdie experiences the majesty, grandeur and might of the natural and unnatural world of the time slip. The liminal space here is also representative of the space between enslavement and freedom that Birdie experiences in the novel. The ABBA rhyme scheme of the first four lines of Wordsworth's poem creates a chant like quality of a spell and is emphasized by the exclamation marks of the first and fourth end-stopped lines. This is highlighted by the typography of hyphenated fourth line and the capital letters of 'Ancient Power'. Birdie comments on this phrase in the rhetorical question about what 'ancient power brought me here?' just before she time slips as an exploration of nature and the wonderment of the experience. Wordsworth's glorification of the 'Twilight' with the capitalised verb 'HAIL' is

indicative of the enormity of nature and is reflected in the novel regarding the overwhelming experience of the blue hour when Birdie time slips.

Birdie, in Chapter 12, refers to her book of Wordsworth poems to enact the time travel just as the stars were beginning to emerge from the twilight:

*Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose  
Day's graceful warmth tho' moist with falling dews  
Look for the stars, you'll say that there are none;  
Look up a second time, and, one by one,  
You mark them twinkling out with silvery light,  
And wonder how they could elude the sight!*

The first six lines of this poem creates a sense of slow revelation, specifically in the lines 'Look for the stars, you'll say that there are none;' and 'Look up a second time' and 'wonder how they could elude the sight'. Wordsworth's reflections on the twilight and emergence of the stars are reflective of Birdie's surfacing realisations throughout the novel that eventually enable her to take steps towards freedom. In this chapter, Birdie and Mary meet in the liminal space of the time shift, 'a twilight starry bubble'; the slow awareness of the stars in Wordsworth's poem is symbolic of the gradual cognizance in Birdie and Mary that neither is alone in their journey from enslavement to freedom. The rhyming couplets in the poem 'none' and 'one' as well as 'light' and 'sight', again, create a chanting spell like quality. It is significant that the final rhyming couplet refers to a sense of goodness and knowledge with the noun 'light' as well as visibility the noun 'sight' suggesting a sense of illumination and transcendence that is reflected in Birdie and Mary's passage to freedom.

The intertextual references to *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) are particularly significant. The text, a satire, mocks the English politics and society, and reveals parallels not only in Gulliver's experience of travelling to distant lands, but in its representation of the enslavement and exploitation of Gulliver in Lilliput and Houyhnhnms. *Gulliver's Travels* links to the creative novel with the purpose of enabling the reader to understand the society in



which they live. This is materialised in its message of responsibility and respect for all humankind and therefore, the words of the text have a distinct power for the time slip of Birdie and Mary. Additionally, the intertextual inclusion of the William Wordsworth poetry acts to form a bridge between the river, the twilight and the timeslip, drawing on his poetry where nature is a transcendental religious experience.

My research on eighteenth-century children's literature, the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and eighteenth-century writers Jonathan Swift and William Wordsworth has influenced the development of the characters, the plot, the themes and symbols within the novel. This has created a layered text rich in meaning. By including these intertextual references and allusions, I endeavored to create characters that are round rather than flat, a multileveled plot and themes and symbols that reflect the movement from enslavement to freedom.

### *Evolution of the Research*

The research for this critical component of the PhD has evolved significantly over the last four years as has the young adult novel, *When We Were Nobody*. Researching published children's literature, such as John Newbery, Ellenor Fenn and Sarah Fielding as well as privately produced reading materials by Jane Johnson, has led me to produce articles specifically on Jane Johnson, Ellenor Fenn, and Sara Fielding's *The Governess* for the Literary Encyclopedia Online. This research has allowed a deeper and wider exploration of the dynamic transition of didactic texts as well as those that instruct and entertain. It is this area that I would be inclined to extend my research beyond this PhD, specifically representations of girlhood in eighteenth century children's literature. I further examined the theme of literacy in Chapter 1 of this critical component, specifically liminality in slave literacy, religion, and enslavement in Colonial America. Both research strands for this critical component informed the young adult novel *When We Were Nobody* with many areas of this

research evolving over the past four years. In exploring the evolution of the research, I shall focus specifically on the strategies for creating empathy, education and entertainment within the novel and the evolution of the plot for the creative component.

#### *A. Strategies for Creating Empathy*

Empathy is created between the main characters, Birdie and Mary, and the intended young adult audience through their unique power to timeslip and time travel; the unjust, disadvantaged and vulnerable situations both Birdie and Mary find themselves in; their ability to cope with disease and ultimately being able to overcome their fears achieving voice and agency. Creating compassion and understanding for Birdie and Mary is essential; while the reader may not have experienced enslavement, they are able to stand in their shoes, feel their pain and emotionally relate to the humanity of their situation.

Empathy is initially created through the plot device of Birdie and Mary's superpower to timeslip and time travel. The novel opens in medias res where Birdie is in the midst of her initial time slip as described in the opening line, 'It was in the half-light that I ceased to be' and enhanced by identifying the setting 'I was sitting by the Thames at Battersea Park' (p. 117, this volume). The reader may infer that this momentary nothingness of the timeslip is indicative of her status as an enslaved individual in London as well as revealing a compelling superpower. Birdie's unfolding unique skill is desirable to readers as they may imagine their own desire and ability to time travel. Similarly, Mary is introduced mid-timeshift and enslaved in Philadelphia, 'The miasma in my head came and went [...] It was by the Delaware where it returned like roots spreading around my mind hastened by the stifling Philadelphia air and master's boot when he did not like me' (p. 125, this volume). The 'miasma' or vaporous nature of Mary's timeslip is a transient image enhancing the mysterious atmosphere to the timeslip, as well as the reference to the 'master's boot', is

compelling to the reader (p. 125, this volume). Both Birdie and Mary do not initially understand the nature of their timeslip underscoring their ordinariness and similarity to the reader. The developing nature of their superpower in the form of a timeslip plot device to a time travel plot device takes the reader from their own sense of ordinariness to a desire for the extraordinary. Empathy is created for Birdie and Mary as their superpower develops over the course of the novel.

Empathy is further created through the unjust treatment of Birdie and Mary. They are disadvantaged, vulnerable and in danger enslaved in domestic servitude. For Birdie, this unjust treatment is clearly evidenced not only in the removal of her freedom where she reflects that ‘the possibility of never seeing my family again was overwhelming’ but in the physical abuse she suffers at the hands of Mr where ‘the palm of his fat right hand landed square on my cheek and I could feel a large red patch extend from the corner of my mouth to above my eye’ (p. 213, this volume). This physical assault is a turning point for Birdie as the ‘blood leaked out from the corner of my mouth and dripped onto my white T-shirt’ (p. 213, this volume). The shift from emotional and mental abuse to physical abuse highlights the ever-present danger in which Birdie finds herself. Her disadvantaged situation and loss of innocence allows the young adult reader to empathise. Similarly, Mary’s physical abuse is presented through a series of flashbacks to her life on Saint-Domingue where ‘There was a noose around my neck’ and ‘The horsewhip cut line after line in my naked back like a thousand tiny knives splitting my skin’ (p. 234 and 235, this volume). While Mary’s situation in Philadelphia reflects the physical restriction of freedom, it is her life on Saint-Domingue where she experiences the extreme physical abuse in enslavement. The references to the ‘noose’, ‘horsewhip’ and ‘naked back’ create violent imagery of extreme unjust treatment, loss of innocence and the ever-present danger that Mary’s life could return to this scenario (p. 234 and 235, this volume). It is through this unjust treatment that the young adult audience

can relate to the universal desires of both Birdie and Mary: they want their freedom; their education, their safety and ultimately to be reunited with their families and friends. Both Birdie and Mary must overcome their respective disadvantaged situations, struggles and conflicts to achieve these universal desires. Their journey is as underdogs; their vulnerabilities are exposed through their physical, intellectual and emotional struggles and conflicts. The fragility of Birdie and Mary's situations encourages the young adult reader to rally for them as underdogs, allowing the young adult reader to take this journey with them and will them to escape their respective enslaved situations. This bildungsroman narrative speaks to the universal journey that all young people go through as a coming-of-age story; this can be seen in young adult literature from the classic novel, *Little Women* (1868) by Louisa May Alcott, to the more contemporary, *The Great Godden* (2020) by Meg Rosoff. The coming-of-age narrative is identifiable to a young adult audience, and therefore, empathy is created.

Yellow Fever epidemic forms the backdrop to the eighteenth-century part of the narrative and creates a layer of societal conflict that further exposes the unjust treatment of enslaved individuals at this time. Now entering a post-Covid time, readers should be able to identify and empathise with Birdie and Mary's ability to cope with an unknown, omnipresent and dangerous disease. The Yellow Fever epidemic is introduced in Chapter 9 with the 'sound of the church bells tolling' indicating that someone had died and is furthered with the foreshadowing of the 'mound of stiff black fur' of a dead cat (p. 160 and 161, this volume). Mary is summoned to assist with Miss Anne's illness and ultimate death. It is with grace and humility that Mary cares for the dying child as she 'stepped over the black vomit and put the water bowl down' and she 'wiped Miss Anne's face removing the blood and tried to clean it off her hair' (p. 164, this volume). It is in Miss Anne's final moments in her father, Master Robert's arms, that Mary kneels 'down and gently washed her [Miss Anne's] hands quietly

reciting: *Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*’ (p. 164, this volume). Despite her situation as an enslaved individual, Mary’s humanity, in the face of a brutal and deadly disease, results in a moment of shared grief between herself and Master Robert as ‘he looked into my eyes [...] like I was human’ (p. 164, this volume). For Birdie, the danger of the Yellow Fever epidemic is initially linked directly to when Mary contracts Yellow Fever in Chapter 28. Locating Mary in Bush Hill Hospital where she ‘wore a shift that was white but now stained by sweat, blood and vomit’ Birdie worries that their ‘fates were intertwined’ but is initially helpless in this moment (p. 248, this volume). However, in Chapter 43, at the eighteenth-century school for girls, Miss Nichols insists that they ‘wash and wash again – everything’ and that they are ‘fighting a war’ (p. 311, this volume). Stepping up, Birdie ‘cleaned like a demon’ (p. 311 and 312, this volume). While this is a rather distanced experience of the Yellow Fever epidemic, it is short lived, as the loss of Kit is in Chapter 48 is devastating and Mary observes that ‘she [Birdie] was kneeling at his [Mayor Clarkson] chair, and he held her hands in his lap and her head rested on her hands [...] then Birdie let out a great long sob’ (p. 331, this volume). The mutual comforting between Birdie and Mayor Clarkson is apparent in this intimate moment of shared grief through their physical proximity. Despite the tangible nature of Birdie and Mary’s grief at the loss of Kit, they both reflect on ‘their memories’ of Kit in his room ‘his desk was covered in papers, drawing and books’ and ‘models made from junk he found on the street’ moving through the stages of grief from anger to acceptance (p. 334, this volume). It is in this mutual grief during the Yellow Fever epidemic, their ability to comfort and look forward with their lives to a time beyond the epidemic that coincides with young reader’s experiences of the Covid pandemic. This allows the reader to empathise with Birdie and Mary and relate to their ability to confront death in the face unknown, omnipresent and dangerous disease.

Ultimately, both Birdie and Mary overcome their fears and take steps towards achieving agency and voice. Separation from family and friends, psychological and physical abuse lead to loss of identity, loneliness, confusion, uncertainty, anger and at times, death. The theme of loss of identity, through the separation from family and friends, for Birdie is addressed in the opening chapter when she vocalises her name, ‘I. Am. Birdie. Jestem. Birdie’ (p. 120, this volume). The difficulty in this vocalisation where Birdie’s ‘mouth was dry and sealed with the remains of the vomit’ and she ‘peeled [her] tongue off the roof of [her] mouth’ is indicative of the difficult journey in her continued search for self and freedom within the novel (p. 120, this volume). In this search, Birdie endeavours to keep the memories of her family and home alive, but as the novel progresses, this becomes increasingly difficult. Birdie recollects her mother’s kitchen ‘with cabinet doors of dark wood with a sky-blue linoleum counter surface and terracotta tiles on the floor – earthy and warm’ which forms a juxtaposition to the white ‘antiseptic’ kitchen of her enslavement (p. 147, this volume). It is after Mr burns the only photograph of her family that Birdie experiences the fading of her family’s faces in her memory where ‘their images seemed to be hiding behind clouds’ and, therefore, she relies on flashbacks to locations including Kraków, the Tatra Mountains and the Wieliczka Salt Mines which conveys a deep sadness and sense of isolation (p. 152, this volume). This is furthered by the psychological and physical abuse Birdie experiences where the severe emotional manipulation and threats made by Mr, against her family, force her into believing that she is protecting her family by remaining enslaved. It is this fear that Birdie contemplates ‘more threats to keep my mouth closed’ and the ‘threats rolled around in my head’ where she feared for the safety of her brother ‘Oskar’ (p. 350, this volume). The confusion and anger compounds over the course of the novel whereby the young adult reader would empathise with Birdie understanding the courage needed to seeking help. At the end of the novel, suspense is heightened as Birdie stands in the queue to pay for the symbolic

hummingbird with her note requesting help. The person in front of her ‘turned around again and scowled’ and the ‘longer [she] waited, the more frightened [she] became’ (p. 350 and 351, this volume). Birdie’s voice is clear in the note ‘Help me. I am a slave. Call the police.’ (p. 352, this volume) as well as the agency required to vocalise her name ‘My name is Birdie – mam na imię Birdie’ (p. 352, this volume). For Mary, separation from her family and friends was equally difficult, but there was the added element that, they too, were enslaved. While Birdie perceived her family to be at risk as a result of her own actions, Mary’s family were subjected to the same treatment in terms of separation from family and friends, psychological and physical abuse. There was the ever-present threat of uncertainty and death as an enslaved individual in the eighteenth century and therefore, Mary’s recollections of Saint-Domingue reflect the precarious experience of enslavement: ‘We were six but are now three. Mama and baby Rachel passed after I was sold’ (p. 295, this volume). It is in this passage that Mary hopes ‘one day to be free and not bound by the dull and tedious toil of a slave’s life’ (p. 295, this volume). However, unlike Birdie, Mary cannot take overt action, choose to be free and seek the help of those in authority. Bound by the laws of slavery of 1793, she must covertly work to form the foundations necessary in the form of not only being able to read but learning to write. In this secretive mission, Mary describes how, when looking after the children, she ‘positioned [herself] next to Miss Joan’ where she was ‘determined to learn to write’ (p. 267, this volume). With Birdie teaching Mary to write, Mary would be in a position of power as Birdie comments that ‘she could work out how not to be enslaved’ (p. 293, this volume). However, for Mary, the separation from her remaining sisters, Eve and Hannah, pervades the novel. They are briefly reunited in Philadelphia where ‘Eve’s face lit up, but she held herself back too’ but Hannah ‘barely acknowledged me’ (p. 229, this volume). However, the reunion is short lived as ‘Their master and mistress wanted to leave Philadelphia’ and ‘go west’ (p. 229, this volume). For Mary, when she receives her

manumission papers and she is a ‘free woman’, it is then that she truly gains agency as she can ‘go to school’ and have the ‘freedom to find Eve and Hannah’ (p. 348, this volume). The constant fear of separation from family, fear of psychological and physical abuse and the resulting loss of identity, loneliness, confusion and uncertainty creates great empathy for both Birdie and Mary; this empathy in the young adult reader is furthered by Birdie and Mary attempting to overcome their fears.

### *B. Education and Entertainment Within the Novel*

The relationship between education and entertainment in eighteenth-century children’s literature forms the argument for Chapter 1 of the Critical Component explored in the *Dynamic Developments of Children’s literature in the Long Eighteenth Century in England and the American Colonies*. I argue that this was a dynamic transition over the decades rather than a particular turning point. This exploration of the transition from purely didactic books to those that instruct and entertain is specifically realised in the creative component where Aunt Charlotte is representative of an eighteenth-century mother who aims to educate her child, Hettie, through both instruction and entertainment. Morals and good behaviour are encouraged through the entertaining value of play, illustrations, toys and fairy stories. Likewise, the novel itself, *When We Were Nobody*, aims to educate its young adult audience on modern-day slavery in context with historic enslavement as well as entertain them using a timeslip and time travel narrative plot device, suspense and the coming-of-age relationships.

In addressing the theme of enslavement, *When We Were Nobody* recognises the preconceived ideas of historic enslavement and realises this through the character of Mary and her family. The physical and emotional violence, the transatlantic slave trade, the separation and isolation all form the historic foundation of enslavement. In educating a



contemporary young adult audience on modern-day enslavement, this foundational understanding works to assist in the understanding of why modern-day slavery is so difficult to recognise and identify. By creating a contrasting scenario where Mary is clearly enslaved due to her race and laws of the time in Philadelphia, Birdie's situation in enslavement, while her freedom and identity have similarly been removed, is vastly different. Despite anti-slavery laws existing worldwide, many people do not realise modern-slavery exists nor understands why a person in modern-slavery cannot just walk away. *When We Were Nobody* aims to educate young adult readers on the psychological and emotional manipulation that occurs making it almost impossible for the enslaved person to seek help. Birdie struggles with Mr's threats and her fears for her family's safety. This extreme psychological manipulation is evident in much of Birdie's narrative, 'It was possible that I would never see my family again' and there was a 'deep fear that what Mr said could be true' (p. 184, this volume). Birdie's narrative also aims to reveal to a young adult audience that modern-day slavery is not something that happens in a far-off country. Placing Birdie in real locations, which are local, emphasises the ubiquitous nature of modern-day slavery. Birdie's ability to move through society unnoticed highlights our own inability to recognise modern slavery, even when it is right before our eyes. This is evidenced in Birdie's encounter with the policemen when she 'stood next to two police officers today' as she waited to cross the road and 'they looked at [her]' (p. 184, this volume). The fact that they 'looked right at [her]' and 'smiled' while she 'scanned their faces to see if they could really see [her]' emphasises the enormous difficulty in identifying modern-day slavery in our society (p. 184, this volume). By highlighting these difficulties and by providing further information at the end of *When We Were Nobody* in the Q & A, the young adult audience will, hopefully, be more educated and more aware of modern slavery, know what signs to look for and who to contact if they suspect someone is a victim of modern slavery.

In addressing the theme of enslavement and the educational nature of the novel, *When We Were Nobody* also aims to entertain its young adult reader through the inherent nature of reading for enjoyment. While including illustrations, toys or fairy stories were not wholly applicable, *When We Were Nobody* draws on the eighteenth-century concept of enabling a didactic book to delight. In this way, the entertainment value is realised through the fantasy plot device of timeslip and time travel narrative, the use of suspense and dramatic action and the coming-of-age relationships between Birdie and Kit, Mary and Clemmie and Birdie and Mary.

The fantasy plot device of the timeslip and time travel in *When We Were Nobody* is an escape enabling the young adult readers to suspend what is known to be true and believe in impossibilities. It is through indulging this escapism, that the readers are willing to accompany Birdie and Mary on their adventure; it is in this imaginary world that the truly awful situation of enslavement and the brutality of human nature can safely be explored. Tolkien defends the use of fantasy as a ‘natural human activity’ and it ‘certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity’; it ultimately ‘remains a human right’.<sup>282</sup> It is in this way that the entertaining value of the novel through the fantasy element is clear; Tolkien highlights that ‘at no time can I remember that the enjoyment of a story was dependent on the belief that such things could happen, or had happened, in real life’.<sup>283</sup> On this premise, the young adult reader can suspend their belief and be thoroughly entertained by the prospect of timeslips and time travel, relinquishing ideas on what is actually possible and indulging in themselves in fantasy dream.

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<sup>282</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories* (1947)

<<https://coolcalvary.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/on-fairy-stories1.pdf>> [accessed: 12 May 2023].

<sup>283</sup> Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*.

In this fantasy genre, suspense and dramatic action work concurrently to drive the plot forward creating an intriguing and complex narrative that is entertaining to the young adult reader. For Birdie and Mary, the main narrative question that follows them through their story arcs is: will they be able to escape enslavement? The essence of Birdie and Mary's desire, their hope of freedom, is combined with the uncertainty and fear throughout the novel; at various points the stakes are high for each character, heightening the dramatic action. This is evident in the continual risks that Birdie takes in time travelling, specifically in Chapter 27 where she realises that Mr left the backdoor key and in stealing the key her 'legs seized up as if there was some invisible force stopping me from unlocking the door with the key' (p. 240, this volume). Here, the action is heightened by the danger of Birdie being caught and the way she encourages herself, 'Do it [...] like taking off a band aid' (p. 240, this volume). Similarly, in Chapter 39, Mary takes a huge risk in learning to write and sews the 'slate and chalk into [her] shift' and nearly compromises herself when she runs past Cook and 'the slate hit against the frame of the door' (p. 293 and 298, this volume). This momentary heightened dramatic action creates suspense and entertains the reader developing the anticipation that Birdie and Mary could be caught.

The coming-of-age relationships between Birdie and Kit, Mary and Clemmie and Birdie and Mary engage the young adult reader with a variety of friendships that shift throughout the novel. There is clearly attraction between Birdie and Kit, as in Chapter 16, where Birdie endeavours to integrate more seamlessly in the eighteenth-century style with regard to her hair and clothes: Kit stammers in his response 'Umm. Your hair. It is...it is...' only to be completed by Hettie, 'Very becoming' (p. 193, this volume). This anticipated romantic relationship simmers throughout the novel, yet is not realised, which may be relatable to a young adult reader. This is partly due to Birdie's growing understanding that she must gain freedom in her own time as well as the untimely death of Kit where 'something

had altered beyond recognition' (p. 331, this volume). The relationship between Mary and Clemmie is one of friendship that verges on romantic love when Clemmie 'leaned into [her] face' and 'her lips kissed mine' (p. 204, this volume). However, this is an unrequited love for Clemmie as the 'kiss had overwhelmed [Mary's] senses', and their relationship remains firmly as friends (p. 209, this volume). Similarly, Birdie and Mary form a unique linked relationship through their timeslips and time travel. Initially adversaries, Birdie and Mary battle in the timeslip where Mary 'gripped her waist more tightly' but Birdie's 'fingers dug into [Mary's] arms as [Birdie] tried to push [Mary] away – away from London and back to Philadelphia' (p. 180, this volume). However, their relationship evolves, and they encourage each other to achieve freedom within their own times with Birdie teaching Mary how to write as they 'sat next to each other, and [Birdie] wrote the first uppercase and lowercase letters A and a on the slate' (p. 293, this volume). The shift in the relationship between Birdie and Mary is identifiable to a young adult audience as it is reflective of the relationships they experience. The themes of romantic love, unrequited love and friendship is highly relatable for a young adult audience and forms further layers to the entertaining aspects of the novel.

### *C. Evolution of the Plot*

Within the plot of the novel, the overall story line remained solid over the four years with the focus on a teenage girl enslaved in contemporary times whose life is intertwined with an enslaved girl from the eighteenth century. The girls time shift to each other's time, their paths crossing like DNA, until they meet and eventually achieve freedom within their own times. Themes of separation, isolation and loneliness pervade the novel in a similar way to previous time slip young adult novels and act as part of the mechanism to time travel. Manipulation, servitude, abuse, enslavement, religion, race, literacy, freedom,

metamorphosis, control, and power are also omnipresent throughout and have been explored not only in the creative component but the critical as well.

The 1793 setting was specifically chosen to enable the context of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic to form a layered conflict that enabled the subtext of the role of black free and enslaved people during this time to be explored in relation to the two protagonists. This research and context have remained consistent throughout and has been refined in each iteration of the novel from the inclusion of the description of the spreading epidemic to the confusion and debate surrounding the source of the illness and to the deaths from the disease and the presentation of the hospital at Bush Hill. In addition to the historical context, literary allusions are a part of the trifold mechanism of time travel, a means to illuminate literacy and its relationship with freedom as discussed in the critical component.

The novel underwent several evolutions in terms of the number of characters. This was significant in the presentation of characters related to Mary Willmont. Originally, I included Mary's previous owners Mistress Rachel Johnson and Master John Johnson who suffered the loss of a child. I explored her transition from the Johnsons to Master Robert and Mistress Sarah Ralston. This tangent, while important in acknowledging the sale of enslaved people, created a confusing and cumbersome backstory. I felt that it was possible to explore the similar theme through a flashback for Mary when she was sold and through the presentation of her sisters (Eve, Hannah and Rachel). By streamlining Mary's backstory, I believe that I was more able to focus on her current enslavement in the Ralston household.

In a similar way, I streamlined Kit's family to create greater clarity. I originally intended to demonstrate the fragility of life at the time by having the first wife (Aunt Sally) of Kit's Uncle Matthew die in childbirth. By providing Uncle Matthew with a second wife, who I named May, and having a second child, also called May, so named to demonstrate the passing on of parental names at the time. In doing this, I had attempted to reflect that 'sons

and daughters often received the names of their fathers and mothers' in Colonial New England.<sup>284</sup> However, I created a confusing family tree, and therefore, the evolution of this family unit was streamlined. In the revised version, Kit's parents have died, and he has been looked after by his Uncle Matthew and Aunt Charlotte Clarkson. They have one child, eight-year-old Hettie. Once this refined family tree was established, I decided to raise the stakes with Aunt Charlotte giving birth to twins, Abigail and Alice, but dying in childbirth. This achieved the same effect as including a first and second wife for Uncle Matthew, exposing the fragility of life at the time. Hettie and the twins are sent away during the Yellow Fever Epidemic and return as a symbol of new hope once the epidemic has begun to pass with the onset of winter. By reducing the extraneous characters and evolving the 1793 plot to be more focused on the main characters, I believe I have produced a more powerful exploration of life at the time.

Within the plot itself, Mary succumbs to the Yellow Fever Epidemic and is transferred to Bush Hill Hospital. I originally created a plot line that enabled Birdie to time travel to 1793, and, having met Mary previously, realise that she could help Mary with simple modern items: paracetamol, Coca-Cola and cool flannels. I wrote the scene in which Birdie discovers Mary in hospital and risks returning to contemporary London to retrieve the items that would help improve Mary's condition. The stakes were raised, as at this point in the plot Birdie had managed to escape Mr and Mrs and planned to live in freedom in 1793. In returning her contemporary London and then back to 1793, bringing medicines and products to help Mary, I encountered two problems. The first was the interference with events in the past. One could argue that simply by returning to the past, there is always an element of interference – conversations, actions, however inconspicuous or mundane, would have an

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<sup>284</sup> Daniel Scott Smith, 'Continuity and Discontinuity in Puritan Naming: Massachusetts, 1771', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 51.1, (1994), p. 68.

impact, however minimal. Secondly, there was the added complication of Birdie returning with a modern consumer product, such as Coca-Cola, and a scene of ‘white-saviour’ was created. In rewriting this part of the plot, I established that Mary was able to recover on her own and witness the work of the black enslaved nurses at the hospital, inspiring her to want to be able to not only read, but to be able to write, with the aspiration of becoming a nurse herself. In this way, I was able to explore the work of the black free and enslaved people at Bush Hill Hospital. In this permutation of the plot, I was also able to explore the view of the time that black people were immune to Yellow Fever and hence, were sent to work at the hospital. Rana Asali Hogarth explains that ‘while some accounts of yellow fever epidemics referenced Black victims of the disease, many White commentators fixated on Blacks’ seemingly low mortality and morbidity from the disease’ and therefore the belief that ‘Black people were immune, because of their race, took hold –’.<sup>285</sup> This, of course, was not true, but by exploring these views in the plot, I was able to add layers to the context of the time.

Birdie’s storyline evolved over time; her journey from enslavement to freedom and finding her voice went through several permutations as to how this would occur. I initially planned for Birdie to ask a police officer for help. In a previous draft, she stands next to a police officer in London, thinking of how many times in the past she stood next to a police officer who could help, if only she would ask. This emphasises the nature of modern-day enslavement in that Birdie is seen – clearly – by someone in a position of authority, but she is unable to articulate her situation and ask for help due to the manipulation and threats from Mr and Mrs on her family. Hence, she goes unnoticed by those in a position to help – she is unseen. I decided that if Birdie were to find her voice, this version of the plot would not best reflect the underlying themes of literacy within the novel. In the rewrite of this scene, I reimagined Birdie writing a note to hand to someone in a shop which stating: *Help me. I am a*

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<sup>285</sup> Hogarth, ‘The Myth of Innate Racial Differences’, p. 1340.

*slave. Call the police.* The scene is dramatic and builds to a climax as Birdie feels the need to get as far away from the house she was enslaved as possible and makes her way to the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. This brings the story full circle, as this is the location that Mary arrives at and where she experiences her initial freedom. In the National Gallery, Birdie seizes her freedom when she chooses to buy small item, a hummingbird ornament (symbolising good luck, joy and healing). Even though she had no money, she stands in the queue to pay and pass her note to the cashier. Giving Birdie a voice through her writing underscores the link between literacy and liberty that is explored throughout the novel. The rewrite of this part of the plot, I believe, is far more effective than simply approaching a police officer for help. These are a few examples of how the plot and characters evolved to develop greater clarity, context, momentum and ultimately a dramatic climax.

## **Conclusion**

*When We Were Nobody* explores modern-day enslavement in context with historic enslavement. This principal theme of enslavement includes race, separation, manipulation, control, isolation, loneliness, servitude, religion, abuse, vulnerability, fear, and identity highlighting how, while modern-day enslavement and historic enslavement are so very similar, there are significant differences. Additionally, literacy and freedom within the context of the dynamic developments in children's literature in the long eighteenth century alongside the liminality in slave literacy, resistance and revolution in the American Colonies, form significant layers to the stories of Birdie and Mary in *When We Were Nobody*. Running through both timelines, the elements of friendship and time underscore the main themes of enslavement and literacy. Unlike these themes that link Birdie and Mary, modern-day slavery differs from historic slavery in that, while it is illegal throughout the world, it proliferates all



around us; modern-day slavery is ‘hidden in plain sight, unseen’.<sup>286</sup> As established, modern-day slavery is a ‘global system of supply and demand that allows these exploitative practices to exist’.<sup>287</sup> Birdie, an enslaved child, is just one example of a composite of modern-day slave narratives exemplifying those who are paralysed in domestic servitude. But modern-day slavery goes far beyond Birdie’s situation with human trafficking being omnipresent in many sectors of society. Garbers highlights that ‘very few of us wake up in the morning and decide to participate in the exploitation and enslavement of another person’, however, as a wider global problem, the enslavement of other people is woven into the fabric of our lives, ‘in the things we buy, the services we commission, the lifestyle choices we make’.<sup>288</sup> The ‘basis of inequality and discrimination’ drives slavery and exploitation of other human beings, and in Birdie’s case, she is unable to extricate herself from her situation for long time, like many others today, because of fear, threat and violence. It is this enslaved situation, one of paralysis, one of voicelessness, one of a lack of agency that is a ‘present reality’ and not a ‘historical fact’.<sup>289</sup> By presenting Birdie’s situation in context with Mary’s, a situation of historic enslavement that we are all too familiar with and has existing repercussions, it is my purpose to raise awareness that modern-day slavery is not something that happens far away, removed from our daily lives. There are people around us, who work with us, who work for us, who are voiceless in their enslaved situations.

In Birdie’s situation, she is a child, lacking the agency of an adult, unaware of her rights and ultimately initially trusted the person who enslaved her.<sup>290</sup> Garbers explains that identifying victims of modern-day enslavement can be hard and in domestic servitude, as in Birdie’s situation, she lives with the family, does not eat with the rest of the family, her

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<sup>286</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 20.

<sup>287</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 20.

<sup>288</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 20, 25.

It is possible to check your slavery footprint at: <https://slaveryfootprint.org/>.

<sup>289</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 28.

<sup>290</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 88.

private space is compromised, she rarely leaves the house; she is subjected to insults, abuse, threats and violence.<sup>291</sup> Additionally, she has few possessions, often appears frightened, has no identification, has restricted movement, is unwilling to speak to strangers or unwilling to interact in public.<sup>292</sup> In considering modern-day slavery, Garbers invites us to ‘put on someone else’s shoes, understand their situation, consider their options (or lack of)’ and I ask the same of my readers.

The Modern Slavery Research Consortium has recently (April 2022) shared a report into the war in the Ukraine and the risks of trafficking and exploitation, based on the round table organised by UCL and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. It highlighted the millions of people who are displaced by the war in the Ukraine with an overwhelming number of those seeking refuge abroad being women and children.<sup>293</sup> The report identifies the war as an opportunity for traffickers with women and children prime targets with the possibility of the humanitarian crisis turning into a human trafficking crisis. The ever-changing nature of modern-day enslavement is exemplified in the report highlights a need for a variety of responses.<sup>294</sup>

It is my hope that Birdie’s story of modern-day enslavement, in the context of Mary’s story of historic enslavement, will encourage the reader to stop and think. It is my hope that for a moment, the reader will put on the shoes of those they are in contact with in their everyday lives, who live unseen and enslaved. It is my hope that the reader will take the first steps to being educated and aware of those enslaved around us.

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<sup>291</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 195.

<sup>292</sup> Antislavery International, ‘What is Modern Slavery?’ <<https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>> [accessed: 24 May 2022].

<sup>293</sup> Gary Craig, ‘Modern Slavery Research Consortium’, 25 May 2022. Personal Correspondence.

<sup>294</sup> Ella Cockbain and Aiden Sidebottom, ‘The war in Ukraine and associated risks of human trafficking and exploitation: Insights from an evidence-gathering roundtable’, 29 April 2022. <<https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1801/ucl-iasc-2022-roundtable-report-the-war-in-ukraine-human-trafficking-and-exploitation.pdf>> [accessed: 28 May 2022].

Birdie's and Mary's stories are not finished. *When We Were Nobody* is the narrative of their enslavement and journey to freedom. In this novel, they are, as Garbers defines, a 'victim' – 'an individual who is still in the situation of exploitation'.<sup>295</sup> Their respective stories do not end here. For both Birdie and Mary, their story shifts from that of 'victim' to that of 'survivor' – 'when they are no longer in a situation of slavery'.<sup>296</sup> Exploring the complexities of what it means to be a 'survivor' would comprise two further novels, one that follows Birdie's path as a child being reunited with her family, returning to school and the people involved in this process, including an 'Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) who would provide advice and advocacy that ensures that all the people involved are working towards her best interest and focused on promoting recovery'.<sup>297</sup> Mary's journey would include her continued education, evolving social activism, with the aim rescuing her sisters from their enslavement. This agency for Mary would be inspired by American abolitionists Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, where further research would include literature such as Jean M. Humez's *Harriet Tubman, The Life and Stories* as well as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*.

Florence Soyekwo, country director for Hope for Justice Uganda, explains the prevention strategies against the trafficking of women and girls as the 'four pillars of living in a world free from slavery: preventing, rescue, restore and reform'.<sup>298</sup> It is with this in mind, that I would endeavour to further the stories of Birdie and Mary as 'survivors' of enslavement and in turn, continue to raise awareness of modern-day enslavement. Garbers summarises that those who are enslaved want to 'be believed, want to have their story told and want to move forward with their lives'.<sup>299</sup> *When We Were Nobody* aims to encourage an

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<sup>295</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 21.

<sup>296</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 21.

<sup>297</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 103.

<sup>298</sup> Florence Soyekwo, 'Intersectional Gender-Focused Prevention Strategies against the Trafficking of Women and Girls', Hope For Justice Conference, 23 March 2022. Conference paper.

<sup>299</sup> Garbers, *Unseen Lives*, p. 211.

understanding of modern-day slavery, urge people to become educated about modern-day slavery and ultimately to be alert to those around us.

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