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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Evelyn E. Nettles entitled "Literary Voices of Nineteenth-Century Reform Movement: An Examination of the Literary Works of Frances E. W. Harper." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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LITERARY VOICES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY REFORM MOVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF FRANCES E. W. HARPER

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Evelyn E. Nettles

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Willie and Harriette Nettles, I dedicate this dissertation. Their loving support and patience provided me with the strength I needed to complete the course of my doctoral studies. For their anchor, I am forever grateful. The work is also dedicated to my brother Michael, my sister Francine, and my sister-in-law Arie, who supplied me with encouragement on a daily basis to complete this document. Also this dissertation is dedicated to my two nieces, Ana and Sabin, whose delightful company provided me with pleasant distractions when I needed to escape my rigid study routine.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this document to the members of my committee, Dr. R. Baxter Miller, Dr. Allison Ensor, Dr. George Hutchinson, and Dr. Cynthia Fleming, whose patience and scholarly guidance assisted in my successfully completing the writing process. To Dr. Allison Ensor I express a special note of gratitude and appreciation. His thorough reading and his insightful commentary on the document were invaluable. Special thanks go to my committee chair, Dr. R. Baxter Miller, whose expert critical guidance and consistent encouragement gave me the resilience to complete this project. To him I am deeply indebted.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation adds a comprehensive study to the small body of literary scholarship that has been published about Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a nineteenth-century black American female poet, essayist, short fiction writer novelist, orator and social activist. The document examines the poetry and prose that she penned in support of the anti-slavery movement, the women's rights movement, and the temperance movement. The fundamental focus of this inquiry is whether Harper subordinated her personal artistic voice to become a public voice for the three reform movements mentioned. Also tangential to this question is the veiled tension created between the author's total acceptance of patriarchal Christianity and her personal conviction favoring the emancipation of slaves and women. A combination of the new historical critical approach and a materialist-feminist method was used in the analysis of the author's works. Using both these analytical modes allowed a significant range of social-historical criteria to be considered in examining the quality of Harper's literary voice, and in expanding the range of interpretations of a number of her literary contributions. Harper embraced an aesthetic which viewed the function of literature as a means to delight and

instruct. Her experimentation with various literary techniques and forms revealed that she was indeed concerned about the artistic quality of her craft. Even though her literary voice was a public one, she did not compromise its artistic nature when she composed works about the injustice of slavery and the need for women to gain equality before the law. The lack of stylistic innovation and the extreme sentimentality that characterized the temperance poetry, however, yielded it ineffective as literature. On the other hand, the prose written in the area presents a clear portrait of the black woman's role in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the bigotry that guided that organizations policies about blacks.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental focus of this inquiry is whether Frances E. W. Harper, a nineteenth-century political and social activist, subordinated her personal artistic voice to become a public voice for the abolitionist, woman's suffrage, and temperance movements. Also endemic to this question is the need to explore the veiled tension created by her total acceptance of patriarchal Christianity (which indeed informed the social ideology of the period) and her personal conviction favoring the emancipation of slaves and women. If indeed literature and culture, as stated by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, are ". . . sites at which ideology is produced and reproduced. . . [and] are also the sites on which the outlines and contradictions of ideology may be made visible" (xxiii), then a close examination of Harper's literary texts and the context in which they were written should render sound critical evidence concerning the nature of Harper's artistic voice and the ideological patterns echoed in that voice.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the predominately male African-American critical establishment has dubbed Harper a minor writer. Assessments of her work

have consisted of short descriptive summaries, which characterize her poetry as "too often . . . banal and trite" (Brown 11), and her novel as ". . . a poor thing as a novel, or even as a piece of prose . . ." (Redding 43). Serious study has not been done of the way her literary texts inscribe and cover her own poetic voice behind significant movements of the period, and simultaneously create a topology or kind of artistic struggle emblematic of gender and race before and after her era. This is, therefore, a study of the interplay between aesthetic voice and intellectual history.

In order to gain a complete portrait of the author's literary contribution, the new historical critical method, which Jerome J. McGann and Marilyn Butler outlined, combined with the materialist-feminist critical approach of Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, have been used to examine Harper's works. Combining these two methods allows the application of a wider range of social-historical criteria to be used in the evaluation process. As a result, the possibility that her literary significance is diminished due to the use of a narrow textual analysis is eliminated. Subsequently, gender and race, though they are significant factors influencing the author's literary productions, are not the only measures which lead to a comprehensive understanding of her works. In addition, the

linkage of these approaches allows an explanation of the way Harper's artistic voice, at times, functions harmoniously within the realm of conflict and contradiction with her philosophical beliefs and her political and social interests.

An investigation which undertakes the examination of Harper's extant literary compositions must engage a theoretical approach which extracts from the literary works the interaction of ideas, language, social, and cultural structures at a given moment in history. Equally important is the capacity of the critical method to derive from the works the contradictions within the author and her times and the appearance of these conflicts in her works. This type of evaluative process provides the modern scholar with a comprehensive view of history and literature. Moreover, chronicling social and literary history from the perspective of a black female intellectual supplies a new dimension to the traditional record.

New historical critics, according to McGann, view a piece of literature as a social act, which when published, has two interlocking interpretive histories. The first history is derived from the author's "expressed decisions and purposes" concerning the work; the second arises from reader reactions, in the past and in the present, to that literary work. Subsequently, literature as a social act

reflects the "dialectical relation" that occurs among all these individuals (author, reader past, reader present) (Mcgann 24). Defining the literary text as a social act goes further than analyzing it in terms of its public reception. The historical method undertakes to examine the work using the following principles:

1. Analysis of a literary text must take into account the historical time and place, and the cultural system that inscribed it.
2. Connections should be drawn between the central text and its literary predecessors.
3. The historical critic does not approach the work with the idea of reconstructing the past. Instead he or she attempts to understand the way the writing "functions in its world in order to understand writing, the world and ourselves" (Marilyn Butler 44).
4. Neither current values nor the critic's own personal values should be imposed on the text as a means to validate those beliefs.
5. The term literature should not denote exclusivity. The scope of what is defined as literature should "take in what is written: for hierarchy or canon of great works is no more beyond question than a tradition (Butler 43-44).

Bibliographical, biographical, historical and cultural information is central to this critical approach. Interpretation of the text relies on these external elements to provided a comprehensive analysis of the work. In addition, these factors provoke discussions of issues related to social ideology and the psychological tensions that informed the period in which the work was produced.

Because materialist-feminist criticism is a sociohistorical method, it complements the new historical theory. Both critical schools view works of literature as social acts which "insist on the social and historical relativity of aesthetic standards" (Newton and Rosenfelt xxiv). For that reason, a literary work is analyzed in terms of the historical and cultural realities inscribing it. Consequently, judgment of the aesthetic worth of a literary piece cannot be separated from the social and historical context in which it was produced. Contextual analysis of any work of literature forces the critic to move outside his/her own cultural sphere "of intuitive understanding" (Butler 25) in order to gain a more comprehensive view of history and culture surrounding the production of the literary piece. As a result, the critic is able to determine the significance of such a work to and for the present and for the future. This sort of critical method allows nonstandard literary genres, such as the hymn

and the oral story, to be examined as literature. Based on the comprehensive quality of sociohistorical criticism, each critical school does not view the canon as exclusive, and thus there is room in the canon for the literary works of writers outside the "main stream."

The common threads that bind these two critical theories have a point of divergence which justifies using both these approaches in the analysis of Harper's works. Because materialist-feminist criticism is gender specific and addresses the various complexities associated with being a female writer and subject, it warrants using the theory in conjunction with historical criticism. This particular feminist approach views race, class, and gender as determinants of women's relations. It also insures that gender is not the only level on which literary interpretation can be rendered. Unlike basic feminist theory, this feminist method does not assume that women are universally the same and that social change is "conceived of in terms of women who are white and privileged" (Newton and Rosenfelt xxvii). Also embedded in materialist-feminist theory is the supposition that liberation, even for the white middle class woman, is not possible if integration into the existing social structure occurs. Finally, this criticism assumes the need for the reconstruction of power relations which omit women and the

oppressed. The aforementioned assumptions assure that this critical school gravitates toward analyzing "working-class and non-traditional literature" (xvii).

Materialist-feminist criticism, because of the multiple factors that are considered in the literary analysis of a work, encourages a less tragic view of women in history. Using this method of analysis allows women's literature to be examined in a sociohistorical context which may provide a view of woman as "both the oppressed and oppressor, submissive and subversive, victim and agent, allies and enemies both of men" and of other women (xxix).

Applying the tenets of historical and materialist-feminist positions to the works of Frances Harper yields a comprehensive portrait of the writer's life, times, and literary productions. This critical linkage also allows insight into the nature and origin of Harper's artistic voice and the qualities molding its uniqueness. Finally, this sort of approach provides an understanding of the conflict between Harper's political interest and her philosophical beliefs. A comprehensive study which critically analyzes the entire body of Harper's works is needed because she is one of the major nineteenth-century progenitors of both the African-American literary tradition and the African-American woman's literary tradition.

Frances Harper's contributions to American literature, like the contributions of many of her black female contemporaries, have been ignored or have received minimal attention in major academic literary and historical sources. The advent of interest in women's studies within the last three decades has spawned a large body of scholarship concerning the social and literary activity of nineteenth-century women. For the most part, this scholarship has centered around the accomplishments of nineteenth-century white females. A few African-American scholars, such as Gloria Hull, Barbara Christian, Frances Foster, and Hazel Carby, have added the names of a number of black women to the annals of American literary history.

Literary histories of nineteenth-century American do not include the facts that in 1841 Ann Plato was the first African-American to publish a book of essays or that Harriet E. Wilson in 1859 was the first black person in the United States to publish a novel (entitled Our Nig). It is not a widely known fact among students of American literature that the final decade of the nineteenth-century was not only the decade of realism, naturalism, and of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, but it was also a decade in which the literary productions of black women writers were plentiful (Carby 6). Between 1890 and 1910 Anna Julia Cooper wrote a black feminist text called A

Voice from the South (1892); Alice Dunbar-Nelson published a number of short stories; Pauline Hopkins published, in serialized form, three novels as well as her major work entitled Contending Forces. In addition, Emma Dunham Kelley wrote a pioneering novel entitled Megda, and in 1892 Frances E. W. Harper published her novel Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted. This listing provides the names and published titles of only a few black women writers of that era. The rediscovery of literature written by nineteenth-century black women necessitates a revision of the American literary canon. For the greater portion of the twentieth century, most college and university American literature curricula, which focus on nineteenth-century writers, placed significant emphasis on the study of the works of white male writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Henry James. This strictly white male fraternity is indeed indicative of Paul Lauter's assertion that the canon ". . . is a means by which culture validates social power" (19). In recent years, however, scholars from both women's and African-American literature have urged canonical representation of their respective groups. Female writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Kate Chopin, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and the black male writers Frederick Douglass and Charles Chestnutt

have been added to the canon. Black female writers of that period, on the other hand, have not only been omitted from university syllabi, but they have also been neglected in the literary research of white feminist critics and of African-American literary critics, who are mostly male. To date only a small number of black feminist critics have conducted substantive research on individual black women writers of nineteenth-century America. Hazel V. Carby, Maryemma Graham, Frances Smith Foster, Deborah McDowell, Barbara Christian, and Gloria Hull have broken significant ground in the critical study of literature by and about black women of that era. The publication of additional serious scholarship in this area of literature would dictate canonical inclusion of a representative number of these writers. Such changes in the canon would, as Lauter states, "reflect and help spur a widening reevaluation of the significance of the experiences with which [these] writers are concerned" (20). If nineteenth-century literary history is recorded accurately, the accomplishments of Frances E. W. Harper and her black female contemporary writers must be included.

Largely, African-American male critics have written the relevant black literary histories. Important reference sources such as Benjamin Brawley's The Early Negro American Writer (1935); Vernon Loggin's The Negro Author (1931); J.

Saunders Redding's To Make a Poet Black (1939); Sterling Brown's Negro Poetry and Drama and the Negro in American Fiction (1969); and even the French historian Jean Wagner's Black Poets of the United States (1973) either minimize the significance of her literary contribution or totally ignore it. Brown characterizes her poetry as "trite and banal" (11), and Brawley places her verse in the category of minor poetry because it lacks technical excellence (45). Wagner omits Harper's work in his discussion of black American poets and merely refers to her. Redding applauds Paul Laurence Dunbar's use of dialect in poetry when he writes that "Negro writers had never experimented with form, and none since Dunbar had seriously tackled the problem of language" (115). He ignores or he did not realize that Harper was the first black writer to experiment with this technique. The only nineteenth-century literary figures meriting critical analysis in the works of black male critics were Charles Chestnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois.

More recently female critics have compiled histories that include discussions of Harper and many of her black female contemporaries. Joan Sherman, in her 1974 work Invisible Poets: Afro-Americans of the Nineteenth Century, includes a substantive discussion of Harper and her poetry. The segment contains a biographical sketch and a

classification of the poetry by subject matter and theme. This text is a good resource for the early stages of a research project, showing the same historical and methodological limits, thematic overview, and literary history of Harper's male counterparts.

Professional research about Frances E. W. Harper is certainly not new, but the subject is indeed fertile ground for yielding new fruit of literary scholarship. At least eight other developing scholars in the twentieth-century have completed research focusing on various perspectives of Harper's life and works. Theodora Williams-Daniel wrote the first master's thesis (Howard University 1937) entitled "The Poems of Frances E. W. Harper," which has become a standard reference. Williams-Daniel collected Harper's extant poetry and prefaced the collection with a biographical sketch of the author and a critical overview of the poetry.

Fifteen years later, in 1952, Beatrice Tatum Greer of Hampton Institute completed a master's thesis entitled "A Study of the Life and Works of Mrs. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper." Though the major focus of this study is the author's life, the thesis catalogues the poetry previously identified in the Williams-Daniel's Study and as much prose as the researcher was able to locate. Neither of these documents offers analytical observations that take issue

with the established critical evaluations of Du Bois, Loggins, and Redding.

The 1981 doctoral dissertation (University of Iowa) of Vashti Crutcher Lewis entitled "The Mulatto Woman as Major Female Character in Novels by Black Women, 1892-1937," devotes a portion of one chapter to a discussion of the heroine in Harper's novel Iola Leroy. Lewis examines thirteen novels by black women writers having at their center mulatto heroines. After analyzing Iola's character Lewis concludes that Harper, by raising the moral and social status of the portraiture, altered the conventional mulatto appearing in the gothic slave fictions of the early antebellum period.

In a study entitled "Four Contemporary Black Women Poets: Lucille Clifton, June Jordan, Audre Lorde and Sherley Anne Williams (A Feminist Study of a Culturally Derived Poetics)," Doris Davenport (University of Southern California) deals with Harper's role as a female forerunner and model for the modern poets examined. Lillie B. Fryar of The State University of New York at Buffalo, completed a dissertation in 1986 entitled "The Aesthetics of Language: Harper, Hurston and Morrison," in which she takes up the language and literary styles of these three poets. As each writer is classified according to the distinct time her work appears in history, Harper is classified as a poet of

sorrow because her writing about the immorality of slavery reflects the pathos of her era.

Lonnell Edward Johnson's dissertation, entitled "Portrait of the Bondslave in the Bible: Slavery and Freedom in the Works of Four Afro-American Poets," completed in 1986 in the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University, treats the impact of the Bible on American literature in general, and on Afro-American literature specifically. Johnson examines Harper's use of the bondslave as an allegorical vehicle to promote the political and social positions of the antislavery movement. Margaret Olenia Roberts, of the University of Maryland, College Park, completed a dissertation in 1987 entitled "Writing to Liberate: Selected Black Women Novelists from 1859 to 1982," in which she contends that the sexual oppression suffered by the heroine of Iola Leroy is a token kind of middle class suffering. Roberts evaluates the novel from a Marxist perspective which assigns some class values to the work which did not necessarily occur to Harper.

Finally, Gloria Shepherd, of The State University of New York at Albany, completed in 1988 the most recent dissertation to include a discussion of Harper. In this dissertation entitled "The Rape of Black Women During Slavery," Shepherd concludes that the slave experience for

black women subjected them to both physical and psychological rape. Thus, the slave experience motivated these women to expose this evil by writing prose. Harper's Iola Leroy is discussed in terms of how the author handled the theme of physical and psychological rape of black women.

Within the last fifteen years, the amount of published research about Harper's political and literary activity has increased. This seed of scholarly interest has been germinated by a movement of Afro-American feminist critics toward the development of a black feminist critical theory. Efforts to define such a theory have led scholars to resurrect literary works by black women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These recoveries have yielded important research which establishes linkages between early literature written by black women and the literature composed by twentieth-century black women. Thus, the foundation has been laid for constructing a written chronicle of the development of the black feminist literary tradition.

In 1977 Barbara Smith wrote what is considered to be the manifesto of black feminist critical theory (Carby 10). The article entitled "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" states that the politically organized feminist movement served as a foundation on which "feminist, literature,

criticism and women's studies are built." Smith contends that the absence of such a group of black women has caused scholars to neglect the study of black women artists. She cites a number of white male critics and white feminist critics who, because of sexist or racist assumptions, do not recognize the critical importance of literature by black women. Hence, she calls on black women to organize a political body from which an examination of "Black women's experience" can spring. According to Smith, black feminist literary criticism would offer "the realization that the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers" (170). Further, she states that the black literary critics and the black writer share a common "language and cultural experience," and through this commonality the black feminist critics establish an "identifiable literary tradition" (174). Even though Smith's theory of commonality is problematic, for some writers and critics, the document played a significant role in the development of black feminist critical theory. It issued a call to scholars of black literary study to examine the works of black female writers past and present, and it also issued to these scholars, according to Hazel Carby, the "principles and the conditions of their work" (8). As a result of this call, more scholars have taken interest in

the revitalization of works by Frances Harper and many of her nineteenth-century contemporaries.

Most of the current scholarship published by Afro-American feminist literary critics has examined Harper's poetry and her novel. Two of Harper's speeches have been analyzed, but no work has been completed on her essays. To date, the criticism about Harper's works tends to approach them from an historical vantage, pointing out the significance of the author's works to her own time and illustrating how her works have influenced the works of twentieth century writers.

Gloria Hull, in a 1979 article entitled "Black Women Poets from Wheatley to Walker," discusses briefly the style of Harper's poetry. She points out the similarities between Harper, the nineteenth-century protest poet, and the protest poets of the 1960s Black Arts Movement. Hull concludes that Harper was a model for these poets.

Harper's poetry has also been examined in two different journal articles by Patricia Leggins Hill. "Frances W. Harper's Aunt Chloe Poems from Sketches of Southern Life: Antithesis to the Plantation Literary Tradition," written in 1981, explored Harper's use of the poems in that volume to express the theme of racial uplift. Hill contends that Harper's poetry is significant because it, unlike other contemporary plantation poetry, does not

tend to reinforce stereotypical and mythical ideas about Negro slave life. In the second article "Let Me Make The Songs For The People: A Study of Frances Watkins Harper's Poetry," also appearing in 1981, Hill treats the major themes of Harper's poetry. This study maintains, like Brawley in a 1917 article, that Harper's poetry lacked sophisticated poetic technique and that "Harper's fame as a poet . . . rests on her excellent skills in oral poetry delivery" (60). From an analytical standpoint, this article goes further than the Brawley article in that Hill discusses thematic use, and she explicates a number of poems illustrating them.

To date, the most significant analysis of Harper's poetic style is Maryemma Graham's introduction (1988) to the Complete Poems of Frances E. W. Harper, one volume in the collection entitled The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. This introduction provides a biographical sketch of Harper, a discussion of various themes that appear in the poetry, a brief explanation of Harper's poetic form, and a brief summary correlating Harper's poetic style and that of other nineteenth-century poets; the work also lists some of the stylistic similarities between Harper and the poets of the 1960s Black Arts Movement. This study describes Harper as a serious author and reviews the poetry objectively.

Fortunately, the essay does not rely on the early judgments of Brawley and Redding. The brevity of the discussion concerning the linkage between Harper and her contemporaries and with her successors is a weakness in this introduction.

Most analytical treatment has been devoted to her only novel, Iola Leroy. Since the novel was first published in 1892 it has been reissued six times, the most recent in 1988 from the Oxford University Press as one of the volumes in The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Frances Smith Foster's introduction gives an historical account of Harper's literary career and of the novel's critical and popular reception from its appearance in 1892 to twentieth-century evaluations of it in texts devoted to critical review of the Afro-American novel. While Foster's essay is an apology for the social purpose of the novel, it does not touch on the literary merits of the text.

In 1987 Beacon Press reprinted the novel with a comprehensive and perceptive introduction by Hazel V. Carby. This essay chronicles the writer's political and social career. Carby also recounts the history of the critical reception of the novel from 1892 to more current times. The negative reception that the novel received from twentieth-century critics, according to Carby, will be

overturned when black feminist critics insist on ". . . the rewriting of Afro-American cultural history" (xiv). Carby uses the remainder of the essay to discuss Harper's novel in terms of its relationship to the activities of nineteenth-century black women intellectuals and in terms of the fiction of her contemporaries.

Examination of the novel has also been included in critical texts devoted to black women's fiction. Barbara Christian's 1980 text entitled Black Women Novelists contains a five page review of Iola Leroy within a chapter called "From Stereotype of Character." This chapter contains an excellent introduction discussing the history of black images in American literature. Christian raises some interesting historical and literary issues about Harper's novel, but she does not provide detailed analysis of these areas. The focal point of Christian's discussion concerns the similarities between Harper's heroine and Clotel in William Wells Brown's novel which was written thirty-seven years earlier. According to the critic, Harper's novel fails because it is unrealistic and too moralistic. In other words, Christian contends that the work does not reflect the author's own experiences nor does it dwell on the pressing issues facing the black woman of that era. The critic views the novel as too "sentimental and puritanical in tone" (28). These comments seem a bit

excessive. Her criticism of the work does not reflect knowledge of Harper's life's work. The novel does reflect Harper's experiences and it chronicles her personal and political philosophies. It also gives a view of circumstances and people she encountered as she traveled through the post-war South. The novel's sentimental and moral tone is certainly reflective of the popular romance genre of the era. Finally, without the benefit of strong support for the argument, Christian concludes that Harper's major objective in writing Iola Leroy was to ". . . describe the rise of the black middle class headed by mulattos who feel the grave responsibility of defining for the black race what is best for it . . ." (29). While the implications raised in the essay are not fully explored, the possibilities are certainly provocative.

Black Feminist Criticism, Barbara Christian's more recent publication (1985), is a collection of essays exploring the nature of stereotypical characters appearing in black women's fiction. Though the title of the text suggests that the theoretics of black feminist criticism are discussed, an in-depth theoretical discussion is not present in the text. As in the collection of essays cited above, the author raises many questions about the subject but supplies few answers. Only a short chapter is devoted to a discussion of Iola Leroy. Christian contends,

rightly, that to understand literature written by Afro-American women requires that the origins or the history of that literature be examined. She views Harper's novel as a forerunner of twentieth century black female novelists because the characteristics of the heroine, Iola, ". . . were to remain [the] dominant elements of fiction written by Afro-American women for decades . . ." (167). Because the author does not cite specific examples to support her idea, the essay simply becomes an historical recounting of the social and political factors which informed the novel.

An article by Deborah E. McDowell in 1987 entitled "The Changing Same: Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists" explores the heroines in Harper's Iola Leroy and Alice Walker's The Color Purple. McDowell uses a rhetorical critical approach to determine whether the point of view of the work is public or private. McDowell points out the similarities and differences in the cultural experiences of black women writers across generational boundaries. The significant difference between the two writers is the audience to whom they address their works. According to McDowell, Iola fits the public's paradigm because the author's major intent was to appeal to a public audience for social change and justice. Walker, on the other hand, fits into the private paradigm because the story's epistolary mode of development leads to the

psychological unfolding of the heroine's character. This article provides an interesting approach to apply to other works by Harper. Marilyn Elkins, in a 1990 article entitled "Reading Beyond the Conventions: A Look at Frances E. W. Harper's Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted," approaches the analysis of the novel differently from most critics. Instead of focusing on the novel's heroine as vehicle to reshape the opinions of the largely white reading audience, Elkins examines the author's use of minor characters, who speak in dialect. Harper's intent, the critic states, is to add a more realistic element to the text. Through these characters, Elkins contends, Harper voices, to her largely white audience, the important concerns of the black community. Harper, she believes, is also attempting to revise ". . . prevailing assumptions about the relationships between speech patterns, skin color, power and intelligence" (45).

The most significant study to date of Harper's novel appears in Hazel V. Carby's critical study, Reconstructing Womanhood (1987). In this work, Carby examines the written prose of black women from the mid-nineteenth-century slave narrative to the fictional narratives of early twentieth-century black women. She uses an historical-critical approach which places emphasis on the factors of race, gender, class, and analyzes each literary piece. The work

is both a cultural history and a critical interpretation of women's narrative. Chapter Four is devoted to an exploration of Iola Leroy. Carby, unlike other Harper critics, does not view the novel as the author's "least successful project" (63). To defend this position, she examines the work in terms of its historical context, its classification as a nineteenth-century romance novel, and its intent to ". . . morally rearm the black intellectual and contest the terrain of racist retrenchment . . ." (94). Carby is quite original in saying, as do I, that the novel is Harper's final statement about the moral, political, and social philosophy of her life and work.

Because her works are related to her involvement with three major reform organizations, it is accurate to identify Harper as a composer of public literature who "rarely personalizes the narrative voice" (Graham xxxix). Though her artistic voice is often homiletic in tone, it cannot be simply characterized as self-righteous, propagandistic, or lacking in artistic merit. The inspiration for creating literary art did not only arise from her sincere desire to effect political and social equality and moral reform for all Americans, it was also a reflection of the artist's need to create original compositions. Examination of her experimentation with literary forms and language makes this point quite evident.

The idea of a literary aesthetic was by no means foreign to Frances Harper. She was not guided by an "art for art's sake" aesthetic, but she was, as Professor Maryemma Graham so aptly states, "a committed artist and activist intellectual, who openly embraced progressive and radical ideas . . ." (xxxv). Of the author's intellectual preparedness her friend and fellow abolitionist William Still writes:

> Mrs. Harper reads the best magazines and ablest weeklies, as well as more elaborate works, not excepting such authors as De Tocqueville, Mill, Ruskin, Buckle, Guizot, etc. In espousing the cause of the oppressed as poet and lecturer, had she neglected to fortify her mind in the manner she did, she would have been weighed and found wanting long since. (811)

As can be deducted from this passage, Harper's literary models were those who sought to effect social reform.

From the author's use of a number of literary forms, styles, and language devices, it is evident that she was keenly aware of the contemporary literary movements of her day. Also evident in her work is her own training in classical literature and the Bible. Her poetic style indicates her familiarity with the genteel tradition of Whittier and Bryant. Her poem "Died of Starvation,"

demonstrates her knowledge of Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist. It recounts the story of a man imprisoned for stealing bread to feed his dying wife. In a footnote Harper writes, "See this case as touchingly related in Oliver Twist, by Charles Dickens" (Harper 16).[1] References in her work to other literary and philosophic figures include Goethe and Swedenborg.

Frances Ellen Watkins (Harper) was born in 1825 in Baltimore, Maryland, of free parents. When she reached three years of age she was orphaned. Responsibility for her care was placed in the hands of an aunt. Until age fourteen she attended the school her well-known social activist uncle, William Watkins, operated to educate free blacks. Under William Watkins' tutelage, Frances not only obtained a classical education, but also training for carrying out her duty as an educated free black to seek political and social justice for her race. She had witnessed her uncle's zeal in using the pen as a weapon against slavery in the many articles he wrote for William Lloyd Garrison's antislavery publications. During the years of her young adult life she used her skill in

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[1]Unless otherwise noted, all of the Harper poems cited in this study may be found in Complete Poems of Frances E. W. Harper, edited by Maryemma Graham. This work is a volume in The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is the general editor.

literary composition and oratory to combat the evil foe of slavery. After the Civil War Frances Harper went south to assist the newly freed people in making the transition from bondage to freedom. When she returned to her home in Philadelphia she composed one of her most outstanding collections of poetry, Sketches of Southern Life, in which she describes some of the individuals she met and situations she encountered as she toured the South. In addition to her Reconstruction activities, Harper became involved with the American Woman's Suffrage Association and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for which she composed literature and delivered speeches. Age did not curtail Harper's efforts on behalf of political and social issues. She continued to write and address public forums until her death in 1911. (For a more detailed account of the author's life see Appendix entitled "A Literary Biography of Frances E. W. Harper".)

Harper's literary aesthetic, therefore, was formed by her classical education, her informed view of contemporary literary productions, and by her interest in political and social issues of the day. Her calls for political and moral reform found expression in her poetry and prose. Thus, she was able to form a linkage between her artistic voice and her political and moral beliefs. It is Harper's

1894 poem "Songs for the People" which best expresses the poet's aesthetic vision. She voices her desire to write

> Songs to stir like a battle cry
> Wherever they are sung.

In the final stanza, Harper concludes that she wishes to create

> Music to sooth all its [the world's] sorrows
> Till war and crime shall cease;
> And the hearts of men grow tender
> Girdle the world with peace. (162)

For Harper, then, the highest aim of literature is to teach and effect societal change.

In order, therefore, to determine effectively the character of Harper's artistic voice and the merit of her writing, twentieth century critics and readers must be willing to suspend some of the qualities and measures that are used to judge modern writers. A writer's fondness "of plain statement" is not a quality which is "fatal" to literature (Hyatt 46). Harper's use of straightforward language and her desire to stir the emotions were prescribed in accordance with her aesthetic ideas to confront, in a creative act, subjects ". . . of immediate urgency . . . [and] to speak in a voice that goes out from the self to others acknowledging both personal fears and hopes . . ." (Jones 16). She felt that through this

"creative act" she could be of some assistance in creating a new social order.

An analysis of Harper's artistic voice is complicated by what seems to be ambiguities in the patriarchal values of her religious world and her active literary, oratorical, and financial support of the emancipation of slaves and women. Like many of her literary contemporaries, Harper's Judeo-Christian morality formed the philosophical core of her creative expression and social activism. As to the way Harper's religious character influenced her literary productions, William Still writes: "Her mind being of strictly religious cast, the effusions from her pen all savor of a highly moral and elevating tone" (785). Retrospectively, modern critic Dickson D. Bruce states that Harper's work reflects an "activist imagination" which expresses its call for societal change in terms of "genteel ideals" (45). Still's characterizations of the writer's works as "effusions . . . of a highly moral . . . tone," and Bruce's use of the terms "genteel" and "activist" to describe her imaginative and social mind, point to the contradictions that are present in Harper's life and works. It is indeed interesting that Mrs. Harper's total acceptance of the patriarchal system of Christianity, which justified or moved slowly in opposing the bondage of women

and slaves, did not prevent her from actively working for the freedom of slaves and women.

Benjamin Mays and E. Franklin Frazier, in their research of antebellum Negro religion, conclude that the Negroes' idea of religion and God "kept them submissive, humble and obedient . . ." (Mays 26); it also "turned their minds from the sufferings and privations of this world to a world after death where the weary would find rest and the victims of injustice would be compensated" (Frazier 45). Harper's response to religion was different. Vincent Harding, in his essay on antebellum Negro religion, categorizes Harper's brand of religion as often "storm[ing] beyond submissiveness to defiance" (181). To Harper, God meant "definite action." He was the catalytic force which moved her to work and write to bring about social and moral change.

For Harper, Christianity provided both a haven of solace and a vehicle of protest. This idea is best illustrated in her reaction to John Brown's insurrection. Mrs. Harper, like a number of blacks and some white abolitionists such as Emerson, equated Brown's actions to those of the martyred redeemer Christ (Harding 181, 195). In a letter to the imprisoned Brown, Harper writes:

> The Cross becomes a glorious ensign when Calvary's . . . sufferer yields up his life upon

> it. And, if Universal Freedom is ever to be the dominant power of the land, your bodies may be only her first stepping stones to dominion. (Aptheker 441)

In the same letter, Harper expresses her hope that slavery will be ended peacefully, and simultaneously she suggests that God's retribution for "national sins" could possibly take the form of violent conflict. This statement of holy defiance, similar to that voiced by Abraham Lincoln, is followed by an expression which reflects traditional adherence to religious duty. Harper urges Brown and his fellow prisoners "to seek a refuge in the Eternal God, and lean upon His everlasting arms for a sure support" (441).

As for Harper's literary works, religious themes and symbols function dually as vehicles for protest and as manipulatives to urge the individual reader to seek moral solutions to the social ills plaguing the country. Similarly, these themes and symbols provide the oppressed with hope and solace. For instance, in her long narrative blank verse poem, Moses, the main character becomes a symbol of the emancipator, Lincoln, and the Israelites are representative of black Americans. The biblical story of Moses' delivery of the Israelites from the bondage of Egyptian slavery is the archetypal narrative which Harper uses to parallel the conditions of both the enslaved and

the free black in America. In a letter to William Still dated April 19, 1865, reprinted in Still's book The Underground Railroad, Harper reflects on the assassination of President Lincoln and compares his act of emancipating the slaves to Moses' liberation of the Israelites. Her desire to see all people of her nation make a moral effort to prevent the reinstitution of slavery is expressed in this letter. She writes:

> Moses was not permitted to see them settle in Canaan. Mr. Lincoln has led up through another Red Sea to the table land of triumphant victory, and God has seen fit to summon for the new era another man. It is ours then to bow to the Chastener and let our honored and loved chieftain go. Surely the everlasting arms that have hushed him so strangely to sleep are able to guide the nation through its untrod future; but in vain should be this fearful baptism of blood if from the dark bosom of slavery springs such terrible crimes. Let the whole nation resolve that the whole virus shall be eliminated from its body; that in the future slavery shall only be remembered as a thing of the past that shall never have the faintest hope of a resurrection. (796-797)

The ideas Harper expressed in the lines from the letter above, were transformed, in 1869, into a poetic form.

Moses, the poem's central figure, is characterized as a contemplative, rational, and sensitive man who believes that God has called him to free his people. Prepared to champion the cause of the Israelites, Moses discusses his decision to join the struggle of the Israelites with his Egyptian princess mother. She is anxious to discover what has moved her son to take up this fight, and he responds:

> Let me tell thee, gracious princess: 'tis no
> Sudden freak nor impulse wild that moves my mind
> I feel an earnest purpose binding all
> My soul into a strong resolve, which bids
> Me put aside all other ends and aims,
> Until the hour shall come when God--the God
> Our fathers loved and worshipped--shall break our chains,
> And lead our willing feet to freedom. (pp. 34-35)

Not only do these lines reveal Moses' call to action; they also indicate that God is a source of consolation for his suffering people.

Realizing the disparity that exists in his life as an Egyptian prince and that life of his Israelite parents and

their people, Moses announces to the Egyptian princess that he is going to leave the comfort and luxury of the Pharaoh's palace to reside in the deplorable conditions of Goshen, the Israelite settlement, with his Jewish parents. Moses describes to the Egyptian princess the conditions of his family's dwelling and the feelings that the mean circumstances of their existence inspire in him. He states:

> Within those darkened huts my mother plies her tasks,
> My father bends to unrequited toil;
> And bitter tears moisten the bread my brethren eat.
> And when I gaze upon their cruel wrongs
> The very purple on my limbs seems drenched
> With blood, the warm blood of my own kindred race;
> And then thy richest viands pall upon my taste,
> And discord jars in every tone of song. I cannot live in pleasure while they faint in pain. (35).

Moses' strong sense of justice and his belief that God brings down retribution on those who "trample on his children" (Hill 62) allow Moses to leave behind all those things that are symbols of oppression. Later his desire to have his race liberated from the tyranny of Pharaoh is

realized after he vehemently challenges the government's authority.

Supporting the cause of women's rights and simultaneously upholding the domestic virtues implicit in the cult of true womanhood present another philosophical ambiguity under which Mrs. Harper lived and wrote. As Paula Giddings states, "On one hand they [black women] agreed with the fundamental premises of the Victorian ethic. On the other they opposed its racist and classist implications" (49). As a free black woman and as a member of the black middle class, formally educated in "grammar, reading, writing, natural philosophy, music and mathematics" (Ward 234), Frances was expected to work for the uplift of the race. Unlike her white female counterparts, who could hold the position of "lady of the cult" (homemaker, mother and family tutor, and the perfect example of social and moral grace), Harper had to secure her respectability as a "lady" through participation in moral reform movements and intellectual societies (Giddings 47-49).

Harper genially defied the restrictions barring both black and white women from speaking from a public platform to gender-mixed groups on serious issues. In 1853 Harper defied this standard when she gave up her teaching career to embark on a new profession as an abolitionist lecturer;

she also expanded her literary career. The author's quiet rebellion led to the development of a successful oratorical and literary career. She was able to capture the attention of race- and gender-mixed audiences in the North before the war and throughout the country after the war.

Harper's lectures and writing reflect her advocacy of women's independence and women's domestic responsibility. In the post-war lectures that she delivered in the South to newly-freed female slaves, Harper urged the women to demand their human rights and also the respect of their husbands. In a letter from the South to William Still, she writes that she has informed the women that it is time for them to "lift up their heads and plant the roots of progress under the hearthstone" (Still 803). In another letter to Still, she states that she has also advised the men to value home life and "to rightly appreciate and value the marriage relation" (800). For Harper, one of the meaningful ways to achieve racial uplift was through building family structures based on a strong moral foundations.

Harper's poetry about women reflects the message she carried to the South. In the poem entitled "A Double Standard," the poet not only calls on black men to respect black women, but she also condemns society for overlooking male behavior in "affairs of love" while placing the entire

moral responsibility of the affair on the woman. The female speaker in the poem states:

> Crime has no sex and yet today
> I wear the brand of shame
> Whilst he amid the gay and proud
> Still bears an honored name. (177)

In the concluding stanza the scorned woman warns:

> No golden weights can turn the scale
> Of justice in His sight;
> And what is wrong in woman's life
> In man's cannot be right. (178)

Harper's efforts to gain for African-American women the political rights and social respect accorded to white women found in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) another political platform. Though this organization was filled with the same racist sentiment that permeated the entire country, black women found this group appealing due to the moral ideals it fostered. Despite the duplicitous moral standard within the organization, black women after the Civil War were attempting to lay the moral foundation for constructing cohesive family units within their communities. In addition, black men and women were seeking a political voice through the ballot, and the WCTU became a powerful political base supporting women's suffrage and franchisement.

An integral part of Harper's effort to strengthen the black family unit was imparting to the newly freed slave the message that the use of alcoholic beverages was destructive to the moral well-being of the individual and to family life. In the speeches she delivered and in the literature she composed, Harper expressed her conviction that all Americans should wage war against alcohol. In one of her essays entitled "Symposium-Temperance," Harper calls on women to take the moral lead in the fight against an immoral foe, "demon rum." Addressing the women of the country, she writes:

> We have before us another battle, not one of flashing swords and clashing steel, but a moral warfare, a conflict in which there is room for women's influence as well as man's power. A battle against an enemy, old, strong cruel and deceitful--an enemy to the home, to our country and our God . . . intemperance is the curse of every land and the deadly foe of every kindred, tribe and race which falls beneath its influence. (373)

The literature she produced in conjunction with her work in the Women's Christian Temperance Union was written in the same tone as the lines cited above. As mentioned before, Harper's aesthetic values were based on Sidney's

theory that the purposes of literature were to entertain and to instruct. The works written while she was associated with the WCTU moved from the sphere of instructive to the realm of strict didacticism. The poetry composed in this phase in her career may be described as sentimental, manipulative, and metaphorically bland. It lacked the original quality of her earlier work because its intent is to instill guilt through cataloging the many ways the "drunkard" inflicts hurt on the innocent persons in his life. The male speaker, in the opening stanza of "Signing the Pledge," states ". . . this cup has brought to me / A world of shame and woe" (145). In stanzas two through six, the speaker relates the harmful impact his drinking has had on his wife, his mother, and his son. His love of wine is tearing his family apart; therefore, he signs the pledge as a symbol of his renunciation of drink. Rejecting drink is not easy for the speaker, but it releases him ". . . from the dust of a sinful life. . . . / And [now] peace and comfort [will] crown the home" (147). In the final stanza the speaker declares that with "the help of grace divine" he will overcome his addiction to drink.

As the only black to serve on the national executive committee of the WCTU, Frances Harper often commented on the racism that existed within the movement. The membership of the WCTU was composed largely of white middle

class women, most of whom had been active in the abolitionist movement, and who did not welcome the inclusion of black women in their ranks. Frances Willard, president of the organization announced that "everything possible would be done for colored people, but that it would be separate and distinct from the work among white people" (Neverdon-Morton 206). A number of black intellectuals, under the leadership of Ida B. Wells, found this attitude of the WCTU membership unacceptable. Other blacks, led by Frederick Douglass, believed that WCTU attitudes had been misinterpreted. Harper supported the views of the latter group. This position has tones of political expediency. The WCTU became a great supporter of women's suffrage, which had not been one of the original missions of this group. The Douglass faction wanted to form an alliance with the WCTU in order to secure voting rights for black men.

It is with the writing of the temperance poetry that Harper sacrifices her aesthetic voice to promote, in an extremely sentimental manner, the philosophy of the cause. Convictions based on Harper's moral philosophy and on the political needs of her race are possible factors contributing to the negation of her artistic voice. An examination of these factors is presented in chapter four.

It is clear that Harper's literary voice was a public one which sought to raise the moral standards of an entire nation. She encouraged the political and social "uplift" of her race and her gender, and she assisted in exposing to public view the destructive nature of alcohol. From the tone of the poetry and from the thoughts recorded in her personal papers, it is evident that literature written to support these three movements was penned as a result of her personal passions and convictions that the causes were indeed noble and just. The radical ideas presented in the literary compositions were acceptable to her largely Christian audience because Harper's own public display of high moral virtue and genteel manner compelled others to view her tempered social revolt favorably. The social rhetoric of her moral and historical self validated her literary art. This study examines the literary merits of her public voice and the contradictions attendant to the philosophies it espouses; it also discusses inevitable tension between the personal text and the social world.

Thus, each of the succeeding three chapters presents an examination of the literature written about the three reform movements. Chapter II discusses literature related to the antislavery movement and reconstruction; Chapter III presents analysis of the literature written about the struggle for women's rights; the fourth chapter analyzes

those works pertinent to the temperance movement. In the conclusion the research findings are summarized.

This timely reassessment of literary works of Frances Harper and other black women authors of her era, as Annette Kolodny states in her essay, "Dancing Through the Minefield," gives new life to literary history, challenges the paradigmatic ways texts are read, and causes a reexamination of the biases and assumptions which shape aesthetic values; this, in turn, will inform "the critical methods" which formulate aesthetic responses (151). Critical evaluation of Harper's work adds a new dimension to American literary study because the extraordinary woman voiced through literary expression, the convictions of three major political movements of her time.

CHAPTER II

LIBERATING AND ELEVATING A RACE

The years 1853-1865 marked Frances Ellen Watkins' beginning and end as a spokesperson and writer for the cause of slave abolition. At the end of the Civil War, she turned her attention to assisting the newly emancipated slaves in their transition to a free status. Since her oratorical voice was interwoven in her literary voice, it would be easy to dismiss her literary composition as purely didactic rhetoric. Instead, evaluation of her literary voice must be based on the aesthetic standard to which she and other writers of her era subscribed; she held forth a different paradigm than that which modern critics use to explore the traditional American literary canon of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, and James. For indeed, American literature is not, according to critic Carolyn L. Karcher, a product of one tradition but "of a dialectic between a culturally dominant tradition and the variants springing from the experiences of the many groups outside that consensus" (41), such as black women writers.

Social and political circumstances surrounding being born a free black female in nineteenth-century America shaped Frances Watkins' concept of art. A formal education

which placed great emphasis on biblical studies, reading, and written composition, a need to be free from the oppression which chained herself, her race and her sex, and a strong sense of morality based on Christian philosophy informed her perception of literature. The author's theoretical idea of the function of literature, especially poetry, is stated in a dialogue between two characters from one of her works of fiction entitled "Fancy Etchings." (The citations from this work come from Frances Foster's anthology entitled, A Brighter Coming Day.) Jenny, a young black woman who loves to write poetry, discusses with her Aunt Jane the joy she finds in composing verse. The aunt enjoys her niece's writing, but she is concerned that Jenny's fanciful notions about poetry have given her a distorted view of the reception her verse will get from a black audience. Aunt Jane pointedly asks Jenny, "What do you expect to accomplish among our people by being a poet?" Jane's concern was not that blacks were not capable of appreciating poetry, but that the difficulty of their lives would not allow them the leisure to enjoy it. Jenny's reply to her aunt's observation is reflective of Frances Watkins' literary theory. She responded:

> It is just because our lives are apt to be so hard and dry, that I would scatter the flowers of poetry around our paths; and would if I could

> amid life's sad discords introduce the most entrancing strains of melody. I would teach men and women to love noble deeds by setting them to the music, of fitly spoken words. The first throb of interest that a person feels in the recital of a noble deed, a deed of high and holy worth, the first glow of admiration for suffering virtue, or thrill of joy in the triumph of goodness, forms a dividing line between the sensuous and material and the spiritual and progressive. I think poetry is one of the great agents of culture, civilization and refinement. (Harper 225-226)

These words echo Watkins' own thought that literature promotes enjoyment, learning, and a sense of social and moral responsibility.

Harper's aesthetics are much like those of sixteenth and eighteenth century British literary critics. Sir Phillip Sidney in the "Defense of Posey" argues that the end of poetry is to "teach and delight" mankind (525). According to Sidney's theory, the writer of literature should devote his work to a moral purpose, exposing both virtue and vice. The ultimate goal of literature is to provide a positive model that lures the audience to follow the good life. Eighteenth century writers such as Pope,

Swift, Addison, and Steele followed a tradition encouraging writers to "address the social rather than the individual consciousness in man" (Granger 3). From Jenny's idea as to the function of poetry, it is evident that Watkins blended both traditions to formulate one which linked art and life. Works written in response to the antislavery cause illustrate her belief that exposing the vice inherent in the slave system would allow truth to prevail and thereby encourage others to follow the righteous path. Her writings were never meant for personal gratification; they were for the consumption of the entire nation.

Writing and lecturing for the cause of racial equality from 1854 through 1871 garnered for Frances Ellen Watkins a large public following. She had her hand on the pulse of the people of her era, and she addressed the values they held dear. She honed in on this group's love of the democratic principle of freedom and its belief in the Puritan ethic of hard work and a self-reliance. Especially she sought to raise their moral indignation about slavery through reminding them of the sinful implications that opposed their basic Christian philosophy of human equality. Thus, she used a number of technical theoretical, literary, and oratorical tactics to reach her audience. Revising in her text the traditional American ideals so as to include blacks and developing themes based on moral and logical

arguments established her literary voice. The works written between 1854 and 1857 fueled the fires of the abolitionist movement. The ones composed between 1857 and 1864 before and during the Civil War were apocalyptic in tone and theme. Finally, those written between 1865 and 1871 while saluting the heroes of the movement, plan for a new social and political order in America.

Fundamentally, Watkins' abolitionist poetry is similar to that of fellow abolitionist writers. She, like others of her ilk, found subjects in national contemporary headlines or in stories familiar to the abolitionist audience. Her peers too, had written about the abuse of slavery. To recount the stories, most abolitionist poets, used the ballad extensively. But, one of Watkins' best antislavery verses, "Moses: A Story of the Nile," appears in blank verse.

Her prose condemns slavery, especially the horrible family separation, of mother from child. Therein the narrator blames the American government for the continuing existence of a slave system that contradicts the spirit of freedom that is ensured by the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Her voice of reform differs from the contemporary ones of John Greenleaf Whittier, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Lydia Maria Child. Hers, unlike theirs, emerges from personal experience. Because slave

laws threatened Harper's status as a free black her tone contains greater urgency. Although her slaves are the victims of physical and emotional abuse, she shapes for them a dignified and often heroic stance. In poetry she attempts to remedy their condition. The white writers' voices are indeed sympathetic in portraying the agony of slavery, but they are distantly inclined. They are, in other words, more revealing of the institution itself rather than drawing individual or heroic portraits of slaves to humanize the issue. For example, in John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "The Slave Ship," the poet fails to convert emotional outrage into human experience:

> Hark! from the ship's dark bosom,
> The ringing clank of iron,
> The maniac's short sharp yell!
> The hoarse, low curse, throat-stifled;
> The starving infant's moan,
> The horror of a breaking heart
> Poured through a mother's groan (21).

The stanza above renders a cataloguing of slave types as opposed to a revelation of types (a "maniac," "the starving infant" and "a mother" in distress). Even poems about individual blacks, such as "Toussaint L'Ouverture" and the "Christian Slave," lack clear portraiture.

Instead, political and moral remarks overshadow the subjects.

Watkins, on the other hand, identifies more closely with the harshness of slave oppression. Her depiction of slaves and their living conditions is more realistic than that of contemporary white writers. In addition, her affinity with the slave gives her works an emotional life. Though the slave men and women who appear in her canon are victims of abuse, her portrayal of them is dignified and at times heroic.

Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, her first volume of poetry and prose after Forest Leaves, appeared in 1857, running through twenty editions by 1871. The subjects covered in this volume not only reveal the writer's religious, political, and social concerns, but also the underlying Christian bond that unified the major moral reform movements of her time. In the preface, William Lloyd Garrison recounts the way that racial discrimination and slavery stifle creative genius, intellect, and individual humanity. As in the preface to Frederick Douglass' narrative, he apologizes for Watkins' work, an example, of what he says the educated Negro might achieve. Further, Garrison urges the critics to keep in mind that the works were written by "one young in years, and identified in complexion and destiny with a depressed and

outcast race." He states that "whatever is attempted [by blacks] in poetry and prose . . . should be viewed with a friendly eye, and criticized in a lenient spirit. To measure them by the same standard as we measure the productions of the favored white inhabitants of the land would be manifestly unjust" (Foster 26-27). His assertion that standards for evaluating Watkins' compositions should be different from those used to judge white writers is an idea that has plagued both women and minority writers through the ages. Watkins' work needs no defense. Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects is poetically satisfying and intellectually stimulating. Indeed this literary collection establishes her reputation as a poet. The 1854 edition includes nineteen poems and three essays that appear under the heading of "Miscellaneous Writings" ("Christianity," "The Bible," and "The Colored People in America"). The 1857 edition adds seven poems while including the essay "Breathing the Air of Freedom." The essay entitled "The Bible" disappears from the second edition.

"Eliza Harris," a poem appearing first in various abolitionist papers during 1853, and then in the first edition of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, recreates a dramatic scene form Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. The protagonist valiantly escapes with her child

over the freezing Ohio River while the slave hunters close in on her trail.

Watkins converts the half page of Stowe's text into a twelve stanza poem that encompasses the major themes of the abolitionist cause. Stowe's scene begins when the two weary fugitives are spotted as they run toward the edge of the river:

> . . . She caught her child, and sprang down the steps towards it. The trader caught a full glimpse of her, just as she was disappearing down the bank; . . . he was after her like a hound after a deer. In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind they came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond . . . .
>
> The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it, but she staid there not a moment. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake; stumbling-leaping-slipping-springing upwards again! Her

> shoes are gone-her stockings cut from her feet-while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank. (64)

In a dramatically intense ballad, Watkins recounts Eliza's crossing. She does not, however, focus on the action of the flight but on the emotional state of the fugitive mother and child. The poet creates tension in the verse through her use of dramatic elements such as the lament of the chorus, iterative imagery, and the dramatic monologue of freedom. Thematically, the work brings out the major precepts of the antislavery movement.

Watkins' poem, unlike the descriptive passage in Stowe's novel, focuses on delineating the mother's emotional state as opposed to concentrating on the physical act of Eliza crossing the icy Ohio River. For both writers the icy water is an obstacle to the heroine's freedom, but for Watkins, the river is primarily a vehicle to bring out the heroine's admirable courage. Stanza four illustrates this point:

> She was nerv'd by despair, and strengthened by woe,
> As she leap'd o'er the chasms that yawn'd from below;
> Death howl'd in the tempest, and rav'd in the blast,

But she heard not the sound till the danger was past (6).

The anguish Eliza feels gives her the nerve and strength to overcome the obstacles. Placing emphasis on persona instead of action enables the poet to use the verse to evoke in the audience concern and sympathy for a courageous mother and small child in distress. It also seeks to motivate that audience to seek a dismantling of slavery.

That Eliza's physical and mental states are the focal points of this poem is apparent in the opening lines when She transforms Stowe's simile of Haley's chase from "he was after like a hound after a deer" (64), to a comparison which places the prey at the center of the analogy. Eliza, in the opening lines, is described in terms of a frightened but graceful "fawn" determined to elude the clutches of the presumably male hunter.

> Like a fawn from the arrow, startled and wild,
> A woman swept by us bearing a child;
> In her eyes was the night of a settled despair
> And her brow was o'ershaded with anguish and care. (6)

The voice in the passage above belongs to a group of bystanders, identified in line two of the stanza as "us." The function of this structural device resembles that of the chorus in a Greek tragedy. In a narrative monologue, a

group of bystanders (the chorus) recounts Eliza's exhibition of courage and determination as she leaps from one cake of ice to another to gain freedom. Not only does the group recount the incident, but it also makes political and moral comments about the institution of slavery.

These onlookers paint the picture of a fearless woman who is oblivious to the obvious dangers of the ice-filled river, but who is intent on gaining for her child freedom in the state of Ohio or freedom in death under the ice of the river. The chorus narrates the intense moment on the river bank:

> She heeded no danger, she paused not to think;
> For she is a mother--her child is a slave--
> And she'll give him his freedom, or find him
> a grave! (6)

To the observers, the sounds remain a haunting memory. They describe the "pale," innocent, and beautiful face of the mother who flees from her would-be captors. Against that vision of beauty in distress is the ominous sound of the "tramp of the horse and the bay of the hound," that creates a scene that echoes the apocalyptic end of the world. Despite the impending dangers, state the narrators, Eliza focuses on her goal of freedom for herself and her child, and she "heard not the sounds till the danger was past." In order to maintain the poem's focus on Eliza,

Watkins juxtaposes a visual description of the black madonna against the sounds of terror and damnation. Such a contrast would have moved her highly religious nineteenth-century audience, especially the women, to sympathize with a desperate mother.

Beginning in stanza five, the poet comments on the mockery America makes of the Declaration of Independence while slavery continues to thrive on her shores. In the fifth stanza also, the narrative voice changes from the collective "us" to the singular "my." The lone voice, in stanzas five and six, exposes the irony of freedom in America when he challenges the government on ethical grounds:

> Oh! how shall I speak of my proud country's shame
> Of the stain on her glory, how give them their name?
> How say that her banner in mockery waves-
> Her star-spangled banner- o'er millions of slaves?
>
> How say that the lawless may torture and chase
> A woman whose crime is the hue of her face?
> How the depths of the forest may echo around
> With the shrieks of despair, and the bay of the hound? (6)

Stanza seven of the poem suggests that until the government's rectifies the duplicity of its concept of freedom, slaves like Eliza will be "aided by Heaven" to gain "a free shore, / Where the friends of humanity open'd their door" (7). The remaining stanzas continue to present Eliza's determination to be free despite the overwhelming odds against her. The dogs are but symbols of legalized animalism.

> The bloodhounds have miss'd the scent of her way;
> The hunter is rifled and foiled of his prey;
> Fierce jargon and cursing, with clanking of chains,
> Make sounds of strange discord on Liberty's plains (7).

Though the last stanza presents a happy picture of a mother who has saved her son from the bonds of slavery, the author is not unrealistic about their future and their legal status. The child's mother, however, has proven that she will brave anything to secure and maintain his freedom. The speaker in the final stanza states that:

> With the rapture of love and fullness of bliss,
> She plac'd on his brow a mother's fond kiss:
> Oh! poverty, danger and death she can brave,
> For the child of her love is no longer a slave!
>
> (7)

Finally, Eliza, as well as the other slave women who are the subjects of Watkins' works, is characterized as a strong and independent individual.

Another verse in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects that is spawned from Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is entitled "Eva's Farewell." Watkins takes the scattered lines of conversation in Chapter 26 between St. Clare and his dying daughter Eva to create a short verse. Just before her death Eva explains to her father what it means to be a Christian. Asked about what she sees, the dying Eva remarks melodramatically, "O! love-joy-peace!" A "glorious smile" is on her face (Stowe 302).

From these lines, the poet writes a four stanza poem in standard ballad rhyme in which Eva gives her father a detailed account of her vision of the beauty of heaven; it is, she tells him, a place where "the sun is ever shining," where "living fountains" flow to / "Quench the pining spirit's thirst," and where holy music is "floating from the Spirit land!" (23). Observe the skillful way that the poet complements Stowe's light imagery with that of water. In this Christian view of heaven Watkins, like Stowe, allows the father to find comfort in knowing that his daughter is going to a wonderful place. Even though this poem may be classified as abolitionist poetry by virtue of the fact that its source is Stowe's novel, the poet does

not incorporate an abolitionist theme. The lines of verse are based strongly, but not restrictively on Christian philosophy. The writer can only suggest that Watkins knew her audience would be familiar with the role of the characters in Stowe's work, and thus the poem would only serve as an implied reminder that encouraging the evil things of the world, including slavery, would prevent one from attaining the glory of Eva's heaven.

Four other poems in the volume treat the plight of slave women, especially the anguish and despair that is felt when separated from family. "The Slave Mother," "The Slave Auction," and "The Fugitive's Wife" were included in the 1854 edition, and in 1857, "The Slave Mother, a Tale of the Ohio" was added to the collection. Other nineteenth-century abolitionist writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Marie Child, and John Greenleaf Whittier, have also used the slave woman's tortured condition as a source for their abolitionist works. Her status as the quintessential victim of rape and abuse obscures her humanity. Thus, she is unable to fit the nineteenth-century notion of the "True Womanhood" (Foster 31). Watkins, on the other hand, treats the female slave differently in her work. This woman, despite the grief and agony she feels when her family is torn apart, does not

willingly accept the condition. In some instances, she takes action to protect the family unit.

In "The Slave Mother," Watkins paints, through realistic images of sounds and sights, a vivid picture of a slave mother, who "in her kirtle vainly tries . . . / To hide" her trembling little boy from the slave merchants who steal him away. The mother's broken heart manifests itself through physical sound, "Heard you that shriek?," that "rose"

> So wildly on the air,
> It seems as if a burden'd heart
> Was breaking in despair. (4)

In the lines above, the sound proves disharmonious with its surroundings; instead it weighs "on the air" to haunt all who hear it. Not identifying the sound, the narrator begins to tell the story of a slave woman and her child who are on display, for possible sale. The poet exposes slavery as an institution which does not respect the natural order of human existence. The boy "is not hers, although she bore / For him a mother's pains / [and] her blood / Is coursing through his veins!" (4). Because she is separated from her child, the slave mother is denied the pleasure or as the narrator states, the "joyous light" that comes to a mother when the child achieves the slightest accomplishment. Rhetorically, she (the narrator) exclaims

to God, "Oh, Father! must they part?" and the boy is taken away (5). At the end of the poem the speaker identifies the "bitter shrieks" as the "disturbing" sounds of a mother's heart "breaking in despair" (5).

"The Slave Auction" reenacts poetically the tragic drama of the various individuals who have been put up for sale. The narrator herself is probably a black woman with moral strength and an abiding love of family. The first portrait is that of a group of "defenseless" young girls who are placed on the auction block unclothed and who are, therefore, unable to maintain a modest posture.

Next on the platform are crying mothers whose children have been taken away from them. Even the world of commerce and greed cannot silence their screams. Then there is the wife, "with her love and truth," who is separated from "the husband of her youth." Her tremendous anguish, according to the speaker, supersedes written expressions of the poet and visual representations of the artist. Finally, the narrator, in one stanza, states that on that block were male slaves whose "sole crime was their hue" and "frail and shrinking children" (10). Perhaps Watkins' cursive treatment of these two categories of slaves may be attributed to her primary desire to call to her audience's attention how the moral integrity of black womanhood is compromised through this brutish activity. The auction

block itself represents a stage where the immodest display of the female flesh and the disregard for motherhood could be played out to an audiences that would readily view it as an affront to Victorian sensibility. Watkins therefore places this at the center of her poem.

The grief of slavery is so great; the speaker tells the audience that it cannot even be equated to the death of a family member. The "desolation" that comes with the forced separation of families is described as a "heavy weight" that presses "the life-drops from the heart" (10).

The only other poem about slave women to be included in the 1854 edition of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects is "The Fugitive Wife." Within the slave narrative, the fugitive's wife tells her own story. She describes her agony when her husband, one of the few pleasures that "cheered" her life, informs her of his intentions to escape without the family. Historically, the number of female runaways was lower than that of males due mainly to the circumstances of childbearing. According to historian Deborah White, the average age of most runaways was between sixteen and thirty-five years. During these periods of a slave woman's life, she "was either pregnant, nursing an infant, or had at least one small child" for which to care (70).

Historically, women who had children tended not to run away unless they felt threatened that they were going to be separated from their offspring through a sale. A man, on the other hand, was freer to escape; he too was more likely to be sold away from the family. The slave father, like the one in Frances Watkins' poem, loved his family, but all he had to look forward to was hard work and severe punishment or being separated from the family as the result of a sale (White 71-720).

In the poem, the fugitive's wife recounts the remorse that burdens her husband's heart when he decides to leave the family. When he informs her "we must part," he reveals, according to the wife, the pain attached to the decision. His manly veneer is stripped away and he tearfully expresses his hurt. Of this she states

> He vainly strove to cast aside
> The tears that Fell like rain:--
> Too frail, indeed, is manly pride;
> To strive with grief and pain. (19)

She, in the final stanza, deeply grieved at the thought of his leaving, gives him her blessing. Fighting back her own tears she tells him:

> "Bear not, . . . unto your grave,
> The yoke you've borne from birth;

No longer live a helpless slave,

The meanest thing on earth!" (19)

The wife does not ask him to stay, nor does she insist that he take the family with him because she too realizes that a successful escape with the family in tow is virtually impossible. Again, Watkins is structuring a full and positive image of the slave woman. She is not only a mother, but she is also a loving wife who unselfishly wants freedom for her mate, though she will be unable to enjoy that state with him.

Critic Frances Smith Foster writes that Frances Watkins, like other abolitionist writers, treats the male slaves in her works as "heroic eunuchs, long-suffering, turn-the-other-cheek christians. They do not march off to war, but steal away (usually to Jesus) when the burden becomes too great" (31). Only two male slave figures are treated in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, the fugitive from the poem discussed above and the slave in the poem "The Tennessee Hero" that recounts the story of a male slave who is knowledgeable of fellow slaves' plot to escape. Instead of betraying the trust of his comrades, he suffers a fatal beating. His martyr's death takes him directly "To the throne of God on high" (24). The poet characterizes the hero as a noble individual of "manly might" who possesses a heart that "beat[s] firm and true."

His love of liberty and his integrity prevent him from revealing the plans of his friends. Defiantly he exclaims to his inquisitors:

> "I know the men who would be free;
> They are the heroes of your land;
> But death and torture I defy.
> Ere I betray that band." (24)

Throughout the work the poet contrasts the hero and his persecutors. She refers to the slave hunters as "The base and coward crew," "the savage troop" all of whom have "murder in their eye." The hero, on the other hand, is drawn as a "monarch" of men who refuses to put the liberty of his friends in peril. Dying with dignity is the only recourse for this slave-hero.

Interpreters of the author's work must remember that Frances Ellen Watkins was a black female writer and political activist who realized her own freedom was tied to that of the slave population. She was ever mindful of the composition of her audience and the intent of her work. She had no intention of alienating her largely white audience. Concurrently she sought not to portray the black slaves appearing in her works as flat subjects, but as human beings who had the same feelings, needs, and above all, the same sense of moral integrity as her audience. In a speech printed in the May 23, 1857 issue of National

Anti-Slavery Standard, two months after the Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott decision, Watkins expressed her contempt for the institution of slavery which deprived the Negro male of his "liberty and manhood," and for a government which did not recognize the concept that "The law of liberty is the law of God, and is antecedent to all human legislation" (n.p.). Watkins, therefore, would not demean any male or female slave characters in her texts.

For the poet, then, the actions of the Tennessee slave and the fugitive slave husband were heroic and she would hardly have considered them eunuchs. Slavery may have made them powerless, but the poet provided the men in this volume with a way to maintain their integrity and a modicum of control over their lives within a system that engulfs their entire being. Each man's opportunity for exhibiting bravery is limited by his status as a slave. The fugitive slave cannot fight to protect his family, but he can lash out at the system by taking his freedom. The Tennessee hero chooses death to prove his manliness as opposed to being stained as a traitor.

Watkins' mission was to liberate all blacks. If her literary voice seems to elevate the characters of women who appear therein, it would be logical for her to focus on their plight. Her literary works and her lectures gave the black woman a voice. Even though the entire race suffered

the oppression of slavery, it was not until the 1850s that free black women had a voice in the political affairs of their own communities. Slavery caused the image of black womanhood to suffer and Watkins did much, as critic Helen Carby contends, to "reconstruct" faulty perceptions about black women.

Poems of Miscellaneous Subjects also contains "The Slave Mother, a Tale of the Ohio," a poem added to the 1857 edition, probably written after Watkins read the article below that ran first in the New York Tribune and was then reprinted in Frederick Douglass' Paper on February 1, 1856.

> Slave Stampede--The freezing of the Ohio River, by the facilities thus furnished for crossing from Kentucky to Ohio, seems to have stimulated many of the bondsmen of the latter State to attempt their escape. We learn by telegraph from Cincinnati of the recapture there yesterday of several of these fugitives, not without tragical circumstances of the most affecting character. A mother finding escape hopeless from the bands of the slave- catchers, to save her three children from being dragged back to slavery, cut their throats, instantly killing one and severely wounding the other two. Six of the fugitives

> were captured, but eight, belonging to another party, are said to have effected their escape. When the slave mothers of the South begin to be affected with this fanaticism for freedom, it is not to be believed that either they of their children can long be retained in bondage. Still less, is it to be believed that the humane and Christian people of the North will tolerate the execution among them of a kidnapping statute by which mother are driven to such extremities. (2)

The poet transforms the brief news account of the slave mother's attempt to commit infanticide into a poem. Indeed, the spirit of the editorial comment that ends the report weaves a narrative verse that encompasses the woman's initial decision to become a fugitive. The poem, like the article, sends a powerful message about the unsavory consequences of slavery.

The narrative voice is that of a slave mother. She states that she has decided to run away from her master in fear that "some cruel hand / Should tear [her] household wreaths apart" (28). It is her plan, on this cold night, to cross the Ohio bridge and follow the "north star" to freedom (29). Unable to find refuge in Ohio, she determines that her descendants will not live as slaves:

I will save my precious children
From their darkly threatened doom.
I will hew their path to freedom
Through the portals of the tomb. (29)

In a desperate attempt to maintain their liberty, she begins to kill the little ones. She does succeed in slaying two of the four children with a knife. When she attempts to end the lives of the other two, "They snatched away the fatal knife, [and] / Her boys shrieked wild with dread . . ." (30). In stanzas one through four, the mother catalogues "the [four] treasures of [her] soul" as two boys, the baby girl, and the "babe" her "precious child." From the lines above, the mother completes the killing of the baby girl and the child. Before she can kill the boys, she is stopped. It is not clear by whom. The technical flaws of detail give way to the emotional power of the issue to stir the hearts of readers to action.

"A Mother's Heroism" honors the mother of Elijah P. Lovejoy, a white man whom nineteenth-century blacks considered to be an abolitionist and who was eventually killed for the cause of human liberty. This poetic tribute illustrates again Watkins' concern with the ideal of true womanhood, especially motherhood. The headnote to the poem reads "When the noble mother of Lovejoy heard of her son's

death, she said, 'It is well! I had rather he should die so than desert his principles'" (18).

Elijah P. Lovejoy was a clergyman who in 1836 moved to Alton, Illinois, where he was the editor of the Observer, a religious journal. Many in Alton opposed his antislavery views. A group of citizens on three separate occasions threw his press into the river to show their dissatisfaction with his ideas. On a November night in 1837, a mob set fire to the building that housed his press; as he walked out of the burning structure, he was shot and killed. Though Lovejoy did not consider himself an abolitionist, blacks hailed him as a martyr.

When in the poem the news is broken to Mrs. Lovejoy, the messenger lists the moral achievements of her son. Though visibly shaken by the news she composes herself and states forthrightly:

> " 'Tis well that, to his latest breath,
> He plead for liberty;
> Truth nerved him for the hour of death,
> And taught him how to die
> "It taught him how to cast aside
> Earth's honors and renown;
> To trample on her fame and pride,
> And win a martyr's crown." (18)

Women in Watkins' poetry may be characterized as strong, loving, and Christian. She did much to construct a positive image of black women, especially of mothers and wives. Elizabeth Ammon in her essay on Uncle Tom's Cabin argues that Stowe embodies the character of Uncle Tom with the male qualities of strength and courage and also with maternal ideals of nineteenth-century. His courage, strength, sensitivity, and gentleness result in the creation of a "morally superior and more loving than average man" (160-161). The crude masculine characters in Stowe's novel, such as Haley and Legree, are placed in contrast to the ideal man. The ideal character, however, is unable to survive in the imperfect world, and death is imminent. If Professor Foster's assertion about Watkins' male slave characters is accepted, it is then possible that Ammon's idea about Stowe's hero is applicable to the slave men in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. The male character in "The Fugitive's Wife," for example, has been according to his wife, a good husband and father. He is pained to the point of tears at the thought of leaving his family behind. The male slave in "The Tennessee Hero" places his comrade's liberty above his own life. He suffers death at the hands of cowards because he will not divulge their whereabouts. Because of slavery these men, like Uncle Tom, have no control over their existence. They, therefore, in

varying manners take whatever bit of control over their lives that is possible.

Other poems in this collection straightforwardly addressed the stance that the Church took on the issue of slavery. Frederick Douglass, in a speech given in 1847 before a group of blacks in Philadelphia, listed the Church as the major oppressor of the Negro. In 1850, before a convention of Negro clergymen, black abolitionist minister Samuel Ringgold Ward charged that the Church "had departed from God and the Bible" (Quarles 70). Ward believed that the church did not take any initiative in improving race relations.

Southern clergymen were also condemned for not forcefully challenging slavery, and Northern white churches were criticized for their support of colonization. Churches, blacks charged, were interested in human souls but not in their conditions on earth. Those white churches that allowed blacks entry to worship, designated back benches for them to occupy during services. Even when allowed membership, blacks were not allowed to participate in the governing process of the church attended. The Methodist Episcopal Church, in the conference held in 1840 in Baltimore "voted to debar Negro church members from testifying against whites in ecclesiastical trials in those

states in which law prohibited Negroes from testifying against whites" (Quarles 70).

Criticism went beyond the Methodist Episcopal Church. Nineteenth-century blacks blamed all denominations "for their lack of reformist zeal and Christian example." Not even the Quakers went untouched, because Quaker zeal for antislavery waned after 1830. In their Yearly Meeting of 1840 the Friends sought to drop the cause. Ringgold Ward, in a published article, condemned them for their condescending attitude toward blacks.

> They will give us good advice; they will aid in giving us a partial education--but never in a Quaker school, beside their own children. Whatever they do for us savors of pity, and is done at arm's length. (Quarles 72)

Most blacks, however, even Ward, appreciated what they had done to promote liberty.

The poem "Bible Defence of Slavery" denounces those churches that support slavery. Christians who do not uphold slavery, the speaker says, are in mourning because so many of their brethren do support it. Clergymen who are charged with the responsibility of guiding the young toward truth, sacrifice truth when they support slavery. Such persons make "a mockery of praise" and use the Bible, "the word of life," to justify "the lie" that God finds slavery

acceptable. The practice of it belies Christian righteousness. The final stanza cautions Christians not to be so quick to convert the heathen when their own behavior of supporting slavery may make them no better than infidels. The pervasive irony is clear.

> Oh! when we pray for the heathen lands,
> And plead for their dark shores,
> Remember Slavery's cruel hands
> Make heathens at your doors! (6)

In "The Dismissal of Tyng" a head note alludes to a line from the Episcopal Church Journal: "We have but three words to say, 'served him right'" (28). In this poem, Harper satirizes a congregation appalled at the idea of slavery, yet does nothing to change the status quo. First, there is the collective voice of the congregation that admonishes one of their number for owning slaves. Though they do not support slavery, they are able to live with it by simply ignoring it. Hence, they encourage their fellow members to do the same.

> What if its shrine be red with blood?
> Why, let him turn his eyes away. (28)

Beginning in stanza two, the second speaker, the slaveowner, appears. From stanza two through four, he presents to the church a pro-slavery argument. He challenges the members to dispute his and other slave

holders' right "to bind / With galling chains the weak and poor, [and]" . . . to sell the mother from her weeping child" (28). Though the speaker is a slaver the words are that of an abolitionist. Harper is suggesting that even the slave-holder is aware of his sin.

Astonished that the slaveholders would ever mention these terrible things in their church, the members expel him. In the last stanza the congregation exclaims,

> Upon our Zion, fair and strong,
> His words fell like a fearful blight;
> We turned him from our silent fold;
> And this we did to "serve him right". (28)

Hypocritically, they turn the slaveholder out not because of this action, but because he reminds them of a condition that they wish to ignore. Their only service to the cause of antislavery is turning him out of their midst. Afterward they return to being a "silent fold."

Frances Ellen Watkins viewed slavery as a moral abomination that touched the spiritual well being of the entire country. But she was very much aware of the economic implication of that dreadful institution. In a letter to William Still dated October 20, 1854, she writes that after reading "the narrative of Solomon Northrup (12 years a slave)" she decided to support the doctrine of Free Labor.

I spoke on Free Produce, and now by the way I believe in that kind of Abolition. Oh, it does seem to strike at one of the principal roots of the matter . . . . Oh, how can we pamper our appetites upon luxuries drawn from reluctant fingers? Oh, could slavery exist long if it did not sit on a commercial throne?

. . . Oh, friend, beneath the most delicate preparations of the cane can you not see the stinging lash and clotted whip? I have reason to be thankful that I am able to give a little more for a Free Labor dress, if it is coarser. I can thank God that upon its warp and woof I see no stain of blood and tears; that to procure a little finer muslin for my limbs no crushed and broken heart went out in sighs, and that from the field where it was raised went up no wild and startling cry unto the throne of God to witness there in language deep and strong, that in demanding that cotton I was nerving oppression's hand for deeds of guilt and crime. If the liberation of the slave demanded it, I could consent to part with a portion of the blood from my own veins if that would do him any good. (788)

Pennsylvania Quakers, in the late eighteenth century, began the free produce movement; it was not, however, formally established until about 1827. In 1830, the Pennsylvania Free Produce Association extended its work to the free black community. This effort was organized to protest "slavery by not using anything produced by slave labor" (Quarles 74). It did not take long for this drive to catch on in the black community. In fact, the first five Negro Conventions held in the early 1830s passed resolutions to support the effort. Some blacks even attempted to run businesses based on the free produce philosophy. A bakery owned by a Philadelphia black man used only "free" sugar. Angelina Grimké ordered her wedding cake from him for that reason (Quarles 75).

To show her support for this movement, Frances Watkins included in her lectures information about this economic method of fighting slavery, and she also wrote an article on the matter in the June 29, 1855, issue of the Frederick Douglass' Papers. In that article, she stated that she viewed the movement as "the harbinger of hope, the ensign of progress and a means of proving the consistency of our principles and the earnestness of our zeal" (Quarles 76). Also, she wrote a poem entitled "Free Labor," which appeared in the 1857 volume of Poems on Miscellaneous

Subjects. Repeated in the verse are the same ideas she presented in her letter to Still and in the news article.

The speaker in the poem refuses to wear a garment derived from slave labor because doing so would only be a means of supporting the institution. In the first verse, the narrator asserts that her apparel is not soft, but it is not guilt stained:

> I wear an easy garment,
> O'er it no toiling slave
> Wept tears of hopeless anguish,
> In his passage to the grave. (25)

When called before the throne of God, the narrator proclaims, she will, "In language deep and strong" (25), emphatically state "That [she has] nerv'd Oppression's hand / For deeds of guilt and wrong" (25). For Watkins and for most abolitionists, the free produce movement was not the principal method to dismantle slavery. They realized that the consumers outnumbered those who abstained. For the antislavery Society the free labor issue, according to historian Benjamin Quarles, rested with the individual and his own conscience "rather than a dividing line between the faithful and the backsliders" (76).

Watkins believed that blacks would enjoy a brighter future. In "Ethiopia," a poem, and in two of the prose works, "The Colored People in America" and "Breathing the

Air of Freedom," she expresses her hope for the future. However, she remembers the current state of affairs. Thus, in "Ethiopia," the poet uses light and dark imagery to frame a scene that encourages promise in the depths of despair. Stanzas one and three illustrate the theme.

> Yes! Ethiopia yet shall stretch
> Her bleeding hands abroad;
> Her cry of agony shall reach
> The burning throne of God
>
> Redeemed from dust and freed from chains,
> Her sons shall lift their eyes;
> From cloud-capt hills and verdant plains
> Shall shouts of triumph rise. (8)

"Lines," an antislavery ballad added to Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects in 1857, is significant because therein Watkins experiments with the use of the allegorical narrative that has characteristics similar to the tenants of the morality play. Later she also uses the allegorical form in the long poem "Moses: A Story of the Nile" and in "The Triumph of Freedom-A-Dream," a short story. "Lines" has three characters, Slavery, Future, and Crisis, who discuss the place of Slavery in the future of the United States.

When the poem opens, Slavery, a figure "Full of madness, guilt, and gloom," stands at Future's gate. His mission is to gain entrance into tomorrow. Future, a "pale and trembling" creature, fears Slavery's entrance into his "portals." Beside Future stands Crisis, a "solemn" and prophetic female who warns of what the approaching ages might hold. In the final three stanzas, Crisis presents America with the possibilities of its destiny. If the country "strive[s] for Truth and Justice," it will be rewarded with strength and God's love. Should the country continue to trample on "His [God's] children," it will sever the cord that binds it "to Him." The ultimate punishment for allowing slavery to continue, according to Crisis, is that the country "Must in Blood or tears of sorrow / Wash away her guilty stain" (27).

This poem sends out an ominous message to Americans because by 1857 the country was on the brink of the Civil War. Watkins, in this poem, uses both New and Old Testament symbols to create a sense of doom. Slaves are equated to the "children" of Israel and, of course, those who support slavery are representative of the Egyptians who refuse to free God's "children." Crisis' warning to

America reflects those prophecies issued in the Book of Revelation.

Other poems[5] written between 1853-1864, which do not appear in Poem on Miscellaneous Subjects, include "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe," published in the February 3, 1854, edition of Frederick Douglass' Paper. This poem pays tribute to the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the penultimate stanza Watkins thanks Stowe on behalf of "the sisters of [her] race" because the novelist has "done [her] part" in bringing to the public's attention their plight (57).

"Be Active," a poem, sends forth a vigorous call to enlist all freedom loving people to fight "On the battle field of life" (76). It appears in Frederick Douglass' Paper on January 11, 1856. Its urgent summons that all moral people join the crusade against the evil of slavery, echoes of Christian battle hymns such as "Onward, Christian Soldiers." The poet calls on men from every occupation, nation, social status, faith, and color to relieve the burden of the slave. Failure to do so would be an affront to God because the cause is a holy one and "[He] is on the side of right" (202).

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[5]The poem "To Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe" is located in A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader, Edited by Frances Smith Foster. When that source is used as the primary text it will be so noted.

The antislavery essays in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects are thematically similar to the poetry. The reader of Harper's work realizes quickly that often times portions of the texts from her speeches find their way into the poems, essays, and fiction. As a periodical writer, Watkins composes concise, well organized and unaffected prose. She, like the neoclassical essayist, viewed the writer as one who "address[ed] the social rather than the individual consciousness in man" (Granger 3). She identified the antislavery issue as one that was of importance to herself and her audience. The language she used is powerful but gently persuasive. Her style may be described in the same terms as Addison's; it has both the tone of the scholar and the simplicity of the artisan. Like the essays in Addison and Steele's serials, Watkins' prose works have a moral purpose with a social point of view (Granger 4-5).

The essay "Colored People in America" appeared in the 1854 edition of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects and every edition thereafter. It has been speculated that this essay may be the text of Watkins' maiden speech "Elevation and Education of our People" referred to in the biographical sketch in the appendix. In it, Watkins discusses what is needed to elevate a race that has "been the butt of ridicule and the mark of oppression" (99-all quotations

from this essay are from the Harper Reader edited by Frances Smith Foster pp. 99-100). First, she presents an historical statement of enslavement and racial discrimination as reasons for the low status of blacks in America; next, she expresses the results of such treatment; then she discusses the positive actions that blacks are taking to elevate their status. Also she explains the problems associated with the upward mobility of the race. Finally, she reiterates that education and morality are needed for the upward climb.

One of the most significant remarks Watkins makes in the opening of her essay is similar to one Garrison writes in the preface to Poem on Miscellaneous Subjects. She explains that slavery and racial discrimination have had "influence over the body and soul [of the black race] which dwarfs the intellect, stunts its development, debases the spirit, and degrades the soul" (99). After cataloging the harm and the resulting negative consequences, she issues a measure of promise suggesting that uplift of the race is possible. This hope, she explains, rests in the success of educational and moral institutions that are being cultivated in free black communities across the country. Evidence that the race is seeking to elevate itself, she states, is visible in the operation of both public and private schools, in the national expansion of the African

Methodist Episcopal Church, and in the publication of periodicals by black editors.

Next, she points out that there are problems within the community itself, and the greatest one is the lack of unity of purpose. She suggests that these problems have their origin in the dark recesses of racial hatred. Despite the problems, a commitment to academic and moral training empowers the race to move forward.

Another prose piece appearing in the volume was taken from a letter Mrs. Watkins had written to William Still. According to her friend and fellow abolitionist, Miss Watkins in 1856 had a desire to visit the fugitives in Canada (her uncle who now lived in Toronto died two years after the visit). Although her visit was a short one, she was inspired by what she witnessed. On September 12, 1856, when she reached Niagara Falls, New York, on the return leg of her journey, she wrote Still a letter describing the exhilarating feeling she experienced when she first stood on free soil. This letter, published in the October 4, 1856, issue of the National Anti-Slavery Standard, appeared in 1857 in the prose section of Poems On Miscellaneous Subjects. The letter, like the poem "Ethiopia," expressed hope for a brighter future for those blacks living in a free land. This intoxicating view fueled her determination to achieve total emancipation.

It is possible to classify the letter as a piece of travel literature that combines the author's description of some of the awesome natural sights she witnesses and the expression of some political thoughts that the visit inspired. She first describes the breath-taking scenes of "the rainbow crowned Niagara, girdled with grandeur, and robed with glory, chanting the choral hymn of Omnipotence" and "the Ocean singing, its wild chorus of sounding waves" (46). None of the spectacular sights she witnessed were as beautiful as her first gaze "upon Free Land." At that vision, Miss Watkins states that "tears sprang" from her eyes because this place allowed the black male to become "a man and a brother" (45-46).

Toward the end of the letter, the writer states that the beautiful Niagara may "hush [the] spirit with its ceaseless thunder; it may [also] charm . . . with its robe of crested spray and rainbow" (46), but the land of freedom has a more important lesson to teach. This land, she writes, transports the heart back to "that heroic struggle for emancipation, in Great Britain, [where] the great heart of the people throbbed for liberty" (46) and won it.

On May 13, 1857, Frances Ellen Watkins, along with several other speakers, addressed the fourth anniversary meeting of the New York City Anti-Slavery Society. The text of the speech was then published on May 23, 1857, in

the National Anti-Slavery Standard. This speech can be analyzed as an essay because it is a prepared text reflecting her ability and growth as a writer. The controlling idea of this document is that "the law of liberty is the law of God, and it is antecedent to all human legislation" (99). Thus, Watkins declares that slavery and its litigious framework is contrary to the God given liberty with which all men are born. Men who support slavery are not moved by God's law, she claims, but by the economic value of property.

She then moves from explaining how the American slavers and their sympathizers are breaking moral laws, to explicating their violation of the civil code. To prove this she gives a powerful example of a fugitive slave who found temporary shelter near Bunker Hill. When his presence was discovered, he was returned to slavery. The case she refers to is probably that of the famous 1854 fugitive slave, Antony Burns. Then she begins to list a number of American symbols and landmarks associated with liberty. Finally, she concludes that despite the ideals the country espouses, black people are unable to find freedom anywhere in America, South or North:

> But from Boston harbour, made memorable by the infusion of three-penny taxed tea, Boston in its proximity to the plains of Lexington and Concord,

> Boston almost beneath the shadow of Bunker Hill and almost in sight in Plymouth Rock, he is thrust back from liberty and manhood and reconverted into a chattel. You have heard that, down South, they keep bloodhounds to hunt slaves. Ye bloodhounds, go back to your kennels! When you fail to catch the flying fugitive, when his stealthy thread is heard in the place where the bones of the revolutionary sires repose, the ready North is base enough to do your shameful service. (n.p.)

In the lines above, the great irony, suggests Watkins, is that in arresting Antony Burns, the captors are reinventing the principles of the American revolution. After establishing the contradictions of liberty for the American black and those promised freedoms of the United States Constitution, she shifts the tone of the essay by returning to the religious theme. She states emphatically that "God is on the side of freedom" (n.p.). In the final paragraph, she challenges persons of "honest, noble hearts [those] seekers [of] truth and justice" to join the side of freedom.

This document indicates some significant things about Miss Watkins' career as a writer and as an abolitionist. It is obvious from the effective organization that her

speeches were as carefully prepared as material she submitted for serial publication. The language she uses is powerful; her skillfulness in alluding to the Bible, history, and philosophy makes more vivid her illustrations and attests to the wide scope of her reading. Further, that she is invited to address this group, which results in her speech being published in the National Anti-Slavery Standard shortly thereafter, indicates that she has, by 1857, built an important reputation as a speaker for the abolitionist movement.

Contemporary reviews of her speeches were always outstanding. In a letter of October 25, 1858, to The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison wrote of her address to the Western Anti-Slavery Society:

> As usual, [Miss Watkins] made a very marked impression upon those who listened to her pathetic and eloquent words; and, though identified by complexion with a proscribed race, and young in years, produced the general conviction that scarcely a white young lady in the land however favored with scholastic advantages, could be found to match her in the gift of speech and the power of literate composition. (587)

By 1858 Garrison felt no need to apologize for her efforts in composition.

As a full time lecturer from 1856-1860, Miss Watkins traveled throughout New England, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey westward to Ohio and Michigan. Her addresses received positive responses. For two of them delivered before the Union Society of New York Central College, McGrawville in October 1856, she received glowing accolades. In a report of the events which appeared in an issue of Frederick Douglass' Paper on October 31, 1856, Miss Watkins is commended for her "well chosen language, superb delivery and [her] effective presentation of the Anti-slavery cause" (Daniel 15). Journalist Grace Greenwood dubbed her a "bronze muse" and described her stance in the lecture setting as follows: "She stands quietly beside her desk and speaks without notes, with gestures few and fitting. Her manner is marked with dignity and composure. She is never assuming, never theatrical . . ." (Still 812).

Her travels throughout Pennsylvania were not always pleasant. In a letter dated April 1858, she contrasted the pleasant treatment New Englanders gave blacks as opposed to the hateful treatment doled out in Pennsylvania. She recounted in this letter several incidents which occurred while she was there. The experience she has on a street

car in that city revealed much about the young Watkins' strength, independence, and determination.

> Now let me tell you about Pennsylvania. I have been traveling nearly four years . . . this is about the meanest of all, as far as the treatment of colored people is concerned . . . The other day, in attempting to ride in one of the city cars, after I had entered, the conductor came to me, and wanted me to go out on the platform. Now, was not that brave and noble? As a matter of course, I did not. Some one interfered, and asked or requested that I might be permitted to sit in a corner. I did not move, but kept the same seat. When I was about to leave, he refused my money, and I threw it down on the car floor, and got out, after I had ridden as far as I wished. Such impudence! (Watkins 46. Foster)

After a speaking engagement in Detroit, Michigan in September, 1858, Many Ann Shadd Cary stated that both "the whites and colored people here are just crazy with excitement about her. She is the greatest female speaker as ever was here . . ." (Bacon 29). The praises she received for her lectures were unending. She "was not," states William Still, "content to make speeches and receive

plaudits, but [she] was ever willing to do the rough work and to give material aid wherever needed" (790). There are a number of letters throughout Still's biographical sketch that show her willingness to contribute hard work and money to the abolitionist cause. In a letter addressed to Still, she writes:

> I see by the Cincinnati papers that you have had an attempted rescue and a failure. That is sad! Can you not give me the particulars? and if there is anything that I can do for them in money or words, call upon me. This is a common cause; and if there is any burden to be borne in the Anti-Slavery cause-anything to be done to weaken our hateful chains or assert our manhood and womanhood, I have a right to do my share of the work. (790)

Black women by 1858 had begun to take full advantage of the invitation to participate in the proceedings of the Negro meetings (sometimes referred to as the Negro Convention). In 1849 the Ohio state convention, as was mentioned in the biographical sketch, adopted a resolution allowing females active involvement (Minutes 1849, 404-5). Both the names of Frances Ellen Watkins and her cousin William J. Watkins appeared in the minutes of the Convention of Colored Men of Ohio held on the 23rd, 24th,

25th and 26th of November of 1858, in Cincinnati. The minutes of November 23 read "Miss F. E. Watkins was requested to take part in the Convention" (Foner and Walker 335). On November 26th, she, along with four men, was appointed to serve on "a committee to raise the five hundred dollars contemplated in the resolutions appended to the Constitution" (Foner and Walker 337). At this meeting, the constitution for the newly organized Ohio Anti-Slavery Society was refined and ratified, and the persons on the committee to which Miss Watkins had been assigned were to raise money for the new organization. The minutes also reflected that William J. and Frances Watkins pledged ten dollars each to the newly organized society.

Lecturing full time for the abolitionist movement kept Miss Watkins quite busy however, she did not neglect her literary career. In 1859 she contributed to the Anglo-African Magazine two poems, "The Dying Fugitive" and "Gone to God," and a short story entitled "The Two Offers," generally regarded as the first short story published by a black woman in the United States. Also published in that same periodical was the essay "Our Greatest Want."

Of the four works, three are devoted to the issue of slavery. Though "Gone to God" does not address slavery, its theme could be applied to it. That God grants comfort in death to those who have anguished and who have been

lonely on earth is the central thought expressed in the verse. The short story "The Two Offers" has a feminist theme and addresses the right of women to make their own career choices. This work is considered in greater detail in Chapter III.

Of the two abolitionist works written during this time the most effective is the essay "Our Greatest Want." "The Dying Fugitive," a poem, appears in several different publications between May 1859 and February 18, 1860. In ballad form, it narrates the tale of a runaway male slave who is on the brink of reaching free soil when the ordeal of his journey takes its toll on his body. Upon his death, he is forced to find his freedom "On the bosom of his God." (93) Whether this poem was written as a companion poem to the one entitled "The Fugitive Wife" is unclear. Only one line could possibly suggest that the two are linked. When the fugitive turns himself over to death the resolve is similar to that of the wife in the former poem.

> And without a sigh or murmur
> For the home he'd left behind;
> Calmly yielded he his spirit,
> To the father of mankind. (93)

The second line in the stanza is not concrete enough to prove linkage. If these poems were related, it is

interesting that the poet does not allow the fugitive to achieve freedom without his wife and children.

Motivation for composing "Our Greatest Wants" arose from Watkins' concern that some middle and professional class blacks had begun to feel that their liberation, and that of the entire race, would be more easily obtained if they could acquire more money; they thought that money bought power. The acquisition of power would in turn lead to equal rights. Harper does not deny the need for the race to acquire property, money, and education, but she does not view these gains as central to obtaining freedom. The greatest need of the race, according to her is "a higher cultivation of all our spiritual faculties. We need more unselfishness, earnestness, and integrity" (n.p.). Once these spiritual qualities are embodied in the men and women of the race, "every gift, whether gold or talent, fortune or genius, subserve the cause of crushed humanity and carry out the greatest idea of the present age, the glorious idea of human brotherhood" (n.p.).

The mode of essay development moves from a general observation to a specific discussion with illustrations that explain it. The essay opens with the basic thought that "Leading ideas impress themselves upon communities and countries." She expands this statement through revealing how an idea can be given to the masses and subsequently

become an intricate part of community life. If the idea is good, the community benefits; if it is bad, it "is a detriment" to the community. Her examples are the British abolitionists who dismantle the institution in their country; Napoleon Bonaparte whose quest to control Europe is sanctioned by the French people and leads to war and bloodshed throughout the continent; and various representatives of American society, who were avaricious, such as the politician, the slave holder, and the minister.

After giving these examples, she begins to admonish blacks for wanting to adopt the materialistic ways of life as a means to gain freedom. Now that the author has reached the focus of the essay, she iterates what has provoked her to write this essay. Her understanding of the idea that is permeating the black community

> is that the greatest need of our people at present is money, and that as money is a symbol of power, the possession of it will gain for us the rights which power and prejudice now deny us.

Then she proceeds to give a litany of those things that blacks should "want" and what they "need." According to Watkins, adopting negative values from the white culture is not what the Negro needs. What he needs is to indulge in those things, especially spiritual things, that will lead him to the betterment of humanity.

Each year of the 1850s a severe blow was dealt to the cause of abolition. Liberty for free blacks was gradually being eliminated and fugitives found it more difficult to maintain their freedom once it had been acquired. The opening year of the decade saw the enactment of stricter fugitive slave codes. By mid-decade, the Dred Scott Decision was handed down, and at the end of the 50s, John Brown was arrested, tried, and hanged for his raid on Harper's Ferry. These represented only a fraction of the crucial events that touched the cause of abolition. Though these acts seemed to strike death blows to the cause of freedom, they were in reality the catalysts needed to make people pay attention to the abolitionist movement and subsequently they helped move the country toward civil war.

On December 2, 1859, John Brown was executed for his October 16 raid on Harper's Ferry. For black and white abolitionists, this day was one of meeting, praying and fasting. No matter how ill-conceived Brown's plan, his action brought the issue of slavery to the forefront of Northern thought. Brown's death caused those Northerners who had been neutral to the cause to move to action. His death also gave abolitionists a martyr figure "of unprecedented proportions" (Quarles 240). Free black communities throughout the North sent letters to Brown and his men while they were incarcerated. They also sent money

to the families of these men. Frances Ellen Watkins was among the group of Afro-Americans who came to the raiders' assistance. She sent a letter, dated November 14 [1859] and postmarked Farmer Centre, Ohio, to Mary Brown. Herein Watkins expressed her sympathy to "the noble wife of the hero of the nineteenth century" (Still 791). The letter also praises Mrs. Brown for her bravery and for the insightful public comments she had made during the ordeal. Watkins further stated that there was hope for "a republic that produced such a wife and mother" as Mary Brown. She closed the letter with an offer of assistance, and she enclosed "a few dollars as a token of [her] gratitude, reverence and love" (Still 791). Later Watkins would spend two weeks with Mary Brown while she awaited the execution of her husband (Still 791).

Miss Watkins' deep admiration for John Brown also prompted her to write letters to him and all those in his band. In a letter dated November 25, 1859, from Kendalville, Indiana, Watkins, on behalf of all slave women, wrote to thank him for "rock[ing] the Bloody Bastille." She expressed her sympathy for his fate, but she told him that her hope was that "great good may arise to the cause of freedom" (Redpath 418). The rest of her letter indicated how much her strength and fervor for the cause had grown, and how radical her belief in a God who

would effect social change had become. She wrote the following to Brown:

> . . . I would prefer to see slavery go down peaceably by breaking off their sins by righteousness and their iniquities by showing justice and mercy to the poor; but we cannot tell what the future may bring forth. God writes national judgments upon national sins; and what may be slumbering in the storehouse of divine justice we do not know. (Redpath 418-419)

The final lines in the passage quoted were apocalyptic, and the writer seemed to imply that God had placed a limit on how long the evil of slavery would continue. Harper viewed Brown and herself as being commissioned by God to dismantle slavery. She saw Brown as an archetype for the crucified Christ who was martyred for the cause of "Universal Freedom." She realized that the incident at Harper's Ferry had made a tremendous impact on those Northern abolitionist sympathizers who had not made a firm commitment to the cause. Whether the issue of slavery was to be resolved peaceably or through violence was not at this point as great a consequence as was the eradication of the institution of slavery.

Watkins was also concerned that the men who rode with Brown not be forgotten. In a December 12, 1859, letter to

William Still, she asked him to send Mr. Stephens (one of Brown's men) "a box of nice things every week till he dies or is acquitted[;]" She felt that his suffering has "been overshadowed by the glory that gathered around the brave old man" (792). To this gentleman, she sent one of her outstanding poems entitled "Bury Me in a Free Land," which had been published earlier in the Anti-Slavery Bugle (Bacon 31). According to Still, when she wrote this verse the author had been suffering from the effects of ill health while she was far away from home and family. Should sickness cause her death, she did not want to be buried "in a Slave State" (792-793). Thematically the poem expressed that sentiment.

The poem is frequently anthologized, and it is the first in which the poet's personal voice is heard. The success of this poem comes as the result of the poet's ability to fuse her personal emotions about her own health and her deep feelings about the abolition of slavery. This poem like the others has a ballad rhyme scheme, and it too attests to the author's adherence to a social aesthetic.

The first three lines of the poem show the author's personal resolution that if death is eminent, she cares not about the greatness nor meagerness of the burial site. In the fourth line of that same stanza, she makes it clear that she does not want to be buried in a land or in a state

"where men are slaves" (93). In the next four stanzas, the poet employs sensory images of sight and sound to picture slavery as a living death, denying the deceased the peacefulness and silence of even the tomb. To build these images, the author presents a litany of the horrible visions and sounds of the tormented slave suffers. The scenes and sounds are familiar ones from her earliest abolitionist poetry such as "babes torn from [the mother's] breast" (93), and the "mother's shriek" when this occurs.

In the penultimate stanza, the poet asks to be given a burial where the horrors of slavery do not unsettle her rest.

> I ask no movement, proud and high
> To arrest the gaze of the passers-by;
> All that my yearning spirit craves,
> Is bury me not in a land of slaves. (94)

The poet is able to maintain a balance between the two emotions by drawing parallels between death and slavery. Death and burial in the grave become more pleasing than the living death of slave existence.

In January 1860, a month after John Brown was executed, the Anglo-African Magazine published Frances Ellen Watkins' prose fiction work "The Triumph of Freedom--A Dream." This apocalyptic piece presented through symbols a negative view of the world and expressed

hope for a new world order. Apocalyptic literature was written "to comfort and encourage the faithful in difficult times" (Oxford Bible 362NT). For abolitionists, the death of John Brown did represent a troubling time, and perhaps Watkins composed the text to reflect this period as well as to deliver assurance of a brighter future to the faithful.

Exposing the evil of slavery is the work's aim. The theme is developed through the male narrator's experience in a dream vision. He takes an otherworldly journey with a female spirit as his guide. The source of this allegorical piece is the book of Revelation Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nineteen. In these sections, the Lamb (Christ) opens the fifth, sixth and seventh scrolls in order to reveal God's plan for the future. When Christ has gained victory over the forces of evil, there is great jubilation in heaven.

The apocalyptic vision of the unidentified male begins in a forest where he is contemplating the beauty of God's handiwork. When he falls into a trance-like state of consciousness, a female spirit with a sad countenance approaches him with the proposition of having him visit the goddess of this dream place. Once the visionary is in the presence of the goddess and her followers, the antislavery theme begins to unfold. The goddess is

> seated on a glittering throne, sparkling with precious gems and rubies . . . . She wore a robe of flowing white, but it was not pure white, and I noticed that upon its hem and amid its seams and folds were great spots of blood. (Harper 21-22)

Around the goddess are her priests and the masses of worshipers who do not seem to notice the blood stains on her garment. Clearly the visionary represents those decent people who have not yet spoken out against the plague that slavery is on society. It is the female guide who enlightens him about the inhumane nature of that system. To her mission in other words, Harper brings the visionary and heavenly power typical of the "House of Fame" in Chaucer and the most hightened moments of Spenser's Faerie Queene. And she endows them with an historical immediacy possibly missing from English poetry since the days of the great Romantics of the preceding generation (Miller).

Establishing a concrete interpretation for the bloodstained Goddess is as complex as devising meaning for some of the allegorical figures in Spencer's Faerie Queen. The bloodstained Goddess may represent slavery itself, or she could represent slaveholders who promote the institution. Possibly, the Goddess represents America, which bears the guilt for not enforcing the constitutional

rights of blacks. The "glittering" throne surrounded by sparkling precious stones becomes a symbol for commerce, the handsome wealth that chattel slavery, "Black Gold," has brought to plantation owners and to the country. The power of economics is so great, according to abolitionist thought, that the government fails in its duty to protect human rights. The Goddess in her dress that is not purely white, represents the government and the southern planters draping themselves within laws shielding the sinful abomination. To Watkins, slavery is not an issue of commerce, but one of morality.

Prominently enthroned above the altar, the Goddess receives from her followers the constant acclaim: "Thou art the handmaid of Christianity; thy mission is heaven-appointed and divine" (22). From this perspective, she could very well be viewed as a symbol of organized religion and its failure to be guided by the Christian principle that condemns man's inhumanity to man. She accuses the church of hiding behind the "sacred books." One of the priestly rights of the cult of the bloodstained goddess is "to search [the sacred books] for texts and passages to spread over the stains on her garment" (22). Other proof throughout the work supports either of these interpretations. Perhaps Watkins' intent was to allow the

symbols of the text to work on multiple levels so as to express a number of abolitionist themes.

The throne of the false Goddess is shaken when a lone man from the crowd stands during the worship service and proclaims that the Goddess is not the handmaid of Christianity. This declaration causes the congregation much anguish and for that, the young man is imprisoned. Confinement does not last long for him, and he returns to the worship site to challenge further the legitimacy of the throne. He reveals to those followers who will listen what is hidden beneath the altar. What they see are "hearts of a hundred thousand new-born babes . . . hearts of desolate slave mothers, robbed of their little ones, . . . [searned] hearts [from] which manhood has been crushed, hearts of young girls, sold from the warm clasp of their mothers . . . and hearts in which manhood has never been developed" (22). In showing the believers the cruelty of slavery the young man also reveals the hypocrisy of the Goddess. This young man could very well represent William Lloyd Garrison, who has been jailed once in Maryland for printing his antislavery paper. The young man may represent the entire body of abolitionists who have stood up for the cause of freedom. In the work, the author writes that the young man's words arouse in the crowd a "spirit of Agitation"

that will not go away, but which sends the Goddess into hiding.

Whether she hides under pulpits or constitutional law, the eye of Agitation follows her. The eye of Agitation is finally embodied in one old man who challenges the Goddess at her altar. Unable to accept the truth of the old man's words, she calls for assistance to a ruffian named "the General Government" who arrests, tries, and hangs the old man. With his death, the Goddess feels that she has conquered Agitation; however, the old man's blood gives life so that others may continue to fight the battle he has started. Of course, the old man represents John Brown. The guide continues to let the narrator see what the future holds. The old man's death has fueled the fire of good men to do battle with the Goddess, and "Truth and Justice" prevail at the end of the altercation.

In framing this narrative within a dream, Watkins is following a long literary tradition beginning with the Bible (Revelation); other writers who have used this invention include Chaucer (The Book of the Duchess) and Dante (Divine Comedy). Authors of periodical literature of the eighteenth-century, especially Addison and Steele (The Spectator), find the dream vision appealing to their readership. Other American writers, including some of Watkins' contemporaries, used this technique. Washington

Irving ("Rip Van Winkle"), Nathaniel Hawthorne ("Young Goodman Brown"), and Mark Twain (A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court) are among the American authors to frame their narratives in this way.

On November 22, 1860, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Frances Ellen Watkins married a widower with three children, Fenton Harper. Of this major event in the writer's life, Still devoted only four sentences. In addition to the name of her husband and the season of the year in which the nuptials were pronounced, Still only stated that the duties of her married state prevented Watkins from continuing her career as an orator. With the money she saved as a lecturer and writer, the couple bought a farm near Columbus (The Harper farm was located in Grove City, Ohio).[6]

To the Harpers one daughter Mary was born. Frances Harper supplemented the family income by selling homemade butter. She did not, however, totally give up writing or her abolitionist activities. On February 23, 1861, she published the poem, "To the Union Savers of Cleveland" in the Anti-Slavery Bugle. A reprint appeared in the

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[6]Perhaps Frances met Fenton Harper in her travels throughout the state of Ohio. She had become active with the state's Negro Convention and could have met him at one of those meetings. The Proceedings of The State Convention of Colored Men of the State of Ohio, lists the name Fenton M. Harper only once. His name appeared in the minutes of the January 1857 meeting held in Columbus; he enrolled as a member of the convention and he gave his address as Muskingum County.

Liberator for March 8, 1861. This poem was written to rebuff the actions of the editors of the Cleveland Leader along with some Republican party officials who returned a young black female runaway to her Southern owner. The men defended their actions by saying that remanding her to her master's custody "was necessary to propitiate the South, secure Northern rights, and preserve the Union" (Daniel 18).

The central focus of this poem is not the cruelty of slavery; instead, the author expresses her indignation with the group that hands over to "a vulture . . . a timid dove of prey" (213). These men are compared to the "heathen priests of old" who offer human sacrifices to preserve corrupt values. For the poet, the Union savers' intervention is not an adhesive that will bind North and South. Instead this action, she explains, supports immoral commercial slavery and places more stain" On the Union's bloody altar." The voice in the poem finds it ironic that the democratic principles for which the "lambkin" is being sacrificed have never been ethically whole; in sacrificing the victim the men do not preserve freedom, but dismantle it. In fact with this action" Mercy, truth and justice shuddered" (214), the speaker contends, because this woman has now been placed-in a situation where "brutal men may trample / On her honor and her fame" (214). For this, the

city of Cleveland and the men have a "Dark and dismal stain" on them that cannot be cleansed even if "Lake Erie . . . should [be] drained" (214). In the final four stanzas, the narrative voice issues warnings to the men who have tried to preserve an immoral union. God has heard, the speaker states, "the bondman's prayers," and His answer to those supplications is the "Fearful sounds [of war] in the air." It is, the voice states, going to take "the whirlwind" of God's judgment to shake the "sin-cursed, guilty Union . . . to its base" and teach the Union Savers that "simple justice, / Is the right of every race" (214).

The strength of this poem rests in the poet's use of irony. With the group of Cleveland men as the primary focus, Harper is able to let their action embody the recurring theme that slavery contradicts principles of the country's premier political and religious documents. Her consistent building of an Old Testament sacrificial image that culminates in a New Testament apocalyptic warning works to bring out the theme that human bondage cannot co-exist with democracy.

Through the Civil War years, Frances Harper lived a quiet life on her farm in Grove City, Ohio. That life came to an end when, on May 23, 1864, Fenton Harper died. In the midst of her grief, she discovered that her husband was deeply in debt, and though she bought the farm with her

savings, it along with all her possessions was confiscated to satisfy the creditors. Later, a neighbor, to whom she had once lent money, went to the magistrate and claimed that she was a nonresident and thus laid claim to her own bed. Alone with four children, Harper had to find a means to support her family. Finally, she decided to break up the family. When she resumed her career as a lecturer, she took her daughter Mary with her (Harper's speech recorded in the Proceedings of the Eleventh Woman's Rights Convention, May 1866, 45-46).

Approximately five months after her husband's death her lectures were again being reported and recorded. The first record of a speaking engagement was in the the Liberator for October 28, 1864. She, it is reported, delivered an address entitled "The Mission of War" at First Independent Baptist Church in Pennsylvania. The reporter wrote favorably about the address, and he encouraged other groups to employ her services. From that point on, she had speaking engagements throughout New England. The subjects on which she spoke bore such titles as the one mentioned above and the following: "The Nation's Great Opportunity," "The Claims of the Negro," (Bacon 32), "The Mission of War," "The Demands of the Colored Race in Reconstruction," and "The Lessons of War" (Daniel 20). As she began to attract a wider audience, comments on her presentations

appeared in a number of publications. Of one of Harper's lectures, Lydia Maria Child stated that the speech was "full of good sense, all aglow with poetic imagery and dimpled here and there with ripples of laughter" (Daniel).

From 1865 to 1867 Harper resided in Philadelphia in the home of the William Still family. While there she worked on her long narrative poem "Moses: A Story of the Nile." By 1869 this poem had reached its second edition. It was enlarged and issued in 1889 and again in 1893. The 1901 the 1889 editions were reissued under the title Idylls of the Bible. From the frequency with which Moses appeared in Harper's works, it was obvious that she admired him. As early as 1856, she had constructed a poem entitled "The Burial of Moses." In the essay "Our Greatest Want" (1859), the author reveals that she liked Moses because he was a "disunionist"; in other words, he was not conciliatory with the Egyptians concerning slavery (Foster 136).

This blank verse narrative recounts the life of the Old Testament figure. Jewish religious tradition places him at the center of God's action to liberate Israelite slaves from Egyptian bondage; afterwards they are to develop a community built on a covenant with their God. It is Yahweh who calls Moses to lead the exodus from Egypt. He then receives and interprets the laws "governing life and worship" of the newly freed community. Moses

constructs the foundation on which succeeding generations are built (Introduction to Exodus 69 OT). For Frances Harper, Moses, the liberator and lawgiver, made an excellent archetype around which she could construct an allegory of the black exodus from slavery in the South. Lincoln, in other words, is the historical deliverer.

Two levels of allegorical interpretation of Moses: A Story of the Nile are possible. Moses could represent, as Professor Maryemma Graham suggests, the "proverbial black leader" guiding his people to freedom (xiii). On the other hand, he could have represented Lincoln who had been assassinated during the time it was written. I believe Moses signifies Lincoln. As stated above, prior to the composition of this poem, Harper had written about Moses and had alluded to him in the prose work. In these instances, she used him as a model for Christian living. In addition, Harper in a letter to William Still dated April 19, 1865, five days after Lincoln was killed, equated the slain president to Moses. She explained that Moses

> the meekest man on earth, led the children of Israel over the Red Sea, but was not permitted to see them settle in Canaan. Mr. Lincoln has led up through another Red Sea to the table land of triumphant victory, and God has seen fit to

> summon for the new era another man. (Still 796-797)

Despite my respect for formalist theory, her intention to pay tribute to Lincoln is probably clear.

The passage from Harper's letter not only shows her admiration for both Lincoln and Moses, but it also indicates that she attributes to each the "feminine" characteristic of meekness. Moses is a sensitive man who is concerned with the feelings of both his Egyptian and Jewish mothers. Like the male figures that have appeared in her earlier works, he is an ideal man, a moral example for both men and women to emulate.

Structurally the poem is divided into nine chapters. The first creates a dramatic dialogue in which Moses and his Egyptian Princess mother discuss his plan to leave the palace and take up residence with his Jewish family. The remaining eight chapters use a third person narrative form wherein bits of dialogue are sprinkled. Chapter two describes the conditions of the hero's life of poverty with the Israelites, and the third chapter recounts his flight into Midian. Subsequently, chapters four and five take up his life in Midian and his return to Egypt. The sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters cover the plagues visited on Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the giving of the

law to the Israelites. Finally, chapter nine narrates the death and burial of Moses.

In the first chapter, Harper creates an emotional dialogue between Moses and his Egyptian mother in which he informs her that he will be ending his life with her and going to live with his own race. Harper's source for this scene is the book of Exodus, Chapter Two, which does not include a conversation between mother and son. Familial bonding between Moses and the Princess appears in the biblical text as follows: "When the child grew up, she [Moses' Jewish mother] brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses because she said, 'I drew him out of the water'" (Exodus 2, 10). From this passage, the poet creates an episode that portrays a deep relationship between mother and son.

The opening scene of the poem is set in a room at the Egyptian palace where the young adult Moses discusses with the Princess his intentions to relinquish the advantages of her home "to join / The fortunes of [his] race" (34). Confronted with the idea of losing her son, the Princess tells Moses that he may, as a consequence of his youth, have arrived at the decision to leave impulsively. She, therefore, encourages him to re-evaluate his course of action. In language reflecting his strength and maturity,

he assures her that "Sudden freak nor impulse wild" motivates him. He further tells her that he has

> "an earnest purpose binding all / [His] Soul until a strong resolve, which bids him to put aside all other ends and aims so that he is prepared when the hour . . . when God--the God [His] fathers loved and worshipped--shall break [the] chains of slavery and lead the Israelites to freedom." (34-35)

The idea represented here is one that appears in works Harper composed prior to the Civil War. She believed that at the appointed hour, God would liberate blacks from slavery. Lincoln's act of emancipating the slaves then parallels Moses' deliverance of his people from captivity.

Because God calls on Moses to deliver the Israelites from bondage, he is set apart from ordinary men. The author's nineteenth-century audience could readily discern the correspondence between Moses and Lincoln. Imbuing his character with warmth, sensitivity, graciousness, strength and a sense of purpose, all values of import to nineteenth-century women, and allowing his speech to echo an abolitionist spirit, the poet has made the parallel between Moses and Lincoln more obvious to her audience. His initial speech indicates this. When Moses first approaches

the Princess about leaving the palace he gingerly explains his decision.

> Kind and gracious princess, more than friend,
> I've come to thank thee for thy goodness,
> And to breathe into thy generous ears
> My last and sad farewell. I go to join
> The fortunes of my race, and to put aside All
> other bright advantages, save
> The approval of my conscience and the need Of
> rightly doing. (34)

Desperate to keep her son from departing, the Princess recounts for Moses their beginning as mother and son, including how she protects him from the wrath of her father. Though she is not the woman who nurses him at her breast, she is, she tells him, the one who has nursed him "Upon [her] knee, and pressed upon no other / Lips the sweetest kisses of [her] love" (39). In an effort to coax him into remaining with her, she attempts to evoke from him guilty feelings. Emotionally she exclaims "thou dost thrust aside that love" (39). After moments of contemplative silence, Moses in a firm, eloquent voice recounts the story of his Hebrew ancestry as has been told to him by the wet nurse, his true mother. He explains to Princess Charmian that "the hour which brings deliverance" to his race has come, and he is going to take up his role

in that process. All the plans of greatness that the Princess has for her son are fading. She is unable to convince him to stay. After Moses leaves, the narrator intrudes with a description of the mother's disappointment. The Princess, states the speaker, "brood[s] in silence O'er her pain" (41).

In treating the opening scene as a dramatic action, Harper has not only set the stage for the narrative that is to follow, but she also establishes the stature of her hero and the central focus of her theme. Like the epic writer, she has embodied Moses with traits that reveal his humanity while simultaneously raising him above the average man. He is loving and considerate to the woman who has reared him and also to the woman who has provided him with daily nourishment at her breast. In additon, the Hebrew woman has given him the historical knowledge of his ethnic heritage. The bounty he has received from these two mothers has allowed him to grow into the ideal man. In the allegorical interpretation, these two women represent the dichotomous nature of the America that nurtured Abraham Lincoln. She (the country) has bestowed on him a legacy of freedom and justice bequeathed in the form of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence; however, she has also dazzled him with the prosperity that has come as a result of depriving a race of its freedom. Lincoln is

unable to enjoy the riches of his legacy until his dependence on wealth gained through slave labor is dissolved. In this first chapter, Harper, like the epic poet, states the purpose or theme of the work. The narrator explains that Moses' departs "To take his mission from the hands of God / And lead his captive race to freedom" (42). These lines establish his mission as a holy one, ordained by God. Thus, the theme takes on epic proportions. After chapter one, the remainder of the narrative corresponds in detail with the Old Testament story of Moses.

In chapters two, three, and four, Moses prepares for his holy mission. He, like the epic hero, is involved in a series of adventures that culminate in an otherworldly experience that serves to strengthen his character and prepares him further for his mission. Experiencing life as an Israelite living under Egyptian rule allows him to view from the inside injustices suffered by his race. One day the hero witnesses an Egyptian officer's cruel treatment to an elderly Hebrew man. Moses' temper flares. He kills the officer and buries him in the sand. When Moses' crime is uncovered, he flees to Midian where he becomes a shepherd. In leading a life of pastoral "solitude," he becomes stronger, more contemplative, and more patient. The bucolic setting of Midian is the training ground for him to

become a leader of men. When he is ready, God appears to him in a burning bush and gives him his mission. When "the hour comes" Moses turns the fruits of his instruction "to action."

Harper continues to emphasize the theme that the appointed hour of deliverance is at hand. She also adds depth to Moses' character. When in chapter two he takes the reactive measures against the Egyptian officer, he is not displaying qualities that reflect leadership. In fleeing to Midian, he lives in a world that allows him to become more pensive. To pursue the historical parallel, Lincoln's national political career, prior to his presidency, had its successes and failures. He, like Moses, matures and formulates his political platform in Springfield, Illinois, part of the expanding frontier. As president, his mission is to preserve the union and prevent slavery from expanding in the United States.

In chapters five and six, Moses returns to the Pharaoh's court to request the release of his people. The Egyptians meet him with hate. Pharaoh tells Moses mockingly, "If thy God be great, show us some sign or token of his power" (55). Moses' response is to transform his staff into a serpent. Harper's description of the transfiguration of the rod illustrates how skillfully she uses imagery:

Then Moses threw his rod upon the floor,
And it trembled with a sign of life;
The dark wood glowed, then changed into a thing
Of glistening scales and golden rings, and green
And brown and purple stripes, a hissing, hateful
Thing that glared its fiery eye, and darting
forth
From Moses' side, lay coiled and panting
At the monarch's feet. (55)

These lines also introduce the account of the ten plagues that were visited on Egypt. These disasters force the Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Lincoln, like Moses, sends a warning to the Southern states when he sends federal troops to defend Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. This does not resolve the conflict, so the plague of Civil War is visited on the South.

In the final chapter of the poem, Harper treats Moses' death on Mount Nebo. She takes Chapter 34 of Deuteronomy and transforms the biblical account of the hero's death into eloquent verse. Moses, in his final days, is at peace with himself. His physical appearance reflects that state.

The calm solemn beauty on his aged brow.
The look of loving trust and lofty faith
Still beaming from an eye that neither care
Nor time had dimmed. (64)

Interestingly, the imagery Harper uses to portray Lincoln would be employed a century later by Margaret Walker to describe Martin Luther King. In other words, Harper helps to establish the figure of the African-American human liberator (Miller).

The hero's life has been one of "lengthened sacrifice" devoted to the liberation of the Israelites. He has gained for them their freedom, transmitted to them God's law for governing their lives, and secured for them a land of their own. His only regret is that he will be unable to enter the new land with them and "tread the soil" of freedom; graciously he accepts this disappointment because it is "God's decree." To the end, Moses has maintained his deep and abiding faith in God. It has empowered him in his cause. He dies without the presence of family or friends, but he is not alone "For God's great presence flowed around his path / And stayed him in that solemn hour" (65).

The slain president parallels Moses in his gentleness and strength. Lincoln has waged war against those who would deny basic human freedom to blacks; he emancipated the slave and secured the newly freed men the right to migrate to lands of their choice. He, too, is unable to see the results of his struggle. Like Moses, Lincoln has gone to a far better land, one "Of crystal fountains, love and beauty, joy / And light . . ." (65). Unlike Lincoln,

Moses lives to be one hundred and twenty years of age. Both men are ideal beings; however, in the world of reality, the ideal man, Lincoln, cannot live to be as old as his biblical analogue.

Also included in the 1869 volume Moses: A Story of the Nile was an essay "The Mission of the Flowers." In this allegory, the rose, in all her splendor and beauty, has been given the power to transform every flower in the garden to her own likeness. The various flowers in the garden resist the change for they each feel that they too have "a mission as well as the rose" (46). Their protests are in vain and each is changed into a rose. The garden has "become a perfect wilderness of roses . . . and men grew tired of roses, for they were everywhere" (47). The rose grows sad at this state of affairs and wishes again to have a variety of plants in the garden. Tears come to her eyes, and she realizes she has been dreaming. Then the narrator voice interjects the moral of the fable. There must be, in other words, tolerance of individuality.

Harper's placement of this work in the volume could be, as Professor Foster states, the writer's way of "prevent[ing] misinterpretations which might suggest that [she] believed the Moses model the more important to emulate" (223). Each individual, as does each flower, has his/her own mission. Moses has many admirable qualities

that the individual could strive to attain; however, there is only one Moses.

When the war ended, Harper did not curtail her labor on behalf of freedom. Since journeying to the deep Southern states was no longer as threatening to free blacks, she broadened the scope of her travel to include them. In a letter to Still dated May 13, 1867 from Darlington, South Carolina, she wrote that the newly freed blacks were receptive to her visit and were "eager to hear, ready to listen, as if they felt the slumber of the ages had been broken, and that they were to sleep no more" (Still 797). She described her audience as "both white and colored," and she stated that the lecture sites were churches, schools, public halls, and legislative chambers. Sometimes she traveled alone by train. She wrote that fellow passengers often drew her into conversation about her lectures. When she informed them that she spoke on politics, she stated that among whites, "There is a sensitiveness on this subject, dread; it may be, that some one [sic] will 'put the devil in the nigger's head,' or exert some influence inimical to them; still I get along somewhat pleasantly" (797-798). Though some of her conversations with former slaveholders were sometimes "exciting," and even if violence preceded her in an area where she was to speak, she explained that, "it is not

worth while to show any signs of fear" (798). No matter the cost to her personal safety, she followed through with her mission.

Between 1867 and 1871 Harper traveled to the states of Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Virginia, Kentucky, and Maryland. Her subjects included freedmen's rights under the law, voting rights, women's rights and domestic responsibilities, education, economics, and temperance. She advised the freedmen to take a greater stake in the governing process through buying land and becoming taxpayers. She also warned them not to squander their votes. Further, she urged both races to relinquish their prejudices and work on building a greater America. Mrs. Harper viewed the South as "a great theater for the Negro's development." In a letter to Colonel Hinton[7] she expressed her optimism about the future of the race.

> So far as the colored man is concerned, I do not feel particularly uneasy about his future. With his breadth of physical organization, his fund of mental endurance, and his former discipline in the school of toil and privation, I think he will

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[7]The letter requested that Hinton intercede in Washington on behalf of Jeff Ghee, a young black man sentenced to death as an accomplice to two escaping union officers, who killed a rebel overseer.

> be able to force his way upward and win his recognition even in the South. (Daniel 25; Philadelphia Press, September 17, 1867, 22)

Within this same letter, she revealed that her greatest concern was with that class of Southern poor whites who possessed "all the ignorance of the slave with all the pride of the master" (Daniel 25). Their status before and after the war, she stated, "is unchanged." To her, their faces do not seem "lighted up with any ambition, hope, or lofty aspiration." They are both "victims and partisans of slavery, who stood by and watched their brothers outraged and wronged." These people "consented to the crime [of slavery] and received the curse in their own souls" (Daniel 25).

The poetry composed during Reconstruction reflects the topics of the lectures on the Southern tour. In addition, some of the people she met are characterized in these works. In 1871 a volume entitled Poems was published, and in 1872 Sketches of Southern Life appeared. The latter volume, her last major collection, is by far her best work.

The volume Poems contains thirty-one poems. No innovative techniques capture the spotlight. Included are poems from her antebellum period such as "Bury Me in a Free Land," "The Dying Fugitive," "Lines to Hon. Thaddeus Stevens," and "Lines to Charles Sumner." All the poems

except "Lines to Hon. Thaddeus Stevens" can be identified as appearing in various periodicals prior to inclusion in this volume. Among the themes in this collection are biblical ones, poems on motherhood, death, and temperance.

Other poems in this volume such as "The Fifteenth Amendment," "The Change," "The Freedom Bell," and "President Lincoln's Proclamation of Freedom" express the joy that blacks felt as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation. Harper does not, however, let this feeling of jubilation take over the volume. Along with the poems of exaltation are those that caution that full equality for blacks remains to be won. "An appeal to the American People," written in couplets, calls on white Americans to resist those forces that would deny the freedman his liberty. Such a denial, she proclaims, would mean that those men who went to war would "have fought and died in vain" (82). In the poem "Words for the Hour," written in ballad form, she advises Northerners of the best ways to assist the freedmen to realize the victories that the Union Army has gained for them. Over "the ruin'd auction-block" they are asked to "Erect the common school" and also to teach the newly liberated "how to wield / The ballot in his hand." Finally, she urges them to maintain the "Truth and Justice" for which they have fought in not "yield[ing] / One citadel of right" (104). On the other hand, the poem

"The Little Builders," written in the same ballad pattern, is addressed to black youth. It recommends that they build for themselves better lives. Young ones must, the poet states, "Fill [their] minds with useful knowledge [and] / Learn to love the true and right" (113). The speaker in other words rewrites the voice of "Our Greatest Want" (1859).

By far the most significant volume of poetry to chronicle the poet's thoughts and experiences during the Reconstruction Period is Sketches of Southern Life (1872). Contained in the first edition are nine poems. "Our English Friends" which pays tribute and gives thanks to the British abolitionists who lent their support to the American antislavery cause, opens the text; however, as far as I can discern, the title mentioned above does not appear in any of the succeeding editions. Former slave, Chloe Fleet, is the narrator of the first six poems in the collection (This group of poems is referred to as the Aunt Chloe section). Finally, two religious poems, "I Thirst" and "The Dying Queen" end the collection.[8]

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[8]I have been unable to find the number of times Sketches of Southern Life was reissued after its 1872 appearance; it like Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects was extremely successful. What is known is that in 1873, 1887, and 1888, the text was reprinted. For the purpose of this analysis, the 1873 edition was used for passage citations. Added to the 1887 and 1888 publications were seven poems and one prose piece. The subjects of the seven new poems include temperance, religion, the plight of children, and

The Aunt Chloe poems, as Joan Sherman so aptly points out, show the poet's talent for matching techniques and subject (73). The writer experiments with black Southern dialect, and in doing, so she creates "a new idiom in black poetry that ripens into the dialect verse of Campbell, Davis and Dunbar" (Sherman 73). She not only created a language model for those poets who came after her, but she also created portraits of the newly freed black that would influence the fictional characters in Charles W. Chesnutt's tales. In addition, the realistic depth of her characters contrasts directly with those black caricatures that populate the pages of plantation literature such as Irwin Russell's poem "Christmas Night in the Quarters," Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus tales, and Thomas Nelson Page's stories of plantation life.

After the War, especially during the 1870s and the 1880s, the audiences of popular Northern magazines displayed a dominant taste for local color literature about Southern life. White Southern writers chose to paint a sentimental picture of the "Old South" as opposed to taking

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It is, however, the six poems of the Aunt Chloe section that form the core of the collection. The remaining poems, though not similar in subject, are thematically joined to the central works in their exploration of the role of "perseverance and faith" in people's lives (Foster 137).

a critical view of it. Thus, the compositions produced, known as plantation literature,

> had as its primary quality a tone of nostalgia evoking without questioning, an aura of Camelot. What appeared was a vision of order and grace to communicate a new myth of a lost cause. (Mackethan 211)

This literature was filled with the courtships and duels of belles and cavaliers who lived in large mansions on cotton plantations. At the center of these scenes were "wistfully reminiscing darkies" (Mackethan 209). The banjo-picking darkie dancers of Irvin Russell, the Uncles of Thomas Page, and Remus of Joel Chandler Harris' tales presented their stories in dialect, which gave the Northern and Southern popular reader a bucolic picture of slavery and a misconception of the contemporary plight of Southern blacks. Joel Chandler Harris credited Irwin Russell with being "among the first to uncover the literary possibilities of the negro [sic] character and the first to develop them" (Harris n.p.). In fact, he called Russell's portrayals "perfect representation of negro characters" (n.p.). In an 1888 introduction to the poems of Irwin Russell, Harris stated that Russell's poems reproduced "the old life before the war . . . with a fidelity that is marvelous" (n.p.). Although the Aunt Chloe section of

Harper's volume may be classified as plantation literature, possessing a lighter tone than those poems she had written prior to and directly after the War, they do not present an idealistic view of plantation life. Along with expressing her thoughts on slavery, lynching, temperance, Christianity and politics, Harper was intent upon recording a truthful picture of the blacks she encountered on her Southern tour; she thereby constructed in literature a realistic image of blacks. Through Sketches of Southern Life and Moses, Harper added another dimension to her literary voice. She established herself as a forerunner of literary style and technique.

Harper's Sketches of Southern Life was published and widely circulated at least two years before Russell's poem, five years before Harris' tales, and eight to ten years before the works of Page. Unlike her white male successors in this genre, she showed Southern blacks' attempt to come to terms with the meaning of freedom and their efforts to build a vital community. The Southern whites in her poems must adjust to the destruction of a social and economic system that gave shape to their lives. In addition to losing the old order, they must also mourn family losses as a result of the war.

To express her theme of hope and loss, Harper uses the voice of Chloe Fleet, a former slave, who is a determined,

Christian woman intent on building a strong black community. In the first poem, "Aunt Chloe," the narrator gives a retrospective view of her days in slavery. She recounts the state of affairs on the plantation when the master dies and his wife, whom Chloe calls "Mistus," learns that he has left behind great debts. Because slavery binds black and white lives to one another on many levels the heroine is rightly concerned when the lawyer "comes to 'ministrate . . . [the] / Heap of debt on the estate" (3). In this legal process Chloe loses her two sons, Ben and Jakey. The loss of the boys is by far one of the most devastating things to happen to her; however, through the spiritual guidance of Uncle Jacob, she is able to come to terms with the separation. He advises her "Just take your burden / To the blessed Master's feet" (5).

In the next poem "Deliverance," Chloe describes the "bright and handsome boy" of her "Mistus." In childhood he is "kind at heart," and he maintained this quality through adulthood. When the War begins, he, much to the dismay of his mother, goes off to join the fight. When Chloe witnesses her mistress' tears because of this circumstance, she states "I felt sorry for Old Mistus" (7). Chloe knows first hand that "`parting with . . . children / Is a mighty dreadful thing'" (8).

Unable to monitor the progress of the war through the press, the slaves on Chloe's plantation keep up with the events through reading the expressions on "Mistus'" face when she receives a correspondence from her son Thomas. When he writes her of the Confederate victory at Bull's Run, "Mistus' eyes did fairly glisten," and when there were Northern victories the mistress' face "looked quite long." When the North wins the War, "Mistus" groaned and hardly spoke and when all the slaves left, "Her heart was almost broke." Her greatest loss, however, is that of her son who is killed in the War.

Harper, in these first two poems, points out the disastrous results of slavery on both blacks and whites. Each family has suffered the tremendous impact of family separation. Irwin Russell's poem "Mahsr John" fails to show the devastation that comes with economic and personal loss. Mahsr John owns five cotton plantations, a sugar cane plantation and one thousand slaves (Hill 406). Russell depicts the unrealistic glory of plantation life while Harper treats its malignancy.

These two poems also portray Aunt Chloe in terms of the slave mothers of the early verses. When she learns that her children will be taken away she grieves:

It seemed as if a bullet

Had shot me through

And I felt as if my heart and strings
Was breaking right in two. (3)

Chloe's character, however, has far more depth than those mothers of Harper's earlier verses. After she bids her sons farewell, she is able to find comfort in her cousin Milly and Uncle Jacob. In Millie, she finds another woman who has suffered the same situation, and in Uncle Jacob, she finds the faith she needs to carry on with her life. Chloe is also not the traditional mammy figure whose life revolves around the white children placed in her care. Instead, she views objectively her young master as an individual with a kind heart, but one who goes off to fight to maintain her as his property. The heroine is also able to sympathize with her mistress when she too is faced with the loss of a child.

In "Deliverance," Chloe discusses the end of the War, emancipation, and the assassination of Lincoln. Of Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson she sarcastically comments:

Then we had another President--
What do you call his name?
Well, if the colored folks forget him
They wouldn't be much to blame. (12)

Aunt Chloe is truly dissatisfied with the new president's inaction on the issue of lynching. Her hope is that he is

going to "be the Moses / Of all the colored race;" she finds however, "when the Rebels" taunt the blacks "He never showed his face" (12). Chloe's view of Grant is more tolerant,

> But now we have a President,
> And if I was a man
> I'd vote for him for breaking up
> The wicked Ku-Klux Klan. (13)

In addition to her concerns about national politics, the heroine also expresses her anxiety about freed men's use of their votes. She rebukes black men in her community for selling their votes. Those who sell their ballots for worthless goods such as "sugar . . . mixed with sand" or "three sticks of candy" she calls by name. These men, she is quick to point out, are exceptions.

> And yet, I would not have you think
> That all our men are shabby
> But 'tis said in every flock of sheep
> There will be one that's scabby. (15)

As she has named those who would sell their votes, she also identifies those who realize that the price of freedom is too great "to fool away their votes / For profit or for pleasure" (16). Chloe makes it clear that though females do not have the right to vote, they are concerned with the

process, and they strongly encourage their men not to squander their votes.

The third poem, "Aunt Chloe's Politics," a short one, continues her commentary on the political scene. In this witty verse, Aunt Chloe characterizes both black and white politicians. Though she has not had the benefit of education, she is sophisticated enough to know that some politicians "Do mightily ugly tricks" (16). She has watched them "talk so awful sweet" during election time, only to sell out the voter after the election is over. To Aunt Chloe, when political wrong doing occurs, "Whether black or white have took it, / The loss we all must share" (16).

The next two poems, "Learning to Read" and "Church Building," show an independent free black people working to construct a strong community. Aunt Chloe takes a leadership role in the race building effort. Harper portrays the blacks in these poems as industrious, self-reliant people who are laboring to fashion a vital society for themselves. Newly freed blacks in the poetry of Russell and Page do not understand the value of freedom and long for the days of slavery. In Thomas Nelson Page's poem "Uncle Gabe's White Folks" (1876), the freed black servant nostalgically recounts the days of plantation life to a white listener. Uncle Gabe's mythic vision includes a

great house, a white mistress whose fine "silk dress [seems to] talk" (294) when she walks to her carriage, and a master whose pleasant "countenance" would bring joy to the slave. When Gabe completes his description, he realizes that the person with whom he has been speaking is his former white master who has come back to purchase the land, his wish for the old plantation life is realized. This poem not only portrays a black man's need to be guided by his white master, but it also seeks to affirm the white man's racial superiority over him.

Even the blacks in Paul Laurence Dunbar's "A Warm Day in Winter" are joyous contented slaves who, while their master and mistress have gone away," idle away the sunlit hours dancing and singing to the plucking of the banjo" (Hill 408). The last stanza of the poem, however, does not depict slaves content with their situation. Their brief respite is a means "fu' people / Fu' to try an' bury All day grief an' sorrer" (Dunbar 168).

Aunt Chloe, in the poem "Learning to Read," stresses the importance of education for the former slaves. She recalls that during slavery, blacks are prohibited from learning because as she states,

> Our masters always tried to hide
> Book learning from our eyes;

Knowledge did'nt agree with slavery--
'T would make us all too wise. (17)

Despite that obstacle, some slaves, she explains, would "steal / A little from the book . . . / And learn by hook or crook" (17). Two slaves she calls by name, Uncle Caldwell and Ben, understand the significance of education. Indeed they practice ingenious methods by which they learn to read. Uncle Caldwell takes the pages "of his book" and "greased" them with "pot liquor fat . . . / And hid" them inside "his hat" (17). Should his master see the "leaves upon his head, / He'd have thought them greasy papers" (18), and not a reading material. Ben on the other hand, listened to the "children spell, / And picked the words right up by hea[rt], / And learn to read 'em well" (18).

After the War, the narrator continues, the "Rebs" did what they could to prevent the "Yankee teachers" from educating the former slaves. Bravely, the Northerners confront the vigilantes and continue to instruct blacks. The poem ends with sixty year old Aunt Chloe describing how she learns to read. She states that she has always "longed to read [her] Bible" and her friends discourage her learning to read because of her age. Chloe, though "rising sixty . . . got a pair of glasses" (18) and proceeds to learn to read. She does not stop her work until she "could read / The hymns and Testament" (18). Learning to read

makes the heroine even more self-reliant. In the final stanza, she states that after acquiring the skill, she purchases a cabin, "A place to call[her] own--" which makes her feel "as independent / As the queen upon her throne" (19). Certainly, this would never have been the desire of the former slaves in Russell's and Page's works.

The next poem "Church Building" asserts the theme that building a strong and viable community takes the efforts of both men and women. Herein, Aunt Chloe recalls that Uncle Jacob has always counseled the freed blacks to build "a meeting place." Though their wages were "scanty," all in the community "pinched, and scraped, and spared, / A little here and there" (19) until they were able to erect a church. On the day of its dedication, Uncle Jacob, now "looking mighty feeble," offers a prayer in a "voice" that has the "range" of "a trumpet" (19) and that beseeches God's blessing on them. He, Aunt Chloe explains, implores the group to live so that they all might "meet . . . in the promised land." This is Jacob's farewell, for shortly thereafter he dies. In this poem, Harper not only shows an independent and hard working people but, through Aunt Chloe, she encourages fashioning a new society based on a strong moral foundation. Chloe's personal desire to learn to read the Bible, in the poem "Learning to Read" is

demonstrative of Harper's belief that a truly fulfilling life incorporates the ethics of Christian doctrine.

The final poem in this series "The Reunion" has a sentimental theme suggesting that the American work ethic coupled with a sustaining faith results in justice prevailing on earth. Here Chloe recalls the day that she is reunited with her son Jakey, who along with his brother Ben, has been sold away from her when he was a small boy. The joy she feels at seeing him is so overwhelming that she declares that she "laughed and just rolled over, / And laughed, and just give up" (21). She discovers that her other son Ben has a wife and three children, and he is living in Tennessee. Jakey is not married, and Chloe enlists him to stay with her since "Old Mistus got no power now / To tear us both apart" (21). Now Chloe views herself "richer . . . than Mistus" for she now has her son and her mistress' son, Thomas, has been killed in the War.

In the two final stanzas, Chloe has plans to enlarge her cabin so as to accommodate Jakey and Ben and his family. She tells Jakey to write Ben and tell him that "he must come this fall" (22), because she wants "to see 'em all / Before [her] life do cease" (22). Within her role as a race builder, Chloe must also reconstruct her family. Harper's concern with the plight of the slave mother in the early poetry is after the war shifted to advancing the idea

of "enlightened motherhood." Her aim is to teach the freed woman how to build a strong and productive family. At the end of "The Reunion" Chloe restores order to the family structure that the chaos of slavery sought to destroy. She reaffirms her position as maternal head of the family when she decides to bring her family together under one roof.

Sketches of Southern Life cannot be viewed simply as one of Harper's better works; it should be examined in terms of the poetry that precedes it. The author's wit, irony, and character portrayals have in this group of poems reached a significant state of development. It is obvious in the early works such as "Eliza Harris" that the author consciously used symbols and images to produce irony and develop portraits of her subjects. The poem, "The Dismissal of Tyng, "demonstrates her ability to use sarcasm and wit. The Aunt Chloe poems combine all these techniques and give evidence of her maturation as a poet.

The only extant published essay or speeches that dealt directly with racial politics were "An Address Delivered at the Centennial Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery" (1875), "A Factor in Human Progress" (1885), and "The Democratic Return to Power" (1885). Various news papers throughout the country provided the dates and titles of Harper's addresses, but there are no texts of these presentations. For example, in

the April 9, 1871, Louisianian (A New Orleans semi-weekly publication--the paper was printed on Thursdays and Sundays), a statement appeared extending regrets to the readership for cancellation of a lecture "The Work Before Us," which was to have been given on April 6, 1871. The address was rescheduled for April 12 and the sponsoring organization's formal written request and Harper's written response was printed in that same issue. The Louisianian of April 20, 1871, published a critique of the second lecture Harper delivered "in the Straight University on Monday evening [April 17, 1871] on 'The Great National Opportunity'" (1). According to the review, Harper lectured on the present condition of the race and what must be done to elevate it. In this lecture she also defended women's rights which disappointed the male reviewer. From this sort of evidence it is clear that the writer continued her work on behalf of her race, and simultaneously, she was becoming a stronger advocate of women's rights.

On April 14, 1875, Frances Harper delivered an address to the members of the Pennsylvania Society, promoting the Abolition of Slavery in celebration of the group's one hundredth anniversary. By 1875 she had completed her tour of the South and settled permanently in Philadelphia. It was in that city that she addressed the organization concerning what they could do to assist the Southern freed

men in making the most of their new status based on what she observed as she toured the region.

In her opening remarks, Harper states that the greatest question that the black race must confront is not what each political party will do for or against it, but how they themselves will become contributing members of American society. To achieve this reality, she calls on whites to make "practical the political axiom of equal rights and the Christian idea of human brotherhood" (Harper. Alice Dunbar 102).

Before continuing the discourse on current needs, Harper reviews the years of slavery and the enormous price that has been paid in lives to secure the freedom of blacks. The contemporary enemy to that freedom, she explains, is the "White League with its covenant of death and agreement with hell" (103). To subvert these threats to freedom, she calls on the membership to encourage a public sentiment that supports "common justice and simple mercy" (103). This "sense of justice . . . [and] humanity" is lacking in the American consciousness. Thus, a nation that does not revere humanity, she concludes, is also "lacking in reverence for God and needs to be instructed" (104). She assures her audience that "all men come from the living God and that he is the common Father" (104), even though various researchers who study man may have

varied views of his origin (Ethologists), his protoplasmic make up (Huxley), and his link to the animal kingdom (Darwin).

If it is difficult for individuals to view the humanitarian advantages of assisting blacks, she suggests that they not see color and then offer aid to a fellow citizen. Economically she states that "it is better to have the colored race a living force animated and strengthened by self-reliance and self-respect than a stagnant mass, degraded and self-condemned" (104). Further, she calls on blacks who are more fortunate to reach out and help their weaker brothers. The membership is called on to help elevate a race by fighting in the "battle against ignorance, poverty, and low social condition" (105).

In this speech, Harper appeals to both black and white Americans to build a better society based on simple justice and humanity which are a part of God's laws. Her appeal for assistance has its root in the values of American justice and the Puritan ethic of self-reliance. In the following decade, B. T. Washington would use these same ideals to mould the Tuskegee philosophy. According to rhetorical analyst Janet Montgomery, Harper's appeal for "public sentiment in favor of common justice and simple mercy," in her era could go farther in benefitting "the

status of Negroes than a law or amendment passed by Congress" (53). It seems that garnering public approval was a kind of universal appeal in 1875; law did not readily ensure individual "rights and privileges," whereas public sentiment in favor of an issue proves more effective (Montgomery 53). Harper was aware of the significance of public opinion, but she also recognizes that legal measures assure freedom. This is evident in the final essay "Democratic Return to Power--Its Effect," when she urges black intellectuals to keep a vigil on legislation that impedes the race's constitutional rights. Finally, the various historical and scientific references the writer uses in this text attest to the range of her reading interests.

"A Factor in Human Progress", an essay appearing in the AME Church Review of July 1885, is devoted to a discussion of how blacks can "best utilize [the] education" they acquire. Harper expresses the same ideas that she recorded in "Our Greatest Want" (1859). Education, she states, will assist blacks in gaining human dignity. Without "moral and spiritual faculties" to guide this powerful entity, it can be "the most dangerous and mischievous force in the world" (Harper 14). As in past works, she explains that intellectual and moral training "go hand-in-hand" (14). She calls on the educated to live

moral lives and to lend themselves to helping others. The essay is vintage Harper.

The author cites Moses and "Bhooda" [sic] as models of selfless giving and teachers of divine law. To further illustrate the responsibility associated with education, she cites a passage from George Eliot's poem, "The Spanish Gypsy." She encourages educated blacks to model the behavior of the gypsy Zarca in setting an example of good and decent living. Harper explains that "examples of deeds of high and holy worth and the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-surrender for some good cause" (16) can awaken in a race a moral conscience. This action can lift blacks out of their low state. When the morally discerning eye is opened, according to Harper, individuals recognize a "dividing line between the sensuous and material, and the spiritual and progressive" (16).

Frances Foster contends Harper may be drawing "a comparison between her own work and that of her British sister" (270). This may certainly be true because the heroine of the Eliot poem, Fedalma, leaves a life of wealth to join her people, the Gypsies, and leads them into founding a new state. The lines Harper quotes from the poem are those Fedalma's Gypsy father speaks to her when he reveals her true ethnic identity. She has, he suggests, a responsibility to her people. The drama that is played out

in Eliot's poem is archetypically identical to the story of Moses. Harper in reading Eliot must have recognized the link. To critique Foster's idea I add that there is an affinity between the two authors' literary aesthetic and their ideas about morality.

Eliot critic, George R. Creeger, states that the writer disliked didactic novels, but never in her own career "abandon[s] the idea that novels serve to instruct their readers" (8). In her own words, she states that art "is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (8). Any individual who publishes his or her writings, according to Eliot, "assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind. So the objective of art for both Harper and Eliot is to "reshape human consciousness and with it the structure of society" (Creeger 8).

Though George Eliot by 1840 had given up Christianity, she still lived in a world that was "divinely sustained and directed," and she had a bond with humanity that was based on strong moral and ethical values (Paris 11-16). She believed that pride (egoism) was the basis of all human problems. Accordingly, the egotistical person lived unfulfilled because the meaning of life was only found in private gratification. In order for the individual to move

from this low state of existence, Eliot contended, the he/she must suffer. Through suffering came the recognition of the worthiness of private desires. Regeneration can ony be realized when the individual senses "kinship with mankind" (Creeger 7). This idea originated in Old Testament philosophy, especially in the Pentateuch. Because the philosophy that regeneration is wrought through suffering is prominent in Eliot's works, critics conclude that her voice is in her works (Creeger 9).

Like Eliot, Harper contends that the individual must reject that part of the ego that prevents the discovery of the kinship with humankind. Similar to Eliot, she establishes a literary voice within her works that seeks to benefit humanity. For Harper, one of the primary focuses of her literature is her race. Worth for the individual comes with selflessness. Though Eliot and Harper view the need for Christianity differently, it is their common belief that a meaningful existence is based on recognizing the need for a moral relation with the world.

The final essay of this period, "The Democratic Return to Power--Its Effect?", appeared in the issue of the AME Church Review for January 1885 in response to the presidential election in 1884 of Grover Cleveland, a Democrat. Twenty-four years had elapsed since a candidate from that party had been elected President of the United

States. Black and white Americans dreaded his election for various reasons ranging from a fear that the government would fall to a worry that slavery would be reinstituted (Andrews 91-92). Under the title "The Democratic Return to Power--Its Effect" a number of prominent black Americans such as Frederic Douglass submitted opinions.

Frances Harper renders an essay in which she calls on blacks not "to despair" over this political change but to look toward "future possibilities" for the race (222). She advises them "to organize victory out of defeat and make friends" with the "calamities" (222). After suggesting that her reader concentrate on the future, Mrs. Harper chronicles the political afflictions that slavery and reconstruction have had on the Negro. American slavery, she states, is unlike any other type of enslavement in history. One of the primary differences is that black slaves after emancipation have no homeland to which they can return. Time and the fact that blacks from various tribes were homogenized as if they shared the same cultural heritage has helped to erase their identity with Africa. Also of detriment to the former slave is his deprivation of education. After being emancipated the freedman finds that "his enslaver [has] need for his labor and his deliverers a use for his ballot" (222). Even after liberation, the freed slave's position in society is

still uncertain. Harper suggests that perhaps the chaotic political conditions that result from the Civil War and Reconstruction call for a change in the head of government.

Thus, Harper calls on her audience to "Trust in God and be patient" (223-224) in order to ameliorate the current political situation. Immediately she explains that her advice "does not mean a servile submission to wrong; an idle folding of hands and going to sleep, waiting for the good time coming . . . nor unreasoning waiting for God to do for [the race] what [they] can and ought to do for [themselves]" (224). The author asserts that she is suggesting that blacks (as well as whites) work and develop "self-reliance, self-control, and self-respect." It is "under the hearthstone" that the roots of good character and progress for the race are planted. In addition, she urges all Americans "to live in harmony with God's laws of moral and spiritual life" (224) because this prevents people from disregarding human rights.

Then Harper calls on all blacks to do what they can to move toward a more just society. She implores the intellectual to work to expose violations of human rights. She asks the young to form reading clubs to study the past and present in order to build a better future. In addition, she urges them to join "the great moral and philanthropic movements" of their time. All black persons

are urged to expend more energy on gaining moral and political "strength" as opposed to seeking pleasure. Again she encourages the race not to despair, but to work on building "useful characters, that if every man should hate you, no one could despise you" (225).

This essay, like the one before it, amplifies Harper's philosophy that morality can make a difference in every aspect of human existence. Along with the building of ethical character, she urges and suggests means that various segments of the black community can use to secure justice. The sources of her illustration in this essay are limited to the Bible, her own experiences, and her adeptness in contemporary history. A line in this essay again connects her thoughts to those of George Eliot. In making a transition from the discussion of the politically chaotic past, which includes untrained black elected officials in the South, to a plan that brings hope for the future, she writes "Ignorance of, and contempt and neglect for human rights create wretched surroundings out of which to develop all the manly virtues and Christian graces" (229). Her profound sense of suffering derives from the Old Testament and from the mores contained in the moral words of George Eliot.

Five of Mrs. Harper's correspondences to three prominent Americans concerning the social and political

status of black Americans have been located in various archival collections throughout the country. In a letter dated January 5, 1885, (the essay "Democratic Return to Power--Its Effect" appeared in January 1885), Harper wrote to Frederick Douglass, a long time friend and fellow activist. She attempted to comfort him during a period of trouble in his life. Recalling a time in her own life when she suffered greatly, she informed him "that there is a fearful capacity in the human soul for suffering," and that she had benefitted from "that awful experience" in that it had led her soul to a state of "peace and rest" (Harper letter to Douglass 1). She did not mention specifically the matters troubling him. One can only surmise that she is referencing the erosion of legal gains that blacks had made when the Supreme Court repealed the 1875 Civil Rights Act, declaring it unconstitutional. Also, in January 1884, Douglass had married Helen Pitt, a white woman. The marriage caused a furor among blacks "who accused Douglass of lacking race pride" (Meier and Rudwick 22). In addition, political power in Washington had shifted to the hands of the Democrats, and this troubled a number of blacks, including Douglass.

That same year, Harper sent a letter (dated March 2) to George Washington Cable. In this letter, she commended Cable's paper "The Freedman's Case in Equity" and thanked

him for "the kind, brave, and earnest manner with which [he] presented [the black race's] case before the bar of Southern conscience "(Harper letter to Cable 1). She particularly thanked him for revealing some of the "humiliations" to which black women had been subjected. Cable's essay was be published in Century Magazine in 1885. Within a year of its appearance the author, who was a Confederate veteran, found it necessary to move from his Southern home in New Orleans to Northhampton, Massachusetts (Wynes 11).

In this group of five letters, three are addressed to Francis J. Grimke, a noted black Presbyterian minister of Washington, DC. His wife, Charlotte Forten, was also a poet and essayist. Grimke is noted for his sermons on any number of political, economic, and social issues and for his relationship with both Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. When Grimke first visited Tuskegee, he admired the Puritan values that the leadership espoused. As the years passed, he learned more about Washington, and he felt "that power had corrupted" him; the educator no longer practiced the values he preached (Ronald White 112). In 1903 Grimke shifted his allegiance from Washington to Du Bois and made it known in a sermon entitled "God and the Race Problem."

The lack of adequate dating of the letters from Mrs. Harper to the minister presents a problem. Two of the letters are marked with the month and day, and one is dated June 27, 1903. (I have not been able to locate this letter and thus relied on the Frances Foster anthology.) Of the copies of the two letters in this researcher's possession one is dated March 30 (Foster has a date of March 20). The second letter has no date, and there is a poem affixed to it entitled "Simon's Countrymen" (published in 1901).

Critic Foster assigned 1903 as the year for all three letters; however, the contents of each did not yield information to support this year. Grimké made sure that his sermons were published in pamphlets (Ronald White 109) and that process could have started as early as 1889 or as late as 1898. In the letter dated March 30, Harper requested that Grimké send her "one or two of those pamphlets" (Harper letter). She praised him for "the strong brave words [he had] spoken in [his] pamphlet of sermons" (Harper letter). Finally, she expressed how pleased she was that the future of the race was in the hands of persons such as himself. It is not surprising that Harper would find Grimké's sermons appealing because they combined "biblical exegesis and political commentary" (Ronald White 110), as she had done in her written composition.

In the letter not dated, Harper acknowledged receipt of the sermons on lynching, and she commended him for the stance he had taken on the issue. Also, she inquired as to the breadth of circulation that his pamphlets enjoyed, especially the length of their reach into the white community. She then suggested possible methods for their distribution. Harper herself wanted to dispense some for him. She wrote that "Perhaps after New Year's Day I will get a few from you to distribute." The sentence which followed indicated that she was to read a paper "The First Thursday of next month" at which time she could make his work available to others. These two sentences indicated that this letter was written in the winter instead of the spring as Foster suggested. Toward the end of the letter, Harper apologized for the delay in acknowledging the receipt of the sermons. She again hailed him as one of the new and younger leaders who had received from "a generation whose ranks [were] thinner and whose graves [were] thickest . . . a burden of loving service" (Harper letter).

The final letter also thanked him for sending sermons. Again, she expressed her desire to see a wider circulation for the sermons and her joy in his role as one of the new leaders. In the last two letters she seemed to be passing on the torch of leadership. She referred to herself as "an old woman," or as an "expiring flicker of a lamp," whose

span of life "may soon, very soon be done" (Harper letter n.d.; June 27).

From 1854 until her death in 1911 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was dedicated to the cause of liberty for blacks in America. Through the arts of oratory and literature she attempted to liberate the slaves from bondage; once freed she sought to elevate their political and social status. In literary works about slavery she registered publicly her protest. Simultaneously, she established a literary voice demanding a public hearing. Unlike fellow abolitionist writers, she created substantive portraits of slave life. In addition, she experimented with various literary forms and techniques. These factors framed her as a significant forerunner in black American literature.

Because she had spent many years of her adult life working to liberate her race, she had not focused on the problems of equality that plagued members of her own sex. It was not until her husband died that she became painfully aware of the precarious legal position in which widows found themselves. Again she used her talents as a writer and orator to speak out on the behalf of women. In Chapter Three the works that focus on womanhood and women's issues are examined in terms of their significance in adding depth to Harper's literary voice.

CHAPTER III

CONSTRUCTING IMAGES AND PRESENTING POSSIBILITIES FOR BLACK WOMEN

An excerpt from an address Frances E. W. Harper delivered before the Women's Congress appeared in the Englishwoman's Review on January 15, 1878, under the title "Coloured Women to America." This article was Harper's testimonial of the progress she had witnessed being made among freedwomen in the South during Reconstruction. The strides they were making, she felt, were crucial to racial uplift. Of these black women she wrote the following:

> The women as a class are quite equal to the men in energy and executive ability. In fact, I find by close observation, that the mothers are the levers which move education. The men talk about it . . . but the women work most for it. They [the women] labor in many ways to support the family, while children attend school. They make great sacrifices to spare their own children during school hours. (10)

These lines reflected Harper's pride in the initiatives black females were taking in building a stronger race. Further, she admired the strength, independence, and

diligence they exhibited as they toiled to lay the foundation for forming a viable community. Particularly, Harper was impressed with the value that the women placed on the education of their children because this indicated that they clearly understood its connection with "race uplift." Academic development these women discerned as the best means for their children to secure the economic and social improvement for themselves and consequently for the race. Harper also viewed the qualities that these women possessed as essential characteristics of finer black womanhood.

As has already been discussed, Harper's theoretical intent in writing literature was primarily to teach noble ideals that would assist in bringing about political and social changes in the lives of black Americans. Composing in this vein established for her a literary voice that spoke to a large public audience. Penning works that articulated the needs and concerns of women, especially black women, added a new and different dimension to her literary voice. The content of this group of works gained public attention and credibility because its language was not abrasive or offensive, nor did it challenge any social ideals that her audience held dear. Instead, she gingerly expanded the "cult of true womanhood" model to include women of color. In addition, the example she had set in

her own life, clearly indicated that Frances Harper had overstepped the gender and racial boundaries that had defined her position in nineteenth-century American society. For instance, she ventured into the world without male guidance in order to pursue a dual career as an orator and writer, and she remained unmarried until she reached age thirty-five. Each event in her life widened the parameters of her understanding of racial and gender oppression and, thus, found its way into her literary production.

In writing about women, particularly but not exclusively black women, she confronted the nineteenth-century social ideology of the "cult of true womanhood" that defined for upper and middle class white women a domestic sphere and totally denied the existence of women of color. Poor white women could aspire to reach that status. Accordingly, the code of the cult mandated that the "true woman" possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. With these traits, a mother, daughter, wife, or sister was guaranteed happiness and power. A woman devoid of these qualities lacked humanity; she was nothing (Welter 21). The primary role of the true woman was that of homemaker, mother, and wife. Confined to her home, the true woman was the enforcer of the moral and social codes of family life.

Though she was guardian of the laws governing the home, she remained obedient to her husband's wishes. Because the ideology of the cult promoted the belief that women were by nature religious beings, the true woman's religious piety could bring goodness "into the naughty world of men" (Welter 22). Coupled with piety was the virtue of purity. Without purity the woman was considered fallen and unworthy to be in the company of decent women. She could, however discreetly, serve as the "toy" of the "good" man.

Due to the social and sexual implications of slavery and the economic reality that made it necessary for the majority of free black women to earn a living outside the home, the nineteenth-century black woman did not fit the model of the cult. In fact, American society did not regard the black female as a woman. The perception of her was that of an individual "governed entirely by her libido, a Jezebel" (Deborah White 29). Because it was believed that she was not religious, she had no power to guide the men and children in her life toward God. Further suggested was that domestic interests were not at all important to her. Consequently, white women's position at the center of the cult and black women's status outside the cult placed them both in social and political situations over which they had little control. Slavery was instrumental in shaping the negative image of black women, and it allowed

white women to live in a world of constant denial. The following passage from Mary Boykins Chestnut's diary reflects the plight of both groups of women:

> Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes, yet an abandoned woman is sent out of any decent house. Who thinks any worse of a Negro or mulatto woman for being a thing we can't name? God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and an iniquity! Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds. (21-22)

To controvert the prevailing image of the black female, Frances Harper (and a number of other black political and literary writers who came after her) redefined the attributes of the cult to include black women. Pauline Hopkins, Emma Dunham Kelley, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells were among the black female writers at the turn of the century who attempted to rectify this malevolent perception. Men of color also composed texts that either delineated ideal black womanhood or

extolled the virtues of prominent black women. Thomas Nelson Baker's The Negro Woman and L. A. Scrugg's Women of Distinction are illustrative of this work.

In addition to exposing the fallacy underlying the negative image of black women, Frances Harper offers her female audience models for expanding the possibilities of their own achievements. In writing prose and poetry that address these two aims, Harper is able to sustain a literary voice which is sensitive to women's needs. This chapter, therefore, examines those prose and poetic works about women and their issues, including those that derive the source of their content from biblical texts. The discussion is arranged chronologically and thematically beginning with the earliest extant "feminist" poems in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. The thematic analysis is based on the author's attempt to construct a positive image of the black woman, expand and offer alternative roles for women, and expose the moral and social hypocrisy inherent in the unwritten standards that dictated women's social, political, and moral conduct. Those pieces that relate to Harper's work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union have not been included in this discussion because they are treated comprehensively in Chapter Four.

The intuitive necessity to balance middle-class sobriety, so coupled with an active commitment to abolish

racial slavery, brought Frances Watkins Harper face to face with the most fundamental contradictions of Judaeo-Christianity. Hence, she would draw upon biblical sources and analogues to achieve a female voice of liberation. She would indeed extend her range to include a nurturing of womanhood and a note of literary authority. In her view she would challenge the plantation tradition. She would create a personal idiom that would suggest a shared vision of freedom by women and men more than a narrow compulsion for only the letter of marriage. Her gift was for the moral voicing of female character. In time she would become entrapped within the inconsistent logic of Christianity as a social hierarchy of power. Her philosophy would on the one hand provide an imagery and diction to undermine the evil vocabulary of slavery.

It is obvious from the literary works already discussed that Frances Harper was a religious woman. Christian principles were the guiding force of her life. Harper's brand of Christianity, however, did not look toward the hereafter for solutions to life's problems; it was concerned with the betterment of life for blacks on earth. As a child, Frances worshipped in the Methodist Church, and she remained active with that denomination throughout her life. At some point during her adult life, Mrs. Harper changed her denominational affiliation to the

Unitarian Church. The change however did not prevent her from crossing denominational lines to help where she was needed. She contributed so many literary pieces to the AME Church Review that she was listed as one of the outstanding women of that church (Upshaw 28).

Because Harper was so deeply religious, it was only fitting that her philosophy about womanhood would have biblical influences. Between 1854 and 1871, Harper published six poems that used women of the Bible as subjects: "The Syrophenician [sic] Woman" and "Saved by Faith" in 1854, "Rizpah, the Daughter of Ai" and "Ruth and Naomi" in 1857, "Vashti" and "Mary at the Feet of Christ" in 1871. There is also the poem "Burial of Sarah" published in 1894 that is omitted from this analysis because its central focus is Abraham, and his actions reveal only cursory information about Sarah. Featured in these poems are women from both the Old and the New Testaments--some are well known figures and others are obscure.

Harper, in this group of poems, transforms some of the shortest biblical passages about women into narrative poems that give substance to their character and more detailed explanations of their actions. Men of her era and those prior to it used the helplessness of women and the gender of Jesus to argue against women's rights; Harper,

therefore, selects women from the Bible, some of whom have direct interactions with Jesus, to provide authority for women's equality and to lay the literary foundation for depicting a finer black womanhood.

The author bases her model of womanhood on biblical women, who despite adversity, maintain abiding faith and love. These women's determination, wisdom, courage, and decisiveness are indeed traits that Harper admires and that she herself possesses. In addition, the portraits of the biblical women parallel the various types of women that populate the author's works. This factor in itself indicates that Harper does not possess a myopic view of woman. For Harper, womanhood is complex, and it has multiple faces; thus, her works include females from every stratum of life. There is no ideal woman in Harper's eyes, but there are traits that she encourages women to cultivate.

The earliest verse the poet composes about biblical women appears in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. "The Syrophenician [sic] Woman" and "Saved by Faith" appear in the 1854 edition; "Rizpah the Daughter of Ai" and "Ruth and Naomi" are included in the volume in 1857. The biblical account of the Syrophoenician woman can be found in Mark (7:24-30) and Matthew (15:21-28). In this story a Greek (non-Jewish) woman continuously begs Jesus to heal her

small child who is possessed with "an unclean spirit." To her request Jesus curtly responds: "Let the children first be fed, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." In reply the woman explains, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus, pleased with her response, tells her that the demon has been cast from her child. In Matthew's version of the story Jesus' final words to the woman are, "Woman, great is your faith!"

In this story Jesus conveys to his disciples a message which condemns prejudice against non-Jews and women. The Syrophoenician woman's response is evidence that she understood well Jesus' metaphor which compares the Jews to "children," the Gentiles to "dogs" and the benefit of his ministry is the "children's food." Her deep faith that Jesus could help her and the great love she has for her child allows her to respond wisely and quickly to the prophet's statement. According to biblical scholars, Jesus' interaction with this woman affords him the opportunity to show his disciples the error in their suspicion of foreign women and the fault in their contempt for women in general.

Harper converts the gospel into a verse form in which the Syrophoenician woman relates her own story. When the woman realizes "Judea's prophet draweth near!" (3), she is

filled with great "joy." She is confident that he will heal her child who is "Rack'd with agony and pain" (3). Even though He does not immediately respond to her request, the woman is persistent in presenting her petition. She is on a mission of love to save the life of her child. The dialogue between Jesus and the woman reveals that he is "astonish'd" by the woman's deep faith and wisdom. The final stanza provides His response and reaction to her request:

> "Woman," said the 'astonished Lord,
> "Be it even as thy Word!
> By they faith that knows no fail,
> Thou hast ask'd, and shalt prevail." (37)

Rightly, this work opens Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects because it is the prototype for the poems that focus on slave motherhood. Like the Syrophoenician woman, the slave mothers in the poems "Eliza Harris," "The Slave Mother," and "The Slave Mother, A Tale of the Ohio," suffer tremendous hardships. Fear of being separated from her children is constantly with the slave mother. Her faith, love, and desperation force her to make decisions that she perceives to be beneficial for her family.

In the poem "Rizpah, Daughter of Ai," Harper narrates the story of an Old Testament mother (II Samuel 3:7; 21:8, 10, 11). Rizpah, whose name has come to mean "intense

suffering, such as only a devoted mother can endure" (Deen 109), has been the concubine of Saul and has borne him two sons. After Saul's death, famine in the land causes King David to seek expiation for this condition. David interprets the Gideonite complaint against Saul as the voice of God and connects it with the famine. He, therefore, hands over to the Gideonites Saul's two sons and five of his grandsons so as to avenge the crimes Saul has committed against those people. On the first day of the harvest, the Gideonites execute the seven heirs of Saul and leave their bodies exposed to the elements. Rizpah takes "sackcloth and spreads it on a rock for herself" and watches over the dead, unburied corpses, "from the beginning of the harvest until rain fell on them" (five months). She does not allow any animals to feed of the bodies by day or by night. When David hears of her vigil, he has the bones of Saul delivered to her. She then carries all the remains to the land of Zela and buries them.

In the opening stanza the narrator of Harper's poem states that Rizpah loses her sons as the result of "Destruction [that] falls like a mournful pall / On the fallen house of ill-fated Saul" (31). Though she is filled with sadness, she accepts "with a tearless eye" the news that her sons are to die. When the deed is done, "Rizpah

takes her lowly seat / To watch the princely dead at her feet" (31).

Harper uses vivid imagery to describe Rizpah's battle with the "jackal," "vultures" and "hyena" who want to make a meal of the corpses. Once these beasts hear the "shriek" of her "despair" and see "her raise[d] form stretch to its queenly height," they are "Subdued by the glance of the daughter of Ai" (32). In the final stanza, the narrator states that the world has seen no greater "wo" or "love" than this mother displays.

Harper's poem, unlike the biblical text, gives greater depth to the persona of Rizpah. She is described in the poem as being stoic but meek. Her great sadness does not paralyze her; instead it moves her to action. Despite being afraid, she is determined to prevent the scavenging beast from desecrating the bodies of her sons. Love for her children motivates her to do what she must to protect them.

Another biblical verse in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects is "Saved By Faith." This poem recounts the New Testament story (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-24; Luke 8:43-48) of a woman who has hemorrhaged for twelve years and has spent all of her money seeking a cure for her illness. She has heard reports of Jesus' healing powers, and she decides that if she can simply touch his garment her ailment will

be healed. Daringly, she touches his clothing, and immediately she is cured. Jesus senses that power has flowed from His person, and He asks who has touched Him. The woman, though afraid, comes forth and recounts for Him the story of her long suffering. Jesus simply says to the woman "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole' go in peace and be whole of thy plague" (Mark 5:34).

The poem "Saved by Faith" begins with the head note, "She said, if I may touch his clothes, I shall be whole" (15). In Harper's poem the narrator delves inside the woman's consciousness and expresses all the emotions she feels from the time she decides to touch the Prophet's clothing until she comes forth to admit what she has done. In the first three stanzas the narrator describes the woman as feeling totally helpless because she is unable to prevent her life from slowly wasting away. She states that "Strength from every nerve has gone; [and] / Skill and art could give no aid" (15). Motivated by "hope and fear" she touches Jesus' clothing, and she is at once healed. The feelings of gratitude and fear also move the woman to respond when Jesus asks "Who hath touched me" (15). The poem ends with Jesus' statement that the woman's faith has saved her.

Harper also converts a segment of the Ruth and Naomi story into verse. Of the poems about biblical women that

she includes in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, the one about Ruth and Naomi presents women who are more familiar to her audience. The source of this poem is the Old Testament book of Ruth 1:1-18. The central idea of Harper's poem is the same as that of the source--loyalty, fidelity, and love are necessary for cohesive family life. Ruth and Naomi are models of committed and abiding love. The poem opens with the voice of the old and wise Naomi advising her two daughters-in-law, Orpha and Ruth, to go back to their families because her life is uncertain since "From [her] bosom death has torn / Husband, [and] children" (32). Naomi, weary with age and the blows life has dealt, wishes to return "To [her] loved and distant home" (32). The old woman's request causes the two daughters to cry; however, Orpah decides to return to her own homeland. Ruth, on the other hand, remains with the mother-in-law.

In the last five stanzas of the poem, Ruth renders her pledge to remain and care for Naomi. Harper lengthens the short biblical pledge, but she maintains the spirit of its beautiful content. Ruth tells Naomi that when her "heart and home were glad, / I freely shared thy joyous lot; / And now that heart is lone and sad / Cease to entreat--I'll leave thee not" (33). She continues to explain to her mother-in-law that she will be with her in wealth or in poverty. To their abject situation, Ruth states that she

is bringing "The wealth of woman's love . . . / 'Till life itself be done" (33). The heroine further promises to take Naomi's country and God as her own. Ruth's final statement to the old woman is "My heart is nerved to share thy lot, / Whatever that maybe" (33).

In Harper's poem, as in the biblical text, Ruth displays both a warm sweetness and a strong decisive reserve. In committing to remain and care for Naomi whose face shows "lines of sorrow, age and care [and whose] . . . form is bent" (33), Ruth is not only the model of the ideal daughter-in-law, but she is the perfect example of the widow. She has displayed love and loyalty for her deceased husband in her willingness to remain and care for his mother. Further, Harper presents Ruth as a model of one who takes up a cause without worrying about future consequences.

Inclusion of "The Syrophonician Woman," "Rizpah," "Saved By Faith," and "Ruth and Naomi" in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects complements the poems on slave women, who like their biblical prototypes suffer hardships, but whose faith helps them overcome the obstacles that are placed in their paths. Like the Syrophonician woman, Eliza Harris is determined to risk what she must to keep from being separated from her child. Echoed in Rizpah's sighs of grief and pain for her dead son is the "shriek" that

comes from the slave mother who is to be separated from her child. The slave-women in the poem "The Slave Auction," like Rizpah the concubine, have no control over their destinies. Similarly, their fates lie in the hands of powerful men.

The Fugitive's wife, like Ruth, sacrifices her own life to maintain the wholeness of the family unit. When the slave woman's husband decides to escape, she does not attempt to stop him. Instead, she gives him her blessing, and she remains behind to care for their children. Her love, like that of Ruth, is an unselfish love.

Harper composed two other poems about biblical women, "Vashti" and "Mary at the Feet of Christ." Both poems appear in the volume Poems published for the first time in 1871. The poem "Vashti" is based on a story from the book of Esther 1:9-19 and 2:1,4,17. According to the biblical account, Artaxeres' King of Persia has a great feast lasting seven days where there is much eating and drinking. On the seventh day, the King sends for his wife, Queen Vashti, so that he can "proclaim her as queen and to place the diadem on her head, and to have her display her beauty to all the governors and the people of various nations" (Esther 1:11). Vashti refuses to come. Her response so angers the king that he calls forth the legal minds of his kingdom to investigate the consequences of her behavior.

He fears that other wives in the kingdom might follow her example and disobey their husbands. The wise men advise him to dethrone his wife and institute a law that condemns her behavior. This biblical text has two versions, the Greek and the Hebrew. They differ in their accounts of the reason for Vashti's refusal of the King's request. The Greek version establishes her coronation as the reason for which her husband calls her, while the Hebrew version suggests that the king wants to display her beauty to his drunken friends.

For the purposes of her poem, Harper uses the later version. In the first four stanzas, the king speaks proudly of his acquisition of wealth and power. None of his "costly jewels," however, can compare "with the glory of [Vashti's] eyes," therefore, he calls on his Lords to bring her forth "Adorn'd and crown'd . . . / With all her queenly grace" and before all the men "Unveil her lovely face" (99). Fearfully and courageously, Vashti proclaims that the "crowds of merry men" will never see her. She feels that it is not modest for a Persian queen to be "unveil'd before the crowd" and have her name "upon each lip." This action, she feels will not set a proper example for Persian women who "would blush / And weep for Vashti's shame" (99).

The king agrees with his "wily counsellors" that Vashti's disobedience might cause "The women, restive 'neath our rule, to learn to scorn our name" (100). Thus, Vashti is ordered to relinquish her crown. She, however, leaves the palace "Strong in her earnest womanhood . . . . [and] / Proud of her spotless name" (100).

Harper's selection of the Hebrew text allows her to create a more heroic character. It allows Vashti to have a valid reason for responding negatively to the king's request. Her decision to relinquish wealth and power, to hold steadfast to principles of modesty, establishes her as a model of chaste womanhood. Interestingly, Harper does not select Vashti as a subject for one of her biblical poems until slavery is abolished. Perhaps in doing so Harper suggests that the right of refusal for a woman is an integral part of being free. For the free woman, Vashti is a model of the virtuous wife.

The poem "Mary at the Feet of Christ," treats the widely known story of the sinful woman who washes the feet of Jesus with her tears (Luke 7:36-50). According to biblical scholar Edith Deen and the explanatory notes contained in The New Oxford Annotated Bible, the woman in Luke is not the same woman as Mary Magdalene. Since the Middle Ages Mary Magdalene has been confused with the

unnamed woman in Luke largely because the account of Mary follows closely after in Luke 8:2.

From the title of the poem and its content, it is obvious that Mrs. Harper thought the two women to be the same. The narrative voice in the poem explains that Mary "stood at Jesus' feet / And bathed them with her tears" (95). Simon, the host of the dinner that Jesus is attending, looks upon her "stern[ly]" and "coldly" and to himself thinks that surely "If Christ a prophet be / He'll spurn her from his sight" (95). While washing the prophet's feet, Mary examines her conscience. Her transgressions have brought her the scorn of the very men who "once [held her as] their prize" and have caused "women [to] pass [her] by / With cold, averted eyes" (96). Now in the presence of Christ a sense of "hope" and "peace" "Steal o'er [her] weary breast." Because Christ is all knowing, he reads the thoughts of both Mary and Simon. He first admonishes the host for not extending Him the courtesy of offering water to wash upon his arrival. Though Mary's "steps have strayed" Christ asserts that she with love has taken care to see that the dust is washed from His feet. For Mary, Christ's words "sweetly fell . . . / Upon her bruised heart . . . [and] / She felt her sins depart" (97).

Within the biblical text of the wayward woman who is scorned by her consorts, but who is forgiven by Jesus,

Harper locates a prototype for her thematic treatment of the double standard that exists in the sexual relationships of men and women. Nineteenth-century values associated with the cult of true womanhood place moral accountability for the actions of both partners on the female. Harper in this poem and in other secular poems on the same theme, lifts the burden of responsibility for saving men's souls from women's shoulders.

All of Harper's biblical female figures are prototypes for the women subjects of her secular poetry; thus, she identifies for black women the admirable qualities that they should cultivate. In addition, the poet's biblical characters are representative of various types of women: the devoted mother, the loving wife and daughter, the woman alone and ill, the fallen woman who is saved by her faith, and the courageous woman who gives up wealth and security for her principles. In writing about such a diversified group, Harper illustrates the complex nature of womanhood, and she challenges the cult notion of a singular acceptable model.

Three other poems in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, "Report," "Advice to the Girls," and "The Contrast," have themes that indicate that as early as 1854 Harper was concerned with the woman's position in contemporary society. The first two of the three poems are companion

pieces which advise young men and women what to look for in a marriage partner. The narrator in the poem "Report" lists for a young male friend, who is in the process of looking for a wife, the characteristics he should search for in the woman he wants to marry. The basic virtue that the potential mate should possess, counsels the narrator, is "truth." She does not have to be talented nor beautiful, but "she must be constant . . . gentle, and true" (13). The narrator warns the young bachelor not to let "wealth" lure him into a relationship, because the woman who has material "treasure" may lack character. In the three final stanzas, the speaker describes the ideal partner. According to the narrator, that individual is "frugal" and not afraid "To work in her household / Or follow her trade." In "language," "actions," and "manner," she should be "modest," "discreet," and "refined." Above all, she should be "free from deceit" (14). Should the young man find these qualities in a woman, the speaker advises him to marry her.

The poem that is placed directly after "Report" is "Advice to Girls." The narrative voice in this shorter piece speaks to a young female friend who "had a mind to marry." In this three stanza poem, the speaker recommends that the young woman not marry a man "whose [only] merit" is that he is handsome. Instead, she is directed in the

final stanza to select a man, "who's good and kind / And free from all pretense." Finally, the counselor advises the young woman that if the man is "without a gifted mind" make sure he "has common sense" (14).

These two poems reveal much about young Frances Ellen Watkins, who is at that time twenty-nine years of age and unmarried. Though on the surface the poems appear to embrace the traditional middle class concept of true womanhood and marriage, there are lines in each evincing the author's revision of that philosophy to accommodate women of color. Specifically, the young man is encouraged to marry a woman who is willing to work outside the home as well as inside. The man that the woman should look for does not have to be professionally successful, but he should be truthful, kind, and good.

Simultaneously, Harper upholds the traditional expectations of marriage. A self-disciplined, respected, poised, and thrifty woman makes a good wife. Harper's good wife, however, is not expected to find strictly the domain of her work in the home. The narrator's advice to the young man is to look for a woman who will do both kinds of work. Interestingly, these poems were published four to eight years before the births of Ida B. Wells, Mary C. Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Margaret Murray Washington who would a generation later echo the same sentiments in

their writings and lives. They follow the lead of Frances Harper in entering the state of matrimony in their thirties.

In her discussion of black club women of 1894, journalist Paula Giddings speculates that women such as Ida Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, and Margaret Murray Washington did not marry until they were in their thirties because the duties of being a good wife and mother would not allow them to participate in promoting public causes. According to Giddings, these persons "had to resolve the conflicts between what they wanted for themselves as women and what middle-class society expected of them as women" (109). They viewed the elevation of the black male to prominent community and national standing as beneficial to their own political, professional, and social well-being as well as to the advancement of the race. Thus, the partnership in marriage with such men advanced them as well. Anna Julia Cooper expressed this idea:

> The question is not now with the woman 'How shall I so cramp, stunt, and simplify and multiply myself as to make me eligible to the honor of being swallowed up into some little man?' but the problem . . . rests with the man as to how he can so develop . . . to reach the ideal of a generation of women who demand the noblest,

> grandest and best achievements of which he is capable. (Giddings 113)

Frances Watkins' works reveal that she struggled with these same sorts of conflicts.

The last poem about womanhood in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects is "Contrast." It tackles the societal issue of the moral double standard that holds women responsible for the failing of themselves and men. In the first three stanzas, the speaker recounts the story of a woman who because of a moral indiscretion suffers the ire of society's ridicule. Even though "The dews of repentance / Stood in her downcast eye," none are willing to forgive. This lack of compassion breaks her heart, and she dies. On the contrary, the man "who sullied / Her once unspotted name . . . [and] / Who brought the winter of despair / Upon Hope's blooming spring" (20), has selected another girl to take "to the altar." The narrator, in the final stanza, points out that the actions of the man are not "scorned"; instead, people view "His crimes" as "only foibles," and these faults "were gently told" (20).

Harper, in this poem, treats the same theme that appears in "Mary at the Feet of Christ." That idea is also the focus of an 1895 poem entitled "A Double Standard." In "Contrast," the poet points out the hypocrisy of societal mores that do not hold men and women equally accountable

for their moral failings. The death of the scorned woman is symbolic of the social death that a woman suffers when her indiscretions are revealed. Jesus is forgiving of the repentant woman in "Mary at the Feet of Christ"; however, the nineteenth-century social order does not allow a "sullied" woman forgiveness. The range of women's subjects Harper covers in her earliest extant volume indicates that she recognizes the social and cultural problems women of her era face and, therefore, she creates literature that speaks to those issues.

Despite her heavy involvement with the abolitionist movement in 1859, Frances Watkins publishes a short story that had a feminist theme entitled "The Two Offers." A number of scholars consider this work to be the first short story written by a black American. The piece ran in a two part installment in the September and October issues of the Anglo-African Magazine. Also, the work marked the beginning of Harper's career as a prose fiction writer.

The life choices of two young women, Laura Lagrange and her cousin Janette Alston, are the central focus of the work. A third person omniscient narrator, who often digresses from the main story line to issue philosophical comments, unfolds the events of the plot. Laura Lagrange has received two marriage proposals, and she is unable to decide which one to accept. Cousin Janette advises her

younger cousin to refuse both because, as she explains, "a woman who is undecided between two offers has not love enough for either to make a choice" (288). Laura admits that her feelings for both men are not the type a woman should have for the person she is to marry. It is, however, Laura's fear that if she does not select one of the proposals, she may end up "an old maid." Janette, who has not enjoyed a life of ease as has her cousin Laura, has experienced an unsuccessful romance, after which she rechannels her energies toward intellectual pursuits. Even though she becomes a widely acclaimed writer, she yearns for the "sympathy and heart-support" (288) of a man. In dealing straight forwardly and alone with life's trials, she becomes a stronger individual.

Laura is not so fortunate. She does not heed her cousin's advice and marries one of her two offers. Her husband is unable to give up the pleasures of his bachelor days, and Laura's life with him is miserable. Through the years of her marriage, Laura experiences loneliness and the loss of a child. She dies of a broken heart without her husband at her bedside. Her cousin's sad, wasted life motivates Janette to devote herself to serve the welfare of others.

At a time when Harper is deeply involved with the abolitionist movement, she chooses not to make slavery the

central focus of her first short story. In fact, she does not identify the race of the two female characters. Perhaps Harper felt that the themes addressed in the work were relevant to all women. The story touches such issues as the meaning of true womanhood, marriage, motherhood, and temperance. (Abolitionist activity is only slightly addressed.) Primarily the story is a defense of the unmarried professional woman's way of life.

When examining the central theme of the work, it is difficult not to relate Janette's experiences to those of Frances Watkins. When this story was published, the author was thirty-five years of age and unmarried. Her career as a lecturer and writer had become successful and she, like the character Janette, was self-reliantly making her own way in the world. Though Janette is self-sufficient, Harper does not want the reader to forget that she is womanly--feminine. Particularly is this evident when the heroine counsels her cousin about marriage.

Janette's advice to Laura not to marry is met with a biting response from the latter, who calls her cousin "a little preacher" who is naturally cut out to be "an old maid" (289). According to Laura, when nature formed Janette it "put in a double portion of intellect to make up for a deficiency of love" (289). Even though Laura admits that her cousin is "kind and affectionate," she does not

believe that she knows "anything of the grand, over-mastering passion or the deep necessity of woman's heart for loving" (289). To these things, the older cousin only responds "Do you think so?" (289). Though Janette continues the needle work she had started, "a mist gathered in her eyes and a slight quivering of the lips revealed a depth of feeling to which her companion was a stranger" (289).

This scene not only emphasizes the heroine's capacity for feeling, but it is also Harper's attempt to shatter the anti-intellectual sentiments that encouraged women of her era to think with their hearts rather than with their minds. Thinking with the heart prepared a woman for her wifely role as a spiritual guide who could lead her husband to a higher plane of existence. Women were considered "exalted . . . creatures who did not use logic or reason" (Welter 71). Thus, female genius was not considered natural, but merely a curiosity which was not allowed expression in any public forum. Competition with male genius was not encouraged; however, a woman could "excel in affection" (Welter 76). The consequences for a woman who moved outside the intellectual realm prescribed for her sex placed her in the position of becoming the victim of public ridicule and scorn.

In bringing the ideological differences of the two women into conflict, Harper denounces the common belief that a woman educated beyond homemaking and motherhood is a freak of nature. Janette is, therefore, presented as woman who in cultivating her intellectual self has found both personal and professional fulfillment. Simultaneously, she has been able to maintain those soft and warm qualities that make her feminine.

In a long digression, the narrator recounts Janette's childhood story. As an adolescent she is orphaned, losing her father first and then her mother. Left to make her way in life alone she is

> Too self reliant to depend on the charity of relations, [therefore,] she endeavor[s] to support herself by her own exertions, and she . . . succeed[s]. Her path for a while [is] marked with struggle and trial, but instead of uselessly repining, she [meets] them bravely, and her life [becomes] not a thing of ease and indulgence, but of conquest, victory, and accomplishments. (289)

Both professional and spiritual growth lead her to a refined state of womanhood, in which "a calmness and strength" prevail.

Harper's story of Janette shows the influence of what Nina Baym calls "woman's fiction." According to critic Baym the stories told in this genre have at their centers a heroine who is deprived of family support, and thus, must make her way through life on her own. She is able to successfully "negotiate" her way to "sound adulthood." After this phase is reached she is rewarded--in most cases--with a happy marriage (11-21). Harper's heroine, like those of Augusta Evans (composer of "woman's fiction" beginning in the 1850s), is strong and intelligent. She succeeds because she defines her own vision and she refuses to let her survival rest in the hands of others. Janette's challenge of traditional ideology about marriage and female intellectualism and her simultaneous conformity to the moral and social values associated with femininity, create a tension in the work. This presentation suggests to Harper's female readers an alternative to the gender constraints that limit their social and professional options.

In juxtaposing Laura's adult life to that of Janette's, Harper maintains the tension and further develops the theme. Laura has found married life unfulfilling. She, like the woman Harper describes in the poem "Report," is "overflowing with a sense of the good, the beautiful, and the true" (290), but she is unable to

make her husband respond "to the deep yearnings of her soul--no appreciation of life's highest realities" (290). Laura has selected a man who is not interested in committing to family responsibility. He is exactly like the man Harper warns young women to avoid in the poem "Advice to Girls." Physically, he is described as having "raven hair, flashing eyes, a voice of thrilling sweetness, and lips of persuasive eloquence" (290). He is "versed in the ways of the world," and thus, "he [wins] her heart." Profiling the life of a woman who makes a choice to marry based on her need to follow societal norms, Harper validates the single life as an option for women that is far more fulfilling than being trapped in a bad marriage. Clearly, Harper is not condemning married life nor is she ridiculing women like Laura. According to the narrator, Laura embodies the qualities that make a woman the perfect wife. Harper is, however, pointing out the error in the social ideology that forces women to make serious life decisions irrationally.

The narrator's digression on the common social perception of womanhood shows the author's sympathy for Laura and continues to develop the theme. The speaker calls to task those who only view women in terms of their "deep capacity for loving, [and for] . . . the strength of [their] affectional nature" (291). Though women do possess

these traits, the narrator explains, they are far more complex. In literature the heroine may appear "as a frail vine, clinging to her brother man for support and dying when deprived of it." This, the narrator states, may be good enough to sooth "the imaginations of school girls, or love-lorn maidens" (291); however, it is not reality. The narrator culminates the digression with a lecture on the complexity of female nature, inclusive of an endorsement of education for women:

> But woman--the true woman--if you would render her happy, it [sic] needs more than the mere development of her affectional nature. Her conscience should be enlightened, her faith in the true and right established, and scope given to her Heaven-endowed and God-given faculties. The true aim of female education should be, not a development of one or two, but all the faculties of the human soul, because no perfect womanhood is developed by imperfect culture. (291)

This section of the story also holds some interesting comments of theory about the author's view of her own literary style. It is obvious from the substance of the digression that she does not view her own literary production as being in the same sphere as those of writers of sentimental fiction. Based on the context of the

material in the narrator's aside, her aim is to render a realistic portrait of life. Harper, to a limited degree, is able to divorce herself from "woman's fiction." She realistically portrays Janette as an admirable figure whose personal needs for self-development are in conflict with the societal expectations of her gender. This indeed reflects a problem that plagued a number of nineteenth-century women. When at the end of the story the heroine has not met the right man and married him, it is clear that the author is attempting to break away from the sentimental genre. Further, in writing about Laura's bad marriage, Harper exposes the fallacies that are inherent in the doctrine of the cult of the lady. Along with treating realistic themes some of the dialog between the two women is natural. It is, however, the highly didactic nature of the text, especially the digressive "sermons" of the narrator, that renders it sentimental. In addition, Harper does not provide Laura with constructive solutions for her bad marriage; instead Laura finds the resolution to her problem in leaving her husband with a legacy of guilt that his behavior has resulted in her dying of a broken heart.

Parallels between Harper's life and that of Janette's may be drawn. Possibly the writer uses the short story as a vehicle to justify her own life choices as an unmarried

woman pursuing an oratorical career. A year after this story appeared Frances Watkins married an Ohio farmer.

After wedding Fenton Harper in 1860, Frances settled into a domestic life in rural Ohio. During this period she occasionally delivered antislavery messages within close proximity of her home. Immediately following her husband's death in 1864, Harper resumed her career on the lecture circuit, and subsequently she traveled South to assist with Reconstruction efforts. May 1866 marked the beginning of her affiliation with the National Woman's Rights organization when she delivered a speech before the group gathered in New York for the eleventh national convention. Among the speakers at this conference were Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

In her opening remarks to the body, Harper acknowledges that she is a novice in speaking from the platform of women's rights. Her life to this point, she explains, has been spent working for the liberation of her race. According to the speaker, the legal entanglement she experiences after her husband's death causes her to realize that race is not the only obstacle she has to overcome. Gender too makes her "unequal before the law" (46). To illustrate this point, Harper details for the audience the legal nightmare she experiences after the death of her husband. She explains that she has known nothing of his

deep indebtedness until his demise. Consequently, she loses all her possessions, even the butter tubs that she has used to help supplement the family income. The one item she is left with is "a looking glass." Had she died instead of her husband, Harper alleges, the situation for her husband would have been different. By this time she states

> he would have had another wife . . . and no administrator would have gone into his house broken up his home, and sold his bed, and taken his means of support. (45-46)

Though Harper may have been a novice in the arena of Women's Rights, this speech indicates that her domestic hiatus did not diminish her oratorical skill. In personalizing a condition that threatened every married woman in the room, she draws the audience to rally around a common cause.

Harper proceeds to make the central point of her address. No American is free, she contends, until all people in the country have the same rights under the law. To the largely white female audience, Harper declares:

> We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul. (46)

From this point she proceeds to explain how a society which would "trample on the weakest" hurts itself. Slavery, Harper states, while promoting the degradation of one group concurrently paralyzes "the moral strength . . . and the spiritual energies" (46) of another, particularly white men. Another group to suffer both morally and financially from slavery, she asserts, are Southern poor whites who have not benefitted from any of the slaveholders' profits. The greatest symbol of this group Harper tells the audience is President Andrew Johnson, who comes from that class. Johnson, she accuses of failing "to catch the watchword of the hour" (46). In this statement Harper is critical of the President's indifference to the freemen's plight, especially his enfranchisement. Her condemnation of Johnson is not based on his class, she explains, but on the fact that "he keeps 'poor whits' [sic] all the way through" (46). This statement gets Harper a round of applause.

Both abolitionists and suffragists disliked Johnson's "do nothing" policy that prevented federal intervention that would extend the right to vote to blacks. Women tied their own right to suffrage to the enfranchisement of blacks; therefore, Johnson's stance was unacceptable to them. Harper, like a number of citizens, attributed the President's prejudice "to his upbringing as a 'poor white'"

(Foner 180). His comment in 1865 to Senator John Conness of California that "White men alone must manage the South" assisted in shaping this view. His bigotry became even more apparent when in February 1866 he proposed to a delegation of blacks, who met with him at the White House, "that their people emigrate to some other country" (Foner 181). No doubt Mrs. Harper had read about Johnson's most recent comment and she lashed out at him in her speech.

As for women's suffrage, the speaker frankly states to the group that giving women the ballot is not "going to cure all the ills of life" (46). She further explains that the right to vote will not change any of the prejudices that some women in the organization hold. In fact, she asserts, white women, if given the vote, will be the same as their white male counterparts:

> I do not believe that white women are dewdrops just exhaled from the skies. I think that like men, they may be divided into three classes, the good, the bad and the indifferent. The good would vote according to their convictions and principles; the bad, as dictated by prejudice [sic] or malice; and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the question, with the winning party. (46)

The comment about women's voting rights indicates Harper's uneasiness with fully supporting women's suffrage before the black male is enfranchised.

In the next part of the speech, Harper discusses the needs of black women. She realizes that the social and political desires of black women are not high on the agenda of this group; therefore, she calls to the organization's attention the problems with which her black sisters are faced. Black women do not share with their white sisters basic rights. The simple right to board and ride a streetcar is not assured to the black woman. Harper provides several examples from her own experiences in which she has had confrontations with streetcar conductors. Even the woman "who has received the name of `Moses' [Harriet Tubman] . . . [and] who had led one of Montgomery's most successful expeditions . . . is excluded from every thoroughfare of travel" (47-48), Harper explains. According to the speaker, the last time she visited with Tubman "her hands [were] all swollen from a conflict with a brutal conductor, who undertook to eject her from her place" (47).

While this sort of brutish act can still occur in America, she declares, white women do need the ballot because, she states, "if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothing and

selfishness, it is the white woman in America" (48). After Harper's speech, the minutes reflect that Susan B. Anthony proposed the following resolution:

> Whereas, By the act of Emancipation and the Civil Rights bill, the negro and woman now hold the same civil and political status, alike needing only the ballot; and whereas the same arguments apply equally, to both classes, proving all partial legislation fatal to republican institutions, therefore
>
> Resolved, That the time has come for an organization that shall demand UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE, and that hereafter we shall be known as the "AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION". (Proceedings of the Eleventh Woman's Rights Convention 48)

Hinted at in this speech is the orator's position which placed more emphasis on race than on gender concerning the issue of suffrage. In May 1869, before this very same body, Frederick Douglass pleaded with the members to recognize "the special character and immediate urgency of the problems confronting blacks" (Foner 448) and thereby urged them to support ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment as a partial move toward universal suffrage. Harper agreed with Douglass and expressed this compliance

to the women of the American Equal Rights Association. Her position on the issue was described in proceedings of the Anniversary meeting of the American Woman's Suffrage meeting in May 1869:

> When it was a question of race, she let the lesser question of sex go. But the white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position. She liked the idea of working women but she [wanted] to know if it was broad enough to take colored women? . . . [because she states] that when she was at Boston there were sixty women who left work because one colored woman went to gain a livelihood in their midst. [It was, therefore, her contention that] [i]f the nation could only handle one question, she would not have the black women put a single straw in the way, if only the men of the race could obtain what they wanted (Stanton 2:391-392)

The expression of these sentiments indicates that Harper realized that black women were in a precarious political situation. Her reported remarks also suggest that though her public support of the amendment is strong, she is experiencing some ambivalence about her decision.

Under the direction of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, a splinter group of suffragist rejected

Douglass' proposal. They felt that both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had dealt a severe blow to their cause in that the language of both documents excluded women. Constitutional exclusion of women from voting was unacceptable to this faction. Consequently, the suffragist-abolitionist alliance came to an end. From this disagreement resulted two national women's rights bodies. Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman's Suffrage Association, and there remained the American Woman's Suffrage Association embodying the old reform movements. To gain support for the cause of the new organization, Stanton voiced racist arguments for denying black male enfranchisement. At the convention in 1869 she voiced her opinion about giving black males the ballot:

> Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who can not read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling-book, making laws for Lucretia Mott, Ernestine L. Rose, and Anna E. Dickison. (Stanton 2:353)

Mrs. Harper's speech of 1866 foreshadows the events of the 1869 meeting.

Harper continued her affiliation with the American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA) following the

organizational split. The AWSA supported the Fifteenth Amendment and pledged to work for a Sixteenth Amendment that would grant voting rights to women. Her active participation with this group resulted in her attendance at conventions of 1873, 1875 and 1887, at which she delivered the closing addresses at the two former meetings. The proceedings of the 1873 gathering reveal that Harper asserted that she agreed that white women needed the ballot; however, she argued that black women needed it more because "they are subjected to the legal authority of ignorant and often degraded men" (Stanton 2: 833).

A year after delivering the speech to the Woman's Right Convention in 1866, Harper began her tour of the South. On this journey she, according to William Still, the author's biographer, labored "for Equality before the law, education, and a higher manhood, . . . among the Freedmen" (797). After observing the quality of life among the newly freed, Harper expressed in a letter to Still the political conclusions she had drawn:

> While I am in favor of Universal Suffrage, yet I know that the colored man needs something more than a vote in his hand: he needs to know the value of a home life; to rightly appreciate and value the marriage relation; to know how and to be incited to leave behind him the old shards and

> shells of slavery and to rise in the scale of character, wealth, and influence. (800)

Though not allotted much space in Still's biographical sketch, an integral part of Harper's Southern mission was the private instruction of freedwomen as to how they could best serve the interest of race building. It is clear from the selected group of letters appearing in Still's work that Harper felt that racial uplift would take the cooperative efforts of both men and women.

Concerning the private lectures and discussions held with freedwomen, Harper writes to Still that she encourages them "to begin to try to lift up their heads and plant the roots of progress under the hearthstone" (Still 803). To these women in private meetings and to the men in public gatherings, she spoke against the ill treatment of wives. During slavery black women had been subjected to the abuse of their masters, and in freedom they continued to suffer maltreatment at the hands of their husbands. Harper was deeply troubled by the attitude some freedmen held about spousal abuse. At one meeting she reported that a man responded to her remarks on the subject stating that "a man must leave them [women] or whip them" (Still 810). The attitude reflected in the man's statement, Harper felt, was a hindrance to race building. Further, she encouraged the women to obtain for themselves and for their children

proper education. Hard work, thrift, and a strong sense of morality, she told her Southern audience, were qualities that should form the foundation of their new society.

When Harper completed her tour of the South, she returned to Philadelphia where she published Sketches of Southern Life (1872). This volume of poetry, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, is based on her impressions of Southern blacks and on the messages she imparted to them. The heroine of this work, Aunt Chloe, is the embodiment of Harper's vision of the type of woman that is crucial to elevating the race to new heights. Aunt Chloe is not the traditional heroine of sentimental romances, or a tragic mulatto, nor is she an accommodating long suffering mammy figure of plantation literature. She is an older black woman who retrospectively recounts her experiences as a slave and describes her current life as a freedwoman.

Like the slave mothers of Harper's abolitionist poetry, Aunt Chloe has experienced the grief of having two sons sold away from her in order that her mistress might pay the debts that her deceased husband left behind. It is through inner strength, fueled by Christian faith, that the heroine is able to survive the harsh realities of slave life. Also Chloe finds solace in the friendship of another slave woman, cousin Milly, who has experienced the same

kind of loss. In an effort to console Chloe, Milly tells her:

> Oh! Chloe, I know how you feel,
> 'Cause I'se been through it all;
> I thought my poor heart would break,
> When master sold my Saul. (117)

The women gather strength from each other and from the spiritual counseling of Uncle Jacob. It is from his advice that Chloe draws courage. The heroine's Christian ideals make it possible for her to sympathize with her mistress when her son, Thomas, is killed in the Civil War.

When Chloe begins to narrate the emancipation/ reconstruction phase of her story, she is voicing Harper's ideas about the formation of a thriving black community. In the poem "The Deliverance" she admonishes those black men who sell their votes for trifles such as "candy" "flour and sugar," and she praises those men who value their right to vote. Like Harper, Chloe keeps abreast of current events on the national political scene. She expresses her distaste for Andrew Johnson and her admiration for Grant.

In addition to her interest in politics, Chloe, at age sixty, learns to read. She realizes that education is important to the elevation of her people. The poem "Church Building" explores how Chloe and the men and women in her community have worked together building a church. The

newly built structure is a symbol for those values that bind the group. By the end of the poetic series this stalwart matriarch is reunited with her sons. Her life is whole again. Uniting all the separated parts is symbolic of the entire community of black Americans who, once divided by slavery, are able to come together as one people.

Aunt Chloe, Harper's model for freedwomen, is symbolically an adhesive that binds the black community. Harper's advice to Southern women "to lift up their heads and plant the roots of progress under the hearthstone" (Still 803), suggests that the black woman's contribution to racial uplift is crucial. The poet, therefore, imbues Aunt Chloe with the strength, wit, wisdom, assertiveness, love, and morality necessary to draw the race together as one. In portraying the character in this manner, Harper has created for black women a model of black female leadership.

A year after the publication of Sketches of Southern Life Harper created another positive female heroine whose discourse reflected the author's social and political ideals. It was not until Frances Smith Foster's anthology of Harper's works was published that the short narratives entitled "Fancy Sketches" or "Fancy Etchings" were made available for public reading. Foster in introducing the

three selections appearing in the anthology states that the number of sketches originally published was five; however, two of them have been lost. According to Foster the works appeared in the periodical the Christian Recorder between 1873 and 1874.

The narratives, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, are dialogues between a young black woman named Jenny and her Aunt Jane. Jenny is the model of young womanhood that Harper envisions as the hope for the future of the black race. The heroine is refined, moral, and intelligent. She is a college graduate who has aspirations of becoming a successful author. Her goal as a writer is "to teach others to strive to make the highest ideal, the most truly real of our lives" (225).

Through Jenny's discourse with Aunt Jane, a wise and mature older woman, Harper symbolically suggests that the past and the future can learn from one another. For example in the sketch dated May 1, 1873, Jenney expresses to her aunt the frustration she feels with her uncle Glumby's inability to understand her love for literature and especially for composing it. Aunt Jane's explanation of family financial circumstances coloring the way she and her brother Glumby view culture and art, assists Jenny in becoming more tolerant of her uncle's attitude.

Of the three sketches appearing in the Foster anthology, the third, which the editor dates January 15, 1874, is by far the best. Though the first two narratives offer significant information about Harper's aesthetic philosophy, their substance is weakened by the contrived nature of the dialogue. In addition, the sentimentality of the language achieves for the works an unnatural quality. The final sketch, however, succeeds because the verbal exchange between the two characters is limited and because the political nature of the subject matter elevates the tone. The tone of the heroine's discourse echoes the strength and resolve that is found in Harper's oratorical presentations.

Thematically this work focuses on the educational and political future of black women. The catalyst for the conversation is a letter Aunt Jane has received from a female friend, who is college educated and who is about to close the doors of the school she is operating for the academic development of girls. Due to the recent passage of civil rights legislation in her state, the woman is forced to give up teaching. Jenny has mixed emotions about the elimination of the all girls' schools. On one hand she feels that combining the learning institutions of men and women will be advantageous for some females. On the other hand, she fears that closing women's schools might

discourage some of them from seeking an education. In addition, Jenny sympathizes with the correspondent's professional dilemma. She is well aware that despite educational preparation, a black woman is limited in her occupational choices outside of domestic services. In the letter, Aunt Jane's friend explains the distress she feels when she considers the possibility of having to take up domestic work: "I do not feel that I have either inclination or aptitude for that mode of life . . ." (229).

Jenny's response to the situation is interesting. She first expresses her wish that "women could vote." Had they been able to do so, the young woman states, they would have been eligible as delegates to the "late national civil rights meeting" (229). The heroine's remarks reflect the dual burden of race and gender that Harper struggled with at the 1869 Woman's Rights Convention when she upheld Frederick Douglass' proposal that that organization support the Fifteenth Amendment. Jenny, like Harper, gently protests the political disadvantages black women suffer. Without the right of the ballot black women are unable to attend the national Negro meetings and, thus, have little to say about their political futures (Foner and Walker, Vol. 1, 338-343). In addition, Jenny expresses the black woman's desire to enjoy simple liberty and respect:

> If white women feel that they are limited by their sex, how must it be with us who have the shadows of the past still projected into our lives? What they call limitations would be to us broad liberty. (230)

The idea expressed in this passage is one that Harper voiced in her first speech to the Woman's Rights Convention of 1866.

Jenny, however, does not let her dismay with political and social conditions prevent her from looking for a solution to the problems facing black women. Harper ends the piece with Jenny issuing a call to black men of wealth to "unite upon some plan by which [the community can] build up some thriving industries" (229) that provide employment for both black men and women.

Harper's struggle to keep the political and social needs of black women in both the North and South alive on the agendas of white women's organizations is evident in the article "Coloured Women of America," which appeared in the Englishwoman's Review of January 15, 1878. The Southern and Northern women described in the journal account provide the reality that undergirds the fictional characters, Chloe Fleet in Sketches of Southern Life, and Jenny in Fancy Etchings. In the article the writer

describes women as the anchors of the black family," equal to men in energy and executive ability" (10).

Harper begins the piece cataloging women from various occupations in different Southern locales she visited on her tour. According to the author, the farm women she met in Mississippi and South Carolina perform "double duty." They work in the fields with their husbands, and they also complete the domestic chores. In addition, she states, there are single women who have accumulated land and money through their hard work and ingenuity. Most of these women are farmers who have either worked alone or who have formed partnerships with other women in order to acquire wealth.

Harper also reports on women who have turned their abilities to perform domestic services into cottage industries. Through taking in washing, ironing, and baking, these women in difficult times have been able "to keep the wolf from the door," and under ideal conditions they have been able to "acquire property." Sometimes they are "the mainstay of the family," as in the case of the invalid woman who through "farming and peddling cakes" had been able to save seven hundred dollars in one year (11-12).

Harper then shifts her travel log North to a discussion of "coloured women [who] have made progress" in the professions (13). Her first example is of a woman who was born a slave but who escaped the wrath of that

institution when as a child she was taken North. During these early years, she received academic instruction and, thus, she was able to convert the "stumbling block" of poverty "into a stepping stone." Through hard study she receives a scholarship from "a coloured lady" to attend Oberlin wherein she prepares to become a teacher. Currently, Harper writes, this woman is "the principal of the Coloured High School in Philadelphia" (13). Also counted in the number of professional black women are two who are studying law at Howard University. One of them, Charlotte Ray, has completed her course of study, according to the writer. There are others Harper identifies who have studied medicine and are "practicing in different States in the Union" (14). The writer also counts two additional "matriculants" at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. In the areas of art and letters she names Edmonica Lewis (artist), Mary Shadd Cary (editor and writer) and "another coloured woman [who] has written several stories, poems and sketches which have appeared in different periodicals" (14). No doubt this last individual is Harper herself.

Black women, Harper denotes, are active workers in charitable causes for the less fortunate of their race. Racial discrimination has precluded blacks who are in need from taking advantage of public facilities. The writer

then cites statistics revealing the number of public institutions that serve blacks. Black women, therefore, have established institutions that throughout the country care for the elderly, children, and the mentally ill. Although this article reflects the author's pride in what black women have accomplished since slavery, it makes clear that Harper also realizes that this advancement is only a slight move toward total liberation.

From the beginning to the end of Harper's career as a poet, she never failed to include in each of her volumes a poem about motherhood. She believed that the occupation held serious responsibility and great joy for a woman. In her early letters to William Still it is evident that Frances' loss of her own mother at an early age greatly saddened her and robbed her of the security of a mother's love. Consequently, her poetry about the maternal state reflects the sorrow that comes with the separation of a mother and child and the strength and happiness that results from a bond between a woman and her offspring.

The pain that is endured when a mother is separated from her child is a theme that Harper treats in her abolitionist poems and in verses about the death of a mother. The 1871 poem "The Dying Mother" narrates the Christian legacy that a young mother leaves her children. In the poem "Out in the Cold" (1887) the narrator calls on

the Church to reach out and save those children who are orphaned due to the deaths of their mothers. The confusion that a young child experiences when his mother dies is treated in the poem "Jamie's Puzzle" (1895).

The responsibilities and joys associated with motherhood are also treated in verse. In "The Mother's Blessing" (1871) the speaker is a mother expressing the life change she experiences when her first child is born. Before the child's birth her "soul [has] grown so weary" and she is, "like a lonely stranger . . . / Bearing on her lips a language / None around her understand[s]" (97). For quite some time she has needed to find "a close communion/ With some kindred mind and heart," whose language is "Past her skill, and past her art" (97). God hears her prayers for relief and sends her a child. Though this poem was written approximately ten years after the poet's one child was born, the verse leaves open to speculation the identity of the speaker. The voice in this piece may be a personal one describing the psychological state of Harper herself after she married and moved to rural Ohio.

The joy of becoming a mother is again presented in the poem "Mother's Treasures" (1896). Harper expands the theme to include a mother's responsibility to teach both boys and girls to be good Christian people. Finally, in the poem "My Mother's Kiss" (1895), the male narrator attributes his

success in manhood to the training he receives at the hands of his mother.

Among the extant prose works is one essay devoted to the subject of motherhood. On November 15, 1892, Frances Harper addressed the members of the Brooklyn, New York Literary Society; her topic was "Enlightened Motherhood." Based on the content of the text, it is clear that her views about womanhood, motherhood, and sexism have not changed. One idea, however, that the speaker treats in this address has not appeared in prior works. She suggests that the members of black social and literary societies begin to discuss the significance of environment and heredity in the child rearing process. Harper gives an example in that each of these factors seems to have influenced the development of an individual. Possibly, Harper is reacting to a popular theory known as social Darwinism which sought to explain social conditions using Darwin's biological concept of evolution.

Developing "mothers who are capable of being character [sic] builders, patient, loving, strong, and true, [and] whose homes will be an uplifting power in the race" (223) is the thrust of Harper's speech, "Enlightened Motherhood." In order for a woman to create a conducive home environment for rearing children she must first select a good marriage partner, the speaker states. As had been expressed decades

earlier in the poem "Advice to Girls," and in the short-story "The Two Offers," women should not rush into marriage, nor should they make a "union [based on] fortunes or [on] an affair of convenience" (217). Marriage, she states, "should be a 'tie that only love and truth should weave and nothing but death should part" (217). Without a good marriage the home is not properly prepared for bringing up children to become good Christian citizens.

An enlightened mother, Harper goes on to say, is one who does not impart one set of moral values to her daughter and another to her son. A woman who claims to love social purity, but who looks after the purity of her daughter and not that of her son and "who would gather her [own] dainty robes from contact with the fallen woman and yet greet with smiling lips and clasp with warm and welcoming hands the author of her wrong and ruin" (219) is hypocritical, Harper asserts.

Finally, the speaker warns that strengthening the race depends largely on the production of enlightened mothers; therefore, educating daughters is crucial for race building. The speaker is not specific about the type of education she recommends for black women; however, from earlier works it may be concluded that a course of college study which includes ethical training suits Harper. Women training for specific professions such as teaching, law and

medicine could find a supporter in the writer. Harper's own daughter, Mary, attended the National School of Elocution and Oratory, at Philadelphia and graduated with a Bachelor of Elocution. Similar to her mother, Mary earned her livelihood as an orator (Scruggs 323). Harper's literary works always encouraged women to pursue charitable and/or professional work outside the home.

Black men writing about "Negro Womanhood" during the final years of Harper's life, viewed the education of the black women in different terms. Thomas Nelson Baker's sixteen page booklet entitled The Negro Woman, encouraged the black woman to get an education, but she "must not be educated away from being a mother" (15). Baker, like Harper, believed that motherhood was the highest calling in life for a female. Contrary to Harper, Baker condemns women who pursue interests or work outside the home. The progress of the entire race, he states, is dependent upon mothers and

> not upon the woman on the platform . . . [or on] women whose highest ambition is to appear in public and pass resolutions about the race . . . [or] women [who] attend conventions where the race problem is solved by resolution and logomachy . . . . (14-15)

Ironically, this young black man enjoyed the benefits that Harper helped win for him through the very actions he condemns.

At the age of sixty-seven Frances E. W. Harper published her last major prose fiction work, her only novel, Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplifted. It was published in 1892 in both Philadelphia and New York. Its popularity resulted in reprintings in 1893 and 1895. Republication of the novel did not occur again until 1971. Since that date two editions appeared in 1987 and 1988.

A review of the novel in an 1893 issue of the A.M.E. Church Review praised it as the author's best work to that time and calls it interesting from beginning to end. The reviewer, however, was critical of Harper's ability in recreating "Plantation Negro dialect" (Foster, Introduction to 1988 edition of Iola Leroy XIV). Another review, appearing in the Philadelphia Public Ledger, stated that the plot of the novel was natural and the characterization was realistic. The work also captured the attention of the white press. The Nation advised its patrons to read the work so as to "better understand what emancipation is and what reconstruction should be" (Carby, Introduction to 1987 edition of Iola Leroy XI). In the Independent Harper is called "one of the most accomplished literary women the colored race has numbered among its members . . . [who has]

accumulated a mass of material for a book on the colored people of the South, which is unrivaled in extent and character" (Carby, Introduction to the 1987 edition of Iola Leroy XI).

Largely due to the shift in the meaning of the Afro-American literary aesthetic Harper's novel (as well as her other works), in the early years of the twentieth century and up to the 1970s, received harsh criticism from Afro-American literary critics. The moral and political philosophy that had guided Harper in creating a literature of uplift was severely attacked by the new critics of the Harlem Renaissance. W. E. B. DuBois' eulogy to Harper in the Crisis magazine of 1911 states that "she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere" (20). From this point, the male Afro-American literary establishment expressed critical disfavor with the novel. The editors of The Negro Caravan call the novel didactic and "as dull as it is pious" (Brown, Davis, and Lee 139). They also accuse the work of repeating "situations from Brown's Clotel, something of a forecast of a sort of literary inbreeding which caused Negro writers to be influenced by other Negroes more than should ordinarily be expected" (139). In addition, Hugh Gloster in 1948 also dismisses the book because it is "almost wholly the product of reading Brown's Clotel" (30-31). Further, he views the

work as too sentimental. Critic Hazel Carby so rightly asserts that the emphasis that these authors placed on the "literary" quality of the work was part of their attempt to define "the parameters of an Afro-American literary tradition" which would exclude Harper from that canon and include William Wells Brown's work (Introduction xiii).

Even with the protest literature of the 1960s Iola Leroy could not find critical favor. Robert Bone in 1965 complains that Iola Leroy does not have "the urgency of the other protest novels of the 1890's" (32). He attributes Harper's lack of aggressiveness to her age. Literary historian Addison Gayle condemns her for being an assimilationist. Current Afro-American literary critics Robert Stepto and Henry Louis Gates, whose theoretical approach entails separating art from ideology, have ignored Harper in their critical analyses.

Over the last decade, however, black feminist critics have revived and reevaluated the significance of Frances Harper's works, and that of other late nineteenth-century black female writers, to Afro-American literary history. In addition, the canons of Afro-American and nineteenth-century American literature have been redefined to include Harper. Though the critical treatment of Iola Leroy by black feminist scholars has resulted in a growth of significant reconsideration of Harper's works, some of

these critics view the novel as historically significant, but are uncomplimentary of other technical areas. Vashti Lewis in the article "The Near-White Female in Frances Ellen Harper's Iola Leroy" concludes that Harper's use of the mulatto woman as her heroine tends to promote the negative stereotype about darker skinned women (322). Lewis feels that Harper does not imitate Brown's Clotel and that the author is innovative in her development of the mulatto character. Barbara Christian views Harper's intent of writing the novel as a means to refute the negative image that nineteenth-century society held about black women. Christian, however, finds the work too didactic.

Critic Hazel Carby, in an introduction to the 1987 reprint of Iola Leroy, writes that the novel should be regarded "as integral to and a very important part of both the wider context of the black women's movement [at the turn of the century] and of Harper's intellectual project" (xv). Another Harper scholar, Frances Smith Foster, views the work as marking a point of transition between the antebellum period and the Harlem Renaissance and as a link between Afro-American fiction and women's fiction. Of the feminist criticism cited above, Carby's comes closest to my idea about Harper's intent in composing the novel.

By 1892 Harper had established her literary voice in the genres of poetry, short fiction, and the essay.

Experimenting with new techniques, literary types, and uniquely framing works around reform themes amassed her a large public following. From the earliest days of her writing career, her primary motivation had been rendering service to ameliorate the condition of blacks. The statement attached to the end of the novel defines her purpose for writing the work, and it does not vary from the literary intent of earlier compositions. In her own words Harper stated that the novel was meant to

> awaken in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice and a more Christlike humanity in behalf of those whom the fortunes of war threw, homeless, ignorant and poor, upon the threshold of a new era . . . [and to] inspire the children of those upon whose brows God has poured the Chrism of that new era to determine that they will embrace every power God has given them to rise in the scale of character and condition, and to add their quota of good citizenship to the best welfare of the nation". (282)

From the passage above it is clear that the novel's raison d'être is to teach and entertain. The work, as the statement from Harper's note indicates, is a humanistic and Christian message of equal justice aimed at both a black and white audience. Although the concerns of women are not

specified in the author's note, within the framework of the text female concerns are addressed. Through the characterization of the heroine Harper presents her own ideas about ideal womanhood. In addition, Harper's creation of a literary figure who is educated and who moves freely in and out of various professional occupations before she decides to marry, presents the female audience with alternatives for their own lives.

It is quite predictable from what is known about Harper's past experimentation with literary forms that she would try her hand at one of the most popular genres of the century. Further, the novel's size provided the author with a larger literary forum in which she could incorporate the ideas and language of the speeches and essays she had written in the earlier days of her career. Frances Harper seems to use the novel to chronicle and bring closure to a long and successful life and career as a champion for the cause of racial and social justice. Her letters to Francis Grimké (see Chapter II) indicate that she, at this point in her life, is ready to hand over the mantle of social reform to a younger generation of blacks.

It is precisely because the novel has as its literary authority Harper's experience as a reformist lecturer and writer that Iola Leroy has both literary and social significance. The novel was not composed in a vacuum and

consequently the influences of the cultural matrix in which it was created are discernable. Reflected in the novel are themes that touch issues of the day such as the following: the cruelty of slavery, the hopes of reconstruction, the need for temperance, the development of culture, the significance of education, and the expansion of the woman's role in American society. Also evident in the work are literary influences of the period. Similarities between Iola Leroy, plantation literature, William Wells Brown's Clotel, and the nineteenth-century romance novel do exist. The differences, however, between Harper's novel and those works by both her male and female contemporaries are the establish her voice as a novelist. Thus, in the novel Harper challenges negative perceptions of black people, especially women, and provides black women with a model of finer black womanhood.

Counteracting the negative image of blacks that appeared in the fiction of Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and Thomas Dixon was indeed part of Harper's purpose in writing Iola Leroy. The novel, as did Sketches of Southern Life, portrays blacks after the Civil War working diligently to build a thriving community for themselves. Harper's former slave characters do not long for the return of slavery--as do those in the various stories in Page's volume In Old Virginia, nor are blacks

depicted as violent beasts like those in Dixon's novels, The Leopard's Spots and The Clansman.

Reconstruction for the ex-slaves in Harper's novels is a time for rebuilding family and for building a sound community. In chapters XVII-XXI Harper presents former slaves in search of kindred from whom they have been separated due to commercial slaves sales. The men and women in the novel have a sense of self-worth, and they invite the responsibility of independence. When the novel's heroine, Iola, opens a school in the basement of a church for the newly freed, both the children and the adults take advantage of the educational opportunity. Iola explains that she is moved to see the eyes which had grown dim under the shadows of slavery, while donning spectacles and trying to make out the words (146). Iola is not content teaching "the rudiments of knowledge," to her eager students; she also feels compelled to teach character building and good home and family development skills. Although a vigilante group burns down the school, the people are not discouraged. When Iola witnesses the resolve of both the pupils and their parents to go forward despite adversity she states, "I am not despondent of the future of my people; there is too much elasticity in their spirits, too much hope in their hearts, to be cursed out by unreasoning malice" (147). The heroine's course of

instruction and her response to the people's resilient spirit echo the same sentiments that appear in the author's letters to William Still from the South.

When Iola and her mother's brother, Robert, begin the search to reunite their broken family, the quest takes them back to the Gundover plantation where Robert had been enslaved. Upon their arrival they find that the destructive system of slavery has been replaced with a thriving black community, which will become for Iola and Robert a source of healing and growth. The race builders Aunt Linda and her husband, John Salters, along with other freed persons, have turned the physical symbols of their enslavement into useful tools for building a better future. Not only has the site of the old plantation been transformed into a dwelling place for the freed persons, but a "school-house ha[s] taken the place of the slave pen and auction-block" (152).

Harper does not in her novel have freed persons glorifying the old slave system. Instead, they reconcile the past and present to build a better future. This is apparent when Aunt Linda introduces Iola and her uncle Robert to her husband, John Salters. Robert is astonished when he realizes that the man Linda calls her husband is one John Andrews, who served as a soldier under his command during the War. John explains to Robert that after the War

he decided to abandon the slave name of his master and take on one of his own choice. Salters states that he "ha Got' nuff ob my ole marster in slave times, without wearin' his name in freedom. Wen I got done wid him, I got done wid his name" (167). In rejecting his slave name John Salters is able to leave slavery behind and enjoy his identity as a free man working to build a good life for his family.

Further, the new free community provides a supportive network for its own members and for other blacks who call on it for assistance. An independent group of blacks who rely on one another to rectify the wrongs of the past is what the author presents. Iola and Robert's quest to locate their family members is productive only when they depend on the resources of the black community (which has the church at the core of its being). Individuals searching for lost family could find in the new community church pulpit a platform to tell their stories in hopes of obtaining information to further their quests. Attending the special church meeting with the Salters brings Iola and her uncle face to face with the femaily matriarch, whom the heroine has never met and from whom Robert has been separated since childhood. The independently established network has allowed Iola to begin to reunite her family and further solidify her identity as a black woman.

Finally, in this section of the novel it is clear that Harper intends for her heroine to have a dual function. First, she is an individual working for the betterment of her people. Iola is willing and eager to impart the benefits of her education to the members of the race with which she has chosen to identify. Her genuine affection for John and Linda Salters and their respect for the opinions she offers them, suggest that Harper is steadily molding the heroine for her role as an intellectual leader of the community. Aunt Linda's recognition that educated leadership is necessary in order to strengthen and maintain the cohesiveness of the community is evident when she states that the race needs persons "who'll larn dese people how to bring up dere chillen, to keep our gals straight, an' our boys from runnin in de saloons an 'gamblin' dens" (161).

Though the author allows the heroine to create a bond with the community of newly freed slaves, she draws a definite class distinction between the two. This is implicit in the difference she makes in the speech pattern that each has. Standard English is the language of Iola and her uncle while a black Southern dialect is found in the discourse of the freed persons. Also the fact that the heroine is "amused and interested at the quaintness of speech and the shrewdness of [Aunt Linda's] intellect"

(175) indicates that Harper sets the heroine above the former slaves. Possibly Iola's observations mirror those of the author when she toured the South. Second, the heroine serves as a symbol for the entire race in that her struggles are also theirs. For example her desire to locate and make whole her family is the wish of countless numbers of blacks after the War. The author's development of Iola as a positive representative of the race makes it possible for her to portray the black characters appearing in the novel with basic human dignity. Harper's presentation is in sharp contrast with the characterizations that are visible in contemporary plantation fiction. As a symbol of the individual, the heroine is a statement of the significance of the black woman's role in the development of a strong race. In creating a black protagonist who transcends the minstrel figures of plantation fiction, Harper defines her distinct literary voice.

Though critics have often argued that Harper's Iola Leroy is highly imitative of William Wells Brown's Clotel (the 1864 version) there is a definite distinction between the two works. Both novels recount the story of two beautiful and refined mulatto women who uphold Christian values and who are raised to "the heights of angelic purity" (Christian Black Women Novelist 29). During the

Civil War both characters serve as nurses for the Union army. There are, however, factors that distinguish Harper's voice as a novelist from that of her male contemporary.

While Harper's novel does cover the heroine's life through slavery, the focus of the narrative is on her life during the Reconstruction era, at which time she and other members of the black middle class unite to work for the uplift of the race. Harper's heroine is more committed to the elevation of the race than is Brown's Clotel. In addition, Harper's heroine reflects the writer's concept of finer black womanhood. It is not enough for Iola to be a beautiful, refined Christian woman. She has a New England education and in her adult life she engages in work as a nurse, teacher, sales person, and writer. At the story's end she marries a physician and works within a North Carolina church community planning meetings for mothers and children.

Further, Harper changes the relationship between mulatto women and white men. The white father in Brown's Clotel provides a home for his mulatto mistress and children, but he is no more than a "shadowy figure in their lives" (Lewis 318). In Harper's novel, however, Iola is reared in a home where her mulatto mother, Marie, is married to her Caucasian father. By portraying the

heroine's mother in a respectable role, Harper attempts to shatter the myth that characterizes black women as morally loose. When the author reveals in flashbacks details of Iola's childhood and parentage, the reader discovers that she has grown up as a white girl in a wealthy home surrounded by slaves. In fact, as a wealthy slave holder's daughter, Iola defends the institution because she views her parents as benevolent to their slaves and as for herself, she expresses the mutual love that she and her "mammy" have for one another.

When in her teens Iola discovers that her mother is black and, therefore, she is of African descent, the shock of the revelation distresses her greatly. According to the narrator, "An expression of horror and anguish swept over Iola's face, and, turning deathly pale, . . . almost wild with agony . . . [she] paced the floor as the fearful truth broke in crushing anguish upon her mind" (105). She does not dwell in this depressed state for long. Instead, she changes her opinion of slavery and proudly accepts her new identity. For a brief period she finds herself in bondage suffering the degradations of that status. Before she becomes the victim of rape at the hands of her licentious slavemaster, Iola is rescued and taken to a Union army camp where her beauty, courage, and purity are admired by both white and black men. Harper, in this section of the novel,

points out the sexual peril in which black slave women found themselves. Iola's determination not to be sexually assaulted allows the author again to confront and reconstruct the negative public perception of black women.

Iola's service as a nurse in the Union camp marks the beginning of the author's emphasis on the theme of racial uplift. The narrative tracking of Iola's tireless efforts on behalf of the former slaves is markedly different from that of Brown's Clotel. In focusing the second half of her novel on the heroine's Reconstruction activities, Harper expounds on the significance of the black woman's role in race building. She is also able to challenge a number of myths about blacks that plantation literature of the day promoted. The heroine's work as a nurse in the Union camp, for example, provides the author with the opportunity to comment on the bravery of black soldiers during the war. Also, Iola's visit to the old plantation, which former slaves have transformed into a bustling community, attests to the industrious nature of the newly freed men and women. By the end of the novel, Iola like Clotel, is a symbol of inspiration which encourages seeking higher values; however, Harper's character belongs to a community of black intellectuals committed to self improvement (via literary clubs) and the betterment of fellow blacks (via community services).

Hazel Carby argues that one of the most significant differences between Clotel and Iola Leroy is their intended audiences. The former, she contends, was published as part of a dime novel series entitled "Redpath's Books for the Campfires," printed for the reading pleasure of soldiers during the War. On the other hand, Harper's novel was aimed at both a male and female audience. Her use, however, of the sentimental domestic novel format assured her appeal to a largely female audience (Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood 72). Harper did, indeed, follow the formula of nineteenth-century domestic fiction; however, the differences in purpose between her novel and those of other female romance novelists established her unique literary voice.

Harper's novel, though published in 1892, fits, in a limited fashion, the paradigm Nina Baym develops for women's fiction written between 1820 and 1870. Accordingly, at the center of Iola Leroy, is a young woman, who when her father dies learns that she is the product of an interracial marriage. At this point a greedy cousin, Alfred Lorraine, wishing to inherit her father's wealth, sells Iola, her mother, and her siblings into slavery. This occurs when the heroine is an adolescent. She is without parental guidance and must make her way through life on her own. During this period of her life, the

heroine develops self-awareness. Thus, Iola manages to escape slavery and proceeds successfully to make her way to adulthood, and at the novel's end she marries.

Baym's delineation of the heroine in what she calls "woman's fiction" is gender-centered and fails to take into account the factor of race. The issue of race adds a dimension of complexity to Harper's novel. Iola's new racial identity results in her enslavement, a status causing her not only to be isolated from her family, but also to be separated from the judicial system that has protected her wealth and her person as a white female. The heroine's race also requires that she, as one who has had the benefit of education, work for the uplift of her new racial group.

Psychologically the heroine must also come to terms with her identity as a woman of color. Through the use of dramatic irony, Harper indicates the magnitude of this reality for Iola. In a scene set at her Northern boarding school, Iola defends slavery to the girls in her class. For her the humane way her mother and father treat their slaves justifies the institution's existence. She explains to them that she loves her "mammy as much as . . . [she does her] own mother" (97). The very moment Iola makes this statement her cousin's attorney is plotting her sale into slavery (Chapter XII). When remanded to slavery, she

has to confront the malevolent realities of that institution. Despite the adversity of her new condition, the heroine accepts this fate courageously. On the other hand her sister, Gracie, unable to face the consequences of her new racial identity, dies a tearful melodramatic death. Interestingly, Iola's attitude toward her plight parallels that of Moses in Harper's long narrative verse in that she too must reconcile her past and present in order to emerge with the type of self-knowledge and confidence that will allow her to lead the race toward a productive future.

After Iola escapes from bondage Harper allows her to have a number of experiences that serve to strengthen her link with her new race and, consequently, discover her personal identity. Thus, when the white Union army doctor named Gresham extends a proposal of marriage to the heroine, she refuses because she wants to be able to live openly with the man she marries without having to conceal her identity as her mother had done. Further, opening the school for the newly emancipated blacks and interacting with the people on the old Gundover plantation allows Iola to become deeply involved with her racial family and simultaneously learn more about herself. From these experiences she realizes that her mission in life is to be a servant to her race.

When Iola is finally reunited with her mother, Marie, and her brother Harry, she has become a self assured young woman who is proud of her racial heritage. Both mother and brother are aware of her transformation. Harry tells his sister "You used to be the most harum-scarum girl I ever knew—laughing, dancing and singing from morning until night" (195). She has matured; however, her growth is not complete.

When Iola goes North to live with her maternal Grandmother and her Uncle Robert, the growth process continues. She decides to take a job as a sales clerk, not out of financial necessity, but based on her belief that women should know how to earn their own living. Despite the proficiency she displays in her work, she loses two jobs when it is discovered that she is black. Harper, in this section of the novel (Chapter XXIV), presents two major ideas that have appeared in her speeches and in other literary works. Often from the speaker's platform the author has expressed the frustrations that black women experience when their employment options and opportunities are limited because of race. Eventually Iola finds employment as a private nurse and then as a sales person in the home and business establishment of a white gentleman who apologizes for the behavior of other Northern whites who have denied her a means of earning a livelihood due to

her race. The author aims, in this scene (Chapter XXIV), to dramatize the type of behavior that the white community should exhibit.

In addition, the contention about women and work links the novel to Harper's oral presentations. The heroine does not view a woman's ultimate purpose in life as marriage. In fact, to her uncle and mother, she asserts "that every woman should have some skill or art which would insure her at least a comfortable support" (210). If work "among women" were "honored", she states, there would be fewer "unhappy marriages" (210). Thus, when Iola meets Dr. Latimer, they are not drawn together due to a physical attraction, but because their

> kindred hopes and tastes had knit their hearts; grand and noble purposes were lighting up their lives . . . [and they were] on the threshold of a new era and labor for those who had passed from the old oligarchy of slavery into the new commonwealth of freedom. (271)

Harper, in allowing Iola's marriage to Latimer to be a partnership based on common intellectual pursuits and goals, avoids the patriarchal trappings of marriage as an institution that brings women under the protecting arms of a husband. Harper, like the writers of "woman's fiction," avoids a sexual focus in delineating the male female

relationship. Attractions "other than lust" (Baym 26) motivate the relationships. Seduction in the novel comes as a result of Iola and Dr. Latimer's noble admiration for one another. It must be remembered also that Harper's audience includes Sunday school youths. Implication of the sexual in nineteenth-century society is not acceptable.

Finally, the author presents to her female reader a number of portraits of black women that point to the dignity of the group. Through the characterization of Iola, Harper's literary voice gives a model of finer black womanhood. In Marie and Harriet, Iola's mother and grandmother, the author describes two generations of slave mothers who are separated from their children but whose love fuels their determination to be united with their offspring. Aunt Linda represents the newly freed woman, who, though uneducated, understands what is needed to move the race forward. On the other end of the spectrum is Lucille Delany, a young black college graduate, who contributes to racial elevation through operating a school for women. She views training the future mothers of the race as crucial for its development. Further, the varied employment experiences that the women of the novel have, provide the female audience with models for their own lives.

Harper's novel is a gloss of the author's ethical and moral philosophies. Through literature she voices the political and social needs of her race and suggests possible solutions for the problems that plague it. In the final chapters of the novel there is a concentration on the role that the black intellectual should assume in the process of uplifting the race. Iola is an integral part of a literary society composed of men and women who are concerned with the progress of the race. They come together to discuss those issues essential to race building. The black intelligentsia (Dubois a decade later would call this group "The Talented Tenth"), Harper believes, are crucial to the survival of the race.

Despite the fact that by 1892 Harper was approaching age seventy, she continued to lecture and write (up to the time of her death in 1911). The only extant oratorical text that remains is an address she presented in May 1893 to the World's Congress of Representative women which convened in Chicago as part of the Columbian Exposition. The purpose of this forum was to display the achievements of the Americas. Advancements of American women were highlighted in a building designed by a female architect. Frederick Douglass presided over the Haitian exhibit. He, in 1889 had been appointed the American minister to the

island. Black Americans, however, had not been invited to participate in the affair.

Black women's organizations attempted to have a delegate represent them on the board of Lady Managers of the World's Congress of Representative Women, but their requests were refused. The board did, however, invite six black women to address the women delegates. Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Jackson Copper, Sarah J. Early, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper each presented a message about the social and political desires of black women.

Harper, the last of the six women to speak, delivered an address entitled "Woman's Political Future." To this largely white female audience she expressed the same sentiments that she had presented to the Woman's Right Convention of 1866. She tells them that they are "stand[ing] on the threshold of [a] woman's era" (433-34) and, therefore, they must prepare themselves to take on the responsibilities of their political future. The speaker asserts to the group that giving women the vote is not going to cure "the ills of our national life" (434). She also proclaims that she does "not believe in unrestricted and universal suffrage for either men or women" (435). According to Harper, what the country needs "is not simply more voters, but better voters." She explains that she

would like to see a literate, moral and just electorate made up of both males and females. She further states that Southern lynchers should be imprisoned rather than allowed to vote.

Harper makes it clear to the women that she does not believe that their feminine nature raises them above men. She states, "It is not through sex but through character that the best influence of women upon the life of the nation must be exerted" (435). Further, she tells them that preparation for obtaining the power of the ballot requires that women

> create a healthy public sentiment;
> . . . demand justice, as the right of
> every race, . . . brand with
> everlasting infamy the lawless and
> brutal cowardice that lynches, burns,
> and tortures your own countrymen.
> (437)

Appearances before the Congress of Representative Women placed Harper and the other black speakers in a precarious situation. Her ambiguous role as part of the politics of white women worked to her advantage. In this contradictory position she could voice frankly the frustrations of her race, as well as the responsibility that women must exercise when they gain the ballot. She

voiced the desire among black women for simple justice and the need for the country to develop a moral conscience; and, above all, she was able to call the body's attention to the bigotry within its own ranks.

The frustrations middle class black women who, like Harper, were excluded from the governing process of those women's organizations, gave impetus to the black women's club movement. In 1896 Harper, along with other veteran social activists such as Harriet Tubman and a number of other younger black females, met in Washington, D.C., and formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). When in 1897 the group met in Nashville, Tennessee, Harper was elected as one of its vice-presidents. At the second convention held in Chicago in August 1899, she delivered an address on "Racial Literature." She was able to establish firmly her literary voice as an advocate of women's concerns. In doing so, she redefined the ideology of the cult of true womanhood to include the experiences of black women. Consequently, she created a "feminist" canon that dispelled the myth of the ideal woman and instead presented the complexity and variety that were encompassed in the term womanhood. Her works urged women to be thoughtful, independent, moral, and strong. Simultaneously, she encouraged her female audience to cultivate those qualities that made them truly feminine.

Despite Harper's progressive attitudes towards women's rights and racial justice and equality, she was conservative in the area of morality. Developing and maintaining high moral character in both women and men, she believed, would lead the nation toward a greater tolerance of human differences. It is, therefore, not surprising that she would find the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) appealing. Especially she was concerned that blacks avoid indulging in alcoholic drink. She viewed it as detrimental to race building. Thus, her support of the WCTU was a part of her crusade for racial uplift and, consequently, she penned literary works to further those efforts.

CHAPTER IV

LITERARY VOICE OF SOCIAL GOSPEL

Frances E. W. Harper's tour of the South after the Civil War allowed her to view first hand the needs of the newly freed people. It was her belief that a strong black community needed to have as its foundation a stable family unit living in accord with Christian principles. One of the primary threats to that structure, and ultimately to race building, according to the writer, was moral intemperance, especially that of the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Even though the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a white female organization, Harper found its Protestant-based Christian philosophy appealing and much needed in the black community.

Before and after her official affiliation with the group, Harper used both her literary and forensic voices to promote the temperance philosophy. The extant literary pieces that are singly about temperance are fewer than those written in connection with slavery and women's suffrage. It is ironic that her moral writing would call so dubiously for an absolute law abolishing the social use of alcohol, thereby placing a limit on individual freedom of choice, an ideal for which she had long struggled. The

stirring tensions within her literary voice derive from the conflicts over Christian morality and the right of individual freedom. A number of the literary works previously discussed, however, do touch on the temperance issue. This factor attests to the interrelation between the three movements--temperance, abolition, and women's suffrage.

The WCTU was founded in 1874, and its membership was strictly composed of white females. The group's primary objective was to work for the enactment for public temperance laws. When in 1879 Frances Willard became president of the organization a link between women's equality and the domestic agenda of the temperance platform was forged. Recent historical research by feminist scholars has revealed the far reaching significance of the WCTU to the political life of women in the nineteenth-century. Willard, according to biographer Ruth Bordin, used "the doctrine of the domestic spheres to move women into public life" (9).

A large number of women were not ready to embrace the women's suffrage movement and viewed the home as the primary source of their power. Willard, therefore, maintained in the forefront of WCTU activities and objectives the sanctity of the "home and [of] womanliness" (Bordin 10), while simultaneously moving women toward

gaining the ballot. Because drinking outside the home was exclusively a male activity, temperance became for women a symbol for protecting the values of the hearth. In addition, Frances Willard understood well that before the law men, drunk or sober, and women were not equal. The drunken husband "became a powerful symbol of women's powerlessness and of the insignificance attached to the domestic sphere in public policy" (Mayer 2:1447). Thus, under Willard's direction the WCTU was a forum from which women could work to transform their moral view into public policy, call for the right to vote, and participate in a wide range of charitable causes.

Frances Harper, in an essay of 1888 entitled "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman," chronicles her own compact in the 1870s and that of other black women with the organization. She explains that for some time she had respected the objectives of the organization but she "was not sure that colored comradeship was desirable" (314) in its ranks. Harper, however, decided to attend a local union meeting in Philadelphia and there she was extended membership. Shortly thereafter she was appointed city and later state superintendent of colored work. Further, she states that by 1881 the work among colored people became a separate department of the national WCTU handled by Mrs. Jane N. Kerney, and in 1883

Mrs. Harper succeeded her (Daniel 32). Harper was the first black woman to serve on the "Executive Committee or Board of Superintendents" (Harper 314). By 1888 there were "two colored women on the Executive Committee and two on the Board of Superintendents" (Harper "The WCTU and the Colored Woman" 314).

For Harper, interest in the temperance issue did not begin with her official membership in the WCTU in the 1870s. Among blacks this moral reform topic held significance as early as 1788 when the Free African Society of Philadelphia refused membership to persons who had a drinking habit (Quarles 93). In 1830 the delegates to the national Negro convention, and every convention thereafter, opposed the use of liquor. At the second annual convention the Coloured American Conventional Temperance Society was authorized to operate as an arm of the Negro convention. Most of these organizations did not extend membership to women and therefore black females formed "The Daughters of Temperance." The significant factor surrounding the temperance reform in the black community was its tie to the abolitionist movement.

The fact that William Watkins zealously advocated of various moral reform efforts, including temperance, indicates that Frances had formulated some opinions about the subject before 1870. Thematically Harper's literary

works before and after joining the WCTU espouse the philosophy of the group, that is that drink is destructive to the family and to the nation. She did in some works aim her message directly at the black community; however, most of the works are addressed to a broad audience. An explanation of this can be found in the essay cited above, "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman," in which she writes that intemperance is "not simply an enemy of one race, but an enemy to all races . . . upheld by fashion, custom and legislation" (313). For this reason the characters in her temperance verses, with the exception of one, are not racially identified. This poem, entitled "The Drunkard's Child," identifies the central figure as a white male.

Since the world of drinking was a male preserve that existed outside the home, the primary subjects of Harper's verse are men. The negative impact of their imbibing on the members of the family is one of the major issues treated. It is usually the death or distress of a child that causes the alcoholic to reform. Also, the poet examines the implications of drinking on the public good and on the survival of the nation. These poems, like the ones discussed in previous chapters, are narrative poems written in ballad rhyme scheme or in rhymed couplets. The temperance works are far more sentimental, didactic, and

melodramatic than the verses discussed in preceding chapters. Deaths of children and the tremendous suffering of women associated with the alcoholic were meant to tug at the heartstrings of the audience. The primary strength of these poems rests in the author's ability to describe realistically the incidents and the physical toll that alcohol takes on the human body.

The poet's earliest extant volume of verse, Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects (1854) contains one writing, "The Drunkard's Child," about the issue. The poem consists of five eight-line stanzas in which every other line rhymes. It narrates the story of a father who is steered away from drinking as the result of seeing his "first-born die" (8). Harper describes the drunkard's physical condition as he attends the death bed of his son. The father goes to the boy's bed with a "staggering tread." In a "reeling" motion he takes the hand of his dying son. His inebriated state over the years causes his face to be bloated and his eyes to be "bloodshot." They hold "A vague, unmeaning stare" (9). The child's joy of seeing his father one last time, including his inquiry as to whether he and his father will meet in heaven, touches the drunkard's "callous heart." Guilt for neglecting his son and the boy's faith cause the father to want to reform.

Harper in this poem attributes the death of the child to the father's drinking. She sacrifices the innocent and highly moral boy's life so that the father can live to repent. The poet's delineation of the drunkard's physical condition is realistic, and it is juxtaposed to the pathetic condition of the dying boy in order to make the reader intolerant of the alcoholic. It is not until the poem's end that Harper racially identifies the character of the poem as white. In describing the dead child she states:

> The marble brow, with golden curls,
> Lay lifeless on his breast;
> Like sunbeams on the distant clouds
> Which line the gorgeous west. (10)

This researcher is unable to speculate why the earliest poem (1854) written during her abolitionist period does specifically identify the race of the characters. Possibly this poem appeared first in her first volume, Forest Leaves, which is now lost which contained works the young writer penned while under the influence of her white employers, the Armstrongs.

Accurately dating the poems Harper wrote about temperance is difficult due to the unavailability of various editions of each volume of poetry. It is clear, however, that the poems composed on the subject after the

Civil War are far more political than the one, discussed above. Three verses, "Save the Boys," "Nothing and Something," and "Singing the Pledge," according to Frances Foster, appeared in the edition of Sketches of Southern Life for 1886.

The male narrator in "Save the Boys" pleads with the public to take action to prevent the young men of the nation from following his fate as an alcoholic. The narrator realizes that he "cannot break [the] fearful spell" (140) of his addiction, nor can anyone save him "from [his] fate." But it is possible, he states, "to save the boys" (140). Persons, the speaker explains, have asked him to "break [this] fiery chain [and] / Arise and be a man again" (140). This for him is impossible because "every street with snares is spread, . . . [with] nets of sin wher'er" (140). There was a time in his youth when his now "sin-crushed heart was glad and light, / But by the wine-cup's ruddy glow" he has placed himself in a degraded state. He calls on the public to remove from their streets the "traps of hell." Further, he advises "freemen" to use their vote to ban liquor from society. He also admonishes those who would "license men to trade / In draughts that charm and then degrade" (140) to hear the cry to ban the sale of alcohol in order to "save the boys."

Clearly this poem indicates that Harper's moral view of temperance has taken on a political dimension. The poet has a particular interest in children and it is apparent that she is placing the responsibility for a wholesome environment for rearing children not only on parents, but on the American public. Harper suggests that when a man becomes an alcoholic it is too late to intervene. Consequently, she makes suggestions to the men of the nation concerning what they can do to save the boys from this fate in manhood.

Another poem contained within the same volume as "Save the Boys" is "Nothing and Something." The poem, as its title suggests, points out that the significance of a situation is relative to the contributing factors of time and space. The poet indicates how a number of people within society are affected by those who drink. The female narrator recounts how six individuals viewed drinking as nothing and after experiencing the problems associated with this activity view the problem as something. A young woman does not see her male companion's drinking as problematic until after she marries him. She is then "drenched with burning tears" (141) and suffers the "grief and dread" of living with an alcoholic. The self righteous mother who prides herself on rearing her son properly is shocked when he "From the path of right was early won" (141). Then

there is the proud young man who does not heed the warnings against imbibing. His life and that of his wife and child are destroyed when his drinking results in his imprisonment. The merchant who does not want to take the time to hear about the cause of temperance is affected when his wife and child are killed in a train accident due to the carelessness of a drunken conductor. Finally, the voter who elects officials that will do nothing to ban liquor must watch the suffering of his daughter who is married to an alcoholic. Problems resulting from alcohol consumption have come full cycle, the poet suggests, and every individual must take some responsibility for a moral resolution of the situation. In the last stanza the narrator calls on all citizens to band together against the politics and the immorality of liquor.

This poem, like the one preceding it, has both a political and moral bent. Through cataloging consequences of indifference, the poet presents the impact that alcohol has on the entire nation. Men and women suffer the degradation that results from problem drinking, she avows.

The only other temperance poem edition of Sketches of Southern Life for 1886 is "Signing the Pledge." In this work the male narrator describes how the "tempting cup" brought to him "A World of shame and woe" (145). According to the speaker, his love of alcohol causes his wife,

mother, and son much sorrow and grief. Because he has caused such pain in his home he decides "to grasp / The gospel and the pledge" (147). The final stanza of the poem indicates that the poet is aware of the complexity associated with an alcohol addiction. The speaker realizes that merely signing the pledge will not cure his problem. He realizes that he will need divine help to conquer it.

The 1889 edition of Moses: A Story of the Nile includes "Ragged Stockings" and "The Fatal Pledge." In the first poem a male narrator recounts tearfully the story of his victory over his addiction to alcohol. The current happy status of his home did not exist when he was drinking. At that time, he explains, his home was a miserable place. This state was reversed one Christmas Eve night when he witnessed the happiness of other parents as they bought gifts for their children. That night he goes home sober and places, in the ragged sock that his son has hung on the mantle, the small amount of money from his pocket. It is this sock that "Is linked with [his] soul's deliverance / From the bondage of the bowl" (69). The sock, therefore, he views as more valuable than all the material things he owns. The poet seems to suggest in this poem that dependence on alcohol can only lead to poverty.

Her narrator explains that after ridding himself of the alcohol dependency he achieves wealth.

"The Fatal Pledge" warns women not to encourage the men in their lives to drink. Harper's sensitivity to the difficulty that staying sober poses to the recovering alcoholic is apparent in this work. The opening lines of the poem come from the voice of a young maiden who requests that her suitor "Pledge me with wine" (69). The young man, who has once given up the bottle, is unable to maintain his grasp on "the reigns of self-control" and takes a drink. Never is he able to resist a drink "his affianced bride" offers him (70). Consequently, her complicity in his drinking weaves for both of them an unhappy life. When the young man dies as a result of his drinking, the woman is left alone to bear the guilt of her husband's death.

This poem, like no other that has been discussed, places the responsibility for the husband's addiction squarely on the shoulders of the wife. Harper's description of the young wife parallels that of Eve. Metaphorically the cup of wine she offers her husband seductively is analogous to "the serpent" whose "hiss" the young man never heard. Nor does he see "the ruby glow [of] / The deadly adder's hiss" (70). Harper seems to be advising women to adhere to the traditional role of wife in matters of morality, especially when relevant to intemperance.

The poem "A Little Child Shall Lead Them" appears in the author's self-published volume The Sparrow's Fall and Other Poems circa 1894. The poem, whose tale is taken from a New Testament text, is meant to be a tribute to the work of the young people of the Loyal Temperance Legion, the youth arm of the WCTU. In this poem Harper uses a woman's voice to narrate the incident which has moved her husband to reform his drinking habit. The implied setting is that of a wake in honor of the speaker's young daughter. According to the mother, "the blue badge of the Loyal Legions" (182) has been placed on the dead child's "breast" in honor of the her work on behalf of the temperance cause. Both the narrator and her daughter, she says, have attempted "to save" the father, but they have failed. When, however, the wife apprises her husband of the meaning of this little blue band he is moved to reform. In fact, he removes the band from her chest and lays "it on a chair." Subsequently, all the men in the room are "by drink deluded" to kneel "on that badge in prayer" (182). This one little badge, states the narrator, causes the room of men to promise to "abstain." For the speaker "this scrap of blue has "changed [her] sad and gloomy home / From darkness into light" (182).

Harper attempts to show the moral power associated with the Youth section of the WCTU. The dead child's

badge, which is symbolic of her allegiance to the cause, moves her father and his drinking companions to give up their immoral ways. The poet's failure to construct an effective metaphor which develops the themes that the innocence of childhood has the ability to lead men toward goodness weakens the work. The human element, the power of the child's innocence and the untimeliness of her death, is lost and the material symbol of the organization, the blue ribbon, becomes the catalyst that motivates the change. Unlike the fathers in the poems discussed above, whose altered behavior results from their love for their children, the man in this work is moved by the blue ribbon. Consequently, the poem becomes a tribute to the symbol instead of to the efforts of the youth. In addition, the theme fails due to the narrative voice. The mother does not recount the child's emotions concerning her father's habit, nor does she impart to the reader the child's role as a guide for the sinner. The mother's own feelings, however, about her husband's alcoholic condition and her needs as a wife are clearly delineated. Harper's attempt to honor the children does not work.

While the temperance poetry lacks the authenticity of dramatic situation, the essays written in connection with her work of the kind are far more effective. The proselythetic nature of the poetry contributes to its lack

of effectiveness as literature. On the other hand, the three extant essays are less didactic. They document the history of the WCTU, especially black women's affiliation with that group. Current research on the WCTU (Bordin 1981, 1987; Blocker 1985, 1989) has overlooked the black presence in the organization and especially its role in galvanizing black interest.

In 1888 Harper submitted to the AME Church Review an article "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman." The author in the first half of the essay presents a brief history of the organization and her own association with the group. She describes her pioneer status in this white female organization and encourages other black women to join her in working for the "overthrow" of the enemy of the entire nation. Since the men of the race have the right to vote, they, she states, should use the ballot to elect individuals representing the temperance cause.

Harper does not deny that racism exists within the organization. She explains to potential members that

> some of the members of different Unions have met the question [of race] in a liberal and Christian manner; others have not seemed to have fully outgrown the old shards and shells of the past as

> to make the distinction between Christian affiliation and social equality. (314)

Despite this problem she urges black women to declare war on the enemy of their homes.

Further, she explains that through the Union black women, such as those associated with the group in St. Louis, have been able to engage in other charitable work. The St. Louis group, according to the writer, has established "an asylum for colored children." In order to appeal to the middle class black woman, Harper states that the St. Louis group has "gathered into its association seventeen school teachers, . . . [and it] comprises some of the best brains and heart of the race in the city" (315). Harper gives accounts of other work for the Union "among the colored people" throughout the country.

In the final portion of the essay the author issues black women a call to join in "moral warfare" on behalf of "an imperiled civilization" (316). She again appeals to black men to use their vote to help stamp out the liquor traffic. Finally, she implores black women to join the Union and use their influence within the home to "plant batteries against rum traffic" (316).

In 1889 the AME Church Review published the essay "National Woman's Christian Temperance Union" in which Harper reports on her work during the past year as the

"Superintendent of Colored Work" (242). The superintendent of colored work presents a summary from a number of white state superintendents reporting on the work of the black organizations. The reports reflect that racism remains a problem; however, black women seem to be using the unions they form to further their own social interests. Harper states that "Where there is an active WCTU . . . the interests of the colored people are looked after" (243). A hindrance to black women organizing, she writes, is the pressure liquor interests place on "husbands and brothers." These men are sometimes threatened with the loss of their jobs "if their wives go into the WCTU" (243).

Though Harper is enthusiastic about her work with the Temperance Union, her discussion of her department's financial relationship to the national organization reveals that she is frustrated with the lack of support, but indeed proud that black women are self-sufficient. Of the financial arrangement she writes "I have neither asked, that I remember, nor received any pecuniary aid at any time from the National Union since I have been superintendent of this department" (242). The only assistance she has received from headquarters she states is "some circular." Operating funds for her work, according to Harper, have come from various unions that "have been clear-sighted

enough to 'lend a hand' . . . at present [she states] my department is paying its own expenses" (242).

According to Theodora Daniel, Harper ended her work with the WCTU in 1890 (32). This is possible because in 1890, historian Ruth Bordin states, the Department of Colored Work was allowed to lapse, but was again reinstated in 1893. There is no report from Harper in the AME Church Review of 1890. In 1891, however, she, along with other women, submits an article under the major title "Symposium-Temperance." In this article she again calls on women and men to declare war on the liquor interests. To her audience she describes four of the most powerful weapons that can be used in the ensuing battle. First, she urges them to consecrate themselves to God to gain the will "to devote time, talent, energy and money" to defeat the "evil which debauches politics, defiles the home and demoralizes man and woman" (374). Next Harper calls on mothers to educate the children against the evil of drink. The third weapon she summons her audience to use is agitation. Black women are encouraged to "clasp the hands" of white women in order to present a united force against the liquor supporters. Should white women refuse the comradeship of their black sisters, Harper advises them to "fight without them" (375). Finally, she urges the male segment of her

audience to use their right to vote against liquor issues and politicians who support "rum traffic."

The final nine lines of the essay are particularly interesting in that Harper links to temperance the issues of lynching and black politics. The large number of black lynchings after the War was of deep interest to Harper and this was reflected in nearly every essay or printed oratorical text composed after the War. Of the extant essays on temperance this is the only one addressing the issue. Harper directs the last lines specifically to the black male voter. His right of enfranchisement, she asserts, demands that he use the ballot wisely and in the commission of God's work. She then strongly implores the black man not to underestimate the significance of his electoral power: "do not think when colored men are still murdered, lynched and even burned for real or supposed crimes that our work is done, and that there is no such need for us except as appendages to some political party or faction" (375). For blacks party loyalty and affiliation is not as important as is casting the ballot for justice and morality, she avows.

Harper's remarks in this section of the essay could very well be a response to Frances Willard's political plan for the WCTU. During the late 1880s Willard attempted to align the WCTU with the Prohibitionist party, which usually

gained its support at the expense of the Republican party. In the early 1890s she endeavored to establish a major reform party resulting from a union between the Populist and Prohibitionist party. Both of her excursions into the national political arena failed (Bordin Woman and Temperance 123-133).

For Harper, political party loyalty did not rest in any one camp. Since the Republicans had emancipated the slaves, she was more supportive of their political agenda. While touring the South she suggested to blacks that they join the Republican party; however, she advised them not to place total confidence in any party since "all politicians are men and work for themselves" (Daniel 31). In the final lines of the temperance essay she advises the black man "not to patch up old political parties . . . [nor create] a third party" but to "vote as a Christian" (Harper 375).

The implications of the final lines of Harper's essay alluded to the rising number of lynchings of blacks in the South. The WCTU when Harper's article appeared had not taken a stand against lynching primarily because Frances Willard did not want to offend the Southern constituents of the organization. When in 1893 the WCTU issued an anti-lynching statement its language was soft. Willard herself condemned lynching while simultaneously supporting the practice in rationalizing that it resulted from black men's

raping of white women (Bordin Biography 216). Harper gently reminded her temperance audience of the severity of the problem.

Shortly after the essay was published Harper's friend, Ida B. Wells, took the WCTU leadership to task for its insensitivity to lynching. By 1895 Wells's anti-lynching campaign had resulted in international embarrassment for Willard. Wells informed her English audience of Willard's duplicitous attitude toward the subject, and she produced a Southern newspaper interview to prove her accusations. In the interview the temperance leader blamed blacks for the defeat of some temperance legislation, and she comments that "The Colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt, [and] the grogshop is its center of power. . . . The safety of women, of childhood, of the home is menaced in a thousand localities" (Gidding 91).

One can only speculate that Harper's official divorce from the WCTU in the 1890s reflects her frustration with the organization's racial policy. When she did work with in the group, she did so earnestly and with great zeal because she believed in the principles it espoused. A strong moral philosophy motivated her efforts on the part of the organization. When she could no longer work within the group, she took the advice that she had given black women in the essay of 1891, "fight without them." This is

evident in her novel of 1892, which reflects her promotion of the temperance cause. Iola and Robert give Aunt Linda a lecture on the evil of alcoholic beverages. Upon returning to her home after the church meeting, Aunt Linda offers her guests "a cup of home-made wine" (185). Robert refuses on the grounds that he is "a temperance man." A line from the temperance article of 1891 is Iola's reason for rejecting the libation: "Aunt Linda . . . the Bible says that the wine at least will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder" (185). They encourage the old woman to let her wine turn to vinegar and sign the temperance pledge. Iola explains to Aunt Linda that keeping the wine around only serves to encourage John's dependence on drink. Harper's heroine imparts to the newly freed woman a lesson on spousal responsibility for defining the moral atmosphere of the home.

Harper continued lecturing about temperance after 1890; as late as 1896 she is said to have delivered a temperance address in Charlotte, North Carolina (Daniel 32). Her personal voice for the cause of temperance was indeed a strong one; however, her poetic voice for this cause does not have the literary merit of the works written in association with the other reform movements. Proselytizing is the only aim of the temperance poetry. The effort that attends literary innovation and stylistic

distinction of the abolitionist verse is absent from these poems. On the other hand, the essays, even though two of them are reports, are typical of the writer's clear and strong prose style. The literary merit of the essays rests in the complexity of the author's simple style. What is seemingly a straightforward presentation of facts about the WCTU "work among colored people," reveals the racial tension that permeates the large religious based organization.

In addition, Harper's literary voice in the essays is similar to the voices of American writers two centuries before, such as Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Paine, in that she, like they, is able to transform her philosophy and conviction into striking images and language that appeal to persons of all intellectual strata. Finally, these essays are invaluable for twentieth-century feminist historians whose research includes the WCTU. Current research about the organization does not give an accurate accounting of black women's involvement in that organization.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

When Iola, the heroine of Frances Harper's novel, entertained the idea of producing a literary composition that would be "of lasting service to the race[,]" she mirrored the thoughts that the youthful Harper contemplated and which she then embraced as a professional career. Because Harper used her creative abilities and her financial and physical wherewithal to serve humanity, scholars have painted her as an extraordinary woman whose life found its very essence rooted in promoting the cause of human justice. Both Harper and her contemporary biographer and friend, William Still, repressed the intimate personal details of the author's life. Perhaps the facts might have provided researchers with a clearer vision of the private woman. Instead, Still and Harper freely made available for public scrutiny only that information pertinent to her reform work, especially her affiliation with the abolitionist movement. It can be speculated that the author did not wish her audience to focus on her personal life but on the political and social issues that she raised in her works.

Because the subjects of a large number of her works are related to her reform activities, one might be tempted to conclude that these writings should be classified only as propaganda literature for those causes. This indeed would be an erroneous deduction and would minimize Mrs. Harper's value to American literary history. Thus, to answer the question posed in Chapter I, as to whether Harper sacrificed her literary voice to deliver the messages of public reform movements, is complex. Her literary voice is a public one in the sense that it does not totally reflect the intimacy of her inner self. Through detached narrative voices in the poetry and fiction, Harper expresses her most deeply held philosophical beliefs and concerns. And even though the texts of her essays and speeches recount the author's personal experiences on behalf of various reform organizations and her own opinions, they likewise maintain that same narrative distance. The philosophy that permeates the reformist segment of her canon leads to the obvious conclusion that Harper's literary voice was a public one. This, however, does not suggest that these works lack an aesthetic quality. It was her intent to produce literary works grounded in an aesthetic (sometimes literature functions to entertain and instruct) that

allowed her to serve the political and social needs of her race, her gender, and her own moral conscience.

When the abolition of slavery was the subject of her works, Harper was able to condemn effectively the institution through her realistic recreation of slave life. Portraits of individual slave characters with varied experiences and ranges of emotions populate her poetry. Her public voice on this issue is different from that of her white male counterparts in that she approaches the subject with a greater sensitivity. The fact that she also experimented with various literary forms and literary devices attests to the significance she placed on producing works that had artistic merit. She had a touch for allegory, for supernatural metaphor. Consequently, her public voice did not undermine her artistic worth.

Frances Harper's interest in writing about matters specific to gender did not begin its evolution with her affiliation with the American Woman's Suffrage Association. A great number of her works about slavery addressed various situations in the female slaves' life. These works firmly established her "feminist" literary voice that aggressively redefined the ideology of the cult of true womanhood to include the experiences of black women. In so doing, she discouraged the notion of the ideal woman and thereby illuminated the diversity that the term womanhood embodied.

This liberal notion of womanhood accompanies the writer's conservative encouragement that women cultivate those qualities that make them truly feminine. The fact that Harper voices the concerns of women does not compromise the merit of her work. Within her literature appears a fascinating chronicle of the social and political ironies of nineteenth-century black womanhood.

Finally, the works Harper composed while actively involved with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union lacked the controlled public voice displayed in the works of abolitionism and women's suffrage. The sole purpose of these last poetic works was to win souls from the clutches of the "demon run." On the other hand, the essays Harper wrote in connection with WCTU activities present an account of black female participation within the "colored branches" of the organization. These works are more artistic, reminiscent of those prose pieces written in the early and middle years of her career. So unobtrusively, they reveal the irony of the racial bigotry accepted within the mainstream group.

Penning literature to advance the causes of politics and society certainly did not begin with Frances Harper. She subscribed to Sir Philip Sidney's aesthetic philosophy that literature should function to entertain and instruct the audience. Further, she followed a long tradition of

English and American male writers such as the Thomases, Norton and Sackville (Gorboduc), Jonathan Swift ("A Modest Proposal"), Jonathan Edwards ("Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and Thomas Paine (Common Sense), who sought to effect some sort of change while pleasing audiences. Through the use of their own voices or through literary devices such as the satirical mask, these writers present their political and social views. But the approach is at once one of artistic quality and social consciousness.

With the same aim and intensity as the writers listed above, Harper established and expanded her career as an artist. She viewed the reform issues, including the abolition of slavery, women's rights, and temperance, as vital to the very moral survival of the nation. It is not surprising then that her view of the function of literature would reflect that of Sidney as opposed to that of art for art's sake.

Through her works Harper transmitted powerful experiences to contemporary audiences and significant historical information to succeeding generations. It is evident from the reported book sales her audience understood and appreciated her aesthetic philosophy. For the twentieth century student and academician, the study of her works allows for the convergence of the study of literature with the social and political history of nineteenth-century

America. Even more significant, my work allows the twentieth century reader to analyze the author's works along with those of other female writers of the period, such a Harriet Stowe and Alice Cary, and with those of more familiar male writers who composed during the same era. For example, Harper's themes and characterizations, especially those associated with her abolitionist works can be examined with Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Melville's "Benito Cereno" and Walt Whitman's "Preface to Leaves of Grass." In addition, any one of Harper's antislavery addresses can be read along with Henry David Thoreau's address, "Slavery in Massachusetts: An Address, Delivered at the Anti-Slavery Celebration at Framingham, July 4th, 1854." Frances Harper made a significant impact on American literary history.

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APPENDIX

A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY OF FRANCES E. W. HARPER

Nineteenth-century America teemed with activities generated by numerous political and social reform movements. Women, one of the largest disfranchised groups in the country at that time, took advantage of this climate of reform to move gingerly from their traditional sphere, the home, to active involvement in the public arena. Women began to speak out and take positions on issues which concerned the social, political, and moral well being of themselves, their country, and their families. The antislavery movement, the temperance movement, and the women's suffrage movement provided nineteenth-century women with organized forums from which to voice publicly their ideas on issues plaguing their society. The membership of these organizations was not exclusively made up of white females. A number of black female intellectuals joined these reform organizations and carried out their duties within the black community and on the national level. It should be noted that a number of the national reform organizations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the women's suffrage movement, did not readily allow black participation at the national level, and when blacks were allowed access, it was limited to a few well-known individuals. For the most part,

African-American women worked to reform a nation through "colored branches" of the organizations. This duality provoked much discussion among white women in these groups because they found it difficult to resolve the conflict that existed between their public commitment to reform the political and moral habits of a nation and their private determination to prevent ethnic intermingling.

Black women, like their white female counterparts, used these movements to work toward the social, political, and moral betterment of themselves, their country, their families, and their race. Within reform groups, women of color found platforms from which they could express the grave plight of both the free and the enslaved black in America. These women used written and oral media to place the circumstances of their race before white American audiences and before audiences of the entire western world.

The subject of this study, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911), was one of these women. As an orator and as a writer of poetry and prose, Harper sought to move the white American consciousness toward a politically equitable and moral solution to the burning issues of slavery and racial discrimination in America. Because Harper was a highly skilled and stylized orator, she was afforded the opportunity to carry her message of political emancipation for blacks and women, and the moral elevation

of mankind, to racially mixed audiences throughout the country. Such organizations as the Universal Peace Union, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the antislavery and abolitionist movement, the American Women Suffrage Association and many other social organizations benefited from her active participation. This study examines her extant literary works as they reflect her involvement with the antislavery movement, the women's right movement, and the temperance movement. About these three movements Harper composed the majority of her works.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spent her life laboring to alleviate the political and social ills that plagued the least powerful persons in nineteenth-century American society. Among those who benefited from her social activism were blacks, both enslaved and free, women, children, and the elderly. Her commitment to reform American social ills was a legacy passed down to her by her uncle, Rev. William Watkins of Baltimore, Maryland. Under his tutelage Frances and her cousin William J. Watkins were instilled with values that mandated that educated blacks work for the "uplift" of the least fortunate of the race.

Frances Ellen Watkins was born on September 24, 1825, in Baltimore, Maryland. The biographical literature and the extant public records contain only a small amount of information about her early life. It is from William

Still's 1871 work The Underground Railroad that Harper scholars derive most of what is known about the writer's early life. According to Still, she was born of free parentage, and she was orphaned before she reached the age of three. Responsibility for the young girl's care was placed in the hands of an aunt (784). Still does not provide the names of her parents or that of her caretaker aunt. He does, however, name William Watkins as the uncle responsible for her education (784). To date no Harper scholar has been able to identify conclusively by name the author's parents. From what Still writes, it can only be speculated that young Frances grew up in the home of her uncle, William Watkins, and his wife, the former Henrietta Russell, and she attended the Watkins Academy, a school her uncle operated for the education of free blacks. In what seems to be a deliberately vague summary of her genealogy, Still remarks:

> Thus she fell into the hand of an aunt, who watched over her during these early helpless years. Rev. William Watkins, an uncle, taught school in Baltimore for free colored children, to which she was sent until she was about thirteen years of age. (784)

Professor Frances Smith Foster, in the introduction to her anthology of Harper's works, entitled A Brighter Coming

Day, suggests that Still does not dwell on Harper's parentage, especially her father, because there was a possibility that he could have been white. Omitting this fact would have been necessary, according to Foster, in order for Harper to maintain "her status as a woman of distinction [who] might have been challenged by the white bourgeois audiences" to which she spoke (6). This speculation about Harper's ethnic heritage is drawn from various descriptions of her that appeared in contemporary periodicals which carried coverage of her lectures. Grace Greenwood, a Philadelphia reporter for the Independent, describes Harper as "about as colored as some of the Cuban belles I have met with at Saratoga" (Still 812). Since no recorded facts exist concerning this matter, Foster's information is purely conjecture.

Letters written to Still in her adult years indicate the circumstances of her being placed in the care of family:

> Yearned for a mother's love? The grave was my robber. Before three years had scattered their blight around my path, death had won my Mother from me. Would the strong arm of a brother have been welcome? I was my mother's only child. (784)

These lines from the correspondence also suggest that being without a mother or siblings caused much loneliness for Frances during childhood. Also significant is that the lines do not mention, nor do they hint at, the existence of a father. William Still's biography of Harper provides a limited explanation of her parentage. He states that young Harper had many trials during these years, but she managed to endure them (784). Even after she became a noted lecturer the pain of her loneliness in childhood persisted. In a letter to Still she comments on the pleasure she gets from her new career:

> Oh, is it not a privilege, if you are sisterless and lonely, to be sister to the human race. (792)

Though key family members remain nameless to researchers, we are fortunate to have the name and some historical scholarship about her uncle, Reverend William Watkins. His dominant presence in her life encouraged her love for reading and composing and for her choosing to make a commitment to social reform.

The occupations that may be attributed to William Watkins are varied. He was a cobbler by trade and also an ordained African Methodist Episcopal minister. In addition to these two stations, Watkins was a journalist, penning articles under the pseudonym "Colored Baltimorean" for

Benjamin Lundy's Genius of Universal Emancipation, for William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator, and for Samuel McGill's Freedom's Journal. Later in his life, after a move to Canada, he contributed articles to Frederick Douglass' Paper and signed them "A Colored Canadian." To further enhance his holistic philosophy that "mental, moral and physical improvement" were necessary for meaningful living, Watkins acquired knowledge in the field of medicine. It was, however, in his capacity as teacher and owner of his own academy that William Watkins built a distinguished reputation.

When Daniel Coker[1], [in 1820], left Baltimore to reside in Africa, Watkins, who at the time was nineteen years of age, took many of Coker's Sharp Street Church School students and began his own academy which operated continuously for about twenty-five years (Gardner 623). The subjects taught in this school were history, geography, mathematics, English, natural philosophy, Greek, Latin, music, and rhetoric. His greatest strength as a pedagogue, however, rested in his command of the English language. Students attending his school knew him as a thorough teacher and a strict disciplinarian. One former student

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[1]Daniel Coker, one of Baltimore's leading black citizens, had once been a slave. After a friend purchased his freedom, he operated a successful day school for free black children in the Sharp Street Methodist Church until he made the decision to emigrate to Africa.

would later recall that Watkins was "strict from the first letter in the alphabet down to the last paragraph in the highest reader" (Gardner 623). His greatest expectation of his pupils was that they be correct in both speaking and writing. Further, it was widely recognized that a "year in Watkins' school was all a boy or girl of that day needed" (Gardner 623).

Watkins' career as a teacher was intricately tied in with his political activism, for he believed that through formal education the Negro could become a self-reliant member of American society. In an address of August 8, 1837, delivered before the Moral Reform Society in Philadelphia, Watkins expresses emphatically his view that

> a good education is the great sine quo non as it regards the elevation of our people. Give them this and they cease to grovel; give them this . . . and they will command respect and consideration from all who respect themselves and whose good opinions are worth having. (Gardner 624)

Growing up as a member of Baltimore's Sharp Street Church community, William Watkins became aware of the connection between education and freedom for the American black. He, therefore, devoted his life to helping both free and enslaved blacks secure their freedom.

Before 1833, free blacks were unable to join the American Anti-Slavery Society because the groups maintained a policy that extended membership only to white males. Subsequently, in 1833, William Lloyd Garrison offered membership to blacks, and in 1840 the doors were opened to women. The invitation offered to the latter group caused a split in the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

Prior to gaining entry into the American Anti-Slavery Society free black men organized within their own communities to discuss and to find remedies for oppressive conditions they suffered due to the enactment of slave laws. In addition to the problems with slave law, the free Negro was forced to confront movement within the Anti-Slavery Society that sought to transport free blacks to Liberia, Africa, as a means of eliminating racial strife and preventing the intermingling of the races. The idea came to be called colonization.[2]

Consequently in 1830 William Watkins and a number of other prominent free blacks organized the Negro Convention.

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[2]Sharp Street Church was built in 1791 by a group of Quaker abolitionists, (among them were Elisha Tyson, Elias Elliott, Moses Sheppard and James Carey), who believed in the right of blacks to have complete freedom of worship. In Baltimore it was unlawful for blacks to conduct their own worship services. Religious services had to be carried out under the supervision of a white minister. In 1802 blacks purchased the church from these men. It remains in existence today. William Watkins senior had been an influential trustee of the church.

This political body represented a national effort on the part of free blacks to convene and discuss ways to combat the obstacles that prevented them from enjoying the fruits of being free in America and also ways to assist their brothers and sister in bondage. Within the Convention, Watkins found a platform from which he could vehemently oppose the rightist faction of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

It was Watkins' contention that whites who chose to assist the Negro should do so through actions that helped elevate him "to the dignity of manhood" in America, the land of his birth (Graham 102). Watkins realized, as did many other free blacks, that the majority of blacks could not trace their lineage to a specific location, family or tribe in Africa, and thus, they would do better carving out for themselves a place in a land that was hostile but also familiar to them (Graham 103).

The impact that William Watkins' life of social commitment had on Frances Ellen Watkins' professional life and on her literary production was significant. Her literary voice embodied social reform as she learned and grew under his supervision. Reading and studying the Bible was a daily practice at the Watkins Academy. Also required on a daily basis was written composition, a subject in which she states she excelled. She recalled that during

her school years she often visited the woods to be inspired to write (Daniel 6). Concerning her literary compositions, William Still writes that "her mind being of a strictly religious caste, [sic] the effusions from her pen all savor of a highly moral elevating tone" (785).

When Frances reached the age of thirteen she was expected to become self-supporting. She did so by taking a position as seamstress and nursemaid in the home of a white family by the name of Armstrong. The family owned and operated a book shop. When Mrs. Armstrong discovered Frances' literary talent, she encouraged her to take advantage of the reading material in the store during her spare time. Frances was also encouraged to write. By the time the girl "reached her majority" (in the state of Maryland eighteen was the age of majority for girls and twenty-one was for boys), she had composed enough poetry and verse to place in a volume for publication. This collection was entitled Forest Leaves (sometimes referred to as Autumn Leaves), and it was published in 1845. Unfortunately, no copies of the work remain.

William Still suggests that some "productions [in the volume] found their way into newspapers and attracted attention" (784). So outstanding was the young author's talent that some who read it doubted that she had composed

such fine work, and "others denied their originality." Still provides extracts from a work which he states is "of this character" (784). The work which Still excerpts is an essay entitled "Christianity[3]". Frances Smith Foster, in her work A Brighter Coming Day, cites Daniel Payne's History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church published in 1891, as stating that the essay "Christianity" was first published in 1853 in the Christian Recorder. Still's essay about Harper, however, suggests that "Christianity" is a work penned by a young woman who had not reached the age of maturity.

The essay appears again in a volume of poems published in 1854 entitled Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. Identifying the exact place of this essay in the Harper canon without the benefit of serious textual study is impossible. One surface clue that places the composition of the essay in the days of her youth is the absence of any discussion of social or political issues. It is not until she leaves Maryland in 1850 that her works begin to address the reform issues of her time. Even though the year of this work's appearance cannot be established exactly,

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[3]The complete text of "Christianity" appears in a Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader edited by Frances Smith Foster. The anthology was published in New York by the Feminist Press at The City University of New York in 1990. This work will not be the primary source for the Harper prose texts used in this document.

analysis of its content is significant due to the fact that it is one of her earliest extant prose works. Stylistic and thematic traits of "Christianity" provide benchmarks from which succeeding works can be analyzed.

In the essay, Watkins defines the concept of Christianity as a "system" so "exalted and pure" that the whole of creation looks to it for enhancement of meaning. The author personifies Christianity as a giving and nurturing female created by God to minister to the needs of humankind and to provide a linkage between all earthly beings and the Creator. Her description of this link is akin to the English Renaissance idea of the Great Chain of being. She writes that Christianity "forms the brightest link that glorious chain which unites the humblest work of creation with the throne of that infinite and eternal Jehovah" (98).

For young Watkins, every segment of man's earthly existence has been affected by Christianity. All earthly ideas pale when placed beside her because she "unveils the unseen world, and reveals Him who is the light of creation and the joy of the universe . . ." (98). From childhood to death, the author asserts Christianity, has been man's constant companion:

> She has bent over the form of lovely childhood, and suffered it to have a place in the Redeemer's

> arms. She has stood by the bed of the dying and unveiled the glories of eternal life gilding the darkness of the tomb with the glory of the resurrection. (97).

Christianity's power and greatness, according to the author, have also reached into the political arena and "changed the moral aspects of nations" (97).

Those entities that are representative of humankind's intellectual domain, specifically genius, philosophy, science, poetry, music and learning, must, states the author, acknowledge the greatness of Christianity and seek her out as a source which enhances their depth. She writes:

> Genius has bent from his erratic course to gather fire from her altars and pathos from the agony of Gethsemane and the suffering of Calvary . . . . Poetry has culled her fairest flowers and wreathed her softest, to bind her author's "bleeding brow". (97)

Even though the young author in the first part of her essay views Christianity as a nourishing source for all areas of human intellect, she, in the penultimate paragraph, writes that the areas of knowledge mentioned above cannot compare to "the truths" offered through Christianity. In the final sentence of this paragraph, she

separates man's intellectual pursuits from his spiritual quests:

> Philosophy has her place; Religion her important sphere; one is important here, and the other of infinite and vital importance both here and here after. (98)

The passages cited from the essay indicate that Frances Ellen Watkins believed, as did a great many people of her day, that moral values based on Christian philosophy should be the guiding force in every area of man's life. In addition, Miss Watkins contends that in order for learning to be of value to humankind, it too must be directed by the precepts of Christian thought. This theme of a life education grounded in Christian values, combined with both a political and social consciousness that calls for ethical and humanistic reforms, dominates most of the author's later works.

The basic structure of the essay can be described as well-organized and balanced. Unity comes as a result of a well-defined thesis placed at the beginning of the piece and developed throughout. Watkins' use of alliteration and personification gives her prose a poetic quality. Portraying Christianity as a nurturing female strengthens the theme that religion, with its moral precepts, is a constant guiding force through life. Watkins seems to be

expressing the nineteenth-century belief that women have the power to bring men to salvation. It is interesting that the next to the last paragraph ends her discourse on Christianity and shifts to the significance of the Word of God, so is "unique and pre-eminent," "Wonderful in its construction" (98). Throughout this paragraph the word of God is referred to with the pronoun "it." [sic] This entity has no gender; it "guides" every individual "through life" (99). The work is a sincere expression of Watkins' philosophical beliefs devoid of excessive sentimentality.

By 1851 most of the Watkins family had left the state of Maryland. Uncle William Watkins and his wife had moved to Toronto, Canada, where one of their sons, John, already resided. There the elder Watkins earned his living as a grocer; however, he continued to submit articles to various abolitionist publications under the pseudonym "A Colored Canadian" (Leroy Graham 126).

The relocation of the Watkins clan is significant to Frances' professional development as a writer and lecturer. As was stated earlier, the elder William Watkins was passionately opposed to the colonization movement, and he encouraged blacks to remain in America while continuing the struggle for freedom. Subsequently, his decision to leave the country tends to contradict the stance he once took. Leroy Graham, William Watkins' biographer, suggests two

possibilities that may have motivated his flight to Canada. First, the author noted that Watkins' name appears in the list of appointments of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the final time in 1844. It is during this same year that he became a follower of William Miller, a leader of a group of Adventist millenialists. In 1844 Watkins became convinced that the world was going to come to an end and preached this message. When the world continued to exist, he lost credibility in the community. The official reasons Watkins gave for uprooting his family, according to Graham, were that "the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had decided to build its mammoth Camden Station in his neighborhood; and also because he yearned to taste the climate of a free society "(126). Son, William J. Watkins remained in the United States, and finally he changed his residence from Maryland to Rochester, New York. In the directory of the city for the years 1855-56, he is listed as the associate editor of Frederick Douglass' Paper.

The biographer's narrative of the actions which provoked the family's move from Maryland did not take into account that throughout the country during the decade of the fifties, a number of prominent Negro leaders emigrated from their home states to other states and to the western territories; some chose to put down roots in foreign countries. This exodus was precipitated primarily by the

compromise of 1850 which strengthened the teeth of the Fugitive Slave Act (Howard H. Bell 270) of 1793. Under the provision a slave owner could present an affidavit to a federal magistrate claiming that an individual was a fugitive. If the judicial official found that the person charged was a fugitive, he was paid a ten dollar fee and the black person was remanded to slavery. Should the accused be cleared of charges, the magistrate was still paid five dollars. The accused was not entitled to a jury trial, and only a white man's testimony was accepted in determining the status of the black person. All citizens were expected to assist in the enforcement of the law. This legislation endangered not only the freedom of runaway slaves, but also that of free blacks who could be falsely accused and thrown into slavery (Foner and Walker 215).

Also, Maryland law after 1830, in every area of life, became progressively harsher for free blacks. Had William Watkins' abolitionist activities been uncovered, he and his family's freedom would have been jeopardized. For example, an 1841 supplement to an 1830 law, forbade free blacks from

> knowingly, call[ing] for or receiv[ing] at any post office or receiv[ing] or hav[ing] in his or her possession any abolition hand-bill, pamphlet, newspaper, pictorial representation. (Brackett 225)

The penalty for such an offense was imprisonment from ten to twenty years. Some sixteen years after the supplement (1857), a free black man suspected of abolitionist activity was imprisoned for having a copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin in his home.

Thus, the Watkins family's flight from Maryland was understandable. Of her oppressive living conditions in Baltimore Frances wrote

> Not that we have not a right to breathe the air as freely as anybody else here (in Baltimore), but we are treated worse than aliens among a people whose language we speak, whose religion we profess, and whose blood flows and mingles in our veins. . . . Homeless in the land of our birth and worse off than strangers in the home of our nativity. (Still 785)

When most of the family headed to the North or into Canada, Frances in 1850, headed west to Columbus, Ohio, to take a job as a teacher at the newly established African Methodist Episcopal Union Seminary.[4] She was the first female ever

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[4]Union Seminary, located fourteen miles southwest of Columbus, Ohio, opened its doors in 1847. The school was founded to educate "colored children" throughout Ohio. Two programs, a "primary and a major," were offered at the school. A major course of study enrolled students "pursuing the higher studies." Subjects taught at the school were "Alphabet, Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, History, Defining, Philosophy, Physiology and Bible." Also offered were

employed at the school. Watkins' decision not to remain with her family, but to travel westward alone without the guidance of some patriarchal figure (either uncle, cousin or a husband), was demonstrative of the course of complete independence that she would follow throughout her life.

Despite her proven record as a writer and her love for reading, Miss Watkins, now twenty-five years of age, was employed by Union Seminary to teach sewing. In his 1850 report to the AME Conference, Brown, the School principal, praised his staff for their hard work, and he included a specific comment about the work of Miss Watkins:

> Miss Francis [sic] Ellen Watkins has been faithful to her trust, and has manifested in every effort a commendable zeal for the cause of Education [sic]; and sacrificing spirit, so that it may be promoted. She has firmly braved the flood of opposition which has manifested itself toward her from "the beginning," and I take great pleasure in commending her to the favorable notice of the brethren. (19)

Frances Ellen Watkins' classes in embroidery and "plain sewing." According to school principal Reverend J. M. Brown's 1850 report to the Ohio Conference of African Methodist Episcopal Church, the institution did not receive the support that had been promised from ministers within the Conference and consequently had a short life (J. M. Brown, 18-19).

From Reverend Brown's comment, it may be conjectured that as the first female on the school's faculty, Frances' presence was not readily accepted. The adversity that she experienced, however, did not dampen her resolve to carry out her responsibilities. Biographers do not know exactly how long Frances remained at the school, but Brown's 1852 report to the Conference does not make mention of her sewing classes in the listing of courses offered. Still writes that Watkins, "contrary to her expectations," did not find "her adopted home and calling" satisfactory, so she left Ohio and moved to Little York, Pennsylvania where she took another teaching job. The abolitionist activity that she witnessed in this area would mark a turning point in her life.

While in Little York, she often encountered passengers who travel by way of the Underground Railroad. Letters she wrote to Still contained comments about such events. In one letter she writes:

> I saw a passenger per the Underground Rail Road [sic] yesterday; did he arrive safely? Notwithstanding the abomination of the nineteenth century-the Fugitive Slave Law-men still determine to be free. Notwithstanding all the darkness in which they keep the slaves, it seems

> that somehow light is dawning upon their minds. (785)

Watkins' letters also reveal the discontent she felt with this new teaching position. In a letter to a friend, she seeks advice concerning abandoning teaching and going back to her trade as a dressmaker:

> What would you do if you were in my place? Would you give up and go back and work at your trade (dress-making)? [sic] There are no people that need all the benefits resulting from a well-directed education more than we do. The condition of our people, the wants of our children, and the welfare of our race demand the aid of every helping hand, the God-speed of every Christian heart. It is a work of time, a labor of patience to become an effective school teacher; and it should be a work of love in which they who engage should not abate heart or hope until it is done. And after all, it is one of woman's most sacred rights to have the privilege of forming the symmetry and rightly adjusting the mental balance of an immortal mind." I have written a lecture on education, and I am also writing a small book. (Still 785-86)

Decisions she made about her professional options were never divorced from the needs of her race or her duty to it. Another important idea that surfaces in this letter is that she has not given up writing.

By 1853 Frances Watkins had grown closer to the antislavery movement, and as Still remarked, she had found that teaching "fifty-three untrained little urchins overtaxed her naturally delicate physical powers" (786). Discussion about her career options occurred simultaneously with the enactment of a Maryland code denying free blacks from the North entry into that state under the penalty of being imprisoned and sold into slavery. A man unknowingly violated the law, and he was sold into slavery in Georgia. The gentleman managed to escape his bondsmen by hiding behind the wheel-house of a boat that was bound for the North. He was, however, captured and again remanded to slavery. Shortly after his capture, the man died of exposure. This incident moved Watkins to vow that "upon that grave I pledged myself to the Anti-Slavery cause" (Still 786).

Miss Watkins gave up teaching and set out for Philadelphia where she hoped to secure a position as an agent with the Underground Railroad. She also had hopes of publishing the small volume of poetry and prose that she had completed. Her contact with fugitive slaves at the

Philadelphia stations of the Underground Railroad increased her desire to assist in liberating all those who were enslaved. Although Frances Watkins' desire to serve in the movement was strong, her "modesty prevented her from pressing her claim," and as a result, neither she nor her intents were common knowledge to those in charge of the operation. Watkins' inability to fulfill her desire to become an agent for the Railroad did not discourage her from expressing her feelings about the institution of slavery. In fact, her short stay in Philadelphia served as a learning experience and as a source of inspiration for the challenging work that was ahead of her.

While in Philadelphia, she composed a poem based on a character from Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin entitled "Eliza Harris." The poem appeared in The Liberator on December 1853 (Bacon 25), in Frederick Douglass' Paper on December 23, 1853, (Maryemma Graham, 219) and in the Alienated American (1853)(Foster 11). The wide Northern circulations of these publications assisted in introducing her name to a larger public audience. Shortly after the publication of the poem in 1854, Frances, with her cousin William J. Watkins, decided to visit the Anti-Slavery office in Boston (Bacon, 27). With her, she took the small volume that she had penned entitled Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. Included in this volume was the

poem "Eliza Harris." Fortunately, the volume was published and a second edition was issued that same year from J. B. Yerrinton and Sons publishers in Boston. Though her visit to Boston was brief, Miss Watkins received a warm and encouraging reception from the advocates of the Anti-Slavery Society of that city.

From Boston, she traveled to New Bedford, described by Still as "the hot bed of the fugitives in Massachusetts" (786-87), where she began her career as an abolitionist lecturer. The "Elevation and Education of Our People" was the title of her "maiden lecture." After this first lecture, she began to speak throughout the city to large audiences composed of men and women, both black and white. In a letter dated August 1854, she describes her public speaking engagements:

> Well, I am out lecturing. I have lectured every night this week; besides addressed a Sunday-school [sic], and I shall speak, if nothing prevent, to-night. My lectures have met with success. Last night I lectured in a white church in Providence. Mr. Gardener was present, and made the estimate of about six hundred persons. Never, perhaps was a speaker, old or young, favored with a more attentive audience. . . . My voice is not wanting in strength, as I am aware

> of, to reach pretty well over the house. The church was the Roger Williams; the pastor, a Mr. Furnell, who appeared to be a kind and Christian man. . . . My maiden lecture was Monday night in New Beford on the Elevation and Education of our People. Perhaps as intellectual a place as any I was ever at of its size.

Taking on this new career as public orator was another act that helped to strengthen Watkins' independent spirit. According to Lillian O'Conner, by 1854, the number of women engaged in giving public addresses on reform issues had increased, but public opinion about this activity continued to characterize female public speakers as "immoral, irreligious, and indelicate" (23). Regardless of public sentiment, Frances Ellen Watkins was determined to use her verbal and written skills in the cause of liberation.

Approximately one month after her speaking engagements began, word of her ability spread, and she was employed by the State Anti-Slavery Society of Maine to lecture state-wide. A letter to William Still dated September 28, 1854, and postmarked Buckstown Center, describes her speaking schedule, the reception she received, her traveling companion, various people she met and their ideas. She alludes to her contentment with having left teaching in

Little York and taking up this new career. The letter reads as follows:

> The agent of the State Anti-Slavery Society of Maine travels with me, and she is a pleasant, dear, sweet lady. I do like her so. We travel together, eat together, and sleep together. (She is a white woman.) In fact I have not been in one colored person's house since I left Massachusetts; but I have a pleasant time. My life reminds me of a beautiful dream. What a difference between this and York! . . . I have lectured three times this week. After I went from Limerick, I went to Springvale; there, I spoke on Sunday night at an Anti-Slavery meeting. Some of the people are Anti-Slavery, Anti-rum and Anti-Catholic; and if you could see our Maine ladies--some of them among the noblest types of womanhood you have ever seen! They are for putting men of Anti-Slavery principles in office, . . . to cleanse the corrupt fountains of your government by sending men to Congress who will plead for our down-trodden and oppressed brethren, our crushed and helpless sisters, whose tears and blood bedew our soil, whose chains are

clinking 'neath our proudest banners, whose cries and groans amid our loudest pæans rise. (787).

The year 1854 marked the beginning of a public career that would last her entire life. After a year and a half, she left her position in Maine and began to travel throughout the Northeast, the West, and Canada. She did not, during this entire period, discontinue her literary production. Comparing the dates and texts of oral delivery to those of the literary works can lead one to theorize that her literature, beginning with that written in 1854, served as subject books from which she built the lectures. Likewise, the events on the lecture circuit and in the national headlines inspired the creation of literary texts. Possibly the essay "The Colored People in America," which appeared in the 1857 edition of Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, is the text of the writer's maiden speech, "Elevation and Education of Our People." This essay could also represent a portion of the small volume that she had completed on education while employed as a teacher in Little York (Foster 95). If so, it is certain that the oral and written compositions were vehicles which generated each other. Her 1892 novel Iola Leroy, written after her speaking career had come to an end, is the primary example of the way she incorporated oratorical content into the fiction. The philosophic thoughts she expressed on the

lecture circuit are echoed in the character dialogue of the novel. The discourse between characters is sometimes crafted directly from her speeches and essays.

Although the author expended energy on only one cause at a time, she incorporated the theme of the other organizations into works written about the cause of her primary focus. In like manner Harper produced literature about the other two groups while concentrating elsewhere. Because the abolition movement, the women's suffrage organization, and the Temperance Union were interrelated, a thematic organization of this study is inadequate. This inquiry, therefore, uses both theme and chronology as the method of organization. Works composed from 1854 through 1872 reflect the author's involvement with the antislavery movement and her travels to the South during the Reconstruction era; those pieces composed between 1872 and 1902 record her activity with the women's rights movement and the Temperance Union. When literature penned outside the sequences is discussed, the year of publication is noted.

In nine volumes of poetry, one short story, four prose allegories, one novel, and eleven essays, she expressed her political sentiments and her ideological philosophy. This prolific legacy of poetry and prose not only chronicles the author's involvement with the three movements investigated

in this study, but with a significant number of nineteenth-century literary, social, and political movements. This body of work is a record of values in nineteenth-century America.

VITA

Evelyn Elaine Nettles was born in Pascagoula, Mississippi, on February 25, 1951. From Kindergarten to grade five she attended St. Peter's Catholic School there. In 1962 her father's military career resulted in moving the family to Nashville, Tennessee, wherein she completed her grade school education at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School. In 1969 she graduated from Cathedral of the Assumption High School in Nashville and entered Tennessee State University in the fall. There in 1972 she received the Bachelor of Science degree and in 1974 the Master of Arts degree in English. In September 1983 she entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and in December 1991 she received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English. She is currently employed as a professor of English at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina.