



The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in "The History of Mary Prince"

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Source: *Callaloo*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (Winter, 2001), pp. 253-275

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3300499>

Accessed: 15/07/2008 10:12

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## THE BODY AS EVIDENCE

### Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in *The History of Mary Prince*

by Barbara Baumgartner

We don't mind hard work, if we had proper treatment, and proper wages like English servants, and proper time given in the week to keep us from breaking the Sabbath. But they won't give it: they will have work—work—work, night and day, sick or well, till we are quite done up; and we must not speak up nor look amiss, however much we be abused. And then when we are quite done up, who cares for us, more than for a lame horse? This is slavery. I tell it, to let English people know the truth.

—Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)

In this concluding paragraph of her autobiography, Mary Prince identifies the key components of slavery: incessant work, unrestrained abuse, silenced voices, and broken bodies. The first slave narrative published by a woman (Ferguson, Introduction 1; Gates xv), Prince's thirty-eight-page text chronicles her personal experience of servitude in the British West Indies. Still legally owned by a white slaveholder when narrating her story, Prince appears, however, to have transcended at least one of the defining features of slavery: with the publication of her narrative, Prince speaks out against the institution and its proponents whose relentless demands have consumed the health of her body. Yet a curious silence characterizes the first part of her text. Despite her graphic depiction of the physical brutality inflicted upon her under slavery, Prince rarely attempts to describe her bodily pain during these episodes or their undoubtedly painful aftermath. In the part of the text that relates the most physically destructive and arduous periods of her life, Prince characterizes herself as a passive, silent victim, recording the "unmaking" of her world.<sup>1</sup>

While Prince's physical abuse and her experience of pain initially appear devastating, her body ultimately provides her with the means of creating a new order of experience, a new subject position from which she can speak and, in some sense, transcend the brutality that had previously shaped and defined her. Once she leaves these conditions of extreme hardship and obtains a place of relative safety, Prince begins to refuse to complete her assigned tasks because of her poor physical condition. The slave's broken down body, which would normally be construed as a sign of slavery's power to debase, mutilate, and destroy, ironically serves as a key locus of opposition; it enables her to refuse to capitulate to further demands of servitude. Prince makes meaning and sense out of her suffering through the telling of her story, rereading the residual marks of slavery left on her body and inscribing a new and different text. No longer the powerless object of her own life or within her story, Prince uses her physical pain as the

central site of resistance, manipulating her place within the system of slavery by deploying, interpreting, and appropriating her body for her own purposes.

Interpretation and appropriation are also a part of the textual history of *The History of Mary Prince*. Prince dictated her narrative to a white woman, identified in the text as Miss S—, and her life story is edited by a white man, Thomas Pringle, who tacks on a variety of supplemental materials. While Pringle's presence is evident on nearly every page, Miss S— is barely detectable. The traces left in the text of the relationship between Prince and Pringle, and Prince and Miss S— are indicative of two different types of collaborative relationships, and the former one is much more combative than the latter. While Prince focuses on her pain and her body as a site of resistance, Pringle presents Prince's body as a highly sexualized one. The nature and structure of Prince's narrative defy the ideal of the solitary author and bring Prince's authorial status into question, which probably accounts, in part, for the scant scholarly attention this narrative has received,<sup>2</sup> despite its ready availability in three reprinted editions.<sup>3</sup>

The battle over interpreting Prince's life did not end with the publication of her narrative. In a recent reprinting of Prince's autobiography, editor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., presents a different view of her body than either Prince or Pringle: through his failure to include two appendixes that discuss Prince's debilitated state, Gates minimizes the role of her body. Another current edition, published at the University of Michigan Press under the editorship of Moira Ferguson, includes all the appendixes published with the third and final edition and presents a more comprehensive view of the slave's life. Thus, Prince's body and text continue to be the focal point of conflicting interpretations, during her life as a slave, during her fight for freedom, and during the recent reprintings of her life story. Ironically, the contested status of Prince's text both reflects and replicates the same struggles Prince endured as a slave; even as a free woman, Prince's body and text remained (and remain) subject to ongoing appropriation and interpretation. Yet, it is precisely these dynamics of authority that make Prince's text interesting and worthy of study. Prince's narrative illuminates revealing aspects about the operations of power working across lines of gender and race and makes a strong case for the need to reevaluate and reinstate dictated narratives as legitimate objects of scholarly interest. *The History of Mary Prince* demonstrates the ways in which Prince, her collaborators, editors, and critics are all variously involved and invested in the political representation of the body and personal pain.

### The Unmaking of Prince's World

Prince's experience as a slave in the British West Indies is in many respects typical, but it is unusual in the number of owners under whom she labored.<sup>4</sup> Born in Bermuda in 1788, Prince is sold at the age of twelve, after a relatively happy, innocent childhood, to Captain and Mrs. I—, where she is initiated into the violent realities of hard work, physical and, probably, sexual abuse. After five years in this household, she is sold to Mr. D—, an owner of salt mines on Turk's Island, located two hundred miles northeast of Bermuda.<sup>5</sup> Prince spends the next five years laboring under harsh conditions before she returns to Bermuda in 1810. After another four years of service to Mr. D—, she is sold to Mr. and Mrs. Wood of Antigua. In 1828, after a vexed, fourteen year association with the Wood family, Prince, acting as nursemaid and laundress, travels with the Woods to England. Fed up with her treatment as a slave and after repeated threats by the Woods to turn her out, Prince leaves the Wood family and walks away to her freedom. Since slavery was illegal in England itself, any slave who set foot on English soil was technically free. Married to a free black man in Antigua, however, Prince is torn between her

desire for freedom and her wish to return to home and husband. If Prince goes back to Antigua with the Woods, she becomes a slave once again<sup>6</sup>; thus, her only hope for freedom is to stay in England, estranged from home and family or to persuade the Woods to sell her to herself or another party who would free her, something the Woods steadfastly refuse to do.<sup>7</sup> Prince finds it difficult to support herself in England during a time of national economic hardship, and her employment possibilities are even further limited by her poor health. Prince's narrative is thus born; in addition to adding her voice to the cries against slavery, it is also a way for her to make money.

Mary Prince begins her autobiography in conventional fashion by relating the place of her birth, followed by an account of her childhood. Prince describes a domestic world, one filled with mothers and children. Although men are mentioned, they are largely absent from the picture: Prince's father is owned by another master with whom he presumably resides, and her master, Captain Williams, is generally away at sea. The women and children left behind coexist as one large familial group. Prince describes strong affective ties that include not only her mother and siblings, but her mistress, Mrs. Williams, and Williams's daughter, Miss Betsey. In addition to being a playmate, Miss Betsey is also portrayed as another "sister," while Prince speaks of Mrs. Williams as occupying a significant emotional position in her life: "Next to my mother, [I] loved her better than any creature in the world" (F 48; G 188).

The writing in this initial part is sentimental in tone and form.<sup>8</sup> There are recurrent expressions of deeply felt emotions and numerous incidents that describe the tearful distress of Prince and those who surround her. The sentimental mode is most pronounced in the scene in which Prince and two of her sisters are sold by Captain Williams following the death of his wife. The extended community of women and children is devastated over her sale. In her description of this wrenching time, Prince repeatedly refers to throbbing, grieving, bursting hearts and unstoppable tears<sup>9</sup>:

Oh dear! I cannot bear to think of that day,—it is too much.—It recalls the great grief that filled my heart, and the woeful thoughts that passed to and fro through my mind, whilst listening to the pitiful words of my poor mother, weeping for the loss of her children. I wish I could find words to tell you all I then felt and suffered. The great God above alone knows the thought of the poor slave's heart, and the bitter pains which follow such separations as these. All that we love taken away from us—Oh, it is sad, sad! and sore to be borne!—I got no sleep that night for thinking of the morrow; and dear Miss Betsey was scarcely less distressed. She could not bear to part with her old playmates, and she cried sore and would not be pacified. (F 51; G 190)

Prince displays her sensibility in this passage, her intense emotional response to an unjust situation. The existence and display of these feelings serve to combat the image of the slave as brute beast, incapable of experiencing or expressing such emotions. Although Prince feels that she is unable to articulate adequately the depths of her emotional pain, it is only because the horror is unimaginable to all but God.

Prince's use of language also contradicts the stereotypical portrait of the ignorant slave, for her text is linguistically rich in her opening section. The language is most metaphorical in the description of events that surround her sale. She identifies the day of the vendue as "the black morning" (F 51; G 190). Prince records her mother saying that she is "going to carry my little chickens to market" (F 51; G 190). As potential buyers examine her as if she were an animal, insensible to the pain of being separated from family, Prince describes their words as wounding

her: "Many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, without regard to our grief—though their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts" (F 52; G 191). Drawing on the language of the Caribbean kitchen, Prince underlines the centrality of domesticity to her emotional life. Moreover, in light of her difficulty with or reticence about describing her bodily pain in the upcoming sections of the narrative, it is significant that Prince characterizes emotional pain as physically wounding. Finally, Prince's use of figurative language demonstrates her level of expressive sophistication and reflects the fullness of her world. This world collapses when Prince is sold to Captain I—.

With her move into the I— household, Prince enters a domain marred by sadism and violence. Work and pain become the center of Prince's existence. While the I—'s ruthless treatment of their other slaves begins Prince's account of her new home and owners, she soon joins the ranks of the punished. It becomes clear that the infliction of physical punishment is part of the routine at the I— household: "To strip me naked—to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence" (F 56; G 194). In addition to the absence of emotion, what is missing here is a description of the pain that necessarily accompanies the laying open of one's flesh. As Elaine Scarry argues in *The Body in Pain*, pain is extremely difficult to express in language. Scarry further asserts that "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (4), as the title of the first part of her book, "Unmaking," suggests. Severe pain can diminish and ultimately destroy the self and the world (Scarry 35).

The contraction of the universe to the level of the body, where the body becomes a source of obsession when it suffers pain, where other objects and people diminish in importance, begins to occur in Prince's world once she becomes a victim of the daily cruelties meted out by her new owners, the I—'s. The collapse of Prince's universe is reflected in her narrative on the level of both content and expression. In the middle section of her autobiography, Prince's language changes markedly. For instance, the word "sore," which had been used in the first section to mean an intense emotional feeling or an extreme reaction, such as a "sore trial" (F 48; G 188) or "lamented her sore" (F 49; G 189), refers in this middle part of the narrative to the physical condition of the body, as in "my body and limbs were so stiff and sore" (F 59; G 196). This change in meaning indicates the overall shift in narrative perspective that reflects a growing literalization and contraction of experience down to the body. She no longer employs the sentimental, nor does she refer to breaking hearts or bursting into tears. Instead, the affect is remarkably flat. Events are described in a straightforward fashion; the kind of figurative language that is found in the first part of the narrative is generally absent here. As Stephen Butterfield has noted, the "language of more typical slave narratives . . . is close to the material facts of experience" (34). Concrete language, according to Butterfield, is more suitable for the political, didactic purposes for which most slave narratives were written. The notable characteristic of Prince's text is that her use of language changes. One would imagine that this period of suffering would be the time to plead that words are inadequate to convey or reflect experience, as Prince states earlier, or that she might resort to sentimentality or figurative language at this point in an attempt to express the horror of her existence in a metaphoric register. Instead, there is a movement toward literalism.<sup>10</sup>

After five years of brutal treatment, Captain I— sells Prince. While she is initially happy to be leaving the I— family, she soon finds that "it was but going from one butcher to another" (F 62; G 198). With her new master, Mr. D—, and her new home on Turk's Island, Prince's problems multiply. In this location, the landscape is appropriated by the white slave owner and used both directly and indirectly as a weapon against the slave. On Turk's Island, Prince is taken away from the domestic sphere and forced to work in the salt ponds where she and the other slaves are compelled to stand in brackish water under the hot tropical sun without any protection from the elements: "We . . . worked through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon

our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat [sic] down in some cases to the very bone" (F 61; G 198). In this description, the external surroundings are given more agency than her body, which appears unable to resist, incapable of self-defense, acted upon and destroyed by the water and the sun. This section of the narrative demonstrates an obsessive focus on the physical. Everything else becomes blurred; objects are only important and mentioned if they comfort the body (she describes making trusses for her legs to rest on to take pressure off the salt boils), or if they cause discomfort (she repeatedly refers to her master's cruelty and the harsh environment). The narrow focus of Prince's narrative on Turk's Island, its concentration on and obsession with the physical suggests that Prince was simply struggling to survive. Resistance requires a wider vision of the world, and at this point, Prince is simply incapable of such a view; she is trapped inside her body.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Making of the World: Pain as Resistance**

Once Prince leaves Turk's Island, her narrative reflects her recovery, the beginning of the reexpansion of her world. Moreover, her renewed sense of self appears to allow Prince to formulate a kind of resistance based on her bodily ailments. During her account of her actual victimization by the I—s and Mr. D—, Prince adopts a certain distance and detachment, which reflect the fact that she is incapable at that point of implementing this strategy of resistance. Pain, or the residue of it, which is manifested in the lasting disabilities Prince suffers, is only represented or fully embodied from a narrative point of view when it accords with the personal and political ideology of freedom. The narrative voice remains initially detached and personal pain unrepresented because to represent it, before its ideological significance has been transformed into resistance, would be to gratify and endorse the very power which inflicted it. In this respect, temporal issues are intimately connected to narrative ones. Prince's ability to utilize her body and its pain to suit her own purposes is reflected in a concurrent narrative shift, one that demonstrates her newfound emotional investment in her debilitated body once she is finally able to reclaim it from the clutches of slavery.

Prince's last years of servitude to Mr. D— indicate the beginning of this change. Returning to Bermuda with Mr. D—, for whom she continues to work for several years, Prince resumes the kind of duties that she had performed before her stay on Turk's Island. She concludes that "I had more than enough to do—but still it was not so very bad as Turk's Island" (F 67; G 202). Even this seemingly insignificant statement suggests an improvement in her physical well being since the ability to make comparisons, to think analogically, implies that she has moved beyond the closely circumscribed circle of her body. In an important omission, she makes no mention of any bodily ailments and references to physical punishment are few.

After her return to Bermuda and to more relaxed work and environmental conditions, Prince begins to play a more active role in controlling her own life, including the deployment of her disabled body to achieve her own goals. Prince's new sense of agency is evident in her sale to the Wood family: it is because of Prince's initiative that Mr. D— sells her to them. Most significantly, it is during the time in which she is owned by the Woods that Prince performs additional work for personal compensation and begins to save money in order to purchase her freedom. Prince explains that when Mr. and Mrs. Wood would leave, she would be responsible for the house and property in their absence. During these periods, "I had a good deal of time to myself, and made the most of it. I took in washing, and sold coffee and yams and other

provisions to the captains of ships. I did not sit still idling during the absence of my owners, for I wanted, by all honest means, to earn money to buy my freedom" (F 71; G 205). Indeed, Prince is able to earn and save what Mr. Woods claims is a "considerable sum of money" while in his service (F 92; G 221).<sup>12</sup>

While Prince "did not sit idling" while her owners are away, she finds it difficult to complete the tasks that the Wood family demands of her when they are home. She describes her bodily disability as emerging shortly after her sale to the Woods. Beginning with a description of her duties at their household, she immediately digresses into a lengthy discussion of her ensuing illness: "My work there was to attend the chambers and nurse the child, and to go down to the pond and wash clothes. But I soon fell ill of the rheumatism, and grew so lame that I was forced to walk with a stick. . . . I got the rheumatism by catching cold at the pond side, from washing in the fresh water; in the salt water I never got cold" (F 69; G 203). In the succeeding pages, Prince dwells on her illness, outlining the ways in which her infirmity interferes with her duties, occasionally incapacitating her to the point at which she can do no work at all. What appears remarkable here, within the context of the emphasis that Prince places on her debilitated body during the time she is owned by the Woods, is her ability to work when she herself is the recipient of the rewards of her labor. While a host of other factors might contribute to Prince's capacity for work from which she profits, a significant gap appears in the narrative between Prince's focus on her inability to labor adequately as a slave for the Wood family because of physical incapacitation and her simultaneous capacity, indeed vigor, in working for her own profit. In particular, it seems meaningful that Prince willingly takes in laundry for pay, even after she specifically identifies washing clothes as the triggering cause of a crippling illness that enervates her for "a long long time" (F 69; G 203).

The emphasis that Prince places on her physical disability in the section of her story devoted to her time with the Woods is striking and can be seen as a type of resistance: Prince narratively situates her bodily illness in ways which allow her to exert some control over her situation. In other words, it seems plausible that Prince rhetorically manipulates her bodily affliction as a means of explaining and defending her inability (i.e., refusal) to work. This discursive strategy has ideological implications. Her labor is valuable to her owners; her body is a commodity that they believe they own and control. Prince's decision to withhold her work and control her body has economic and political consequences. This type of resistance is consistent with what James C. Scott calls the "weapons of the weak" (*Weapons* 29), or indirect opposition to the dominator, a well documented mode of defiance in North American slave communities. Scott, a political scientist interested in resistance and subordination among oppressed groups, identifies this type of opposition to include "foot dragging, false compliance, flight, feigned ignorance, sabotage, theft, and, not least, cultural resistance. These practices, which rarely if ever called into question the system of slavery as such, nevertheless achieved far more in their unannounced, limited, and truculent way than the few heroic and brief armed uprisings about which so much has been written" (*Weapons* 34).

The subtle and covert nature of this type of indirect resistance makes it difficult to recognize and uncover. These "hidden transcripts" (Scott, *Domination* xii), an oblique critique of power by a subordinate group that employs various guises, poses, linguistic tricks, rumors and euphemisms against the dominant, are intentionally concealed:

For good reason, nothing is entirely straightforward here; the realities of power for subordinate groups mean that much of their political action requires interpretation precisely because it is intended to be cryptic and opaque. . . . By recognizing the guises the powerless must adopt . . . we can, I believe, discern a political dialogue with power in the public

transcript. If this assertion can be sustained, it is significant insofar as the hidden transcript of many historically important subordinate groups is irrecoverable for all practical purposes. What is often available, however, is what they have been able to introduce in muted or veiled form into the public transcript. What we confront, then, in the public transcript, is a strange kind of ideological debate about justice and dignity in which one party has a severe speech impediment induced by power relations. If we wish to hear this side of the dialogue we shall have to learn its dialect and codes. (Scott, *Domination* 137-38)

As Scott points out, the slave is not in a position, within the unequal power dynamics of the master/slave relationship, to refuse to work or to criticize directly his/her owner without risking serious consequences. Thus, slaves must often resort to indirect methods of resistance in order to obtain personal relief from lifelong, backbreaking labor and /or to sabotage the goals of the slave owners. In the case of Mary Prince, her description of her illness functions as this type of "dialect and code," an oblique and acceptable way of protest, at least while she is on Antigua and to the audience of anti-slavery readers to whom her autobiography is addressed.

The extent to which Prince relies on her body and its illness to justify her work stoppage or slowdown can be seen as a kind of "passive form of non-compliance" (Kleinman, "Pain" 174). This is not to say that Prince is feigning her physical ailments; her narrative supplies abundant verification of a body abused and brutalized by the environment and humans alike. Even so, there is no certain means of assessing the extent of Prince's disability or the influence it had on her ability or inability to work. The point is that Prince employs her affliction as a "rhetoric of complaint" (Kleinman, "Pain" 175) in which she tacitly comments on the difficult conditions under which she labors and indirectly lobbies for improvements. The timing of this strategy is important: only after a period of recovery and reexpansion of her world is Prince able to marshal the inner resources to resist, even in this somewhat circumscribed fashion.

These prostrating illnesses that interfere with Prince's assigned duties while working for the Woods and her remarkable ability to persevere while laboring for herself or in the salt mines must be viewed within a social context. Responses to illness and pain are culturally constructed phenomena. The subjective experience of a sick individual is profoundly conditioned and influenced by local customs and expectations. Moreover, the meaning that is attached to both illness and pain is overdetermined and polysemic, and can change with time and circumstances (Kleinman, *Illness* 3-31; Morris 55). Thus, Prince's physical difficulties and disabilities and her responses to them vary in significance in part because of the difference between Turk's Island and Antigua.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the harsh environment and the arduous labor on Turk's Island, Prince recalls that bodily complaints were never acceptable reasons for not working. Indeed, such excuses only led to punishment: "When we were ill, let our complaint be what it might, the only medicine given to us was a great bowl of hot salt water, with salt mixed with it, which made us very sick. If we could not keep up with the rest of the gang of slaves, we were put in the stocks, and severely flogged the next morning. . . . Work—work—work—Oh that Turk's Island was a horrible place!" (F 63; G 199). The all-consuming nature of the work on Turk's Island and the rigid discipline explain why a strategy of bodily protest is not effective in this situation. Any articulation of physical complaints resulted in harsher conditions. Moreover, work and bodily pain are the center of her life on Turk's Island. Prince's broken-down body consumes her attention, leaving little energy for any strategies of resistance.

In contrast, Prince's inability/refusal to work at various times for the Wood family yields, on several occasions at least, benefits for Prince, not vindictive reprisals: through her physical



ailments, Prince is able to avoid her assigned tasks—without physical punishment. During one of Prince's prolonged bouts with rheumatism, a free mulatto woman, Martha Wilcox, is hired to take over Prince's childcare responsibilities, relief that would have never been provided on Turk's Island. Prince also uses her illness to help persuade the Woods to allow her to accompany them to England since she thinks that the change in climate might help her rheumatism. Their consent to allow her to travel with them implies that they too hoped that such a move would be beneficial to Prince's constitution. Although her inability or refusal to work because of her illness is responsible for tensions and difficulties in her relationship with the Woods, it also allows her an amount of freedom and degree of expression that she does not have prior to this time. While she talks back to the I—'s on only one occasion and to Mr. D—on another, her account of life with the Wood family is filled with such "sass," which, according to Joanne Braxton, is the employment of language as a weapon, and it is an important tool in helping a slave regain self-esteem (30-31). Prince uses spirited replies and retorts to Mr. and Mrs. Wood when they criticize her failure to complete her tasks, lapses that Prince always attributes to physical incapacity. Prince's increased impudence and defiance in speaking back to her owners further reflect the changes in her social conditions, her widening world view and expanding self-confidence, and her desire to exert some control over her life and body.

Prince's use of pain and disability to avoid work is more than a mode of resistance: it also serves as an indirect critique of her owners and the system of slavery. The physical manifestations that Prince describes, lameness, skin inflammation, painful and swollen joints, are not simply descriptions of her malady; rather, as Brodwin argues, such symptoms represent "both a performance and a protest against the demand to perform . . . [in which the sufferer] uses her body (and its sufferings) to communicate with and influence her social world. Her pain symptoms function like a language. Indeed, her bodily messages can speak with an authenticity and power that her verbal messages often lack" (80).<sup>14</sup> Although Prince directly attacks slavery in her autobiography, drafted while she was free, verbal expression of such opposition would have been risky while Prince continued to reside with and work for the Woods or any slave owner.

The failure of Prince to mention any children of her own is another possible example of her body acting as a site of resistance. Because West Indian slave women's fertility was strikingly low in comparison to more "healthy" birth rates of American slaves, several historians of slave culture have argued that Caribbean slave women manipulated their fertility in order to decrease their childbearing potential.<sup>15</sup> In her discussion of Caribbean slave women and fertility, Barbara Bush concludes that "[d]eliberate management of their own fertility may have been a form of hidden, individual protest against the system over which slave masters had even less control than more overt forms of collective resistance. . . . In refusing to 'breed' as well as labour, women were voicing a strong protest against the system of slavery" (150). Since Prince never discusses the issue of children, there is no concrete evidence to claim that Prince is involved in this type of protest. However, given the silence surrounding this method of resistance and given the centrality of Prince's body to her defiance, Prince's failure to bear children and the absence of any articulation of desire to do so strongly suggest another sign of her refusal to support the system of slavery whenever possible.

Prince's manipulation of her body and its disabilities is effective: by emphasizing her symptoms and acting out her pain, Prince receives a variety of gains. During one particularly debilitating period, when Prince is ill for a "long long time" (F 69; G 203), her cries arouse the compassion of a neighbor woman, who sends her slave to tend to Prince. While in England, Prince's painful entreaties regarding her swollen limbs cause the English washerwomen to pity her and wash the laundry for which Prince was responsible. By testifying to her pain, Prince is able to garner sympathy and care from those who surround her and escape her assigned duties.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, she attempts to renegotiate these designated tasks with the Woods. While this enterprise is not always successful and is responsible for further friction between Prince

and Mr. and Mrs. Wood, Prince's complaints directly lead to her freedom: the arguments over her required work load and the continual bickering and insults finally cause Prince to leave.<sup>17</sup> While life as a free woman is not easy for Prince, Mrs. Wood's threat, that "people will rob her, and then turn her adrift" (F 79; G 211) does not come to pass. Instead, with the aid of some members of the black community and the Anti-Slavery Society, Prince not only survives, but attempts to obtain her freedom (her slave status would be reinstituted if she returns to Antigua) and fight against the institution of slavery by giving voice to her experience in bondage.<sup>18</sup>

### Editing as Control

While the slavocracy is able to write on her body and silence her for years by controlling the meanings associated with her person, Prince struggles to take control of her body and manipulate it to serve her own purpose. With the publication of her narrative, she indicts a system that assaulted her body with impunity and asserts her rights as a full and complete human being. Prince's autobiography can be seen as an attempt to make sense and meaning out of her own suffering by sharing her experience with others. Her account begins with a child who is happy, healthy, and carefree and ends with a barely middle-aged woman whose body has been consumed by the system of slavery. In telling her history, Prince rereads and reinscribes the meaning of her life; her body and pain become her central text, a counter narrative to the inscription of slavery.

Yet Prince's control over her own voice and body, even within the context of her personal narrative, does not go uncontested. With his numerous and lengthy explanations, additions, and interruptions, Thomas Pringle, Prince's editor, appears to compete with Prince for control over her story and its meaning. Supplemental material was not uncommon in slave narratives, as William Andrews points out: "Slave narratives usually required a variety of authenticating devices, such as character references and reports of investigations into the narrator's slave past (almost always written by whites), so that the slave's story might become operative as a linguistic act" (26). However, even though these devices were common in slave narratives, the extent of the material accompanying Prince's narrative is unusual and excessive.<sup>19</sup> In addition to his preface, which introduces Prince's life, Pringle writes and attaches an explanatory "supplement" to Prince's history, which is nearly as long as Prince's narrative (thirty pages long as compared to Prince's thirty-eight pages). Moreover, Pringle floods Prince's text with his own explanatory footnotes (eighteen in all). Finally, Pringle includes as "a convenient supplement to the history of Mary Prince" (F 121; G 239) a short two-page account of a young African boy named Louis Asa-Asa. Thus Prince's text is repeatedly compressed from below by intrusive footnotes, and her narrative itself is sandwiched between white and black male-authored texts, as if a black woman's story is inadequate on its own and needs the authority of a white man and the company of a black male's tale to make it complete. Pringle's editorial decisions are probably motivated by his concern—not unreasonable in itself—that Prince's text will not be taken seriously without his assistance; his ubiquitous and intrusive presence throughout her text calls attention to his anxiety that her text will be dismissed and/or misinterpreted.

In the supplement, Pringle chronicles his negotiations, both private ones and in his capacity as secretary for the Anti-Slavery Society, with Mr. Wood, Prince's last owner, on behalf of Prince and her desire to purchase her freedom. All such efforts failed while Mr. Wood was in England, and the family finally sailed back to Antigua without her. Pringle then enlists the aid of the Moravian Missionaries and the Governor of Antigua to help convince Mr. Wood to sell

Prince. Their efforts, which were also unsuccessful, provoked a written response from Mr. Wood. In his letter, which is highly critical of and defamatory to Prince, Mr. Wood outlines his reasons for not complying with Prince's request for freedom. The slave owner gives scant attention in his letter to his refusal to sell Prince; he simply asserts that it would reward ingratitude and that he would be subject to insult from her if she returned to Antigua as a free woman. Instead Mr. Wood focuses on what he identifies as Prince's "baseness" (F 91; G 220). Wood asserts that Prince is prone to quarrel and enjoys staying out late at night, despite Wood's protests. He also suggests that she is promiscuous. The charges that Wood makes include one "circumstance" that Pringle censors because it is "too indecent" to retain in a "publication likely to be perused by females" (F 91; G 220). The excised material is indicated in the text by a line filled with asterisks, allowing the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks.<sup>20</sup> Pringle retains Wood's remark regarding Prince's censored behavior: "Such a thing I could not have believed possible" (F91; G 220). Mr. Wood's incredulity over Prince's so-called "depravity" (F 91; G 220) only fuels reader speculation about the alleged event.

Curiously, Pringle includes this slanderous letter from Mr. Wood in the supplement. This letter, therefore, serves to raise explicit suspicions about Prince's moral character that had previously been implicit. In relating her life story, Prince employs strategies of omission and deflection regarding all matters relating to sex, including any abusive sexual experiences from which she probably suffered.<sup>21</sup> With Pringle's decision to print the letter, the focus turns from the disabled-turned-resistant body (Prince's portrayal) to a sexualized body (Pringle/Wood portrayal).

Although Pringle responds to and attempts to refute Wood's accusations, is it truly in Prince's best interest to have included what Pringle identifies as a "deliberate criminatory letter" (F 98; G 225)? It seems a hollow victory for Pringle to proclaim that Mr. Wood is in the spotlight now because of his attempts to destroy "the poor woman's fair fame and reputation,—an attempt but for which the present publication would probably never have appeared" (F 98; G 225). Pringle's strategy of including such accusations must be questioned: why reprint questionable material about Prince that suggests moral turpitude in a society obsessed with female propriety? Indeed, why include charges that "would probably never have appeared" had Pringle not reproduced them? While representing alternative and even incriminating points of view was common in anti-slavery publications such as *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*,<sup>22</sup> Pringle's decision to take this tack seems surprising in a publication whose intended audience was predominantly Christian women.

After detailing and refuting the charges against Prince's morality for over fifteen pages of the supplement, Pringle concludes, "But after all, Mary's character, important though its exculpation be to her, is not really the point of chief practical interest in this case. Suppose all Mr. Wood's defamatory allegations to be true—suppose him to be able to rake up against her out of the records of the Antigua police, or from the veracious testimony of his brother colonists . . . suppose all this—and leave the negro woman as black in character as in complexion,—yet it would affect not the main facts" (F 106; G 231). The "facts" that would remain, according to Pringle, are that Mr. Wood drove Prince from his home in England where he felt certain she couldn't survive, and he consistently refused to free her. Pringle's logic again needs to be questioned. If Prince's moral character is not relevant to the "facts," why introduce the disputed claims and spend over half of the supplement debating them? Through his obsessive concern with Prince's sexualized body, Pringle undermines Prince's interpretation of her own body as a site of resistance and her attempts to inscribe a different meaning on her body and text. Moreover, Pringle's focus on Prince's chastity suggests that the fidelity of her tale hinges on her sexual conduct: Pringle appears to conflate textual and sexual integrity and, in doing so, undermines Prince's credibility. By framing Prince's narrative in this light, Pringle serves to

perpetuate a stereotype of female slaves held by abolitionists and proslavery advocates alike: "As a worker she was portrayed as a defeminised [sic] neuter unit, as a woman she came to represent the delights of forbidden sex and in consequence her sexual attributes were highly and often sensationally exaggerated" (Bush 13). While the latter group argued that the moral degeneracy of female slaves was due to the primitive nature of blacks, the former asserted that their downfall was a result of the evils of slavery and used the debased black woman as a reason for abolishing slavery (Bush 13). Pringle thus sacrifices Prince's body and character to the anti-slavery cause. Despite Pringle's disclaimer that the "Anti-Slavery Society have no concern whatever with this publication" and that he has published it "in my private capacity" in order for Prince to "benefit" (F46; G186), it seems clear that the abolition of slavery, not Prince's personal situation, reigns as the supreme factor in Pringle's editorial decisions.

Given Pringle's eroticization of Prince and his focus on the question surrounding her moral character, perhaps it is not surprising that the former slave's body became the battleground for the ensuing controversy that erupted after the publication of Prince's narrative. In his scathing response to the slave woman's life history in *Blackwood's Magazine*, James Macqueen attacked Prince's version of events, as well as her and Pringle's morality. According to Macqueen in his article entitled "The Colonial Empire of Great Britain. Letter to Earl Grey, First Lord of the Treasury, &c. &c.," Mary Prince is a "despicable tool" of the "prowling anti-colonial fry," and in this "pretended history," Pringle has "given to the world the history of the profligate slave . . . for the purpose of destroying the character of two respectable individuals, her owners, MR AND MRS WOOD of Antigua" (744). Interestingly, as Macqueen so aptly notes, the major battle here is between Mr. Wood and Mr. Pringle, and Mary Prince is reduced to a "despicable tool," whose own interests—her freedom and her desire to return to her husband and home—are never considered by Macqueen and obscured by Pringle. Prince's goals appear lost, or at least eclipsed, in this struggle between Pringle and Wood. Her body is deployed by both sides as evidence to support their own causes.

Macqueen provides the details of the incident involving Prince that Pringle deletes from Mr. Wood's reprinted letter, although the veracity of the source is questionable. The pro-slavery writer quotes testimony from Martha Wilcox, the free mulatto woman who was hired in Antigua by the Wood family in order to help the debilitated Prince with the work she was no longer able to do. In her narrative, Prince speaks disparagingly of Wilcox, calling Wilcox "a saucy woman, very saucy" (F69; G 204). Wilcox is one of Macqueen's key witnesses in his attempt to discredit Prince. According to Wilcox, Prince had a number of sexual liaisons with a variety of men. The censored event concerned a fight that erupted between Prince and another woman when the latter individual claimed that Prince slept with her husband. Wilcox concludes by stating that Prince "took in washing, and made money by it. She also made money *many, many* other ways by her badness; I mean by allowing men to visit her, and by selling \* \* \* to worthless men" (Macqueen 749, emphasis in original).

Wilcox, in short, claims that Prince prostituted herself. Even though the reader can figure out what Prince is accused of selling to these men, the unspecified nature of the charges indicated by the asterisks again serves to leave the particulars open to the imagination, potentially implicating Prince further. In addition to her sexual history hinted at by Pringle and expanded upon by Macqueen, the ensuing libel cases brought by both Pringle and Wood ensured that Prince's sexual activity was aired in two separate English courtrooms.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as was customary, the London *Times* covered these trials, publishing synopses of courtroom events thereby publicizing further what was normally an intensely private matter in the early 19th century.<sup>24</sup> Mary Prince's sexual behavior thus became the center of a public debate while the abolition of slavery and Prince's own freedom, both central concerns of Prince's, got pushed to the margins. Based on the controversy evident within and in response to Prince's narrative,

it appears that interest about black women's sexuality and morality override the issue of freedom, for both pro- and anti-slavery forces.

While the pro-slavery lobby is content to portray Prince as an immoral, untrustworthy sexual monster, Pringle's perspective is more complicated. At the same time that Pringle assigns a sexual dimension to Prince's body and text through the content of his supplement, he tacitly reinforces Prince's deployment of her body as site of resistance and recuperation through the addition of two addendums that discuss the state of her body and health. Both were added after the initial January, 1831, edition. The first addendum, dated March 22, 1831, discusses Prince's eye affliction and suggests the possibility that she may eventually become totally blind. This "postscript," located after Pringle's preface and before Prince's narrative, appears in the second and third editions and is signed with the letters "T.P.," Thomas Pringle's initials. Pringle provides the following explanation for this addition: "I mention the circumstance at present on purpose to induce the friends of humanity to promote the more zealously the sale of this publication, with a view to provide a little fund for her future benefit" (F 118; not in Gates). Pringle thus employs Prince's blindness to increase sales of her story. Prince's body becomes part of a sales pitch for her text; her debilitated body continues to work for her.

The other appendix, dated March 28, 1831, and attached to the end of the third edition, is also concerned with Prince's body. Included in response to "various quarters respecting the existence of marks of severe punishment on Mary Prince's body" (F 119; not in Gates), this appendix consists of a letter written by Mrs. Pringle and signed by three other white women, including Prince's amanuensis, Miss S—. Their testimony confirms the physical condition of Mary Prince: "The whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, chequered, with the vestiges of severe floggings. Besides this, there are many large scars on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with gashes, by some instrument by most unmerciful hands" (F 119, emphasis in original). The decision to include this additional material suggests Pringle's sympathy for and understanding of Prince's interpretation of her life/body/text. The conflict between the two contrasting images of Prince's body—one as debilitated, resistant former slave, the other as sexualized, fallen woman—indicates Pringle's ambivalence about his ability to read and interpret Prince's body and text.

The letter from the four women affirming the battered state of Prince's physique does not demonstrate similar uncertainty. Their report on Prince's physical condition results in a confirmation and affirmation of her story. While their action has an element of invasion in which the black female body is seen as a spectacle, an object to be inspected and dissected, it also serves to situate Prince's story as truthful and her body as supporting evidence. In a very literal sense, they act as the ideal readers of Mary Prince's autobiography and their resulting testimony is a graphic depiction of the interpretive process. The women read and verify the bodily evidence while Pringle raises and provocatively conceals allegations that serve to undermine the authenticity of Prince's narrative. Pringle feels compelled to manufacture a body of evidence through accumulation of information: letters, testimonies, and explanatory footnotes. The women, in contrast, let Mary Prince's testimony, as represented in the narrative, in conjunction with her body, speak for itself. The women's method of collaboration and corroboration stands in contrast to Thomas Pringle's more combative, equivocal, and skeptical position: appearing at the end of Prince's history, the women's testimony does not interrupt or detract from Prince's text, as do Pringle's footnotes and supplement. Nor is it irrelevant to her life, as is Asa-Asa's narrative. Rather, the women appear to play a more supportive, enabling role.

This model of participation and collaboration can also be a useful context from which to view the entire transmission of Prince's narrative.<sup>25</sup> The multitude of voices within Prince's text, from the stories of other slaves that Prince records within her own account to the voices that surround her autobiography—Thomas Pringle, the four white women, and Miss S—, the

amanuensis—can be seen as working together to write *The History of Mary Prince*.<sup>26</sup> If situated within the broader definition of collaborative writing, the most significant collaboration occurs between Prince and Miss S— and Prince and Pringle. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, in their jointly produced study about collaborative writing, include a diverse assortment of activities that are part of these collective efforts, from “written and spoken brainstorming, outlining, note-taking . . . [to] planning, drafting, revising, and editing,” that occurs between two or more individuals and progresses toward a finished written document (14). Like an unrecorded conversation, what actually happened between Miss S—, Thomas Pringle, and Mary Prince is not known. “What precedes and surrounds a collaborative act of writing is the ever elusive, irrecoverable, and deeply interwoven process of two voices in conversation” (13) notes Holly Laird in her introduction to a special forum, “On Collaboration,” in *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*. Since no drafts or notes remain to document the telling/drafting/writing/editing process between Prince and Miss S— or Prince and Pringle, the text is the only available evidence. From the clues given in *The History of Mary Prince*, Prince appears to have a very different type of relationship with each of her associates.

While Pringle’s mark is on nearly every page, Miss S— is barely visible within the text: the only explicit vestige of Miss S—, is a direct mention of her by Prince in the final paragraph as “my good friend, Miss S—” (F 84; G 214), and an indirect reference by Pringle to the amanuensis in his preface as “a lady who happened to be at the time residing in my family as a visitor” (F 45; G 185). The scant traces of Miss S— stand in sharp contrast to the towering presence of Pringle and help define the differing nature of their working relationships with Prince. In *The History of Mary Prince*, Prince’s association with Miss S— appears to be the kind of collaboration which Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny call a “sort of stretching, [a] ‘tension’ . . . which enables stretching,” while the process of collaboration with Pringle is closer to “friction, crises of appropriation” (249). The struggle for control and authority that appears between Pringle and Prince seems absent in Prince and Miss S—’s collaboration.

The lack of visible tension between Prince and Miss S— is most likely influenced, in part, by their shared gender. In their research on collaborative writing, Ede and Lunsford identify two types of collaboration: the hierarchical mode of collaboration is “carefully, and often rigidly, structured, driven by highly specific goals, and carried out by people playing clearly defined and delimited roles. . . . This mode of collaborative writing is . . . highly productive, typically conservative, and most often . . . a masculine mode of discourse. . . . The hierarchical mode can be, and indeed often is, realized in situations that locate power in structurally oppressive ways” (133-34). The dialogic mode, on the other hand, is characterized by a type of interaction that is more

loosely structured and the roles enacted within it are fluid: one person may occupy multiple and shifting roles as a project progresses. . . . furthermore, those participating in dialogic collaboration generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivalent ventures. In dialogic collaboration, this group effort is seen as an essential part of the production—rather than the recovery—of knowledge and as a means of individual satisfaction within the group. . . . Because most who tried to describe it [the mode] were women, and because it seemed so clearly ‘other,’ we think of this mode as predominantly feminine. (Ede and Lunsford 133)

Lunsford and Ede reject the idea that these modes exist in binary opposition to each other and recognize that, like gender roles, discourse situations are “inherently mixed and paradoxical”

(134). They conclude, however, that it is reasonable to “find inscribed in any piece of collaboration or any particular collaborator the same kind of risks and tensions that are generally inscribed in our culture” (Ede and Lunsford 134). Thus, Pringle’s seemingly more assertive relationship with Prince, an association between a white man and a black woman, makes sense within the social context of early 19th-century England. It is equally important, however, to acknowledge that Miss S—’s relationship with Prince, despite their common gender, would probably be influenced by the racial attitudes of 19th-century abolitionists who, while they deeply believed in the evils of slavery, still presumed the superiority of whites.

Miss S—’s relationship/collaboration with Prince also serves a fundamentally different purpose than Pringle’s work with Prince. While Pringle’s position as editor is to present Prince’s story to the public, Miss S—’s role is to provide a written record of Prince’s life history. The nearly invisible presence of Miss S— within the text suggests a seamless, dialogic collaboration between Prince and Miss S—. Miss S— can be viewed as an intermediary who assists in the recovery of the voice of the (ex-)slave: the genesis of Prince’s narrative can be seen as an extension of her bodily pain and a rewriting of the slaveholder’s script of tyranny and ill-usage. The lasting psychic and physical consequences of severe pain cannot be underestimated, and the assistance of others can be instrumental in regaining a voice that has been silenced. As Elaine Scarry argues in *The Body in Pain*, the world and language are incompatible with pain, but with the expression of pain through language, pain can be destroyed or diminished (51). Prince’s recollection of a life marked by extraordinary difficulties, multiple losses, and physical abuse must have been emotionally difficult and may have caused some reaction (tears, inability to continue speaking?) that would require a response from Miss S—. In serving as an amanuensis, Miss S— can be seen as playing a healing or restorative role vis-à-vis Mary Prince. By speaking instead of writing, by sharing with Miss S— in lieu of conducting her exchange upon a sheet of paper, Prince regains some of her own powers of self-extension. Through their concerted and collaborative efforts of speaking and writing, Miss S— empowers Prince to give voice to her experience. As her amanuensis, Miss S— may be seen as a mirror that reflects and frames Prince’s story. “To be sure, like all metaphorical mirrors,” as Albert Stone explains in his study of contemporary as-told-to autobiographies, “this one has depths and a frame which affect the images contained” (163). Thus, while as-told-to life stories are, theoretically speaking, the simplest type of collaborative writing, the practice is often more complicated. For example, while Ford Madox Ford claims that Joseph Conrad dictated his works *A Mirror of the Sea* and *Some Personal Reminiscences*, Ford also admits pressing his friend for details that Conrad had suppressed or felt were unimportant (Davis 130). Again, while there is not concrete evidence to definitively prove a more active role for Miss S—, it seems reasonable to presume that Miss S— may have acted in a manner similar to Ford, questioning Prince when the account was unclear or probing for more details if the situation needed elaboration.

Although Miss S— might have helped Prince recover her memories of the past, she shouldn’t be seen as supplying or inventing those memories. In dictated autobiographies, as Albert Stone argues, memory belongs exclusively to the subject, while imagination is the province of both amanuensis and speaker (154). He concludes by emphasizing “the fact that two minds can sometimes create more veridical statements about one life and one psyche than might have been accomplished by the subject-self alone” (164). While Stone stresses the “veridical statements” that result from collaborative work in autobiography, the imaginative element is undeniably present in all autobiographies, including slave narratives. As Patricia Meyer Spacks notes, “We have become accustomed by now to the idea that autobiography, no matter how ‘honest,’ involves necessary fictions, artifices of self-exposure, masks through which alone the self can be known” (55). Like any autobiographer, Mary Prince, unconsciously or not, probably did create some “necessary fictions” during the telling of her life story. It seems

unfair, however, to hold her narrative to a different and more rigorous standard of “truth” than other autobiographies.

Scholars of slave narratives have dismissed dictated texts because of questions of truth and veracity. As a number of these critics have argued, the white editor/amanuensis had an enormous amount of control over the future of the black narrator and his/her manuscript.<sup>27</sup> William Andrews represents the typical position of literary scholars toward as-told-to tales: even while acknowledging that problems of composition, editing, origin, and control of manuscript complicate all early African-American autobiographies, Andrews finds dictated narratives so troubling that he excludes them from any in-depth scrutiny in his full length study on black autobiography.<sup>28</sup> These criticisms raise valid concerns. There are known cases of inauthentic slave narratives passed off for the “real thing.”<sup>29</sup> There is little evidence, however, to support such a charge in the case of Mary Prince’s narrative. While Miss S— wrote children’s books, short stories, and poetry, which were all produced and published under her name Susanna Strickland before she worked with Prince, the contrasting styles of Prince’s narrative and Strickland’s fiction, which critic Carol Shields described as “florid romantic” (2), suggest that Strickland did not embellish the slave’s story.<sup>30</sup> Further, some of Prince’s notable metaphors, such as her figurative use of the Caribbean spice, cayenne, as the wounding agent in place of the offensive words of slave traders, clearly emerge from Prince’s experience. Prince’s narrative is markedly devoid of the types of “stylistic extravagances” that white amanuenses and/or editors inserted in dictated narratives that were claimed nonetheless to be faithful transcriptions of the former slave’s words (Olney 163).

Yet the scholarly bias against dictated slave narratives remains strong.<sup>31</sup> The preference for written texts over orally transmitted narratives minimizes the external forces that impact all slave narratives, dictated or written: authors who wrote their own accounts of their lives in bondage were necessarily aware of and catered to their potential audience (who were white), their editors (who were white) and their publishers (who were white). Slaves, who depended on their ability to interpret the ubiquitous white power structure that controlled their lives would not need the reactions of their amanuensis to edit their story in an appropriate fashion. Furthermore, according to John Blassingame, the interfering hand of an editor in a slave’s narrative is easy to spot: “His literary flourish, weeping condemnation, and stirring appeals generally contrast sharply with the monotonous details of daily routine supplied by the slave” (372). Slaves who either wrote or told their stories before the abolition of slavery were well aware that the primary purpose of relating an account of their life was to assist in the battle to end slavery. Valerie Smith points out that both written and dictated narratives conform to certain demands since they “serve an outside interest: the stories are shaped according to the requirements of the abolitionists who published them and provided them with readers” (9-10). Finally, many ex-slaves who wrote about their lives in bondage were employed by abolitionists, and their written accounts usually retold their well-rehearsed, oft-repeated life stories. Because their abolitionist employers often had a hand in the publication of their account, the slave author was expected to conform to the agenda of the abolitionists. The anti-slavery lecture circuit permitted these former slaves “to structure, to embellish, and above all to polish an oral version of their tale,” according to Robert Stepto in his essay on authorial control in slave narratives, allowing the ex-slaves to have “a fairly well developed version of his or her tale . . . even before the question of written composition was entertained” (230). Given the influential cultural context in which ex-slaves related their life stories, to privilege self-written texts to the point of excluding dictated narratives from serious analysis seems unjustified and arbitrary.

Implicit in the critique and dismissal of dictated slave narratives is the privileging of single-authored texts. Any type of collaborative writing suffers in a culture that reveres and sustains the myth of the solitary genius/artist. The concept of individual authorship, however, has recently come under attack. From a variety of perspectives and for a multitude of reasons,



feminists, Marxists, structuralists, deconstructionists, to name a few, have questioned the Romantic ideal that locates the source of ideas in the authors themselves and identifies their texts as the expression of the author's individual genius. Notions of the subject and subjectivity have undergone rigorous interrogation that has challenged the concept of author as the solitary individual who produces a text.<sup>32</sup> Michael Groden summarizes these questions regarding the constitution of an author in his essay "Contemporary Textual and Literary Theory": "Are we concerned with an isolated human being who conceives and writes a work, or the social being who, willingly or reluctantly, collaborates with others (manuscript editor, copyeditor, printers, proofreaders) to achieve a public text? Can an author, or any of these individuals, be seen as an autonomous, unified subject isolated from other forces (social, economic, historical, psychological)?" (264). This attack on the conventional definition of the author and the challenges to the notion of an individual artistic subjectivity allow for the expansion of the category of "literature," raise new sets of questions, and call for different perspectives and definitions. *The History of Mary Prince*, for example, is a collaborative text, and it reveals perhaps more openly than many other 19th-century works the ways in which individual experiences and cultural forces constitute all narrative subjectivities.

Furthermore, Prince's narrative serves as a reminder of the social nature of all textual production. Jerome McGann summarizes this view: "Texts are produced and reproduced under specific social and institutional conditions, and hence . . . every text, including those that may appear to be purely private, is a social text. This view entails a corollary understanding, that a 'text' is not a 'material thing' but a material event or set of events, a point in time (or a moment in space) where certain communicative interchanges are being practiced. . . . One comes to see that texts always stand within an editorial horizon (the horizon of their production and reproduction)" (21). The "communicative interchanges" that are often hidden in textual production are visible, to a degree, in Prince's autobiography. A close analysis of Prince's narrative illuminates revealing aspects about the operations of power working across the lines of gender and race. Indeed, as Albert Stone argues, such collective work presents a unique perspective: "As psychoanalysis proves, certain kinds of historical and psychological revelations are created only when two minds work together. The results of such collaboration may, moreover, be used to understand more fully the cultural moment out of which each emerges" (164). *The History of Mary Prince* offers a fascinating glimpse of the ways in which as-told-to life stories are transformed into cultural narratives.

The production and reproduction of Prince's narrative are not only revealing about the 19th century; variations in recent reprintings of Prince's narrative disclose that Prince's body and text are still being subjected to manipulation and interpretation and expose interesting revelations about current operations of power. The Mentor edition of *The History of Mary Prince*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., does not include the postscript which discusses Prince's eye affliction and appears in the second and third editions; nor does it reprint the appendix which is attached to the third edition and contains the letter signed by the four white women; both appear in Moira Ferguson's edition.<sup>33</sup> Gates states that the Mentor version uses the second edition of Prince's text (G 516).<sup>34</sup> Since the second edition includes the postscript that mentions Prince's eye affliction and since Gates's edition does not have this material, Gates either mistakenly reprinted the first, rather than the second edition, or he omitted material. Further, Gates claims in his introductory material that only two, instead of three, editions of Prince's text were published (xv). These two errors—claiming two rather than three editions and reprinting an incorrectly identified or a changed edition—affect the modern readers' interpretation of Prince's autobiography. In the excitement and rush to republish texts that had been "lost" or ignored, Gates may have let his desire to fill a void in the publishing world take precedence over accuracy. That such mistakes occur by scholars "seeking recognition for previously ignored,

forgotten, or suppressed individuals or groups" is not surprising or unusual, according to Julie Bates Dock. In her article on misprintings of and misconceptions about Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the January, 1996 *PMLA* issue devoted to "The Status of Evidence," Dock notes that "A similar effect has doubtless occurred not only for other authors and texts 'rediscovered' by feminist critics but also perhaps for any works recovered when textual and scholarly exactitude was not a critical priority" (62).

Regardless of the reasons for the discrepancies in Gates' edition, it is important that modern readers are aware of such textual variations and take them into account when reading Prince's text. Without the appendix that mentions Prince's eye problems, it would be impossible to speculate upon one potential possibility regarding the oral transmission of her text: Prince's visual difficulties may have interfered with an attempt to set down her own history. Since Prince includes several references to learning how to read and write in her autobiography, it seems possible that she is literate. Whether Prince's eyesight had anything to do with the method of production for her narrative cannot be proven definitively; however, the availability of all material published in Prince's narrative can make a profound difference in interpretation. As textual critic Peter Shillingsburg observes, "editors *are* critics, too; an edition reflects the editor's critical biases and talent or lack thereof. . . . Edition-users have a very high stake in knowing what principles were used to produce the edition they are relying upon" (91).

Despite their very different roles as editors, Gates's and Pringle's editorial practices put them in dialogue across the centuries. Just as Pringle attempts to control and interpret Prince's text by attaching his preface, supplement, and footnotes, and by appending Asa-Asa's narrative, Gates's editorial decision not to include or mention the postscript and appendix that specifically relate to Mary Prince, whether by omission or design, can be seen as eerily replicating Pringle's appropriation and manipulation of Prince's body, voice, and text to suit his own purposes and priorities. While Pringle and Gates are undoubtedly interested in Prince's life and helpful in disseminating Prince's story, their editorial practices further mediate and complicate the reader's relationship to Prince's text. There is an inherently problematic political dynamic at work in all editorial and critical practice involving authors whose stories are being recovered and represented for contemporary readers, and I am aware that my own critical engagement with Prince's text raises similar ethical concerns. However, it is my hope that my mediation serves to deepen readers' appreciation not only for Prince's text, but also for the complicated power dynamics involved in textual production and reproduction.

#### NOTES

1. This phrase, the "unmaking of the world," is from Elaine Scarry's brilliant book *The Body in Pain*, and refers to the ways in which intense physical pain annihilates the sufferers' sense of self and the world. I am deeply indebted to Scarry's insightful analysis and observations about pain.
2. Very little critical material on *The History of Mary Prince* exists. In addition to a handful of articles, including those by Sandra Pacquet, Jenny Sharpe, Gillian Whitlock, and Rosetta Haynes, and a few dissertations, Moira Ferguson has a chapter on Mary Prince in her book *Subject to Others*. Finally, Clare Midgley briefly discusses Prince and her narrative in her book, *Women Against Slavery*.
3. Moira Ferguson edited *The History of Mary Prince*, which was published by Pandora Press in 1987 and then by The University of Michigan Press in 1993. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., included Prince's autobiography in an anthology he edited, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, published by Mentor Books in 1987. In 1988, Oxford University Press in conjunction with The Schomburg Library for Research in Black Culture published *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, which included Prince's story. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., acted as general editor for the thirty-volume set, but no individual editor was identified in this Oxford University edition. There are several important

omissions from the Mentor and Oxford editions. Since these editions appear to be identical, only the Mentor text will be cited, since it was published prior to the Oxford University Press version. Because of these textual variations, both the Ferguson (F) and Gates' Mentor (G) editions will be cited when quoting from the text, and the differences will be discussed later in this article.

4. As Moira Ferguson documents in her comprehensive introduction to her edition of *The History of Mary Prince*, most Bermudan slaves had one or two owners throughout their life, and slaves were frequently purchased for "lifetime servitude" (7).
5. Prince's editor, Thomas Pringle, explains in his preface to *The History of Mary Prince* that the names of all people mentioned by Prince were printed in full except for those of Captain I—, Mrs. I, and Mr. D—, since these "individuals are now gone to answer at a far more awful tribunal than that of public opinion" and since their surviving and "perhaps innocent relatives" may suffer from Prince's statements about them (F 46; G 185).
6. Prince's situation occurred shortly after the infamous case of Grace Jones, who traveled to England with her Antigua owner in 1822 and then returned to Antigua—and slavery—the year after. Debate ensued regarding whether Jones' reenslavement was legal, and her case was ultimately decided upon by the High Court of Admiralty in 1827. Lord Stowell ruled that Jones' freedom was contingent to her residency in England and that she forfeited this right on her return to Antigua, where she came under the jurisdiction of colonial law. See Midgley, (86-87) and Shyllon (210-29) for discussions of this case.
7. The Wood family's obstinate refusal to sell Prince is difficult to explain. While still in Antigua, the Woods offered on several occasions to sell her, but refused each time she came up with someone who was willing to buy, and then free her. See Ferguson's introduction for an extensive discussion of Prince's relationship with the Woods and some possible explanations for their behavior.
8. Prince draws on the style of the sentimental novel whose goal was to teach virtue by demonstrating the capacity to feel and display sentiments. See Mullan; Todd.
9. Sandra Pouchet Paquet discusses Prince's use of the trope of the heart as a site of resistance and as the central value in her narrative.
10. Prince's text is remarkable because of the switch away from sentimental language, a mode that would seem to be precisely the genre in which to communicate her pain. As Franny Nudelman points out, abolitionists employed the sentimental mode with the hopes of inspiring white women toward political action through the descriptions of suffering female slaves. She finds Harriet Jacobs's narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, unique because of Jacobs's utilization of a genre generally used by white abolitionists speaking on behalf of slaves. Like Jacobs, Prince also employs the sentimental, but unlike her successor, Prince is unable to sustain the use of this genre. While it is impossible to account completely for the change in narrative style, the timing of the switch suggests that it is connected to the frequent presence of physical pain.
11. Prince seems so overwhelmed, so consumed by bodily woes that she does not appear to mount any opposition at Turk's Island, even though the island was infamous for its slave escapes; slaves frequently found passage to nearby San Domingo (Ferguson, Introduction 9). Her passivity on Turk's Island contrasts with earlier, brief moments of resistance, suggesting the degree to which physical concerns consume her at this point in time. While at the I—'s, Prince runs away and briefly finds protection and shelter with her mother. Continuing her defiance when returned to her owners, she summons the courage to speak out to Captain I— and protest her repeated beatings. In contrast, she records no such acts of resistance or attempts to escape while she lives on Turk's Island.
12. This quote from Mr. Wood is not part of Prince's narrated text; it is from a letter written by Mr. Wood and included in the lengthy appendage written by Thomas Pringle. Mr. Wood's letter and Pringle's supplement will be discussed later.
13. Although this point underplays the possibility of Prince's disability worsening over the course of time, it stresses the primacy of one's immediate environment in determining the response to one's body and illness.
14. Brodwin's remarks refer to a patient, Diane Reden, suffering from symptoms of chronic pain. Despite drastically different life circumstances, Reden and Prince's situations are analogous in that both use their bodily symptoms—unconsciously or not—to avoid certain situations and as a way to critique disagreeable social circumstances.
15. Barbara Bush documents the accusations by Caribbean planters who suspected that slave women induced miscarriages and reviews the work of several other historians who assert that

- some slave women consciously manipulated and controlled their childbearing potential as a method of resistance. See Bush's chapter on "Slave Motherhood," particularly pages 137-42.
16. Brodwin distinguishes the practical benefits of what is commonly called secondary gain from the rhetorical aspects of expressing pain which results in a change of the balance of power. See Brodwin, especially page 93.
  17. The practical difficulty of a slave leaving his/her owners while in England, where all slaves were legally free, was that most ex-slaves found it difficult to find employment. Moreover, the economic crisis in England in the 1830s made work even scarcer (see Ferguson, Introduction, 1). Prince admits how frightening the prospect of leaving the Wood household is for a black woman who has no acquaintances, friends or family in England. Most likely, the Woods were counting on this fear and were shocked when she did leave.
  18. The autobiography ends with Prince's freedom unresolved. The Woods refuse to sell Prince, and they return to Antigua without her. The Anti-Slavery Society fought in order to secure Prince's freedom (including the introduction of a bill in Parliament to free Prince), but the matter remains unresolved at the time that Prince's autobiography is published. Prince's last documented appearance was in court in 1833; her remaining life is a mystery. See Ferguson's Introduction.
  19. The authenticating devices in Frederick Douglass's 1845 narrative, which contains a nine-page preface written by William Lloyd Garrison and a three page letter from Wendell Phillips, could be considered typical, both in terms of length and content. Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) is similar to Douglass's because of the introduction supplied by Lydia Maria Child and the testimonials contained in the appendix from Amy Post and George Lowther. Like Douglass's text, the documentation for Jacobs's narrative is minimal, occupying just a few pages. In three (Lucy A. Delaney's *From the Darkness Cometh the Light or Struggles for Freedom* (1891), Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story* (1898), or Annie L. Burton's *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (1909)) out of the five narratives included with Prince's autobiography in *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, there are no introductory or concluding documents which attempt to introduce the author or provide character references. In the remaining two slave narratives in the volume, both of which are as-told-to tales like Prince's, the supporting material is minimal: a sentence of introduction from the amanuensis precedes *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* (1863), while a one and one-half page preface by the transcriber, Dr. L.S. Thompson, the sister-in-law of the narrator, introduces *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson* (1866). Slave narratives published earlier than those mentioned, closer to the time of Prince's, also reveal the excessive nature of Pringle's written additions to Prince's narrative. See *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper* (1838) by Moses Roper, and *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) by Olaudah Equiano, both of which contain several pages of introductory material only. Finally, while Robert Stepto asserts that the introductory documents to Henry Bibb's *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1850) "may be the most elaborate guarantee of authenticity found in the slave narrative canon" (Stepto 228), the editor's introduction is only 10 pages long and precedes Bibb's two hundred page narrative. While Lucius Matlack might have included more voices in his introduction to Bibb's text than does Pringle in his supplement to Prince's text, Matlack is confined to the opening pages, and no one voice predominates or competes with Bibb's story. The excessiveness of Pringle's editorial apparatus can be assessed more accurately in the context of these examples.
  20. The censored incident concerns the accusation that Prince stole another woman's husband and physically fought with the woman in the presence of Mrs. Wood. I talk further about this alleged event later in this article.
  21. For scholarly speculations about the sexual abuse and harassment from which Prince probably suffered and the social constraints which forbid her to speak of such experiences see Ferguson, Introduction (9-10); Ferguson, *Subject* (281-98); and Sharpe.
  22. The case of Eleanor Mead, which Pringle briefly mentions in his supplement, can be seen as representative of the coverage of contested slave cases in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*. In this situation, the slavery journal reprinted the account of Eleanor Mead's trial that was carried in the local Jamaican paper, *The Royal Gazette*. Eleanor Mead, an elderly slave, wanted to be removed from the care of her master and mistress because of alleged ill treatment. In addition to reprinting excerpted transcripts of the trial, *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* also included the reporter's depiction of Mead as "a personification of the passion of Hate" (485). The account in the slavery journal concludes with a comment on the Jamaican newspaper's coverage: "These closing remarks of the Editor, or Reporter, are doubtless intended to operate unfavour-

ably to the wretched sufferer in the mind of the English reader; but they have, very probably, no foundation, except in prejudice, and in the desire to blacken her character" (485). This format, in which the slaveowners' perspective is included and then refuted, is typical of *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*.

23. Macqueen's accusations that Pringle was responsible for destroying Mr. Wood's reputation lead to a libel suit by Pringle against Macqueen's publisher, Thomas Cadell, which was decided in Pringle's favor. Mr. Wood responded by suing Pringle for libel, a case that he won "by default because Pringle could not produce witnesses from the West Indies to prove his allegations" (Ferguson, Introduction 23).
24. See the February 22, 1833, *London Times*, page 4 for an account of the Pringle v. Cadell trial and the March 1, 1833, *London Times*, page 6-7 for a summary of the Wood v. Pringle case.
25. My conversations with Rachel Rosenberg about collaborative writing were very useful in clarifying and expanding my ideas. The introduction to her dissertation, "Dramas of Collaboration in Twentieth-Century Women's Theatre and Fiction," was also invaluable.
26. The collaborative writing paradigm for Prince's narrative stands in opposition to Robert Stepto's models of slave narratives, which he divides into eclectic, integrated, generic, and authenticating narratives. Prince would be put into the eclectic, or first-phase, narrative since the authenticating documents are segregated and not in dialogue with her tale. The introductory materials in the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*, Stepto's example of an eclectic narrative, serve to enact "many race rituals . . . not the least of which is Matlack's [the editor] conversation with white America across the text and figurative body of a silent former slaver. . . . Insofar as Bibb must depend on his publisher to be an intermediary between his text and his audience, he relinquishes control of the narrative" (229) which, in the final analysis, "relegates him to a posture of partial literacy" (231). Prince's authenticating devices, like Bibb's, are not integrated within her text. Rather than consigning Prince's narrative, along with Bibb's, to a less sophisticated narrative category, a collaborative model would highlight the textual struggle over the meaning and interpretation of her life and reveals Prince's incredible resilience and her refusal to capitulate to the demands and stereotypes that surrounded her. The collaborative model is also different than the "collaboration" that occurs between Nat Turner and Thomas Gray that Eric Sundquist discusses in his book, *To Wake the Nations*. The Turner-Gray collaboration, which Sundquist describes as resembling "the collaboration of master and slave" and "recapitulat[ing] the dynamics of bondage" (39), is fundamentally different from Prince's relationships. First, Turner was a captured runaway, accused, and ultimately executed, for masterminding the bloody Nat Turner Rebellion. Secondly, Gray appeared to have a financial interest in obtaining and publishing Turner's "confessions," while neither Prince's editor or amanuensis had a similar economic motive. Thus, these two "collaborations" are fundamentally different in structure. Nonetheless, like Sundquist, I agree that there is much to be learned about master-slave dynamics through the ambiguities inherent in these jointly produced texts.
27. See Smith, Andrews, Butterfield, Blassingame, and Stepto for a discussion of the ways in which white editors/amanuenses were felt to influence, even distort, the slave's story.
28. It is useful to remember that nearly all slave narratives, self-written or narrated, were viewed with suspicion by historians and dismissed by literary scholars for a good part of the 20th century. Narratives written by ex-slaves are now widely accepted as appropriate objects of literary study, but as-told-to tales remain maligned. See Blassingame.
29. See Starling (221-48) and Blassingame (372-73) for a discussion of fabricated and disputed slave narratives. Sometimes such charges are unfairly made, as Jean Fagin Yellin proved in the case of Harriet Jacobs, whose narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was long presumed to be fiction or heavily edited by a white editor. See Yellin.
30. Susanna Strickland was a close friend to and a frequent houseguest of Thomas Pringle, and was introduced to Prince by Pringle. After marrying and emigrating to Upper Canada, now called Ontario, Susanna Strickland Moodie wrote about her life as a pioneer. These two autobiographical works, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853), are her best-known writings. She also wrote five serialized novels, published over seventy sketches, stories and poems, a book of poetry, children's stories, and served as an amanuensis to one other slave, Ashton Warner. See Carl Ballstadt's introduction to *Letters of a Lifetime* for more information about Strickland Moodie's life.
31. The scholarly bias against dictated slave narrative may explain the dearth of critical material on *The History of Mary Prince*. See note 2 for a list of the work published on Prince's narrative.
32. See Ede and Lunsford's chapter on "The Concept of Authorship" and James Leonard and Christine Wharton's essay, "Breaking the Silence: Collaboration and the Isolationist Para-

digm," for comprehensive discussions about recent theoretical attacks on the notion of the "author."

33. Ferguson's edition also contains an appendix with a copy of the petition presented to Parliament on Prince's behalf. This petition, however, never appeared in the first, second, or third editions of Prince's original narrative, so its absence in Gates's text is not an issue.
34. Moira Ferguson, in her comprehensive and extensively researched introduction to her edition of *The History of Mary Prince*, published the same year as Gates's edition, states that she could not locate a copy of the second edition. She did find copies of the first and third edition (the latter one contains the changes in the second edition). Ferguson identified and included these textual variants in the Pandora Press, and later, the Michigan University Press, editions. After searching several computerized world-wide data bases of library collections, I could only locate—and looked at—one copy of the second edition, a facsimile owned by Smith College which contained, as expected, the postscript that mentions Prince's blindness, but not the letter by the four white women attesting to the physical evidence of abuse on Prince's body.

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