

## *Black Romanticism and the Lyric as the Medium of the Conspiracy*

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In 1917, Benjamin Brawley made a half-hearted case for the African American poets of the mid-nineteenth century: “At least three persons . . . in the long period between Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar, deserve not wholly to pass unnoticed. These were George Moses Horton, Mrs. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Albery A. Whitman.” He continued, “Each one of these poets had faults and even severe limitations as an artist. Each one had also, however, a spark of the divine fire that occasionally even kindled a flame.”<sup>1</sup> Brawley’s reservations were more influential than his appreciation. In Alain Locke’s 1925 *New Negro* anthology, William Stanley Braithwaite repeated and reframed Brawley’s periodization, taking a more unforgiving view of the period’s poetry: “All that was accomplished between Phyllis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar, considered by critical standards, is negligible, and of historical interest only.”<sup>2</sup> For Braithwaite, the work of Harper, Horton, and their contemporaries matters only as a set of artifacts of the Civil War era, but makes no formal contribution to what was then coming into focus as the tradition of African American verse. In his critical survey *To Make a Poet Black* (1939), J. Saunders Redding elaborates Braithwaite’s dismissal: “They [Harper et al.] lived precariously through a trying period of the most significant action. Most of them were far too much engaged with the business of existence to devote hungry time to the more esthetic ends of art.”<sup>3</sup> These early twentieth-century critics’ wish to separate aesthetic work from historical context belongs to the coincident emergence of New Negro cultural nationalism and New Critical standards for poetry. Both forms of literary “newness” took their distance from Romanticism.

Just a year before the publication of the *New Negro* anthology, Arthur Lovejoy famously pointed out the difficulties involved in “the discrimination of Romanticisms.”<sup>4</sup> Brawley, Braithwaite, and Redding’s conclusions exemplify the trouble critics have had with categorizing the global movement’s various iterations. Their critiques mix the specificity of African

American cultural history with aesthetic principles that evolved through transatlantic debates. The historical judgment of the New Negro critics, and their preference for belatedness, corresponds to a reading of Romanticism later expressed by M. H. Abrams, who argued: "The great Romantic poems were written not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair."<sup>5</sup> In Brawley's periodization, the frustrations of the end of Reconstruction and the onset of the Jim Crow era, artfully expressed in Dunbar's attention to the vernacular, set the true direction of African American literary tradition. Scholarship on Romanticism since Abrams has expanded substantially, not least to account for its role in responding to racial slavery.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, scholarship on African American literature has begun to return to the poets who wrote, as Braithwaite put it, between Wheatley and Dunbar.

This chapter seeks to define what Brawley calls the divine fire in African American poetry from 1850 to 1865. It suggests that Horton, Harper, and their contemporaries constitute a specific and coherent Black iteration of Romanticism, that they conceived the end of slavery as an instance of Romantic revolution, and that they understood their poetic practice as a part of the cultural work of that revolution. These Black poets cast visions comparable to W. E. B. Du Bois, writing on the 1850s in his magisterial *Black Reconstruction* (1935): "The United States was on the verge of the greatest labor revolution it had yet seen."<sup>7</sup> Their political-aesthetic practice represents the lost revolutionary promise of the period. In paying particular attention to the cultural, moral, and psychological dimensions of the crisis, the Black Romantics provide a very different picture of "the inner Civil War" than George Fredrickson's classic 1965 history of white northern intellectuals' views.<sup>8</sup>

The point of rereading early African American poetry as Romantic is not to enact a separate but equal periodization, but instead to account for its prophetic character. The Black Romantic poets were uniquely attuned to the aspects of slavery that ramified in its aftermath: its racism, its sexual violence, and its implication in capitalism. Acting as a kind of abolitionist avant-garde, the Black Romantics took advantage of the multivalence of the print lyric (open to both quiet contemplation and public performance) to bridge the racial divisions of antislavery movements and the disparate experiences of enslaved, fugitive, and free people of color.<sup>9</sup> Lyrics by Joshua McCarter Simpson, James Monroe Whitfield, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and George Moses Horton moved through abolition publics, articulating experimental notions of Black nationalism and African American racialization, Black interiority and African American

individualism. Often granted short shrift in literary historical surveys, the Black Romantics nonetheless made important contributions to African American literature and culture.

### **Joshua McCarter Simpson and the Fugitive Romance**

To understand the role of lyric poetry in this period, one must first recognize that most mid-nineteenth-century Black poets were born with free status, did their work as an adjunct to activist commitments within the abolition movement, and addressed audiences otherwise riven by race, class, legal status, and political orientation.<sup>10</sup> Much more so than the slave narrative, lyric poetry moved across the oral/print binary, and it thus took on an important role in cementing the bonds of interracial abolitionist friendship and in making appeals to fugitives from slavery. In his classic 1938 history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James argues that African diasporic religion played a similar role of forging coalitional ties, claiming that “voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy,” in other words that it provided ritual contexts for organizing and articles of faith in revolutionary possibility.<sup>11</sup> He refers specifically to the famous Bois Caïman ceremony of 1791, conducted by Dutty Boukman, which sealed the collaboration of a disparate group of enslaved people, maroons, fugitives, and free people of color to the cause of what would become the Revolution. James and others report that this ceremony involved an oath, recorded in one of the earliest sources, Hérard Dumesle’s *Voyage dans la nord d’Haïti* (1824), as a nine-line irregularly rhymed lyric poem. Reports of the Bois Caïman ceremony are richly conflicting, but the presence of the lyric echoes in the US abolition movement, which had its own complex of social groups to organize, including white middle-class liberals, free people of color, fugitives from slavery, and more.<sup>12</sup> In the revolutionary culture of the decades around the Civil War, the lyric became the medium of the conspiracy.

The most signal example of a lyric functioning this way is Joshua McCarter Simpson’s “Away to Canada,” which circulated both orally and in print through the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Simpson included “Away to Canada” in his first book, *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*, printed in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1852. Only two copies of this short text survive, but its author had ambitions for it to “find its way and lodging place in every house and family in the land of the free and the home of the brave.”<sup>13</sup> *Original Anti-Slavery Songs* apparently traveled quickly enough to the offices of William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* in

Boston, where “Away to Canada” was reprinted in the December 10, 1852, issue, as a “fair specimen” of the volume’s contents.<sup>14</sup>

The lyric would then begin to appear without credit to Simpson in a wide variety of contexts: as a broadside under several different titles including “Song of a Fugitive Slave” and “Song of the Free,” as well as in fugitive James Watkins’s collection *Poems: Original and Selected by James Watkins, a Fugitive Slave* printed in London in 1859, under the title “Slave’s Escape to Canada.” Around this time, it also began to be quoted in a series of important works of abolition prose writing. “Away to Canada” appears in the portions of Martin Delany’s novel *Blake, or the Huts of America* serialized in *The Anglo-African Magazine* from late 1861 to 1862. It was quoted again in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s profile of Sojourner Truth in the April 1863 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. After the war, the lyric continued to appear in various publications documenting the history of abolition. Its widespread circulation exemplifies the Romantic appeal of the figure of the fugitive, who seemed all at once to prove the miseries of slavery (contra its paternalist justification), to confirm the desirability of white nineteenth-century liberalism, and to hold out the possibility of realizing yet grander ideals of freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Simpson himself is something of a mysterious historical character; he lived his whole life in small-town Ohio and appears to have worked as a grocer and herbalist. He was involved in some capacity with the Underground Railroad, but his name does not appear in any of the standard sources on the movement. He wrote a nationally well-known poem, but did not himself have a national reputation as a Romantic poet, perhaps because fame would have carried enormous risks. Simpson does insist on his authorship at times (note the title *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*). In the preface to his second collection, entitled *The Emancipation Car* (1874), Simpson writes: “This work is *all original*, though several of the songs have been republished several times, under other names, and by other persons, *they are my own Composition*.”<sup>16</sup> This assertion is especially ironic in light of Simpson’s compositional practice, which was to rewrite the lyrics to popular songs, including national anthems and minstrel tunes. He intended “Away to Canada” to be sung to the tune of Stephen Foster’s “Oh! Susanna” (1848), perhaps the most popular minstrel song of the period. This choice, in addition to being an extraordinary act of *détournement*, also surely helped the widespread circulation of “Away to Canada.”<sup>17</sup>

The role of the lyric in period political organizing adds another layer of complexity to the question of its authorship. Delany depicts fugitives

singing “Away to Canada” on their way to Canada, as an accompaniment to what David Ruggles called the “practical abolition” of the Underground Railroad.<sup>18</sup> Simpson suggests, in the preface to *The Emancipation Car*, that he intended his work to be performed in exactly that context. “Away to Canada” appears in an especially extraordinary instance of abolitionist sociality in Stowe’s account of her meeting with Truth. Just as she would sing at the start of her public lectures, Truth breaks into Simpson’s song in Stowe’s Connecticut mansion:

Sojourner was fond of singing an extraordinary lyric, commencing,  
“I’m on my way to Canada,  
That cold, but happy land;  
The dire effects of Slavery  
I can no longer stand.  
O righteous Father,  
Do look down on me,  
And help me on to Canada,  
Where colored folks are free!”

The lyric ran on to state, that, when the fugitive crosses the Canada line,  
“The Queen comes down unto the shore,  
With arms extended wide,  
To welcome the poor fugitive  
Safe onto Freedom’s side.”

In the truth thus set forth she seemed to have the most simple faith.<sup>19</sup>

Stowe frames this scene with a colonizationist’s skepticism about the Anglophilic image of the hospitable and protective Queen.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the piece, Stowe makes a point of what she calls Truth’s “solemn twinkle of humor . . . a gloomy sort of drollery which impressed one strangely.”<sup>21</sup> Stowe uses these paradoxical formulations to portray Truth as a kind of “naïf” and classical oracle, the “Libyan Sibyl.”<sup>22</sup>

The song as represented in Stowe’s report deviates from Simpson’s original text, leaving out a whole stanza between the first two quatrains:

My soul is vexed within me so  
To think that I’m a slave;  
I’ve now resolved to strike the blow  
For freedom or the grave.<sup>23</sup>

The profile thus sets aside Simpson’s articulation of Black interiority and his declaration of commitment to fugitivity as a form of masculinist violence.<sup>24</sup> In other ways, Simpson’s poem resembles Stowe’s most famous work. Taken as a whole, “Away to Canada” condenses in lyric form across sixteen stanzas the panoramic representation of slavery that thrilled

audiences in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). It thus acts as a form of vernacular political education, representing the psychological, spiritual, legal, and economic dynamics between the fugitive, his lover, and their various enslavers.

Stowe and Truth's proto-feminist revision remakes a text that ends with the death in slavery of a fugitive's wife. The last stanza and refrain of "Away to Canada" frame the fugitive's masculine loneliness:

I've landed safe upon the shore,  
 Both soul and body free;  
 My blood and brain, and tears no more  
 Will drench old Tennesse.  
 But I behold the scalding tear,  
 Now stealing from my eye,  
 To think my wife – my only dear,  
 A slave must live and die.

O, Susannah!  
 Don't grieve after me –  
 For ever at a throne of grace,  
 I will remember thee.<sup>25</sup>

The speaker's bodily freedom and eternal memory are likely small consolation for Susannah, and yet Truth's affectionate appropriation brings "Away to Canada" into the practice of a much more womanist abolition.

Simpson's work signals a deft sense of the relations between authorship, print lyric, memorization, and performance. Its circulation and revision as an anonymous ballad constituted Black and abolitionist community in complex and recursive ways. The theoretical frames of Romantic lyricism are of some help here. "Away to Canada" is certainly a "song of experience" in the Blakean sense; it captures the abstracted "cries" not of London but of the Mississippi Valley.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, it centers on the quality of "difficulty overcome" that Wordsworth finds at the meeting point of form and content in the metrical experiments of the *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>27</sup> The sophisticated play on minstrel music puts Simpson in the category of late Romantics like Baudelaire, who sought to "make a new cliché," and Lautréamont, who felt "plagiarism is necessary."<sup>28</sup> Simpson's taking up the fugitive persona anticipates Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855): "I am the hounded slave... Agonies are one of my changes of garments."<sup>29</sup> Simpson deployed the effects of the lyric to stage the fugitive romance as an ideological challenge to slavery, but he also made an entry into transatlantic debates about the aesthetics of liberal individualism and racial nationalism.

### James Monroe Whitfield's Seething Brain

Simpson's work is remarkable for its movement through oral and print networks, but he was not alone among the poets of the period in writing lyrics that circulated in ways beyond what we can see through bibliography. James Monroe Whitfield sold copies of his stridently abolitionist collection *America and Other Poems* hand-to-hand from his barbershop.<sup>30</sup> "Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String," a poem from that volume, has a publication history similar to "Away to Canada": it appeared first in the March 15, 1850, issue of *The North Star*, then in Whitfield's *America and Other Poems* (1853), then again whole in an advertisement for the book in the July 15, 1853, issue of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and finally, like "Away to Canada," in Delany's *Blake*. This poem is much less clearly intended for vocal performance than Simpson's, but it offers perhaps the most condensed statement of Black lyric theory of the period. It also focuses even more intently on Black emotional life and its relation to prophetic modes of historical thinking.

Whitfield's conceit is simple enough; his speaker addresses a singer, encouraging and directing him:

Yes! strike again that sounding string,  
And let the wildest numbers roll;  
Thy song of fiercest passion sing –  
It breathes responsive to my soul!<sup>31</sup>

The lyric's framing as a musical conversation cuts against John Stuart Mill's definition of poetry as "*overheard*": "Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude."<sup>32</sup> By contrast, "Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String" reads as one-half of a call-and-response exchange. The poem's tetrameter quatrains echo the musicality of its subject, but also tend (by avoiding the traditional ballad's alternating 4 and 3 stress lines) toward a sense of the lyric poem as more interior, more intellectual, and more deliberative than song. In this respect, it anticipates a range of twentieth-century poems about music, for instance, the rhythmic experiments of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement.

Whitfield's speaker elaborates a preference for deep feeling, expressed in "the wildest numbers," a "song of fiercest passion," which can articulate affect at the limits of human imagination. He argues against pastoral music, the "whisperings of the gentle breeze," because it agitates his distemper:

If thou wouldst soothe my burning brain,  
Sing not to me of joy and gladness;  
'T will but increase the raging pain,  
And turn the fever into madness.<sup>33</sup>

The speaker claims that happy music paradoxically enrages him further by contradicting his characteristic misanthropy; he demands emotional mimesis “responsive” to his “soul.” The hypercatalectic abstract nouns “gladness” and “madness” underline the irregularity of the speaker’s reasoning. The figure of the “burning” or “seething brain” appears throughout Whitfield’s work to break down the conventional division of emotion and logical calculation. Here the speaker’s demand for emotional music counters racist assumptions about Black sentimentality and its connection to Black musical culture. The speaker does not represent himself as made insensible with rage; instead, he arrives at his preference for aggression through a measured reasoning, what Emerson called “metre-making argument.”<sup>34</sup>

Whitfield’s argument revises other contemporary accounts of enslaved people’s songs as paradoxical. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Slave Singing at Midnight” (1842) works from a similar premise, with a lyric speaker overhearing the titular singer:

And the voice of his devotion  
Filled my soul with strange emotion;  
For its tones by turns were glad,  
Sweetly solemn, wildly sad.<sup>35</sup>

Here Longfellow anticipates Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*, which describes the enslaved singing “the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone.”<sup>36</sup> According to Douglass, this dialectical effect derives from enslaved peoples’ need for subterfuge, but also signals the alienated character of enslaved consciousness, here echoed in the rhetorical figure of chiasmus.<sup>37</sup> Longfellow’s poem doubly estranges its enslaved subject by representing his song through the narrative account of a white listener. The speaker goes on to wonder, “what earthquake’s arm of might / Breaks his dungeon-gates at night?”<sup>38</sup> Longfellow refers to an episode in Acts (16:25–37) when Paul and Silas sing hymns to God in prison at Philippi, after which an earthquake breaks their chains and throws open the doors of the cells. Black abolitionist verse of the 1850s, like Whitfield’s, sought to bring about an apocalyptic liberation by singing a radical integration of sentiment and rationality.

“Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String” expands on the encoded songs of enslaved people in Longfellow and Douglass and explicitly demands an aesthetic of revolutionary violence:



Sing of the battle's deadly strife,  
The ruthless march of war and pillage,  
The awful waste of human life,  
The plundered town, the burning village!  
Of streets with human gore made red,  
Of priests upon the altar slain;  
The scene of rapine, woe and dread,  
That fill the warriors' horrid train.  
Thy song may then an echo wake,  
Deep in this soul, long crushed and sad,  
The direful impressions shake  
Which threaten now to drive it mad.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the poem's indignation, these lurid scenes have no specific setting, nor any obvious racial content, and thus Whitfield avoids making direct threats to the planter class. The affective encoding of Longfellow and Douglass's slave songs becomes historical and ideological encoding in Whitfield's abolitionism. Whitfield's messianic rhetoric points back to seventeenth-century Protestantism, to the Terror of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and to the slave revolts in the New World, but only in the most ambiguous terms. He derives, from the calculated representation of rage in song, a prophetic theory of history. The singer and the lyric speaker's Romantic "echo" wills judgment upon history and augurs the revolutionary violence of the Civil War.<sup>40</sup> But the lyric's historical abstraction also suggests that the war, ten years after its composition, might not satisfy the "song of fiercest passion" and that the speaker's demand might account for some longer conflict as yet unfinished. Martin Delany responded to these prophetic suggestions when he incorporated the poem into his novel in the early 1860s. He represents the lyric as a ballad, authored by the revolutionary Cuban poet Plácido, who performs it with eight accompanists and an "orchestra" on the eve of a fictionalized slave revolt.<sup>41</sup>

The elevated language and symbolic complexity that made Black Romantic poetry difficult to read in the twentieth century also made it an apt vehicle for the divided political sentiments of the abolition movement. Despite the deeply felt urgency of his political purposes, Whitfield encoded his ideas of Black rage and revolutionary history in the Elizabethan meter and syntax often found in the work of other American writers of the 1850s. His revolutionism is unmistakably Romantic: a prophecy in the ostensibly individual, but also suggestively communal, world-historical, musical, and philosophical voice of the

nineteenth-century lyric in print. At the same time, it foreshadows the Black cultural revolutions of the twentieth century, through what Langston Hughes heard as “the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul – the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world.”<sup>42</sup>

### Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s Objectifications

Across the 1850s, slavery increasingly became the subject of lyric poetry embedded in both the popular performance culture of the ballad and the print culture of bourgeois reflection. No Black poet of the period was more sensitive to these dynamics than Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Like Simpson and Whitfield, Harper was born with free status but was deeply committed to abolition, and she saw lyric poetry as integral to the success of the movement. Like many of her contemporaries, she took interest in the fugitives as a foil to paternalist justifications of slavery and as a signal of Black people’s will to freedom. She writes in a letter to William Still from early 1850s Ohio: “Notwithstanding all the darkness in which they keep the slaves, it seems that somehow light is dawning upon their minds. \* \* These poor fugitives are property that can walk.”<sup>43</sup> Harper finds in the fugitives the “light” associated with expressive genius across transatlantic Romanticism. She opposes this “dawning” consciousness to the legal paradox of the enslaved as an object in a system of exchange.<sup>44</sup> Harper’s poems of the 1850s and early 1860s anticipate the abolition of slavery as a revolution in consciousness in ways that combine the populist lyricism of Simpson and the dialectical complexity of Whitfield.

The idea of the fugitives as “property that can walk” derives from Harper’s careful attention to the role of slavery in US political economy. After reading Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1852), she committed herself to Free Produce, a consumer activist movement that encouraged abolitionists to purchase goods produced without raw materials from plantations.<sup>45</sup> In another letter to Still dated October 20, 1854, she writes: “I have read somewhere, if I remember aright, of a Hindoo being loth to cut a tree because being a believer in the transmigration of souls, he thought the soul of his father had passed into it. . . . Oh, friend, beneath the most delicate preparations of the cane can you not see the stinging lash and clotted whip? I have reason to be thankful that I am able to give a little more for a Free Labor dress, if it is coarser.” She continues, “I can thank God that upon its warp and woof I see no stain of blood and tears; that to procure a little finer muslin for my limbs no crushed and broken heart went out in sighs, and that from the field where it was raised went up no

wild and startling cry unto the throne of God to witness there in language deep and strong, that in demanding cotton I was nerving oppression's hand for deeds of guilt and crime."<sup>46</sup> Harper's terms here anticipate Karl Marx's discussion of the commodity form in the first volume of *Capital* (1867). She draws attention to the human labor "congealed," as Marx would have it, in everyday objects consumed far from scenes of plantation brutality.<sup>47</sup> Also like Marx, Harper points to the seemingly metaphysical dimensions of these effects, referring to reification as a "transmigration of souls." The Free Produce movement had its limitations – its goods tended to be more expensive and of lower quality than those from plantations using enslaved labor. It was also a consumer politics for the northern middle class, and when referring to the guiltlessness of Free Produce garments, Harper marries the language of politics to that of advertisement.

Even if Free Produce failed as a form of direct action, its rhetoric implicated northern consumers in the crime of slavery in ways that intrigued Harper. Free Produce suggested the prospect of staging a poetic reversal of commodity fetishism, making obvious rather than obscuring the brutality that went into producing food and clothes. Harper reworked the language of the letter to Still into a poem entitled "Free Labor" for the 1857 edition of her *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*:

I wear an easy garment,  
O'er it no toiling slave  
Wept tears of hopeless anguish,  
In his passage to the grave.  
  
And from its ample folds  
Shall rise no cry to God,  
Upon its warp and woof shall be  
No stain of tears and blood.  
  
Oh, lightly shall it press my form,  
Unladen with a sigh,  
I shall not 'mid its rustling hear,  
Some sad despairing cry.<sup>48</sup>

Here again Harper touts Free Produce, enjoying the absence of ghostly pains and guilt associated with commodities produced by enslaved labor. The lyric voice calls up enslaved labor, via negation and synesthesia, through the absent "stain of tears and blood" or "sad despairing cry" rising from the garment. Here now in lyric form, the political rhetoric of Free Produce brings slavery into physically distant scenes of bourgeois consumption. The immediacy of the lyric draws near the global systems of production wrought by the market and transportation revolutions, and

makes felt the consequences of capitalism's dependency on enslaved labor. Harper relies on the contemporary convention of the "poetess": the female poetic genius endowed with transcendental intuition.<sup>49</sup> She indexes, at the same time, the sensual pleasure of a liberated object and the sentimental torture of one produced by enslaved people.

One need only juxtapose this lyric with the countless references to the apparel of fugitives in advertisements across the periodical culture of the period to recognize the boldness and intricacy of Harper's cultural politics here. The aesthetic pleasure of the Free Produce garment derives from its distinction from rough "linsey woolsey" used to cloth the enslaved, which Harriet Jacobs later called "one of the badges of slavery."<sup>50</sup> Her enjoyment of the dress in and for herself, against the sexual exploitations of slavery, prefigures a Black feminist politics of pleasure. Harper knew the experience of objectification herself – accounts of her performances never fail to mention her appearance, and Grace Greenwood famously referred to her as the "Bronze Muse," an appellation that would follow her well after her death.<sup>51</sup> Her lyric's *sprezzatura* quality, its studied carelessness, expresses a kind of self-ownership in exploring the "power and information" Audre Lorde would later find among the "uses of the erotic."<sup>52</sup>

The ideas about the objectification of enslaved labor Harper found in Free Produce also frame her concern for fugitives. In early 1861, Harper took an interest in the case of Lucy Bagby, who had escaped from Wheeling, Virginia, to Cleveland in October 1860, only to be arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law. Bagby's trial attracted significant attention; four Southern states had already seceded and it was widely considered a test of northern allegiance to the Compromise of 1850. Harper responded with a poem entitled, "To the Cleveland Union Savers: An Appeal from One of the Fugitive's Own Race," which concludes:

There's a curse upon your Union!  
Fearful sounds are in the air;  
As if thunderbolts were forging  
Answers to the bondman's prayer.

Ye may bind your trembling victims,  
Like the heathen priests of old;  
And may barter manly honor  
For the Union and for gold; –

But ye cannot stay the whirlwind,  
When the storm begins to break;  
And our God doth rise in judgment  
For the poor and needy's sake.

And your guilty, sin-cursed Union  
Shall be shaken to its base,  
Till ye learn that simple justice  
Is the right of every race.<sup>53</sup>

Here the objectification of Black chattel slaves sets off an apocalypse of judgment within an explicitly prophetic scheme. As in Whitfield's lyric, Harper's figure of the "whirlwind" abstracts the violence of retribution – who will sow the wind of this historical turn? Who makes the "curse" on the Union? Who will "shake" the Union to its "base"? The problem of attribution multiplies in the poem's allusions. The "whirlwind" recalls Ezekiel's vision of the judgment of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 1:16) and its remediation in the spiritual "Ezekiel and the Wheel." The poem stages a reading of the period through biblical typology, as did a great deal of jeremidic African American political rhetoric of the period.<sup>54</sup> In this respect, Harper echoes the standard Romantic association of the French Revolution and the Last Judgment. She likely read in Jules Michelet's *History of the French Revolution* (1847): "Believe, hope! Right, though postponed, shall have its advent; it will come to sit in judgment, on the dogma and on the world. And that day of Judgment will be called the Revolution."<sup>55</sup> The lyric's tetrameter quatrains, like Whitfield's, gesture to song but also make room for declamatory rhetoric and political deliberation. The poem's abstraction meant its prophetic determinations may or may not have been satisfied by the reckoning of the Civil War and Reconstruction. To read it again today begs the question of whether the Union that survived the war remains "sin-cursed," or whether the "whirlwind" of the war was not a squall line in a longer, perhaps ongoing, conflict.

Harper's complex array of references to Christian tradition, Atlantic revolution, and African American vernacular form contextualizes the circumstances of the "feeble lambkin" that prompts the poem, Sara Bagby. Her prophetic response to the Bagby case was broadcast through the abolitionist press, first published in the Ohio-based *Anti-Slavery Bugle* on February 23, 1861, and later reprinted in the *Liberator* on March 8, 1861. Bagby, for her part, was freed when Union forces took Wheeling in early summer of 1861, and turns out to have been the last person in the United States prosecuted under the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>56</sup> Harper's subtitle, "An Appeal from One of the Fugitive's Own Race," makes a gesture of racial solidarity with Bagby across the legal division of freedom and enslavement. Though at times her early work addressed white liberals, she was beginning

to think in the direction that would lead to her poetic experiments with Black voices and vernacular personae in the “Aunt Chloe” poems of the 1870s. Harper’s contribution in those poems to the formation of the aesthetic concerns of twentieth-century African American literature was no doubt substantial, but her close study of the vocal possibilities of lyric poetry began in the much more middle-class, but also much more explicitly revolutionary, culture of northern abolition.

### Conclusion: *Naked Genius* at the End of the Civil War

Almost all of the poets writing in the period between 1850 and the end of the Civil War were born with free status, including Simpson, Whitfield, and Harper.<sup>57</sup> In many ways they more closely resembled the period’s roiling and indeterminate white middle class than what Du Bois would refer to as the “mass of slaves.”<sup>58</sup> The print lyric form allowed them to articulate the experience of enslaved people through rhetorical and aesthetic effects. In this respect, their work makes a particularly acute and intense instance of Antonio Gramsci’s formulation about Romanticism: “Among its other meanings romanticism has assumed that of a special relationship or bond between intellectuals and the people, the nation.”<sup>59</sup> African American writers and literary historians have long worried this distinction, which was fundamentally transformed by the end of slavery. The dramatic 1865 publication of George Moses Horton’s collection *Naked Genius*, written while he lived as so-called contraband in Union Army refugee camps, marks the end of abolition poetics and the beginning of the reckoning of slavery as a historical past in literature. Horton’s work, like the other poets in this period, has long been characterized as derivative of Romantic convention.<sup>60</sup>

The boldness of the volume’s title belies its richly ironic contents. Horton’s long decades writing and publishing poetry while enslaved had not left him sanguine about the vindicating power of Black genius against white racism. Nevertheless, the book is remarkable for its tonal range. Horton adds to his repertoire a number of explicitly political poems, such as apostrophes to Union generals Sherman and Grant, an elegy for Lincoln, and the Confederate satire “Jefferson in a Tight Place.” He also expands his already significant corpus of love lyrics to include a number of poems that reckon with the disappointment and difficulty of romantic relationships, with titles like “The Treacherous Woman” and “A Wife, a Wife, a Wife, All the Din Is Wife – Oh Fie! Fie! Fie!” He never makes clear how autobiographical these poems are, although he left behind a wife and

grown children when he migrated first to Philadelphia and then to Liberia in the late 1860s.<sup>61</sup> Instead of documenting his experience, Horton's lyrics toggle between Euro-American conventions of romantic love and the specifically Black historical experience of romantic disruption in slavery.

"The Southern Refugee" makes explicit the geopolitical circumstances of Horton's mobility in an otherwise richly allusive series of quatrains:

What sudden ill the world await,  
From my dear residence I roam;  
I must deplore the bitter fate,  
To straggle from my native home.

The verdant willow droops her head,  
And seems to bid a fare thee well;  
The flowers with tears their fragrance shed,  
Alas! Their parting tale to tell.<sup>62</sup>

The riff on Byron here is extraordinarily ambiguous, with the "verdant" southern flora taking the place of the beloved. The fugitive romance here, rather than making Black people recognizable in their desire for freedom, scrambles the most basic relations between subject and object. Syntactic inversions and pathetic fallacies rough out the bitterly ironic estrangement of this rare early Black nature poem. The later decades of the nineteenth century would answer the implicit question in the line "What sudden ill the world await," with renewed brutality. In its weird music, disjunctive grammar, and projective rhetoric, Horton's lyric illuminates the anxious conditions of romantic love in the transition from slavery to freedom. His work thus also draws a line between Byronism and the "easy riders" of the blues who emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Responding to both the disruptions wrought by slavery and the rapidly shifting circumstances of the Emancipation, Horton writes the lost Black loves of the nineteenth century among the great Romantic stories of the age.

Simpson, Whitfield, Harper, and Horton experimented with the lyric as means of objectifying, encoding, and intensifying historical experience; in so doing they generated political identifications across spatial, economic, and racial divides. The movement of their work as "the medium of the conspiracy" to bring down slavery indicates both the aesthetic complexity and political urgency of this long underappreciated period of African American literary history. These poets should be reckoned for how their verses echo Hughes's "eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul," as well as for their early measures of the distance between actually existing American freedom and its stated ideals.<sup>63</sup> They wrote theme songs for

the end of slavery as a revolution, and in a country still defined by slavery's legacies, their prophecies echo. The Black Romantics belong in any full reckoning of what Amiri Baraka called the "changing same" of African American culture.<sup>64</sup> Their innovations in the lyric tradition still matter for African American cultural practice in the twenty-first century. If Hughes's "tom-tom" is indeed "eternal," it syncopates with Whitfield's "song of fiercest passion."

### Notes

- 1 Benjamin Brawley, "Three Negro Poets: Horton, Mrs. Harper, and Whitman," *Journal of Negro History* 2 (October 1917): 384.
- 2 William Stanley Braithwaite, "The Negro in American Literature," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 37.
- 3 J. Saunders Redding, *To Make a Poet Black* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 47.
- 4 Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39.2 (June 1924): 229–53.
- 5 M. H. Abrams, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," in *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 53.
- 6 For transatlantic literary studies that focus on Romanticism, see René Wellek, *Confrontations: Studies in the Intellectual and Literary Relations between Germany, England, and the United States during the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730–1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). For work on slavery and British Romanticism, see Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Paul Youngquist, ed., *Race, Romanticism, and the Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2016), especially Marlon Ross's contribution, "The Race of/in Romanticism: Notes toward a Critical Race Theory." See also anthologies of Anglophone verse about slavery: James Basker, *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660–1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Marcus Wood, ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764–1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 7 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, 1935 (New York: Free Press, 1992), 25. Historians working through Du Bois's view of



the period as revolutionary include James McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002); and Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Relevant literary studies include Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Betsy Erkkilä, "Revolution in the Renaissance," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 49.1–3 (2003): 17–32; and Larry Reynolds, *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011). For Romanticism in early African American literature, see William L. Andrews, "The 1850s: The First Afro-American Literary Renaissance," in *Literary Romanticism in America*, ed. William L. Andrews (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Ifeoma Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness, and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and John C. Shields, *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010). For the period's African American poetry in general, see Joan Sherman, *Invisible Poets: Afro-Americans of the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974); Joan Sherman, ed., *African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); and Joan Sherman, ed., *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

- 8 George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).
- 9 Research in print culture has clarified the technological innovations and market forces that framed early African American literature; see Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Eric Gardner, *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); Jordan Alexander Stein and Lara Langer Cohen, eds., *Early African American Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), especially Meredith McGill's piece therein; and Eric Gardner, *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Relevant research on the social and historical function of poetry in the nineteenth century includes Ivy Wilson, *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Michael Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in*

- Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
- 10 For interracial collaboration in the abolition movement, see John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: Abolition and the Origins of American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).
  - 11 C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Santo Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage 1989), 86.
  - 12 For the Bois Caïman oath in English, see Doris Y. Kadish and Deborah Jenson, *Poetry of Haitian Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). For a survey of the complex contradictory accounts of the ceremony, see David Geggus, "The Bois Caïman Ceremony," in *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 81–98.
  - 13 Joshua McCarter Simpson, *Original Anti-Slavery Songs, by Joshua M'C Simpson, a Colored Man* (Zanesville: Printed for the author, 1852), n.p.
  - 14 Joshua McCarter Simpson, "Away to Canada," *The Liberator*, December 10, 1852, 200.
  - 15 Stanzas of the poem show up in Sarah H. Bradford's *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W. J. Moses, Printer, 1869). Stowe's profile of Truth was also widely reprinted. Vicki Lynn Eaklor provides a partial (and partially different) list of reprintings of "Away to Canada" in "The Songs of *The Emancipation Car*: Variations on an Abolitionist Theme," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 36 (January 1980): 92–102. For the role of reprinting in antebellum American literature, see Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
  - 16 Joshua McCarter Simpson, *The Emancipation Car* (Zanesville: Sullivan and Brown 1874), vi.
  - 17 In the preface to *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*, Simpson claims: "My object in my selection of tunes is to kill the degrading influence of those comic Negro Songs, which are too common among our people, and change the flow of those sweet melodies into more appropriate and useful channels." Simpson, *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*, n.p.
  - 18 For Ruggles and "practical abolition," see Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 63–103.
  - 19 Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl," *Atlantic Monthly* 11.66 (April 1863): 479.
  - 20 For Anglophilia and the US abolition movement, see Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Simpson was not an emigrationist, and the poem that follows "Away to Canada" in *Original Anti-Slavery Songs* is entitled "Old Liberia Is Not the Place for Me." At the same time, his

commitment to fugitivity prevents him from making claims to US national belonging like Joseph Cephas Holly's "This Is a Fatherland to Me":

My mother breathed the inspiring air,  
That sweeps along our craft-filled sea;  
And here my father lisped his prayer;  
This is fatherland to me.

This forceful statement of African American nativity combines nationalism, genealogy, and nature writing in ways commonly associated with Romantic aesthetics but rare among early African American poets. Joseph Cephas Holly, "This Is a Fatherland to Me," in *Freedom's Offering* (Rochester: Chas. H. McDonnell, 1853), 28.

- 21 Stowe, "The Libyan Sibyl," 473.
- 22 For Stowe's representation of Truth, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: Norton 1997), 151–64. For Truth's oral performance, including a transcription of "Away to Canada" as "Song of a Fugitive Slave," see Suzanne Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport: Greenwood, 1997), 217–19.
- 23 Simpson, "Away to Canada," in *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*, 21.
- 24 The third line is a reference to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, quoted by many African American writers across the nineteenth century: "Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not / Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?" For the range of these citations, see Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 118, 124, 496.
- 25 Simpson, "Away to Canada," in *Original Anti-Slavery Songs*, 23.
- 26 William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York: Anchor, 1988), 27.
- 27 William Wordsworth, "Preface [1802]," in *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111.
- 28 Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Norman Cameron (London: Syrens, 1995), 21; and Lautréamont, *Maldoror and the Complete Works*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1994), 240. These references belong in conversation with James Snead, "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (London: Methuen, 1984), 59–79.
- 29 Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 225.
- 30 For Whitfield's barbering, see Ivy G. Wilson and Robert S. Levine, "Introduction," in *The Works of James M. Whitfield: America and Other Writings by a Nineteenth-Century African American Poet*, ed. Robert S. Levine and Ivy G. Wilson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 3–7. For Whitfield in relation to the idea of national poetry, see Edward Whitley, *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
- 31 Whitfield, "Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String," in *America and Other Poems* (Buffalo: James A Leavitt, 1853), 77.

- 32 John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," in *Autobiography and Literary Essays. Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 348. See also Max Cavitch, "Slavery and Its Metrics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Kerry Larsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94–112.
- 33 Whitfield, "Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String," in *America and Other Poems*, 77.
- 34 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," 1844, in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library 2000), 290. Whitfield also borrowed the phrase "seething brain" from Emerson, who uses it in a famous passage of his essay "The Transcendentalist," 1840, 1841, 1843, in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 87.
- 35 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Slave Singing at Midnight," 1842, in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Poems and Other Writings*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (New York: Library of America, 2000), 26.
- 36 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, 1845, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1984), 28.
- 37 See Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the "opacity of black song," where she points to slave traders' injunction that the enslaved sing, or "strike up lively," while being sold on the market, a formulation that Whitfield echoes in his lyric. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35–6.
- 38 Longfellow, "The Slave Singing at Midnight," in *Poems and Other Writings*, 26.
- 39 Whitfield, "Yes! Strike Again That Sounding String," in *America and Other Poems*, 78.
- 40 See Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- 41 Martin Delany, *Blake or the Huts of America* 1859, 1861–2 (Boston: Beacon, 1970), 285–6. On Whitfield, Delany, and Plácido, see Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*; and Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*.
- 42 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation* 122 (June 23, 1926): 694.
- 43 William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872), 757.
- 44 In this respect she also anticipates Fred Moten's more recent conception of Black cultural-political practice as "the resistance of the object," for which see Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1–24.
- 45 Free Produce originated among British abolitionists in the 1790s and continued as a theme in abolitionist discourse through the Civil War; see Lawrence Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56:4 (December 2004): 889–912.

- 46 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 759.
- 47 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 130. Marx's discussion of commodity "fetishism" in *Capital*, vol. 1, draws on Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1822–30), where the term is used to disparage African religion. For Hegel, the fetish emblemizes a religion of false objectivity because of its supposed mediation between the living and the dead: "The power of the dead over the living is indeed recognized, but held in no great respect; for the negroes issue commands to their dead and cast spells on them." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 182. Marx turns Hegel's misunderstanding of African spirituality into a critique of capital. Harper further repurposes the fetishism of the commodity as a medium for the expression of enslaved ancestors. For the historiography of slavery and capitalism with a particular emphasis on the commodity form, see Walter Johnson, "The Pedestal and the Veil: Re-thinking the Capitalism/Slavery Question," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24.2 (Summer 2004): 299–308.
- 48 Frances E. W. Harper, "Free Labor," 1857, in *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, ed. Frances Smith Foster (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), 81.
- 49 For the poetess tradition, see Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Tricia Lootens, *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- 50 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 2009).
- 51 Grace Greenwood, "Lectures in Philadelphia – A Letter from Grace Greenwood," *New York Independent* (March 15, 1866): n.p.
- 52 Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," 1978, in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 53–9. Much more so than in Harper's work from 1850 to 1865, Daniel Payne's long poem "The Pleasures" (1850) anticipates the anti-aesthetic presuppositions of what would come to be called "racial uplift" at the end of the nineteenth century.
- 53 Frances E. W. Harper, "To the Cleveland Union Savers: An Appeal from One of the Fugitive's Own Race," 1861, in *A Brighter Coming Day*, 94.
- 54 See Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 55 Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, trans. C. Cocks (London: H. G. Bohn, 1847), 26. Still testifies to Harper's reading of histories of the French Revolution. Still, *Underground Railroad*, 778.
- 56 For the publication history of Harper's "To the Cleveland Union Savers: An Appeal from One of the Fugitive's Own Race," see *A Brighter Coming Day*, 93. For the Bagby case, see William Clark and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829–65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

- 57 In addition to the poets addressed here, Joseph Cephas Holly, Daniel Payne, James Madison Bell, George Boyer Vashon, Alfred Gibbs Campbell, Charles Lewis Reason, Elymas Payson Rogers, and Charlotte Forten Grimké were active in the period 1850–65, and all were born with free status.
- 58 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 19, 122.
- 59 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 205.
- 60 Brawley writes: “Horton’s work showed readily the influence of his models . . . [he] was essentially a romantic poet.” Brawley, “Three Negro Poets,” 386. See also Keith Leonard, *Fettered Genius: The African American Bardic Poet from Slavery to Civil Rights* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 40.
- 61 For the later years of Horton’s life in the United States, see Reginald H. Pitts, “‘Let Us Desert This Friendless Place’: George Moses Horton in Philadelphia – 1866,” *The Journal of Negro History* 80.4 (Autumn 1995): 145–56.
- 62 George Moses Horton, *Naked Genius* (Raleigh, NC: Wm. B. Smith; Southern Field and Fireside Publishing House, 1865), 22.
- 63 Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” 694.
- 64 Amiri Baraka, “The Changing Same,” 1967, in *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder’s Mouth, 1991), 186–209.