Errant Memory in African American Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century

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Errant Memory in African American Literature of the Long 19th

by

Tristan Striker

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

ERRANT MEMORY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE OF THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

Tristan Striker

Adviser: Professor Robert Reid-Pharr

In this dissertation, I trace the complex black literary trope of errant memory through American and African American literature. Authors of African descent are constantly subjected to what I call Africanity, or the paratextual historicizing elements provided by white interlocutors that seek to impose specific caricatures and stereotypes on them and their works to force them into the American historical narrative that depends on their dehumanized and commodified status. These caricatures and stereotypes are rooted in an Africa imagined by these white interlocutors, one that does not match any reality. Authors of African descent transcend this paratextual Africanity through what I call errant memory. Based on Edouard Glissant's errantry, which stipulates a way of life that is simultaneously aware of and disproves the sovereignty of Universalisms, errant memory emphasizes the act of remembering over fetishized narratives of trauma and inescapable violence inherent in Universal History and its version of black life and history. In short, persons of African descent are not just socially dead, they are mnemonically dead as well. Their mnemonic life is replaced with static and dehumanizing historical narratives. However, African American literature serves as a testament to mnemonic life. Africanity seeks to disallow authors of African descent to participate in the true freedom found within the space of literature, defining and determining their literary capacities to mimicking, parroting, rebelling, resisting, or otherwise reacting to and against the way white hegemonic society reads them. Errant memory, occupying the space of literature, explodes these definitions through the choice to embrace and emphasize personal, indeterminate, and disorienting memories. Instead of allowing the rhetoric of trauma to dictate their mnemonic lives, authors of African descent, including Phillis Wheatley, Nathaniel Turner, Hannah Crafts, and W.E.B. Du Bois, read their determined roles within the larger historical narrative and reclaim their personal mnemonic relationships with the important moments of the Middle Passage and American Slavery, freeing their literature and these cultural memories to the possibility of unlimited interpretation.
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Introduction: Errant Memory

In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published *On the Social Contract*, a text that provides the theory of civil freedom that would eventually become one of the pillars upon which the national narrative of the United States would be built. In his introduction to the Penguin edition, Christopher Bertram notes that Rousseau fearlessly and often contentiously braved the turbulent waters of the social and political discourses of the Enlightenment, being in contact with, citing, and being influenced by the likes of Hobbes, Hume, and Descartes. In short, Rousseau, however contentious his theories on society may be, remains one of the dominant figures of the Enlightenment, an era in which the ideas that framed the United States Constitution and governing bodies would be forged in fires of passionate debate. In chapter seven, titled “On Sovereignty,” Rousseau argues that “in order that the social pact should not be a vain formula,” the one who “refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the entire body. This means nothing more than that he shall be forced to be free” (23). In one of his classic ambiguities, Rousseau prophesies the true state of freedom for persons of African descent in the United States. The general will of the young republic of the United States, while being torn on the issue of slavery, has rarely been torn on the abjected and dehumanized state of the person of African descent. Nowhere is this consensus more clearly demonstrated than in the reception of literature written by persons of African descent, specifically through the literary mechanisms put in place that complimented a social constraint on one who refuses to obey. However, what Rousseau does not take into account in his famous tract is disobedience of a general will that seeks to strip the one of her or his citizenship and humanity. Freedom, then, is contingent on consent, on being interpreted by your peers as a part of the social body. What the African
American literary tradition reveals in its interplay with the American social contract is the manner of constraint and force used by the general will of the American reading public.

We must accept, and have accepted, that some authors’ identities, including their level of commitment to their perceived Africanity, will never be fully discoverable. The fact that persons of African descent must fit into a historically specific category like Africanness, blackness, African Americanness, or any other identity category, is itself playing into the forces that reduce persons of African descent to mere referential shadows. Lewis Gordon refers to this as “epistemic closure,” where “to know that role is to know all there is to know about the individual. In effect, there is no distinction between him or her and the social role, which makes the individual an essential representative of the entire group. The group, then, becomes pure exterior being. Its members are without "insides" or hidden spaces for interrogation. One thus counts for all” (275). In many circles of discussion, the realm of history can be the only arena of existence for authors of African descent, even while their works tell entirely different stories. Critics must somehow trace the lineage of blackness of any and all authors of African descent so that they may earn their place in the Black Literary Canon. Dominick LaCapra relates this epistemic closure to trauma by invoking “wound culture,” or “the idea that everyone (including perpetrators and collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma,” which leads to “the conflation of absence and loss” and “the appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them, typically in a movement of identity formation which makes invidious and ideological use of traumatic series of events in foundational ways or as symbolic capital” (65).

This kind of ideologized trauma is at the heart of Africanity and its insidious project of appropriating the Middle Passage in particular (and slavery more generally) as an ur-myth to which persons of African descent are chained. In this dissertation, I hope to display how errant
memory frees events like the Middle Passage from this function as symbolic capital and opens it up to the unique readings and rememberings of individuals who experience it directly and as post-memory.

It is not an aspect of an author’s identity that attaches them to some historical moment. Instead, for authors of African descent, their entire authorial identity is attached to the history of American race relations. In this dissertation, I theorize what I call errant memory through African American literature of the long 19th century. I argue that this long 19th century is defined by errant memory, which is memory in exile, maroon memory, fancy, and the long memory of the African diaspora. Based on Glissant’s concept of errantry, errant memory is generated when errant persons within a socio-historical network, like the American body politic, enter the space of literature. In contrast to trauma theory, errant memory manifests itself without context, plan, direction, or a framework of understanding. Errant memory is the echo of indeterminate experiential memory, and like it functions relationally and occurs randomly. However, within African American literary production, authors and their works are exiled from the larger socio-historical framework of Western history. As such, errant memory is indelibly linked to epistemic historiography. Finally, errant memory is uniquely literary. Based on the premise that writing is thinking, errant memory is the manifestation of personal, indeterminable memories that rise to the surface of the writer’s subconscious. Errant memory is a conscious act of self-determination, but comes from a personal place and is therefore immune to the reification of universal history. It is a direct challenge to the notion that “the duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self” (Ricoeur 89). Errant memory is an activity that stems from a strong sense of duty to the self.
Errant memory is an interrogation of a specific mechanics of remembering acted out through the act of writing from what many Enlightenment philosophers and authors of African descent call Fancy, or the memory of experience. It stands apart from existing theories of memory dominated by rhetorics of trauma, forgetting, and memorialization in that these conversations frame memory as a concept that defines the subject. Errant memory, as a sustained literary practice and theoretical fascination, is perhaps best described by Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory*. What stands out about Bergson’s analysis of memory is his basing his theory of fugitive memory on what philosophers from Hobbes to Hume called Fancy, or the memory that does not rest. Like the Enlightenment philosophers that preceded him, Bergson believes “good” and “practical sense” lie “between” what he refers to as “dream” and “impulse” (198). Bergson usefully summarizes the general consensus among Cartesian thinkers in that he defines impulse as lack of memory (belonging to animals who live only in the present) and dreaming as “living in the past” exclusively. What authors of African descent prove through the act of writing errant memory is that this memory without rest, the memory of experience which constantly supplies the unconscious with images, can in fact be harnessed, and that writing is that harnessing made manifest materially. As I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, what many (including Bergson) interpret as mimicry is in fact genius in the bondage of narrativization and emplotment.

The attribution of poetic and literary genius to mimicry is a blight that threatens to undermine the role of authors of African descent in producing the American literary landscape. It is seen especially throughout the 19th Century, from Phillis Wheatley to Hannah Crafts. Literary mimicry has a legacy that stems from and perpetuates the mnemonic death of enslaved persons of African descent. Echoing Hume’s and Jefferson’s famous dismissal of Wheatley’s poetry,
Bergson says, “A missionary, after preaching a long sermon to some African savages, heard one of them repeat it textually, with the same gestures, from beginning to end,” attributing this act to an “intellectual development” that “hardly goes beyond that of childhood” (199). Bergson relegates these “African savages,” whoever they may be, to the realm of dreams, of living in the past without any stake in the present. Like these unknown “savages,” whose identities do not matter to Bergson’s narrative, authors of African descent are not authorial because they cannot experience and relive through reflection. They either live through impulse or an “exaggeration of spontaneous memory” (199). In both cases, they are not in control. They do not themselves remember, but are instead only remembered by others. The importance of errant memory is that it names the very unique act of remembering how to remember. Like Fancy and fugitive memory (two terms that will be discussed more extensively in later chapters), errant memory is spontaneous memory, or the memory that reveals the “whole of our past…hidden from us because it is inhibited by the necessities of present action” through the “strength to cross the threshold” of that action in “the life of dreams” (199). However, what errant memory adds to the conversation is the addition of action to the realm of dreams and the unconscious.

As such, errant memory is directly antithetical to what I call democratic history, which is the specifically American version of universal history. Based on Pierre Nora’s assertion that American history is unique in that it allows for a democratic revising, as well as on Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory, democratic history originates within the lexicon of the progress of civilization. According to Karen Lerner Dovell, authors like Phillis Wheatley engaged an already popular notion of her time, a “political vein found in the classical tradition” put forth by such philosophers as Aristotle. His “zoon politikon” states that “in service to the republic, man achieves his highest and best capabilities.” Furthermore, “Stoic theory of natural
law held that virtue was innate…attributed to an essentialized, inborn reason, and it was to be
nurtured and expressed through service to the *polis*.” Aristotle’s *zoon politikon* anticipates
Hegel’s conception of Freedom through Spirit and State, an idea that was largely and
dramatically influenced by the so-called Age of Revolutions and the Enlightenment. Most
importantly, “Wheatley participated in the American discourse of revolution and liberty, which
continually invoked these classical precedents and ideals” (39). Furthermore, “According to Carl
J. Richard, knowledge of the classics gave the founders “a sense of identity and purpose,
assuring [them] that their exertions were part of a grand universal scheme” (8). Early Americans
believed that the westward progression of civilization, embodied in the classical concepts of
*translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, was destined to be carried out in America. As Anders
Stephenson explains, *translatio imperii* was an “imperial theme” in the eighteenth century; it
referred to “the agreeable double notion that civilization was always carried forward by a single
dominant power or people and that historical succession was a matter of westward movement”
(18). *Translatio studii* referred to the classical body of knowledge that accompanied this
progression” (37). *Translatio studii* refers to the transference of cultural knowledge, while
*translatio imperii* refers to the transference of political power from one civilization to another.
Democratic history is based firmly on extending classical traditions and continuing the work of
civilization. In addition, however, a uniquely American origin myth had to be created in order to
make room for what would eventually become American exceptionalism. Democratic history
pays homage to its ancestors, but makes clear that the United States would carve out its own
space within this legacy. The United States becomes the culmination of this progression.

Democratic history is perhaps most beautifully described by Georg Friedrich Hegel’s
“Philosophy of History,” published in 1837. As an origin story, the American Revolution
embodies Hegel’s notion of Freedom as “the sole truth of Spirit,” or what “may be defined as that which has its centre in itself.” To Hegel, writing directly after an age in which many communities realized their independence by producing their own social and cultural structures, Spirit as “self-contained existence…is Freedom exactly…when my existence depends upon myself.” To Hegel, and to the producers of societies like what would eventually become the United States, the true “nature of freedom…is to be displayed as coming to a consciousness of itself…and thereby realizing its existence. Itself is the only object of attainment, and the sole aim of Spirit.” The Spirit of the Age of Revolutions, Hegel reveals, is the notion that “In the History of the world, only those peoples can come under our notice which form a state. For it must be understood that this…is the realization of Freedom, i.e. of the absolute final aim,” and that “all the worth which the human being possesses—all spiritual reality, he possesses through the State…Thus only is he fully conscious, thus only is he a partaker of morality—of a just and moral social and political life” (20). The apparent contradiction between Spirit and State reflects the conflict between the author’s errant memory and history’s paratextual directionality that I will trace in this dissertation. This conflict is what Democratic history purports to reconcile. The individual’s Spirit drives the construction of the State, which in turn presents fertile ground for the growth of Spirit. Hegel’s ideas of Spirit and State enter the discourse of Universal history through his articulation of Progress. Hegel explains Progress as “an advancing from the imperfect to the more perfect…to break through the rind of mere nature, sensuousness, and that which is alien to it, and to attain the light of consciousness, i.e. to itself” (22). Hegel’s diction in describing Progress closely mirrors his description of Spirit. However, to be fully conscious, to attain full use of the Spirit, one must participate in the State. For Hegel, then, Universal history can be described as moving from Spirit to State. This is called Progress.
I engage teleology and universal history here in order to highlight the ontological power of errant memory. That is to say, I do not set out to link history to progress or freedom. Instead, I only wish to establish that this has been done and continues to be done to the detriment of persons of African descent specifically. History for me is an epistemic tool, not a destination. Engaging democratic history is a public act, an act of calibrating one’s self to the larger social consciousness, whereas errant memory is a personal act, one that engages the self in its purest form, and one that informs when, how, and why one chooses to engage that larger historical narrative. Ian Baucom, in *Specters of the Atlantic*, engages the historical philosophy of Walter Benjamin, who posits that “Time does not pass, it accumulates.” Baucom bases his own theory of sedimentary time on this notion. For Baucom, the “conditions of possibility” found in specific historical moments “have not waned but intensified, a present in which the past survives not as a sedimented or attenuated residue but in which the emergent logics of this past find themselves enthroned as the dominant protocols of our “nonsynchronous” contemporaneity” (24). Baucom’s brilliant and important assertion informs my theory of errant memory, not teleological history. In other words, where Baucom rightly asserts that the errantry of the Zong massacre and moments like it inform the way in which history’s teleology is replaced by “nonsynchronous” time, I offer that these moments do not merely “haunt” texts and, by extension, the persons who write them. Instead, moments like the Zong massacre alone did not change conceptions of time and history. Persons for whom these moments are part of their selves, existing in their memories, ensure that they remain intact in spite of the efforts of universal history to erase or direct them. This is errant memory: not the helplessness implied in hauntings and repetitions of trauma, where the subject is subjected to the whims of the ghost of the past, but the overwhelming power in the ways in which authors of African descent demanded and insisted on engaging the act of writing with all
of its inherent dangers of entering the space of literature. In allowing their errant memories of the Middle Passage, the slave trade, and slavery to enter into their literature, they are not succumbing to their determined identities as persons subjected to their trauma, but instead choose to include these memories, let them wash over them and their readers, because they are essentially personal. Our “nonsynchronous contemporaneity,” as Baucom calls it, is in fact rooted in the way in which we read race into texts written by persons of African descent.

What makes democratic history democratic is the importance it places on the participation of the citizen in the production of its narrative. In other words, democratic history is history by the people, for the people. However, what this rhetoric cloaks is the inevitable erasure of the individual in favor of the collective. What we have here is not history written by the people, but people being written into history. Specifically, persons of African descent are made into non-citizens not only by direct physical, ideological, and spiritual violence, but also by the way they are written into the American democratic historical narrative as persons without memory and, by extension, without the capacity to participate. This is so because democratic history is based on collective memory, which Halbwachs defines as the reference point for individual memory. In other words, Halbwachs situates himself within the Durkheimian tradition, articulating the primacy of collective consciousness. While this collective consciousness is made up of a collection of individual memories, the collective influences and dictates which memories are appropriated and which are forgotten. As Ron Eyerman succinctly states, “Even in literary fields or in popular culture, discourses can be silently at work in terms of selectivity, sorting out those authors/texts that express the ideologies and values of the dominant culture. It is these that are more likely to get published, to be read and talked about” (162). This is what I engage in this dissertation: the way in which literature, as a physical manifestation of
errant memory, helps produce the abstract space of history, which in turn dictates the production of national or group identity. Where history, as the ultimate form of collective memory, absorbs narratives that help solidify its supremacy, I am more concerned here with the errantry of the individual and his or her memories made manifest in literature and through writing.

The central premise this work engages is the link between memory and Freedom within the space of African American literature. Focusing primarily on 19th century African American authors, this work seeks to bring to the surface the importance of memory as an intellectual barometer to the development of Freedom as the penultimate goal of democratic history. As the continuation of a Western historical tradition that began with the Greeks and spread West, the United States as it eventually formed based its supremacy on the idea of this Western trajectory, made apparent in such socio-political ideals as Manifest Destiny. The idea of American exceptionalism, then, is nothing if not a natural consequence of history as an organizing epistemology, or way of knowing, for the Western subject. It is history, then, that epitomizes the violence inherent in Freedom. As I will discuss below, the centrality of Freedom to the American collective consciousness is based on the idea that, as a state, what makes the United States exceptional is its unique and potent practice of Freedom as a political and social principle upon which the framework of the nation is built. However, as authors of African descent reveal through the act of writing and publishing, Freedom as a historical destination, framed as the quintessential goal of democracy, proves to be a fruitless endeavor designed to, as the grandfather in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man puts it, keep one running. Like Satan in John Milton’s Paradise Lost, people of African descent must serve in order to keep their place within the social hierarchy produced by the creators of their socially viable identities, identities that are indelibly written outside of Freedom’s narrative. What I mean by this is that a notion of what I
call Africanity, so important to the production of both black and white identities, is produced, read into, and superimposed upon individuals who have no inherent link to this identity formation. The action of remembering, or errant memory, is replaced with constructed memories that seek to collectively reduce those upon whom it is forced to mnemonic death and intellectual subjugation. Further like Satan, people of African descent are made to serve in the Hell of a system of racial hierarchy designed to promote white supremacy while looking up at the Heavenly myth of Freedom. However, this analogy, while powerfully embedded within the American imaginary, does not match the mnemonic articulations found in the cultural productions of those made to appear socially and mnemonically dead.

All notions of Americanness are inherently exclusionary and effacing in nature. The lack of a mention of a subjectivity means an ignorance of that subjectivity, which is an action that must be performed and cannot be accidental, passive, or natural. Authors and readers who read race out of literature written by “white” Americans are performing an act of forgetting. Similarly, those who read race into a text written by a person of African descent are also performing an act of forgetting, namely forgetting the author’s personhood in favor of the racial role engineered for said author by the forward-plunging forces of American history and culture. I choose to use “person of African descent” when referring to individual authors, while I use African American to refer to the already established literary tradition. I do this because I realized, after immersing myself in the richness of this tradition, that there is hardly a designation complex and all-encompassing enough to describe the individual authors and their works. I am fully aware of the sensitivity of this issue. I choose not to use “African American” when referring to the individual authors because I am committed to the centrality of choice and to the overthrowing of determinism. Judging from their works, it is clear that the authors of the Long 19th Century do
not all align themselves with the political and social aspects of being African American. Instead, I choose to use “person of African descent” because each one of these authors acknowledges this descent and struggles with it in complex ways. They do not, however, always acknowledge their membership to the African American community, even if we allow for anachronism and place this designation on authors like Wheatley and Turner. For example, Hannah Crafts aligns herself much more with the white part of her identity while grappling with her African descent. They are, however, part of the African American literary tradition because they engage the complexity of their identity, which I believe to be one of the many defining elements of said tradition.

Africanity stands for the reduction of the complexity of what we now call the African Diaspora to stereotypes, tropes, and otherwise imagined fantasies regarding the identities of persons of African descent. While there are many such active reductions, I focus my attention in this dissertation on the ur-myth of the Middle Passage. The literary echoes of the Middle Passage that reverberate throughout African American literature are perhaps the most enduring examples of errant memory. When we trace this trope through the Long Nineteenth Century, starting with Phillis Wheatley and ending with W.E.B. Du Bois, we begin to realize how the Middle Passage and errant memory converge, doing so dynamically and actively. The paratextual elements attached to these texts are agents of historical reification. They attempt to direct readings of said texts into the current of history, thereby reducing their literary impact to historical signification. One such historical reading restricts the literary manifestations of the Middle Passage in African American letters to the traumatic. In other words, literary uniformity is achieved by anchoring the Middle Passage to its historical interpretation. This is an example of what I refer to as Africanity. The Middle Passage in literary texts, instead of being produced by the author’s unique reading of that cultural memory, is instead imposed on the text and the author. An
example of this is Phillis Wheatley: instead of reading her poetry as a unique articulation of her attempt to synchronize her personal sense of self with the public sense of her self, her poetry is often (un)read as unworthy of any tradition, primarily because she does not engage her Africanness.

Here, we find the all-important distinction between Africanity and Africanness, Blackness, and the many other community-building and self-preserving identities with which persons of African descent align themselves. Wheatley does not choose to be read as a slave poet or as a parrot-like puppet of her benevolent master and mistress. She does not choose to be read as she was in the 1960’s, too whitewashed and grateful to her enslavers, yet “African” enough for white critics to dismiss her poetics as Bergson’s “savage” and childish mimicry. These readings are the result of her Africanity. They are imposed on her poems, and ultimately on her. Wheatley is defined by her poetry, and her poetry is defined by a white fantasy of what persons of African descent are. This is possible only because as slaves, persons of African descent are seen as socially dead by those that kidnap and enslave them. With this social death comes what I call mnemonic death, or the systematic detachment of a person not just from their memories, but from their ability to remember. The way in which persons of African descent are separated from American society mirrors the way authors of African descent are detached from their literary works. Writing is thinking, and publishing writing is the act of making public one’s thinking, including the inevitable occurrence of experiential memories. Here, I align myself with Halbwachs’s belief that memory is always a public act. Writing, as remembering, is an author giving part of herself to the society in which she lives. For authors of African descent, their texts were read as they were read: not fully human. This lack of humanity was, in turn, implicitly attached to an inability to think, which basically meant an inability to remember the self. Social
death is justified through mnemonic death, or the lack of the basic human capacity to “think” (read remember) the self, and therefore be. Since persons of African descent could not remember, imagine, or perform any higher level thinking, the philosophy was provided by the reader, to use William Lloyd Garrison’s remark to Frederick Douglass. These unwanted and unwarranted philosophies are the Africanities of which I speak. Africanity is simultaneously possible because of mnemonic death and highlights its existence.

In a more practical sense, I interrogate the ways in which writers of African descent actively combat the forgetting inherent in the processes of history by forging specific iterations of errant memory, or mnemonic resuscitation. This bringing back to life is not just reactionary to social death, but to mnemonic death, a denial and erasure of a person’s ability to remember him or herself into existence (based on the Cartesian principle “I think, therefore I am”) that comes inevitably with commodification and dehumanization. Writers of African descent and their texts do not haunt or act as ghosts or specters, a hermeneutic practice that has dominated scholarship on social works that engage race in its myriad forms. This is an outdated and potentially dangerous idea that further dehumanizes individuals and perpetuates the social and mnemonic deaths they are subjected to by reinforcing their mnemonic death and replacing their personhood with a supernatural attachment to a world of which they can never fully be a part. Instead, the texts produced by these individuals actively expose the ways in which they are forced into a small plane of existence that is produced to limit their abilities as human beings. For persons of African descent, memories are ideologized and detached from their selves through their traumatization, which makes them one-dimensional and allows them to be pigeon-holed into the larger historical narrative by removing from them personal choice and control. Cathy Caruth describes the “historical power of Trauma” as “not just that the experience is repeated
after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (17). Implicit in forgetting is the removal of memory, a personal detachment from the moment, in favor of imprisonment within repeated attempts to insert one’s self into the narrative of history. Persons of African descent must not only “remember” the trauma of slavery and the Middle Passage, but they must also form their identities around the inescapability of the dehumanization and commodification imbedded by historiography into these traumatic moments.\textsuperscript{ix}

Ur-myths, as common history, indelibly base themselves on common memory, or collective memory. As such, “memory can be ideologized through the resources of the variations offered by the works of narrative configuration. And, as the characters of the narrative are emplotted at the same time the story is told, the narrative configuration contributes to modeling the identity of the protagonists of the action as it molds the contours of the action itself” (Ricoeur 85). This ideologization of memory amounts to a necessary forgetting of models and narratives belonging to potential protagonists that would change the trajectory of the action. In other words, history is ideologized memory, and ideologized memory, as Paul Ricoeur points out, is always narrativized. As Paul Ricoeur, in Memory, History, Forgetting, brilliantly points out, the way in which memory functions as ideology, as history, is through “imposed memory,” or “the official history, the history publicly learned and celebrated.” “A trained memory is,” therefore, “an instructed memory; forced memorization is thus enlisted in the service of the remembrance of those events belonging to the common history that are held to be...founding, with respect to the common identity” (85). Ricoeur here echoes not just Bergson, but some of the most important Enlightenment philosophers in implying that experiential memory trumps learned, or imposed, memory. I argue in this dissertation that the most effective vessel of forced memory is the
written word, like Benedict Anderson’s printing press, in producing not so much an imagined community as an imagined shared place of origin; a shared root which legitimizes the national body-politic as a living, breathing Subject worthy of being protected. As ideological memory, history has an agenda, a trajectory of action that pulls with it all who are submitted to it. More importantly, history has mechanisms in place through which it can pull a veil over the eyes of those implicit in its perpetuation. In the case of the democratic history of the United States, democracy is the veil, and the American Revolution the founding collective memory from which and to which history propels. Edouard Glissant, in his landmark text, *The Poetics of Relation*, would call this circular nomadism, even if he conceives of history’s workings as arrow-like (12). Glissant’s theory of circular nomadism becomes a useful looking glass that reveals the way in which any Universal Historical narrative can be nothing but circular, based solely on its reliance on and constant reference back to an origin story. Without this origin, there is no orientation, no direction in which the narrative of Universal History marches. History is directed memory.

This shared root is the root of the problem which I engage in this text, doing so by starting with Glissant’s notion of errantry and exile based on the rhizomatic poetics of Relation (Glissant 11). Within Glissant’s poetics of Relation, a poetics based on horizontal conversation instead of vertical imposition, Freedom and its relation to imposed memory is exposed. Literature produced by persons of African descent in the United States is not indelibly attached to a project, however liberatory and revolutionary that project may be. The project is exactly the problem from whence comes the over-determination so common is criticism of literature written by people of African descent. A perfect example of this is the ground-breaking collection *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, edited by Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally. In
the introduction, the editors frame the context of the collection in Pierre Nora’s Lieux de Memoire. The passage merits quoting at length:

“Our task was to reconsider American history not only so that it better accounted for the works of black historians in the usual sense. Our larger purpose was to revise what was meant by this history as a process inclusive of “black and unknown bards,” historians without portfolio, who inscribed their world with landmarks made significant because men and women remembered them so complexly and so well that somehow the traces of their memory survived to become history” (8, emphasis mine).

What the editors describe here is essentially revisionist historiography. Published in 1994, this collection dictated the direction of African American scholarship to this day. However, this is still just a radical redefinition of history. Memory becomes history even here. The editors further note that traditionally, whites “had the history while the blacks…were stuck with nothing but impulsive, affective memory” (8). Building on the important work these scholars did twenty years ago, I seek to study this “impulsive, affective memory” and give it the attention it deserves.

To take as an example the very conversation within which I am situating myself in this dissertation, John Ernest’s important engagement of Liberation Historiography as “an attempt to liberate African Americans from an other-defined history so as to provide them with agency in a self-determined understanding of history and African Americans as “inevitably metahistorical” describes the way in which persons of African descent in the long nineteenth century produced a new historiography, one that “determines” and “gather[s] together a fragmented people into an equally fragmented and always provisional historical narrative” (4, 18). As perhaps the most comprehensive engagement of black historiography in the nineteenth century, Ernest’s text exemplifies the wave of revisionist historicism that took hold over the last two decades.
However, Ernest, and the many scholars who perform the important work of investigating and rewriting African American history, often engage just the history and the project of liberation through rewriting and revision, without engaging how these projects supplant literary production as the primary mode of self-expression. For example, the influx of scholarship on the Middle Passage and the Slave Trade in recent years has successfully exposed the silences in the existing historical narrative. Many of these scholars attempt to reclaim these silences by imagining an alternative narrative that simultaneously fills said silence and humanizes the dehumanized. What these imagined narratives (un)do in fixing the historical narrative is favoring a teleology in which persons of African descent are involved in producing the modern world over acts of imagination. In short, the conflation and history and memory, even within the ideal of creating revolutionary, radical, or otherwise new historiography, does not take into account the clear and sustained manner in which persons of African descent were aware of the importance of memory in spite of history. We are doing an injustice to authors like Wheatley and Crafts by attempting to rewrite them into even a radical black historical narrative, mainly because it blurs the transformative power of errant memory as a means of acting individuality.

Instead, I believe Glissant’s errantry is a much more productive place from which to start working towards a hermeneutics of memory that, by its very existence, explodes the project of democratic history. Glissant says of the “Errant” that “he challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access…The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or possess it” (20-1, emphasis mine). Errantry does not resist, it rejects. Unlike the marginal status of “internal exile,” which “tends towards material comfort,
which cannot really distract from anguish” and may “erode one’s sense of identity,” errantry “reinforces this sense of identity” (20). Most importantly, however, “one can communicate through errantry’s imaginary vision,” while “the experiences of exiles are incommunicable” (20). This imaginary vision is, in turn, concerned with “digging up roots” and “Myth’s opacities” (21).

What we come to, then, is a poetics that rejects the reifying forces of universal history while theorizing in its place an alternative epistemology of rootlessness and routelessness. What the African American literary tradition gives us is a theory of being that does not merely rely on Relation, however powerful this notion is. Through errant memory, the authors I interrogate in this dissertation make room for the individual. It is the opacities that interest me in this dissertation and that I will track through the long 19th African American literary century.

I take from Glissant the power of errantry and form it into a descriptive adjective for the unique mnemonic process I trace in the literature of Phillis Wheatley, Nat Turner and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Hannah Crafts, and W.E.B. Du Bois. I base my interrogation of the intellectualism of these authors on Jerry Watts’s interest in “ideological contexts that helped shape their intellectual outlooks” and “those material forces that an individual black intellectual had to face in order to engage in his or her creative activity,” an important intervention into black criticism that sees Watts pleading for “reinvigorate[ing] our abilities to deal with sloppiness” (12-3). In short, while I am in fact invested in interrogating the creative and artistic depths of the works of these authors, I also believe that their intellectual contexts prove invaluable in highlighting that creativity and artistic depth. Like Watts, I resist the overdetermination and reification inherent in limiting authors of African descent to their superimposed Africanity, making room for their engagement with, and not merely resistance to, so-called Western ideologies and intellectual currents. Specifically, my interest lies in the development of errant
memory as a unique intellectual current within African American literature, one that hinges on viewing history as an epistemology and memory as an action of trust in experience.

What happens to those who do not have a seat at the historical table is what happens to those who would write themselves into the social fabric of American democracy, namely an erasure of their own identities, linked to their memories (read selves), in favor of a forced calibration to the laws, norms, and social structures created by those who hold the majority. Those who do not occupy the majority become Glissant’s internal exiles. Let me make very clear here that for me, the word majority is not only linked to numbers, but to inheritance of Progress. As a group largely seen as existing outside of history, people of African descent in the United States do not inherit Progress and, by extension, Freedom, because they are not the ones defining the meaning of it. They are the antithesis of what Nietsche calls “historical people,” or those whose “glance into the past pushes them into the future, fires their spirits to take up life for a longer time yet” (5). As self-proclaimed historical people, Americans experience the power to write history, to define the past, and to decide what to discard in favor of a progression towards an indeterminate future. I hope to show that in spite of this ontological position within history, it is memory that is really at the center of the creation of United States, or rather a negation of memory. After all, as Nietsche himself says, echoing countless philosophers of the human spirit, “The truth is that, in the process by which the human being, in thinking, reflecting, comparing, separating, and combining, first limits that unhistorical sense” of forgetting is through using the past for living and making history out of what has happened,” through which “a person first becomes a person” (4). In short, the act of remembering as the countermeasure to the inevitability of forgetting signifies personhood. Where Hegel focuses on nation and its history as self-determining, Nietsche focuses on the self and memory. Memory, then, cannot be forgotten
in a discussion of the African diaspora, especially within the context of the United States existing in the future. What better way to articulate ownership of the unknown future than by producing a constantly changing past that allows for endless variation. It is here, Pierre Nora suggests, that memory becomes dangerous.

However, before we engage the relationship between memory and history further, we must stop for a revelation. This revelation relates to how and why people of African descent have been denied a role in the process of American nation-building. This denial is indelibly tied to the ideologized memory of the Middle Passage. However, I am not suggesting that, like many historians and critics of the African diaspora, black community and history is rooted in a common experience like slavery or the Middle Passage. As I discuss in my conclusion, Saidiya Hartman implicitly exposes and questions the validity of this tendency in Lose Your Mother. After traveling “back” to Ghana to find answers to the many questions surrounding her identity, she leaves with none. The implication of this failure to find answers in the proverbial “return” is that Hartman reveals the fallacy of rooting one’s identity in a place that is ultimately imagined. Hartman’s image of Ghana, of Africa, does not match reality in any way. I bring this up to illustrate the tendency scholars have, both past and present, of framing their reinterpretations of African American identity within the confines of a historical ur-myth. For example, Stephanie Smallwood and Markus Rediker articulate the radical notion that the African diaspora was born on the slave ship. Even in this newer revisionist historicism, a theorization must happen that creates an origin to which persons of African descent inevitably “return” to claim their membership in that community, whether it’s the common trauma of slavery or the Middle Passage. What these scholars demonstrate is that despite our radical rethinking of it, we are still heavily reliant on history as an epistemology.
Instead, I suggest that the community of the African diaspora is experienced through an exile repeated, a detachment from personal memory in favor of a collective memory built on a denial of a subject’s humanity. In other words, the innate directionality of history leaves no space for the directionless, the disoriented, those that live in errantry. The Middle Passage, as an event, echoes through the individual memories of authors of African descent. However, Hannah Crafts, Saidiya Hartman, Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and W.E.B. Du Bois do not engage the Middle Passage because of some innate responsibility to this historical event. These authors are not rooted to the trauma associated with it. Instead, as Robert Reid-Pharr reveals, these authors choose to engage this part of their mnemonic selves: “not understanding Black American identity as a process of choosing and re-choosing, or if you prefer, forgetting and re-membering, is to cheapen both our culture and our cultural studies” (113). Reid-Pharr articulates the crucial crux of the argument implicit in the worship of historical fact, namely that choice as an affirmation and result of self-actualization is undeniably tied to the ability to remember and forget. Here the fundamental concept of social death, iterated by Orlando Patterson, finds its inner workings beyond the loss of honor and lineage. Social death is mnemonic death, not simply the disorienting exile inherent in the objectification of slavery. To be disoriented does not mean one does not know where he or she is heading, or where he or she is located in space. Disorientation only becomes a problem when the space one occupies is produced with a direction always indicated in every corner. Glissant’s errantry articulates a positive disorientation, one that by its very existence imagines a world without the organizing principles inherent in Hegel’s Freedom of State.

Mnemonic death, as the socio-political agent of erasure, gives birth to something that powerfully haunts the American imaginary. People of African descent do not haunt anything.
Instead, Africanity, the commodified and reified essentialities produced within the space of American history, are the things that go bump in the night, the ghosts that occupy the space of death, simply because this identity, which has morphed over time from “African” to “African American,” cannot be anything but dead. A person may choose to align him or herself with said identity formation, but this does not mean that one who matches the ever-changing criteria of this social construct must inextricably be part of it. Nothing less can be expected from the abstract space of democratic history, founded as it is in the project (projection) of whiteness as both separate from and superior to whatever it is not. After all, the history of whiteness itself proves the dubiousness of race as a legitimate method of categorization. We find that the abstract space of whiteness “speaks—but it does not tell all. Above all, it prohibits. Its mode of existence, its practical ‘reality’ (including its form) differs radically from the reality” that the space of whiteness “is at once result and cause, product and producer…the locus of projects and actions deployed as part of specific strategies, and hence also the object of wagers on the future” (Lefebvre 142-3). This study is as much concerned with black memory as it is with the space of whiteness and the ways in which this space produces and is produced by the identity formations to which people of African descent have been subjected since that epochal moment of the American Revolution. Going somewhat against Lefebvre’s wishes, I interpret the space of whiteness as a space that “commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered.” Authors of African descent prove that the reading of space, instead of being an “irrelevant upshot,” is actually a necessary hermeneutics of socially sanctioned violence and domination in the name of Progress. It is precisely this unintended readability that gives the practice of it so much subversive power. The routes and distances to be covered by the arrowlike
teleology of the space of history, synchronous with the space of whiteness, cannot reconcile with the errantry inherent in choice, which is always personal.

Persons of African descent and their mnemonic faculties are abstracted by the (white) space of history. History, however, is always read. When authors like Wheatley and Crafts read their constructed narratives within the space of history, they free themselves from its Progressive orientation. In other words, Blanchot’s practice of reading severs memory from its idealogization. This is possible because the work “does not come into its presence as a work except in the space opened by this unique reading” of a specific reader, “each time the first and each time the only.” What brings errant memory to life is the unique reading, or interpretation, each reader or viewer brings with them, which in turn is based on their own memories. An author’s choice to allow her memory to permeate her work unrestricted is what ultimately gives the reader her freedom: “Reading…lets be what is. It is freedom: not freedom that produces being or grasps it, but freedom that welcomes, consents, says yes…and in the space opened by this yes, lets the work’s overwhelming decisiveness affirm itself, lets be its affirmation that it is” (194). If to be is to remember, and history declares blight on this basic human function for persons of African descent, the practice of reading as remembering is resuscitation.

The space of whiteness is inherently historical because it has direction and purpose. History is synonymous with direction. As Yi Fu Tuan, in his seminal *Space and Place*, explains, “Space is historical if it has direction or a privileged perspective” (122). Moreover, it is Tuan’s distinction between space and place that is particularly useful to our discussion of history and Progress. Tuan explains that place is space with value. Place is experienced space, intimate space, space endowed with memory. For Tuan, home, homeland, and all other articulations of home derive from a person’s or collective’s ability to transform space into place by endowing
that space with experiences remembered and recreated when one visits and reads it. Here we find an excellent explanation of the importance of space to the idea of Freedom. “Spaciousness,” Tuan says, “is closely associated with sense of being free. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act.” Are persons who attach themselves to a homeland not free? They are free in the sense that they have the space in which to move and act. Tuan continues, “Being free has several levels of meaning. Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition, and this transcendence is most simply manifest as the elementary power to move” (52). Tuan channels Hegel’s idea of Freedom in his definition of space, which attaches space to movement in both space and time. History, then, is an articulation of movement in time: “The intention to go to a place creates historical time: the place is a goal in the future.” Intention creates orientation in time and space. The abstract space of American democratic history, based on a continuation of Western history, is a constant movement towards a future, be it the biblical future of Revelations or the desired future for a land in which a specific collective can define itself and be free. Tuan warns us that “The future…cannot be left open and undefined” (130). An open future is an open undefined space, a space of uncertainty and danger. In fact, one must have a goal, an orientation, even in the openness of space. This orientation comes from a perceived root or lineage that supports not only the movement forward, but also justifies it. Hence the importance of lineal history in writing the larger historical narrative of any homeland, especially the American homeland. The Western lineage, articulated as Anglo-Saxonism and many other deviations, insures that any space is already a place, imbued with memories transplanted from the old world onto the new, with translation studii and imperii. What errant memory reveals is that even these spaces turned places are dangerously indeterminate.
These places, like homeland and nation, must be separated from intimate places like the home and the community, a distinction that Tuan does not clearly make. It must be made here, because there is a vast difference between the abstract space of the United States, which claims for itself and is claimed by the collective memory and consciousness of countless people living both in and outside of the geographically outlined borders, and true space in which one is free to move and be. True space is where intimacy is allowed to happen. The space of literature is such a space. Even Tuan acknowledges that “There are as many intimate places as there are occasions when human beings truly connect…They are elusive and personal. They may be etched in the deep recesses of memory” (141). In other words, abstract spaces like that of democratic history cannot claim as a single experience that of millions of people who each have a unique and personal connection to one another. Persons of African descent may choose to connect to the intimate space of the African diaspora, they may even choose to move within the abstract space of American history, but they cannot be appropriated by said spaces. Intimate places are relational, based on relationships and encounters. It is no surprise, then, that Tuan, a social scientist, declares “The images of place, here sampled, are evoked by the imagination of perceptive writers. By the light of their art we are privileged to savor the experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall” (148, emphasis mine). When read as a mnemonic act, literature is itself a space in which intimate places can be produced, since both reader and writer occupy the work, unknown and strange but bursting with potential, and make it place through their growing familiarity. Within this space, persons can experience those around them, the spaces and places in which they struggle to move, and the many manifestations of their selves. Reflection, or memory, is the only true way in which these places, produced by an author’s choice, can be savored, but never understood.
Choice, in turn, leads to the crux of this dissertation’s argument: the possibility of not fully understanding a work written by an author of African descent. Specifically, I intend to interrogate understanding as a manifestation of colonialist epistemology inherent in democratic history. For this, we must, as reader/critics, accept the fact that we will not understand a literary work completely, for this would mean that said work has lost its uniqueness and all of what makes it worthy of the attention we devote to it. Hence the plethora of books, articles, lectures, and other materials engaging a single work by a single author, like Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Note Douglass’s use of the pronoun “my”). That is to say, we as readers must, yet cannot, accept this inability to understand, especially when it comes to works written by authors of African descent. While much has been said about the fathomless depths of the sea of Melville’s *Moby Dick* or the lofty hermeneutics required for a basic reading (singular) of T.S. Elliot’s *The Wasteland*, critics are often quick to dismiss equally deep and rich works by poets like Phillis Wheatley or authors like Hannah Crafts as works that can and should only be concerned with issues of race. To many critics, this makes works written by authors of African descent one-dimensional. They would root these authors in the appropriated memory of the Middle Passage or slavery. However, as the authors in this book demonstrate, there are no roots in the Middle Passage, but there is movement. For this reason, all the works engaged herein, and many others, remember the Middle Passage. Again, authors of African descent can only articulate Freedom within the narrow confines of American racial interpretation. Frederick Douglass made sure, in the revision of his own work, to note that the book would be concerned with *his* freedom, not Freedom. Similarly, I argue that the kind of choice that occupies the space of Douglass’s literature challenges socially constructed Freedom.
My contention is that the Middle Passage, as a trope within African American literature, does not restrict or imprison these works to a polemical rhetoric of race. Instead, the use of this trope, or the presence of the remembered event within the paratextual elements of the author’s oeuvre, implies the errantry that comes with the uncertainty of fugitive memory and fancy.

Maurice Blanchot, when speaking of literary works, sets in motion a critical hermeneutics based on “the solitude of a work” of literature, which gives it an “absence of any defining criteria” and makes it “without any proof…without any use. It can’t be verified. Truth can appropriate it…but the existence it thus acquires doesn’t concern it” (22). Blanchot reveals here that the very thing that gives life to literary criticism is not just the death of the author, but the death of the reader as well. The absence of the author, along with the absence of any one meaning, one truth, allows the reader/critic not only the option of endless exploration, but also allows for the discourse that is so crucial to the continued life of the field. As such, literature, steeped as it is in imagination and memory, underwrites and subverts the project of democratic history for the singular truth to be reached. More importantly, here is where the project of democratic history and its reliance on literature for its subsistence converges with the related project of restricting the potential of authors of African descent to writing only about the condition of race, a condition imposed upon them by these same critics. What unites these authors, then, is not any identity to which they inherently belong, but instead an identity to which they are assigned by the reader, and on which is based the larger project of white supremacy with which democratic history is infused.

It is exactly when something cannot be appropriated that the Subject, in Althusser’s terms, takes action to do whatever it can to silence that which, by the very nature of its existence, disproves said Subject’s sovereignty. The literary theory of haunting, as compelling as it was, is no longer and should no longer be the only way in which the larger critical discourse understands
(read appropriates) texts written by authors of African descent. As Blanchot notes, “Those who think they see ghosts are those who do not want to see the night.” In other words, those who figure images of blackness as haunting the American literary space deny the “invisible” that “one cannot cease to see…the incessant making itself seen.” Literary critics, then, deny “the other night” (163), or the possibility of resuscitation. The true essence of this Other Night, Blanchot argues, is the essence of the space of literature, a space that has been appropriated by the democratic historical narrative to perpetuate the progressive teleology of white American identity. The Other Night, Blanchot explains, “is not true night, it is night without truth, which does not lie, however—which is not false,” simply because it is not and cannot be appropriated by any veritable narrative. As a result (and this is the essence of my theory), “In the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But the other night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest” (164). In discussing the apostle Paul, Patterson reiterates the principle of the Other Night in relation to Freedom: “If slavery is spiritual death, then freedom must be the death of death, death negating itself in order to generate the renewal of life which is freedom” (329). The space of literature, as the Other Night, is the death of death, the renewal of life. As a space in which memory reigns sovereign, literature presents authors of African descent, as mnemonically and socially dead persons, with a moment of resuscitation.

The memory without rest is the memory that cannot be appropriated. Like Bergson, Blanchot sees memory without rest as the experiential memory that occupies the unconscious and surfaces in the realm of dreams. Here we arrive at mnemonic death, a theoretical position tied to several important stances: first, that emancipation, associated as it is with Freedom, has not been achieved for persons of African descent within the context of the white American
hegemony; second, that this lack of freedom derives directly from the lack of personhood attributed to persons of African descent, which places them outside of the narrative of history; third, that persons of African descent, as a result of not being seen as part of the democratic historical narrative, are replaced within that narrative with caricatures based on socially produced stereotypes; finally, that these caricatures are products of an abstract space read by those who claim this space and those placed outside of it. The resulting conflict, as described above, results in the mnemonic erasure of persons of African descent from the collective memory of those who stand to benefit from the democratic historical narrative. The absence of memory, or the willful forgetting of one’s unique experiential remembering, is the mnemonic death common to all persons whose imposed identities, tied to whatever physical marker can be imagined, usurp the ability to remember imaginatively. This imaginative memory is errant, personal, and stands directly against the universalizing project of democratic history.

Errant memory is restless memory. Here we come to the driving force of this dissertation: authors of African descent during the long 19th century, beginning with the eve of the American Revolution and extending to the First World War, carefully crafted a poetics of errant memory, a making one’s self seen in the heart of oblivion. Errant memory engages the “vanishing memory…this place (this house) the one they say we come from” (Glissant 40) of Africa as it was and is imagined by a national collective consciousness. So when Glissant observes that “it is around interactions of memory and place that things irreconcilable for both poet and storyteller are perpetuated” (40), he is speaking of the way in which “duration…history…cancels out the detail of the place” of one’s being (41). Africa and universal history are made synonymous when fused as the origin Myth of persons of African descent and their enslavement. Paradoxically, this origin has no filiation, no lineage that grows from it. This very simple fact negates any pretention
of rootedness in the works of literature I engage in this work. While there is value in undefined space, I argue that authors of African descent do not settle for freedom within the self or within their literary creations, instead opting to make themselves seen where their readers refuse to see them. Only literature has this power, mainly because, as Tuan reveals, it allows the author to transform an abstract space of death into a place imbued with memory. Errant memory is errant precisely because it reinforces one’s identity within an abstract space in which that identity is reified and over-determined into a narrow definition rooted in an imaginary place. Flying in the face of the epistemology of history, which always and forever distrusts and fears personal memory and constantly reproduces this fear in the many narratives of factual empiricism, errant memory is a consistent, maintained, and elaborate theoretics of not merely fashioning a self or affecting one’s surroundings, but actively changing American democracy. While errant memory is articulated in different ways in the works of Wheatley, Turner, Stowe, Crafts, and Du Bois, they share in the work done and the Relational inscribing of this theory into a literary lineage, passed down through the ironic birthright of the very Africanity they destroy in favor of their selves.

I want to be careful here in separating my idea of errant memory from the more common idea of trauma. The way in which authors of African descent theorize errant memory is self-affirming and bespeaks control and ownership over the property of their mental faculties, be they conscious (imagination, learned memory, willed remembering) or, to use Fabre’s and O’Meally’s term, affective (errant memory, fancy, trauma). The important distinction between trauma and errant memory is that trauma is often figured as a “wound of the mind,” to use Cathy Caruth’s phrase, “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions
of the survivor” (4). Trauma, then, necessitates the passivity of the traumatized, or wound culture. The focus is totally on the traumatic event. One must, it seems, deal with said event on its terms to be able to transcend it. Errant memory, on the other hand, is a mastery of a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (4) coming from the personal remembering over collective traumatization. In this sense, the origin myth of the Middle Passage and Africa, used contemporarily to delineate the African diaspora, can be seen as a traumatic event whose “historical power…is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (17). The collective memory of the African diaspora, when framed traumatically, is given over to the collective consciousness of history. In other words, within the narrative of universal history, the Middle Passage becomes a breach, both of lineage/history and of consciousness; a disorientation that shows its horrors in the centrality of forgetting to its ontology. As survivors of the Middle Passage, persons of African descent belonging to the African diaspora have no choice but to relive the historically forgotten event, bearing the burden of these repetitions for the entire world so affected by the chattel slave trade. Trauma is historical precisely because, like history, its focal point is time, not the person. That is to say, like history erases the person in favor of a reified version that fits into the direction of the narrative, trauma erases the individual in favor of the historical absence, one that serves to help shape said historical narrative by defining it through what it is no longer, through what it has progressed past. I offer errant memory as an alternative within the context of bringing to light the highly specific, variable, and multifaceted personal experiences of a journey that was never the same for every person, and should not be treated as such. I base this simply on the prevalence of dreaming in the texts I analyze over the nightmare of trauma.
While the Middle Passage and the Slave Trade are the two historical traumatic forces that are repeated through the collective processing of its reified horrors, errant memory shows them to be much more powerfully influential and central to our personal lives. As I demonstrated above, errant memory affirms personal identity, even in the face of a lack of immediate control. What I mean by this is that, like trauma, errant memory comes upon the person remembering spontaneously and without warning or any particular desire. However, unlike trauma, errant memory makes the person the focal point. The disorientation inherent in these episodes, particularly in literature, is intentional. In other words, errant memory is memory without rest, but memory embraced and accepted as part of one’s self. Where trauma marks one as outside of the social life of history and culture by trapping one within a specific moment in time, errant memory serves to generate and modify space that gives birth to and sustains social life. As such, literature is the perfect vessel for the realization of errant mnemonics, as we will see in the works of Wheatley, Turner, Stowe, Crafts, and Du Bois. As each one of these authors engages the lineage of errant memory in their own way, they each indelibly alter their social environments not by re-imagining freedom, but by reminding their peers of what freedom really means.

In order to understand fully the ways in which African American literature is subjected to democratic history, we must consider the role of the audience/reader. What we find is that literature written by persons of African descent is trapped within an over-determined historicity not because this literature only has historical value as testaments to the real past of slavery, but instead because readers bring this relegation with them. Speaking of testament, Ricoeur points out that “it is the citizen as much as the historian who is summoned by the event…at the level of participation in collective memory, before which the historian is called upon to give account” (258). In other words, when speaking of the task of the historian as determining “the
discrimination among testimonies as a function of their origin,” we realize that citizens reading African American literature bring this same discrimination to these texts, seeing them as testimonies of perceived historical events as opposed to “an unreal universe” of fiction “concerning which the question where and when these things took place is incongruous” (261). Persons of African descent, within this historicist mentality, cannot be authors of narrative, only actors within it. Through errant memory, authors of African descent displace the burden of interpretive responsibility from the reader back onto the author, creating an “implicit contract between the writer and the reader” that dictates that the reader can trust the writer in suspending his disbelief on the condition that the story exists in the “as if” (261). However, particularly in the 19th century, works written by authors of African descent are “under the guidance of a mass of archives” that can verify the authenticity of the work. While this was especially true in the 19th century antebellum period, there is no doubt that this legacy of historicity has stayed with African American literature. The authenticity has always been and is now located within the Africanity of the author. In short, and to repeat myself, literature written by an author of African descent is trapped within the Africanity superimposed on the author. This is an inevitable consequence of the collective epistemology of history as an epistemology for the zeitgeist of the American people. As I will further argue below, the way in which the highly contested and indeterminable space of literature is historicized is through the paratext, which conditions the already conditioned reader to see African American literature as only having value within a racialized sociopolitical context, and one that is reactionary to and always a subject of whiteness and its so-called supremacy. However, as the authors I investigate in this book will demonstrate, errant memory inherently destroys even the most powerful paratext and rejects even the most insipid historiography, mainly because through this ontology authors of African descent seek to
and do manipulate the very fabric of the society of which they are indelibly architects. The clash between the social force of history and the personal force of errant memory is played out within the space of literature.

This clash is made most visible in the interaction between the text and paratext. The central theoretical framework of this analytical approach is paratextual analysis, especially that posited by Gerard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Genette argues that paratexts, or parts of a book that exist outside of the actual text of the written work, have a power of influence and inform the ways in which the texts are read. Genette notes, “And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption in the form…of a book” (1). Paratexts, then, present a work to the world and make it present, meaning that paratexts also define and impose an understanding of the book on whoever attempts to read it. In the case of authors of African descent, the paratextual elements attached to their literary products vary greatly, from the prefatory assurances of Phillis Wheatley’s literary competence to Du Bois’s research notes. However, they all have in common the project of racializing the author, thereby reducing them and their works to an identity that allows them to fit in the narrative of democratic history. In other words, paratexts are the articulation of an imagined community grounded in an epistemology of racialized history. Even though Benedict Anderson’s brilliant and influential figuration of the imagined community, or that national consciousness rooted in the universal materiality of print culture, has fallen out of favor, I believe that print culture stands as the primary constructor not only of national consciousness, but of national consciousness rooted and routed in race in the 19th Century. Just
like Anderson notes that “a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origin of the world of men essentially identical…rooted human lives firmly in the nature of things” and the universal, those often credited for writing this nation into existence did so through print culture, thereby creating the illusion of a universal history of which this nation was a harbinger (Anderson 36). However, Anderson’s argument must be extended to the paratextual elements associated with African American literature, many of which were written by the same individuals who produced an imagined American community through their written productions. What inevitably comes to the surface is the realization that the community of the eventual United States was imagined into existence as much by the ways in which these individuals attempted to delimit and define their own race as through the imagining of different races.

The revelation we come to here is that the dissemination of Africanity through the specific print culture of paratexts to the literary production of persons of African descent presents a crucial mechanism for producing the myth of white American racial superiority. This myth of American racial superiority, in turn, is disseminated as American Exceptionalism, patriotism, and other articulations of nationalism. In short, American nationalism does not exist without this constant defining and redefining along racial lines. More importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, the literary production of persons of African descent provide the unwitting ground upon which the imagined community of American racism builds its houses. A good example of this is found in Ernest’s excellent Liberation Historiography. Ernest explains, “Throughout the black national conventions, a constant concern was the influence of the press in promoting and maintaining the system of white supremacy by controlling images of African American character and negotiating the cultural politics associated with the system of slavery” (281). Here, then, we
get a side of the American printing press that “presents a social realm in which African Americans were marginalized, rendered invisible, brought to visibility as a problem to be solved, or otherwise degraded” (281). I am concerned here mainly with the specific manifestation of paratexts found in African American texts. However, I argue that paratexts are just as instrumental in constructing and controlling these images of African American character precisely because they so often acted as, and were disseminated within, the printing press. We must not forget that the space of literature was and is a vital aspect of print culture. As I have revealed above, with the way it is absorbed into the larger American historical narrative, literature written by persons of African descent occupies a space within the social framework of the “print culture” precisely because a large part of the audience for these works read them more as cultural shapers and determiners as opposed to literary works. My main work in this text is to reveal how, why, and to what extent this reduction was enacted and, most importantly, how these works produced a tradition of Belle Lettres that sought to manipulate this social practice by producing a space wholly independent of historical determinism. Enter errant memory.

Literature is a paratext to history, presenting and making present the social and political currents that produce the narrative of democratic history. However, literature as paratext does not limit or confine history to a single project or purpose. Democratic history, in turn, produces paratexts that make present and present literary works in a limiting way. One leads to the other, for the paratextuality of literature to history brings it up for scrutiny, thereby subverting the nature of its abstraction as a space of domination and restriction. On the other hand, the paratextuality of history to literature is a reaction to the former, where individuals existing within said historical narrative bring that aspect of their identity (often very powerful) to bear on how they interpret and, most importantly, attempt to understand the text. The two forms of
paratextuality are dialectical in that they inform and need each other. However, just because literature presents the forces of history does not mean that this is the only function of literature, or the only mission of the author. This is where the dialectical relationship breaks down, in the disorienting errantry of the author’s personal memory-image. On the subject of authority, Genette says, “The author’s name fulfills a contractual function whose importance varies greatly depending on genre: slight or nonexistent in fiction, it is much greater in all kinds of referential writing, where the credibility of the testimony, or of its transmission, rests largely on the identity of the witness or the person reporting it” (41). An author of African descent seems inevitably to fall into the category of referential writing, where his or her writing is constantly referencing an imposed racial identity. As such, the author has a contractual obligation to the name he or she puts on the cover. Rather, that responsibility is read into that name by the historically situated reader. However, I bring up again that ever-important element of choice, an affect forever errant and disorienting. It is choice, then, and the obviousness of it, that reveals the true violence of democratic history.

I extend the paratext beyond what Genette referred to as the “peritext,” or the elements contained within the book itself, like a preface, introduction, title page, and cover. I believe, like Genette does, that paratexts are far-reaching and vary greatly. Similarly, I believe that in the case of African American literature, many paratextual elements exist that attempt to present and make present the work in ways not native to text or author, but brought in with the colonizing reader. Genette puts it best: “Para’ is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once the proximity and the distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority,…something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it, equivalent in status and also secondary or subsidiary, submissive, as of guest to host, slave to master” (1). Ultimately, a
paratext’s relationship to the actual text is one that constantly shifts because of its threshold function. The last simile is the most striking and converges with the fact that emancipation, and the freedom that supposedly comes with it, has not been achieved. These elements that present and make present a text written by an author of African descent as only reacting to or mimicking “true” (read white) literature take away the freedom of choice. However, it is not merely these elements by themselves that restrict, be they prefaces, critical pieces, reviews, or reactions. The purpose of this dissertation is to reveal that it is the reader, most of all, who restricts authors and the literature they produce. Too often black authors are tied to their texts in ways that reduce both to mere abstractions, reverberations of the abstract space of democratic history. That, ultimately, is what unites authors of African descent across the diaspora on any deterministic level. I believe that the choice on the part of these same authors to write a diasporic community into existence is a much more powerful unifier.

The final major organizing issue of this dissertation is the Enlightenment debate around the human mind, especially as it pertains to the function of memory. Started by Descartes and carried through by Hume, the way in which these philosophers built their ideas of the human mind and human subjectivity around memory is often overlooked within literary philosophical discussion. As I begin to make clear in my first chapter, however, this specific discussion on memory had a major impact on authors of African descent, many of whom were familiar with or read the works of Descartes, Hobbes, Rousseau, Vico, Locke, and Hume. The general consensus among these thinkers is that memory plays a central role in the establishment of human subjectivity. This is nothing new. Imbedded in this discussion is the concept of what Bergson would call “fugitive memory.” Bergson argues that “To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power
to value the useless, we must have the will to dream.” This power to dream, to value that which has no value within the directed narrative of purpose, is what the authors discussed in this work embrace. What comes out of this embrace is a past that is “fugitive, ever on the point of escaping him, as though his backward turning memory were thwarted by the other, more natural, memory, of which the forward movement bears him to action and to life” (94). This backward turning memory is errant memory, and it has a power that awed Hume into silent respect and shook Hobbes into fearful admiration. The ability to tap into these vast memories at will, or at least to recognize them and the power they have, is what Hume would call genius, and what many others would relegate to the realm of the subconscious.

Chapter One establishes the errant mnemonic literary tradition by engaging the poetry of Phillis Wheatley. Using the pioneering and fascinating work of John Shields on Wheatley’s place within the Western poetic tradition as a starting point, I place Wheatley within the African American literary tradition, doing so by suggesting that her revolutionary concept of Fancy is the first articulation of errant memory. Phillis Wheatley is, in fact, the mother of African American literature, not because she is a curiosity who happened to be the first to publish a book of inconsequential poems, but instead because she is, as Shields begins to suggest within the Western poetic tradition, a deeply misunderstood and misread poetic genius who revolutionized the Western literary landscape. While Shields focuses on Wheatley’s influence on Romanticism, I focus on Wheatley’s place within the Enlightenment tradition around memory and the self and her centrality to the establishment of a unique African American literary tradition. Writers within this tradition do indeed inherent the status of the mother, which in this case means the powerful errant mnemonic faculty of embracing what David Hume refers to as true genius: the fancy, or pure memory, that operates within the realm of the unconscious. In other words, the memory of
the Middle Passage does not haunt or is not read into the works of authors of African descent.

Instead, as Wheatley’s Fancy demonstrates, it is purposefully part of the author’s complex engagement with the space of literature. Wheatley reveals that what makes the African American tradition unique is the manner in which the authors who are part of this tradition choose to absorb the paratextual limitations placed on their works and their selves into who they are, thereby simultaneously demonstrating that they were fully aware of these collective social forces that sought to define and limit them and actively changing their social and cultural environments through their texts.

Chapter Two moves from the first poetic phase of the African American tradition, where the tradition gained its poetics of errant memory, to the second phase of black tropofication. That is to say, in this chapter I engage the way in which black voices increasingly found themselves absorbed by the larger narrative of democratic history, embodied by white authors both for and against slavery. The best place to see these dynamics at work is Nat Turner’s Confessions, transcribed by Thomas Gray, and its relationship to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Dred. Stowe’s choice to include Thomas Gray’s The Confessions of Nat Turner as an appendix speaks not only to the power Nathaniel Turner’s rebellion had and continues to have on the American imagination, but also to the power of black voices to influence a text. In fact, Dred demonstrates the parallels between American social and literary memory as spaces not merely haunted by, but shaped by and produced as a result of the mnemonic life of black subjection. In essence, Stowe’s choice to include the Confessions is a confession in and of itself on her part. What Stowe confesses is her inability to create a believable character of African descent that is based only within the purview of her limited knowledge, which in turn is based on Africanity produced by the abstract space of American democratic memory. Gray’s confessions have an exponential
effect on *Dred* because it too is affected by paratexts put in place to attempt to channel Turner’s aggressive humanity into violent mental deficiency resulting from his status as an African, and therefore inferior, subject. The relationship between *Dred* and *Confessions* exemplifies errant memory. Just like the Dismal Swamp and other Maroon communities throughout North and South America significantly altered the social and political landscape of the various nations within which they existed, the errant mnemonics of the black trope affects the textual and aesthetic milieu of the narrative that contains it. I will call this the Maroon Aesthetic, essentialized through the character of Dred and his channeling of Nathaniel Turner. Through the maroon aesthetic, Dred embodies the true freedom inherent in the indeterminate space of the Dismal Swamp. Through the example of Stowe’s use of Turner through Dred, we see first-hand the way in which the larger historical narrative attempts to reduce complex black subjectivity to perceived and imagined racial markers. Like Wheatley’s Fancy, the maroon aesthetic of the black trope within literature written by white authors cannot be anticipated or directed. As a result, Dred’s voice explodes from the confines of Stowe’s pages.

We move from Nathaniel Turner’s and Dred’s rebellions to Hannah Crafts’s assertion and redefinition of human rationality in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. Hannah Crafts engages Freedom and history through errant memory by rearticulating the Enlightenment discussions on experiential memory and knowledge. Crafts questions the certainty of the racial markers used to determine the historical roles of persons of African descent. She does so by embracing her own, self-taught, experienced idea of her racialization. Like Wheatley and Turner before her, Crafts resists to be constrained by the paratextual elements, taking the form of contemporary criticism, that would seek to define her as an author tied exclusively to writing about what it means to be a slave and to her Africanity. Crafts resists this imposed identity in a manners similar to both
Wheatley and Turner. Like Wheatley, Crafts uses the very discipline from which she is barred by the collective consciousness of the United States to articulate a unique identity. Like Dred, Crafts uses a version of the maroon aesthetic in her repeated escapes from society to her chaotic sanctuary of nature. Like Turner, Crafts dictates interpretation by manipulating literary conventions and the Enlightenment philosophies surrounding rationality, memory, and history as it relates to what defines being human. Unlike all three of these figures, however, Crafts exists as both author and character, narrator and listener, in a novel that defies convention in being both an autobiography and a work of fiction. The lack of a definitive direction in terms of genre, along with the lack of authorial authenticity, makes *The Bondwoman's Narrative* an errant text truly devoted to the space of literature as a space of indeterminacy, choice, and the generative power of chaos. The uniqueness of *The Bondwoman's Narrative* lies not just in the narrator’s deep and complex articulation of slavery, but also in her theorization of the self that is based on a critical interpretation of Enlightenment ideals of rationality as it relates to humanity. Crafts presents errant memory as experiential knowledge, articulated through her continued emphasis of pure memory over learned memory.

In Chapter Four, we explore W.E.B. Du Bois’s engagement of historiography and the discipline of history. Two works in particular, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America* (Du Bois’s doctoral dissertation published in 1896) and *The Negro* (1915), stand as two exemplary works on the history of the African slave trade and the African continent, respectively, and are not merely revisionist historiography. As such, history continues to be explored in this dissertation not as an academic pursuit, a manifestation of collective memory, or even as the social framework of memory, to use Maurice Halbwachs’s term for written records, archives, and monuments. Instead history is treated as an epistemic position, a
way to organize, make sense of, and define the way the world works and is put together. Du Bois, like his predecessors, engages the Enlightenment tradition of memory by theorizing the archive as collective memory capable of harboring collective errant memory. This Du Bois names long memory. Specifically, Du Bois interrogates historiography as paratext, the methodology with which historians organize, hierarchize, and prioritize cultural mnemonic productions that make history a highly effective mechanism of control. In other words, I propose that Du Bois unveils the hegemonic and oppressive nature of traditional historiography, built as it is on ideas of progress, Providence, and destiny that inherently buries what it deems unworthy of remembrance. In this way, Du Bois also engages Hegel and his successor, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his theories of historical forgetting that, to him, are essential to Progress and, by extension, Freedom. This way Du Bois, as one of the excluded, the forgotten, trespasses on the sacred ground of history by embracing the long memory of the African diaspora over the inclusion of people of African descent in the already existing narrative of history, a flawed and violent space made powerful by its exclusionary nature.

Finally, the epilogue to this musing on memory will bring us back to Henri Bergson and his insightful reading of the philosophical tradition of memory. Through the lens of Hortense Spillers’s flesh memory, the epilogue discusses the implication of the dissertation’s revelation of errant memory to the often gendered dynamic of memory and motherhood. While history is reserved for the father, memory is often attached to the mother and the maternal. This attachment is the result of ideological violence that removes women and feminized subject positions, like slaves and “othered” persons, from positions of power and, more importantly, self-actualization. What errant memory in African American literature reveals, then, is that this matrilineal tradition of remembering in its purest form is what gives it power and potency. The idea of Phillis
Wheatley as the mother of African American literature takes on new meaning when we consider just what being a mother means within the contexts of slavery and memory, and how memory is essential to self-awareness.

The abstract space of democratic history feeds on the cultural productions of those it claims as part of its ever-expanding and ever-evolving structure. My project focuses on literary cultural production. As the repository of imagination and memory, literature is the vessel for the personal and the errant, while at the same time being the litmus for the nature of a community’s inner workings. As such, literature, specifically that attributed to the imagination (like fiction, poetry, and plays), presents the ideal place where one can see firsthand the ways in which an abstract space like democratic history reproduces and adapts to changes in social and political climates. In literature, the fleeting errantry of the personal memory-image clashes with the collective memory manipulated by the abstract space(s) of the universal, the hegemonic, and the suppressing whole. The way in which texts by authors of African descent have been received has been through the production of history by the state, or, as noted above, the manipulation of memory into a narrative. As Hegel points out, “It is the State which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of history, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being.” Within the State, the only true manifestation of Freedom, the process of “formal commands and laws – comprehensive and universally binding prescriptions…produces a record…on which Mnemosyne…is compelled to confer perpetuity.” In other words, the record produced by the structure of the State compels memory, first individual and then collective, to reproduce those same structures and to ensure the continuation of said structures. By extension, “Where that iron bondage of distinctions derived from nature prevails…no object for Mnemosyne presents itself; and imagination…to be capable of history,
must have had an aim within the domain of Reality, and…Freedom” (23-4). As we will see in the following chapters, Hegel is writing against a long intellectual debate on the nature of memory. While Hegel focuses on the bondage of distinction, the authors of African descent of the long 19th Century focus instead on all the objects presented for Mnemosyne through experience, and the process of remembering without aim, without an anchor in the domain of reality of Freedom. Instead, the iron bondage of distinctions presents an entirely new reality to memory, a reality which history is incapable of.
Chapter 1

Snatching the Laurels: Phillis Wheatley’s Poetic of Fancy

To begin our mnemonic journey with Phillis Wheatley is apt in many ways. First, Wheatley is considered by some, including Henry Louis Gates, to be the progenitor of African American literature. With the publication of her book of poems, Wheatley started a literary lineage of African American publication that would shape American and world literary discourse. However, many contemporary critics are struck by the apparent lack of an African American element in Wheatley's poetry. While each critic will probably offer a vastly different definition of said element, the general consensus is that Wheatley's poetry focuses more on classical topics, biblical allusions, and white persons than on the poet's origins, her status as a slave in colonial Boston, and other persons of African descent with who Wheatley was in contact. How, then, can a poet who seemingly ignores her political and social status as a slave in favor of her relatively advantageous position in the Wheatley household be considered part of a tradition that seemingly defines itself on a collective political and social status stemming from bondage and oppression and the experiences arising from it? This question will drive my analysis of Wheatley in this chapter, and the authors I discuss after her in subsequent chapters. To begin to answer this question, we must go back to what I proposed in the introduction, namely the ways in which authors of African descent engage, interpret, and revise historiography through errant memory.

For Wheatley, the act of publishing was in itself a daring act of making public her personal mental processes. By engaging the discourses of poetic theory, Freedom, and intellectualism, Wheatley entered the scene as an intellectual whose words would be judged by a
jury of her peers. The kicker, of course, is that this jury would often not rule in favor of the
defendant. It is no coincidence that Wheatley had to prove her intellectual worth in front of a jury
of socially distinguished men, publicly consented-to intellectuals whose mental faculties were
counted on to steer the community in the right direction. As a person of African descent,
Wheatley’s personal interpretation of the intellectual currents of her time would have to gain the
trust of her readership. Wheatley had every intention of carving out a life for herself within the
space of revolutionary New England. Her poetry does not display a mere freedom in writing, or
freedom in subversive poetics. Phillis Wheatley, through physical subscriptions to her books of
poems and through poetic arguments for her status as a free person, intended on enjoying her
newfound freedom beyond the limits that were set on this social status for persons of African
descent. As Frank Shuffelton astutely observes, “Publication of her poetry had guaranteed
Wheatley the respect that distinguished her from slavery’s anonymity, but in making public the
instrument of her manumission, …she consequently demanded the equal recognition that Charles
taylor has identified as the basis for an authentic modern freedom” (176). Equal recognition,
which I call public consent, is the basis of modern freedom because modern freedom is based on
the idea articulated famously by Hegel, that truly free people have the ability to establish a State
in which their Spirit can reach its ultimate potential. One must be recognized as part of the State
in order to be given the freedom to pursue their full Spirit. Wheatley was fully aware of this
philosophy, one that carried the American Revolution forward. It is not surprising, then, that
Wheatley attempts to create, or at least modify, the already existing State in which she must live.
Wheatley chooses errant memory, or fancy, as her vehicle for self-actualization because, just like
errant mnemonics defy suppression and break through the walls meant to keep them from
participating in the waking consciousness, Wheatley defies oppression and the suppression of her
humanity and breaks through the social barriers meant to keep her from participating fully in the society of which she is undeniably a part.

Errant memory, as I revealed in my introduction, is the mnemonic aesthetic unique to African American literature within the highly historical and forward-driven poetics of the American literary landscape. The choice to engage Phillis Wheatley and her poetry first in the interrogation of errant memory makes sense for many reasons. Most importantly, Wheatley typifies the Africanity of authors of African descent. What I mean by this is the process by which authors of African descent are absorbed into the forward-moving, oriented, linear, and lineaged narrative of American history. This process is the first step in the production of errant memory, as I will demonstrate below. Second, and perhaps most important, Wheatley revolutionized the idea of imagination, and links memory with imagination throughout her poetry. We must remember that it is this link between memory and imagination that produces errant memory.

John C. Shields, in his ground-breaking *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics*, reveals Wheatley's complex engagement with the concept of "meditatio," or "an act of the mind...wherein the faculties of memory (containing the subtrinity of appetites, senses, and imagination), the understanding (reason and intellect), and will are summoned into mental operation" (Shields 5). Shields brilliantly traces this foundational idea of the mind's inner workings, stemming from St. Augustine's De triniteate, to which Wheatley was exposed through Mather Byles and Samuel Cooper, two important figures in Wheatley's artistic life (7). Wheatley's significant contribution to this developing discourse on the mind, according to Shields, is the separation of fancy from imagination, "placing the former in secondary relation to the latter, suggesting that fancy serves imagination as a species of agent" (10). This, in turn, leads Wheatley to identify "imagination as "leader of the mental train"," enacting "a revolutionary moment in the evolution of literary
aesthetics," namely the naming of imagination as the "poet's reason" (54). While Shields begins the important work of seeing Wheatley for the truly brilliant poet she is, there is more to the separation of fancy from imagination than placing imagination at the top of a poet's faculties, however ground-breaking it is.

In order to understand better Wheatley’s unique poetics of Fancy and its relation to errant mnemonics, we must entertain the possibility of her being in conversation with many of the greatest Enlightenment philosophers. While the fact that Wheatley may have read works from the likes of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Descartes, Vico, and even Hume, it would be presumptuous to assume she read them without concrete evidence to support such a claim. However, when one looks closely at the ways in which these philosophers theorized fancy as something separate from learned memory and imagination, one cannot help but see the striking similarities between theirs and Wheatley’s conceptions of the mind. Moreover, Wheatley’s poetics of Fancy necessitate a critical reexamination of Enlightenment philosophy and its relationship to radical theoretics of the mind in relation to what many thinkers of this age would call “savages” and “brutes.” In true historical fashion, it may be apt to begin with Descartes, whose edict of Cogito Ergo Sum, or “I think, therefore I am” (413), would shape Western humanist philosophy for centuries and move it towards contemporary definitions of what it means to be a person. Descartes, of course, believed that all human beings possessed reason (39), and his definition what it means to “think,” and therefore “be,” are heavily reliant on memory. Early on in his meditations, Descartes makes a distinction that would be echoed by most Enlightenment thinkers, that “Those in whom the faculty of reason is predominant…are always the best able to persuade of the truth of what they lay down,” while “those whose minds are stored with the most agreeable fancies…are still the best poets” (97). Fancy, and the propensity
for poesy that accompanies it, however, “are more gifts of nature rather than fruits of study” (97). This sentiment is not only echoed by thinkers like Vico almost a century later and one of Wheatley’s admirers on the eve of the American Revolution, but is also played with by Wheatley herself throughout her poetry.

Descartes’s musings on Fancy, poesy, and reason are taken up with a distinct fervor by Hobbes, who published his *Leviathan* about a decade after Descartes published his *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*. Even though Hobbes belonged to the Empiricist school of thought, where Descartes laid the foundation for Continental Rationalism, these two schools join, or at least converse, on the level of their engagement of memory. Again, it is Wheatley who points us to this through her distinguishing through poetic practice Fancy, memory, and imagination. Unlike Descartes, who distrusts memory but never draws out what exactly what it means to think (famously engaged by Heidegger through his Dasein), Hobbes spends a great deal of time on what exactly it means for one to think. However, for our purposes here, Hobbes definition of fancy as “seeming” or “the pressure…of external things” upon our senses echoes Wheatley’s affective notion of Fancy in significant ways (86). Hobbes notes that what the Romans call “imagination,” or “the image made in seeing,” the Greeks call “Fancy, which signifies appearance.” The difference, then, is that imagination is “decaying sense,” memory is how “we would express the decay, and significie that the sense is fading,” becoming, in essence, “one thing” (89). While these distinctions are useful in that they anticipate later developments in theories of memory and its importance to what it means to think, Hobbes’s specific meditation on the dangers of Fancy, and its implicit separation from memory and imagination, strike eerily close to Wheatley’s own use of Fancy as an articulation of errant memory. Hobbes says, “But without Steddinesse, and Direction to some End, a great Fancy is one kind of Madnesse; such as
they have, that entering into any discourse, are snatched from their purpose, by every thing that comes into their thoughts, into so many, and so long digressions…that they utterly lose themselves,” and that while “Fancy must be more eminent” in the creation of poetry, “In a good History, the Judgement must be eminent; because the goodnesse consisteth in the Method, in the Truth and in the Choyse of the actions that are the most profitable to be known. Fancy has no place, but only in adorning the stile” (116). Like Descartes announcement that he would abandon the Humanities in favor of the sciences, Hobbes seems to declare the dangers of Fancy in overtaking reason and displacing judgment and rationality, thereby anticipating Bergson’s dreamer. However, as Wheatley makes clear through her poetry, the Madnesse of Fancy is much more than a lack of control over one’s faculties. Instead, Wheatley harnesses the creative power of Fancy in her poetry.

Locke enters the discourse on memory and imagination by again separating Fancy from the other faculties, basing its definition on that of Descartes and Hobbes. Locke responds directly to Hobbes’s assertion that “where Wit is wanting, it is not Fancy that is wanting, but Direction. Judgement therefore without Fancy is Wit, but Fancy without Judgement not” (137). Like Hobbes, Locke believes that “Men who have a great deal of Wit, and prompt Memories, have not always the clearest Judgment or deepest reason.” He also agrees with Descartes that Judgment is a mental process “quite contrary to Metaphor and pleasantry of Wit, which strikes so lively on the Fancy, and therefore [is] so acceptable to all People; because its beauty appears at first sight,” and requires “no labor of thought to examine what Truth or Reason there is in it” (92). Wheatley, as we will see, affirms through her poetics only one of these assertions and disproves another. The one affirmed is, of course, that poetry is a way of communicating to all people, at least those willing and able to read. The one disproved is that no labor of thought is required. My goal in
this chapter is to trace exactly how Wheatley disproves the seemingly central tenant of Enlightenment thinking that memory is untrustworthy and that Fancy is dangerous. This tenant was not restricted to the 17th century. It bled into the thinking of 18th century Enlightenment thinkers like Vico, Rousseau, and Hume as well.

Wheatley’s poetics of Fancy powerfully refute the growing trend appearing in Enlightenment thinking at the turn of the 18th century. Namely, thinkers began to characterize memory, imagination, and its inevitable artistic manifestation, poetry, as inferior to reason. This began in the 18th century with Vico, who theorizes a Universal History in which the youthful world was populated by poets devoid of reason who interpreted the world around them symbolically (read poetically) using only their senses. To Vico, “The weaker its power of reasoning, the more vigorous the human imagination grows,” and “people living in the world’s childhood were by nature poets” (2086). Vico’s conflation of poetic brilliance with child-like sublimity anticipates the Romantics by a century and is indicative of the continuing devaluation of mnemonic faculties of the mind in the discourse on the human mind. No philosopher, however, comes closer to Wheatley’s poetic endeavor than Hume. Writing much later, Hume takes a dramatic turn from his predecessors by not dismissing fancy as dangerous, childish, or inferior to reason. His thoughts are worth quoting at length:

“Nothing is more admirable, than the readiness, with which the imagination suggests its ideas, and presents them at the very instant, in which they become necessary or useful. The fancy runs from one end of the universe to the other in collecting those ideas, which belong to any subject. One would think the whole intellectual world of ideas was at once subjected to our view, and that we did nothing but pick out such as were most proper for our purpose. There may not, however, be any present, beside those very ideas, that are
thus collected by a kind of magical faculty in the soul, which, though it be always most perfect in the greatest geniuses, and is properly what we call a genius, is however inexplicable by the utmost efforts of human understanding” (480).

Note especially Hume’s conception of Fancy as running “from one end of the universe to the other” (an image Wheatley uses in her own poetry, especially in “On Imagination”), and as a “magical faculty of the soul…properly what we call genius…inexplicable by the utmost efforts of human understanding.” Hume here is referring to the mind’s ability to recollect large ideas from single words or images, which goes far beyond his own definition of memory’s primary function as “not to preserve the simple ideas, but their order and position.” Here, it seems, Hume attempts to explain a more contemporary view of imagination, not as deceptive and dangerous, but instead as a method of creating something out of almost nothing. He is, in fact, describing errant memory and Wheatley’s soaring Fancy. Hume defines Fancy earlier as “THE LIBERTY OF THE IMAGINATION TO TRANSPOSE AND CHANGE ITS IDEAS” (270). This liberty is what Wheatley practices in and through her poetry. Specifically, she transposes and changes not only the ideas she encounters through her experience, but also those forced upon her by those who see her as nothing more than a parrot and a curiosity. Hume, of course, famously relegated Wheatley’s poetry to these places. Wheatley, however, takes Hume’s idea further by showing through her poetry how fancy works, something Hume could only squawk at. While Wheatley’s having read the aforementioned thinkers cannot be proven definitively, a close examination of her poetry will put beyond doubt that her use of “loose floating image of the fancy” (1889) is a result of nothing less than the same intellectual journeys these men went on. A genius in bondage indeed.
Placing Wheatley’s poetic fancy within the discourse of memory found in Enlightenment thinking is important because it indicates that, if anything, Wheatley is aware of the general currents of philosophy. Shields’s theory that Wheatley anticipates the Romantics in her treatment of memory and the sublime rings even more true when approached through the lens of an often neglected aspect of 17th and 18th century philosophy. Thinkers from Descartes to Hume spent a great deal of their written works on explaining the way in which people think, paying special attention to the role of memory in the conception of self. Wheatley’s separation from her mnemonic self, from her ability and capacity to think, takes on an added dimension when one takes into account that being was thought to rely heavily on the ability to remember. Wheatley’s mnemonic death, enacted through the paratextual violence of racialized reductivism, is figured in terms of specific memories. In short, Wheatley’s poetry supposedly presents regurgitations of already constructed memories, ones that she mimics. What a close reading of Enlightenment philosophy reveals, then, is that memories do not make the person, but rather the ability to create them, a distinction not engaged enough by many scholars of revisionist historiography. The separation of fancy from imagination, then, is nothing new within 17th and 18th century intellectual circles. Wheatley’s theorization of Fancy, however, is one wholly unique and dependent on her status as a mnemonically dead individual within a historical society.

The separation of fancy from imagination takes on a specific note in Wheatley's "long poem" (“On Providence,” “On Imagination,” and “On Recollection,” to quote Shields) and sets the table for subsequent authors of African descent to enact errant memory. Wheatley's version of errant memory is fancy, which then becomes the true vehicle for Wheatley's self-actualization through her poetry. This, then, is the final aspect of the importance of Wheatley's place within the African American canon. While her position as mother of African American literature can
and has been debated, no serious critic can deny Wheatley’s role in producing a unique literary space that both resists the reifying violence of democratic history and allows the author to critique its methods, actions, and existence. In other words, Wheatley as mother begins a different kind of lineage, one inherently passed down to her literary successors. These successors inherit from Wheatley the errant memory of fancy, or the power to run riotous within one’s own mind. No longer is the mother the sole source of enslavement for her children. Instead, Wheatley, if she is to be a mother at all, begins the infusion of choice throughout African American literature. Wheatley remembers and imagines her self independent of the sometimes overwhelming influence of democratic history, embodied in the paratextual pressures of her white audience. What we find in Wheatley’s poetry is the realization that we may not find Wheatley within this poetry at all. It is this realization, ultimately, that may be the most important of all. After all, errant memory reminds readers that authors of African descent are not tied to the interpretation readers bring with them, while simultaneously affirming that the author’s imposed identity, grounded in an imagined Africa, does not dictate the direction of the literature.

Imagining Africa is central to the formation of the Western world in general and to America specifically. This imagined, or re-membered, Africa is also essential to Wheatley’s errant mnemonic aesthetic. In fact, the reader can glean much from Wheatley’s engagement with this imagined Africa about her conception of “fancy” as a personal mnemonic aesthetic. Wheatley’s articulation of and response to Africa and, by extension, her early childhood memories, are an indication of how prevalent African myth-making was in the early phases of the construction of an American historical narrative. For example, dedicating a poem to “a gentleman of the navy” prompts a response poem in which said gentleman envisions Africa as
paradise from Genesis.\textsuperscript{xxvi} The gentleman praises “the lovely daughter of the Affric shore” (8), an Africa “Where nature taught (tho’ strange it is to tell,)/ Her flowing pencil Europe to excel” (27-8). The gentleman betrays his interpretation of Wheatley and her poetry as a curiosity, finding it strange to tell of someone taught by nature who masters so thoroughly the education meant to cultivate Anglo-European male minds. He also echoes the aforementioned Enlightenment philosophers who place poetic imagination within the realm of natural ability and intellectual infantilism. Wheatley is described as “nature’s bard” (41) who can “The pristine state of paradise display” (42) and “Describe the first the only happy pair” (44). Not only does the gentleman allude to Adam and Eve and the world before original sin, he also places Africa within this temporal limbo outside of history. He is relatively kind in his praise, even if it still commits the violence of detaching Wheatley and her place of origin from the human family. Furthermore, it is nature that teaches Wheatley to catch up with and eventually overcome Europe’s progress through historical time. In other words, Wheatley is naturally gifted, like Vico’s primitive poets. Her exposure to and mastery of Western education (which was widely known by her readers), however, allows her to put these natural gifts to use. Wheatley and Africa are imagined outside of history, and this is exactly the point to which Wheatley gives a resounding answer through her poetry and in her answer to the gentleman’s response.

Wheatley’s response to the gentleman’s answer is emblematic of her engagement with the paratextual myth-making to which she and her poetry are subjected. In this answer, the reader finds not an outright refutation, but instead what seems to be a young woman embracing her admirer’s compliments and using them to kindle her memories of her life before her enslavement, much in the manner about which Hume sang his praises. This remembering is, of course, inherently subversive in that it links the process of remembering not merely to the
process of imagination, but to the process of what Wheatley would call fancy, and what I call errant memory. First, Wheatley does what the gentleman and her other white readers expect her to do: she deflects the gentleman’s praise. “The generous plaudit,” she claims, “’tis not mine to claim,/ A muse untutor’d, and unknown to fame” (143 9-10). Like many of her other heroic couplets, this one shows an errant reality in plain sight. The reality, of course, is that Wheatley is in no position to claim anything. That is up to her enslavers, who, as we will discuss below, believe they deserve the plaudit for educating and taking care of her. Also, as an enslaved person, she is property, and is not allowed to own any, even if it is literary. The other reality is much more complicated and subtle. Taking the gentleman’s plaudit of being a poet taught by nature, Wheatley points out the obviously untrue implication in this plaudit, namely that she is untutored in the traditional sense, and therefore not a real poet. Finally, Wheatley plays with the gentleman’s act of placing her within his idea of Africa, which simultaneously places her outside of the realm of fame. To have fame, one must have a social life. Even though Wheatley had a considerable social life and many friends, she also knows that, as a slave, these friendships are subordinate to her status as property. Because of this, Wheatley implores the gentleman to “fix the humble Afric muse’s seat/ At British Homer’s and Sir Isaac’s feet” (143 15-6). As Reginald Wilburn astutely points out, British Homer refers to John Milton, and Sir Isaac Newton is one of the progenitors of the Enlightenment. Already it becomes clear, as Shields has shown us, that Wheatley’s poetry will require a considerable amount of space within the pages of anyone who whishes to write about her. All of this for two lines, and we are not even close to finished. To think that this transaction was not even published in her book of poems! 

Wheatley continues her errant memory by writing about the effect the gentleman’s Edenic African fantasy has on her own imagination. She says, “Charm’d with thy painting, how
my bosom burns!/ And pleasant Gambia on my soul returns/…and Eden blooms again” (144 21-4). The gentleman’s imagination paints for Wheatley an image of Africa that inspires her, but is separate from her own memory of it. The painting stands apart. It is Gambia that returns to Wheatley’s soul, to her very spirit. Not only is does this act of remembering fly in the face of what many of her contemporaries (including her own eventual biographer!) consider to be the limited mnemonic faculties of persons of African descent, but it also resists the mythologizing implicit in the gentleman’s poem. It enacts, in fact, memory’s faculty of recalling instantly a complex world from a single word or image, the faculty Hume referred to as genius and could provide no explanation for. Wheatley names a specific place instead of an entire continent. Subsequently, Wheatley describes her Edenic childhood, playing upon the gentleman’s myth-making and ahistoricizing. Wheatley’s own experiential memory, real to her alone, replaces the gentleman’s conflation of Africa with paradise and primitive natural beauty and talent. The only ideal part of Wheatley’s youth is the implicit freedom she enjoyed before being enslaved. After her childhood memories, Wheatley passes judgment on the gentleman’s fantasy: “There, as in Britain’s favour’d isle, behold/ The bending harvest ripen into gold!/ Just are thy views of Afric’s blissful plain” (144 31-3). Next to comparing Gambia to Britain economically, Wheatley judges the gentleman’s version of Africa to be acceptable, mainly because “Pleas’d with the theme…sportive fancy play[s]” (144 35). Here, then, we encounter the true nature of Wheatley’s errant memory. As she does in much of her poetry, Wheatley characterizes fancy as sportive, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “Of a person or mental faculty: inclined to jesting or levity; light-hearted or playful in temperament, thought, or manner of expression.” Fancy is playful and unpredictable. With fancy being one of the actions of memory, and with memory itself being seen as unpredictable, unreliable, and untrustworthy, Wheatley’s use of the
word in this poem, in response to a white man’s idea of Africa, stands as an exemplar of the aspect of her complex poetics I wish to interrogate in this chapter. Wheatley sees the gentleman’s Africa as a theme, albeit a theme vital to the same historical narrative that deems her an object. While Wheatley may seem to be embracing the gentleman’s and history’s version of Africa and herself attached to it, she is instead privileging her own errant mnemonics, articulated through fancy, to allow her experiential memory to take center stage. History, then, becomes an opportunity, and literature the space within which this opportunity can be taken advantage of. Wheatley would do exactly this in her book of poems.

As a historical subject, Wheatley is hard to conceptualize and reify, and therefore lends herself to severe scrutiny by those that stand to gain political and social power from the overdetermination of her person and, by extension, her poetry. The little that has been written about Wheatley often suffers from an apparent urge to contextualize her within a certain historical narrative, be it cultural or literary. From this urge comes a notion like the one discussed above, to name her as a first, the mother of African American literature. This naming and placing within a chronological model of time allows the teleological narrative of democratic history to easily absorb her artificial image into its body. As Vincent Carretta shows in his important biography of Phillis Wheatley, the words of her contemporaries and close acquaintances help construct an easily reproducible image of Wheatley within such reductivist narratives as primitivism and white supremacy. However, as I have begun to show above, Wheatley is not only aware of these shaping forces and the philosophical foundations from which they spring, but also actively manipulates and reshapes them in an attempt to (re)produce a State in which she may achieve the full flight of her spirit. Even Carretta himself cannot seem to escape the powerful avatar of Wheatley that exists within the historical narrative, or is at least aware of the
powerful narrative against which his new biographical findings must fight. However, as a historian, Carretta relies exclusively on the paratextual elements around her poetry to make sense of said poetry. This creates a dissonance within the biographical text that undermines his project of historical liberation for a “genius in bondage,” a bondage that is perpetuated. For instance, in one of the more striking moments of Carretta’s characterization, he refers to the young Phillis Wheatley as “the future Phillis Wheatley” (4). Coming in the chapter that attempts to make sense of the disorientation of Wheatley’s childhood memories, all of which are marked by the trauma of the “middle passage” that Wheatley “does not mention…in any of her known writings,” Carretta is understandably bound by the sources at his disposal when it comes to constructing her for the modern reader. Because of this, Carretta refers to the future Wheatley because there exist more paratextual documents that can help define her as a person cemented within a specific historical context. However, this is exactly the phenomenon I expose in this dissertation. Despite Carretta’s positive and often successful intention of helping modern readers appreciate and understand Wheatley as a person, he is at the mercy of sources that similarly place Wheatley the person within a space in which that personhood is inevitably stripped. I contend that when one looks at Wheatley’s poetry, no clearer picture of who she was is produced. However, what does appear is a mnemonic process of errant memory, what Wheatley calls "fancy," that resists and refutes the very historical narratives that attempt to root Wheatley in transient African soil. Wheatley’s Gambia wins out, even if the images this errant memory conjures means something only to Wheatley.

Wheatley’s presence within the Atlantic world precipitates her presence within the African diasporic community, one that has not yet been imagined fully into existence at the time of her interaction with her contemporaries. Next to answering the question of what ties disparate
individuals of African descent together, we must also engage what it means for Wheatley to be placed within that community based on the social and political existence of her poetry. To engage these issues, we need look no further than Ignatius Sancho, a prominent black author who actively participated in the intellectual life of the 18th century. Placing himself squarely within the Enlightenment, as many other black authors and scholars did, Sancho’s response to Wheatley’s poetry is an excellent barometer of the state of the diaspora at the eve of the American Revolution. Most importantly, as Carretta points out, Sancho is the first and one of the only individuals to “have questioned the motives of Wheatley’s owners and other whites who helped get her book published” (171). With this questioning, Sancho both anticipates the social and mnemonic death to which Wheatley is subjected as well as the solidarity that arises not just from the common experience of bondage and the horrors of the Middle Passage, but also of the perpetual effacement to which persons of African descent are subjected when they join the national body politic. The diaspora, forged in common experience and common memory, is also produced out of the common experience of mnemonic effacement. When Sancho says that Wheatley’s poetry “reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master—if she is still his slave—except he glories in the low vanity of having in his wanton power a mind animated by heaven,” he is the first and only of Wheatley’s contemporaries to come close to understanding the true weight of Wheatley’s poetics (171). We must keep in mind Sancho’s invaluable contribution to the discourse on Wheatley’s poetry when engaging the paratextual elements that are so often to blame for the missive attitude that Sancho so keenly observed. Sancho saw Wheatley as a human being first, a fellow human being of African descent second. This is what allowed him to see through the thicket of paratextual frameworks put in place by Wheatley’s social authors. As serious readers of Wheatley’s poetry, we must see the same.
Like the other texts we will encounter in this dissertation, the paratextual elements that frame her poetry are vital indicators of just how Wheatley is both produced and erased by her own text. Wheatley engages with paratexts that attempt to both justify the publication of her poetry to potential readers and to do so by framing her life within a narrative of exceptionalism attributed to her proximity to white people of respectful standing. It is, then, not so much that Wheatley is engaging the actual paratexts themselves. In fact, many of the ones discussed below, like the biography, were written after Wheatley wrote her poetry. However, the editorial that precedes the above-discussed poetic conversation, the letter from her male captor, the “memoir,” and the apology perfectly capture the social activity of the text and its subsequent echoing in the collective memory of the nation. Wheatley’s interactions with the paratextual elements, in turn, are emblematic of the errant memory that combats the social and mnemonic death inherent in the stereotypifying process of the construction of whiteness. First, in the preface, the reader is reassured by an unknown voice that Phillis Wheatley is not a traditional poet, in the sense that “she had no intention ever to have published them.” This voice goes on to say that the poems would not have been published had it not been for “her best and most generous friends, to whom she considers herself as under the greatest obligation” (iv-v). Here we see the beginnings of a formation of Wheatley’s public and racialized identity. This person is not a poet. She is a curiosity, a precocious slave who is lucky enough to have been around generous white people and their form of education to hone her natural gifts. Her poetry, or at least the aspect of it that merits admiration, does not necessarily come from her, but from the generosity of the white world to give her a chance to write something as wonderful as poetry. “As her attempts in Poetry are now sent out into the world,” the voice says, “it is hoped the critic will not severely censure their defects” (iv). As attempts, Wheatley’s poems are sent out to the jury of her peers already
manipulated. Or, rather, the public’s perception of them is warped by the opinion of this invisible, although trusted, voice. If Shuffelton is right, then this particular paratextual element is not helping Wheatley achieve her goal of equal recognition. As attempts, her poems do not have to be taken seriously, and they were and are often not.

In the editorial introduction to the above-analyzed poetic exchange between Wheatley and her gentleman, we find another instance of how powerfully paratexts influence the memory of Phillis Wheatley the poet and person. Moreover, the editorial corroborates the gentleman’s construction of an ahistorical Africa outside of the movements of universal history. It is worth quoting at length:

“By this single instance may be seen, the importance of education.—Uncultivated nature is much the same in every part of the globe. It is probable Europe and Africa would be alike savage or polite in the same circumstances; though, it may be questioned, whether men who have no artificial wants, are capable of becoming so ferocious as those, who by faring sumptuously every day are reduced to a habit of thinking it necessary to their happiness, to plunder the whole human race” (cited in Shuffelton 185).

Imbedded in this seemingly simple critique of Western avarice is a complex ordering and hierachizing of Europe and Africa. First, the author of this editorial establishes a specific circumstance, that of a particular tradition of education, one in which Wheatley apparently participates. This, of course, is the highly specialized education of elite Anglo-European individuals. Then, we have uncultivated nature, which can only belong to everyone else, but to Africa in particular. While the good intentions of conceding that even Europe could have been in Africa’s position of un-cultivation without this specific educational tradition seems laudable, it actually damn Africa for not having the same tradition. In other words, Africa is imagined as
savage because the many intellectual traditions that are present there do not match that of the
Christian Europe. Even in their thievery, Anglo-Europeans are exceptional, having that ability
only because they are taking advantage of their superior intellect. Africa, in having no artificial
wants, in being uncultivated and savage, is imagined as incapable of participating in a discourse
like the one being had by Wheatley and the gentleman, while Wheatley can only do so because
she has been exposed to this education. This editorial extends the image of Africa as a land
outside of the discourse of history, its people incapable of the Imitatio model of memory. Even a
savage can be trained to talk like the teacher. With this editorial, however, it is doubtful whether
any reader read more into Wheatley’s replies, or the gentleman’s praise of her as a poet, than
what amazement is directed as a curiosity. However, as we have seen above, and as I will
demonstrate further below, this is exactly what Wheatley’s fancy disproves.

The most perplexing and interesting paratextual element is the “memoir” attached to the
end of a republication, written in 1834 by a distant cousin of Wheatley’s captors, Margaret
Matilda Odell. It is at once an attempt to explain her poetry through her life, an abolitionist tract,
a defense of her abilities, and a mechanism of systematic dehumanization in favor of a primitive
status befitting a larger project of white racialization. The most important aspect of this
memoir is the way in which Wheatley’s recreation is achieved through Odell questioning her
memory. Specifically, Wheatley’s ability to learn and repeat is not questioned, in line with
what her critics would term her parroting of greater minds, and what Bergson and Ricoeur would
refer to as learned and forced memory. Instead, the narrator notes that “She did not seem to have
the power of retaining the creations of her own fancy, for a long time, in her own mind”. This
“lady…of primitive simplicity” cannot recall things that came from her self, from within her own
mind, with her fancy “vanish[ing] in the land of dreams” (Wheatley The Poems 574). According
to Odell, Wheatley lacks the very ability Hume praised as genius, even though she demonstrates it repeatedly throughout her poetry. The narrator of Wheatley’s memoir, then, is basing her primitive status on her lack of fancy, or the inability to “recall scenes and events long since forgotten,” an “operation of the mind” “more wonderful” than any other (583). First, it is important to note here that Odell participates in the same discourse on memory that Wheatley does, where the ability to remember moments in one’s life proves one’s genius and humanity. However, Odell is trapped within this limiting vision and cannot meet Wheatley on her elevated level. Odell’s critique does not prove Wheatley’s inferior mnemonics. Instead, it only proves Odell’s inability to understand Wheatley’s complex contribution to the classical and neoclassical discourse on the mind. While Odell’s intentions in stating that Wheatley cannot contain for long the images of her fancy may have been intended as an attempt to place Wheatley within the shackles of limited mnemonic ability so often attributed to persons of African descent, it instead only reinforces what Wheatley sets out to establish in her poetry. When Odell describes the need for Wheatley to write down her thoughts at night in order to remember them, she misunderstands Wheatley’s poetic process as an inability. Instead, Wheatley’s transcribing her fancy is essential to capturing the images conveyed within the fleeting space of her dreams. Fancy is, in fact, the penultimate manifestation of self-generative memory. As errant memory, Wheatley’s fancy does not match Odell’s ideation of memory as merely the ability to “recall scenes and events long since forgotten,” the most wonderful operation of the mind. Instead, fusing as it does sustained imagining with the harnessing of affective, subconscious, and experienced memories kept safely within the deepest part of the psyche, the errant mnemonics of fancy are truly unique to Wheatley. In order to understand what comes from Wheatley’s fancy,
one must know not just classical and biblical allusions, but also (and most importantly) Wheatley.

Odell further demonstrates her misunderstanding of Wheatley’s poetics by naming “On Recollection” as the perfect example of Wheatley’s mnemonic shortcomings (587). Ironically enough, this poem displays better than any other the workings of paratextual juxtaposition in which Wheatley engages, mainly because the link between the text as social construction and the author as being defined by said structure is made inherently visible in the paratext itself. By mentioning “On Recollection” as the poem that exemplifies Wheatley’s lack of mnemonic faculties, the narrator inadvertently brings the reader to that poem, as well as “On Imagination,” which comes right after. As Wheatley inserts herself into this debate, she continues to make clear that her mnemonic faculties are powerful. While she states this in the poem, the reader can find proof of this throughout the rest of Wheatley’s poetry in the often obscure and highly appropriate classical and biblical allusions she uses. Shields and many others have traced the complex poetics Wheatley engages in when it comes to classical allusions. I offer here that in addition to the importance of the allusions themselves, the act of alluding also has significance for a poet whose memory is under suspicion. The importance of the act of alluding lies, of course, in the link it has to the reader’s ability to remember the subject of the allusion. Wheatley, then, does what so many others after her would do: she imaginatively interprets, creates, and reimagines her poetic persona as a living being producing within and influencing the increasingly racialized literary and cultural space in which she is thrust with the publication of her work.

With the creation of this poetic persona, Wheatley detaches her poetic self from her person while at the same time intimately connecting them. This act mirrors the violent creating and destroying of her persona enacted by the paratexts that would force her into the limiting
space produced for her within the newly forming white (read Anglo-Saxon) imagined collectivity. Wheatley’s “follies” of “eighteen years” of living “pass/ Unnoticed, but behold them writ in brass!” (63). First, she imagines her memories memorialized, as it were, in brass, a desirable alloy for sculpting due to its malleability. However, despite its malleability, it is more durable than wax. Wheatley then claims ownership of these memories: “And sure ‘tis mine to be ashamed and mourn” (64). Wheatley makes memory exclusive to the self, while at the same time making this equation the most prescient in self-formation. The verbal complexity of this stanza lies in the heavy critique she levels against a “race” who cannot do the same as she, that is, recollect her shameful yet equally essential moments of self-definition and use this process of remembering to better one’s self. Here Wheatley harshly criticizes those who refuse to respect Mneme, her favorite and the first muse, and the wrath she brings down on those who forget. The acts of cruelty committed by her enslavers and kidnappers are written in brass within her mind.

In this sense, Wheatley takes ownership not just of her mnemonic faculties, but also of the memories that surface, be they conscious or subconscious. In this sense, Wheatley owns herself, but she does not fool herself into thinking this will eliminate the horrors of actual slavery and the treatment of persons of African descent in Revolutionary New England. Most importantly, Wheatley levels a heavy critique against a collective of individuals who remember themselves as belonging to the same source-myth. It is this collective that has a diminished mnemonic faculty, not Wheatley.

Perhaps it is a lack of an autobiographical element that allows her readers to insert their own meaning without any checks and balances. Unlike many of her contemporaries, like Ottobah Cuguano, Olaudah Equiano, and John Marrant, Wheatley does not shape her own persona in a way traditionally accepted within critical circles. Where other authors of the Black
Atlantic took control over their personal selves through their literary personas by rewriting their own life stories and experiences, Wheatley does not offer the reader such a clear reinterpretation of her own life. The lack of an autobiography coincides with the anxiety around how little we as scholars know about Wheatley’s “actual” life. Here we find exactly the discrepancy between history and memory at play. Literary critics understand the imaginative nature of the genre of autobiography, where often historians and biographers will take what is said in them at face value, usually because these autobiographies stand as the only written record of a person’s existence. In the case of authors of African descent, this issue becomes more pronounced because of the mnemonic death inherent not just in enslavement, but in cultural and social appropriation. The discomfort and anxiety that inevitably comes with not knowing an author’s origin, his or her life experience, and, by extension, the source of their literary imagination, proves the centrality of memory. The problem arises when the few people of African descent that exist in public record through their personal writings are misread and appropriated into the larger historical narrative, one that perpetuates theories of intellectual inferiority, providence, the fortunate fall, and Western benevolence. The need of the historian to place authors like Equiano in a linear narrative of social uplift belies Equiano’s autobiography, dishonors Equiano’s personal memory, and discredits his ability to craft and reimagine himself. Again, we must not forget that writing an autobiography at all for most persons of African descent was a self-defining act that stands against the American historical narrative of racial superiority. Instead, these documents stand as testaments to the centrality of persons of African descent in shaping the modern world, not as proofs of white benevolence and the powers of Western civilization.
The lack of an autobiography for Wheatley does not absolve her from her social responsibility as a publicly visible “African.” Instead, it necessitates what has been described above: the creation of a narrative that places the source of Wheatley’s literary achievements in Western civilization. Wheatley’s poetry disproves the theory of reactivity often applied to authors of African descent and implicit in the protest tradition of African American literature. It is not Wheatley herself that disproves the primitivism and exoticism of her contemporaries and her critics. Instead, it is her poetry that reveals the inner workings of cultural appropriation, partly by highlighting the reader’s inability to their true complexity. Significantly, similar to the controversy around Equiano’s birthplace, Wheatley’s lack of an origin exemplifies the poetics of relation outlined by Glissant. Wheatley’s errantry lies in her social existence. Wheatley does not exist in the public consciousness before the publication of her poetry. This in itself gives these poems the same weight of an autobiography. While Wheatley may never have had the intention of writing herself into existence like Marrant (we will never know, and that is the point!), she does so simply by making her poetry public. When it comes down to it, how can anyone be the mother, the originator of anything without having herself an origin, a starting point? Wheatley’s status within the literary circles that have mutated her relational poetic persona as the “mother of African American literature” makes her either a God-like figure of creation or the pioneer of a tradition steeped in self-fashioning and errant memory. I prefer the latter.

Perhaps the most overbearing paratextual element standing in Wheatley’s way as a poet is not anything that is written down, but rather what is not. The memoir leaves out anything before Wheatley came to Boston, and Wheatley only addresses the issue a handful of times. When she does address her life before Boston, it seems to be conciliatory and even grateful in tone. However, as is the case with the poems discussed above, this shallow reading leaves out
Wheatley’s true powers as a poet. Just like the personal memory of an enslaved individual is actively repressed in favor of one fitting the larger national historical narrative, Wheatley suppresses her own errant memories in favor of a narrative that can be easily accepted by her readers. However, just like dismissing all enslaved persons as being without memory is a gross overdetermination, dismissing Wheatley’s poetry as being without her own memory is a gross misreading and only exacerbates her alienation from her own text. Because we are concerned here with Wheatley’s public persona and its impact on her person, it is useful to interrogate an oft-read and taught poem: “To Maecenas.” This poem alludes not only to Wheatley’s status as an oppressed person, but also to her life before that in Boston. Her powers of remembering are not merely displayed in her copious classical and biblical allusions, but also in her ability to weave her self into these conventional poetic practices, making these poems highly unconventional in their errant intimacy. If only the reader had eyes to see, he or she would gather from Wheatley’s poetry more than he or she ever could from the memoir or anything else provided on her by others writing about her life. Investigating these poems will corroborate the importance of the paratext in its greater definition to the writings of persons of African descent.

Wheatley begins her book of poems with a message to her supporters, cloaked in a dedication to patrons. In “On Maecenas,” Maecenas, a famous Roman patron of the arts, stands in for all of Wheatley’s contemporary patrons who supported her work. As such, Wheatley links Maecenas to the words of support these patrons gave to her career, including the paratextual elements of her book. Wheatley is addressing directly those who define her as a poet while simultaneously revealing the true nature of the patron/poet relationship. In short, with a simple referential title, Wheatley shows the lack of poetic and artistic freedom inherent in patronage. The first stanza is, in fact, devoted to describing how “what felt those poets, but [Maecenas] feels
the same” (9 3), a clever use of verbal irony in that Wheatley brings this great patron, and those he stands in for, to the same place as feeling, creative human beings. This feeling of mutuality seems quickly dampened, however, when Wheatley begins to lament a “groveling mind/ that fain would mount and ride upon the wind” (11 29-30); she, “less happy, cannot raise the song; the faltering music dies upon my tongue” (11 35-6). Wheatley cannot sing because her paratextual persona denies her the chance to be heard as a true poet, and because she is fully aware of the limits placed on her mental faculties by her reading public (as noted above). The song already exists, but dies for lack of an audience to hear it. In fact, the groveling mind Wheatley mourns may not be her own, but that of her readers who cannot hear the “ardors” that “burn” her “soul” (10 26). She continues along this strain by alluding to Terence, a playwright of African descent in classical Rome, who, according to Wheatley, has the sole distinction of “the first glory in the realms of fame” (11 42). However, Wheatley notes that Terence is the exception that proves the rule, him being “one alone of Afric’s sable race” to have his name from “age to age transmit[ed]/ With the first glory in the rolls of fame” (11 40-2). Terence is the only one to have his name written on the scrolls of history. His presence there is both an affirmation of the lack of “Afric muses” and proof that persons of African descent are fully capable of producing great literature.

In fact, Wheatley comments directly on the workings of historiography, noting that Terence’s sole presence in its rolls is not due to lack of other individuals like him, but rather of these individuals being forgotten or left off. It is no coincidence that in later versions of the poem, “rolls” is changed to “realms.” Finally, in the most important stanza of the poem, Wheatley uncovers her true design: “I’ll snatch a laurel from thine [Maecenas’s] honored head,/ While you, indulgent, smile upon the deed”. Wheatley, in the first poem of her book, tells her patrons she intends to take the glory owed her for her poetic deeds, and the patrons and readers will indulge
her as she does it! Wheatley, as blatantly as she can, states her intention to convert the very people who restrict her into supporting her, a trope that carries throughout African American literature, and one we will encounter in every single text discussed in this book.

In opposition to the workings of history exposed in “On Maecenas,” Wheatley begins to explore the powers of errant memory in “Thoughts on the Works of Providence,” the first of what Shields names to Long Poem. In “Providence,” Wheatley expounds for the first time in her book of poems on fancy, her own version of errant memory that rules her poetics and aesthetics. Wheatley juxtaposes “reason,” which “by day our God disclose” (47 83) with “Fancy’s queen,” who “in giddy triumph reigns” “in the night’s repose” (88, 84). As Shields so acutely points out, Wheatley continues the tradition started by Charron in separating fancy from imagination. While imagination is a ruled mechanism of bounded creation, fancy is “Licentious and unbounded” (87), moving from “pleasure” to “vengeance” (91) within the realm of dreams, or the unconscious. What is significant here, and what Shields does not discuss, is that fancy’s connection to night, the unconscious, and the dream places it within the uncertain realm of the Other Night, that space of death in which dreams come unrestricted to reveal the forgotten and the unknowable. It should come as no surprise that the very same philosophers who discussed Fancy also spend considerable time on dreams and their relationship to memory and reality. Descartes begins this discussion by proving the necessity of reason through the power of dreams and imagination to trick our senses into false ideas. He says, “For, in fine, whether awake or asleep, we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason. And it must be noted that I say of our reason, and not of our imagination or of our senses,” because “our reasonings are never so clear or so complete during sleep as when we are awake, although sometimes the acts of our imagination are then as lively and
distinct, if not more so than in our waking moments, reason further dictates that, since all our thoughts cannot be true because of our partial imperfection, those possessing truth must infallibly be found in the experience of our waking moments rather than in that of our dreams” (504). Dreams are the realm of fancy, where memory can join images that cannot and do not match reality. Wheatley, on the other hand, embraces dreams because they are the realm of imagination and, more importantly, of Fancy.

Both Hobbes and Locke also use dreams to qualify their idea of Fancy as separate from imagination and memory. For Hobbes, a sensation appears as “Fancy, the same waking, that dreaming…the object is one thing, the image of fancy is another” (86). Hobbes observes that the fancy functions both in waking and dreaming states, making the images it provides suspicious. “After the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen,” a faculty “found in men…as well sleeping, as waking” (88). In sleeping, then, the mind recalls images stored by the memory. However, as Locke confirms, the objects of fancy are different from those sensed and observed when awake, implying that Wheatley’s nightly visions are more than mere imitation. As Locke says, “the Soul thinks, even in the soundest Sleep, but the memory retains it not.” Even when we do recall these sleeping thoughts, “how extravagant and incoherent for the most part they are, how little conformable to the Perfection and Order of a rational Being, those who are acquainted with Dreams, need not be told” (60). Locke, of course, is suspicious of these thoughts, claiming that all that matters in the pursuit of “reality of Things” is reason, not the thoughts of “Dreams and Fancies” (361). Locke clearly makes a connection between Fancy and dreaming. Locke sees both as unbounded “reveries” rather than ideas grounded in reality. If, however, dreams are only images or thoughts of reality appearing in the sleeping mind, then why does Locke so strongly distrust them? Simple: dreams and their warped realities challenge the
sovereignty of the reality upon which Hobbes and Locke build their theories of reason. Wheatley, better than any other poet of her time, conveys the power of Fancy to challenge the reality of the waking world. While Odell makes it seem easy to remember the images we see as we dream, Hobbes and Locke clearly respect the transience of dreams.

Wheatley’s naming this poem “On Providence” is appropriate because, as is indicated by the above philosophers, the mysteries of the workings of Fancy are like the poem’s namesake. Like God’s mysterious ways, Fancy’s mysterious workings are often articulated through dreaming. More importantly, Wheatley places her own roving Fancy on the same plane as God’s Providence, suggesting the primacy of Fancy within the mental train. Wheatley’s “passions…vent” admiration for the overwhelming “power” of fancy’s errantry. Fancy, this errant memory, rules and occupies the space of the dreams. For Wheatley, the source of reason’s return remains a mystery: “What secret hand returns the mental train” (48 95)? Of course, this mystery is intentional. The reader is never told who returns reason to its ruling place, but it is clear that Fancy’s queen never relinquishes power. As Shields reveals, Wheatley puts imagination at the head of the mental train, and imagination is Fancy’s queen. This can be interpreted as Fancy being subject to imagination, but it can also be read as imagination being queen to Fancy as king. Fancy enjoys a freedom unparalleled even by reason, who occupies the realm of order, progress, and history. When Love hails Reason with the question of “What most the image of th’Eternal shows?” (48 105), she restricts Reason within the confines of a scholastic debate pertaining to religious metaphysics. However, marked off in parentheses, the poetess dictates “so let fancy rove” (106). While reason is engaged in understanding, fancy is free in misunderstanding. This is not the only time Wheatley characterizes fancy as roving. This is
because the act of roving, or being a rove, defines fancy and, by extension, Wheatley’s errant memory.

In “On Recollection,” Wheatley continues to show her greatest contribution to the development of African American letters: the conflation of fancy and memory, producing what I have called errant mnemonics. While Wheatley certainly participates in the discourse on Meditatio, and while she certainly is the first to mark imagination as the poet’s reason and highest mental faculty (to cite Shields again), Wheatley also produces an entirely new mnemonic aesthetic grounded in what Blanchot would name the Other Night, anticipating his work by generations. Even if Wheatley places imagination above all other faculties, it is still subordinate to fancy within the tradition of Meditatio. Wheatley expresses this by having “Mneme begin” the “great design” of the “vent’rous Afric”: “The acts of long departed years, by thee/
Recover’d…Thy power the long forgotten calls from night,/ That sweetly plays before the fancy’s sight” (62 1-8). Note the references (both unintentional) to both the Other Night and Odell’s idea that Wheatley could not recall these acts of long departed years. By naming Mneme as the primary poetic muse, Wheatley makes one the process of imagination and the calling forth memories from the night of forgetting. However, the primary player in the creative train is fancy, who sees these images and transforms them into poetry. Wheatley also echoes again the Enlightenment philosophers’ musings on the workings of memory. The poet continues, “Mneme in our nocturnal visions pours/ The ample treasure of her secret stores” (9-10). As we see in “On Providence,” Wheatley specifically marks night as the realm of fancy, whose nocturnal vision receives Mneme’s offerings. Dreams, the realm of fancy, the “unbounded regions of the mind” (15), are the space in which Mneme “To the high-raptur’d poet gives her aid” (14). What we see start to develop here is another level of sustained poetic theoretics based on Meditatio and
Enlightenment notions of memory, but advancing these ideas to a level of individual freedom that borders on Watts’s ethnic and social marginality. However, Wheatley’s contested role within the African American canon comes primarily from her readers, contemporaries, and critics. Fancy, as we are starting to see, is Wheatley’s ultimate actualization of her social, political, and experiential place within the larger framework of a burgeoning community engaging in its own perceived struggle of freedom. The key, as we will see, is that Wheatley’s idea of freedom differs drastically from that of the larger social collective.

Before we interrogate Wheatley’s engagement with her society, we must continue to trace Wheatley’s poetic development. Right after “On Recollection” in her book of poems comes “On Imagination,” a poem that, according to Shields, cements Wheatley’s mental train with Imagination at the front. As the poet’s reason, imagination serves as an organizing principle to Shields and students of the Meditatio school of mental action. Even if the imagination can reach lofty heights and create completely unique worlds, it is grounded in a purpose. For Shields and many other Wheatley critics, this purpose is the poetics of liberation, with most scholars writing ably on the way in which Wheatley uses her poetry to carve out a freedom based in literary creation. In this instance, I am invested in interrogating the way in which Wheatley separates imagination from fancy. As Shields notes, and as I have mentioned above, this choice is significant because it carves out a unique and radical space within the development of poetics. There is more to this separation. While Shields discusses the importance of seeing “On Imagination,” “On Recollection,” and “On Providence” as one poem, I posit that “On Maecenas” must also be included. In fact, there are several other poems that are crucial to Wheatley’s production of errant memory within her poetry.
In “On Imagination,” Wheatley continues to separate imagination and fancy in a specific way, with imagination still acting as the “imperial queen” whose “wond’rous acts in beauteous order stand” (65 3) while “Now here, now there the roving fancy flies” (9). The distinction here is clear: imagination is ordered, oriented, and controlled, while fancy is affective, disoriented, and uncontrollable. Wheatley also repeats the image created in “On Providence,” with Imagination as queen and fancy as “roving.” What is most striking about Wheatley’s personification of fancy in this poem is that she imbeds a conflict between fancy and what memories it brings to the surface. While, on the one hand, imagination allows the reader to “on [her] pinions…surpass the wind,” fancy does not serve this purpose to reader or poet, a distinction highlighted by the declarative tense used to describe Imagination and the conditional tense used to describe Fancy’s activity. The “roving fancy flies” without the “course” or “force” of Imagination, whose “orders” to the rest of the mental train derive from her status as “sov’reign ruler” (37-7 13-4, 38). Imagination’s abilities are described in declarative terms. It helps us “surpass the winds,/ and leave the rolling universe behind” (17-8). While the “mental optics rove,” they rove “from star to star” (19), and “measure the skies, and range the realms above” (remember Hume’s imagery here) (20). Imagination’s “orders” are not “vain” as “leader of the mental train” (33-4). “In full perfection all [her] works are wrought” (35). These lines are suffused with a tone of certainty and confidence. The language of measure, “grasp” (21), and perfection link imagination with conscious control.

Fancy’s activities, on the other hand, are described in conditional language and are subject to her “wan’dring eyes” and what they see, or experience. In stark contrast to Imagination’s queenly statues, Fancy is in bondage to “some lov’d object” that strikes fancy’s won’dring eyes, binding the senses in “silken fetters” and the mind in “soft captivity.” Fancy’s
silken bondage, which echoes the uncontrollability and indeterminacy that Enlightenment philosophers respected and feared, is contrasted further to the bondage she experiences at the hands of Winter, who resides in the north. “Winter,” Wheatley muses, “frowns to Fancy’s raptured eyes” and their tendency to rove. In spite of this,

“fields may flourish, and gay scenes arise;/ the frozen deeps may break their iron bands,/ and bid their waters murmer o’er the sands./ Fair flora may resume her fragrant reign…”

Sylvanus may diffuse his honours round,/ and all the forests may with leaves be crown’d:/ Show’rs may descend” (23-31).

In short, despite the coldness of winter, which seeks to freeze fancy’s eyes in place, Spring may come and thaw them. After this possible Spring (pun intended here), “Fancy might now her silken pinions try/ To rise from earth, and sweep th’expanse on high” (41-2). Suddenly, in the last stanza, Wheatley’s poetic “I” emerges and “might behold” the “monarch of the day.” However,

“But I reluctant leave the pleasing views,
Which Fancy dresses to delight the Muse;/ Winter austere forbids me to aspire,/ And northern tempests damp the rising fire;/ They chill the tides to Fancy’s flowing sea,/ Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay” (48-53).
Again, like in *On Recollection*, Fancy provides the Muse with pleasing views. Also, notice how Fancy, Muse, and Winter are italicized, as if Wheatley suggests them as characters in a struggle. This struggle is based on that between master and slave. In short, what we have here is a multilayered expression of Wheatley’s own view of her bondage. While freedom in imagination is feasible, even to Wheatley, in this poem, she aims for a deeper analysis of enslavement and its effects on the human mind. Wheatley, through her personification of personal, experiential memory as Fancy, seeks to highlight the effect bondage has on it. Winter and northern tempests (read Odell’s biography, Hume’s dismissal, and her audience’s objectification) seek to stop this errant remembering, this ability and embracing of dreaming and what may come within that space. They freeze the flow of Wheatley’s personal and experiential memory. They do so, however, specifically by freezing Fancy. Wheatley’s unequal lay is not just her song, but also her payoff for her wager in making her poetry public, and it must indeed cease, because the support she counted on from the public did not come. More importantly, however, her song falters upon her tongue before it is even heard like in *On Maecenas*. The responsibility here is on the reader. Wheatley does not stop her own fancy from flowing. The cold tempest of the reader’s lack of support and interpretation does. The public dismissal of her poetry, from Hume, the person who wrote the preface, and Odell, stem from Wheatley’s physical slavery and her status as a non-person. Wheatley cannot think, cannot remember, and therefore cannot be. As a poet, Wheatley’s own errant memory is dismissed in favor of mimicking and parroting of others. It is no coincidence that Wheatley echoes Hume’s description of Fancy. Hume is the quintessential person signified through Winter because his words most famously condemned Wheatley and her poetry to mimicry based on her perceived Africanity. After all, as Wheatley clearly theorizes, without fancy supplying the images, imagination is nothing. This is the violence of mnemonic
death that Wheatley engages and refutes in her poetry. Wheatley’s poetry is the seasonal Spring and the act of springing to a mnemonic freedom. The rising fire of her self signaled by this winter, like Odell’s paratext, signals Wheatley’s mnemonic brilliance.

Wheatley’s engagement is with a freedom steeped in the principles of the Age of Revolutions, which would ultimately inspire philosophers like Hegel to conceptualize their notions of Freedom in Spirit and self-improvement within the confines of a self-created State. In “Liberty and Peace,” Wheatley tells of an “accomplish’d prophecy” where “new-born Rome shall give Britannia Law” (154 2-22), suggesting the notion of Universal History in what would eventually become the United States inherited the spirit of liberty and presented the historical and geographical continuation of Western expansion. What we find in Wheatley’s poetry, then, is both an intimate awareness of this notion of Freedom and an active engagement with it through fancy. While Wheatley writes several poems dedicated to the complex interplay between the colonies’ struggle for independence and the social life she encountered in an obviously freer Britain, the poem dedicated to the Earl of Dartmouth provides a particularly useful litmus for gauging Wheatley’s interpretation of her own situation within this struggle.xxxv Sitting in the contested space of pre-war politics, Wheatley’s poem to the Earl of Dartmouth, whom she met in Britain, signifies the complexity of Wheatley’s own position as one who cannot enjoy the freedoms being fought for by American Revolutionaries due to her slave status, who enjoyed a heretofore unknown amount of social freedom in Britain, yet aligns herself with the plight of a burgeoning national consciousness that sees itself as enslaved by the very place to which Wheatley owes the publication of her poems. The Earl of Dartmouth personifies the complex errantry of Wheatley’s allegiances. As such, she characterizes Dartmouth as a person who can give the Colonies their Freedom while remaining under the governance of a King that gave her
as much social mobility as she would ever enjoy. In her dedication to the Earl of Dartmouth Wheatley uses fancy to articulate this complex social position.

Wheatley’s careful diction in “To Dartmouth” links the poem to her Long Poem and to the poetic exchange between her and the gentleman from the Royal Navy. This connection defines Wheatley’s idea of freedom and ties it inextricably to fancy. When “Fair Freedom rose New-England to adorn…Elate with hope her race no longer mourns,/ Each soul expands, each grateful bosom burns” (73 2-6). We remember that Wheatley refers to her burning with the fire of fancy in “On Imagination.” We also see that Wheatley refers to New England’s race, signaling her awareness of the parallel between this Fair Freedom and membership to that race. It is the Earl of Dartmouth that holds the “silken reins” of Freedom’s “charms” (8). Unlike fancy’s silken fetters, Fair Freedom’s reins indicate the ability to dictate direction. Furthermore, along with “To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty,” Wheatley defines Freedom as the ability to rule the self, and defines “the iron chain” of “Tyranny with lawless hand/…made…meant to enslave the land” as the imposition of governance to which the person subjected to it has not consented. xxxvi

Wheatley’s Fair Freedom is the ability of the larger population to form a government which rules by the consent of popular opinion. However, Wheatley’s next stanza indicates that this idea of Freedom derives from Wheatley’s errant memory of fancy. The stanza is worth quoting at length:

“Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,

Wonder from whence my love of freedom sprung,

Whence flow these wishes for the common good,

By feeling hearts alone best understood,

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch’d from Afric’s fancy’d happy seat:

...And can I then but pray

Others may never feel tyrannic sway?” (74 20-31)

First, Wheatley makes it clear that her desire for Freedom (as defined by Hegel) comes from a yearning for public consent to the injustice of her kidnapping and enslavement. Wheatley attempts to tap into the sentimental as well moral economies of the “feeling hearts” of her reading public. Through this act, Wheatley further establishes Freedom as a public state of being, one predicated on social life and mobility. Second, the assonance in line twenty-five draws the reader’s attention to it. This essential line is loaded with connotation. On one hand, Wheatley refers back to the conversation with the navy gentleman by referring to an Africa “fancy’d” into existence. In other words, Wheatley does not merely imagine or remember the Africa from which she was taken, she fancy’d its happy seat, implying the more dangerous and powerful mental faculty admired by Hume. Wheatley further manipulates her readers’ pathos by defining for them an Africa, much like the gentleman of the navy attempted to do, and much like the same reading public tries to impose on Wheatley and her poetry. In the face of public Freedom, Wheatley practices the freedom in errant memory. More important, Wheatley does not merely practice fancy in the isolation of her poetry, however liberating that may be. She actively attempts to carve out a space for herself within the sphere of public Freedom by manipulating and affecting the public to accept the injustice of her position as a slave and non-person and non-citizen. She does this, finally, by embedding this errant memory, fancy, within a poem that seems to channel the common notion held by Whigs and patriots that England and King George were subjecting the Colonies to slavery by taking away their right to produce their own state in which they could prosper. Like the colonists to the King, Wheatley makes this same argument to her
readers. Wheatley, then, is not merely an expert on tyranny, but on Freedom as well. In using the errant memory of fancy, Wheatley constructs a complex and effective mechanism by which to ensure her own well-being. In a letter to the Earl, Wheatley “apologize[s] for this freedom in an African who with the now happy America with equal transport in the view of one of its greatest advocates” (166). The freedom within the African is, of course, the free reign fancy has in giving precedence to Wheatley’s most personal memories. She is, finally, “with equal transport” to America viewed by the Earl who, after having read her poem, has been sufficiently convinced by her argument. She does not just practice freedom within the space of literature as many critics put forth. Wheatley actively and indelibly seeks to change her physical environment and through it her actual position with the larger social structure.

It is perhaps appropriate to come full circle to Wheatley’s other famous poem, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” which establishes another paradigm within her own literary space, one based on pinning her own memory against the manipulation of said memories by the larger historical narrative. This poem demonstrates beautifully Wheatley’s errant mnemonics of fancy at work. I use the term “work” conscientiously here. Wheatley puts fancy to work here in creating a poem that demonstrates a mastery of public manipulation. While there are other poems that mention Africa (as discussed above) Wheatley never mentions this origin, Africa, outright in this poem except for in the title, instead opting to refer to it only as “Pagan”, a place where she had not yet learned about the teachings of Jesus. With the poetic exchange between her and the gentleman fresh in our memory, Wheatley’s taking up of this theme is not a coincidence, nor is it a reconciliatory move towards white imaginings. Choosing the word Pagan over the word savage presents another paratextual moment. Despite the apparent opinion of Odell, who misquotes this first line by inserting “savage” instead of “pagan,” Wheatley knows there is an important
distinction between the connotation of these two words. While “savage” implies not just uncivilized but also rude, animalistic, course, and wild, “Pagan,” on the other hand, historically refers to those who came before Christ, especially the Classical civilizations. In fact, many Enlightenment philosophers use “savage” alongside “brutes” to describe peoples who are without reason, without memory, and without social order. Judging from her copious use of classical allusions, Wheatley’s use of “pagan” is not a coincidence, and the memoirist’s misquote stands as a perfect example of the social damage the paratext can and does exact. Characterizing her own soul as “benighted” inserts her poetic persona into the realm of the Other Night and of dreams, the space Wheatley marks as the arena of fancy. Wheatley’s benighted soul, steeped in the freedom and errantry of fancy, is taught to understand. Again, Wheatley echoes her playful engagement with the gentleman and her education at the hands of her captors by linking education to Ricoeur’s forced memory. When Wheatley suggests that the “redemption [she] neither sought nor knew”, she reinforces her pagan, un-oriented, and errant state of being before her subjection to her education. She once again echoes the likes of Descartes, who favors “natural intelligence” over “example and custom” that “darken” it (138), and Hume, who calls “credulity, or a too easy faith in the testimony of others,” a “weakness of human nature…more universal and conspicuous” than any other (1845). Steeped as she is in the classics and such modern works as Milton’s Paradise Lost, the tone of her Pagan status, one neither seeking nor knowing of the Anglo-American epistemologies of history, echoes the special treatment given pre-Christian thinkers in relation to their social status. Like these thinkers, Wheatley existed beyond the confines of teleological history, finding a place in this narrative only as another pillar upon which American Exceptionalism and white supremacy is being imagined. She does not
qualify this statement further. Instead, she chooses to leave it as is before turning to the matter of public opinion, to which she as poet is subject.

As such, Wheatley reveals her awareness of how she and others like her were “view[ed]” into existence “with scornful eye”. The sable[ness] of the “race” of persons of African descent is seen as a “diabolic die” (18). Wheatley makes clear that the subject of these lines is the collective consciousness that “views” her and others as part of the same group based on skin color. The word sable is another complex connotative choice. While it refers to black as a color, and could have been pulled from the likes of Alexander Pope, it also refers to agencies personified (also found in Pope) as well as natural elements (found in Milton). xxxix Again, Wheatley could be referring back to the experiential knowledge of fancy as a agency, like fate, that is beyond personal control. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, sable can also function as the verb “to blacken,” also found in Pope. xl Again, Wheatley chooses to describe herself in both deterministic and active forms. The sable race is both labeled, or died, as such, and sables, or darkens, the historical narrative of which it is a part. For Wheatley and her poetry, we again fall into the aegis of night, the realm of fancy. The elephant in the room of this poetry is of course the Middle Passage to which Wheatley was subjected as a result of her being brought from Africa to America. xli When we remember Genette’s assertion that the title influences the way we read the rest of the work, then this poem is directly referring to this unspeakable memory. However, what Wheatley offers in relation to why this memory is unspeakable is radical. As we have noted above, Wheatley is not passively carried with the currents of trauma. Instead, Wheatley moves beyond it and harnesses the errant memories into productive fancy. As such, what the reader has here is not a coy refusal to offend readers, nor an inability to articulate the traumatic, but instead a supremely personal pondering on the larger societal implications of how this journey produces
a restricting identity. In relation to “On Recollection,” the last two lines read as a warning:

“Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,/ May be refined, and join th’angelic train” (7-8).

Like sugar can be refined, or reduced, into an essence of its former self, persons of African
descent, on this Middle Passage, are reduced, reified, and commodified into chattel. Of course,
Wheatley does remember, unlike her readers. However, those who have been through similar
circumstances will also remember and read the complex interrogation of Wheatley’s reduction as
a person and restriction as an artist. From this point forth, Wheatley sets out to prove that what
makes her powerful as an artist is exactly that Pagan, unrefined errantry of fancy, her natural
talent similar to that of all great poets and artists of African descent: to master the Other Night of
the personal, and not to succumb to the diabolic death.

Finally, Wheatley’s death poems reflect her mastery of her personal memory of the
Middle Passage through her engagement with mourning. LaCapra suggests that mourning be
seen as a way of ending the cycle of trauma by separating the “then” from the “now.” This is
achieved through “ritualization of the repetition compulsion that attempts to turn it against the
death drive and to counteract compulsiveness” by allowing for “critical distance” (66). In short,
LaCapra suggests that mourning equals ownership of the past through a measured and controlled
working through it, which in turn implies an ability to reflect and dictate when and where one
relives the event. For Wheatley, mourning takes on an even deeper meaning through her poetry.
Eric Ashley Hairston offers an argument in relation to Wheatley’s elegies as “Trojan Horses…to
make herself a valued member of the community—as elegist and fellow mourner” (87).

However, what is carried in these Trojan horses is more than a demonstration of Wheatley’s
ability to remember through mourning. Her obsession with death is in itself symptomatic of her
own experience with it during her own harrowing Middle Passage. Specifically, in “To Mr. And
Mrs. ----, On the Death of Their Infant Son,” Wheatley connects fancy to mourning: “Thee, the vain visions of the night restore,/ Illusive fancy paints the phantom o’er” (151 49-50). Here, the reader will note that, as in “On Recollection,” fancy is most active in the realm of night. However, what is most striking about this line is that it forces the reader to think back to Wheatley’s own poetic articulations of the workings of fancy in her long poem. Suddenly, through the lens of mourning, Wheatley’s roving fancy becomes an agent of mourning similarly to that of the parents. Like them, Wheatley is forced to confront the phantoms of her own losses. While these phantoms infiltrate her defenseless sleeping mind, Wheatley demonstrates through her elegies that she can choose not to let them infiltrate her poetry. Her most profound act of proving her membership to her reading public is that she, like her poetic subjects in her elegies, can and has worked through her losses, to the point that she can mourn privately and offer advice on how to mourn to those who cannot yet do so.

Eileen Razzari Elrod, in “Phillis Wheatley’s Abolitionist Text: The 1834 Edition,” discusses the republication of Wheatley’s book of poems: “In 1834 George W. Light published a new edition of Wheatley’s poems in Boston. [It was] Advertised in William Lloyd Garrison’s Liberator” (96). On August Twenty-first, 1831, Nathaniel Turner would lead his rebellion in Virginia and kill fifty-five white people. Elrod reveals that many would have recognized Light as a publisher of books concerned “largely with a domestic and traditionally Christian focus” (99). It is no coincidence, then, that Light would publish with Wheatley’s edited book of poems Odell’s biography. As Elrod astutely notes, “Odell’s Wheatley, with her complete absence of agency, would have offered a reassuring antidote to an American populace riveted by Nat Turner’s revolt just a little over two years earlier. Albert Stone asserts that ‘no slave narrative had a swifter impact on the American public than The Confessions of Nat Turner’. Turner and
Thomas Gray (to whom Turner dictated his memoir) tapped readers’ desire for accounts of slave experience and racial violence” (103). Readers would not find their desires for accounts of slave experience and racial violence quelled in Wheatley’s book of poems. Such reductivist desires were far beneath Wheatley’s mastery. However, due partly to Odell’s biography and other paratextual elements, readers would not see this Wheatley either. Instead, they would envision a Wheatley docile in both manner and mind. As Elrod explains, “In contrast to Turner, who embodied and articulated rage over slavery and an unconditional quest for freedom, Odell’s Wheatley didn’t seek freedom at all. Rather, she faced the most oppressive circumstances in her life after her unacknowledged manumission and the subsequent death of Susanna Wheatley” (104). While this may be true, the publication of Wheatley’s poems two years after Turner’s rebellion speak to how grossly Wheatley’s errant memory has been misinterpreted by those who read her. Like Turner, Wheatley actively sought to change the environment, both social and political, of which she was a part. Like Turner, Wheatley used writing as a medium. Unlike Turner, however, Wheatley would have a chance at legal manumission, only to find out that, as she demonstrates in her poetry, freedom for her and others of African descent did not mean the same thing. As she had always known, Wheatley found out how powerfully public opinion was set against seeing her as anything but an African, not an American. What Turner would try to change with violence, Wheatley had already tried to change with poetry. However, as we will see in the next chapter, Turner’s impact went far beyond his actions, and his power was not limited to his physical existence. His presence within Thomas Gray’s text belies his subjugation to men like Gray who sought to define him as a primitive brute without the necessary mnemonic faculties, just like Wheatley. However, just like Wheatley, Turner’s errant memory would alter the American landscape indelibly.
Chapter 2

The Heap of Witness: Nat Turner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Dred’s Maroon

Aesthetic

Nathaniel Turner, along with his actions, has left an indelible mark on the American collective memory and imagination. The importance of the writings about the rebellion lies in the repeated act of trying to make sense of what happened in Southampton County. The various literary manifestations of Turner’s act and person, then, present a perfect example of the workings of cultural trauma. Both Thomas Gray’s Confessions, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Dred, present correlating examples of a specific national memory narrative, or history, working out a sudden and violent rupture in its young and burgeoning development. This narrative, of course, is Democratic history, founded on principles of Westerns philosophy of Freedom, civic duty, and civilizing intelligence transcribed through the ages through translatio imperii and studii. About half a century after Wheatley provided those relegated to the dark wilds of this narrative with a poetic and intellectual vocabulary to adjust its direction, Nathaniel Turner’s rebellion provided a different challenge to its sovereignty. Through errant memory, Wheatley theorized an epistemology based on the act of remembering rather than on specific memories, placing forever out of reach their literary works and their selves. Nathaniel Turner, on the other hand, did not have the opportunity to write a book of poems. However, it would be premature to assume that Turner’s legacy is confined to his act of physical resistance. One important aspect of Turner’s legacy is what his memory teaches readers of it about the way in which Democratic history absorbs, reifies, and tropofies the Africanity Wheatley so deftly refuses in her poetry.
Africanity, or the reduction of the artistic expression of persons of African descent to its relation to a Western-imagined Africa and its stereotypes, can be most directly observed in the use of black tropes in literature written by white American authors. Where in Wheatley’s poetry the reader witnesses the production of errant memory through fancy, the same reader will observe the power of errant memory in refusing reification through the interaction of white authors with black tropes. I make here a careful distinction between black tropes and tropes of blackness. Black tropes are literary and cultural images and traditions created by authors of African descent and found throughout the African Diaspora. Tropes of blackness, on the other hand, are a manifestation of Africanity, products of minds invested in Democratic and universal history. While tropes of blackness deserve their own discussion, and while they bear on my discussion here, this chapter is primarily concerned with black tropes, namely because the two works I investigate attempt to transforms black tropes into tropes of blackness. Thomas Gray’s *Confessions* is based on the verbal testimony of Nathaniel Turner, while Stowe’s *Dred* is based on Gray’s *Confessions*. Both, then, attempt to direct Turner’s voice into an acceptable historical narrative. In other words, in attempting to transform Turner into a trope of blackness, of Africanity, Gray and Stowe are working through the trauma of the Rebellion of 1831 and the rupture that continues to echo in the ears of the Narcissistic self-absorption of the United States.

The topic of this chapter, then, is the method with which white authors attempt to use black tropes to advance Democratic history. Despite this effort, a close reading of the black trope as a manifestation of errant memory reveals the consistent failure of this absorption and, by extension, the reduction of these tropes to mere signifiers of an identity rooted in and routed back to an Africa imagined into existence by Western historians and philosophers. Russ Castronovo says, “The metaphoric continuity of the nation in which the sons remember the blood of the
fathers confronts the tangles of miscegenation, discovering the blood of the fathers in people whom the Dred Scott decision would later delineate as unprotected and unrelated to the founding promise” (3). In other words, the very existence of enslaved persons within a state built on principles of freedom, democracy, and violent action against tyranny threatens the viability of that state and the founding narrative on which it is built. I argue that American antislavery authors reconcile these threats to the organic unity of the American social text by appropriating them into narratives in which these errant energies are channeled and given a direction concurrent with the growth of the nation. For this purpose, there is no better author to investigate than Harriet Beecher Stowe and her more obscure antislavery novel, *Dred: a Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856). In *Dred*, we find a character marooned within the complex errantry of the black trope. In what I call the maroon aesthetic, Dred as character undermines Stowe’s project of directing Nathaniel Turner’s justified violence against the evils of slavery into a moral, lawful system of gradual emancipation and universal progressive history. The maroon aesthetic is further strengthened by the reader’s and author’s role as unsure spectator to the black trope’s constant disorienting presence throughout the orienting narrative structures of the text. Like a maroon community, Dred’s presence outside of organized systems of understanding displays the mechanisms of control and cooption upon which the exclusive community of United States citizenship depends. Nathaniel Turner and Dred discard universal historicity and plunge into the literary opacities of the American collective imagination.

The maroon aesthetic, as a literary trope of errant memory, does not so much contaminate the text as provide constant threat of errantry, mirroring the widespread anxiety in relation to slave revolts and race riots that permeated the American imaginary. The Africanist presence, or “American Africanism…the ways in which nonwhite, African-like (or Africanist) persona was
constructed” present the literary form of a cultural trope used to reduce persons of African
descent to stereotypic signifiers (6). Specifically, the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe provide a
particularly useful litmus for the way in which this Africanist presence, or black trope, permeates
textual boundaries, doing so because ““Blackness” is not a material object, an absolute, or an
event, but a trope; it does not have an essence as such but is defined by a network of relations”
(Gates 40). I would take Gates’s assertion even further in saying that it is not just blackness at
stake in the function of these tropes. Tropes are also literary functions of memory, both cultural
and individual. Tropes permeate textual boundaries because they trigger in the reader memories
of places in other texts. Furthermore, authors who write these tropes, consciously or
unconsciously, remember encountering them and interpret them through rewriting them in their
own text. Tropes, through both reader and author, through both reading and rewriting,
demonstrate Bergson’s pure memory, the memory of experiencing that infiltrates at times when
the mind’s occupation on the present and future is dimmed. Turner, as a black trope, lives on in
the collective remembering of those who read his words. Tropes, then, are examples of errant
memory at work.

Stowe attempts to use “blackness” as a literary device and as a rhetorical strategy to
advocate against slavery. She expects blackness to function in what she believes to be its natural
(read historical) context, namely in submission and passivity to an existing moral narrative of
progress. For Stowe, this translates into characters like Uncle Tom and Tiff. However, the black
trope functions in relation to other tropes, cultural references, and Africanist presences. In other
words, the black trope acts like a signifier in the network of collective literary memory. As such,
the single trope exists most powerfully in relation to other tropes and functions primarily in this
relational manner. As a result, black tropes used by Stowe always function outside of their texts,
no matter how hard she tries to contain them. This relational existence makes the black trope inherently subversive, constantly undermining and usurping the authority of the author. However, this subversion does not happen because blackness is inherently fraught with counternarratives and reactionary impulses. I would argue that literary tropes in general function in this relational manner. Instead, it is the errantry of memory that imbues these tropes with rebellious and reactionary power, namely the memories the reader brings to the text. The threat of rebellion comes from both reader and trope, speaking to both the power of black voices to tell their own stories and the power of anxiety surrounding this ability situated in the American collective memory.

To curb these declarations of independence that saturate the black tropes, Stowe attempts to place mechanisms of control onto her black characters. She fails to completely silence the black voice in her works, resulting in the resurfacing of errant memories carried by these voices, which are associated with slave rebellions and their implications of black humanity and, by extension, the immorality of slavery as a founding institution. The source of these subversive tropes lies in the beginning of the abolitionist movement itself, a movement for which “the radicalism of the black community prepared the way” (Bennet 3). Stowe uses various sources for her creative projects, many of which were written by authors of African descent and contained some of the most subversive black tropes. Stowe, in her Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, reveals the many slave narratives that contributed to her creation of a realistic plantation society, including those of Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, and William Wells Brown (Reynolds Mightier 103). Furthermore, Stowe includes an entire appendix with Dred, in which she provides as a major source Thomas Gray’s The Confessions of Nat Turner (1831). Finally, Stowe pulls her black voices from sources already loaded with subversive energy, energy that constantly threatens their
respective works. As Michael Gilmore explains, “The extratextual catalyst for Dred's silencing is Stowe's fear about the "overpowering mesmeric force" of the prophetic language she has unleashed (450)” through Dred’s voice: “The novelist goes to considerable lengths to counter and vanquish her black rebel's bloodthirsty imaginings”’” (Gilmore 113). Gilmore implies that Stowe herself has to combat the rebel voice that the structures of her narrative cannot control. Stowe’s choice to include the voice of the leader of a slave rebellion only further undermines her project of absorbing these acts of rebellion into the acceptable narrative of moral progress.

Stowe’s choice to include Thomas Gray’s *The Confessions of Nat Turner* as an appendix speaks not only to the power Turner’s rebellion had and continues to have on the American imagination, but also to the power black voices have in influencing a text. In fact, *Dred* demonstrates the parallels between American social and literary memory as spaces not merely haunted by, but shaped and produced as a result of the mnemonic life of black subjectivity. In essence, Stowe’s choice to include the *Confessions* is a confession of her own inability to create a believable character of African descent that is produced only within the purview of her limited knowledge, which in turn is based on the myth of “Africanity” produced by the collective consciousness of American democratic history. While read by select scholars of Stowe, *Dred* has largely been ignored in favor of the more acceptable and understandable *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). This text, while certainly containing subversive elements in its own right, contains what David Reynolds, in *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), calls “an angel or a reassuring vision” that reorients the “skeptical conclusion” or “restless doubter” that inevitably arises out of engaging subject matter like slavery (50). Reynolds continues, “By the early 1850s, the American public thirsted for a novel that would give vent to all the Subversive forces associated with slavery and would yet somehow rhetorically overcome these forces and ensure victory for
the Conventional. It found that novel in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (74). Even while writing *UTC*, Stowe admitted that slavery “was a dangerous subject to investigate, and that nobody could begin to think and read upon it without becoming practically insane” (Cited in Reynolds *Beneath 76*). Writing, as a mnemonic act, fires the kiln of this moral and rhetorical furnace. To write upon slavery, then, is even more dangerous. Stowe’s reading and re-writing of Gray’s *Confessions* proves better than any other source the volatility inherent in attempting to confine the activity of remembering found in black tropes to the stagnancy inherent in tropes of blackness. Before engaging *Dred*, a close reading of *Confessions* is needed to fully understand the complexities of both the character of Dred and Stowe’s intricate relationship with him.

Gray’s confessions have an exponential effect on *Dred* because it too is affected by paratexts put in place to attempt to channel Turner’s aggressive humanity into violent mental deficiency resulting from his status as an African, and therefore inferior, subject. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* are not just his confessions. The Nat Turner the readers receive is written to life by Thomas Gray, who lets his own personality seep into what should be a space reserved for his interviewee. The reader must trust Gray as a witness to Turner’s confessions, placing the reader at an even further distance from the supposed speaker. Turner, in a strange way, falls into the Slave Narrative tradition in this sense, further evidenced by the paratextual elements attached to the *Confessions*. Next to Gray’s two cents, the narrative is preceded by the typical confirmations of legitimacy and authenticity put there by Gray. These conventions are also prevalent in, if not essential to, court documents. In fact, the need for veracity in slave narratives and autobiographies written by formerly enslaved persons of African descent limited authors of these texts to spending a significant amount of their creative faculties producing authenticity. Authors of African descent, even when they wrote their own narratives, were
often forced to stand trial in front of the jury of their reading peers. Nathaniel Turner stands trial and not only proclaims his innocence in an actual court room, but also refuses to participate in the process of authentication that would make his words more acceptable to his white readers. Hence Gray’s concerted effort to fold Turner’s memories into the larger American historical narrative, one that fears humanizing violence from those it labels inhuman. This sheds interesting light on the testimonial nature of slave narratives that fall under these conventions and illuminates the place Turner’s recorded and interpreted confessions have within the slave narrative tradition, one of errantry. This place within an African American literary tradition is important because of the relational way in which the text can be subsequently read. Turner’s orality, transcribed by Gray, goes beyond merely verbalizing his side of the story, but also suggestively has Turner participating in yet another traditionally antislavery activity within the space of law that denies him humanity. Subsequently, Stowe’s choice in what parts of the *Confessions* to include becomes that much more important and reveals Stowe’s intentions in limiting and in some way silencing the power of Dred as a Turner-like figure.

What Stowe chooses to leave out of her appendix is as telling as the inclusion of said appendix to *Dred*. In similar fashion, Gray’s choices are important to the image of Nathaniel Turner that would linger in the American imagination. Eric J. Sundquist calls the “representation of Nat Turner’s rebellion as an isolated act of fanaticism, instead of a legitimate if futile quest for freedom” a “strategic necessity,” with Gray’s transcription of Turner’s words “participat[ing] in the suppression of ideas of rebellion and freedom” (145). While this is certainly Gray’s intention, “Turner quickly became a heroic figure in black folk history…despite Gray’s legalistic framework.” I contend that, beyond “establish[ing] a vital link between African American religious practice and a formative tradition of revolutionary thought” (146), Gray’s *Confessions,*
through a paratextual relationship with Stowe’s *Dred*, demonstrate the authorial errantry of black tropes within delimiting American narratives of moral and social progress. In his own address to the public, Gray comments on how Turner’s “insurrection…has greatly excited the public mind, and led to a thousand idle, exaggerated, and mischievous reports.” These idle and exaggerated reports pose a threat to how “the first instance in our history of an open rebellion of the slaves” is to be remembered within the progressive parameters of democratic history. Thomas Gray is here to set the record straight and makes sure that the “atrocious circumstances of cruelty and destruction” leave the correct “deep impression…throughout every portion of our country” (Gray 3). Gray’s desire to control the way in which Turner’s rebellion is remembered suggests his desire to in some way control the way in which his confessions are interpreted by that fragile public. In other words, the complexity of Turner’s identity and his subsequent actions result in “a thousand” versions of those actions. Gray, conscientious of the importance of democratic history to the unity of “our country,” attempts to produce a pure Nathaniel Turner while trying simultaneously to reduce these honest confessions to the ramblings of a madman with an inferior “African” brain. Turner’s adjusted persona, designed for the “gratification of public curiosity”, ends up influencing Stowe’s Dred. However, as we will see, even Gray’s version of Turner does not suffice and must be further adjusted in order to fit into the even more specific narrative of her antislavery novel.

Turner’s recorded confessions engage the black literary tradition from the opening letter addressed to the public. However, Turner not only engages, but also challenges these conventions and loads his own words with subversive experience, an act of errant memory that Stowe will eventually attempt to erase. Gray clearly distrusts Turner’s confession, leaving room for only “one stamp of truth and sincerity” in his entire confession: “He makes no attempt (as all
the other insurgents who were examined did) to exculpate himself, but frankly acknowledges his full participation in all the guilt of the transaction” (4). Gray inadvertently participates in the trope of providential uniqueness so often seen in slave narratives by revealing that Turner is not like the other insurrectionists who attempt to deny their guilt. Turner accepts it, thereby also accepting the implicated reason for his rebellion: judgment ordained by God himself. This is important mainly because Turner, by confessing, claims control over his own mnemonic faculties, despite efforts by Gray to stifle them. This self-determination clashes with Gray’s attempt at channeling the collective memory of a nation into a neat historical narrative in which Turner turns out to be no more than a fanatic. Gray tries to deny Turner the ability to remember, much like other transcribers in the slave narrative tradition try, in some way, to reduce the subject of these narratives to mere symbolic entities. Put simply, Gray’s repeated attempts at silencing Turner in his own confession come out of Turner’s owning his actions by recollecting them. This recollection, as an act of errant memory, is what makes Turner so dangerous, and it is what imbues Dred with the errant power to unravel Stowe’s narrative.

Gray repeatedly calls the reader’s attention to Turner’s faculty of mind, only to question these faculties in an attempt to undermine Turner’s power as a witness. Along with Turner’s memories of his own role in the rebellion (a prerequisite, as we will recall, of self-actualization), Gray’s fascination with Turner’s copious mental (read mnemonic) faculties are transcribed to the page. Gray must not only silence Turner, but himself as reader/listener as well. Gray does this by attempting to fit Turner into the “Africanity” typology. In describing Turner’s motivation for taking action against his oppressors, Gray claims,

“If Nat’s statements can be relied on, the insurrection in this county was entirely local, and his designs confided but to a few, and these in his immediate vicinity. It was not
instigated by motives of revenge or sudden anger, but the results of long deliberation, and a settled purpose of mind. The offspring of gloomy fanaticism, acting upon materials but too well prepared for such impressions. It will be long remembered in the annals of our country, and many a mother as she presses her infant darling to her bosom, will shudder at the recollection of Nat Turner, and his band of ferocious miscreants” (5).

Gray begins by admitting Turner’s agency in manipulating his own confession, with the consequence being a hidden plot for more rebellions around the country. Gray then describes Turner’s actions as being motivated not by uncontrollable passions often ascribed to rebelling slaves, but instead to a plotted revolution more like the one acted out by the founding fathers during the American Revolution, requiring “long deliberation and a settled purpose of mind.” These sentiments are not usually connected to slave rebellions because they suggest a prolonged mental and mnemonic involvement, requiring a plan and, more importantly, determination in a single purpose. Determination requires one to be able to reason, or the ability to remember one’s own thoughts and imaginings, something that was not typically connected to persons of African descent.¹ Immediately after this suggestive characterization, Gray provides a fragmented afterthought, both grammatically and rhetorically, correctly adjusting Turner’s plan to mere fanaticism. Turner, then, acts upon materials too well prepared for fanatical impressions. The ambiguity of this statement betrays the difficulty Gray has with reducing Turner’s mental faculties to one who cannot possibly act out these kinds of complicated plans and succeed in them as he did. The result in a confused questioning of Turner’s mnemonic wax, imprinted with specific images from the Bible that cannot be deciphered by Turner. If Gray cannot question Turner’s recollection, he can certainly question his interpretation. Gray anticipates the reader’s interpretation when he states rather prophetically that Turner’s actions will be remembered
throughout history, liking it to the sentimental image of the mother protecting her offspring from
the offspring of Turner’s mind. This memory is what Gray is here to adjust, transforming the
suggestiveness of Turner’s deliberation into the localized whimsy of a mere fanatic who is no
more aware of his own actions than a child is of the source behind his mother’s fears.

In his actual confession, Turner continuously challenges existing notions of the limits of
black intellectualism, even by the standards put forth in slave narratives. In response to these
complexities that challenge the vision of Turner as a docile slave, Gray relies on the image of the
fanatic intertwined with that of the intellectually incapable “African.” For example, when
relating his own process of learning how to read (a quintessential slave narrative trope), Turner
claims, “The manner in which I learned to read and write, not only had great influence on my
own mind, as I acquired it with the most perfect ease, so much so, that I have no recollection
whatever of learning the alphabet” (8). Turner removes himself from the conventional tradition
of black literacy of the time by noting a lapse in his mnemonic ability, in this case his ability to
recollect learning the alphabet. Literacy proves to be of so little consequence that Turner, unlike
many other black authors of the time, does not commit this all-important moment to memory,
showing his priorities to be far different from the rhetorical resistance of his contemporaries.
Most importantly, Turner himself decides what he can and cannot remember. Turner takes this
mnemonic independence one step further when he suggests that “an opportunity…of looking at a
book” only has him “find many things that the fertility of my own imagination had depicted to
me before” (8). Again, unlike his contemporaries, Turner is not influenced by books, not even
the Bible. He receives the word of God directly. Put another way, Turner privileges experiential
memory over learned memory, pure memory over forced and ideologized memory.
In response to these claims, Gray again focuses on Turner’s early impressions and attempts to discredit Turner’s experiential memory: “He is a complete fanatic, or plays his part most admirably. On other subjects he possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining anything; but warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions.” Gray again cannot help but praise the daunting intellect of the man sitting before him, but must reduce this man’s intellect by exposing the poison of early impressions, or experiences. Again, Gray attempts to pinpoint Turner’s memory as denying him true intelligence. According to Gray, Turner cannot seem to interpret his experiences, even if he can recall it: “It reads an awful, and it is hoped, a useful lesson, as to the operations of a mind like his, endeavoring to grapple with things beyond its reach. How it first became bewildered and confounded, and finally corrupted and led to the conception and perpetration of the most atrocious and heart-rending deeds” (4).

The real problem, Gray reveals, is not Turner’s reaction to his own enslavement (a moment of self-realization), but instead his attempts at understanding the very forces which were controlling his life. Gray, in short, attempts to limit Turner’s intelligence by questioning his experiential memory, something “a mind like his” cannot do. This mind, of course, is the mind of a “negro:” “He is below the ordinary stature, though strong and active, having the true negro face, every feature of which is strongly marked” (19). By making clear Turner’s “negro,” or “African,” features, Gray gives a source for Turner’s delimited intelligence and attempts to reduce the effects of his words. However, Gray again betrays his inability to fully nullify the power of Turner’s confession. After all, the readers of Turner’s actions, both socially and literarily, will bring their own mnemonic baggage with them. In addition, the reader will pick up on Gray’s discomfort as a judge to Turner’s actions. Stowe, reading the confessions, realizes this and does her part to further limit Turner’s power.
Gray’s attempt at curbing Turner’s errant potency as coming from a place of deep insecurity is made apparent in the reception of his Confessions and the opinions of other important figures in the trial of Turner. For example, in “The Construction of the Confessions of Nat Turner,” David F. Allmendinger, Jr., notes that both James Trezvant and William C. Parker, the two other investigators assigned to Turner’s case along with Gray, “dismissed Nat Turner as a fanatic, mainly because they were aware of Turner as having carefully and consistently adhered to his religious principles” (631). Allmendinger’s observation suggests that Gray’s assertion of fanaticism, upon which his determining of Turner’s memory is built, is an interpretation, not an observation of an undeniable fact. Thomas C. Parramore, in “Covenant in Jerusalem,” goes so far as to say that Gray’s document was “composed before the interviews, the rest after some hours in Nat’s presence,” suggesting that Gray had “fallen under Nat’s spell” (1331). Turner’s presence in Gray’s text is felt even at the time of its first publication. William Lloyd Garrison “called dryly on Southern legislators to “offer a large reward for the arrest of Gray and his printers.” The pamphlet, he prophesied, would “serve to rouse up other leaders and cause other insurrections, by creating among the blacks admiration for the character of Nat and appreciation for his cause” (1339). Garrison’s speculation about Turner’s character is strangely, if unintentionally, appropriate since this is precisely what Gray attempts to do. However, the character of Turner is not what will inspire admiration among the blacks. Instead, it is Turner’s errant memory. Similarly, Dred’s marooned position as a black trope will channel Turner’s errant memory and inspire similar feelings in his readers.

Stowe’s respect for the power of Turner’s Confessions is made apparent in what she chooses to leave out of her appendix. There are several important omissions that impact the way in which Turner is read, which in turn impacts Dred’s characterization. First, it is important to
note that Stowe chooses to provide this source matter at the end of her text. From this we deduce that the reader’s impression of Dred will be impacted after he or she already has a firm grasp of the character of Dred in his or her head. More important, however, is how Stowe abridges the text to fit her needs. As noted above, Stowe does not include Gray’s opening letter to the reader. Furthermore, Stowe leaves out several moments of Gray’s commentary that speak directly to the reader. For example, while she repeats Gray’s sentiments mentioned above on the effects of a limited mind overreaching its capacities, she does not include the segment that follows: “It is calculated also to demonstrate the policy of our laws in restraint of this class of our population, and to induce all those entrusted with their execution, as well as our citizens generally, to see that they are strictly and rigidly enforced” (5). While Stowe chooses to include Gray’s warped ideas about the capabilities of the mind of a person of African descent and the dangers in giving this mind too much to think about, she also chooses not to include a passage that addresses the importance of laws limiting what enslaved persons could do. It seems, then, that Stowe wants her readers to encounter Gray’s expose on black intellectualism, but does not want to damage her antislavery cause, which dealt mainly with laws on the national stage, not with individuals. Stowe also leaves out the above-mentioned thought pertaining to the way in which Turner’s actions will be remembered negatively on the national stage, with the mother and her infant standing in for the American body politic. However, Gray’s thoughts on Turner’s fanaticism make it into her appendix. It seems, again, that Stowe chooses not to include thoughts that extend the reach of Turner’s actions beyond the localized setting of the confession. Implying a national effect would perhaps be too powerful a thing to suggest to her readers and would make Dred’s character that much more dangerous.
Finally, and most interestingly, the way in which Stowe chooses to end this portion of her appendix reveals her mechanism of silencing within her actual text. Here the paratextual link between appendix and text is revealed to be essential to Stowe’s project of providing a cautionary tale without the effects of actual rebellion. When going into the actual events of the rebellion, Stowe leaves out the detailed account of Turner’s murders, saying instead, “We will not go into the horrible details of the various massacres” (Stowe 558). Similarly, Dred never actually acts on his anger and indignation, choosing instead to wait, a choice that leads to his death. Similarly, Stowe chooses to end the appendix with Gray’s interpretation of Turner’s demeanor, one that “curdles” the blood in his veins (561). The reader is left with the impression Turner’s self-assurance makes on Gray. In the actual confessions, this fear and disgust is undermined by the constant flashes of awe Gray betrays for Turner’s self-assurance. Similarly, the reader risks being swept up in Turner’s dictated self-determination. Ending the appendix with Gray’s words instead of Turner’s provides a failsafe, however weak, against the total domination of Turner’s personality. Turner’s actual last words, according to the court documents included in the *Confessions*, are as follows: “Nat Turner! Stand up. Have you any thing to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced against you?” Ans. I have not. I have made a full confession to Mr. Gray, and I have nothing more to say” (Gray 21). Turner silences himself, refusing to speak within a context where his words may be interpreted and, in turn, appropriated into an existing discourse of guilt in which he does not believe. Turner believes his actions are righteous within the discourse of God’s higher law, and it is this that makes Gray’s blood curdle.

However, Stowe’s manipulation of Gray’s *Confessions* produces a caricature of Turner that does not reflect accurately the person presented in the full *Confessions*. Even within these *Confessions*, the true Turner is tainted by Gray’s interjections. The first appendix, then, as a
paratext, presents another mechanism for controlling the highly explosive Dred and the associations that come with him. Like Turner is not allowed to choose to have the last word, Dred is killed before he can enact his revolutionary plan.

In order to understand fully how Dred’s impact on the reader mirrors Turner’s impact on the collective memory and imagination of the United States, it is useful to study a few other paratextual documents that aided in the construction of Turner’s collective memory-image. The usefulness of these documents, however, lies not in how Turner is described as a fanatic, but how fanaticism is implicitly attached to imagination and fancy as a specific faculty of the mind separate from reason. In short, the writers who interpreted Turner’s actions and their legal consequences repeatedly frame Wheatley’s fancy, here more often called imagination, as the source of uncivilized brutality and unreasonable sympathy for it. Ironically, Stowe targets the collective imagination and memory of her readership by making Dred occupy the same space as Turner relative to their respective audiences: the space of imagination and fancy. Before Stowe is able to do this, however, several newspaper articles consistently attribute the act of rebellion to fanaticism, and fanaticism to an overwrought imagination. In the Richmond Compiler of August 24th, 1831, the writer argues that “the wretches who conceived this thing are mad—infatuated—deceived by some artful knaves, or stimulated by their own miscalculating passions” (Greenberg 62). To be infatuated is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be “possessed with an extravagantly foolish passion.” The writer uses language similar to Wheatley and the Enlightenment philosophers in their engagement of Fancy as something that possesses one and is dangerous because control over it is difficult. The phrasing recalls Hume’s description of Fancy as genius, but also those of his contemporaries as the madness of poets and madmen. The writer of this article is writing soon after the incident and is reacting to reports and conjecture, not to
the event itself. He is, in other words, interpreting hearsay. However, even in this unsure state of mind, the writer establishes a trend in framing the rebels’ states of mind in madness and infatuation, diseases of the mind where imagination and fancy overrun reason. This idea would be repeated in subsequent reports.

In a report supposedly written by Gray in the Constitutional Whig of September 26th, 1831, the writer establishes imagination as both the source of fanaticism and the repository of its negative memory. The writer also implicitly places abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison in the arena of fanaticism, a sentiment that would be echoed later by Thomas R. Dew. To the possibility that the insurrection would spread beyond Southampton, the writer explains “its cause must be attributed to the misguided zeal of good men, preaching up equality, and to ignorant blacks,” whose “heated imaginations” were influenced by the “work of fanaticism” wrought by Turner, who resembles a “Roman Sybil” (80-1). This Sybil, like Wheatley before him, sees his visions in “dreams” and “interprets” them. The use of the word Sybil is powerful, even if the writer does not try to make a conscious reference to Wheatley as the Libian Sybil. By placing Turner and his heated imagination within the black prophetic tradition, the writer equates it to fanaticism. Later, the writer indicates how Turner’s rebellion will affect the collective memory of the nation: “In future years, the bloody road” of the Rebellion “will give rise to many a sorrowful legend; and the trampling of hooves, in fancy, visit many an excited imagination” (86). With tongue firmly in cheek, the writer characterizes the infectious power of fanaticism by suggesting that imaginations will be “excited” by Fancy, that very faculty which Hume praised as the source of genius. Only Fancy can turn the trampling of hooves into images of horror. However, what remains unspoken is the role the writer, and others like him, have in producing this national trauma and in keeping the wound open in the collective memory of the nation.
National trauma and Democratic history is written by those who have the privilege to read and interpret events and persons involved in them.

Perhaps the most developed argument linking imagination with fanaticism and danger is found in Thomas R. Dew’s “Abolition of Negro Slavery,” published in 1832 in reaction to the increased attention given to the possibility of abolishing slavery in Virginia after Turner’s rebellion. In this piece of persuasion, Dew repeatedly sources arguments for the abolition of slavery from the same mental faculty from which fanaticism originates, naming the arguments drawn for abolition sketches of “glowing fancy” (127). By drawing this implicit yet powerful parallel, Dew takes advantage of both the memory and imagination of the Virginia public by working on their collective fancy. What Hume noted earlier, and what Wheatley uses as the foundation of her poetics, Dew begins to develop into the trope of blackness which Stowe eventually uses in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. However, Dew fails to completely reify the black trope of Fancy, ushered in by Wheatley, into a trope of blackness that seeks to limit this faculty and define it against the supposedly superior mental faculty of reason. Dew begins this condemnation of imagination by referring to Turner as a “fanatic negro preacher (whose confessions prove beyond doubt mental aberration),” strengthening the association of Turner and his actions towards personal freedom with fanaticism. Dew also names Turner as the creator of Gray’s *Confessions*, suggesting that Gray’s intention of removing Turner’s agency from the document was already failing in the eyes of one reader. The other interpretation actually places Gray in the same inferior mental train as Turner by suggesting that his interpretation or fabrication of Turner’s last words before being executed are merely a product of his imagination. Either way, Dew’s defense of slavery, or rather his attack on abolition, must begin with a paratextual attack on Turner’s memory. As he notes immediately after, “the ghastly horrors of the Southampton tragedy could
not immediately be banished from the mind” (115). In fact, the presence of these horrors in the collective memory of the public banishes “reason…from the mind, and the imagination” takes over and “conjures up” images of the rebellion. What Dew is refuting, then, is not so much an argument for abolition as the errant memory of Nathaniel Turner. Dew’s “empire of reason” must reclaim and reenslave Turner from the maroon of errant memory (116).

To William Lloyd Garrison, who condemned the violence, the blame lies not just in the imagination of the actors in the rebellion. The “poetry—imagination” of slave insurrections now made “reality” by Turner’s actions are those of whites, both slave-owning and abolitionist, who debate and fear the inevitable violence resulting from enslavement of human beings. In the September 3rd, 1831 issue of the Liberator, Garrison pinpoints the self-fulfilling prophecy of white obsessions with slavery and the persons being subjected to it. He also names the process of mnemonic death inherent in the dehumanization of persons of African descent: “They were black—brutes, pretending to be men—legions of curses upon their memories!” (70-1). In echoing the popular reactions of other newspapers, like the ones cited above, Garrison inadvertentely reveals an important truth, namely that these reactions dehumanize the actors in the rebellion by reducing the workings of their minds to blind fanaticism and fancy, the very same rhetorical violence Gray attempts to commit against Turner in his Confessions. He also echoes the Enlightenment philosophers in their opinions of the mental capacity of brutes, or anything not human. To be black, Garrison suggests, is to be a brute who can only pretend to be a person (like Hume believed Wheatley could only be a parrot to poetic brilliance). The punishment for this pretending, this acting out of place, is a curse upon their memories, the way they would be remembered by future generations. Garrison further implies that the rebellion is a profoundly human act. In rebelling, Turner and his fellow insurrectionists are acting human. Of course,
Turner’s memory is already cursed as inferior and unworthy of respect. However, in remembering through Gray, Turner dictates the misdirection of his memory within the larger narrative of Democratic history. Stowe’s Dred stands as the best example of this complex process of tropofication.

Dred’s unique presence in the text is predicated on his maroon community. This maroon community, residing as it does in the Dismal Swamp, impacts the reading of Stowe’s work in many important ways. To understand the source of Dred’s power, we must first investigate the disorienting errantry of the maroon community and its influence on the collective memory of communities that relied on slavery for their economic viability. The United States is no exception, housing several maroon communities within its own borders. Beyond its borders, maroon communities continually compromised the integrity of the colonies and the collective memory embedded within them. The existence of “sizeable maroon communities” around New Orleans and Central Florida was apparently common knowledge, since “Local planters felt compelled to try to eradicate them, and they expended considerable resources to do so” (Landers 97). The reason for this compulsion is not merely explainable by the “maroon banditry” that “settlers complained about” (98). It is also not explained away by the theory that maroon communities were connected to English activity (100). Like Dred’s presence, the maroon community was threatening in its very existence, a collection of socially dead persons operating completely outside of the confines of the logic of American societal and political structures. These communities were communal in a way unfamiliar and threatening to the theoretical foundations of Enlightenment conclaves. Often invisible, never publicly sanctioned, and always made up of individuals without apparent social and mnemonic roots, maroon communities throughout the colonized world stood as untouchable testaments to the inherent flaws embedded
within notions of democracy. The existence of the maroon community, then, is an anomaly that
does its most destructive work in highlighting the fraudulence of democracy, white superiority,
and black inferiority. It does this work by affirming the ability of persons of African descent to
escape and successfully survive outside of the supposed Providential confines of Western (read
Christian) space and time and form communal bonds with other individuals who share only their
former status as enslaved persons. Most important, the fact that these communities exist inside
the perceived geographical territory of the abstract space of democratic history allows them to
illuminate the true nature of that mechanism of organization.

Stowe is aware of the existence and power of maroon communities. In her second
appendix, Stowe establishes for the reader the way in which the structure of democratic history
attempts to reduce persons of African descent to property. Specifically, Stowe metonymizes
democratic history within the confines of state laws. These laws, acting as representations of the
processes that sacrifice individual memory for stable slave identity, are intimately linked to
anxieties surrounding the “outlaw.” While Stowe seems to be demonstrating the barbarity of
Southern law in allowing murdering slave owners to go free despite overwhelming evidence of
their crimes, what Stowe actually accomplishes is a demonstration of the ways in which
organizing systems like law mark and outline the boundaries of mnemonic existence. As the law
clearly states, any person who maliciously kills a slave is guilty of murder “Provided always, this
act shall not extend to the person killing a slave OUTLAWED BY VIRTUE OF ANY ACT OF
ASSEMBLY OF THIS STATE” (Original capitalization, Stowe 566). Since persons of African
descent are the only ones that qualify implicitly as slaves by virtue of racial markers like skin
color, Stowe implies that one becomes an outlaw when one chooses to leave the social structures
where one is deemed a slave. Stowe first provides several examples of murderous slave owners
in order to establish the cruelty of the system of state law that allows their crimes to go unpunished. Their crimes go unpunished not only because these white landowners garnered favor with the judge and jury, but also because the person murdered cannot remember his self, thereby voiding him as a member of society. When discussing the Castleman case in the “Spirit of Jefferson,” which tells the story of how enslaved persons by the names of Lewis and Ruben were tortured and brutalized for stealing, the paper admits “that the evidence does not prove the legal crime of homicide” because it is believed that the men died of the wounds or exhaustion resulting from the torture, leading to one of the men accidentally choking on the collar that was restraining him (570). What is not considered, despite it being extremely obvious, is the possibility that he hung himself because the paper, which seems to be sympathetic to the plight of the murdered, cannot fathom that this man could self-reflexively remember that he was a man, and that what was being done to him was both inhuman and was done to make him inhuman.

Enslaved individuals of African descent, then, are outlaws before they ever run away. Killing a runaway slave is always protected under the law because persons of African descent are not. Through her appendix, Stowe sets a precedent for Dred as well in that he is an outlaw to the laws that govern her narrative. While he is not protected under its laws, he is also free from them. The “Law of Outlawry” clearly states that “MANY TIMES slaves run away and lie out, hid and lurking in the swamps, woods, and other obscure places…stay out, and do not immediately return home,” and that slave owners may “kill and destroy such slave or slaves by such ways and means as he shall think fit, without accusation or impeachment of any crime for the same” (572). The maroon community, as seen by the democratic laws of the United States, lie out in obscure places, spaces that resist definition. Similarly, Dred exists in the obscure place of the dismal swamp. Stowe provides this appendix to explain her own indiscriminate killing of
Dred within the space of her text. Within the first few pages, Stowe includes a description, in horrid detail, of how a slave named “Sam” was brutally tortured and murdered, yet she refuses to make any mention of white people being murdered at the hands of Turner and his fellow rebels (564). Clearly, Stowe chooses to include this graphic scene, almost a page long, not only because of its cathartic and pathetic impact on her antislavery reader, but also because, to her, Sam only exists within the brutalized body presented in the court document. Her ability as witness only goes so far. When she creates Dred, made up as he is from various images and black tropes, she does not have the luxury of locating the reader’s pathos and empathy within a body clearly marked by violence within the confines of the law. Kenneth S. Greenberg, in “Name, Face, Body,” discusses how Stowe interpreted Turner’s historically determined character to fit her own purposes: “For example, in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1856 novel Dred, the title character is a slave based on the historical Nat Turner, and yet she imagines him as “a tall black man, of magnificent stature and proportions. His skin was intensely black and polished like marble.” Stowe chose to envision the slave rebel as an exotic figure, very black and very noble” (397).

Even though she tries to construct a working Dred out of Turner’s historical pieces, Dred, as outlaw, as disembodied presence, does not die even when his textual body does. The heap of witness can only attest to the disappearance of “the mortal signs by which that soul had been known on earth” (518). These mortal signs exist within a space already beyond the scope of the reader’s vision.

The disorientation enacted in space and time by Dred as a character in the text speaks to the way in which the book itself was, is, and will be received by an American readership thirsting for an engagement of complex social issues that will fit them into the neat narrativized progression of democratic history. In other words, Dred cannot be understood, even by Stowe
herself. While *Dred* “pondered relativist and atheistical questions surrounding slavery,” it does not “effectively resolve these questions through powerful Conventional images” (Reynolds *Beneath 78*). *Dred* ponders more than relativist and atheistical questions. It brings to life a character in Dred that has no place, no root, and no source that would help author and reader understand him as a character. Dred and the dismal swamp seem to be one and the same. The maroon community, in similar fashion, was often hard to combat because it could not be located. The individuals who inhabited the space of the maroon community were not tied to a place. Instead, they lived relationally, in true communal fashion, and had their community wherever they had others who shared not a common root, but a common memory.iiiiiiiiii Similarly, Gates’s black trope does not have a source. Instead, as he himself posits, the black trope exists in the ways in which black authors read each other’s works and were, in effect, reproducing a mnemonic image, amalgamating the existing text to their own interpretations loaded with their own errant memories. We find this in Dred, a maroon character. What Stowe fails to understand (and this is precisely what gives Dred his power) is that Dred, derived from Turner, the enslaved individuals killed by their captors, and the reports of maroon communities, exists in these materials only as selected parts of many persons with complex histories and even more complex and unfathomable memories.

Harriet Beecher Stowe is remembered as one of the most vocal and most effective white antislavery writers, mainly because of the massive success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. While this text is not as outwardly revolutionary as her second work, *Dred*, the black tropes serve a revolutionary function in both. For Stowe, more than perhaps any other writer of the time, black tropes and voices figured heavily in her work. The publication of her *Key* resulted from heavy pressure form the proslavery public to substantiate her black voices and their plights. Many did
not believe that a white woman would be able to realistically reproduce black characters and plantation life. However, Stowe did just that, but her detractors were right in their belief that Stowe did not produce these characters and settings out of thin air. In fact, what makes her first novel so effective is that she reproduced black tropes from black sources. As one of her sources, Frederick Douglass’s Narrative provides her with one of her most powerful and subversive tropes precisely because it writes Douglass into existence and provides Douglass with his first claim of true ownership of the self produced within it. Eric Sundquist, in To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature, writes about Douglass’s first narrative, “The Narrative was set down primarily so that Douglass might guarantee its authenticity…, but also that he might take personal possession of it, declare it his own property, thereby capping the quest for literacy that had been so crucial to his resistance to and escape from slavery” (87). By inserting Douglass’s “scarred slave’s body” (87) into her own fiction, she also inserted its resistant and liberating potential, seen in characters like George. Furthermore, it was Douglass who noted the importance of having been a direct witness or survivor of the violence and terror of slavery in order to fully glean sympathy from the reader, an identification that Stowe cannot produce on her own. As a result, Stowe relies on the experience of others whose voices she cannot control. Stowe does a lot more than “recognize black Americans as moral agents…capable of citizenship,” which is why she “seeks to close” these black voices in her text (Crane 76-7). Instead, she allows independent black tropes and voices to enact their resistant energies throughout both Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Dred.

Topsy and Cassy present two of the most troubling figures in all of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, not because of their racialized status or their lack of depth, but because they present black tropes beyond Stowe’s control. Topsy, for one, presents a narrative of social death that constantly
undercuts the more humorous and one-dimensional minstrelsy of her antics, while Cassy’s
harrowing narrative of infanticide acts as a powerful foil to the moral economy of Eva and her
saint-like death. Topsy “always made great capital of her own sins and enormities” (228), the
biggest of these sins being her natal alienation and social death. Orlando Patterson, in his seminal
*Slavery and Social Death*, defines a socially dead person as one “Alienated from all “rights” or
claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order” (5). In a
conversation with Ophelia, when asked about her mother, Topsy responds, “Never had none!”
When asked where she was born, Topsy replies, “Never was born,” not once, but twice, even
after being reprimanded (220-1). While this scene is designed to carry humor and make the
reader laugh, Topsy’s responses are no laughing matter, especially in a text that is proclaimed by
Stowe herself to be mainly concerned with family. Topsy, in direct contrast to many of the other
black families and their eventual regeneration in the text, presents a case of acute and complete
social death. When Ophelia thinks she has “got hold of some sooty gnome from the land of
Diablerie” (220), she is partly right. It is not so much Topsy’s manner that surprises Ophelia, but
what seems to her the impossibility of not having a mother and not having been born. Topsy
essentially figures herself as a nonperson, and in doing so becomes a radical voice in the text that
constantly resists assimilation. Ophelia’s incredulity and lack of ability to understand Topsy’s
full meaning is symptomatic of the reader’s response. Topsy’s social death cannot be understood
unless experienced. The reader, and Ophelia, are doomed to understand Topsy only at the level
of her minstrelsy. However, her subversion runs much deeper, made evident by the perplexity
she generates. Eva’s rescue of Topsy cannot happen unless there is something that needs
redeeming. What is redeemed is not Topsy’s naughty behavior, but her affirmation of her self as
something more than a specter, a socially dead person.
Cassy’s story of infanticide contrasts sharply with Eva’s angelic death earlier in the text. The subject of infanticide, next to being hard to digest, is a common trope in African American literature. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is based on the story of Margaret Garner, a fugitive slave mother who killed her children rather than let them be captured. This story gained national attention in the 1850’s and was used by abolitionists as proof of the wickedness of the Fugitive Slave Law (Morrison *Beloved* 2). While it may not be as apparent, it is not a stretch to say that Stowe knew about this tragic story and based Cassy on it. More importantly, Stowe chooses to repeat this story in *Dred* with Cora Gordon. When speaking of her child, Cassy laments, “O, that child!—how I loved it!...But I had made up my mind,—yes, I had. I would never again let a child live to grow up” (334). Cassy presents the opposite case to Topsy’s motherlessness. In both cases, however, the inability to beget children is made apparent through death, be it social or actual. For Cassy, this means killing her child to save it from the evils of slavery, a fate worse than death. Not only does it force the reader to reconsider what Topsy must have gone through as a motherless child before coming to Ophelia (hints of which are littered throughout the text), but it also forces us to reconsider Eva’s death. The nameless child, who died without ever being known by anyone but his mother, has a powerful resonance throughout the rest of the text, one that challenges Eva’s overdetermined and hypersentimental death and subsequent spiritual presence. Uncle Tom is the most important recipient of Eva’s spirit, but he is also the only recipient of Cassy’s story. Consequently, the errant memory of Cassy’s dead child competes with Eva for Tom’s conceptions of the sanctity of family. The reader, too, experiences the memory of the unnamed child. While Stowe clearly intended Cassy’s story to have a sympathetic effect, the story has far-ranging repercussions. Like Topsy, the unnamed child acts as a foil to Eva’s angelic and unrealistic essence. While Eva’s power comes from an
ineffable presence, even after death, the child’s power comes from its absence, another prominent black trope. While Eva’s presence graces us and is dependent on Stowe's narrative creation, the child’s presence haunts us and is free from the narrative structures. The child is not created by Stowe. His death is an act of resistance in itself, albeit a horrifying one. However, the dead child speaks more powerfully to the evils and horrors of slavery in what is left unsaid than Eva’s angelic presence ever could.

In *Dred*, Cora Gordon presents another manifestation of the same trope. However, in *Dred*, Cora is much more vocal about her guilt, showing no remorse for what she did within the ever-important confines of the law. Within this system, in which Cora knows her children will suffer a fate similar to herself and the individuals mentioned in appendix two, her guilt is meaningless. Cora’s long and impassioned speech is not a defense of her actions, but a powerful challenge to those witnessing her confession. Like Turner, she challenges the very notions of good and evil that her white observers hold dear within the structures of their notions of morality. Unlike Cassy, who has seen so many of her children taken that she can no longer bear to let one live, Cora anticipates future horrors at the hands of Tom Gordon. In this way, she fits with the indeterminacy that pervades the text, with the main characters living for a future that cannot and is not actually realized. For Dred, this is revolution. For Cora, this is the horrors of slavery for her children. This story, too, is much closer to Margaret Garner’s. After giving her confession, Cora challenges the mothers in the room, saying, “if any of you mothers, in my place, wouldn’t have done the same, you either don’t know what slavery is, or you don’t love you children as I have loved mine. This is all” (440). To both witness and reader, Cora exposes a truth that voids any pretense of pathos and empathy that Stowe tries to generate. The mothers reading this text do not know what it is to be a slave, and never will. Therefore, they will look
upon Cora’s actions as unconscionable. Cora, then, undermines the direction and purpose of the text by revealing the impossibility of pathos, the very sentiment essential to the success of getting readers to hate slavery. More importantly, hating slavery does not solve the real underlying issue, demonstrated by the ways in which the lives of persons of African descent did not improve after “emancipation.” Cora, by challenging the reader’s love for her children, taps into the sentimental structures of feeling essential to reproducing American values of domesticity. Like Dred, then, Cora cannot be placed within her appropriate structure. Stowe produces a character that subverts these structures instead.

The tropes of the mother and the child work in conjunction with the trope of Turner embedded in the character of Dred. These tropes are all derived from white readings of black acts and the memories they leave behind. Together, these tropes form a textual maroon community within Stowe’s works. In this way, the memorialization of persons of African descent through their paratextual reification, as evinced by Gray’s Confessions and the reception of Garner’s matricide, is subverted by their errant memories. The maroon aesthetic, enacted through Dred’s physical absence, subverts Stowe’s attempt at silencing Dred’s mnemonic work as a trope by detaching him from the memory of Turner and from the body. Dred’s power over both the reader and characters like Harry comes not from his physical presence (even though it is imposing), but rather from his disembodied voice that reverberates throughout the natural setting of the dismal swamp. Even before the voice has a chance to wreak havoc on characters and readers, the very title of the novel establishes Dred’s presence and importance for the reader. Dred’s name, given in bold letters, is a disembodied name. The subtitle would have the readers believe that the focus of the tale is the dismal swamp, not a man named Dred. In fact, Dred is so close to the word “dread” that it almost seems that the story is not concerned with a man at all,
but instead with the affective space of the dismal swamp and the initial horror felt by those who witnessed and read about Turner’s rebellion. The space of the swamp, then, becomes the true focus of the reader’s attention. However, Like Turner, Dred is always present, even in his absence. Dred is a literal embodiment of the affective feeling of “dread” that results from the presence of the dismal swamp and its role as a refuge for “outlawed” individuals. Dred’s absence from the first half of the text speaks to this relationship. Even though Stowe is fully aware of the viability of an unseen presence, the unseen presence of Dred has implications beyond her expectations. IV Not only is the swamp a constant source of dread for many of the evil characters in the text, like Tom Gordon, it is also a source of anxiety for the reader. Judging from the title, the reader expects Dred to be a presence from the start. However, the constant deferral of his arrival serves to increase the dread felt by the reader. From the moment Dred enters the reader’s imagination, even if that imagined conception only has physical ties to the dismal swamp, he exceeds the boundaries of Stowe’s text and her subsequent measures of control, mainly her attempt to silence him through death.

Dred continues to escape narrative control through his disembodiment. Dred always enters the text with his voice first, to which a body is added only later, and only after the effect of his namesake has been achieved. Dred’s subversive power is multiplied in this text by the fact that his voice always comes first, even before that of Stowe’s narrator. During the camp meeting, Dred makes a dramatic appearance that is announced not by Dred’s physical presence, but by the crowd’s “startled” reaction to his voice, which is described from the point of view of the audience as a “sound which seemed to come peeling down directly from the thick canopy of pines over the heads of the ministers” (262). Dred’s voice is not recognized as such at first, but is instead attributed to the swamp, as is the case in his first appearance. When Dred speaks again,
his voice seems to “fall from the clouds” (263). Dred’s omnipresence, which invokes “terror” and, yes, dread in the audience, comes not merely from his “singular voice” (263), but its lack of a body, a lack of a mortal form. Like Turner’s memory, Dred is invincible. The characters in the text cannot stop him or even silence him, because they cannot touch him. The reader cannot touch him. In this moment, even the narrator cannot touch Dred. The narrator’s omnipotent knowledge of Dred’s inner workings is reduced to attributing mere primitivistic conventions to his bodily relationship to nature: “He who spoke was one whose savage familiarity with nature gave him the agility and stealthy adroitness of a wild animal” (264). Stowe as author attempts to create a trope out of a memory, not a character. As a black trope, originating in Turner’s errantry, the memory Dred carries cannot be narrativized. When Stowe tries to anchor Dred to a racialized and embodied phenomenon, figuring Dred as “some awful form, framed to symbolize to human eye the energy of that avenging justice which all nature shudderingly declares,” she instead echoes Garrison’s figuration of Turner’s rebellion as God’s inevitable vengeance for America’s original sin (458). While Stowe, as author, frames Dred’s function in the text within the symbolic, which not only limits the scope and breadth of his disorienting potential to the text and its organic unity, but also detaches his body from human agency and attaches it ineffably to the polemical purpose of the text, this endeavor fails, since Dred’s true subversive power is never limited to his symbolic body, but is contained instead in his mnemonic existence as Turner’s disembodied voice.

The climax of the text arguably comes when Milly, channeling Sojourner Truth, challenges Dred’s Turner-like militancy and silences him. This moment presents Stowe’s most elaborate attempt at silencing a character about to break through the barriers of the narrative. It is no coincidence that this moment of rhetorical defeat is given more space in the text than Dred’s
physical death. Also, it is no coincidence that Stowe’s reading of Truth’s interaction with Douglass, on which the conversation between Milly and Dred is based, is Conventional and sides with Truth’s plea for moral suasion over Douglass’s radicalism. Milly, who represents the most Uncle Tom-like manifestation of the moral structures that govern Stowe’s imagined world, must be the person that temporarily stops Dred’s errantry. In having Milly echo Sojourner Truth, Stowe is directly referencing the famous and much publicized moment when Truth challenged Frederick Douglass’s militancy. Margaret Washington argues that “Sojourner Truth conformed to Stowe’s stereotypical image of enslaved women—dark-skinned, unschooled, homespun, and religious. Stowe immediately incorporated Truth’s experiences into Dred, A Tale of the Dismal Swamp” (271). The famous episode between Truth and Frederick Douglass is famous largely because of Stowe’s depiction of it in “Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sybil,” published in 1860. In it, Stowe pleads for “agitation” over the violent rebellion of Douglass, Turner, and Dred through Truth’s supposed intervention with these words: “Frederick, is God dead?” (301). This moment is famous not just because Truth confounded one of the great black public figures and orators of the Twentieth century, but because she did so through moral suasion, the very ideology Douglass turned away from because of its conciliatory nature. In this public moment, then, we have Douglass’s dangerous militancy put out by Truth’s safe and historically acceptable morality. More important, however, is the moment from Truth’s own narrative that Stowe chooses to reference: “My heart has been broke over and over for every child de Lord gave me. And, when dey sold my poor Alfred, and shot him, and buried him like a dog, O, but didn’t my heart burn? O, How I hated her dat sold him! I felt like I’d kill her…and I broke down and forgave her.” This famous scene has Milly admitting her desire for revenge before conceding to forgiveness. For a black Christian woman to admit anger meant that women of African descent were not as cut out
for blind morality as Stowe and many others originally thought. On the contrary, Truth’s memory testifies to her complexity and her growth as a person whose faith was shaken and is not absolute. While Truth and Milly both preach “love yer enemies!”, they do so only after shattering the conventionally held belief (perpetuated by Stowe!) that the docile, Uncle Tom-like morality people of African descent were prone to protected slaveholding sinners from their wrathful indignation and anger (Stowe 462). Finally, Milly’s word choice is important. She did not rise up to forgive, she broke down. This breaking down of personal affect into morally regulated affect is transmitted to Dred, who breaks down his resolve with dire consequences.

Milly’s speech as moral regulator fits into the generally accepted narrative of peaceful, gradual change and opposes Dred’s lack of narrative. However, when Dred accepts Milly’s plea, he enters the social framework, previously exemplified by law, in which he has no protection and in which he has no power. In short, Dred changes from a disembodied, errant voice to a solid character with a deferred direction. This deferment is what entrenches Dred in an arrowlike nomadism, an orientation towards some future action previously thwarted, which leaves him now vulnerable to the negating efforts of the society within which he becomes nothing. Milly, then, makes Dred reactionary to Tom Gordon mainly because, unlike Turner, Dred does not see his act of vengeance fulfilled on his terms. Moreover, Dred’s breaking down seems to affirm the common notion that people of African descent are predisposed to Biblical morality, especially the aspects that relate to forgiveness. After Milly finishes her speech, “a dead silence followed this appeal…At last Dred rose up solemnly: ‘Woman, thy prayers have prevailed for this time!’ he said. ‘The hour is not yet come!’” (462). The hour of retribution, the apocalyptic moment of social upheaval, is thwarted by Milly’s “prayer” to Dred. Ironically, Dred’s deferral parallels Turner’s insistence on waiting for the right sign, which many scholars argue may have been one
of the primary causes of the rebellion’s failure. The dead silence that precedes Dred’s announcement foreshadows the dead Dred we find shortly hereafter. The chapter, titled “Jegar Sahadutha,” is a direct reference to Dred’s last words. The title means “heap of witness,” something Dred mentions in his last words. Dred’s burial under the heap of witness happens in two places. The link created by this reference strongly suggests the relationship between Dred’s conceding to morality and his physical demise is causal. Like the heap of witness, Dred becomes a mere covenant between Stowe and her readers, a pact between the author and her creation. He exists only as a moral signifier to the power of forgiveness even over righteous, Turner-like militancy. His errant memory is routed and rooted in the metonymic narrative of Uncle Tom, whose Conventionality speaks for a larger national fantasy that helped perpetuate a system of beliefs that would support slavery and, by extension, the nation’s growth. Milly’s memory of her breakdown breaks down Dred into an empty vessel. Dred died long before his physical death.

Dred’s disembodied voice, and the words that it conveys, point constantly to his marooned errantry. While Stowe obviously channels the prophetic tradition throughout, this tendency leads Dred to unexpected places. The most important of these places appears in one the most important chapters, “All Over,” the chapter of Dred’s death. The mention of an abandoned ship alludes to far more than a biblical verse, even if that is what Stowe intended. This is, in fact, the very nature of the black trope’s activity. Through a complex network of mnemonic currents, Dred’s story of the abandoned ship anticipates his physical death in the same chapter. Dred reveals that he “slept three weeks in the hulk of a ship out of which all souls had perished,” noting that the spirits drove [him] there” to seek knowledge of the future. To achieve this, God told him to “seek out the desolate places of the sea, and dwell in the wreck of a ship that was forsaken for a sign of desolation unto this people…and the Lord showed unto me that even as a
ship which is forsaken of the waters, wherein all flesh have died, so shall it be with the nation of the oppressor” (Stowe 510-1). The images of a hulk of a ship where souls have perished, where flesh has died, and that is forsaken and stuck in the desolate areas of the sea allude to the Middle Passage, the quintessential trope representing the disorientation of African diasporic errant memory. Here, then, we see Dred conflating the Biblical image of the apocalyptic Revelations with the fate of others who, like him, share a common bond in the space of mnemonic death. Dred’s unique and personal experience of the Middle Passage is itself what Marianne Hirsch would call a postmemory, or a memory passed down to a generation that did not physically experience an event. However, Dred’s experience of the Middle Passage through the shipwreck is beyond postmemory. Not only does Dred see in this space of death the flesh that is forgotten, he also experiences that memory without rest, the experiential memory, in recalling the episode itself. In short, Dred, as a black trope of Turner’s rebellion, turns the Middle Passage from a trope of blackness into a black trope.

Dred’s death happens long before the sentimental moment in the chapter titled “All Over.” The chapter title itself is a pun on the repetitive nature, all over again, of Dred’s, and Turner’s, existence in and out of the space of death, the space of the Maroon, within antebellum Southern society. However, the death depicted in this chapter, as the death of the literary figure, presents a watershed moment not in Stowe’s successful silencing of Dred, but instead in his reawakening. Like Turner before him, Dred’s errant memory is carried on by witnesses to his death, in this case the rest of the fugitive band in the text. Also like Turner, Dred’s last words affirm his choice in the face of overwhelming pressure to live on symbolically in the minds of his survivors. Dred asks Harry to “lay [him] beneath the heap of witness,” to “let the God of their fathers judge between us” (513). Like Turner, Dred chooses to say no more, and to let a higher
power be the judge of his actions. More significantly, Dred’s play on words connects the responsibility of the witness to his white readership, asking as he does to be buried beneath wit(white)ness. Here, Dred speaks directly to the white readers that made up the majority of his audience at the height of the book’s popularity. The readers are witness to Dred’s existence, not merely as a character in a book, but as an errant memory that powerfully dictates the disorientation of the American democratic historical imaginary. What the link between Turner and Dred does is bring back to the surface the suppressed memory of self-determined and righteous anger resulting from the dehumanization of a person of African descent. What comes “All Over” is the disorienting errantry of personal memory in the face of national and racial history, the determined voice of Turner against the historicizing anxiety of Gray, and the disembodied voice of Dred against the physical representation that Stowe tries to fit into a narrative designed to move American history in the right direction. It is in the space of the Maroon aesthetic, then, that Dred moves indeterminately to the pace of his heartbeat.

Dred’s quick and sudden death right after this most important and intimate moment further establishes a connection between Dred’s errantry and the space of death. Like Turner and Vessey before him, Dred’s true power lies in the inability on the part of the white reader/witness to understand him. Stowe, too, fails to fully understand the parts she used to make up Dred. As a result, she cannot fully understand her character. This, I think, is where Stowe’s true brilliance shines. Despite the fact that she does attempt to silence and fit Dred into a neat(er) narrative structure, Stowe’s choice to write Dred into existence speaks to the growth she experienced as a writer. Furthermore, as Dred’s death chapter demonstrates, Stowe allows Dred free reign as a character. In effect, like all authors, Stowe loses herself within the depths of the space of literature. It is no surprise that Dred returns at the end of the book, when Harry, Lisette, Tiff, and
the children flee to the North, in the form of a storm of “dreadful noise,” whose “horrors…can only be told by those who have felt the like” (539). In short, only experience can convey the power of Dred’s disembodied existence as an errant memory. After Dred’s death, there is no more mention of him. He seems to get buried in the truest sense of the word. However, in true maroon fashion, Dred (read dread) comes back mnemonically and relationally, reminding the reader not just of his prophetic vision, but of the terror of the journey that brought those of African descent to the American continent. Dred’s kingdom, then, extends beyond his person. Much like “the tall pines, and whispering oaks…seemed like broad-winged attesting angels, bearing witness” to his words and deeds in the maroon space, the reader bears witness to Dred’s dominion over the text that bears his name in title, but not in author (501). This is the condition of the author of African descent. This is also the power of errant memory, fashioned within Wheatley’s fancy and forged into black tropology.

Shortly after Dred was published in 1856, a landmark court case determined the true status of persons of African descent in the United States. In 1857, *Dred Scott, vs. Sanford* established that persons of African descent were not citizens when Dred’s Scott’s unassuming claim for freedom was denied. While this landmark event occurred after Stowe published her second antislavery novel, the sharing of the namesake cannot be ignored. Even if these two things have nothing to do with each other, one of the benefits of looking back is that the observer is able to critically analyze the narrative of history. As it is written now, both Dred Scott and Dred are denied their freedom. The process that leads to these moments reveals in both cases the manner in which the freedom is denied. After a ten-year-long battle, Dred Scott’s freedom was denied by Justice Roger B. Taney, who said people of African descent were “beings of an inferior order, so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to
Next to the complex legal reasons given, then, the denial of freedom was based on the perceived inferiority attached to blackness. However, the complex and long-winded legal reasons given for denying Scott his freedom, something that had been done in Missouri under similar circumstances many times, present the most telling evidence of the violence of democratic history. The law did not protect Scott. It erased his citizenship. What Dred shows us is the complex mechanisms of the narrative that is democratic history. Dred Scott’s memory of his rights, his ensured freedom under existing Missouri laws, were made meaningless by a historical narrative endemic to this nation’s development, in which persons of African descent are seen as inferior precisely because they cannot remember. Similarly, Dred’s mnemonic existence as both a relational maroon subject and as a black trope is erased in favor of Conventionality found in Milly. The memory Dred evokes of Turner, Denmark Vessey, and San Domingo is supplanted by the assurance of history’s moral path. What we get at the end of the text is a forgotten Dred who manifests himself only in a disorienting storm. However, while Stowe does her best to enforce this silencing, there is a clearly a part of Stowe that embraces Dred’s maroon aesthetic. Stowe’s complexity as an author is not just supported by her willingness to take on more challenging subject matter in her second novel. It also comes to the reader, like a disembodied voice, through the thicket of her text. Stowe is willing to lose herself, however briefly, in the uncharted waters of Dred’s character. Even her act of silencing leaves room for Dred’s voice to continue. Dred’s death is not an end or a beginning. It is a continuation of a circular nomadism four centuries in the making.
Chapter 3

Thoughts in Chaos: Hannah Crafts’s Experiential Memory

Embedded within the previous two discussions on Wheatley and Turner is the issue of learning. Learning as a mnemonic faculty is well established and often referred to as the primary mode through which to discuss the ways in which memory acts. However, another common thread through the philosophical discussions surrounding memory and the mind is that learning stands as an artificial form of remembering based in repetition and conscious engagement with a chosen object of interest. Learning, then, is forced memory. A person learning does not choose what to learn, nor when and how to learn it. Even those who may choose what to learn have to select from options put in front of them. In fact, this conflict between experiential knowledge, based on errant memory, and learned knowledge, based on repetitive and directed recollection, is common to all Enlightenment philosophy and discourse on memory and the mind. Descartes, the progenitor of this tradition, bases his Meditations entirely on his realization that “too decided a belief in regard to nothing of the truth of which I had been persuaded merely by example and custom” clouds the mind’s innate disposition to choice, which led him to “gradually extricate myself from many errors powerful enough to darken our natural intelligence, and incapacitate us in great measure from listening to reason” (138). Experience is the greatest teacher because, instead of being grounded in the innate direction of custom, it allows the mind to choose for itself what to use to construct one’s mnemonic life. The next step in Wheatley’s literary development of errant memory, then, is fancy’s intrinsic attachment to independence. It is this independence, seen in Wheatley’s poetic interpretation of her education and Turner’s use of experiential knowledge, that we find in The Bondwoman’s Narrative.
Continuing the tradition that Phillis Wheatley started, Hannah Crafts wrote *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* around 1850, several years before Stowe would write either *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or *Dred*, and about eighty years after Phillis Wheatley published her book of poems. *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* stands out because the author incorporates many different elements, conventions, and narratives into her story. What makes this text special is that the author manages to produce a coherent and engaging autobiographical novel that incorporates what many have called gothic elements with tropes culled from slave narratives, autobiographies, and other works of fiction produced by authors of African descent. Set in Antebellum Virginia, the story centers around Hannah, a house servant who identifies as white in the face of being seen as black due to her status as a slave. Even though Hannah claims her white identity, she does acknowledge the black blood that runs through her veins, and finds herself pitted against the societal forces that would determine and define her as black based on this blood and her status as a slave. This societal force is personified through Trappe, a scholar and lawyer obsessed with lineage and learning and who profits from seeking out African descendancy in white-identifying persons. In her struggle with Trappe, Hannah encounters several individuals who stand as guide posts on her path to personal freedom, including her mistress at Lindendale (the plantation where the story begins), Aunt Hetty (who teaches her how to read), and Mrs. Wheeler (who claims to own her person before she eventually secures her freedom). While each character brings a different definition of selfhood based on race, Hannah remains the focal point of the story. Her self-identification as white remains steadfast. While this text remains largely understudied, it stands as one of the most important in the African American and American literary traditions, not because it may be the first novel written by a woman of African descent, but because of the way in which the author, through Hannah, inherits Wheatley’s gift of errant memory, thereby placing
herself firmly within the specific mnemonic tradition found in works of literary art written by persons of African descent. What may be most significant about this text is not the way in which Crafts seemingly uses the gothic or even the slave narrative conventions, but in how she pursues Descartes’s dictum of abandoning custom in learning for independence in experience. 

Like Wheatley and Turner, Hannah Crafts engages Freedom and history through errant memory and within the space of literature. Building on Wheatley’s poetics of fancy and Turner’s maroon tropology, Crafts engages the Enlightenment tenant of experience to further develop a poetics of memory in spite of mnemonic death forced on her and her narrative by readers and critics. Crafts builds on Wheatley’s and Turner’s contributions by acknowledging a specific aspect of errant memory set forth by Hume and others, namely the idea that this memory, and the ability to remember spontaneously and use it, develops through personal experience rather than artificial learning. For one, Hobbes echoes Descartes in his belief that “those men that take their instruction from the authority of books, and not from their own meditation, to be as much below the condition of ignorant men,” because “Naturall sense and imagination, are not subject to absurdity” and “nature it selfe cannot erre” (106). Crafts will repeat these sentiments throughout her text. For Hobbes, then, “Much memory…is called experience” (89), and works through the “sense…delivir[ing]” ideas “to common sense, and the common sense delivers them over to the Fancy, and the Fancy to the Memory, and the Memory to the Judgment” (93). In short, Hobbes theorizes judgment as an innate ability sharpened by experience and reliant on fancy and memory, two separate faculties working together to distinguish sensations worthy of contemplation from those that are not. Crafts bases her own intellectual growth in this process, relying on errant memory and its indeterminacy over the directed intentionality of book learning. Trappe’s characterization as a learned villain is appropriate within the context of Hobbes’s
critique of book learning as ignorance, or the inability to choose. As we will see, while Crafts is virtuous through her independence in crafting her self, Trappe is trapped by his reliance on book learning and succumbs to the evils of custom, which support slavery.

Locke and Hume echo Hobbes’s opinion of experience and book learning. For Locke, who discusses the importance of assent, “misemploy[ing] their power of Assent, by lazily enslaving their Minds, to the Dictates and Dominion of others, in Doctrines, which it is their duty carefully to examine, and not blindly, with an implicit faith, to swallow” is foolish. Instead, people must “let their Thoughts loose” (51). Locke further muses that “the busy and boundless Fancy of Man” receives all of its “materials of reason and knowledge” from “Experience: in that, all our knowledge is founded, and from that ultimately derives it self” (54). Wheatley’s boundless fancy, then, is painted by experience, not by education alone. Locke, like Hobbes, also believes that memory serves to restore and channel what is stored up in fancy. Like both Locke and Hobbes, Hume also believes that “It is therefore by EXPERIENCE only, that we can infer the existence from one object from that of another” (1427). With firm finality, Hume declares that no form of knowledge acquisition “can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority” (138). Crafts, in A Bondwoman’s Narrative, builds a poetics of errant memory through experience. Crafts declares her independence from indoctrination and subverts the laws against teaching enslaved persons how to read and write by affirming the power of experiential knowledge and errant memory. In short, not only does Crafts continue what Wheatley started, but she also further explores the liberating potential imbedded in the act of remembering in its purest form. Crafts, however, has a different paratextual reification to contend with, one that seeks to orient her text and her person within democratic history from a place of looking back in conceited historical narrativization, rather than a place of looking forward in
This effort to place Crafts within a restricting tradition is both confounded and directed by her authorial status. Hannah Crafts’s true identity is not known. As a result, the author of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, rediscovered by Henry Louis Gates, remains uncertain. Even with Gates’s full efforts in trying to authenticate authorship, the reader must be satisfied with Hannah Crafts as both author and main character of the text. This gives *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* a unique place within the tradition of African American letters, and a powerfully transformative one. Crafts refuses to be constrained by the paratextual elements that would seek to define her as an author tied exclusively to writing about what it means to be a slave and what it means to be “African.” Crafts transcends this imposed identity through errant memory. Like Wheatley embraces indeterminate fancy, Crafts channels the chaos of experiential memory culled from her contact with and interpretation of nature. Like Dred, Crafts uses a version of the maroon experience in her repeated escapes from society to this chaotic sanctuary of nature. Like Turner, Crafts dictates interpretation by manipulating literary conventions and the Enlightenment philosophies surrounding rationality, memory, and experience as it defines being human. Unlike all three of these figures, however, Crafts exists as both author and character, narrator and listener, in a novel that defies convention in being both an autobiography and a work of fiction. The lack of a definitive direction in terms of genre, along with the lack of authorial authenticity, makes *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* an errant text truly devoted to the space of literature as a space of disorientation, choice, and the generative chaos of errant memory. Crafts’s articulation of errant memory takes the form of interpretation through her figuration of experiential knowledge. Unlike the translatio imperii and translatio studii so imperative to the continuation of universal history through American Exceptionalism, Crafts embraces the chaotic in experience
and fugitive memory, both physical and human. The errant mnemonics of experiential knowledge continue the lineage of literary tradition established by Wheatley by transforming the apparent reality of lineage rooted in and routed through the universal narrative of democratic history. Crafts juxtaposes the experiential memory of chaotic nature to the lineal traditions of translation imperii and studii, which take the form of learning from the authority of others.\textsuperscript{Lxi}

The attractiveness of this text lies primarily in its relative obscurity, even a decade after its so-called discovery by Henry Louis Gates. While criticism on The Bondwoman’s Narrative certainly exists, not much has appeared after the initial flux of interest upon its discovery. Concerned as it is with the life of an enslaved woman of ambiguous racial status, a large contingency of scholars devote many pages to this issue. I want to start my discussion of this radical text with this discussion for several reasons. First, the book itself is deeply concerned not merely with race, but with how race is read upon a person through various historically produced and publicly consented-to tropes. As I noted in my introduction, the printing press, including fiction, played a central role in determining racial roles and boundaries. The imagined community of white supremacy, articulated through the paratexts attached to African American literature, is at work once again with Crafts’s text, despite the fact that the book was never published. Instead, (and to bring me nicely to my next point), the paratexts are produced contemporarily by those who now perform the task that would have been undertaken by Crafts’s potential publishers and reading public. Like Wheatley, Crafts must stand in front of a jury of her peers, albeit more than a century later. This demonstrates, more than anything, the pervasiveness of these reading practices and their printed paratextual manifestations. In other words, the concerns of the text anticipate the concerns of the reader. These readers, then, present my first and primary paratextual element. Finally, this discussion has done much to determine the
reception of Crafts’s book, inserting it into a tradition which restricts writers of African descent from doing the very thing Crafts does in her book: refuse racial readerly assignments in favor of errant self-actualization based within the self’s experience. What is exposed through Crafts scholarship, then, is that even today the practice of obliterating the complex ontology of black author and work continues to serve the important function of perpetuating a historical narrative that can only be written with these authors and their works as flat and stock characters, not as round protagonists.

The uniqueness of The Bondwoman’s Narrative lies not just in the narrator’s deep and complex articulation of slavery, but also in her theorization of the self that is based on a critical interpretation of Enlightenment ideals of rationality as it relates to humanity. The narrator of the text, who is also named as the author, begins this complex discussion of the self on the title page. Here, the reader has to contend with the highly irrational idea that, as an autobiography, The Bondwoman’s Narrative has no authorial source or root to which said reader can refer the information he or she receives. Upon finding the text, Henry Louis Gates spends a considerable amount of energy not only trying to find out exactly who the author is, but also describing this process to the reader. In fact, the introduction to this text is not only allographic in that it is written posthumously, but the information Gates provides within it seems more geared towards concretizing the author as an actual person than introducing the text of the book. In other words, Gates commits the same act as the nemeses Hannah encounters in the book: he is more concerned with defining her then with letting her define herself. Although Gates does use information given in the text in his quest for authorial certainty, the use of this information is meant to restrict the possibilities of Hannah’s identity as much as possible. As is the case with all of the texts discussed in this dissertation, Hannah defies these paratexual efforts, even after her
death. In fact, the lack of true authorial certainty adds to the power of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* in subverting the given roles of authors of color. Hannah’s journey towards self-actualization, then, begins in the current moment, when we as readers look back from our own time and impose on her work a need for rootedness. This text needs an orientation, and an orientation is possible only if there is a person behind it with a purpose in mind. However, within the space of literature, a space where intentional orientation is impossible, Hannah is truly free to craft her self independent of even the best intentions to define her.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Continuing along Gates’s line of inquiry, many scholars offer theories on Crafts’s identity as well as on the authenticity of the text as an autobiography. However, to these scholars, the text can be an autobiography only if Crafts is Hannah, and only if Hannah is in fact black. The important work recently done by Gregg Hecimovich in seemingly determining Crafts’s identity as the black “Hannah Bond…revolutionizes our understanding of the canon of black women’s literature,” and Hollis Robins has called it a “‘tremendous’ finding” (Bosman 1). It is as if the confirmation of Hannah’s blackness, through her status as a slave, confirms the authenticity and worthiness of the book to the African American literary tradition. However, according to others, Hannah’s status as a slave does nothing for the veracity of the book. Instead, it must be about race. One particularly telling article that addresses this issue is Celeste-Marie Bernier and Judy Newman’s “*The Bondwoman’s Narrative: Text, Paratext, Intertext and Hypertext*.” In this article, the authors make the provocative claim that Hannah may have been white, a person of Irish descent, or a servant, basing some their argument on the word “Bondwoman” in the title of the book. The authors note,

“Fairly obviously, as far as the market is concerned, the story is only of interest if Hannah is a black ex-slave and this is how the book is sold to readers. Its appeal depends absolutely on
the “fact” of its being authored by a black woman, and its readers are expected to value it according to the marginal and oppressed status of the author, her racial definition, and the particularities of her life. The dominant question is “who was Hannah Crafts?”, not “what can this manuscript tell us about slavery?” or “what literary values does this book have?”.

Paratextual traces – the blurb, back cover, inside cover, notes and title – are part of the marketing process” (149).

While I agree with the sentiment about the importance of the paratextual elements, I do not call them traces, and neither would Genette. As these authors would attest to themselves, the title does important work in terms of framing the way in which Crafts wants Hannah to be read. In this sense, these authors make an important intervention into already established Crafts scholarship, especially in relation to the influence of the first book of essays published with help from Gates. Even if their take on Gates’s work is rather pessimistic in its emphasis on marketability, they are right in exposing the importance Hannah’s, and by extension Crafts’s, social status has in the text’s reception. Just like in the nineteenth century with Wheatley and Turner, Crafts humanity is tied to her book, and vice versa, in the twenty-first century. These authors instead place the value on the book itself. In doing so, however, they echo another dangerous nineteenth-century sentiment, namely the judging of works by authors of African descent on what they can tell us about slavery and whether or not there is any literary value. If these authors did care about the text’s literary value, they would have read it closely enough to notice that Hannah does in fact refer to her African heritage in several important places, and that their question pertaining to her whiteness is moot. Instead, these authors perpetuate the paratextual imagined community of racial determinism. Finally, when discussing a famous passage in which Hannah harshly criticizes people working as slaves in the field, the authors
lament her lack of “a description of the epic noble suffering slave as portrayed by Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb and others; instead it is redolent with the stench and odiousness of a Dickensian poorhouse characterized by the vice and villainy of social outcasts. Crafts is concerned not with reclaiming black humanity or redeeming individuals but with exposing their condition at the bottom of society” (162). As if a lack of an epic noble slave a la Douglass proves their claim that Hannah must be white, these authors limit black humanity to what is supposedly portrayed in works by authors who largely wrote within the social framework of abolitionism. If one is not fighting against slavery or portraying a singular vision of blackness, they must not and cannot be black. It seems that it is impossible for Crafts to transcend the role to which her readers assign her. She cannot be a person of African descent without displaying Africanity, without fulfilling her socially assigned role.

On the other hand, more recent scholarship has painted a more complex picture of Crafts’s work and the tradition of which she is a part. In Robert Levine’s Dislocating Race and Nation, Levine argues that The Bondwoman’s Narrative was part of a literary tradition that “expose[s] the pure white bloodlines touted by white nationalists as little more than fictions, thereby encouraging readers…to develop a skeptical relationship to mythified stories of founding and transmissions, especially as those stories are put to the service of making contemporary hierarchies (racial, economic, and national) seem logical, just, and destined” (121). Levine astutely points to the importance of Hannah’s complex racial self-definition in that it raises questions about the reader’s perception of race and how this perception impacts not only Hannah’s characterization, but also determines the (in)humanity of countless persons. Another example is a recent article by Martha Cutter titled “Skinship: Dialectical Passing Plots in Hannah Crafts’ The Bondwoman's Narrative.” It also paints a much more complex and dynamic picture
of Hannah and her relationship to race. Cutter uses the term “skinship” to articulate a relationship based “not o[n] physicality or blood but o[n] racial affiliation—Hannah will only affiliate with other people who show themselves to be culturally “black” by their actions, behaviors, or psychology” (130). Cutter’s intervention is important because it highlights that “a racial unity is a matter of consent, a choice—and that not all individuals historically configured as “black” in this time period make such a choice” (130). As I have repeated throughout this dissertation, making room for choice in relation to race is vital to allowing ourselves as readers to give black intellectuals and authors their proper due. In terms of The Bondwoman’s Narrative, Cutter’s exposition on Hannah’s choice in the tradition of Robert Reid-Pharr foregrounds my own assertion that Crafts participates and perpetuates the lineage of errant memory begun by Phillis Wheatley. Like Wheatley and Turner, Hannah produces a personal space within the confines of memory while un-producing the abstract space of history, and like them, Crafts’s errantry lies not merely in her act of writing or even her unique engagement with her own blackness, but also in her choice to situate her self within the Enlightenment traditions of Freedom, memory, and Spirit. In short, Crafts seeks to craft her self within the chaos of her experiential, affective act of remembering that defies the narrow definition of trauma while simultaneously refusing to be swallowed whole by the forward plunging of teleological, universal history. After all, memory becomes traumatic only when its unwanted appearance disrupts the predetermined flow of an already existing narrative that seeks to streamline countless and constant acts of remembering into an organized and determining movement of collective consciousness called history. Not only does Crafts’s skinship disrupt historical definitions of race, it also signals a choice to embrace, rather than repress, errant memory. Experiential chaos, then, is the signification of Wheatley’s fancy and Dred’s maroon aesthetic.
Hannah’s engagement with the enlightenment principles of Freedom, Spirit, and memory demonstrate the lingering importance of these elements to our current efforts to understand and organize our world. More importantly, her unique and complex interpretation of these elements can only be articulated in a book. This is so because Hannah is concerned with the mnemonic element of experience over the historical element of knowledge derived from instruction. In other words, Hannah relies on learning “at the subconscious level,” learning that comes experientially, over learning that requires one to sacrifice the self forged through choice for a self based on given directions by others.¹xiv This conflict manifests itself in the book through Hannah’s struggle with lineal history. Yi Fu Tuan, whose ideas of space and place are discussed in the introduction, provides an excellent but brief exposition on the importance of experiential knowledge:

“A large body of experiential data is consigned to oblivion because we cannot fit the data to concepts that are taken over uncritically from the physical sciences. Our understanding of human reality suffers as a result…Blindness to experience is in fact a human condition. We rarely attend to what we know. We attend to what we know about; we are aware of a kind of reality because it is the kind that we can easily show and tell. We know far more than what we can tell, yet we almost come to believe that what we can tell is all we know…experiences are slighted or ignored because the means to articulate them or point them out are lacking” (201).¹lxv

Tuan here discusses the contemporary obsession with objective fact over subjective experience. However, this applies to the predicament of enslaved persons in the 19th century as well. In the 19th century, objectivity was consigned to the realm of literacy and learning from books. As we have discovered, Enlightenment philosophy did not treasure objectivity and the authority of
others. Hannah, as a slave, discusses how she does not have access to this type of learning. Instead, she relies on experience to teach her what she needs to know. She returns to this idea often and contrasts it with the knowledge of those who impose her identity as an “African” and a slave on her. The knowledge of her oppressors is not just rooted in book learning, but also in lineal history. Hannah uses the very space from which she is excluded to articulate her experiential knowledge. Through synecdoche, symbolism, allegory, and complex characterization, Hannah is able to articulate her own conception of what it means to be a rational being and what it means to be human. The space of literature, as a space of disorientation and uncertainty, is the perfect space for Hannah to practice her own unique version of freedom grounded in choosing errant memory.

While it seems that Hannah, in her apparent denial of any affiliation with antebellum ideations of blackness, actually sympathizes with the Hegelian idea of Freedom, her allegorization of nature as the space of experiential knowledge shows that Hannah differs markedly from these ideas, which ground themselves primarily in rationality, literacy, and the transference of knowledge and power through the construction of history. Instead, Hannah privileges the errant memory of natural (read experiential) knowledge. As Hegel himself said, “In all African kingdoms with which Europeans have become acquainted, slavery is indigenous…It is the basis of slavery in general that a person does not yet have consciousness of his freedom and thereby becomes an object, something worthless. The lesson we derive from this, and which alone interests us is that the state of nature [before the establishment of a state] is one of injustice.”

Hegel establishes a person associated with the African continent as non-human based on that person’s lack of freedom, or lack of an established state within which he or she can practice his
or her freedom. Moreover, Hegel makes this point self-referential, meaning that persons related to his idea of Africa have not achieved Freedom because they cannot think of themselves as free (read again existing in a state to which he or she sacrifices his or her self for participation in the greater collective consciousness). Slavery is then a result of a lack of freedom, or a lack of a state. However, it is also a result of a lack of consciousness, or the ability to experience and interpret the world around them. Most important is that Hegel links slavery with nature, and that he brands a state of nature (carefully chosen words) as one of injustice. Hannah’s linking experience with her own rationality and attainment of self-consciousness and freedom places her outside of this state of nature. What becomes evident as one reads her book is that, like Turner and Wheatley, Hannah intentionally redefines Hegel’s state of nature so as to avoid the state of (in)justice, in which she is not a human but a slave, and whose structure is created mainly to keep her imposed identity as a slave upon her like the proverbial yoke. Hannah’s interpretation of Hegel is not only acute, but errant as well. Like Phillis Wheatley, Hannah uses errant memory to articulate her own ideas of freedom and existence. As we shall see, this idea of the self relies on Hannah’s choice to see these memories as part of herself, as opposed to an interruption of that self. Through this embrace, Hannah exists squarely outside of the confines of history.

Hannah's awareness of her racial status as being imposed on her unfairly signifies her astuteness in relation to her status as a rational being. Specifically, Hannah's self-actualization as a rational being, stemming from her errant memory, is based primarily on her belief that she is separate but equal to others upon whom is imposed the same racial signification (Cutter may call this skinship). The moment Hannah first notices the power of her racial markers parallels similar moments in other slave narratives, most notably that of Frederick Douglass. However, she differs markedly from Douglass and others who are placed within the slave narrative tradition by
separating herself from the group she is forthwith forced to join. \(^{lxvi}\) Hannah "soon learned that the African blood running in [her] veins would forever exclude [her] from the higher walks of life. That toil unremitting unpaid toil must be [her] lot and portion, without even the hope or expectation of anything better" (Crafts 6). Hannah's lot and portion, like her contemporaries, must be unpaid toil. Immediately Hannah highlights the unfairness of her unpaid labor to her self-perceived status as a woman with "African" blood. She knows better than to believe that her lot as a slave is inevitable. Instead, Hannah figures her plight as a slave as she does her plight as a black woman: both are a matter of imposed circumstance, albeit one she cannot avoid. The real source of pathos for the reader, then, is the fact that a woman like Hannah, who sees herself as "mostly white" (6), has blackness and, by extension, slavery, forced upon her. Hannah turns the pivotal moment of self-actualization, marred by a tradition of conceding power to those who read race into the person in question, into a moment of self-imposed signification. Instead of confirming her reader's image of herself as a black enslaved woman, Hannah crafts a white woman unfairly enslaved due to the virtually invisible "African" blood running through her veins.

Hannah's self-imposed plight as a woman enslaved by her perceived Africanity is further complicated when she dictates what aspects of her African heritage become visible to the reader. By refusing to distance herself completely from her status as a person of African descent, even while she seems to embrace her status as a white woman, Hannah crafts herself into a breathing force of errantry in the vein of Phillis Wheatley. At first, Hannah seems to distance herself from her blackness when she bluntly states, "This seemed the harder to be borne, because my complexion was almost white, and the obnoxious descent could not be readily traced" (6). Hannah again places the responsibility of birthing her own blackness on herself. Next, Hannah
plays with the importance of lineage and vertical rootedness, something she will return to, by implying what Orlando Patterson calls social death in the difficulty of tracing an obnoxious descent. Hannah is careful here not to explicitly name blackness as the descent. Instead, she leaves it open for her readers to determine what she is referring to, a brilliant rhetorical strategy because it again places the responsibility of producing this Africanity squarely on the reader. The reader, then, inevitably traces the idea of blackness to him or herself. Hannah, on the other hand, chooses to focus on an entirely different aspect of her African descent, modifying the previous sentence and shifting the burden of responsibility back to herself: "though it gave a rotundity to my person, a wave and curl to my hair, and perhaps led me to fancy pictorial illustrations and flaming colors" (6). Next to directly referencing the centrality pictures will have to her engagement with her lineage, Hannah notes an awareness of her fancy, or that mysterious faculty that lies between perception and memory, by declaring that her attraction to pictures and colors is based in her African blood, echoing Wheatley’s fancy and her ability to harness its power as a result of her experience of mnemonic death as an enslaved person of African descent. More importantly, Hannah's image of herself shows a person who struggles with her status as a person of color, showing both apprehension and appreciation for her African descent. It is this choice that carries through the rest of the book an errantry that physically manifests itself in Hannah's exile from society.

Hannah's preoccupation with lineage manifests itself most obviously within the De Vincent house, where her errant process of self-crafting clashes with the established inheritance of evil that haunts the household and the family that occupies it. Hannah does not use the gothic element conventionally, using memories instead of ghosts to convey the evil lurking within the walls of the house. The source of these memories is a willow tree, which presents the location of
gruesome violence to a black woman's body. Again, Hannah engages oft-used elements of slave narration, again making the primary site of violence the female body. However, Hannah does not allow the reader to implicate this body with his or her cathartic spectatorship. Hannah houses Rose's ghost not in the Linden tree, but within the memories of the readers themselves (including Sir Clifford, who reads Rose as a body upon which he can exercise his power). By doing this, Hannah frees Rose from the unremitted toil of haunting the text with her violated body. Instead, it is the trauma of the violence committed to Rose, carved into the Linden tree, that haunts the house and the people in it. This haunting is starkly contrasted with Hannah’s memory of Rose and her ability to discern the historical forces responsible for Rose’s fate. More importantly, however, Hannah engages the lineal structures of the De Vincent house by bringing her own body into the room of the above mentioned pictures. These pictures, next to visually displaying the history of the De Vincent house, provide a medium through which Hannah can begin to craft her self and her freedom.

Hannah's first engagement with Hegelian freedom also comes in the picture room, a place supersaturated with history. The room consists of "person and lineaments, side by side with that of his Lady. The ceremonial of hanging up these portraits was usually made the occasion of a great festivity" (16). The ritual hanging up of the next line of the De Vincent family, complete with the Lady who would bring forth the next generation, implies the teleological and progressive nature of the room. This is why the current De Vincent, "unaccompanied by [a portrait] of a Lady," is hung without the "usual demonstration of mirth and rejoicing" (16). While Hannah is aware of the historical and teleological importance of the ritualized room, she is more interested in the "memories of the dead":

"I was not a slave with these pictured memorials of the past. They could not enforce
drudgery, or condemn me on account of my color to a life of servitude. As their companion I could think and speculate. In their presence my mind seemed to run riotous and exult in its freedom as a rational being, and one destined for something higher and better than this world can afford" (17).

Instead of focusing on the historical narrative these pictures try to create, Hannah chooses to focus on the space of memory created by them, a space that puts the power within the viewer/reader of the pictures. Hannah, echoing both Hume and Wheatley, finds in the ceremony of memorialization the very reifying force to which she herself is subjected. Like the persons in the pictures are forever reduced to an existence within the specific De Vincent lineal history, Hannah, as a person of African descent and a slave, is constantly reduced to an existence within the confines of her Africanity. Furthermore, by echoing Hume and Wheatley, Hannah reminds the reader of her “fancy” for pictures, which now refers back to Wheatley’s “running riotous” and Hume’s genius. The pictures do not merely interest her, they provide for her a model in which she can stand face to face with her oppressors on equal ontological footing. The current De Vincent, hung without a lady, is rendered impotent and useless within the narrative of progress and reproduction from which Hannah is excluded. Hannah and De Vincent are equals in this place of memorialization.

As if on cue, Mrs. Bry attempts to put Hannah back in her place, wondering "if such an ignorant thing as you are would know any thing about them" (17). Without missing a step, Hannah responds to the accusation of ignorance, an accusation that echoes the sentiment of exclusivity contained within the drawing room itself, by affirming her status as a human being. More importantly, Hannah responds to Mrs. Bry's accusation of ignorance, a word to which many persons of African descent are forcibly tied: "Ignorance, forsooth. Can ignorance quench
the immortal mind or prevent its feeling at times the indications of its heavenly origin. Can it destroy that deep abiding appreciation of the beautiful that seems inherent to the human soul?" (17-8). Instead of denying ignorance altogether, Hannah instead reinforces the power of "the immortal mind," which even the most ignorant person has. Moreover, Hannah frames ignorance in diction that links it to slavery. Like a slave master, ignorance may try but ultimately fails to suppress the inherent knowledge of a slave's "heavenly origin." Hannah makes her presence within the drawing room an act of errant remembering. Hannah remembers her divine origin, thereby proving the existence of her immortal mind. The act of remembering, in other words, is an inherent act beyond the control and reach of what Mrs. Bry implies is the only cure for ignorance: a proper education and, of course, the ability to be properly educated, an ability persons of African descent were not believed to possess. Instead, Hannah channels Hobbes and reveals the limits of Mrs. Bry’s learned knowledge of the pictures and what they represent. Mrs. Bry, personifying ignorance, cannot indeed quench Hannah’s immortal mind.

Mrs. Bry's nasty remark is not the thing the reader is left with by chapter's end. On the contrary, Hannah's claim to her own humanity is the last word. As such, Hannah denies Mrs. Bry and the reader the comfort of ignorance. What Hannah experiences in the drawing room is the real moment of self-actualization that presents the unifying motif for the rest of the book. Where many slave narratives revolve around the author's status as a slave, Hannah's autobiographical work centers around her status as a person. Most important of all, Hannah establishes here the importance of natural knowledge to humanity against acquired knowledge, setting up a dichotomy of sorts that further serves to challenge the supremacy of historical teleology. Hannah finishes her speech by highlighting the importance of natural human faculties shared by all. She says, "Can [ignorance] seal up the fountains of truth and all intuitive perception of life, death and
eternity? I think not. Those to whom man teaches little, nature like a wise and prudent mother teaches much" (18, emphasis mine). The fountain metaphor highlights the affective and uncontrollable way in which the errant mnemonics of experiential memory flow from its source, despite even man-made obstructions. Nature, the wise and prudent mother, replaces man as the teacher of the two most treasured and valued aspects of knowledge: truth and the perception of life, death, and eternity. Hannah carries the sentiment that nature provides humankind with the only knowledge one needs throughout the rest of the text. By redefining the requirements for human self-perception and by relocating it in experiential faculties instead of man-given ones, Hannah further establishes herself as a human first, and an enslaved human second. Hobbes would have been proud.

The foil to Hannah's experiential knowledge is Mr. Trappe, whose "ravenous" hunger for gold is awakened by his "hunting, delving, and digging into family secrets" (45). Mr. Trappe is not just an embodiment of learned knowledge; he is also a manifestation of the evils of history. In “The Problem of Freedom in the Bondwoman’s Narrative,” John Stauffer argues “that Crafts is not this practical, instead using the space of literature to produce a conflict between the force represented by Trappe and Hannah’s individual struggles, as well as playing with reader’s expectations” (64). It is the way in which Crafts sets up this conflict that demands attention. On the one hand, Mr. Trappe exists within the epistemic confines of universal history. He is driven by greed, or by a desire for improvement through the unnatural means of accruing unlimited wealth. He is, in other words, a capitalist. Through Trappe the reader comes to see that history, progress, and Freedom are all systems that promote unscrupulous greed that is fed by the oppression and exclusion of others. Trappe is the quintessential example of Freedom as it is defined by Hegel, Rousseau, and those who dictate the formation of the American myth. His
hunger for power is a positive, a sign that he desires more than is given to him. In addition, Trappe is a scholar of family histories. This particular discipline ties in directly with the lineal import of historical knowledge. Levine aptly describe Trappe as a “bloodhound…[who] pursues fugitives not through the swamps, rivers, and forests, but through paper trails of blood” (Dislocating 172). Lineal history presents the intersection at which meet the teleological ideals of improvement and progress, the scholastic systems of knowledge and literacy, and the Spirit of willing more for one's self than nature gives. Crafts produces this complex intersection by crafting Trappe as the antagonist of her story. Hannah, then, is not so much struggling against the evils of the Peculiar Institution as she is struggling against history and Freedom.

Trappe’s obsession with lineal histories as they pertain to people of African descent is a synecdoche for society’s obsession with the same thing. Like the strange power the one-drop rule gives to African heritage to overpower white lineage, African ancestry possesses the power to undo whiteness and, by extension, the power to uproot individuals from their family lines and their Freedom. Here individual memory is supplanted by the collective memory of a society that defines whiteness as essentially not being of African descent and a slave, or vice versa. As Trappe reveals to Hannah’s mistress, “You are not the first fair dame whose descent I have traced back—far back to a sable son of Africa” (98). Trappe literally has to read race into a person to reap the rewards of the person’s subsequent Fall. The author crafts a complicated allegory, where Trappe and his actions stand in for the reader of her text and their inevitable search for her lineage, be it historical or literary. Like Gates, Trappe has to spend copious amounts of time to determine any lineage back to Africa. In a moment of pure situational irony, Trappe reveals that the idea of social death that is so important to American notions of what makes a slave is preposterous, since he himself traces back such a lineage. Trappe must first find the lineal line to
be able to cut it. Once found, Trappe has the person’s “destiny…in [his] hands” (98). What disqualifies one from participation in democratic history, then, is not an absence of lineage, but a presence of a specific lineage. Trappe, as a complicated allegory for a complicated process of historical erasure, becomes the antithesis of Hannah’s experiential knowledge. Trappe’s unnatural usury, his greed for wealth that has no end, reflects his unnatural hunger for knowledge, as is reflected by his books. Against these forces Hannah must struggle to preserve her self through experiential memory.

Hannah's struggle with Trappe is defined by a space saturated with *translatio studii* and written literacy. This space is not rooted or localized in place, but instead is produces whenever Hannah and Trappe find themselves in Trappe's preferred environment: a space filled with books. Even in the De Vincent house, Trappe has a "room," a room that is his because of the "great pile of books and papers" (45). The apartment's "chief furniture was books and bundles of papers. There were books on the floor, books in the corners, and books heaped up and piled up in an antique cupboard" (46). Hannah paints Trappe's room to reflect his primary function as a character: to represent the antithesis to Cartesian experiential learning. Unlike Hannah, who overcomes her exclusion from learning by embracing her innate abilities and experience, Trappe represents one who has had the luxury (or curse) of having had his pure memory replaced with memories crafted outside of himself, memories he must seek and ones that, like wealth, he can accrue forever. He is described like a hoarder who zealously pours over book after book. It is no coincidence that Hannah links Trappe's thirst for knowledge to a thirst for gold. Furthermore, here Hannah solidifies the connection she creates between "unnatural" learning and Freedom. Like Freedom, this kind of learning is exclusionary in nature, even while it is lauded as the exemplar of democracy. Hannah's exclusion from learning to read parallels her exclusion from
Freedom and history. Her perceived ignorance, or her inability to remember herself and, by extension, anything that is taught her, disqualifies her from entering Trappe's space of existence. Once again, the clash over lineage serves as the meeting point for these complex forces, a place where Hannah's immortal mind is tested for the first time.

Hannah's first great challenge comes from a single piece of paper, one that does not even concern her. However, the information this piece of paper contains, which Hannah’s mistress reads, challenges her immortal mind because it pertains to lineal history, something her memory has failed to give her. It is no coincidence that Hannah allows her mistress to take over the narration of the text, suggesting a mnemonic link between the two storytellers. This link is further established by the eerily similar actions Hannah and her mistress take within the space of the house. Like Hannah, the mistress “asks to hear the legend connected with Sir Clifford’s portrait…or speaks gloomily of the linden and its dreary creak.” The mistress even “shuns Mrs Bry” (35). It is as if the mistress, upon entering the house, performs the same actions that Hannah did. Hannah affirms her experiential memory by proving that she could just as well have been her mistress, since she holds that status only because Africanity has not yet been imposed on her like it has been with Hannah and Lizzy. After Trappe urges Hannah’s mistress to "examine this paper," he holds it "towards [her] old, and torn, and yellow with age. I took it and commenced reading. At first I could make nothing of it. I could not understand the horrible truth thus presented to me" (47). Hannah’s mistress can make nothing of the truth she knows is in front of her because it is articulated to her through a medium from which she is excluded. Her freedom, her intelligence, and her mnemonic self cannot function in Trappe’s scholastic space. Even though she “reads and re-reads,” the “mystery unfold[s]” as if separate from her ability to read and understand. Instead, Hannah’s mistress says, “I perceived the worst and what I was, and
must never be” (47). This piece of paper outlines the mistress’s identity both in the positive and negative. However, even though it tells her who she is and will never be, it does so within the dangerous space and bound by the inherently exclusionary rules of Western linear and lineal history. The mistress’s supposed lineage, proven by a written document, challenges her radical claim to an errant, even maroon, mode of relational existence as a black woman passing for white. This challenge, which takes the form of an affirmation of her above-mentioned imposed “African” identity, undermines her choice of self-perception. Unlike Hannah, Hannah’s mistress does not trust or rely on her experiential knowledge. The little piece of paper establishing her lineage places her within a historical narrative and stunts her mnemonic faculties.

Hannah’s mistress’s participation in history, brought about by Trappe, the agent of Western teleology, necessitates her inability to remember. This inability is the essence of historical participation. The primary conflict of this dissertation has been between a participation in the democratic narrative of history, which requires a relinquishing of personal choice in favor of participation in the collective memory of a state, and errant memory, which simultaneously promotes self-actualization and reliance and allows one to transcend collective consciousness through an awareness of its inner workings. However, as Hannah points out, escape, and the choice inherent in this act, is escape not just from slavery, but also a reunion with the self through experience. Hannah’s reaction to Trappe’s trap is emblematic of the process of sacrifice mentioned above, the sacrificing of personal memory and personal choice to an acknowledgement of identity rooted in the past and routed towards a determined future of slavery and, more generally, participation in democratic history. However, what Hannah makes clear in her own narrative is that this process is violent and coercive. This, then, is how the space of literature becomes a space of errant memory. Whether *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* is
autobiographical or not, or whether Hannah Crafts is the actual author of the book, the narrator can engage larger philosophical questions and explode established beliefs without the risk of bodily harm within her book. The space of literature, as a space of exile and errantry, allows for Hannah to make choices, both as a character and as an author, independent of her imposed Africanity. What Hannah does, then, is craft an African identity free from limits and constraints. Instead, Hannah’s Africanness flows through choice and change.

The mistress’s fainting after realizing the information contained within Trappe’s document is emblematic of the coerced appropriation into the historical narrative. Since the reader is subjected to Hannah’s gaze, the reader also experiences an intense lapse in narrative flow and continuity. This narrative collapse presents Hannah’s way of disorienting the reader, giving said reader the same negative reaction to Trappe’s scholastic obsession with lineage. Hannah here mimics the errant mnemonic process of a breaking in of remembered experiences into the weakened state of consciousness. However, Hannah embraces and harnesses this memory to complete her narrative. Hannah’s mistress falls “to the floor without sense or motion” (47). She moves without moving, and knows she is falling without sensing. In other words, Hannah’s mistress knows she fell only because she wakes up on the floor. She does not remember falling. Instead, she has only a “confused recollection. My thoughts were in Chaos. I was half mad, half-wild” (47). This chaos is similar to Wheatley’s dream state in that it allows “confused recollections” to infiltrate her consciousness. The mistress’s madness is the same madness which Hobbes attaches to fancy and its realm of dreams. Here, half-wild, Hannah’s mistress is free from the implications of Trappe’s attempted plan: to frame her within a lineal narrative that would tie her, like Hannah herself, to an imposed Africanity designed to take away her freedom. This is done by taking away her free movement, enacted through her passing as
white, within an historical narrative in which she, as a woman of African descent, is tied to the perceived limitations of her race. The narrative collapse further increases the parallels between Hannah and her mistress. Hannah leaves it up to the reader to remember that Hannah is not telling this story. Hannah often does this throughout her book, giving other characters the freedom to tell their own stories within hers. This instance of errant memory transcends the narrative convention of having one narrator tell or otherwise influence the stories of her characters. Instead, Hannah allows her mistress to break into her narration like an errant memory, subjecting the reader to her memories and point of view. The Chaos, then, is the book itself, a space in which people like Hannah’s mistress act as personifications of errant memory.

Hannah’s solution to her mistress’s problem, even to her own problem, is to literally flee to nature to escape the bounds of history. After her mistress asks Hannah for advice, Hannah points out that “it becomes not a slave to advise.” However, she “thinks the question might be satisfactorily answered” (48). Hannah’s status as a slave belies her intellect, and her mistress’s reliance on her opinion indicates a breakdown in the master-slave dialectic. The act of fleeing that Hannah suggests is an act of plunging into the chaos of the maroon. The future becomes uncertain, and the past must be forgotten, indicated by her mistress leaving Lizzy and everything that she holds dear to her self-image. Like Hannah, her mistress must dissolve the ties that bind her to her whiteness in order to erase those that tie her to a specific iteration of blackness. The final transformative act the mistress engages in is one for Hannah as well. After the mistress commands Hannah to “Call [her] mistress no longer. Henceforth you shall be to me as a very dear sister,” the mistress’s “transformation was sudden and complete,” due mainly to her “impulsive nature” (48). Learned ties based on written historical evidence are replaced by experienced ties based on memory. Even though the mistress had been enjoying relative freedom
up to the point of her revelation with Trappe, she laments, “Oh: to be free, to be free” (48), as if she had been a slave for life. The freedom she seeks, then, is an errant freedom, a freedom in her choosing her sister and fearing the uncertain future of their escape. In nature they find a “lonely and desolate place,” with loneliness being their “security,” and “at least we should be free” (66). In nature Hannah and her mistress are free to practice their relational bond and their existence free from the ties of lineage and history. Like Dred, Hannah and her mistress embrace the errantry of nature, a self-imposed exile from the erasure inherent in universality.

The two women’s second encounter with Trappe further cements the sovereignty of experiential intellect over scholastic historical learning. Trappe’s greed for understanding, his hoarding of infinite knowledge stored forever in books, is juxtaposed to Hannah’s “impulsive” rationality. While hiding away from society, Hannah pontificates one of her more profound ideas, worth quoting in full: “But those who think that the greatest evils of slavery are connected with physical suffering possess no just or rational ideas of human nature. The soul, the immortal soul must ever long and yearn for a thousand things inseparable to liberty” (94). With one thought, begotten in the solitude of nature, Hannah crushes the very foundation upon which abolitionist propaganda is built by calling those who focus on the physical suffering of enslaved individuals irrational and unjust. Abolitionism, housed as it is within the walls of teleological history and white supremacy, can never accurately articulate the horror of being enslaved, a horror that invades even the isolation of the two women’s natural refuge. The “fear…the dread, and the deep anxiety” (94) come not with an uncertainty of the future, but rather with a certainty of transience. The dread lies exactly in knowing that, as a person marked within the linear and lineal history of Western expansion, one has only one possible future as a non-person within that system. For Hannah and her mistress, Trappe represents that certainty. He is the embodiment of the fear and
dread that are inseparable from and truly endemic to being a slave.

The heaviest engagement with the tyranny of history and the illusion of Freedom comes, ironically enough, from Trappe himself. In true ideological fashion, Trappe is fully aware of the system he perpetuates with his practices. Moreover, Trappe’s self-awareness is appropriate to Hannah’s claim above. Trappe is learned, rational, and just in that his actions are allowed within the legal system of the time, as he himself points out. Trappe’s rationality leads him to acknowledge that people like himself are the truest agents of history. Trappe does not worship lineal history. Instead, he uses it to gain wealth and power. However, Trappe’s speech on Freedom seems out of place even for him:

“We are all slaves to something or somebody. A man perfectly free would be an anomaly, and a free woman yet more so. Freedom and slavery are only names attached surreptitiously and often improperly to certain conditions and in many cases the slave possesses more. They are mere shadows the very reverse of realities, and being so, if rightly considered, they have only a trifling effect on individual happiness” (97, italics indicates crossed-out section).

The reader must not forget that Trappe is not the author of the text. The closest indication we have of the author is the name of the narrator. Because of this, Trappe’s oddly insightful comment on Freedom and its antithesis, slavery, seem more indigenous to Hannah’s philosophy. In any case, Trappe here articulates a version of Locke and Hegel’s principles of government and state. However, what brings Trappe’s theory into the space of Chaos is the phrase that is crossed out in the text, shown above in red. Trappe says that in many cases slaves have more Freedom. First, we must consider Crafts’s choice in removing this sentence from her narrative. While it is obvious that she attempts to anticipate the argument of one like Trappe, who resembles a pro-slavery capitalist who would argue that those enslaved have it better than some of the wage
laborers, it is more likely that the narrator/author’s own sensibilities seep into Trappe’s speech. If this is the case, then the phrase is in fact pointing to the true nature of Freedom: that those who are enslaved possess more simply because they define the concept for others, and that in Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, the slave defines the master’s reality while being defined by the master’s. Slaves literally define Freedom. In other words, Trappe points to the true meaning of Freedom, a truth that would be hard to accept for anyone, especially readers of the 1850’s. The effaced phrase has an even greater impact on the sentence that comes after it. While without the erased phrase the subject of this sentence is clearly the ideas of Freedom and slavery as mere labels (another dangerous idea), with the phrase the sentence could also have the aforementioned slaves as its subject, in which case Trappe is figuring slaves as shadows and the reverse of reality. By erasing it, Hannah inadvertently (or not) brings more attention to this nebulous phrase. In metonymic fashion, the phrase acts like a declaration of the errant freedom found in solitude and nature. The labels, as well as the people subjected to them, are reverse realities. In true Hegelian fashion, the master is slave and the slave master.

Trappe is just, or lawful, in his treatment of Hannah and her mistress, which says more about the system of law in place than it does about Trappe. Engaging the idea of consent, Trappe taps into the collective consciousness of the state, justifying his actions on grounds of support from his fellow countrymen. Even if most of his countrymen do not agree with his actions, the fact that the law of the nation condones his behavior is a powerful testament to the importance of his actions in sustaining the status quo. Trappe’s conscience is directly linked to the national conscience, both of which do not feel “troubled” (98). Trappe’s twisted logic has it that “it is rather the fault of the law that permits it than of me who profits by it.” Since the law cannot be held accountable, due to the fact that it is not a person, but rather a system based on the consent
of the governed, Trappe places the blame on the people of the United States for allowing persons like him to exist. Again, Trappe levels a heavy critique against the United States trying to save face. As he makes clear, “Whatever the law permits, and public opinion encourages I do, when that says stop I go no further” (98). Here, the author exposes Trappe as a synecdoche for the system of law that governs the United States. Rather, Trappe reflect the conscience of the community. His morality exists in public opinion, just like the United States. His conscience is democratic. In this case, public opinion supports the entrapment and abuse of Hannah and her mistress. The pleas of Hannah and her mistress are powerless mainly because they are not engaging a man but a state. Trappe, the white man who profits from lineal history, presents an acute and complex allegory for the history of the United States. The system of law completes this complex literary device. Through Trappe, Crafts actively seeks to point out and alter this social system that enslaves her by forcing her readers to come face to face with their own culpability.

The author takes the law as literary device further into the text during a pivotal moment for Hannah’s character development at “Forget me not” (121). Again, when Hannah finds herself in relative safety, her individual freedom and memory is challenged by the collective memory of the state. When Saddler, a slave trader, takes Hannah from Trappe to the next stage of her journey, Hannah once again establishes nature as a space that promotes true mnemonic freedom. As she travels with Saddler, her mind is “too confused and agitated for any close observation.” However, Hannah does remember the natural scenery. Her “anxiety and sorrow gave way before a sensation of pleasure awakened by the vernal influences of nature.” Her pure memory, or what Wheatley would call fancy, chooses to focus on images of nature over the anxiety of being captured, signifying Hannah’s personal freedom to choose within that free floating fancy. After remembering that she is also one of God’s creatures, Hannah falls into a “reverie in which the
past, present, and future seemed indistinctly blended” (111-2). All sense of organized
chronological time falls away. Hannah does not forget her current situation. Instead, she enters
the atemporal space of Chaos. Here, Hannah exists only within her own mind. She produces a
safe space of her own, and is able to do so because Trappe’s presence no longer compels her to
struggle with her Africanity. Even though Saddler is a slave trader, he is not like Trappe. He
“would rather be cheated [himself] than cheat another,” and believes that “public opinion is
arbitrary and unjust,” citing “Very respectable people, honorable gentlemen, grave Senators, and
even the republican President” as people who participate in the slave trade (113). Saddler’s view
reflects popular beliefs that slave traders were no worse, if not better, than slavers themselves, a
product of a class struggle that found slavers condemning traders and vice versa.\textsuperscript{1xx} However,
Saddler’s contention that public opinion, or consent, is arbitrary and unjust echoes Hannah’s
statement about believing that slaves only suffer physically. In both cases, the nebulous entity
that is “public opinion” is questioned as a viable means of producing a just and realistic social
space. Saddler, like Hannah, questions democracy itself, based as it is on public opinion and
consent. Like Trappe’s, Saddler’s beliefs are oddly in line with Hannah’s, or at least that is what
the reader assumes. Crafts allows these political viewpoints into the narrative as Hannah’s
experienced memories, to which we as readers are subjected. The entire sequence is given to us
in a flashback that specifically repeats Hannah’s mnemonic efforts. This mnemonic life gives
Hannah a freedom she did not have within Trappe’s house. More importantly, it contrasts sharply
even with the apparent Freedom Hannah encounters at Forget me not after an accident kills
Saddler and leaves her, however briefly, without a captor.

Forget me not, a space of limbo for Hannah, traps the reader into a false sense of
Freedom to further demonstrate its fallacies. Here, once again, lineal history and public opinion
reflected in law present a rude counter-reality to Hannah’s natural errant memory. Forget me not is a place, in Yi Fu Tuan’s terms. Where space denotes freedom and uncertainty, place denotes order and harmony. At first, Hannah admires these qualities in both the house and the people who occupy it. “Pictures of birds…true to nature” hang on the walls (122), “unique and singular objects” are organized in “tasteful confusion,” and “method and regularity likewise prevailed over the estate.” The objects that Hannah sees “agree in nothing but good taste.” The harmony of the place “blent so many parts into a perfect whole” (123). The place of Forget me not is an ordered space, which does not bode well for Hannah. Moreover, this order generates the singularly powerful simulation of harmonious nature, with everything in its God-given place. There is no chaos, no confusion, and no room for Hannah’s errantry, as will be demonstrated by Mrs. Henry. Even the name of the house alludes to the nickname for a flower known for its fragility. Forget me not is a spatial manifestation of Mrs. Henry’s morals and politics, to which Hannah must appeal for her independence. However, like the house, Mrs. Henry’s seeming uniqueness is predicated on order. In fact, the house’s quaintness comes from its references to the past, Mrs. Henry’s morality comes from the same place, a promise she made to her father. The author continues her codification of spaces with Forget me not, a house whose name brings memory back to the surface of the text. After Hannah’s mnemonic journey with Saddler, she finds herself in a place filled with a specific memory that serves to perpetuate lineal history. There is no room for Hannah’s errant memories. The house’s name, then, is a plea for Hannah and people like her, who are not and cannot be part of the house’s history. This plea becomes more poignant when Hannah asks Mrs. Henry to not give her to another captor, another person who claims to own her. What Mrs. Henry does about this further exemplifies the dichotomy the author establishes throughout the book between errant memory and collective history.
Mrs. Henry’s refusal to save Hannah from being taken presents the most complex
ingstance of critique that the author levels against lineal history and democracy. Here, we find a
woman who seems to see Hannah as human, but who cannot bring herself to oppose the ruling
forces of law that bind Hannah to her fate. She cannot do this because of lineal history, which
takes the form of a promise she made to her father. Her responsibility to her progenitor is
binding, so much so that even Hannah’s repeated pleas cannot change her mind. She is bound by
the law of lineage and honor. Mrs. Henry is a complex manifestation of two defining aspects of
social death, two things that those enslaved do not have: honor and family, bound in the arrow-
like direction of history. Mrs. Henry says to a pleading Hannah, “I must tell you my history…and
then you will see how utterly impossible it is for me to do as you desire, unless, indeed, I perjure
my soul” (126). This history involves a promise made to a dying father whose guilt over being “a
trafficker in human flesh and blood” compels him to “exact from [Mrs. Henry] a solemn promise
never on any occasion to sell or buy a servant” (127). Mrs. Henry cannot commit the sins of the
father. However, it is not just because he is concerned with her immortal soul that he warns her.
The father is also concerned with his own immortality within the narrative of his family’s history,
and that narrative’s place within the larger history of American democracy. The father is, then,
concerned with the progression of history, his family’s history, and his place within that
narrative. Mrs. Henry can influence the way in which her father is remembered by honoring his
wish and making sure to point out that it is his wish she is honoring. The horrible truth, however,
is that Mrs. Henry’s literal interpretation of her father’s rule, which “prevents” her from buying
Hannah’s freedom, actually goes against his wishes, or so it seems. However, upon closer
inspection, it becomes clear that Mrs. Henry inherits from her father the same curse to which he
succumbed: Freedom.
Mrs. Henry’s refusal of Hannah marks Hannah as a slave. Mrs. Henry enslaves Hannah within her system of honor based on lineal duty. This is her law. Mrs. Henry, like Trappe, presents another personification of history. Both are concerned with lineal history at the expense of personal memory. In addition, Mrs. Henry’s obsession with her father’s sins represents history’s unhealthy obsession with trauma, often at the price of wrongfully interpreting those events and becoming trapped by them. This is exactly what happens to Mrs. Henry, who, in a moment of dramatic irony, cannot see the obvious course of action that would help Hannah and would honor her father. In another brilliant metatextual moment, the author leads the reader into this literary device. As a result, the reader must disagree with Mrs. Henry’s actions for the dramatic irony to work, which simultaneously makes the reader disagree with what Mrs. Henry indelibly represents: the failings of a system of honor and law that is based on dubious claims of lineal responsibility and historical progress.

In an even more daring rhetorical move, the author has Hannah replicate Mrs. Henry’s behavior to her own detriment. Hannah, as one who believes herself to be above many of the other enslaved individuals, attempts to insert herself into the larger social narrative of honor, only to have it prevent her from gaining valuable allies and escaping. William, one of the escapees, says it best: “And so to a strained sense of honor you willingly sacrifice a prospect of freedom…Well, you can hug the chain if you please. With me it is liberty or death” (142). Echoing the battle cry of the American Revolution, William conflates Hannah’s sense of honor with the chain. However, he does not just address Hannah, but Mrs. Henry as well. Through it all, the author reinforces the preposterousness of honor and duty, ideas chained to hierarchy, lineage, and teleology. Wheatley’s legacy, begun with the fashioning of fancy, lives on in Crafts’s active manipulation of her environment through her manipulation of the act of reading and the
power of the space of literature. One cannot find true freedom in history. As for Hannah, her quest for freedom is stunted by her choice. However, even in this choice, Hannah practices something of her freedom, a freedom to choose not to take the risk of betraying someone she feels to be undeserving of it. Even this seemingly puzzling move has to be considered by the reader and critic. Even this choice is essential to crafting the Hannah that will eventually find her self-made freedom.

Before Hannah finds her freedom, she finds herself in the fields, a transition that catalyzes her choice to escape. However, it is not merely being sent into the fields by Mrs. Wheeler, the woman who claims Hannah from Mrs. Henry, that sends Hannah over the edge. It is also her forced marriage to Bill, a field slave, which stands as the penultimate manifestation of Hannah’s sustained critique of American hypocrisy. It is no coincidence that Hannah expostulates on slavery right before being sent into the fields and into marriage. For her, marriage is the most cruel institution forced upon enslaved individuals, since it painfully demonstrates the transience of all things, including human bonds, for those who do not fit into the larger historical narrative. For them, procreation is not a blessing, but a curse, a sentiment revealed earlier when Hannah’s mistress’s passing is revealed through the revelation of her mother having been a slave. Hannah observes that “many of these huts were even older than the nation,” and that the “greatest curse of slavery is it’s [sic] hereditary character.” Next to implying that the nation to which she refers was born out of these huts, she makes the more direct point of naming lineage as a negative. In this case, “The father leaves to his son an inheritance of toil and misery” (200). Even though the curse of slavery was actually passed down from mother to children, Hannah chooses to focus on the father-son relationship, a choice that links this hereditary chain to the lineages of the white Western United States she has been critiquing all
along. Hannah points out the dual nature of lineage. On the one hand, those with power may choose to interpret their lineal histories as they see fit, adjusting negative elements and making them positive. An obvious example of this is the above-discussed Mrs. Henry and her father. On the other hand, those without power and without choice cannot adjust anything, since they inherit nothing but a constructed identity formation and the social position that comes with it. Soon after further deconstructing lineal history from the eyes of the enslaved, Hannah has a rare moment of empathetic theorization in relation to those that occupy the huts, people that she has separated herself from since the beginning of the book. In a rare moment, Hannah does not focus her critique on the system of slavery, but on those who are subjected by that system.

Right after Hannah theorizes the duality of heredity, she articulates the experience of the enslaved in anticipation of her own enslavement. Hannah, who does not accept the “African” identity imposed on her, theorizes the subjection and abjection of the enslaved not from the point of view of Africanity, as so many other antislavery writers do, but instead from the perspective of one just like her, one to whom “The Constitution that asserts the right of freedom and equality to all mankind is a sealed book.” Hannah refers back to Trappe’s scholasticism and to how literacy has been used to exclude people of African descent from participating in the body politic. However, even in this seeming moment of empathy, Hannah is careful to separate herself from those who “know nothing” and who are “unfamiliar with the flowers, and in utter darkness as to the meaning of Nature’s various hieroglyphical symbols, so abundant on the trees, the skies, in the leaves of grass, and everywhere” (200-1). Hannah alluding to Nat Turner’s Confessions connects her experiential knowledge with that of Turner, a bold rhetorical move that signifies her radicalism. Even if no direct proof exists that Crafts read Gray’s Confessions or Whitman’s Leaves of Grass, the allusion to these two texts is too strong to overlook. With this allusion,
Hannah names the true evil of slavery as the destruction of the memory’s ability to interpret and retain the experiential knowledge provided by one’s own critical eye. In this case, Hannah channels Turner and interprets his memory in describing his seeing hieroglyphics in nature as a form of learning through experiencing. In short, Hannah is not like those enslaved in the field because she is able to perform Hobbes’s complex act of using her fancy through her memory. Like Turner, Hannah sees the value of the messages in her own experience of the world around her.

Hannah’s forced marriage to Bill is the final and most intense affirmation of Hannah’s status as a slave within American society. Treating Bill and the space of his hut as a slave ship that transports her away from her self allows Hannah to convey to her readers the true horror of slavery for persons like her: the loss of the mnemonic faculties established through her embracing of experiential memory. The institution of marriage, as noted above, serves a metonymic function, standing in for the whole complex lineal, progressive, and teleological nature of American history. By forcing Hannah to marry Bill, Mrs. Wheeler reminds Hannah of the way in which she is seen by the larger collective: “With all your pretty airs and your white face, you are nothing but a slave after all, and no better than the blackest wench.” To Mrs. Wheeler, Hannah’s self-perception is detached from the reality of her status as a black woman, which is tied to Mrs. Wheeler’s perception of Africanity as being hereditary and all-encompassing. Hannah’s perception, while echoing Mrs. Wheeler’s, is much different: “Accused of a crime of which I was innocent, my reputation with my mistress blackened.” To Hannah, her identity is based solely on public perception. Hannah’s reputation is blackened, but not her identity. Reputation can be controlled by the subject, but relies ultimately on public opinion and perception. As a result, Hannah faces the prospect of “association with the vile, foul, filthy
inhabitants of the huts, and condemned to receive one of them for my husband” (205). The hard work in the fields is not what concerns Hannah. For her, the ultimate insult is being viewed as someone she is not. To herself, Hannah is not a field slave. She is aware of her enslavement, but does not reduce slavery to a monolithic qualifier. For her there are degrees of degradation. As Henry Louis Gates notes in the introduction, this is a unique position for a slave narrative author to take. More powerfully, Hannah sees marriage to Bill, a stranger, as the harshest punishment of all.

Hannah never allows her self-perception to succumb to her status as a field slave. As a result, she escapes to her freedom. However, part of this drive to escape comes from her forced marriage to Bill. What makes Hannah’s “soul actually revolt with horror unspeakable” is the forced marriage. The reason for this is not merely because Bill is a stranger, or even a field slave. Rather, it is because Hannah “had ever regarded marriage as a holy ordinance, and felt that its responsibilities could only be suitably discharged when voluntarily assumed” (205). To Hannah, the removal of choice presents the biggest threat to her person. She compares the forced marriage to having to endure the Middle Passage. Upon entering Bill’s hut, Hannah echoes Olaudah Equiano’s *Narrative* when she describes her initial reaction, worth quoting in full:

“In front was a large pool of black mud and corrupt water, around which myriads of flies and insects were whirling and buzzing. I went in, but such sights and smells as met me I cannot describe them. It was reeking with filth and impurity of every kind, and already occupied by near a dozen women and children, who were sitting on the ground, or coiled on piles of rags and straw in the corner” (208-9).

Like Equiano and his contemporaries who wrote about their experiences of the Middle Passage, Hannah fails to fully articulate her initial response to the space of death and degradation she
encounters in the hut. Like Equiano, Hannah does not solely rely on her sight. Her other senses, especially her smell, are also affected. The crossing of the black water for Hannah is a crossing into the space of death, transposed from ship to hut. Hannah describes her relative fall from her position within the slave hierarchy as a descent into the darkness of an enclosed space filled with bodies. The water represents her status, black and corrupted. The hut, representing as it does the conjugal union between her and Bill, becomes the vessel that carries her towards a future away from her self. In other words, Hannah’s echoing of the Middle Passage finalizes her detachment from self-control and self-rule in favor of a life directed by her identity as a black woman. Perhaps the most terrifying thing to Hannah is not her loss of self-government, but the absolute certainty of the direction her life has taken. She is bound to a life of repetition. Moreover, Hannah is doomed to repeat actions that continually reinforce her status as a non-person. Her marriage, too, is a constant reminder of this status. To escape this direction, Hannah must jump ship.

Hannah’s return of self-mastery comes with escaping the Wheeler plantation. This escape is an echo of the act of jumping overboard only symbolically, but it is a powerful link nonetheless, one that authors of African descent use to separate themselves from their deterministic identities. For the author, Hannah’s escape mirrors her own escape into the space of death. Ironically enough, this is the space of literature. For Hannah, this space is the space of Chaos, represented most directly by nature. Once Hannah finds herself again in nature, she finds herself detached from all societal bonds. Replacing these bonds is a relational bond with her self and two others who find themselves equally detached and errant. What differentiates this escape from the others is the prevalence of death. Not only does one of the two other runaways die, Hannah herself enters a space wherein she loses herself and her orientation. As she waits for her
two new companions to fall asleep, her “thoughts became confused with that pleasing
bewilderment which precedes slumber. I began to lose the consciousness of my identity, and the
recollection of where I was” (215). This moment is striking for two reasons. First, its proximity
to the death of one of the fugitives suggests to the reader a method for interpreting the way in
which she dies as similar to Hannah’s falling asleep. Earlier in the book, Hannah makes a similar
link when her mistress dies: “There was a gasp, a struggle, a slight shiver of the limbs and she
was free” (100). After her death, Hannah posits that her mistress had “escaped woe and
oppression, and insult and degradation. Through death she had conquered her enemy, and rose
triumphant above his machinations, and I longed to follow her” (101). In other words, much like
her mistress, Hannah escapes her identity in the realm of dreams. Furthermore, her slumber
disorients her even further, replacing the recollection of spatial orientation with the disjointed
memories of places she had visited: “Now it seemed that Lindendale rose before me, then it was
the jail, and anon the white towers of Washington” (101). Hannah is experiencing the power of
fancy, the very power Wheatley harnessed in her poetry. While Hannah does not die physically,
she dies historically while running through the chaotic space of her experiential memory. She
only exists to the reader, who is subjected to her memories without context. Like Hannah, the
reader also loses sense of his or her place within the space of the book. Both Hannah and the
reader are subjected to the purest form of errant memory, which Wheatley describes as being the
space of dreams. Finally, Hannah’s faux-death conjures images of Dred’s death and the heap of
witness.

Hannah’s encounter with death through Jacob’s sister leads to her rebirth as a free
woman. The death of Jacob’s sister, a nameless character, occasions a moment of independent
action that reinforces nature as a space of chaos wherein true freedom is found. The action is
mourning, or remembrance of the dead, and Hannah reflects on the importance of being able to
deal with death outside of the larger social context. Hannah and Jacob can “weep in silence and
privacy. Public opinion came not to dictate the outward expressions of our grief. We were not
required to mourn discreetly or in fashion. No ceremonial was dictated by officious friends”
(220-1). Jacob’s sister is remembered, not memorialized by fashion, public opinion, or tradition.
However, Hannah’s close proximity to death, embodied in Jacob’s sister, brings a “dark night”
where “all was darkness.” In this moment of gothic terror, “Heaven seemed to have turned its
face against” Hannah (221-2). This struggle with death, which earlier in the book seemed like a
better alternative to her life, indicates Hannah’s yearning to live. Within the space of death come
dreams of life, and Hannah finds nothing with death itself. Instead, the darkness is terrifying and
Jacob’s voice, signifying human connection, brings her back to the world of the living. Unlike
her other slumbers, this nightmare is visited by a startling revelation: that death signifies not an
escape from slavery or a triumph over it, but a measure of how truly horrible slavery is. If death
brings dreams like the one Hannah has, then slavery itself must be truly too horrifying for words,
something Hannah has already shown the reader. With her successful escape, Hannah does not
play into the myth of the noble suicide. Instead, Hannah imagines a far more powerful option,
steeped in her personal choice to survive and thrive. Hannah is not a dramatic example for
abolitionists to use, nor is she one that allows others to define her. Within the space of literature,
she imagines herself a free woman. It is only appropriate that this freedom coincides with the
finding of her mother.

Hannah’s reunion with her mother signifies the ultimate denial of lineal history in favor
of errant memory and imagination. With the curse of slavery being passed down from mother to
child, and with the prevalence of mothers being separated from their children, the loss of one’s
mother stands as the ultimate testament to one’s exclusion from societal structures, starting with the structure of family. As Fanon acutely observes, the family is a microcosm of the larger societal system, often mimicking its methods of organization. For Hannah, the loss of her mother detaches her from any human bond. Moreover, the reunion with her mother allows Hannah to finalize her critique of lineal history, based as it is on patrilineage. Where fathers pass down slavery, mothers bring a person back into a family and a community. If mothers pass down anything, it is a desire for a life beyond slavery, precipitated by a desire for reuniting again with one’s mother. Hannah’s reunion with her mother is also striking because of how it juxtaposes with the role of mothers in other slave narratives. For example, in Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*, published around the same time in 1855, the narrator’s mother inadvertently introduces Douglass to slavery when she leaves him behind. Douglass emphasizes this break from his mother as the moment when he awakens to the realities of slavery. Slavery, then, is passed down by the mother. Hannah’s approach links to her continued effort to separate herself from the African identity imposed on her. Again, the space of literature is where Hannah can imagine this happy ending.

By finding freedom with her mother, Hannah produces an alternative idea of freedom that grows out of chance and uncertainty. While she does attribute her finding her mother to Providence and the hand of God, Hannah’s interpretation of God and Providence are drastically different from those that find their roots in teleology. Hannah’s continued escape attempts point to a mindset motivated by a desire for more, one she outlines in the beginning of the book. Unlike her mother, Hannah does not rely solely on prayer to be delivered from slavery. Instead, she repeatedly takes drastic action to attain her desired life. Hannah and her mother are brought together “by such strange and devious ways” (238). Where Hegel’s idea of Spirit, of always
striving for more, drives Hannah’s spirit throughout the text, “There is an hush on [her] spirit these days,” because she “found a life of freedom all my fancy had pictured it to be” (237). Note Hannah’s use of the word “fancy,” carefully chosen to refer not only to imagination, but rather to Wheatley’s complex errant memory. Hannah’s fantasies are based on memories she retained of her mother. Hinting metaphysically at the process of creation through literary imagination, Hannah’s newfound freedom is not one that requires her to become someone she is not. She does not have to calibrate her self to the larger context of society, nor does she have to sacrifice her errant memory to the collective memory of American democracy. Instead, Hannah imagines her own freedom and produces it in the space of literature. She even leaves the specifics of her new life, the true happiness of it, to the reader’s imagination, making the reader participate in her philosophy of self-fashioning and preventing her authorial voice from doing the very thing that she has been running from her entire life: “I could not, if I tried, sufficiently set forth the goodness of those about me…the undeviating happiness I find in the society of my mother, my husband, and my friends. I will let the reader picture it all to his imagination and say farewell” (239). Again, Crafts seeks to change her environment by manipulating her readers. Instead of remaining silent about the horrors of slavery, Hannah leaves the reader with the thought of her happiness. This happiness is made possible only by Hannah’s mother not forgetting Hannah or “certain marks on [her] body” (237). Where every other place Hannah has inhabited, from Forget me not to Trappe’s book-filled offices, have forgotten her as a person, her mother has not. The ultimate testament to the power of the bond Hannah and her mother share is the mother’s mnemonic faculties. Outside of lineal history, Hannah finds true freedom with her mother, made possible by her mother’s memory. Ultimately, Hannah Crafts, whoever she may have been, found true freedom within the space of literature.
What becomes clear from Hannah Crafts’s *A Bondwoman’s Narrative* is that there is a type of independence that comes with uncertainty, a freedom that anticipates the indeterminacy of pure memory discussed by Bergson. The freedom of undifferentiated space is threatening, as Tuan points out, only because it is a kind of freedom that is very different from the Freedom cultivated within the abstract space of American democracy. Democratic history, oriented by its progression, always has the potential of expanding beyond the boundaries of written history. Crafts’s authorial uncertainty leaves her book squarely within the realm of memory. Despite Gates’s best attempts, it is impossible to root Crafts in a historically viable identity. He even admits as much himself: “Not everyone wants to be located, locatable, or identified” (xxxvi), and this “seemed to be the way that Hannah Crafts had wanted it” (xxxiv). The narrator of *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* mirrors this errantry. The kind of freedom Crafts practices is threatening precisely because of its uncertainty, its unknowability (in the factual sense). Experiential knowledge trumps recorded knowledge, and with that comes the threatening and disorienting fact that, like Hannah, one’s self-actualization is based more on genuine self-awareness than on imposed ideas meant to direct and define. As we have said before, it may be alright, even good, to grant to authors of African descent the endless possibilities of the space of literature. Crafts practices this in her poetics of chaos.
Chapter 4

Ripping the Veil: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Long Memory of the African Diaspora

After Hannah’s struggle with the scholarly endeavors of Mr. Trappe, we now engage that *translatio studii* so vilified in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. Specifically, we turn to W.E.B. Du Bois, who spent his life deeply involved in academic and scholarly pursuits, including sociology and history. However, unlike Trappe, Du Bois’s relationship to the attainment of knowledge is not merely about manipulation and accruing wealth. In fact, Du Bois is much more like Hannah in that he embraces experiential memory to influence his interactions with his academic endeavors. Like our preceding writers, Du Bois is concerned with history, and is embedded within the lineage of errant mnemonics propagated by Phillis Wheatley. From the outset, Du Bois engages history as collective memory, namely the collective memory of an imagined community belonging to the same nation. Ron Eyerman offers an excellent summary of the Durkheimian concept of collective memory, built upon by Maurice Halbwachs, noting

“that individual memory is conceived as derivative of collective memory. It is the collective memory which orients a group, providing the temporal and cognitive map mentioned above. Collective memory unifies the group through time and over space by providing a narrative frame, a collective story, which locates the individual and his and her biography within it, and which, because it can be represented as narrative and as text, attains mobility. The narrative can travel, as individuals travel, and it can be embodied, written down, painted, represented, communicated and received in distant places by
isolated individuals, who can then, through them, be remembered and reunited with the collective” (161).

This collective memory not only describes the myth-making inherent in American democratic history, but also appears to describe the workings of such imagined communities as the African diaspora. While Du Bois seems to embrace the African diaspora as a community with a collective memory, his historical writings suggest that his memory is not derivative of the larger story. In fact, what Du Bois reveals in his oeuvre is that the African diaspora, as a community with a collective consciousness, does not operate in the Durkheimian manner. Instead, as Du Bois shows through his conception of long memory, the errant memories of persons of African descent, especially those discussed in this dissertation, dictate the direction of the collective. The collective memory may orient the group, as it does with democratic history, but the tradition of errant mnemonics, begun by Phillis Wheatley and carried on into the twentieth century by Du Bois, disorients that group mentality, opening up the possibility of the disorientation of choice.

For Du Bois, the “social mind” of the person of African descent, with the “finer manifestations of social life which history can but mention and which statistics can not count, such as the expression of Negro life as found in their hundred newspapers, their considerable literature, their music and folklore and their germ of esthetic life” (cited in Gordon 275), requires one to accept the incomprehensibility of these choices and the errantry of the act of remembering from which they come.

As the first person of African descent to earn a doctoral degree from Harvard under the tutelage of one of American history’s progenitors, Albert Hart, Du Bois’s legacy is commemorated today in the form of the Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, which is considered widely to be the epicenter of African and African American
scholarship. After his upbringing in New England and his education at Fisk University, Harvard was the culmination of Du Bois’s journey towards formulating one of his most overlooked endeavors: the study of African and African American history. *Black Reconstruction* stands as one of the best examples of the critical life of Du Bois’s historical works. Now seen as an early exemplary work of revisionist historiography, Du Bois’s challenge of the Dunning School of Reconstruction History was not received well in the Jim Crow United States. As David Levering Lewis notes in the introduction to the 1992 edition, there existed a large controversy around *Black Reconstruction* upon its publication in 1935, a controversy mainly focused on Du Bois’s apparent lack of historically viable sources used (Lewis xiii). However, as Lewis further notes, “even if Du Bois had stood hat in hand until the white South eventually made its sources available, this issue would still have been less one of historiography than of ideology, of sources in the service of a social order” (Lewis xiv). The archive, as the proverbial wax upon which a society’s collective memories are printed, is not as objective a professional tool as historians often say. Nobody knows this better than Du Bois, whose perceived blackness enables him to experience the true nature of democratic history firsthand. Du Bois’s mission, it seems, is not to rely on dubious sources that were being withheld to begin with, but more about “aggressive reinterpretation” of sources that were being misused or even fabricated. In other words, Du Bois was not concerned with being a responsible historian when writing *Black Reconstruction*. Instead, Du Bois attempted to engage the very practice of historiography, which to him at the time of his writing his seminal text meant having archives closed off to him, having to deal with blatantly bigoted and fictional accounts of black life and history, and being alienated by many of his colleagues.
In fact, Du Bois redefines the nature of the archive altogether. While the idea that Du Bois uses historiography as a strategy to combat traditional historiography has been discussed brilliantly by David W. Blight in “Du Bois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory,” I contend that Du Bois does more than attempt to “restore his people’s history” (46) or warn against “selective, willfully narrow history” (53). Where Blight conflates Du Bois’s ideas of history and memory as both working against these narrow histories, and where Blight believes Du Bois attempts to rescue “black history in America from…”structural amnesia”, I contend that Du Bois engages an established and specific definition of memory grounded in the personal and the indeterminate that Blight warns against in his piece. In short, Du Bois embraces the indeterminate errantry of his personal memory in molding a sustained critique of what Blight astutely calls selective, willfully narrow history. Through his work as a historian, Du Bois opens up the possibility that the archive, as part of the national mind, is closer in function to the fancy than to the record. In fact, the idea of wax itself suggests the workings of fancy described by Hobbes, Locke, Wheatley, Crafts, and Bergson. Fancy, or pure memory, takes in everything subconsciously and allows memory and imagination to choose which images are appropriate and which are not. Our perception of the world is a matter of concentration, as Bergson points out, which implies an inherent choice and a resulting indeterminacy. Du Bois, through his work with (or without) the archives, reveals that it too functions as fancy, absorbing many more images than can be accounted for in the democratic historical narrative. What happens, then, is that those who act on behalf of collective consciousness dictate what is given over to collective memory. These actors often do their work in the service of a given ideology, or concentration, which necessitates what Nietsche would call forgetting. There is, then, a collective subconscious, one that exists in the realm of dreams, one that cannot be accessed by the lay person. This
subconscious is made up of the traces, the shades, and the memory-images encountered and suppressed by the collective memory of the United States. These traces are the voices that interrupt the flow of the narrative, like Nathaniel Turner, Phillis Wheatley, and Hannah Crafts. The paratextual mechanisms put in place to correct these deviances leave traces. It is these traces that Du Bois highlights. This collective subconscious is what Du Bois would call the long memory of the African diaspora, which acts as the memory-images forgotten in favor of those that would fit the collective memory and democratic history of the United States and the West writ large. By embracing this long memory, Du Bois is sharing in the ability demonstrated by Wheatley, Turner, and Crafts, namely the ability to access the fancy and embrace its images.

_Black Reconstruction_ is not the first or only intervention Du Bois offered into the production of the American historical narrative. Two works in particular, _The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America_ (Du Bois’s doctoral dissertation published in 1896) and _The Negro_ (1915), stand as two exemplary works on the history of the African slave trade and the African continent, respectively, and are not merely revisionist historiography. As Lewis Gordon astutely points out in regard to Du Bois’s scholarship, “Du Bois, in effect, announced the metatheoretical question of how theory is formulated” when it came to the study of persons of African descent (270). In other words, Gordon reveals that from his early works on, Du Bois had a vested interest not in perpetuating the pathologizing inherent in white academic pursuits and archival readings, but instead in uncovering the ways in which American intellectual endeavors helped produce these pathologies. Du Bois’s intervention into the historical narrative crafted by traditional historians about the concept of Africa and the slave trade has been documented and discussed by Robert Gregg and Eric Sundquist, among others. The true impact of these works lies in the way in which they explode the myth of the democracy of American
history through the errant mnemonics of Du Bois’s “long memory.” Using Du Bois’s idea of the “long memory” of the African diaspora, a memory transmitted and passed down through generations of the descendants of formerly enslaved individuals, Du Bois’s errant memory overthrows history. As indicated above, Du Bois’s unique position as a highly trained historian excluded from the tools of his own discipline due to his imposed Africanity allows him to continue the work started by Phillis Wheatley. Like Wheatley, Du Bois transforms his social and cultural landscape by engaging the white interpretations of the archive that make up his historical sources as paratextual elements that determine the direction of a piece of writing and the person attached to it. In other words, while Du Bois’s work on Africa and the slave trade can simultaneously trap him within his own Africanity and trap his work within the restricted space carved out for him by this historical determinant, it does something much more powerful. Like Black Reconstruction, these two works position Du Bois within the tradition of errant mnemonics.

As such, history continues to be explored in this dissertation not as an academic pursuit, a manifestation of collective memory, or even as the social framework of memory, to use Maurice Halbwachs’s term for written records, archives, and monuments. Instead history is treated as an epistemic position and an ontological lens, a way to organize, make sense of, and define the way the world works and is put together. Du Bois, like his predecessors, engages the concept of Freedom tied to Universal history that Hegel articulated in his Phenomenology of History. Specifically, Du Bois interrogates historiography, the methodology with which historians organize, hierarchize, and prioritize cultural mnemonic productions that make history a highly effective mechanism of control. In other words, I propose that Du Bois unveils the hegemonic and oppressive nature of traditional historiography, built as it is on ideas of progress, providence,
and destiny that inherently buries what it deems unworthy of remembrance. In this way, Du Bois also engages Hegel’s successor, Friedrich Nietzsche, and his theories of historical forgetting that, to him, are essential to Progress and, by extension, Freedom. This way Du Bois, as one of the excluded, the forgotten, trespasses on the sacred ground of history by embracing the long memory of the African diaspora over the inclusion of people of African descent in the already existing narrative of history, a flawed and violent space made powerful by its exclusionary nature. Du Bois’s sentiment of feeling “imprisoned, conditioned, depressed, exalted and inspired” within “the folds of this European civilization,” his feelings of being “integrally a part of it and yet, much more significant, one of its rejected parts” demonstrates how he viewed himself as a trespasser within an epistemology that depends on his status as an outsider (Du Bois Dusk viii).

In order to fully understand Du Bois’s errant memory in his “historical” works, it is important to look at the way in which Du Bois conceived of his own imagination and process of remembering, a process that is articulated in The Souls of Black Folk and Dusk of Dawn. In Dusk of Dawn, Du Bois reflects that “one thing is sure,” which is that the bond he shares with his “ancestors” is based on a “common history,” the suffering of “a common disaster,” and a “long memory” of the “social heritage of slavery” (Cited in Gilroy 126). Paul Gilroy, when talking about Du Bois and the use of music, reveals the importance of religion in bringing to the surface “the buried social memory of that original terror,” the Middle Passage (129). Implicit in this practice is a belief that there is a buried social memory, the traces of historiography, that can be dug up and revived. This buried social memory is similar to what Pierre Nora calls “true memory,” or “gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (Nora 13). Like Joseph
Roach, I believe in the supremacy of Nora’s true memory in opposition to “history,” which Nora sees as “voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty…never social, collective, or all-encompassing” (13). However, while Roach and Nora explore true memory through bodily performance (echoing Bergson in the process), I theorize the act of imaginative writing as a powerful way of deconstructing what is often seen as the primary method of historical production: written records and archives. Nora acutely constructs true memory as “taking refuge” from the “flame” of history, which by its very organizational nature consumes and reduces to ash whatever does not fit into the system it helps create. Like Du Bois’s presence at Harvard belies the very exclusionary history its scholars primarily produced, Du Bois’s written history of Africa and people of African descent belies these same historical narratives that resist African and African American participation. The errant mnemonics of long memory transcend the historical conception of race, elucidating history’s weak links. Using recorded history, the cornerstone of historiography, as a Trojan horse, Du Bois breaches the high walls of the ivory establishment. Du Bois’s presence at Harvard changed this institution’s history as a school to never have graduated an individual of African descent from its graduate school. In similar fashion, Du Bois’s historical writings change traditional historiography and its tendency to exclude people of African descent from its practices. Long memory is personal, felt, affective, and errant. What Du Bois and his predecessors inherit, then, is the knowledge of the importance of indeterminate memory in allowing one to construct a self that is flexible, adaptable, and free from the constraining and erasing forces of history.

In 1961, in the twilight of his life, W.E.B. Du Bois remembered and spoke the unfiltered manifestations of his memories to Moses Asch, the same man who orchestrated the first recorded piano solo by Scott Joplin. What Du Bois did in writing in *The Souls of Black Folk* for the
“sorrow songs,” Asch did, in whatever small way, for Jazz with the recording of Joplin’s musical revolution on the piano. Both men attempted to preserve what they arguably perceived to be essential examples of American folk culture. Both, however, ran into the problem that drives this dissertation: how does one archive and solidify in historical narrative something like the spiritual or Jazz music, forms of expression indelibly fluid, improvisatory, and relational? The same question, of course, can be asked of Du Bois, who wrote copiously about his own life. Why, then, the need for a “recorded autobiography?” The answer lies, ironically enough, in the improvisatory nature of speech and the oral tradition, but not in the ways one would think. It’s not merely a clever signification of African diasporic culture and the music through which it has perpetuated itself for centuries. The interview is much more about Du Bois’s relationship to historiography and errant memory. Du Bois moves away from his preferred medium, the written word, one that ties him to the Western traditions of recording history, and participates instead in an oral tradition that, while it may be transcribed to paper (from which I am reading), will never be able to fully convey the Du Bois one hears on tape.

Of course, we are still dealing with recorded history, even if it is oral as opposed to written. Du Bois’s conversation with Asch was recorded and is now available in the Du Bois archives at the University of Massachusetts library. However, the usefulness of recording music goes hand in hand with the limits of written music, which is apparent in the frustration and indignation shown by many Eurocentric critics about Jazz, the blues, and spirituals. They resisted being recorded in that traditional sense, and needed the relatively new medium of auditory recording devices to truly get across the variation, improvisation, and relational communication that made Jazz what it was. So it was for Joplin. More importantly, every recording became a reminder of the countless other possibilities that were out there, that were being heard nightly by
those who went and saw artists like Joplin perform live the piece that was just recorded. Only, the piece they heard was very different from the one existing on record. With Du Bois’s interview, the same applies. The Du Bois we hear over the recording may not be the same Du Bois we read in, say, *Dusk of Dawn*. Therein lies the importance of the recording: its ephemeral nature speaks to one of Du Bois’s greatest contributions to those lucky enough to study his works today. Sadly, it is also a contribution that is overlooked. Genette says about the recorded conversation that the reliance on an interlocutor, a questioner, “deprives the author proportionally of control over his discourse- but not absolving him completely of responsibility.” Du Bois allows his words to leave his matrix of control (Genette 356). Du Bois’s public persona, crafted over long years of writing and manipulation of that writing, is now vulnerable to “the author’s bad memory” and the public’s free interpretation (364). Much like Turner, however, Du Bois allows his memory to dictate the direction of the recorded interview.

Du Bois’s conversation with Asch, in short, reveals the shifting location responsibility takes as a result of advancing technology. To many, recording heralded the next step in the evolution of recording history. Now, instead of having to rely on the shadowy documents of the written archive, subject as they are to authorial manipulation, historians can get the facts from the mouths of the historical subjects themselves. With recordings, Universal history realizes its teleological ambition in practice as well as in purpose. The public, taking the vulnerable voice of the historical subject, can make its own interpretation. However, in a way, the conversation also reveals the power of the written word in preserving the author’s Freedom. Within Hegel’s own theory of self-actualization through the writing of a history, authors who write are able to do just that in the truest and purest fashion. By manipulating the text and all that comes with it, authors like Du Bois intervene in the process of erasure inherent in the forward movement of history.
Just like his predecessors, Du Bois operates within the space of literature, a space of death precisely because it is a space of memory. The errantry of memory, as demonstrated by Du Bois’s interrogation and explosion of historiography, is the only true preserver of the author of African descent’s choice, namely his choice to exist within the indeterminable space of endless interpretation and variation. What recording brings to light is that even orality, the purest form of the subconscious of history, can be made part of the archive. What Du Bois’s interview shows, in tandem with his writing, is that the written and the oral are both infused with long, errant memory, and therefore belong to Hume’s mysterious realm of genius and Wheatley’s powerful realm of fancy.

Like the spirituals he subversively placed within the sacred space of the written text, an act of upheaval that revealed the fallibility of the written word and, by extension, challenged its viability as a measuring device for one’s humanity, Du Bois’s discussion of history, specifically African diasporic or, in his own words, Negro history, has a powerful impact on subsequent historiography. The interview reveals the source of Du Bois’s interest in African history, one that comes from a vested concern with the concept of the African diaspora as a collective related and united in memory. The memory, more than the collective, provide Du Bois with a space within which he is free to create a fluid sense of self. In Du Bois, then, we find one of the pioneers of a collective memory not based on Halbwachs’s societal reactivity, but rather on the concept of relation and the indeterminacy of pure memory, one based not on reaction and one not dependent on the presence of others or the existence of an established collective memory. Du Bois saw throughout his career that his people, or those with whom he most readily identified through that long memory, were drowning in the sea of memory, left behind by the ship of history, a ship propelled by the wind coming from the storm in Paradise. Like so many others before him and
like so many would after him, Du Bois attempts to get to the bottom of this void, to make a home there, in a space reserved for death. Why fear the sea when the ship was much more terrifying. The ship is exactly what Du Bois interrogates throughout his career. Like those who jumped to avoid the fate into which they were violently coerced, Du Bois jumps overboard into the sea of memory, and learns that even a thing so terrifyingly crafted for a single purpose as a slave ship cannot hide the countless potential purposes being imagined by the individuals trapped below deck for themselves. It is this knowledge, more than anything else, which allows Du Bois to provide his most devastating contribution.

Before we can engage Du Bois’s struggle with history, we must walk the path he took to get to his belief in the “long memory” that runs through people of African descent across the world. There were three especially crucial moments to Du Bois developing this idea: his time in New England as a child, his time at Fisk University, and his time at Harvard University. The New England upbringing juxtaposes with his time at Fisk, a juxtaposition that allows Du Bois to see more clearly the bond that ties people of African descent he encounters together, since “growing up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois felt little connection to Africa” (Campbell 227). This insight into the mechanisms of diaspora, however shallow, set up Du Bois’s more thorough engagement of it at Harvard through the discipline of history, a pursuit that would prove to be lifelong. The repetition of his New England upbringing in most of his autobiographical works establishes the importance that upbringing had in setting him up to appreciate “Negro culture,” which he encountered fully for the first time at Fisk University. This is due mainly to the fact that Du Bois, along with “a generation of African American intellectuals,” created a bond with Africa not through “memory or direct experience,” but through “‘later learning and reaction.’” Even at Harvard and the University of Berlin, “neglect
of African history had the force of a philosophical proposition” (Campbell 228). Thus, Du Bois remembers:

“I go down to Fisk University and suddenly I am in a Negro world where all the people except the teachers (and the teachers in their thought and action) belong to this colored world and the world was almost complete. I mean, we acted and thought as people belonging to this group. And I got the idea that my work was in that group. That while I was, in the long run, going to try to break down segregation and separateness, yet for the time I was quite willing to be a Negro and to work within a Negro group” (Side 1 Band 1).

This feeling of separateness, of being part of a group of people, would stay with Du Bois through his educational career. Most important in this parcel of the interview is the way in which Du Bois, looking back, predicts his own future in breaking down racial barriers, one that he subjugates to the responsibility he had to the “Negro group” that he believed himself to belong to. In fact, Fisk is the source of the “feeling of a separate race,” and the importance of this feeling must not be understated (Side 1 Band 1). Even if we as readers believe in the importance of moving beyond the confines of race, something that Du Bois himself believed, the reality is that Du Bois’s time in New England, a largely white area of the country, increased the impact his subsequent time at Fisk would have. The memory of this moment of identity formation for Du Bois, one articulated verbally in an interview, is all the more potent. Du Bois’s idea of responsibility to a social group, articulated verbally, indicates a memory that has stood the test of time. Throughout the rest of the interview, Du Bois talks frequently about how his responsibility manifested itself through a dedication to “Negro history,” on which he “began to concentrate” at Harvard under Albert Hart and continued to work at Atlanta University.
While it is tempting to interpret Du Bois’s interest in African history as having been influenced by his time at Fisk and the recommendation of Albert Hart, the way in which Du Bois engages this history belies this interpretation. More importantly, it illuminates the reader’s (or listener’s) deterministic readings of Du Bois’s acts of remembering. Like many other African descended authors, Du Bois has been the victim of mnemic and creative entrapment, where those who read and interpret his work confine him within the space of the racial categories they bring with them. These racial categories come, in turn, from the way in which people of African descent have been cast in the great drama of history. As a black author, Du Bois must speak to and about black issues, or so his work is interpreted. This interpretation is much more about what readers bring than what Du Bois himself intended. Du Bois, a person of African descent and therefore outside of progressive human history, can only function within the infinite loop of reactionary blackness crafted by hegemonic whiteness. Even if Du Bois declares himself to be writing about African history, he does so with the intent not just of writing about African history, but also to engage this concept of history itself. More important, Du Bois chose this path for himself and made it part of himself. Writing about race and Africa was not his destiny or sole purpose, and believing it was or is reveals the reader’s own complicity in the traditional Hegelian notion of teleology. Du Bois realized the transformative power in identifying with the African diaspora. However, he could just as easily have gone in a different direction, especially considering his upbringing in New England. The interview, *Dusk of Dawn, The Negro*, and *The Souls of Black Folk* all contribute not to an articulation of some inherent identity into which Du Bois eventually grows, but instead reveal a man looking back as well as forward. It is the looking back, more than anything, that reveals Du Bois was not predetermined to be a mere victim of his status as a person of African descent in a white hegemonic world.
Like any autobiographical project, Du Bois’s interview contributes to how he is remembered. However, like Frederick Douglass before him, Du Bois’s many autobiographical documents, including *Dusk of Dawn* and *The Souls of Black Folk*, continually reshape that memory, not only by the multiple interpretations of his life contained within the documents, but also in the many ways in which people currently read and interpret them. Here, then, we begin to uncover the particular importance of this interview in relation to Du Bois’s work and the memory of it. Like Joplin’s ragtime and the “sorrow songs,” Du Bois’s errant memory, made manifest through his voice, cannot ever truly represent Du Bois the person, or the way Du Bois conceives himself through memory. Like Douglass, Du Bois also knows that his memory is subject to the scrutiny of those who peer into the depths of history, and as such is vulnerable to being manipulated and changed to serve some purpose. Hence the numerous retellings of his upbringing in New England, his educational career, his work at The University of Pennsylvania, and his continuous struggle against “the problem of the color line.” These retellings tell the story of Du Bois’s perception of himself, or lack thereof, within the confines of both “Negro history” and universal history. Moses Asch listens to a man give details of his life, asks questions to prompt certain responses, and through this mechanism controls, at least in some way, what Du Bois remembers. However, this interview is beyond Asch’s control, much like the music of Joplin, for even if Asch succeeds in getting Du Bois to talk about the aspects of his life that he wants to hear, he cannot control what other errant memories come to the surface or what Du Bois’s own articulation of those memories will do to listeners and readers.

What this interview does is establish Du Bois’s dedication to the history of the African continent and the people that are descended from there. More important, however, is what this dedication does in the larger context of Du Bois’s career as social critic. The space of Du Bois’s
errant memory actually defies and threatens to undo all that has been thought as “true” and “factual” about his career, life, and legacy. The way in which Du Bois perceived himself and his acts in life constantly undermines the neat and tidy narrative that is given to those who are interested in studying his contributions to the society of which he was a part. In this narrative, and in many others concerning African American artists, writers, and scholars, the determined destination is the study of what it means to be black. The expectation surrounding black scholars in particular, especially those like Du Bois, severely limit their contributions. With Du Bois, we hear often about his struggle against the color line and racial prejudice. We assume, then, that Du Bois’s only motivation in studying the history of Africa is to combat the way it has been used to oppress people of African descent. While this is unarguably true (Du Bois mentions his battle against color prejudice in most of his writings), the trap of determinism keeps Du Bois’s most important contribution from being discovered, namely his devastating unraveling of history itself. Like errant memory unravels the interview and challenges the questions raised by Asch, so does Du Bois writing on the history of Africa and interpreting that history through the lens of long memory unravel the concept of history itself.

What stands out here is that Du Bois admits to forming a bond with “Africa” through “learning and reaction” instead of through “memory and direct experience.” Like Crafts, Du Bois makes a distinction between learning and experience. Du Bois’s testament to being willing to be a part of the “Negro group” for the time being suggests a future break from that group. What, then, does Du Bois really attach to his learned perception of “Africa” and the Negro group attached to this conception? Like Crafts, Du Bois realizes that what he learns about Africa at Fisk, Berlin, and Harvard does not match his own experiential memory of the place. We must remember that Du Bois lived and dies in Ghana. [xviii] More important to our discussion here,
what Du Bois learns about Africa does not match what the long memory, or errant memory, provides as an image. Like Hobbes, Du Bois connects learning to reaction and memory to experience. To correct this reactive vision of Africa, Du Bois writes his dissertation on the slave trade in the United States.

The unraveling of history, as Du Bois reveals, begins at Harvard, a place where much of American history has been and continues to be written. How strange to find that Du Bois does not begin in Africa at all, but in the United States. This is so because he orders his findings experientially instead of scholastically. Once here, Du Bois does not dive into the history of the African people by engaging their memory, but rather the collective memory of the nation’s governing body, the law and the archives of reactions to and interpretations of that law. While strange at first, this harbor from which Du Bois begins his voyage back to the darkened history of the imagined dark continent can actually, in hindsight, be the only place to start. Seeing as to his place of residency and education, Du Bois engages history with the tools given to him by the very people who helped write it. Du Bois carries this tendency, begun in *The Suppression of the Slave Trade To The United States of America*, with him through the rest of his career. “The question of the suppression of the slave trade,” Du Bois knew, “is so intimately connected with the question as to its rise” that the two cannot be separated (Du Bois *Suppression* 5). The suppression Du Bois is referring to is of course not merely the eventual ending of the slave trade due to pressures from within the body politic and without, but also to the suppression by that body of any acknowledgement of that question within its collective memory. In other words, Du Bois is not so much interested in tracing the fall of the slave trade in the United States, but more in the ways in which the country as a whole, through its laws and the voices of its elected representatives, forgot the slave trade and the role it played in the building of this nation,
relegating any memory of it to the subconscious shadow. When Du Bois states the purpose of his book to be “to set forth the efforts made in the United States of America, from early colonial times until the present, to limit and suppress the trade in slaves between Africa and these shores,” he is not merely revising history (178). He is explaining its mechanism of forgetting. Du Bois is both setting forth the efforts to end the trade and the efforts to erase the trade from the collective memory of the nation. History is not about revision. It is about erasure, and Du Bois knows this. This is why much of the text of his dissertation is devoted to exposing the ways in which history has been used to forget what cannot and should not be forgotten. His dissertation, then, is long memory made manifest, a physical specimen of errant memory floating to the surface of America’s collective consciousness. Du Bois continues Wheatley’s legacy and walks in the footsteps of Turner and Crafts by tapping into the genius of fancy.

As we have said before, Du Bois’s first suprahistorical act is the exposure of forgotten elements of memory to the historical gaze, thereby delimiting and refuting history’s infallibility. The second, more sinister act comes in the form of revealing actual negligence in the specified historical moment. These acts of negligence translate to the ways in which they are not remembered by the larger collective, despite the existence of numerous records. Again, it is not so much the exposure of the records that is important, but rather the exposure of the selective neglect to which these records have been subjected. A particularly poignant example presents itself in chapter eight, called “The Period of Attempted Suppression.” By juxtaposing laws as the primary form of historical documentation with the interpretations and reactions to these laws by those who attacked or defended them, Du Bois sets the stage for the grand act of neglect that he proves was pervasive throughout the 19th century. After noting the lack of documentation supporting the government’s reinforcement of anti-slave trade laws, Du Bois shows that
lawmakers were “criminally negligent” in reinforcing the law and prosecuting offenders, with an air of “official silence” hanging over the entire chain of U.S. antislavery laws (2763). The U.S., in short, was wary of having “her criminal negligence in enforcing her own laws thus exposed” (3481). By making the sacred realm of law the primary area of critique, Du Bois is able to “expose” not merely negligence, but the “blissful, and perhaps willing, ignorance of the state of the trade” (4465). Like collective memory, law relies on collective agreement and belief in its rightness, a concept Gregg Crane calls “consensual determination of public standards” (7). In the case of the slave trade, there existed a discrepancy between the written law, which forbade it, and the belief in that law by those who were meant to follow it. This is no civil disobedience, since those that were disobeying the laws forbidding the slave trade were the lawmakers themselves. In order for this disobedience to be feasible, those who created the laws had to turn a blind eye to what was right in front of them. More importantly, those who would later craft the narrative of American history would have to forget this disobedience ever happened. Like the lawmakers in the early 19th century, historians have dutifully forgotten this part of American history. As Herbert Klein notes, “Despite its central importance in the economic and social history of Western expansion, its fundamental role in the history of America…the Atlantic slave trade remained one of the least studied areas in modern Western historiography,” a lack based on “ignor[ance].” Klein continues that “Even today…the gap between popular understanding and scholarly knowledge remains as profound as when the trade was first under discussion,” with a “surprising ignorance” even pervading “the scholarly world at large about the nature of the trade” (xvii). In other words, Du Bois points to a mnemonic, rather than historical, handicap, a willful forgetting that is predicated on national economic interests. This mnemonic handicap leads to the formation of history as we know it, a history that leaves out the large role the U.S.
played in the slave trade through the Civil War. Du Bois attacks this history through the use of errant memory, channeling the ability to recall images from the Long Memory of the African diaspora.

While Du Bois acquires his intimate knowledge of the inner workings of history from his education at Harvard, it is his own experiencing of the “long memory” of the African diaspora that bestows on him the ability to challenge the sovereignty of history in his subsequent texts. In order to fully understand the legacy of his seminal *The Negro*, it is important to look at the way in which Du Bois conceived of his own imagination and process of remembering, a process that is articulated, sometimes more clearly than others, throughout his major works. *The Negro*, however brilliant, lives in the shadow of *The Souls of Black Folk*, a work that, along with *Darkwater* and *Dusk of Dawn*, was considered by Du Bois to be his trifecta of contribution to the world concerning race. In these works, specifically in *Souls* and *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois articulates a mnemonic aesthetic that is influenced by the memory of the slave trade and the Middle Passage. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois reflects within “the autobiography of a concept of race” (1) that “one thing is sure,” which is that the bond he shares with his “ancestors” is based on a “common history,” the suffering of “a common disaster,” and a “long memory” of the “social heritage of slavery” (670). Long memory is not grounded in common disaster. It flows through the literary manifestations of persons of African descent transcending the historicizing trauma of these events as they are appropriated by history. Paul Gilroy, when talking about Du Bois and the use of music, reveals the importance of religion in bringing to the surface “the buried social memory of that original terror” (Gilroy 129). Implicit in this practice is a belief that there is a buried social memory that can be dug up and revived. This social memory, then, is what Du Bois taps into when constructing his narrative in *The Negro* and elsewhere. The long
memory that unites the Pan-African diaspora gives Du Bois and others who identify as being part of this kinship system a different way of interpreting the world, what Du Bois famously calls the “veil” of race. In *The Negro*, the veil does not distort the vision of the subject. On the contrary, this text reveals, among other things, what Du Bois really means with that metaphor: the world of which he and others are a part has a distorted view of them and imposes this view on those they distort, much like one would throw a veil over someone’s eyes. Du Bois works not just to throw off this veil, but also to take this veil apart, thread by thread, and figure out how it functions as a tool of mnemonic oppression. The veil, Du Bois reveals, is the fabric of history, a heavy veil worn proudly by those who produce it and thrown unceremoniously on those who it not only distorts to others, but to themselves whenever they look into a mirror.

Where the dissertation provides Du Bois with a space in which to engage the instrumentality of forgetting to the formation of history, his later works allow Du Bois to use the “long memory” of the African diaspora to apply this knowledge to a life-long struggle with the infamous veil that Du Bois believes separates the races. In the “Suggestions of Further Reading” section of *The Negro*, he prefaces what is presumed to be his source material for his own attempt at a complete history of the African continent with: “There is no general history of the Negro race.” This simple declaration impacts in multiple ways the text it follows and the reader. First, Du Bois’s sense of verbal irony is put into practice in how closely he echoes Hegel’s violent assertion that Africa lies outside of the confines of human history: “At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit…What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History” (Hegel 99). Du Bois takes Hegel
to task by transforming the memory of “mere nature” into the experiential disorientation of the
Long Memory used by Wheatley, Turner, and Crafts, deconstructing Hegel’s own reliance on
history in the process. On the very first page, Dubois, tongue firmly in cheek, refers to
“those…who would write universal history and leave out Africa” (9). His direct mention of
universal history can leave no doubt to whom he is referring. This echoing of Hegel is no
coincidence. Like Narcissus, Hegel sees only his own memories and refuses to hear those of the
Native in the bush crafted by his own imagination, turning said Native into an echo-like
reverberation doomed to haunt the outskirts of the universal historical narrative. Du Bois, then, is
echoing, returning back upon Hegel and his followers their arrogance and privilege. Here, then,
we find another way in which this simple statement functions in the text. It echoes, ripples, and
reverberates throughout the text and throughout subsequent historiography concerned with
Africa and those of African descent. The further verbal irony is found directly after the
statement, where we find the sources Du Bois used to compile his text. However, (and this is
where Du Bois’s brilliance shines) these sources, as Du Bois points out, are incomplete and some
are even “ridiculous” (The Negro 273). In short, those who have attempted to write a history of
the African continent and its people/descendants, who have attempted to fit this history into
Hegel’s universal history, have failed miserably, because they have failed to tap into the
experiential memory of those who are descended from the continent, relegated as their voices are
to the subconscious of democratic history. Their mnemonic death, and the absence it creates in
the American historical consciousness, is enacted through forgetting. However, as Wheatley and
Crafts demonstrate, the faculty of fancy does not forget and cannot be manipulated.

Du Bois’s apparent lack of reliable sources in writing The Negro is strikingly similar to
his situation when writing Black Reconstruction. Du Bois is fully aware of the paratextual power
of source materials. *The Negro*, then, is not merely Du Bois’s attempt at writing Africa and persons of African descent all over the world into an already existing universal history. Instead, Du Bois challenges the very notion of history as it was known at the time of *The Negro’s* publication. As he notes a little further down the page, “None of these authors write from the point of view of the Negro as a man, or with anything but incidental acknowledgement of the existence or value of his history” (273). In other words, they speak from learning instead of experience, from history instead of memory. How, then, can Du Bois suggest these further readings to his readers, let alone base his own history on these sources? Du Bois not only claims to be the first to attempt a human history of Africa and the person of African descent, as revealed by Gregg, but reveals the unreliability of existing knowledge about Africa by making the reader rely on incomplete texts for further reading (259). In other words, Du Bois is the final and only authority, at this point in time, on Africa and the people connected with it. Next to this, Du Bois reveals the shortcomings of traditional historicity through the very practice of it. Like any responsible historian, Du Bois gives his sources. In providing them, he exposes the mechanism of forgetting of which they are all a part. He uses traditional historiography to turn history on its head.

Du Bois continues the unraveling of history in the preface to the text: “The time has not yet come for a complete history of the Negro peoples” (6). Again, tongue in cheek, Du Bois places his work within the larger context of universal history. The complete history, lying somewhere in the future, contradicts Hegel’s and many others’ beliefs that African history, if there is any, can be fully articulated and is already finished, whatever civilization they had having died out long ago. Instead, Africa’s history is a constant process. In explaining why, Du Bois lists a series of problems, including lack of archeological data and a need to understand
documented source materials in other languages. The most important reason he gives has nothing to do with traditional historiography, but relates directly to human experience and the inherent problems surrounding it. Du Bois points to the “racial prejudice against darker peoples” as the most potent poison slowing the pulse of African self-determination (6). The world, according to Du Bois, is not ready for “judicial appraisement of the peoples of Africa.” The world already has an history of the imaginary African continent. What it needs is a just assessment of the nature of the people of and descended from Africa. Du Bois carefully chooses the words “judicial appraisement,” suggesting and conflating legal and commercial gazes. In short, this judicial appraisement takes the form of paratextual histories written about the continent, which look at “Africa” as if it was a piece of property or a criminal on trial. Therein lies the true problem. The problem is not the lack of sources (there are apparently many, even those written by European colonizers) or the sand that covers the monuments and physical evidence of grand civilizations. The problem is the lack of vision, the prevalence of ignorance that clouds the eyes of those beyond the African Diasporic community who would gain something valuable from this history.

History serves as one of the most efficient and powerful mechanisms of control. Due to its personal and subjective nature, memory is often viewed as the antithesis of history, which is apparently metaphysical, outside of the realm of human influence. History is recorded, a passive action akin to a stenographer typing away at his or her typewriter, trying feverishly to keep up with all of the information that is washing over their limited vision and hearing. While we as readers of history are led to believe, and want to believe, that the stenographer is able to record every single word uttered, every single gesture given, and every single piece of evidence presented, we must be aware of the limits of human conscious perception. No one person can recall every experience at will. If there is more than one, we hope that their records match. This
is the problem Du Bois remedies through errant memory. The records most readily available to him and others were produced by the same culture that contributed to the erasure of African history. One only has to remember the important work of Du Bois’s dissertation. In fact, it is this dependence on written history, a dependence that runs deep through Western historicity, which disqualifies much of what would be perceived as historical in many of the African nations and states discussed in *The Negro*. In fact, if history is to be seen as separate from human influence, metaphysical in the sense that we are subjects of history, of a narrative that we are witnessing and processing, then the sameness of the stenographers’ records is inevitable. In the case of Du Bois’s sources, they certainly decried African history as lost and nonexistent in unison. However, Du Bois knew that this was not an indicator of their reliability. He knew that any attempt at historicizing humanity, especially a part of humanity ideologically tied to the African continent, could not be so perfectly uniform. He knew that history, despite its hegemonic stranglehold on the past, was not a sufficient mechanism for giving voices to the silenced.

Du Bois’s complex view of himself in relation to history is often overlooked in favor of his stronger and clearer positions on race relations and Pan-Africanism, of which the lack of attention paid to *The Negro* is a clear indicator. However, this does Du Bois a great disservice. It silences a large part of Du Bois’s self-actualization articulated throughout his texts. Du Bois was not merely tied to race and the way in which the veil of history imposed its epistemology and ontology on him. A strong indicator of his position on history and his role within it comes later in his life, in the form of the semi-autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn*. Within this text, much like Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies, Du Bois looks back on his own career and reflects on his work, resulting in a revisionist history of his own life based solely on memory. In other words, Du Bois affirms the dubiousness of history and his strained relationship with it. From the very
beginning of the text, Du Bois establishes the mnemonic nature of his life’s work, including the present one: “I have written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds which were mine” (Dusk viii). The “thoughts and deeds” refer, of course, to his own experiential memory invading the neat narrative of his life. Even if the reader accepts Du Bois’s attempt at distancing himself from his own autobiography, Du Bois gives himself away as being at the mercy of his memory. Du Bois does not work through them or try to overcome them. He embraces them. Du Bois does not paint this mnemonic errantry in a negative light, and does not apologize for it. These memories elucidate and magnify the “concept of race” in a way that an objective history of the matter could not. Du Bois, then, practices what he preaches in the fashioning of his own legacy through his autobiography. Of course, this is clear from the outset. Du Bois chooses to call his work an autobiography, which, even if it is of something arbitrary like race, receives its meaning from the personal lens Du Bois’s memories provide.

The “distortion” of which Du Bois speaks refers to his distortion of history, or rather the distortion his presence within history causes. The question raised by the “Apology” is answered in the first chapter, entitled “The Plot:” how can one write an autobiography about an historical construct like the concept of race? We must remember here that Du Bois’s efforts earlier in his career have attempted to deconstruct, fiber by fiber, the fabric of history. Here, then, is Du Bois’s latest attempt, inserting himself indelibly into the historical construct of race: “From 1868 to 1940 stretch seventy-two mighty years, which are incidentally the years of my own life but more especially years of cosmic significance” (3). Seventy-two mighty years, years of cosmic significance, are still subordinated to Du Bois’s own life. These years would not exist as they did, as they are described in this text, without Du Bois having lived them. His experience of
these years are what the reader receives in *Dusk of Dawn*. The monumental moments in history that Du Bois lists after, then, are meaningless without him. Du Bois sentiment of feeling “imprisoned, conditioned, depressed, exalted and inspired” within “the folds of this European civilization,” his feelings of being “integrally a part of it and yet, much more significant, one of its rejected parts” continues to demonstrate his belief in the power of remembering from a position of marginality. He is “one who expressed in life and action and made vocal to many, a single whirlpool of social entanglement and inner psychological paradox, which always seem to me more significant for the meaning of the world today than other similar and related problems” (3). This book is not about race. It is about him. To Du Bois, there is no better way to engage the problem of race than through his own mind. The whirlpools and paradoxes of his mind are more important than anything else to the meaning of the world, *his* meaning of the world. That is the point.

In reflecting on his position within the fold of European civilization, Du Bois could not have picked a better term or a better title for the chapter. With the word “plot” as title, Du Bois comments simultaneously on the narrative structure of history and its indebtedness to human memory and imagination. A structural phenomenon meant primarily to help readers construct another world, plot is not based on social structures so much as on an unfolding of time. As a plot, then, Du Bois’s musings on his own place within history present the reader not merely with a plan for the rest of the book, but also for his life. The double meaning of the word further serves to implicate both the narrative nature of the text and Du Bois’s own control of how he will be perceived as a result of this text. The plot is a map through Du Bois’s life, his whirlpools of social entanglements and inner paradoxes. Even in a reflective work, Du Bois is conscious of the fact that he will be read and remembered by others, and that he can indeed influence how these
two actions are performed. Despite Du Bois’s distrust of autobiographies, these misgivings are what make up this text, “repeatedly they assume too much or too little: too much in dreaming that one's own life has greatly influenced the world; too little in the reticences, repressions and distortions which come because men do not dare to be absolutely frank” (vii). To be frank, to Du Bois, means to give memory free reign, much like Wheatley would do with fancy in her poetry. Du Bois is himself a paradox, as is this text, an autobiography despite its apparent shortcomings. Du Bois does in fact dream that his life greatly influenced the world, and outside of the greater problem of race. Moreover, he realizes the limitations of distorting one’s own life to make it seem more memorable than it was, or more virtuous, or, dare I say, more important.

If Du Bois’s efforts in The Negro are anything, they are an affirmation of his own importance to the process of producing historical narratives. Instead of accepting his prescribed fate as an ahistorical non-entity, doomed to exist only as the product of Western teleological history, Du Bois affirms his role as a judge and jury of the testimony offered by some extremely arrogant witnesses to the passing of time. Witnesses, it must be said, that have led themselves to believe it their sole duty to interpret this passing of time and impose that interpretation on everyone else. The Negro engages the “dialogical structure” of “trust” implicit in testimony, where the witness’s credibility relies on the trust of the listener. As Ricouer reveals, “Certification of the testimony then is not complete except through the echo response of the one who receives the testimony and accepts it” (164). Du Bois rejects the testimony thus far brought before him, and instead acts as judge, piecing together the knowledge available in order to paint a comprehensive picture. The person in the bush spying on Narcissus is not the native out of white imagination, but something much more powerful: the echo without which all that self-aggrandizement means nothing. For after Narcissus waists away, it is Echo that keeps his
memory alive. Only Du Bois takes it one step further. His echo denies Narcissus’s greatness, and in its place produces a different memory that reverberates throughout the decaying archives of history, a memory that shows Narcissus in his true colors.

If Du Bois deconstructs the process of historical production through his use of it to build something contrary to what has been established by these same tools, then his focus on the human element of African history brings memory to the forefront. If his mission was to reinterpret already existing archival material, and to stay true to objectivity, as Gregg claims, then what was the source of his reinterpretation (Du Bois Negro 253)? From whence came these new ways of seeing and knowing archives that often generated troubled and skewed pictures of the past? The answer lies in something that is quoted above, namely that up to the point of Du Bois’s intervention, no person of African descent had interpreted these archives. Implicit in this statement is Du Bois’s belief that a person of African descent, like himself, would possess something a white Euro-descended individual would not, namely an experience as a person of African descent whose identity is tied to an imaginary Africa. Something within the consciousness of one would differ from the other, but only experientially: “consciousness and memory are one and the same thing,” and “sameness equals memory” (Ricoeur 105). In this Bergsonian sense, a person is a person in the existential sense because he or she is able to remember him or herself as having existed before the current moment, and sees him or herself as part of a larger body of collective memories. For Du Bois, errant memory takes the form of long memory, which allows Du Bois to interpret the same sources differently.

The issue of interpretation and the centrality of memory become apparent when one notices what Du Bois chooses to focus on in his study. While the first part of the book is largely devoted to establishing the early history of the African continent (a large undertaking), the entire
work is tinged with Du Bois’s own subjective voice. Despite the fact that Du Bois insists on the importance of objectivity and the scientific method, he cannot resist making his immense project personal. In other words, Du Bois’s human history must privilege experiential memory over archival history, since by his own admission there are not enough sources available to construct a historical narrative through traditional historiography. In saying that “The history of Africa is unusual” (Negro 10), Du Bois is referring to the ways in which African cultures have been “uprooted…leaving only misty reminders of the ruin in the customs and work of the people” (29). Unlike European history, which, as the prime mover of universal history, lies somehow outside of the realm of human memory, existing instead as an abstraction that must be observed as it passes by or discovered after the fact, African history, according to Du Bois, exists only in the monuments and memories of the people and their experiences and actions. This is long memory. Traditional historiography’s reliance on monuments, documents, and archives often leaves out the very human elements contained implicitly within these source materials. This is an inevitable result of objectivity, something that Du Bois respects but clearly moves away from in The Negro. It is the element of choice, no less, which most clearly demonstrates Du Bois’s unconventional approach, one grounded in remembering in the purest sense of that word. Du Bois chooses to identify as part of the African diaspora, as he notes in the interview with Asch. The choice makes all the difference. It allows him to see this formation as the potential basis for the historical construct of Africanity, which limits those who believe themselves to be a part of it without knowing what it actually is.

Du Bois remembers African history in the sense that, by his own admission, at the time of his writing The Negro, “the Negro has no history, culture, or ability” (139). I must be careful here to explain fully what I mean, lest I get misinterpreted the way the source of this phrase has
gotten misinterpreted by many who read Du Bois’s work. The verbal irony in this sentence is thick. Not only is Du Bois subtly referring to the lack of such traditional history in the book itself, which bears the same title, but he also makes clear the reason why those of African descent, and his text, have none, or rather where they have none. They have no history and ability “for the simple fact that such human beings as have history and evidence culture and ability are not Negros!” (139). The verbal complexity of this sentence is staggering, lending itself to misinterpretation. In short, Du Bois dismantles the perception of Africa’s unhistorical non-existence by exposing a simple truth, namely that the historical framework within which Du Bois is working is one produced by men and women who separated themselves from those they perceived to be “Negros” and place them outside of the capability of history. In other words, the idea of history itself is a construct created by people who subsequently chose not to allow those of African descent into that epistemic framework. Du Bois extends this metaphysical moment by making “evidence,” the very fabric of history, into a verb that describes the action, or production, of “culture and ability.” Evidence is not a thing, but an action. What a delicious piece of writing this largely forgotten book is turning out to be! Du Bois, then, is not at all the conciliatory student of the West. Instead, he is fully aware that the landscape he is traversing is one where his subject matter is not welcome. Du Bois here answers his own repeated question: “Why is it, then, that so much of misinformation and contempt is widespread concerning Africa and its people…among men of education and knowledge?” (138). The education and learning is the problem! While this sentiment may seem redundant today, it troubles the dark waters of Du Bois’s “historical” text, making it much more than just a reinterpretation of “ridiculous” sources.

So the question arises again: what is The Negro? It is clearly not an historical text. While Du Bois seems to privilege the historical conception of knowing the past, he also understands
that it must be separated from the past at large. In this sense, he follows Nietsche only in seeing the destructive side of objective historiography. He differs from Nietsche in the level of his critique, leveled not at individuals who would dull the potential life-giving aspects of the past, but instead at the entire manner in which the socio-cultural system in which he was brought up and educated articulates the past. In this context, Du Bois’s interrogation of the slave trade, a central concern in this text and the beginning of his historical career, takes on a different and more important meaning. To Du Bois, the “historical facts” are where one finds problems, not answers. To him, the “origin” of “color prejudice” comes from these facts, not “physical or cultural causes” (142). Du Bois is not saying that one finds answers in the knowledge historical facts bestow. Instead, these facts in themselves are the source of the problem, for the “answer” lies in “modern Negro slavery and the slave trade” (142). Next to the devastating dismantling of historiography, Du Bois’s research on the slave trade from the perspective of the African continent may be his greatest achievement in this text. The problem is history. The answer is the slave trade. Consequently, Du Bois dives deep into the archives to find out whatever he can on this seldom-discussed topic. It is exactly here, in his discussions of the slave trade, where he puts into action his critique of history and supports the importance of memory. We learn, simply, that the objectivity and empiricism of history is a myth perpetuated to hide amnesia on a large scale:

“The natural desire to avoid a painful subject has led historians to gloss over the details of the slave trade and leave the impression that it was a local west-coast phenomenon and confined to a few years. It was, on the contrary, continent wide and centuries long and an economic, social, and political catastrophe probably unparalleled in human history” (155).
Next to the obvious revelation of the actual scale of the international African slave trade, Du Bois’s remarks reveal his thorough understanding of the limitations of history as both a discipline and an ontological and epistemic system. Du Bois here defines forgetting. These historians, in proud Nietscheian fashion, forget what they deem detrimental to the overall progress of human history and to their own happiness. The consequence, however, is that they all acknowledge not just the existence of the slave trade in the act of forgetting it, but also the subjective and mnemonic nature of historiography. The use of the word “impression” is no coincidence. Du Bois is fully aware of its Platonic origin. These historians wanted to leave an impression in the collective memory wax of what they perceived to be a progressing civilization that could not afford to sink in the awful truth of its wealth and power. The impression in itself, however, is ineffable proof of the existence of the very memory they wanted to obliterate. Thence the paradox of forgetting, one of which Du Bois is fully aware. He subsequently tears the fabric of history asunder, leaving in the gashes a space that would prove to provide many with the opportunity to remember on their own terms. It started with Du Bois’s choice to remember the slave trade, a choice that goes as far back as his days at Fisk and Harvard.

The massive cultural amnesia concerning the slave trade presents Du Bois with an opportunity to display the powers of memory and the foibles of forgetting. Throughout The Negro, Du Bois continuously makes clear the importance of the slave trade to the society in which he lives. In so doing, he brings to the surface his own apparent conflict over memory and history. In effect, Du Bois demonstrates history’s need for forgetting. However, he makes clear, through his own efforts, that choice is not reserved for those who write it. Above all else, Du Bois’s discussion of the slave trade influenced many scholars and authors after him. Du Bois is one of the first, if not the very first, to frame the slave trade as the “first step in modern world
commerce, followed by the modern theory of colonial expansion” (223). In addition, Du Bois is also one of the progenitors of the theory that the slave trade is not just the cause of modern “color prejudice,” but also of the stunting of African development (67). All of these theories, while centering on Du Bois’s missions to both deconstruct prejudice and propagate Pan-Africanism, are attached to the slave trade and its legacy. It is this legacy, in turn, that becomes most valuable in *The Negro*. With this text, Du Bois produces a space wherein one can begin to unravel this legacy in its myriad forms.

This mnemonic space is predicated on the existential Cartesian principle of thinking one’s self into existence, which Bergson astutely interprets as remembering one’s self into existence. *The Negro*, as a space in which Du Bois exercises his own right to remember, presents an excellent example. However, as Ricoeur deftly theorizes, oneness predicated on memory is “haunted” by the “other,” “diversity,” and “difference” (104-5). Du Bois challenges the idea that identity “equals sameness with the self,” based on consistency of memory by embracing errant memory, as shown above (104-5). Specifically, Du Bois’s errant long memory interrupts the consistency of collective memories that make up the history of the United States and even the “Western world.”

Here Du Bois’s statement that comes at the end of *The Negro*, “There is no general history of the Negro race,” once again must present itself to scrutiny. Ending what many readers would initially perceive as a “general history of the Negro race” with a statement that denies the existence of one within the same text points undeniably to Du Bois’s refusal to see *The Negro* or his efforts as historical. The implication here is that Du Bois, with this largely forgotten work, ushers in a new era of unhistorical production. It is no coincidence, then, that Du Bois discusses the slave trade. However, it is the way in which he goes about it that makes all the difference.
Du Bois’s narration is unabashedly artistic and imaginative. The imaginative thread that holds the text together, Du Bois’s “so short a story” of “mainly conclusions and generalizations,” further belies the text’s historical pretensions (6). Moreover, this imaginative thread places Du Bois’s enterprises firmly in the sphere of Wheatley’s fancy, Turner’s maroon mnemonics, and Crafts’s chaotic experiential memory. The book’s first paragraph is worthy of quoting at length.

“Africa is at once the most romantic and the most tragic of continents. Its very names reveal its mystery and wide-reaching influence. It is the “Ethiopia” of the Greek, the “Kush” and “Punt” of the Egyptian, and the Arabian “Land of the Blacks.” To modern Europe it is the “Dark Continent” and “Land of Contrasts”; in literature it is the seat of the Sphinx and the lotus eaters, the home of the dwarfs, gnomes, and pixies, and the refuge of the gods; in commerce it is the slave mart and the source of ivory, ebony, rubber, gold, and diamonds. What other continent can rival in interest this Ancient of Days?” (9).

The similarities between this paragraph and the one found in chapter one of The Souls of Black Folk is no coincidence. Du Bois deliberately draws a parallel between the texts, establishing a line of reasoning based on the soul-searching motivation that produced the earlier book. The constant references to the ways in which Africa has been and continues to be viewed by outside gazes mirrors the way in which Du Bois focuses much of The Souls of Black Folk on correcting the gazes of the white interloper. However, since he concerns himself with his own memory, he indirectly reveals the way his own sight, his self-conception, has been compromised by these gazes. The “mystery” of the “dark continent” romanticizes Africa, placing it firmly within the realm of the imaginary (remember the epistolary conversation between Wheatley and her naval admirer). The historic aspect of the rest of the text, then, is undermined by this “interest,” yet
also strengthened by it. Du Bois uses the fantastic gaze, one that he himself possesses, to strengthen his case for the considerable powers contained within Africa as an idea, a concept. Du Bois’s discussion of the different names further brings to the surface the many ways Africa has been and continues to be conceptualized by everyone who does not believe themselves to be a part of the physical confines of the continent. This plethora of names shows an Africa that resists definition. Instead, Africa, or whatever name it receives from those who think it in their power to define it, exists only in the imagination. This is exactly what Du Bois realizes, both in The Souls of Black Folk and The Negro; Africa is an imagined place, even in the Pan-African sense, one that exists in the memories of the displaced individuals who imagine their return. What Du Bois powerfully shows in The Negro is that those who believe themselves above memory, who see themselves within the hallowed halls of history, participate in the same memory work as persons of African descent, the very persons they attempt to exclude from this activity.

The slave trade, then, presents the only real choice for engaging this enterprise, due no less to what it contributed, not what it took or prevented. Part of the power of Du Bois’s vision in the texts mentioned here lies in his ability to appropriate and transform the meaning of the slave trade and the Middle Passage. Du Bois writes this event into the texture of his own style, making that style fluid and lugubrious, flowing and melancholy, yet full of the yearning for hope in the future. There exists no better example of this than The Souls of Black Folk, in which Du Bois begins the work of tearing apart the veil of history he would eventually continue in The Negro. In Souls, a text filled with images of water, Du Bois articulates his memories through his style. Using spirituals as his source, Du Bois reveals the way in which, like Alexander Crummel, he hears “the slave ship still groan[ing] across the Atlantic,” the “faint cries burden[ing] the Southern breeze,” and the “great black father whispering mad tales of cruelty into those young
ears” (Souls 177). These voices and groans are imbedded in the spirituals taught mostly from memory by those who heard them from others. For example, Du Bois learned in his study of these pulsing memories that “Life was a “rough and rolling sea” like the brown Atlantic” and that “of death the Negro showed little fear, but talked of it familiarly and even fondly as simply a crossing of the waters…back to his ancient forests again” (210-2). The Middle Passage is the most apparent source of this spirituality, one based on the disorientation of the Littoral, the experience of finding one’s self adrift at sea for the very first time. To get back to this mythic Africa, the one perpetuated in the memory work of those of African descent, one has to cross again the Atlantic, albeit figuratively. In light of actually returning to the African continent physically, this spirituality locates the afterlife in the mnemonic space produced by these songs and many other forms of African diasporic cultural production, including written works.

It is this errant memory, exactly, and not the tradition of history, that enables scholars of African descent like Du Bois to be able to see the legacy of the slave trade, one of the more remarkable aspect of The Negro. Du Bois’s concern with the future is not limited to the hope he shows for the African continent and its descendants spread across the globe. His awareness of the way in which the slave trade has poisoned the world is staggering considering the sources he was working with. To Du Bois, in direct opposition to many of his contemporaries, transatlantic slavery was “different from that of the past” (this after having spent a considerable amount of time expounding on African slavery before 1450) in that it “came in time to be founded on racial caste, and this caste was made the foundation of a new industrial system” (Negro 149). Du Bois does not have radically different archives at his command, nor does he have a way to travel back in time to interview those directly involved. He does, however, have that long memory, which gives him that “second sight.” In this case, he sees what traditional historians up to the moment
had been unable to see. He sees what is considered common knowledge today, but was in 1915 anything but. The system that “traded human beings” was of “such tremendous proportion that the physical, economic, and moral effects are still plainly to be remarked throughout the world” (149). The adverb “plainly” is important here and signifies Du Bois’s heavy critique of history and historiography. It is embarrassing and telling enough that the result of a trade that lasted more than 400 years had been ignored and mutated by historians up to that point. It is worse that these effects were “plainly” to be seen. The plainly remarked effects of the slave trade can no longer be ignored, however, thanks to the efforts of Du Bois and many others after him.

Even the moments where Du Bois seems to reproduce or engage traditionally Eurocentric ideas about race are filled with the tensions of his own vision and his long memory. Much has been made of the ways in which Du Bois apparently panders to traditional white ideas about race within The Negro. There are many such moments, and even I marked them continuously as I read the text. However, I realized that a more thorough reading was due them. Take, for example, the discussion of color in chapter one. A scientific proposal that differences in color are due to climate, harkening back to geohumoral theory, is preceded by a declaration that “no scientific definition of race is possible” (13-5). This contradiction seems to work against Du Bois’s mission, but this is exactly what Du Bois wants. Throughout the text, Du Bois undermines deterministic scientific theories with his own insights and observations. When we read on about race and the scientific reason for color, we learn that “there have been repeated efforts to discover, by measurements of various kinds [like the hair measurements Du Bois provides in the ending sentences of the paragraph right above this one!], further and more decisive differences which would serve as really scientific determinants of race.” The measurements and theories Du Bois summarizes before this moment serve much like a presentation of an object meant to be
blown up seconds later. One does not come for the object. One comes for the destruction, in
grand fashion, of said object. Du Bois explodes the racial myths perpetuated by the likes of Von
Luschan and other European anthropologists and historians by juxtaposing them to his own
interpretations. To Du Bois, hair follicle measurements do not adequately explain the way
“typical races are continually changing and developing, amalgamating and differentiating.” Du
Bois takes this opportunity to explain to anyone not yet on board that “in this little book…we are
studying the history of the darker part of the human family.” Studying the history, not writing it.
This is an important point to clarify for Du Bois. He is not constructing a history, but studying
one already in existence and dismantling it. This part of the human family, furthermore,
“forms…a social group distinct in history, appearance, and to some extent in spiritual gift” (15).
This declaration, while clearly referring to the African diaspora, is powerful in its ambiguity. Du
Bois seems to go against his own strategy by differentiating the diaspora based on two things he
systematically deconstructs throughout his text and one that he does not define. This sentence,
better than any other, displays Du Bois’s own veiled interpretation, one where his Western
upbringing clashes with his long errant memory. The African diaspora is distinct in these three
categories, not because Du Bois deems them to be so, but because they are perceived as such by
a scientific tradition in which Du Bois is well versed. Du Bois is making this claim from the
standpoint of a Western observer. Despite what Du Bois knows to be true, the diaspora continues
to be viewed as a cohesive entity not because of common experience or memory (Du Bois’s
ideation) but because of fallacious Euro-centric standards.

In lieu of these facts, the way in which Du Bois repeatedly compares African culture to
Western culture must be viewed through the lens he provides the reader in the beginning of the
book. That is, Du Bois outlines and traces the various cultural exchanges that occurred before the
rise of the Atlantic slave trade in the beginning of *The Negro*, which sets up the comparisons in later chapters as corroborating evidence of the meaningfulness of African culture to the development of the Western world before individuals from all over the continent were forced into slavery and kidnapped. This proves to Du Bois his own claim, that people of African descent and those populating the African continent developed similarly to their European counterparts despite being relatively closed off by the geography of the African continent (18-9). Du Bois connects African memory to European history, noting that “from the earliest times the Greeks have been in contact with Africa,” the Romans came into contact with sub-Saharan peoples, and the Germanic tribes invaded later. Not until Islam swept the continent did Africa become “veiled,” being freed again from that veil by the Portuguese later (17). Africa, however, was veiled only to the Western progress of world history, as Hegel points out. When Portugal arrives and brings with it half a century of devastating economic exploitation, it brings with it the veil that is said to cover Africa in the sense that it opens up the continent to the judgment of Western ideas of Universal history. In fact, Du Bois contradicts this figurative language later when he explains the difficulty historians have had in “trac[ing] this changing past.” Where in the beginning of the text, Du Bois cites geographical and religious reasons for the limited contact between Africa and the West, he does not see Africa “offer[ing] any great physical barrier to the invader,” the same invader who apparently lifted the veil from the sub-Saharan part of the continent (106-7). Du Bois does not contradict himself, but rather the traditional view offered by Western historiography. In the beginning of his text, Du Bois often echoes the figurative language of the West in order to deconstruct it later on in his own words, using the long memory of his experience as a person of African descent. Contact did exist between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, as is evidenced by the multiple examples Du Bois lists of similarities between
African and European culture. These similarities, furthermore, are not a result of European influence. Du Bois’s vagueness on the reason for these similarities leaves open the possibility for the direction of exchange, inherently challenging the narrative of North-to-South influence brought by the Portuguese.

Here, then, Du Bois claims a role among the long line of writers who contributed to the building of the City of Bones, to use one of August Wilson’s articulations. What makes Du Bois different from the others is that he produced this space within the hostile currents of scholarship and academia, a legacy that cannot be understated. Du Bois understood that, despite the outcry of many critics of Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, keeping this “long memory” intact and participating in its development is essential to African American social development (Sundquist Wake 474). However, his efforts of preservation went beyond the spirituals. Using these spirituals as vessels of memory served to imbed within The Souls of Black Folk the mobility and displacement inherent within them. Du Bois begins here what he would finish in The Negro (470). However, in this text, Du Bois does not use the “sorrow song”. Instead, he uses the memory of the slave trade and the Middle Passage, the source for the sorrow song and its aesthetic of displacement, to bring about the same result: a text, seemingly in the Western tradition, upon which is superimposed the “long memory” of his experience as a person of African descent. As noted above, Du Bois successfully infiltrates the ivory tower, showing others after him how to enter. The result of this preservation of the memory of the slave trade and the Middle Passage was an explosion of historical and creative texts that resounded with the echoes of these memories. Furthermore, the extensive research Du Bois did, as well as the interpretation he offered in The Negro, produced a literary space in which artists for the first time engaged these topics free from the restricting influence of those “ridiculous” narratives offered by the
veiled historians. History, Du Bois reveals, is a trap from which he frees himself and those who come after him.
Epilogue: Fugitive Memory

In this dissertation, I have dissected the complex negotiations of memory in African American literature of the long 19th Century. I have named this sustained tradition within African American letters errant memory, which combines Glissant’s errant subjecthood with the Enlightenment ideas of fancy and experiential memory. This tradition of errant memory derives from the experience of being subjected to the stereotypes of Africanity by the teleological narrative of democratic history. The literary manifestations of errant memory produced by authors of African descent conflate writing and remembering within the space of literature as a space where the unconscious reigns. As such, the space of literature is the perfect place for errant memory to materialize, since fancy brings the experiences to light when the burdens and distractions of consciousness are removed. Democratic history attempts to conventionalize errant memory through paratexts, or textual manifestations of directing and determining forces that seek to limit the potentiality inherent in texts written by authors of African descent. However, these paratexts only highlight the powerful indeterminacy of errant memory and its testimony of the personal.

This tradition starts with Phillis Wheatley, who theorizes errant memory from her experiences with fancy and practices that unique act of Cartesian self-knowing in her poetry. Wheatley’s poetry strongly suggests that Wheatley read Enlightenment ideas of fancy put forth by Descartes, Hobbes, and Hume. More importantly, her poetry combines these theories with her own experience as a person of African descent, producing a unique poetics based entirely on errant memory and the careful and sustained interpretation of experiential memory, or fancy. Nathaniel Turner’s tropofication culminates in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Dred. Where Stowe’s narrative exemplifies the reductivist tropofication found in reactions to Turner’s actions and
subsequent “confessions” to Thomas Gray, the character of Dred displays the complex ways in which black tropes stem from and are loaded with errant memory, making them impervious to narrativization. Where Wheatley theorizes errant memory, Turner’s errant memory exemplifies its impact on democratic historical narratives like that of Stowe’s. While Stowe is breathing new life into Turner’s memory, Hannah Crafts demonstrates the errantry of experiential memory, gleaned from Enlightenment ideals of experience, in The Bondwoman’s Narrative. Both autobiography and fiction, this text finds Crafts pitting Trappe’s scholasticism and learned (read forced) mnemonics against Hannah’s experiential memory, with Hannah finding her freedom in the memory of her mother. Finally, W.E.B. Du Bois reads the collective memory ideologized into democratic history into the archives. Theorizing long memory as the errant memory that is forcibly forgotten by the always conscious and busy collective consciousness of the hegemonic white historians, Du Bois reveals the mechanisms with which historiography is used to enact what Nietsche would refer to as necessary forgetting.

In the rupture created by my thinking of how to write the conclusion to this dissertation, a certain memory-image found its chance to insert itself into my writing. Put differently, in the process of writing I have forgotten that to write is to remember, and that the interruption in my writing is an interruption in my conscious remembering. This interruption gives the memory-image of motherhood a chance to insert itself into my thought process. I am enacting, in some small way, what the authors discussed in this dissertation enacted in their writing and embraced in the reading of their dreams, fancy, and experiential memory. As Bergson points out, “personal recollections” are “essentially fugitive” as “they become materialized only by chance, either when an accidentally precise determination of our bodily attitude attracts them, or when the very indetermination of that attitude leaves a clear field to the caprices of their manifestation” (129).
This fugitive memory is what Du Bois culled from the absence of the archive, both in essence and in his purpose of research. It is what Hannah Crafts finds in her experiential memory as she embraces her natural knowledge over learned, or forced, memory. Fugitive memory is embodied in the actions of Nathaniel Turner as the trope of his memory acts like a maroon within the wilderness of errant memory, the very existence of which threatens the neat narrative of history. Finally, fugitive memory found a home in Phillis Wheatley, the poetic genius who finds the ability to tap into said genius through her embracing of fancy, a mental faculty that is both revered and feared due to its indeterminate and inaccessible nature. However, it is not fugitive memory, as Bergson chooses to call it, that has presented itself to me as a revelation. After all, what the above-mentioned authors have shown through their individual genius is that this memory is not fugitive at all, but errant in that it is the locomotive to the mental train, indelibly a part of yet always separate of and taken for granted by those who use it.

Like the web of errant memory that connects the African American literary tradition, persons of African descent exist within the collective memory of the United States like fugitive memory, or the “warning” received from the “obscure depths of consciousness.” If we were, as Bergson asks of us, to “Concentrate [our collective] mind on that sensation,” we “would feel that the complete image is there, but evanescent, a phantasm that disappears just at the moment when” its “outline” appears (100). Persons of African descent, then, act as the pure memory of a social structure founded on forgetting. This is what the practice of errant memory is, as demonstrated by Wheatley, Turner, Crafts, and Du Bois: the concentration on that warning, that sensation of error that indicates that we remember more than we know. The difference lies in degree, as so many philosophers of memory declare. Authors of African descent, by virtue of being excluded from their memories and, more importantly for this project, from their
remembering, must learn to concentrate on their experiential memory, that knowledge that is the only act of remembering not prohibited to them by law and custom. Where learning is disallowed, persons of African descent are indeed united in memory, but not in specific memory-images. Instead, they are united in a specific mnemonic faculty, one that escapes Hume’s understanding. Bergson, like Hume, is one of the only philosophers to respect the power of Fancy: “Past images, reproduced exactly as they were, with all their details and even with their affective colouring, are the images of idle fancy and dream” (130). It is no coincidence, then, that Wheatley writes down her dreams and builds a poetics around the images of the fancy. Like Hume before her and Bergson after her, Wheatley understands the errant power of fancy as the ultimate builder of self-awareness through choice, something Bergson realizes more than a century later: “The only regular and certain service which the second memory [fancy] can render to” consciousness “is to bring before it images of what preceded or followed situations similar to the present situation, so as to guide its choice: in this consists the association of ideas” (102-3, emphasis mine).

Next to this utilitarian function, fancy allows choice because it is endemic to the self. Ironically, the unique theorization of memory imbedded in the works discussed in this dissertation reveal simultaneously the extensive education the authors received and their independence from that education, that forced memory, both good and bad. This is mnemonic death, but not the death of remembering. Next to implicitly engaging how learning has been used to undermine the intelligence of people of African descent, another implication imbedded within this project is an education of a different sort, a lineage passed down through writing. This lineage is matrilineal in nature and defies the logic of time and the constraint of chronology. To begin discussing the implication of the mother to this project, we must go back to the beginning,
to Phillis Wheatley, and to the future at the same time. This future, from Wheatley’s point of view, sees her as the mother of African American literature. While I discussed the inherent problems with this designation, it comes back to bear fruit beyond any of Gates’s limited articulations of firstness.

The point here is not so much that Phillis Wheatley is the mother of African American literature, whatever that may mean, but more that Wheatley begat a tradition, a sustained literary lineage, that is disoriented because of its attachment to the feminine, the mother, and the subject position of black womanhood. To make sense of this literary lineage, we must turn to Hortense Spillers’s groundbreaking “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” wherein Spillers outlines “a distinction between “body” and “flesh” and impose[s] that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the body there is the flesh, that zero degree of social conceptualization.” In this flesh, according to Spillers, are “hieroglyphics…whose severe disjunctures came to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color” (67). These hieroglyphics are what is fleshed out in fancy, the flesh’s memory. In other words, as Bergson points out, the flesh remembers, saying that as the body “experiences” and grows experienced, it “learns” to “adopt our body as a centre” against which all interpretation, perception, and awareness is measured (43). I must be careful here in distinguishing what I interpret to be Spillers’s idea of flesh memory and such bodily memory as is suggested by Joseph Roach. For Roach, who theorizes the body as remembering, the body falls within a subjected sphere, as Spillers would see it, and is no longer within the zero degree. Furthermore, Bergson would call Roach’s idea of bodily memory “habit,” or the body’s learned movements through repetition. To Bergson, this cannot be called memory because it contrasts dramatically with “memory par excellence” (95). It is Crafts’s experiential memory as opposed
to scholastic learning. The flesh is intensely personal and indeterminate, where the body is social and determined. It is no coincidence that Bergson spends a considerable amount of time theorizing that a sickness of memory manifests itself most directly in the symptom of disorientation, or the loss of the ability to determine direction (132).

Like the hieroglyphics Turner and Crafts saw in nature, the hieroglyphics of the flesh cannot be seen without errant memory, the memory of experience, the fancy that makes the self the only orientation against which everything else is measured. Wheatley found her independence, then, not in measuring herself against her society, but measuring her society against herself. This independence comes to bear in Spillers’s brilliant assertion regarding the role of black women in the construction of American personhood. It demands quoting in full:

“Therefore, the female, in this order of things, breaks in upon the imagination with a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an “illegitimacy.” Because of this peculiar American denial, the black American male embodies the only American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn who the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including her own. It is the heritage of the mother that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of “yes” to the “female” within” (80).

I would extend Spillers’s bold assertion from men of African descent to the tradition of African American letters, where the legacy of Wheatley’s fancy continuously breaks in upon the imagination of the authors within this tradition and the readers of it. I would also say that it is not merely the male of African descent that has to regain the heritage of the mother, but also the entire population of the democracy of history. The gendered aspect of my study, then, comes
from the gendered nature of history and memory. History is a male-gendered space, a vertical movement upwards through lineal and heritable vines that climb towards an ending in which the imagined community fits perfectly the desires of those who occupy it. Memory, on the other hand, resides in the realm of the feminine by virtue of the danger lying in its indeterminacy. Like women within a male-dominated space, memory is safe only when it is directed and limited by a historical narrative. History is inherited through the father, and memory is passed down through the mother. As Spillers knows, the power of the female within is the power of flesh memory, of errant memory.

Like a boomerang, we come back to unhistorical Africa, the point of departure. The return shows us that Africa, as an imagined place, is unhistorical because of its attachment to the mother. Like the rule of partus sequiter ventrem, children of Africa are doomed to an unhistorical existence. Their Africa, as a result, lives on in memory, indeterminable because it is personal and thusly limitless in its variation. This indeterminacy is what history and its paratextual elements attempt to direct towards a yearning for the father, a traumatic loss that results in repetition and habit. Like the imagined place, the people who come from Africa are not human because they lack a father figure like God, or even like a lineage of patriarchy. Africa is without God, without an origin in the paternal teleology of universal history. They do not and cannot inherit history from the father, benevolent or otherwise. It is no coincidence, then, that each author in this text includes some element of the Middle Passage in their works. They do this to honor mother memory. Mnemonic death, then, is an effort to silence the mother and the matrilineal memory that accompanies that relationship. Errant memory is the effort to keep that matrilineality alive. From Wheatley’s incorporation of her mother in her images of the sun, to Crafts’s finding of her freedom in her reunion with her mother, remembering is regained with the
maternal. In Turner’s tropological existence, as well as in Du Bois’s rhetorical return to Africa through long memory, these men practice what Wheatley and Crafts preach by defying the patriarchal verticality of history for the indeterminacy of memory, infiltrating the structures that uphold these vertical systems in the process. In short, as Spillers points out, the mother is essential to reclaiming personhood because from the mother comes memory, and from memory comes the self.

While the devaluing of women and mothers (and the conflation of the two identities) is not strictly a Western phenomenon, it is writ large throughout its treasured narrative. The devaluation of memory is not strictly tied to its gendered relation, but it shares the same source: a deep distrust for that which cannot be determined, learned, or recorded. The need for a known origin is so powerful that the true origin is forgotten. This memory-image, which found itself within my subconscious as a result of thinking (and remembering) through this project, found a chance to come to the surface here. Looking back, let this be a paratext to my dissertation. However, I suspect that those who read this project will come to this conclusion by themselves because it will break in upon the imagination in true errant fashion. The fear of the mother is, I believe, largely a result of a fear of what one must admit to and accept once one does engage the mother, motherhood, and the matrilineal. It will differ for everyone, but one commonality will be a realization that out of gendering enslavement, indeterminacy, and inferiority as feminine, one inevitably marks those seen as feminine as belonging to these adjectival categories. At the risk of falling into the trap of some deterministic declaration, I will just say that an inevitable consequence of associating the feminine and the maternal with abjection, absence, and danger, is that one loses the ability to value what these words mean and do when chosen.
This is the true value of tracing errant, pure, genius memory through African American literature. As Bergson reveals, errant memory guides choice. Errant memory is independence in practice, not just in spirit. Errant memory is freedom written in the flesh. Phillis Wheatley’s figuration as the mother of African American literature is often dismissed as limiting and insulting. What Spillers offers is another reading of this categorization, one that goes beyond firstness. Wheatley, as mother, represents remembering. By writing into existence a poetics of fancy, or errant memory, Wheatley produces a way for men and women of African descent to read this memory of the flesh, thereby taking it out of its feminine context by taking the feminine out of the sphere of the negative. Phillis Wheatley redefines mother by redefining the matrilineal. As Spillers says, “The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the mother, handed by her in ways that he cannot escape, and in ways that the white American male is allowed to temporize by a fatherly reprieve” (80). Historically, both white and black men and women have been touched by the mother. However, where white men have the father of history, black men and women have been denied by this father. Literarily, at least, the handing of the mother takes on the form of a handing down a way to tapping into what Hume called the true genius of the human mind, and what many others both feared and admired for its potency and elusiveness: errant memory. Wheatley reclaims the definition of mother as life-giving while simultaneously moving it outside of the limiting scope of reproduction. Wheatley begets life through the gift of self-actualization in its truest and purest form. Errant memory is errant, after all, because it is able to exist and maintain its independence in the face of overwhelming forces that seek to make it submit.

Saidiya Hartman, in *Lose Your Mother*, practices errant remembering in her return to the
Motherland of Ghana and in her attempted return to her matrilineage. These two endeavors go hand in hand and present the penultimate manifestation of errant memory’s overthrowing of history. What Hartman discovers as a result of her journey is that it is not in fact a going back, and that the important realization made appears through a process much different than the one she initially imagines. Hartman’s journey starts the way the journeys of every author in this text started: from a need to understand why and how their process of remembering, as well as their memories, were being forced, directed, and determined. Hartman says,

“If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial status and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery” (6).

As a member of the black community, one that is often perceived as coagulating around the wound of slavery and the forced displacement from Africa by virtue of the slave trade, Hartman embodies the afterlife of slavery. To enter this afterlife of slavery and its function as a final destination firmly rooted in the Christian apocalyptic tradition, one must first die. The death, of course, takes the form of mnemonic death. Hartman has imposed on her memory the labels of the antiquarian obsessions and too-long memories. These labels are meant to blind her and others subjected to the same condition by history’s teleology to the fact that injustices are not imagined, but real. The afterlife of slavery is a hellish landscape, a stasis within which persons of African descent are separated from their ability to remember.
As the authors discussed in this dissertation knew, this mechanism of control is built on race and gender. For Europeans, Hartman argues, “race established a hierarchy of human life, determined which bodies were expendable, and selected bodies that could be transformed into commodities.” Race was and is a mechanism of control within the narrative of Western supremacy, under which fall the more localized narratives of American Freedom and white supremacy. For persons of African descent, on the other hand, “race was [and is] both a death sentence and the language of solidarity” (6). Solidarity is found in death, but it does not imprison persons of African descent in a death sentence. The choice to be a part of this community, to find solidarity in race, frees that solidarity from determinacy. Choice, as an act, is an act of remembering. As an act of remembering, solidarity cannot signal death. Solidarity, then, is the only way to circumvent the death inherent in inclusion in democratic history.

Why, then, does Hartman follow many others in returning to Africa in search of answers to questions of where she belongs? Hartman says, “Neither blood nor belonging accounted for my presence in Ghana, only the path of strangers impelled towards the sea. There were no survivors of my lineage or far-flung relatives of whom I had come in search, no places and people before slavery that I could trace. My family trail disappeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century” (7). Hartman returns to the motherland, a place existing only in imagination and the hope it offers for answers to the questions inevitable raised by the process of commodification. Wheatley, Turner, Crafts, and Du Bois are these strangers impelled towards the sea, writing the memory of the Middle Passage into their texts. They go, in essence, through their own Middle Passage by daring to cross that indeterminate sea of errant memory. Hartman does the same, not by crossing the physical Atlantic, but by opening her place within the narrative of history to the inevitable rupturing of remembering that comes with encountering the
myth of Africa head-on. The fugitive memory of the mother, of the matrilineal, compels Hartman to Africa in spite of her initial search for answers within the patriarchal lineage system.

Even though Hartman hopes to find herself within history, she finds instead possibility. Hartman notes that “my attempt to rewrite the past would be as thwarted as my mother’s. Saidiya was also a fiction of someone I would never be—a girl unsullied by the stain of slavery and inherited disappointment.” The act of renaming herself is akin to the act of writing committed by Wheatley and her successors. What the authors discussed in this dissertation inherit is not disappointment, not the stain of slavery. Instead, as Hartman will soon realize, they inherit errant memory. At first, Hartman seeks “the slave route, which was both an existent territory with objective coordinates and the figurative realm of an imagined past,” because it is what she is trained to believe in, much like Du Bois (9). However, as her journey progresses through Ghana, the slave castle, the trails, the people, and especially the archives, Hartman comes to realize that the answers she finds come not from these sources, but from her reading of them. Her family being from Curacao, Hartman has many stories that compete with and complete each other to form an incoherent long memory. These stories are like “the embarrassing incidents adults love to share with you about some incredulous thing you had done as a toddler but of which you had no memory. It wasn’t that you suspected them of making it up as much as it concerned some earlier incarnation of yourself that was not really you.” To Hartman, “Slavery felt like that too, something that was part of me but not me at the same time” (10).

Hartman’s journey begins with and centers around a mother-figure, much like the other authors discussed. Her effort at revisionist history is unsuccessful because history, revised or otherwise, leaves no room for the mother, as Spillers makes clear. Going through the archives, Hartman realizes this too, and learns what Du Bois learned a century before her. She notes,
“Years later when looking through the Alabama testimony, I was unable to find [my grandmother]…nor did I find the paragraph stamped in my memory…It was as if I had conjured her up.” The next question she asks herself is pivotal and acutely self-reflexive: “Was my hunger for the past so great that I was now encountering ghosts? Had my need for an entrance into history played tricks on me, mocked my scholarly diligence, and exposed me as a girl blinded by mother loss” (16)? Hartman gets at the heart of the subjectivity of historiography. The problem, then, is not historiography itself, but those who frame it as an objective, scientific endeavor concerned only with searchable facts. This criterion already excludes many from ever being found again, including Hartman’s great-grandmother. Hartman’s desire for an “entrance into history” is a yearning for inclusion in the larger historical narrative of American Freedom and democracy. However, as she finds out the hard way, the archive is a learned (read forced) memory. The archive is habit: “The archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons catalogued, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios. To read the archive is to enter a mortuary” (17). However, as Du Bois learned through long memory, the archive is also a space of possibility as the physical representation of collective memory. Hartman, as the embodiment of the afterlife of slavery, lives within the archive as errant memory. Like the fugitive memory that finds a space to enter consciousness, Hartman and her reading of the archives presents a moment of rupture, the embodiment of memory-images thought long-forgotten. Hartman brings these forgotten memories to the surface, allowing her and others reading her work to make choices by calibrating these errant memories to the learned and forced ones. This choice is indeterminate, as each person entering the archive of history brings a unique rupture, a unique errant memory. This choice is true freedom, true independence.
What Hartman exposes in her book is not just the errant memory of the archives. Instead, as a space of death, a mortuary, the archive exposes the “invisible one cannot cease to see, the incessant making itself seen…In the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But the other night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest.” Suddenly, we find ourselves back in Blanchot’s Other Night, the space of literature. Hartman also exposes the forgetfulness inherent in history. In her search for her mother-figure, Hartman finds errant memory. By contrasting the indeterminacy and potential of errant remembering to the forgetfulness of history, Hartman further acts out the tradition started by Wheatley. From the collective memory of the archive comes Lose Your Mother. While it may not ever be able to replace the ghost of Hartman’s great-grandmother, it is a work in which Hartman engages her own story on her terms. If Hartman is “the vestige of the dead,” and if “history is how the secular world attends to the dead,” then Lose Your Mother is Hartman’s memory without rest, a reminder that Hartman is not merely a “reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic and the past is not yet over” (18). Lose Your Mother, like the other works discussed herein, makes sure that Hartman is not trapped in this past and is an archive to the many choices that have led to who and where Hartman is, was, and will be.

The point to take away, and the point of contact between memory and the image of the mother, is indeterminacy. Like pure memory, the idea, image, and reality of the maternal and the matrilineal are interpreted as dangerous because of their need for paternalistic context. What I mean by this is that the only space within which the maternal functions to the liking of those that limit it in its stereotypical definitions of reproduction is within the patriarchal and patrilineal space of history. However, as Hartman, Wheatley, Turner, Crafts, and Du Bois make clear, this space of history cannot exist without the place of memory and its place within the matrilineal.
This embrace of indeterminacy truly frees the author and the reader. Each one of the works discussed herein is not limited by the identity of its author. Instead, they too are subject to the reader, who “‘makes’ the book, the work, become a work beyond the man who produced it, the experience that is expressed in it and even beyond all the artistic resources which tradition has made available.” Here, then, we finally have an alternative freedom: “Reading does not produce anything, does not add anything. It lets be what is. It is freedom: not the freedom that produces being or grasps it, but freedom that welcomes, consents, says yes, can only say yes, and, in the space opened by this yes, lets the work’s overwhelming decisiveness affirm itself, lets be its affirmation that it is, and nothing more” (Blanchot 194).
Kenneth Warren, in *What Was African American Literature*, takes this focus on wound culture in African American literature as a chance to refute the viability of an African American literary tradition beyond reaction to a time when these wounds were particularly egregious. I do not agree with Warren, but do recognize his engaging of wound culture in African American literature as important.

In *From Text to Action*, Paul Ricoeur describes emplotment as “plot,” or “the act of ‘taking together’ – of composing – those ingredients of human action, which, in ordinary experience, remain dissimilar and discordant” (*Text 4*).

Bergson echoes Nietzsche, who says, In *On the Uses and Abuses of History*, that a person “forgets most things in order to do one thing; he is unjust towards what lies behind him and knows only one right, the right of what is to come into being now” (5).

The importance of history and freedom lie intertwined in the idea of democracy, an ideation sacred to the American collective identity. As such, American collective memory, in its myriad forms, seeks to emulate the ideals upon which the nation it inhabits was founded. As a result, the historical tradition in the United States, as Pierre Nora points out, has been inextricably tied to a project of democratism (10). In other words, where other places have attempted to write absolute or indisputable histories of their national growth, the United States, it seems, has given a myriad of voices a chance to constantly challenge the historical narrative in place.

Elizabeth Raul Bethel makes a convincing case for the origins of African American identity residing in the transfer from “autobiographical memory,” or individual memory based on one’s experiential relationship with specific lieux de memoires, to collective historical consciousness.” Bethel argues that “in this manner, individual fate—‘good’ fortune and ‘bad’ luck—could be reinterpreted and understood as producers of larger historical and cultural patterns of normative behavior, of socially structured arrangements of power…Historical consciousness is a way of understanding and interpreting individual biography, a process whereby the individual and the autobiographical is collectivized and generalized” (168). While I do not disagree with Bethel’s assertion, it is this interpretation, this collectivizing and generalizing, that I take issue with and interrogate.

According to Susan Buck-Morss, Hegel, whose idea of Freedom I interrogate in this dissertation, believed that “Europe and European-colonized America were…history’s dominant agent in the modern time,” justifying the colonizing project as the development of reason in the world. The West was declared the historical avant-garde for all humanity progressing necessarily toward a common end” (*Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* 116). Hegel’s belief reflects a more commonly held belief by the writers of history and philosophy. As is the case with Freedom, I take Hegel more as an exemplar of his time, a person who wrote about the influences of his world.

See Maurice Halbwachs’s *Collective Memory*.

In describing his search for a true philosophy, Descartes describes his revelation that nothing “contributes to the perfection of the mind” save “promptitude of thought,…imagination,…[and] fullness and readiness of memory,” with “reason or sense” being “found complete in each individual” (29). Thus the notion, “I think, therefore I am,” cannot be separated from the ability to remember (400). While others, like Locke, may waver on the innateness of reason, he too believes that memory is essential to the eventual fostering of Reason (23).

Historiography around the Middle Passage, whether traditional or revisionist, focuses largely on the commodification and dehumanization of the actual journey. For traditional historiography and the way in which enslaved Africans are quantified into numbers, see Phillip Curtin’s *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, Herbert Klein’s *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, or Johannes Postma’s *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. For revisionist historiography, where these individuals’ transformation into objects is explored, see Markus Rediker’s *The Slave Ship*, Stephanie Smallwood’s *Saltwater Slavery*, or Walter Johnson’s *Soul by Soul*.

Louis Althusser’s distinction between the subject and the Subject is useful here for delineating the larger body politic from the individuals who make up said body-politic.

Glissant produces this idea from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s critique of the root-like structure of Western lineage.

Glissant notes, “Internal exile strikes individuals living where solutions concerning the relationship of a community to its surroundings are not, or at least not yet, consented to by this community as a whole” (19).

Reid-Pharr writes in *Once You Go Black*, that “we must contend with the fact that the belief that enslaved Africans and their ancestors were deprived of choice is a central element within the mythic structure that underwrites Black American identity…the contention that they cannot and will not choose is, in fact, an affirmation of the racial status-quo” (8).

I want to make clear here that I am not saying that every person has the luxury of choosing. Often, as is the case with American history, individuals have very little choice. That is, they can choose to conform or, upon discovering
the fallacy of their crafted identity, choose to discard it, but this often comes at the risk of physical harm, social alienation, or death.

xv Nell Irvin Painter, in *The History of White People*, discusses at length the ways in which whiteness changes as the need arises. This need, Painter reveals, has always been to unite against those with dark skin. To this point, whiteness has only opened itself up to identity groups produced by its own rhetoric of domination, and only because these identities try actively to fit into whiteness and because they largely did not suffer mnemonic death on as large a scale as those kidnapped from all over the African continent and used to build to foundation of the United States and the Atlantic world.

xvi On interpreting space as a text would be interpreted, Lefebvre opines, “The ‘reading’ of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and lived obedience” (143).

xvii In *Freedom, Vol I*, Patterson reveals that “freedom was socially constructed—not discovered, for it was an invented value” (3). With American definitions of freedom firmly founded on the principle of what Hegel calls the Spirit, or the idea that one found ultimate freedom in participation in the ideal state, Douglass both challenges and affirms freedom by creating his own state within his space of literature and by actively changing the State to which his personhood was subjected by refusing to let his memory be historicized.

xviii Ricoeur explains that “the appearance of an unprecedented concept of collective consciousness” (94) with the birth of sociology ushered in a new era in the relationship between history, citizenship, and freedom. Basing his ideas on Maurice Halbwachs’s idea of collective memory, Ricoeur points to an important moment in the development of universal history, one that finds the nation, as collective consciousness with a collective memory, overtaking the subject as the driving force behind history’s movement. However, I argue that this happens long before the birth of sociology, as is made evident by Benedict Anderson’s landmark *Imagined Communities*. Even before the moment of the printing press as an agent of allowing people to think of themselves as belonging to one nation, nationhood was taking shape in powerful ways through literature in Early Modern Europe. As scholars like Kim Hall have brilliantly asserted, an awareness of belonging to a nation often went hand-in-hand with racial consciousness, the sails of which received a considerable amount of wind from the encounter with other cultures and epistemologies as the world was rudely forced to acknowledge Western Europe’s existence as a self-declared agent of history.

xix Footnote 2 on page 1.

**Notes to Chapter 1**

xx Robert Reid-Pharr, in *Conjugal Union*, says, “The simple fact that Phillis Wheatley was an author of African descent, that she existed within a purportedly black body, should not be enough to secure her status as the originator of the Black American literary tradition. The very obviousness of this claim startles, especially when juxtaposed with the fact that it is taken almost without question that Black American literature is that which demonstrates the impress of the black hand, the black body, even a body, as problematically situated as Phillis Wheatley’s. It signals, in fact, the depth of the ideological calculus by which our understanding of the black body is wedded to our understanding of black literature and literacy” (4).

xxi In “Works of Wonder, Wondering Eyes, and the Wondrous Poet: The Use of Wonder in Phillis Wheatley’s Marvelous Poetics,” Jennifer Billingsley discusses the Wheatley’s engagement of Hobbes’s idea of imagination as a “‘decaying sense’: ‘the imagination of the past is obscured and made weak’…For Hobbes, imagination and memory are the same thing” and is “subordinate to experience” (176). However, Wheatley’s interpretation of Hobbes’s idea of imagination grounds it firmly in experience instead of subordinating it.

xxii Henry Louis Gates discusses Hume’s opinion of Wheatley, as well as Jefferson’s, in *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*.

xxiii In *Middle Passages*, James T. Campbell offers an excellent and thorough discussion of the literature of explorers in Africa, who helped disseminate the myth of Africa as a “dark continent.”

xxiv In “Pan-African and Puritan Dimensions,” Babacar M’Baye discusses the “indefinite and supportive” and “ambiguous” relationship with Africa (291). Wheatley’s complex relationship with Africa is complicated because the Africa to which she has a relationship is not real. Her real home, of which we get very few hints, is brought on by the errant mnemonics of fancy, while the Africa of which M’Baye speaks is the one imagined by Wheatley’s readers and the people of the African diaspora (271).

xxv Mary McAleer Balkun argues, “As John Wood Sweet points out, “black and Indian Christians who became celebrities were constantly reminded of—and prompted to promote—their racial roots and their cultural origins” (127). Thus, the impetus to advertise [Wheatley’s] race seems to have come consistently from others, not Wheatley herself” (373). In fact, as I state above and in my introduction, “the writings on race of Hume, Kant, and Hegel
“played a strong role in articulating Europe’s sense not only of its cultural but also racial superiority” (375-6).

Wheatley’s Africanness proved central to her social life, as indicated in her paratexts.

Shuffelton identifies this gentleman as “Lieutenant Rochfort,” who had “previously served on the African coast” (182-3).

Reginald Wilburn brilliantly reads “British Homer,” or Milton, as “the British equivalent to Homer, honoring him both as a master of epic in the English language and as a literary and inspirational idea” (92).

Shuffelton also smartly and rightly points out that the specific reference to Gambia may have “spok[en] to the yearnings of a repressed, silenced community of black readers” (185).

In “Marketing a Sable Muse,” Jennifer Rene Young notes, “Odell’s biography may be responsible for the majority of myths about Wheatley that still exist today” (219). The impact of Odell’s biography cannot be understated, and stands as an exemplar of how paratextual elements impact a work’s and author’s historical presence. She further observes that “In the antebellum decades following her death, those who printed her poetry dictated how she would be perceived” (236).

Hairston reveals that “This inability [to remember] could indicate the aftermath of significant trauma, which a seven-year-old child experiencing the Middle Passage no doubt endured. Contemporary psychiatry clearly articulates a series of neuropsychological responses to various kinds of trauma, and a range of memory impairments is among them” (82).

For more on Wheatley’s extensive participation in classical and neoclassical traditions, please see New Essays on Phillis Wheatley, edited by John Shields and Eric D. Lamore. See also Reginald Wilburn’s Preaching the Gospel of Black Revolt.

Frances Smith Foster notes that Wheatley’s “language was always subjected to interpretations engendered by non-literary expectations. As poets and black women [she] knew that the connotations of [her] poetry would be far more complex, complicated, and uncontrollable than other poetry…[Her] poems are true autobiographical statements” (43). Foster’s astute observation reflects the depth of Wheatley’s poetry. However, her contemporary critics and readers did not enjoy the luxury of Foster’s acute critical eye.

Note, for example, how Carretta made it a point to bring to light Equiano’s birth place as something that could undermine his entire narrative.

Vico’s idea that Mneme is primary muse is repeated by Wheatley here.

Other poems in which Wheatley engages the revolutionary debates are “America,” “On the Death of Mr. Snider Murder’d by Richardson,” “To His Excellency General Washington,” “On the Capture of General Lee,” On the Death of General Wooster,” and “Liberty and Peace.”

“To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty” is a celebration of the repeal of the Stamp Act, which indicates that Wheatley celebrates King George’s willingness to rule by the people’s consent.

This is in contrast to Balkun’s argument that fancy is “unequal to the task” and that Wheatley found freedom in her “mind and her soul” (392).

The Oxford English Dictionary lists as the primary definition of the word “pagan”: A person not subscribing to any major or recognized religion, esp. the dominant religion of a particular society; spec. a heathen, a non-Christian.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, it is said that Pope uses it in the Dunciad as follows: “The King of Dykes! than whom, no sluice of mud With deeper sable blots the silver flood” (ii 250). For a more thorough discussion on Milton’s influence on Wheatley, see Wilburn’s Preaching the Gospel of Black Revolt.

Carretta has done brilliant and important work in seeking out documents describing the voyage of the Phillis that carried Wheatley and gave her her name. The trip “was a relative disaster in its length, mortality rate, and cargo,” with “a mortality rate of nearly 25 percent” (7). From this information we can deduce that Wheatley’s trip was horrifying, even by the already despicable standards of the Middle Passage. It may also explain why Wheatley wrote so much about death and the almost coercive hope of a better afterlife.


Notes to Chapter 2

Frances Smith Foster notes that “As the various colonies combined to become the United States, they also agreed to create a more stratified society, which reserved the privileges of the Constitution for a few. During this time of the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence, white men began to seriously justify their physical domination by alleging their intellectual superiority. “What American intellectuals did in the post-Revolutionary decades,” Jordan says, “was, in effect, to claim America as a white man’s country” (xiii).” (11).
Hegel, in *The Philosophy of History* (1837), famously says, “At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit…What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History” (99).

This narrative of gradual emancipation, espoused by the majority of abolitionists, “derives from the perceived capacity of the country to remedy in “the Future,” contemporary national misdeeds. The belief in national progress allows the U.S. citizens to bracket the sins of the present, to read through them and behold the corrective and consolatory utopic horizon,” to use Bruce A. Harvey’s excellent summation of antebellum “Universal history in its American guise...designed to teach the body politic to discern the providential hand behind history” (8, 249).

Robert Stepto refers to the paratextual elements attached to many slave narratives as primarily designed to “authenticate the former slave’s account; in doing so, they are at least partially responsible for the narrative’s acceptance as historical evidence” (3). Stepto goes on to say that “Together, both in what they do and do not say, these statements reflect the passions, politics, interpersonal relations, race rituals, and uses of language of a cross-section of America in the 1840’s” (10). In order to become part of the larger American historical narrative, the voices of persons of African descent needed the process of authentication to cleanse them of their errantry.

William L. Andrews astutely observes that “White America was willing to suspend disbelief and assume the sincerity of an autobiography whom it identified as a political peer and racial equal. However, the knowledge that they could not predicate their life stories on this racially based trust forced black autobiographers to invent devices and strategies that would endow their stories with the appearance of authenticity” (2). The process of authenticity is directly linked to the absorption of blackness into appropriate American narratives.

For example, in his *Narrative* (1770), James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw tells his readers that he “had, from my infancy, a curious turn of mind; was more grave and reserved in my disposition than either of my brothers and sisters” (35). Olaudah Equiano describes himself as one of “those children whom our wise men foretell will be fortunate,” remembering that “many used to come to see” him (205) in his *Narrative* (1789). Interestingly, Gronniosaw and Equiano credit providence with their capture and their eventual journey to the Western world. Equiano has many providential moments, and starts off his narrative by saying, “I regard myself as a particular favorite of heaven, and acknowledge that the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life” (Original Italics, 197). Gronniosaw separates himself from his peers by claiming that he was “strongly impressed…that there was some great man of power which resided above the sun, moon, and stars, the objects of [everyone else’s] worship” (35).

Frederick Douglass, in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), describes the way in which he was perceived by his fellow antislavery lecturers. He recalls, “I was generally introduced as a “chattel”—a “thing”—a piece of Southern “property”—the chairman assuring the audience that it could speak.” About his speeches, Douglass remembers, “During the firsts three or four months, my speeches were almost exclusively made up of narrations of my own personal experience as a slave. “Let us have the facts,” said the people. So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative. “Give us the facts,” said Collins, “we will take care of the philosophy”” (268-9).

Henry Louis Gates astutely points out that “The question of whether Africans were human was less related to color than the possession of reason, a tradition inaugurated by Descartes” (*Trials* 25).

Davis notes that “maroon communities took shape in unsettled and difficult-to-access regions in the South,” and that their “identity and political orientation was defined by the national character of American slavery” (236).

In *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, David Brion Davis reveals that Stowe wrote to Douglass in 1851, asking him for “information on cotton plantations” (319).

Genette says that “In actual practice, identification is the most important function of the title” (80), and argues that the title’s function of “describing, in theory optional, in reality is unavoidable: “A title,” Eco rightly says, “unfortunately, is in itself a key to interpretation. We cannot escape the notions prompted by” titles.

Michael T. Gilmore notes, “But presence, as we have seen, doesn't have to be corporeal. It is possible to be present without being visible in the flesh, just as the risen Christ is immanent spiritually but not materially in the Eucharist—or, perhaps better yet, just as he is present in the Word and in the life around us, discernible not by the five senses but by the insight that comes from faith. Stowe is contemptuous of the notion that things lack reality unless they can be physically seen and heard. To her, such literalism betrays an utter poverty of imagination, like that shown by the servants who misinterpret the parental reactions to Eva's death. These people are "the slave of their eye and ear"” (106).
Washington reveals later that Stowe’s version of Truth’s discussion with Douglass is “Truth in blackface” (302), a contention that reflects the length to which Stowe and other antislavery authors went to superimpose a prefigured black Africanity onto a complex, vibrant, and irreducible person of African descent.


**Notes to Chapter 3**

Augusta Rohrbach, in “A Silent Unobtrusive Way: Hannah Crafts and the Literary Marketplace,” makes this important claim: “Among the titles I found in the 1882 catalogue, I was surprised to see an 1833 edition of Phillis Wheatley’s poems; its presence in his collection is suggestive of Crafts’s relationship to white literary tradition. Though not included in Sinchi’s list, Wheatley’s work foreshadows Crafts’s radical appropriation of white forms. Just as Wheatley appropriated the sonnet form for her own purposes, Crafts took on the lineaments of the novel when nonfiction was the norm for African American writers. But unlike Wheatley’s work, which was tested and ultimately sanctioned by white community leaders, resulting in publication, Crafts’s work never got into print” (9). Rohrbach’s excellent discussion on Crafts’s relationship to print culture does not entertain my assertion that Crafts may in fact have been deeply influenced by Wheatley’s uniquely black aesthetic of errant mnemonics, as opposed to her use of white tropes and conventions.

I disagree with Christopher Castiglia, who claims, “Having disavowed her identification with black women and having recognized the violent control instituted by her identification with white women, Hannah is left with a self-produced and imaginative identity pieced together, like _The Bondwoman’s Narrative_ itself, from historical events and fictional genres, between outward show and inner desire, options for storytelling and the drive toward self-determination that makes stories necessary. Hannah learns to treat identities the way she treats the portraits that are their representational equivalent: she takes a speculative freedom that refuses the direct correspondence between seeming and being. Yet the acts of imaginative freedom that divorce outer show from inner life risk accommodating the historical forces that insist on direct correspondences and clear identifications—the slave economy and the legal apparatus that upholds it—rather than working, materially, to change them” (250). While I agree with Castiglia’s idea of an indeterminate freedom, I assert that Crafts does in fact change her environment materially through her melding of her inner and outer selves.

This sentiment is defined more acutely by Bergson in _Matter and Memory_.

John Staufer argues that “Douglass stressed humanity’s common origins, and the superiority of imagination over reason. The “full identity of man with nature,” he said, “is our chief distinction from all other beings on earth and the source of our greatest achievements.” While “dogs and elephants are said to possess” the capacity for reason, only humans sought to recreate nature and portray both the “inside soul” and the “outside world” through such “artificial means” as pictures (Douglass, “Pictures”)” (57). Like Douglass, Crafts embraces the full identity of Hannah with nature. However, unlike Douglass, Hannah does not privilege the visual space of pictures as the space where this relationship is articulated. Instead, Hannah locates the forces of history in pictures, in the face of which her own articulation of freedom in experiential knowledge becomes apparent.

Gerard Genette names prefatory material written posthumously as allographic (263). He discusses the often informational nature of these prefaces (265).

Henry Louis Gates provides a lengthy introduction in the 2002 edition of _The Bondwoman’s Narrative_, where he chronicles his journey trying to find out Hannah Crafts’s true identity. He achieves one of his goals, which is to authenticate the book as a genuine slave narrative written in the antebellum 19th century. However, he is unable to find out exactly who Hannah Crafts was.

Tuan 200. Yi Fu Tuan, in his conclusion to _Space and Place_, actually theorizes the superiority of human intelligence over animal intelligence as “This power to see people and places in their complex particularity,” which is “most highly developed in human beings” (200). Needless to say, this articulation of what makes one human differs drastically from the conventional (even today) babble of needing to be able to prove with fact and evidence. It even goes against much of the rest of Space and Place. However, it is a theory that holds massive importance. I like to think that I am partly and humbly fulfilling Tuan’s wish by continuing this vital thought, whose potential lies not in taking us in any direction, but rather in its potential to disorient the foundations of contemporary epistemologies and ontologies of human knowing and human being.

Even Tuan admits that “Literature, for example, is full of precise descriptions of how people live” (202).

Hegel, _Die Vernunft in der Geschichte_, 225-6, as quoted in Buck-Morss, _Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History_.

In “Bondwoman Unbound: Hannah Crafts’s Art and Nineteenth-Century US Literary Practice,” Lawrence Buell notes, “Unlike the narratives of Douglass, Jacobs, and various others, she does not start with a scene of awakening to "the hell of slavery," as Douglass calls it. From the very start, she knows that slavery is hell. From the very start, she
feels the injustice of her position. But she displays no overriding need to make a literal break for freedom. She is too practical, too risk-averse for that. For most of the narrative, such desires get displaced onto other figures” (20). While Buell argues for practicality, I argue that Hannah deals with the injustice of her position by writing a new break for a different kind of freedom, one based not leaving the hell of slavery, but instead on arriving at a place where her own image of her self can flourish.

In opposition to Karen Sanchez-Eppler’s assertion that “Hannah's feeling of freedom in the portrait gallery derives from a double act of "recomposition." If young Hannah sees in these pictures "companions" rather than owners, she does so through a complex process of interpretation and denial that rejects the artistic and ancestral intentions behind such portraiture, refusing to view them as signs of lineage, possession, and power” (257), I interpret this scene’s power through the historical function of the pictures.

See Orlando Patterson’s Freedom, Vol. I, for a full discussion on the centrality of slavery to ideas of Freedom.

Tuan predicates Space and Place upon this dichotomy. “Place is security, space is freedom” (3). He continues, “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get it know it better and endow it with value…from the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space…if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause” (6). I repeat this here from the introduction to remind readers of the importance of abstract space turning into oriented place.

Dickson Bruce, in “Mrs. Henry’s Solemn Promise in Historical Perspective,” notes “Throughout the novel, as in the story of Mrs. Henry's oath, Crafts creates an opposition between what might be described as a formalistic, even legalistic approach to human affairs and an approach based on a deeper, more complex understanding of moral situations. The world, Crafts stresses, is not the sort of place for which rules should serve as the only guide to right action. Indeed, a rule-governed approach to morality can lead to the kind of moral blindness Mrs. Henry displays and may even serve as a way of evading the morality of one's acts (131).

William Andrews, in “Hannah Crafts's Sense of an Ending,” observes “Marrying "a fond and affectionate husband," establishing a secure home, finding fulfilling, socially respectable work, and recovering her long-lost mother represent almost a fantasy of social and spiritual gratification for Hannah, the likes of which cannot be found anywhere else in early African American autobiography or fiction” (38).

Notes to Chapter 4

Lewis R. Gordon, in “Du Bois’s Humanistic Philosophy of Human Sciences,” discusses the way in which Du Bois, from the very beginning of his own academic career, was beset on all sides by the temptations of traditional scholarship. Specifically, in relation to his research for The Philadelphia Negro, Gordon writes “We see here an ironic relation to research, for if Du Bois were successful at what he was commissioned to do, he would have been a failure at what he had set out to do, which was to find out the "truth," as it were, of the Philadelphia black population's situation. The glitch in the institution's expectations was Du Bois himself. He was, after all, W.E.B. Du Bois, the future dean of African American scholarship” (269). In other words, where his peers had wanted an absorbable narrative of Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward, Du Bois gave them something altogether different.

Gordon says, “Given the impact of Hegel's introduction to his Philosophy of History (1956), it was a long-standing view that blacks were not historical. Du Bois's advancement of the historical here was, in this area of thought, Copernican” (275). I agree with this statement and build on it by arguing that through his advancement of the historical, Du Bois uncovers the power of the mnemonic.

Blight offers a thorough analysis of Du Bois’s training and its influence on his life as a writer and social critic in “Du Bois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory.”

Blight warns readers that “we would do well to use [Du Bois’s] autobiographical readings with caution” (47).

See James T. Campbell’s Middle Passages.

In the introduction of Dusk of Dawn, Du Bois notes, “I have essayed in a half century three sets of thought centering around the hurts and hesitancies that hem the black man in America. The first of these, "The Souls of Black Folk," written thirty-seven years ago, was a cry at midnight thick within the veil, when none rightly knew the coming day. The second, "Darkwater," now twenty years old, was an exposition and militant challenge, defiant with dogged hope.” The third book in this trilogy would be the one in which he wrote these words.

See Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk

Robert Gregg provides an excellent discussion of the impact of The Negro, charting a long list of seminal historical and anthropological texts that seemingly glean from Du Bois’s foresight.

I want to briefly remind the reader of the importance of Reid-Pharr’s and Watts’s theories of choice and self-determination, respectively, to the theoretical foundation of my project. Choice, as I use it here and throughout my
work, is framed within the complexities involved in performing this act within a deterministic society that seeks to control that human capacity and limit it within the authors’ lives here discussed, including Du Bois’s.

Gregg again provides invaluable insight into the history of this phrase’s misinterpretation, as well as an excellent reading of it.

See Nietzsche’s “On the Uses and Abuses of History.”

Gregg again provides excellent material on how Du Bois influenced Eric Williams and many others.

Ron Eyerman, in “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory,” summarizes the general idea about memory and identity: “Memory is usually conceived as individually based, as residing inside the heads of individuals. Theories of identity formation, socialization, tend to conceptualize memory as part of the development of self and personality. Notions of collective identity building around this model (like the collective behavior school) theorize a ‘loss of self’, and thus of the constraints of memory (as super ego or ingrained habit) in accounting for collective behavior and the formation of new collective identities” (161).

For a full and insightful discussion on the sources of these “Dark Continent” myths, please see James T. Campbell’s Middle Passages.

Paul Gilroy, in The Black Atlantic, discusses the difficulty Du Bois had with incorporating Africa into “modernity,” which led him to instead to see Africa as “a mythic counterpart to modernity in the Americas” (113). While I agree that Du Bois sees Africa as mythic, I would amend Gilroy’s assertion to say that Du Bois was fully aware of his this mythologizing and its sources and consequences. There was not so much anxiety around not being able to fit Africa into modernity (a concept Du Bois critiques with works like the ones discussed here) as an awareness of the nature of modernity and its shortcomings.

The story of Alexander Crummel, a man who crossed the sea, appealed to Du Bois for its Pan-African implications. However, it is also clear that he was fascinated by the journey across the ocean. The chapter is sustained by a constant sea metaphor.
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