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Trans-Colonial Collaboration and Slave Narrative: *Mary Prince* Revisited

Summary

In 1831 in London, two formidable women met: Mary Prince, an ex-slave from Bermuda, who had crossed the Atlantic to a qualified freedom, and Susanna Strickland, an English writer. The narrative that emerged from this meeting was *The History of Mary Prince*, which played a role in the fight for slave emancipation in the British Empire. Prince disappeared once the battle was won, while Strickland emigrated to Upper Canada and, as Susanna Moodie, became an often quoted 19th century Canadian writer. Prince dictated, Strickland copied, and the whole was lightly edited by Thomas Pringle, the anti-slavery publisher at whose house the meeting took place.

This is the standard account. In contesting this version, the paper aims to reinstate Moodie as co-creator of the collaborative *Mary Prince* text by considering multiple accounts of the meeting with Prince and to place the work in the context of Moodie's pre- and post-emigration oeuvre on both sides of the Atlantic.

Key words: Mary Prince, Susanna Moodie, slave narratives, Anti-Slavery movement

Čezkolonialno sodelovanje in pripoved sužnje: *Mary Prince* vnovič

Povzetek

Leta 1831 se v Londonu srečata pomembni ženski: Mary Prince, nekdanja sužnja z Bermudov, ki je našla onkraj Atlantika pogojno prostost, in angleška pisateljica Susanna Strickland. Srečanje obrodi pripoved z naslovom *Zgodovina Mary Prince*, ki je odigrala svojo vlogo v boju zoper suženjstvo v britanskem imperiju. Po zmagi se je za Prince izgubila vsaka sled, medtem ko je Strickland emigrirala v Zgornjo Kanado, kjer je postala kot Susanna Moodie pogosto citirana kanadska pisateljica 19. stoletja. Kar je Prince narekovala Strickland, je potrpežljivo uredil Thomas Pringle, založnik in borec proti suženjstvu, v čigar hiši sta se ženski sestajali.

Takšna je splošno sprejeta verzija, ki pa jo članek izpodbija z vzpostavljanjem Moodie kot soustvarjalke skupnega besedila *Mary Prince*, in sicer tako, da upošteva mnogotera poročila o sestajanjih s Mary Prince ter umešča delo v kontekst Moodiejinega opusa na obeh straneh Atlantika, to je pred njeno emigracijo ter po njej.

Ključne besede: Mary Prince, Susanna Moodie, pripoved sužnje, gibanje za odpravo suženjstva

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1. Introduction

Over nearly three centuries of trade in slaves there were “an estimated thirty-five thousand Atlantic slave voyages” (Hochschild 2006, 28). From that vast number of transported slaves and their descendants, some came forward in print to inform the world of conditions from within slavery. Of sixty-thousand who escaped the American south for the north, for example, one hundred managed to write slave narratives (Gates 2006, 1). This figure is impressive, given the obstacles to any slave or ex-slave becoming a published author. The silenced condition of slavery is explicable by illiteracy, language denial and the state of material deprivation in which New World slaves lived. Those slaves and ex-slaves who took up their pens usually did so retrospectively, from a condition of earned freedom and often from the safety of non-slaveholding territories. England itself formed a partial refuge for Africans lucky enough to get there because English law permitted an interpretation that freed all slaves on English soil (Hochschild 2006, 35–6).

One such example is the woman known as Mary Prince, who arrived in London in 1828 after a life of toil and abuse in the British colonies of Bermuda and the Antilles. In 1831, Prince’s story, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, sold with great success. Mary Prince, however, had not taken up her pen; instead, the writing was done on her behalf by Susanna Strickland, who would later emigrate to another part of the British empire, Upper Canada, and as Susanna Moodie to become the author of *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and Canada’s best known settler author.¹

It was thus partly through Moodie’s writing talent that Prince was given her voice. Though much attention has been given to the encounter between the two women, Moodie’s role has more often been accepted as that of passive amanuensis.² This study aims to create a more nuanced account of the transaction between the black speaker and white recorder, by looking at Moodie’s treatment of slaves and slave language before and after 1831, in texts written in London as well as in the colonial territory of the Canadas. It is my contention that the encounter between these women left a long-lasting trace in the work of Moodie, one that may reflect an anxiety of mimicry on Moodie’s part.

2. Trans-Colonial Context

As a story, *The History of Mary Prince* held many surprises for the English reader of 1831. Though it told of verbal and physical abuse, of grief and family separation, it also narrated resilience and resistance. Most surprising might have been the degree of mobility in the life of this slave. For Prince was well traveled – not just across the Atlantic to England where she ran away from

¹ I will designate the author as Moodie throughout. Although she was Susanna Strickland when she worked with Prince for the Anti-Slavery society, she married soon after, and is better known as Susanna Moodie.

² For fuller accounts of the historical genesis of *The History of Mary Prince*, see M. Ferguson’s edition of the reissued work (1987), as well as Whitlock 2000, Paque 1992, and Baumgartner 2001.

her owners, but within the West Indies. Born in the mid-Atlantic, in Bermuda, Prince was transported to Turk's Island (near the Bahamas) to work in the salt industry; after returning to Bermuda and changing owners, she moved south again, to the British colony of Antigua in the Lesser Antilles. In all, this slave covered nearly 7000 miles in ocean travel. Moreover, Prince seems to have acquired as she matured, a certain degree of agency in changing masters and location. This trace of the willed life project can be overlooked by the reader focusing on the sensational details of whipping and near starvation. This facet of slave life is corroborated by the account given in the contemporaneous *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro*, the story of Ashton Warner from the island of St. Vincent. Prince and Warner shared a common ghost writer, for it was again Susanna Moodie who took down Warner's story, having also taught him to read the Bible. As Susanna Strickland, her name appeared on the title page of *Negro Slavery* in 1831. Warner's travels were even more various, though, at 5000 miles, less extensive because of the shorter distances between the islands of the Lesser Antilles. By his account, Warner visited Grenada, Martinique, Barbados and St. Kitts before embarking for London.

Both slave narratives reveal the extent to which even these most marginalized of imperial subjects participated in the economic exchange between colonies and moved across seas and oceans, sometimes as the property of their colonial masters, but sometimes as quasi-free agents bound on commercial or life projects of their own – such as Warner's travels to Grenada and Barbados (Strickland 1831, 58–61). In transcribing the slave accounts, Moodie retained precise geographical details that bolster the value of the texts as anti-slavery testimony. In contrast, other details of Prince's story were clearly elided and the text shaped as an appeal to humanitarian feeling and women's sympathy. The constructed nature of the Mary Prince text gains prominence when we consider Moodie's post-emigration writing in which she re-tells the story of her meeting with Prince in two different ways. Temporal and spatial displacement affects memory and narration in such a way as to raise questions about the original account of the genesis of *The History of Mary Prince*. To assign authorial agency for this text, we must go back to London in 1830/31.

3. The Collaboration on *Mary Prince*

The History of Mary Prince enjoyed a modest publishing success, going through three London editions in 1831.³ Moodie's name did not appear on the cover, which included the words "related by herself" to exert Prince's claim of authenticity. Nor was Moodie named in the original paratext that accompanied the slim account of the slave's life. As the transcriber of Mary Prince's oral narrative, Moodie was publicly assigned the anonymous role of drawing-room scribe. Baumgartner, for example, finds that, although "the most significant collaboration occurs between Prince and Miss S-----," nevertheless, Miss S---- herself is "barely detectable" in the text (Baumgartner 2001, 265; 254).

The original account of this act of transcription comes from the 1831 "Preface" to *Mary Prince*, in which Thomas Pringle mentions copying services rendered by "a lady who happened to be at the time residing in my family as a visitor." Pringle's wording, especially the phrase "as a visitor",

³ Publishers who handled the text include F. Westley and A.H. Davis of London, as well as Waugh & Innes of Edinburgh.

puts the transaction on the purely accidental level – almost a leisure time activity for lady callers. Susanna, however, was hardly an amateur at the time but an author whose work was already selling. The word ‘visitor’ is also disingenuous, as it conceals the closeness of Pringle’s relationship to Susanna, who used to refer to Pringle as “my dear adopted father” or even as “Papa” (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 50; 11). That the lady in question might have been present for reasons connected to anti-slavery advocacy is excluded by Pringle’s insistence that she was a visiting amateur doing the family a favour.

Pringle’s wording also stresses the closeness of the published text to Prince’s oral recital.⁴

It was written out fully, with all the narrator’s repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into the present shape, retaining, as far as was practicable, Mary’s exact expressions and peculiar phraseology . . . to exclude redundancies and gross grammatical errors. (Gates 2006, 251)

Any editing or censorship has been relegated to the background as far as possible (*practicable* is Pringle’s word).

The second account of the transaction occupies a paragraph in Moodie’s letter to her friends the Birds in late January 1831. In the middle of more exciting events such as the temporary suspension of her engagement, the letter writer inserts this account:

I have been writing Mr. Pringle’s black Mary’s life from her own dictation and for her benefit adhering to her own simple story and language without deviating to the paths of flourish or romance. It is a pathetic little history and is now printing in the form of a pamphlet to be laid before the Houses of Parliament. Of course my name does not appear. Mr. Pringle has added a very interesting appendix and I hope the work will do much good.... (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 57)

As the account closest in time to the meeting of the two women, this one recommends itself by its immediacy. The writer echoes Pringle’s concept that the “simple story” has been left intact, and its details merely taken down in “dictation”. However, Moodie’s metaphor of the path of writing, from which flourish and romance are deviations, is an intriguing one. The wording suggests that there must have been at least some temptation to take these deviations, and that *flourish* and *romance* were powerful inducements in literary composition. Rhetorical restraint is depicted as having been accomplished for the “benefit” of Prince herself, a benefit for which Susanna gladly sets aside personal recognition. The passage still constructs Prince as being owned (*Mr. Pringle’s black Mary*), and includes her skin colour as a matter of social identification for her correspondent. As evidence about the transaction, this account falls more on the side of passive amanuensis – the version of events congruent with Pringle’s wishes – despite the strong opening words *I have been writing*, which suggest an activity that stretched over more time that would have been taken by mere transcription.

⁴ Throughout the paper, I will refer to her as Mary Prince, since that is the name in the title of the main work being explored. However, there are doubts about her name, and her petition to parliament names her as Molly Wood. Prince had been married in the Moravian church to a man called Daniel James. She left her husband behind when she came to England, however, and no account refers to her by the name of James.

Moodie alludes to her connection with Mary Prince in a letter written a few months later, just after her wedding to Dunbar Moodie (April, 1831):

Mr. Pringle ‘gave me’ away, and Black Mary, who had treated herself with a complete new suit upon the occasion, went on the coach box, to see her dear Missie and Biographer wed. (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 60)

This reference suggests fondness and familiarity between the two women, while revealing that differences of rank and race still expressed themselves in terms of address: “Black Mary” from Moodie but “Missie” on the part of Mary Prince. Interestingly, Moodie now calls herself Prince’s “Biographer,” in what is surely a departure from the claim in the earlier letter that Prince’s written story belonged to Prince alone.

These contemporary letters reveal their author’s flirtation with conversion to Methodism, as well as her role in distributing anti-slavery literature (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 49). Both details indicate that Moodie was fitted by belief to become the mediator between the slave voice and the anti-slavery narrative that the movement required. Although she is careful to give credit to Prince in these letters, there are slippages that suggest how the earnest young writer might have strayed from the path of strict “dictation” to that of ‘flourish’ in composing the “pathetic little history” in a manner calculated to highlight its pathos for the English public. The Moodie in the Pringle’s drawing room should be seen as a disciple producing a gospel for the collective cause and not as a visiting amateur with a pen and paper.

4. Later Accounts of the Collaboration

The third account of the meeting between ex-slave and author occurs in Moodie’s novel *Flora Lyndsay* (1854), published after *Roughing it in the Bush*, and heavily autobiographical, perhaps even “Moodie’s autobiography in fictional form” (Steenman-Marcusse 2001, 123). The novel centers on the decision of a gentlewoman, Flora Lyndsay, to emigrate to Upper Canada and on the complicated arrangements to be made beforehand and the adventures of the Atlantic voyage.

The slavery question is explored during the voyage to the embarkation port in Scotland, when Flora’s fellow-passengers include a West Indian, Mrs. Dalton, whom Flora engages in debate about slavery. Flora takes the anti-slavery side, while Mrs. Dalton voices the pro-slavery position, including the idea that the enslaved condition was itself proof that slaves had no souls: “Their degradation proves their inferiority” (Moodie 1854, 123). Mrs. Dalton’s position recapitulates the state of skepticism that Moodie attributes to herself before her meeting with Prince and Warner (Strickland 1831, 6–7). The author thus has her alter ego, Flora, debate her own pre-conversion beliefs and defeat them. Defending the intelligence and humanity of slaves, Flora reveals that, before embarking, she had “taught a black man from the island of St. Vincent’s to read the Bible fluently in ten weeks”.⁵ A few pages later, she reveals her role in the production of *Mary P-----*: “I wrote it myself from the woman’s own lips”, Flora says (Moodie 1854, 124–5).

⁵ Moodie, 1854, 123. This refers to Moodie’s work with Ashton Warner in writing *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro* in 1831.

Moodie's wording opens the question of the true relation of amanuensis to speaker in the production of the *Mary Prince* text, or, at any rate, of the fictional Flora Lyndsay and Mary P---. One sentence presents clashing claims of agency: *I wrote it myself from the woman's own lips*. The contradiction between the main clause and the prepositional phrase at the end permits one to elevate Flora to primary authorship of the text, and thus to wonder about Moodie's parallel role in creating *Mary Prince*. Certainly, Mrs. Dalton interprets this as a claim of authorship:

. . . and I have been talking all this time to *the author* of Mary P _____. From this moment, Madam, we must regard ourselves as strangers. No West Indian could for a moment tolerate *the author* of that odious pamphlet. (Moodie 1854, 125; my emphasis)

Mrs. Dalton's prejudices prevent her believing that any ex-slave could have been an author, so her ascription of agency to Flora is perfectly in character. To Mrs. Dalton, *Mary P---* is necessarily a convenient invention on which to hang the agenda of the Anti-Slavery movement. Without falling into the same fallacy as Mrs. Dalton, it is yet possible to read this remark in a semi-autobiographical work as signifying a more engaged role for Moodie in the production of the *Mary Prince* text.

What might have motivated Moodie to give Flora this near-paradoxical remark, appearing to reclaim custody of the *Mary Prince* text? With her brief conversion to Methodism long in the past, Moodie must have lost the zeal for marketing a dated ideology. Perhaps it simply no longer mattered who had written what. With the passage of twenty-three years and of the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833, the issue of authenticity in the *History of Mary Prince* might have faded in practical relevance (even as it became magnified in personal relevance). Prince and her problems had been left behind on the other side of a wide ocean.

Moreover, slave narratives from the American continent (some penned by ex-slaves themselves) were becoming much more usual by the 1850s. Accounts of conditions under slavery and of personal escape from this condition had been written by Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Solomon Northup, Moses Roper and William Wells Brown (Gates 2006, 3–4). *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (1849) originated closer to Moodie's home – from what is now Dresden, Ontario. The story told by *Mary Prince* had not only performed its task in the fight against British slavery but had been overtaken by more up-to-date accounts. As both documentary evidence and fictional entertainment, then, *The History of Mary Prince* had lost importance. Nevertheless, it must have remained an important memory for Moodie and a connection with the flourishing anti-slavery movement in the United States. In Moodie's autobiographical memory, a life narrative short on success might well have looped back to pick up this early, unacknowledged publishing coup.

However, it is worth noting that an autobiographical incident involving a similar conversation forms part of Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush; or Life in Canada* which was published just prior to *Flora Lyndsay*. In Chapter 11, she narrates a conversation resembling that between Flora and the Mrs Dalton. In *Roughing It*, the racist conversational opponent is named only as Mrs D---, and is a United Empire Loyalist who cannot abide Mollineux, a black settler (Moodie 1989, 214). Mollineux, who had just sold a cow to the Moodies, got his start on land earned from

the D--- family, but this patronage does not prevent Mrs. D from despising him: “Good God, do you think that I would sit down at the same table with a nigger? . . . Sit down with a dirty black indeed!” (Moodie 1989, 215). The conversation functions as an index of the hypocrisy of Yankees who criticize English settlers for eating separately from their servants, while themselves harbouring racial prejudice. In the eyes of Moodie, a certain separation between master and servant is justified on the grounds of differences in education and habits, while discrimination on the grounds of race alone is unjustifiable. In *Roughing It*, Moodie offers purely biblical arguments in favour of more equal treatment of black people, and never alludes to her own intimate transactions with black people in London. This omission of the Mary Prince episode reads curiously when one considers the defiant claim of association with Prince and Warner that marks the similar *Flora Lyndsay* passage. There is a structural similarity to the narratives – and even a resemblance between the names, Mrs. Dalton, Mrs. D – that can lead one to suspect that both episodes may be less records of actual conversations than distillations of many such defenses of black dignity. The defense of Mollineux in *Roughing It in the Bush* presents itself as a rehearsal for the full-blown anti-racist dialogue in *Flora Lyndsay*.

We cannot reconstruct what pushed Moodie to craft the scene between Flora Lyndsay and Mrs. Dalton that re-opens the authorship and authenticity debate around the Mary Prince text. However, if Flora Lyndsay’s experience can be taken as analogous to that of Moodie, then the role of Pringle’s “lady” in producing the Prince text may have been greater than had ever been acknowledged in Moodie’s lifetime, and certainly must have seemed greater in Moodie’s own memory.

5. Context within Moodie’s Other Writing

In order to reconstruct the moment of Moodie’s act of textualizing the Prince story, we must examine Moodie’s other writing and explore her representations of racial otherness, narrative agency and the adoption of voice. One must begin with the years before Moodie came to London, and with her first publications. Moodie’s early didactic fiction reveals her use of Africans as characters. Although exhibiting traces of the racist ideas that were common at the time, even among evangelical abolitionist circles, Moodie’s fiction shows a contrary tendency to individualize African characters by according them life narratives. Let us consider the interplay of these two contestatory principles in *Hugh Latimer* (1828; 1834),⁶ which is a sentimental, moralized story, where poverty and virtue triumph over snobbery and wealth.

In this work, two boys, Hugh Latimer and Montrose Grahame, epitomize the lower and upper classes. Latimer suffers the sneers of gentlemen’s sons because his mother keeps a shop. As a test of the boys’ empathy, Moodie introduces an African boy – a slave and cake-seller – who enters the schoolyard only to be verbally and physically abused by some of the pupils. Rescued by Hugh and Montrose, the black boy, Pedro, is taken to Montrose’s father, where he tells his story. After his freedom is purchased from the Jewish owner, Pedro agrees to become Montrose’s servant and vanishes from the story.

⁶ There is some confusion about the date of appearance. *Hugh Latimer* was published as early as 1828 by A.K. Newman and Dean & Munday (Moodie, 1985. *Letters*, 218) but was reissued in 1834.

Throughout, Moodie treats this character in a manner not very different from the unthinking racism of earlier writers. Pedro, for instance, speaks a truncated language: “Who buy? . . . Little Massa, buy cake of poor Blackey”. One of his tormentors complains that “a magpie could speak better English” (Moodie 1834, 37–8). Moreover, Moodie’s image of the happy ending for the young African is a menial career, in Montrose’s words, “Let him be my servant, he will feed my dog, and take care of my pony” (Moodie 1834, 55). Clearly, the author uses Pedro’s story as a side issue in the drama of Latimer’s class vindication. In this way Moodie echoes the ideas of anti-slavery activists who believed that even emancipated Negroes should keep their place in society.⁷ To be anti-slavery in England in the 1830s did not necessarily imply a desire to overhaul the social structure and its assumptions.

On the other hand, Moodie does indicate an emerging anti-slavery ideology in this one-dimensional text. For instance, Pedro has human feelings; his humanity is recognized by Montrose’s uncle: “This poor fellow seems to possess a feeling heart” (Moodie 1834, 53). Pedro shows sensibility in his reaction to the schoolyard humiliation: “What was sport to them was agonizing to the feelings of the poor negro . . . uttering a wild and piercing cry, he sank down upon the ground, and burying his head between his knees, wept aloud” (Moodie 1834, 39). This sentimental vignette echoes the abolitionist scenario of the master beating the slave. Moodie chooses to highlight how differently the act is conceptualized by the two main actors: *sport* for the boys is torture to Pedro. In real master-slave encounters, the master’s agenda often included the idea that torture functioned as just punishment, as moral education or as a social good, ensuring the stability of plantation society. It took an act of imaginative will to see the other perspective. Reading Pedro in place of the tortured slave, we can see Moodie ascribing subjectivity to the receiving end of the whip, calling attention to the emotional and not just the physical consequences of degradation. This scenario, then, shows the early Moodie’s awareness of the instrumental value of sensationally narrated slave experience in didactic fiction for juveniles, if not yet in anti-slavery propaganda aimed at the adult reader.

A second reminder of the author’s exposure to anti-slavery ideology involves the slave’s personal story: Moodie includes a concise version of Pedro’s history, which functions as an agent in his acquiring a freer life. The reader learns about his place of origin and enslavement (the coast of Coramondel [sic]), his journey from owner to owner (“serve many massas”) and eventual ownership by a Jew, “massa Isaac”. Thirdly, Moodie appends to Pedro’s qualified happy ending the promise that Pedro will be taught to read and write (Moodie 1834, 55). These three gestures signal that Moodie thought of Africans as fellow human beings, as people with pasts, with narratives of their own lives and as potentially intelligent consumers and creators of text.

One must not get carried away with reading a post-civil rights liberalism into Moodie’s position on Pedro. Whatever her early anti-slavery sentiments, Moodie situates this story within a dominant ideology tolerant of benign forms of slavery. In its ideological stance, *Hugh Latimer* belongs to the interval between the abolition of the trade and the end of slavery itself. This is a narrative, for instance, that has room for good and bad masters: “Me love kind massa – me

⁷ Even William Wilberforce, who worked tirelessly for the abolition of first the slave trade and then of slavery itself, still envisioned emancipated slaves as “a grateful peasantry” (Hochschild 2006, 314).

no hate good man” (Moodie 1834, 47). Pedro is victimized, less because he is a slave than because he has had multiple bad masters. Moreover, his current bad master is distanced from the normative English reader by his Jewishness. Massa Isaac fulfills the stereotype of the grasping Jew.⁸ What has happened to Pedro is thus not the fault of English society as a whole, but of one specific bad element in society. The ever-present potential for goodness and redemption underlies this narrative. Even the promise of literacy supports this interpretation, as Pedro will learn to read the Bible and become a Christian, something impossible at Master Isaac’s. While Latimer and Montrose undoubtedly perform a good deed in buying Pedro from Isaac, it is still a transaction that makes Christian action perfectly practicable within the bounds of slave-owning. The potential for ameliorative agency thus exists on the individual level and not the societal.

Moreover, what Moodie definitely denies Pedro is an articulate voice with which to tell his story. His English is barely sufficient for street selling, while the history of his life before coming to England is told in one disjointed, though eloquent paragraph:

All asleep, white men come,--burn hut,--take away,--quite little child!—serve many massas—see many country—go to France,--massa Isaac bring to England. (Moodie 1834, 47)

This is not pidgin, but ‘foreigner language’ – that truncated discourse attributed to those who are assumed to have limited understanding of a language. Decorated with the code-word “massa”, it stands for the language of black slaves. In 1828 Moodie cannot represent the discourse of a slave or ex-slave with any greater degree of accuracy. Only a few years before her sessions with Mary Prince, then, Moodie represents an African’s life story as an oral text of brevity and selectivity, with strong end-orientation, little emphasis on personal suffering and no address to God. Ex-slaves talk in ‘foreigner language’ with few compound and no complex sentences or subordinate clauses. All of this runs counter to many features of the text of *Mary Prince*. The syntax and lexicon attributed to Prince in her *History* belong elsewhere on the language spectrum. At moments of emotional heightening, in particular, the language in *Mary Prince* is Standard English, complete with irony and a very English tone of restraint and understatement:

I then saw my sisters led forth, and sold to different owners; so that we had not the sad satisfaction of being partners in bondage. When the sale was over, my mother hugged and kissed us , and mourned over us, begging of us to keep up a good heart, and do our duty to our new masters. (Gates 2006, 258)

Since, in *Hugh Latimer*, Moodie signified authenticity with an extreme degree of departure from Standard English, then why is the more “authentic” Mary Prince shown speaking in something close to Standard English? What is clear is that, in writing *Hugh Latimer*, Moodie constructed ex-slaves as possessors of powerful stories containing sentiments craved by readers of fiction, but also as linguistically circumscribed narrators in need of mediation and textualization.

⁸ Jews were no more likely to be slave owners or traders than any other prosperous persons of the time. Eli Faber’s research clarifies the minor role of Jews in the slaveholding societies of the British West Indies. Where Jewish families did own slaves, these were more likely to be domestic servants or used in trade (like Pedro) than to be field workers. See Faber 1998.

Further evidence about Moodie's views on race, slavery and on the creation of a fictional voice for Negro characters comes from an obscure work. "Richard Redpath" is a lengthy prose fiction piece, which first appeared in the magazine *Literary Garland* (four installments, September to December 1843), and later was included with other pieces in the volume entitled *Matrimonial Speculations* (1854). Moodie's preface claims that the story is factual and that she heard it from a West Indian merchant on the boat from England to Scotland. The genesis of this story is thus connected to the ship-board conversation between Flora and Mrs. Dalton in *Flora Lyndsay*.

Set in Jamaica during slavery and before the abolition of the slave trade, "Richard Redpath" engages directly with questions of racial identity and inter-racial power relations; "It's serious subject is slavery," affirms editor Carl Ballstadt (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 88). This distinguishes it from *Hugh Latimer*, where Pedro's story formed a mere sub-plot. Nevertheless, there are parallels in language, theme and plot.

To take language first, here Moodie once again places a variant of English in the mouths of slave characters, such as Mungo the Negro lad: "me nebba see de like ob dem" (Moodie 1854, "Redpath," 153). The pidgin in this text is not foreigner language but shows the influence of versions of American Black English in print. The slave voice has been textualized according to received North American norms, thus forming a third kind of linguistic 'authenticity'. This Creolized language is readily copied by the white characters for contingent or parodic purposes, while they retain Standard English as their main means of communication. The Negro and mulatto characters in this narrative, however, remain confined to the Creole. Linguistic versatility in "Richard Redpath" is thus hierarchized, and operates to the advantage of white characters.

Secondly, in an echo of the Flora/Mrs. Dalton exchange, her anti-slavery theme plays out in arguments between pro- and anti-slavery characters, some of whom are outrageously racist. On hearing of the wreck of a ship captained by a Negro, one bigoted seaman dismisses the sum of the loss by commenting that "the captain was only a nigger" (Moodie 1854, "Redpath" 158). In general, Moodie's good characters are more flexible in their attitudes towards other races, her villains more inclined to be intolerant; nevertheless, every character uses skin colour as the basis of moral and class distinctions.

Most interesting for our purposes is how the plot of "Richard Redpath" inverts racial identities by having the title character, an Englishman, disguise his skin colour, pretend to be a slave and endure the humiliation of being sold at a slave auction in Kingston, Jamaica. This racial masquerade recommends itself as a comment on the Moodie-Prince textual transaction of a decade earlier and merits further analysis. In his role as "Sambo," Redpath utters the stilted Creole of the other African characters, before reverting to his own Standard English and doffing his disguise. It cannot be coincidental that Moodie created this role-playing scenario, which may reprise her role in pretending to be Mary Prince in print ten years before. In a letter to her publisher, Moodie refers to the work as "Richard Redpath, or the voluntary Slave", thus revealing that she viewed the racial masquerade as the book's main feature (Moodie 1985, *Letters*, 142). Instead of passing as white, Redpath is passing as black, in a transaction that embodies (in the sense of literally conferring a physical body) the condition of being a Negro and a slave. Moodie, in contrast, had given

not a body, but a text. Interestingly, critics often stress the slave body embedded in the Mary Prince text, thus identifying the nexus of text-body relationships emerging from the complex act of making text out of voiced experience.⁹ The textualization of the slave's voice can be seen as having perpetrated a parallel masquerade – in print rather than greasepaint and rags. Instead of a white, English character beneath the physical mask, it is a white, English author in the textual background that makes the sale of *The History of Mary Prince* to the English public as the words of an ex-slave analogous to the sale of Sambo to the Jamaican planter.

Moodie thus has a character perform blackness – take on the appearance, social value and commercial role of an African slave – in an acceptable, cleaned-up version of slave identity. “Sambo” experiences the slave market, works at menial household tasks and even receives a whipping – which leaves him not flayed but sulking. None of this experience is exploited for its potential as anti-slavery propaganda – emancipation having been a fact in the British Empire for 10 years before the work was first published. Slavery here and the tale's setting in the British West Indies serve narrative functions other than the didactic, perhaps even of the merely exotic and sensational. This lack of demonstrable instrumental function for the slave motif leads one to seek explanations other than simple exhaustion of Moodie's narrative imagination. In picturing Redpath's improbable transformation into a slave with the voice of a slave, one is led to speculate that the scenario might have emerged from the author's autobiographical memory of the silent textual masquerade behind the production of *The History of Mary Prince*, an act of role-playing which has been only partially acknowledged in print.¹⁰ In seeking to understand the masquerade, one finds that American studies of the blackface tradition have established the conflicted roots of such cultural performance, its combination of contradictory emotions such as desire and fear, of motifs such as transgression and retrenchment, of subconscious motivations such as racism and subliminal identification.¹¹ Certainly, behind the melodramatic plot, there is much to interest and puzzle the cultural and psychoanalytical critic in Moodie's “Redpath.”

Moodie's choice of the plot motif of performed blackness for “Richard Redpath” may allude subconsciously to more than just Moodie's role in the performance, but inclusively to the role of the Anti-Slavery society in substituting white voices for black, conducting what Deck calls “a conversation with England across the text and figurative body of a silent former slave” (Deck 1996, 299). It is conceivable that guilt about such masking through textualization may have lingered and found literary expression in this displaced manner, where the gender of the actor is changed, the site is distanced to the West Indies and the colour issue is diluted (Redpath pretends to be a mulatto, not a Negro). As well as guilt, Moodie may also have felt resentment at the elision of her own role in the creation of the first female slave narrative. These emotions might have emerged in this displaced re-working of racial masking and appropriated voice.

⁹ See Pacquet, Whitlock and Baumgartner – who maintain that Pringle's editing “sexualized” the slave's body.

¹⁰ Malorie Blackman, for instance says that Thomas Pringle “arranged for Mary's story to be written down,” thus leaving unanswered the questions this remark raises (Blackman 2007, 61). Mary Jeanne Larrabee elides Moodie altogether: “She [Prince] dictated her life to a White abolitionist who helped get it published” (Larrabee 2006, 464). Pacquet acknowledges Moodie's role in the production of the text but stresses how much of the “West Indian turn of phrase and style” survived (136) and ends by hailing Prince as a “precurse ancestral voice” (Pacquet 1992, 143).

¹¹ See Lott (1995).

Moreover, the parodic quality of Redpath's enactment of Sambo casts an ironic light on Moodie's role in creating a public persona for Mary Prince. Notably, Sambo is merely an artifact created by Redpath for public consumption and ultimately for his own financial advantage. If this forms a parodic version of Moodie's masque of textualization, then it undercuts the image of the earnest anti-slavery worker selflessly giving a voice to the illiterate ex-slave (a popular version of the incident – see Blackman and Deck). The Moodie of “Richard Redpath” remains aware of the current of mocking degradation that passes from white body to black face in the ‘blackface’ performance. A hierarchy of representation energizes both masquerades: the superior level has the right to represent and speak for the lower, but not the other way around.

The white, English character, Redpath, experiences no hesitation in planning the masquerade, and no difficulty in executing it. Some skin dye and ragged pants (both provided by a Negro woman in Kingston) mediate between white mastery and black enslavement. The ease of physical transformation echoes the simplicity of the linguistic masquerade; thus the hierarchy of linguistic mimicry allows the Englishman to become the voice of the slave in a performance so convincing as to fool his own brother.

Moodie probably remained unaware of the further situational irony of the black woman's role in creating the mulatto (the dye and ragged clothing), even though it was necessarily through the agency of real black women (minus the makeup and costume) that European men went about the creation of mulatto children like Sambo. It is, moreover, precisely this type of miscegenation, sexual encounters between white masters and African slaves, together with the human results (half-caste children) that was almost completely elided in the Mary Prince text. The mothering African woman is re-inscribed into Moodie's story of slavery only in this parodic form.

We should not exaggerate the importance of “Richard Redpath” in Moodie's oeuvre; it is a sensational, hastily-written piece of fiction, probably first produced because the *Garland* needed content and republished in *Matrimonial Speculations* because Moodie needed money. It exhibits a lack of information about its setting in the island colony of Jamaica. As a text, *The History of Mary Prince* is far superior. Nevertheless, “Richard Redpath” does show Moodie re-using the situations, motifs and textual practices of the slave narrative as she had come to know it. In revisiting this scenario, I contend, Moodie confronted her anxiety of mimicry, while negotiating her conflicted feelings about racial masquerade and her unacknowledged part in the creation of a voice for female slavery.

6. Mary Prince in an Anti-Slavery Context

In contextualizing the production of the Mary Prince narrative, one must make clear that the Anti-Slavery campaign of which it formed a part was far advanced. By 1831 this was a battle almost won, and only parliamentary reform remained to cement the victory. The earlier fight against the slave trade (culminating in the act of 1807) was a much longer and stiffer battle. Why exactly the campaign felt the need of the Warner and Prince stories in 1831 is worth investigation. Thomas Pringle's preface establishes a distance between the Anti-Slavery Committee and the Prince text; he acted on his own as a disinterested philanthropist, he stresses. Baumgartner discounts Pringle's disclaimer, preferring to see anti-slavery activity as the main

impetus behind Pringle's actions in 1831 (Baumgartner 2001, 263). The wording suggests that Pringle feared accusations of the Committee's mercenary interest in either the political or the financial rewards of publication (proceeds of sale were to go towards Mary Prince herself). That, despite these potential objections, the work was published with his name prominently displayed testifies to the movement's perceived need of Prince's testimony in 1831. It might be that Mary Prince owed her voice to the new role of upper and middle-class women in political action such as the anti-slavery movement.

The historian Claire Midgley has established the significant role played by Englishwomen in anti-slavery (and anti-slave trade) activity. Working and middle-class women contributed funds, bought pamphlets and attended meetings.¹² With this evidence of the potential for support from half the population, it is not surprising that the anti-slavery movement needed the authenticated voice of a woman slave. Olaudah Equiano had uncovered the man's story, but slavery had a female face, too. By the time of the second campaign, this role for women has expanded greatly; at one time the women's associations formed the heart of the anti-slavery movement, keeping it in the public sphere when the parliamentary future of any emancipation bill seemed dark (Hochschild 2006, 327). For women reared on the sentimental fiction of the age, the pictures of the delicate sex in chains, or a mother deprived of her children caught at the heart.

Without taking an entirely cynical view of the genesis of *The History of Mary Prince*, it is nevertheless possible to discern the potential for manipulation in the situation involving the Anti-Slavery movement, Pringle, Moodie and Prince. The movement needed a voice and image for female slavery and found to hand both a convenient runaway and a young English writer anxious to serve the cause by ensuring that the slave story was shaped to capture the hearts of the public.

There may have been less of fortunate contingency in the meeting between Moodie and Prince than Pringle's account allows. In 1831, moreover, the Anti-Slavery movement was a highly organized public opinion machine that hired publicists, writers and lecturers at need. Turner calls it a "militant extraparliamentary organization" (Turner 2005, 118). Hired staff received £200 per year for lecturing on the Anti-Slavery campaign circuit (Hochschild 2006, 335). A society willing to put its money behind such a publicity campaign can certainly be suspected of commissioning the ghost-writing of a slave narrative as part of its campaign to reach the hearts of English women. If zeal and pragmatism drove the organizers to deprive Mary Prince of her authentic voice and substitute that of Susanna Moodie, then that was just another facet of the general paternalism that marked the attitude towards slaves and the rhetoric in which it was expressed (Hochschild 2006, 133).

7. Conclusions

From the later writing following Moodie's own transatlantic passage as a migrant to the colonies, the writer appears merely to have mildly exploited the material gained from the colloquy with Prince, to have focused increasingly on her own role in the creation of the 1831 text (perhaps retroactively exaggerating its extent) and to have taken away from the personal encounter a need

¹² For a discussion of the under-appreciated role of women in anti-slavery activity, see Jennings. 2005. The three women represent an earlier generation, and its fight against the slave trade.

to re-enact a conversational scenario in which racism is first voiced by one character and then contradicted by the character identified with Moodie herself.

In combination, then, the looming presence of the anti-slavery agenda, Pringle's need and Moodie's enthusiastic acts of recording and editing combine to erode what genuine core of words and experience are at the heart of *The History of Mary Prince*. Given what we know about the hands that edited the text, and what can be suspected about the selection and censorship of content, it is unlikely that the current text holds many of Prince's own words as uttered in 1831. This casts doubt on a project such as Larrabee's, where the author declares the intent "not just to recover her [Prince's] voice". It certainly problematizes claims such as Larrabee's that "she [Prince] was writing for all slaves", since the ex-slave demonstrably was not writing, nor was she addressing slaves, but the English population (Larrabee 2006, 453–4). As an act of fortuitous collaboration, the construction of a text for Mary Prince's story must rank as a prime example of the conjunction of cultural, literary and personal forces to create a public voice in political discourse. Furthermore, the original collaboration was followed by a long trans-colonial echo, as Moodie in her new guise as Canadian settler re-enacted fictional scenarios of racial derogation, defense and masquerade. For researchers, detailed stylistic analysis of the Prince text along with Moodie's contemporary works remains to be done in the quest to provide more definitive answers to the question of who "wrote" *The History of Mary Prince*.

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