

Abolition as a Global Enterprise



Readings:

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave (Related by Herself)*. ed. Sara Salih. New York: Penguin, 2001.

[first published 1831, edited by Susanna Strickland]

Note: Read the narrative itself and the appendices.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” (Boston) *Liberty Bell*, 1848

[http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/projects/runawayslave/storyReader\\$10.html](http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/projects/runawayslave/storyReader$10.html) or

<http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/ebbrowning/bl-ebbrow-runaway-1.htm>

Secondary scholarship:

Baumgartner, Barbara. “The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in ‘The History of Mary Prince.’” *Callaloo* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 253-75.

Marjorie Stone, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Garrisonians: ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’, the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, and Abolitionist Discourse in the *Liberty Bell*.” *Victorian Women Poets*. Ed. Alison Chapman. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003. 33-55. This text is available on e-college.

Alan Rice, “Dramatising the Black Atlantic: Live Action Projects in Classrooms,” from Hughes and Robbins, *TT*

Marjorie Stone, “Frederick Douglass, Maria Weston Chapman, and Harriet Martineau: Atlantic Abolitionist Networks and Transatlanticism’s Binaries,” from Hughes and Robbins, *TT*

[Note: As of 8/29, we are still awaiting permission from Professor Stone to share her draft. We’ll keep you posted. At this point, it is not available on the workspace.]

- I. **Guest presentation: Graduate Student Larisa Asaeli**
- II. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”**



The syllabus gives two websites where you can find “Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” but we encourage you to read the poem in the *Liberty Bell* itself, since this was the first, and transatlantic publication venue, for the poem. (You can access this annual publication in TCU’s American Periodicals Series database or simply search in the library catalogue for the journal title *Liberty Bell*, follow the link, and click on the 1848 issue.) For images and more information on the *Liberty Bell* itself, including an image of an 1848 bound copy, go to <http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gcarr/19cusww/lb/gallery.html> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Liberty_Bell_\(annual\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Liberty_Bell_(annual)).

We also invite you to go to the *EBB Archive*, a digital resource initiated by Marjorie Stone at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. In addition to a brief chronology of EBB’s life, images of some mss, and other contextual material, the “media archive” includes a film of Connie Winston performing “Runaway Slave” during the 2009 British Women Writers Conference convened at Iowa University (<http://ebbarchive.org/media/media.php>). Linda Hughes was lucky enough to be present for this memorable event.

We encourage you to begin with Marjorie Stone’s essay, since she contextualizes the poem in depth. You might also want to note the essay by Elizabeth Battles cited by Stone: Beth Battles is a TCU Ph.D. (1992) and now Professor of English and Director of the Honors Program at Texas Wesleyan University.

We will elaborate just a bit on EBB’s West Indian connections. Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (1806-1861) was the daughter of Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett, the grandson of an “immensely wealthy Jamaican plantation owner”; her father himself was born in Jamaica and did not leave for England until he was 7—old enough to have memories of the slaves his family owned (Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1988], p. 4). He married Mary Graham-Clarke, whose family also owned land in Jamaica, in 1805. When EBB’s younger brother was born in 1807, her father ordered a holiday for the slaves back on the plantation in Jamaica in honor of the occasion.

The sugar cane plantation meant wealth for the family, and Elizabeth along with the increasing brood of Barrett children (eleven in all, though one died in infancy) grew up in the idyllic country house called Hope End. They lived there until the impending abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, plus a slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1832, meant an end to income from the plantation. Hope End was sold, and the Barrett family (the widower Edward and all the children) eventually settled at 50, Wimpole Street in London.

The grandfather of poet Robert Browning (1812-1889), with whom EBB eloped in 1846 (since her father forbade any of his children to marry), was also a slave-owning plantation owner in the Caribbean, in St. Kitts. Browning’s father, Robert Browning, Senior, however, rebelled against this system, teaching some of the Afro-Caribbeans to read when he was sent to the plantation as a youth. On returning to England, Browning, Senior, renounced his inheritance on moral grounds and sought his living in the world of banking.

Marjorie Stone is McCulloch Chair in English and Professor of Gender Studies at Dalhousie. In 2011 she spent a semester at the National Endowment for the Humanities Center at

Research Triangle Park, NC working on her project tentatively entitled *Citizenship Formations and Nineteenth-Century Transnationalist Networks*, which will examine 19th-century English, American and Italian writers and activists and the new forms of cosmopolitan citizenship generated by transformative international movements in the nineteenth century (anti-slavery, Italian liberation, Ragged Schools, women's rights, peace and free trade, Zionism, and the anti-trafficking campaign led by Josephine Butler, often labeled the "white slavery" controversy).

As you read Professor Stone's essay and experience the poem, consider these questions:

- 1) You'll recall that we discussed the issue of audience in Rowson. What sort of audience does "Runaway Slave" seem to invite or demand?
- 2) In relation to our discussion of transatlantic studies' scope, method, and "approach," how would you characterize Stone's orientation? You might also consider the relationship she maintains between theory and archival research.
- 3) Stone discusses the abolitionist networks and rhetoric adopted by EBB; how would you also compare EBB's abolitionist rhetoric to the Mary Prince edition?
- 4) Some of you may be very comfortable with poetic analysis and others less comfortable. For those less comfortable, I suggest that you read (or hear read) the work aloud and worry less about line endings than units of thought that carry along the larger poem and its story.

It might also help if you track these motifs as the poem unfolds and see how they modulate and with what effect (ironic, melodramatic, affective, satiric, political, etc.):

the "look";
the song;
whiteness and blackness (and dark)
the "mark"

For an overview of further issues in the poem in a teaching context (a useful model of the intersection of pedagogy and poetry scholarship), see also the Schaub essay in the "Supplementary Readings" below.

- 5) If you're doing a close reading, does this divert attention away from ideological and cultural analysis of the poem or contribute to it? What about the relation here between close reading and the work's transatlantic status?
- 6) Stone notes that some scholars have raised questions about the political and ethical stakes of EBB's assuming the voice of a black woman. How do you approach this exercise of agency, especially when you're reading the poem next to Mary Prince? And what impact does knowledge that the poem first began as a monologue uttered by a male speaker have on your response to the poem?

III. The History of Mary Prince

First published in 1831, this narrative came to its initial readers with a heavy dose of paratexts designed in part to authenticate elements in the story that supporters of slavery might call into question. As a number of critics have noted, therefore, we need to pay close attention to the historical moment and the material features of this publication's initial circulation—particularly its ties through editor Thomas Pringle to the anti-slavery publishing techniques of the day. (Pringle was Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society and clearly viewed Prince's account

as a viable tool for the active campaign then being carried out to persuade Parliament to end slavery in Britain's colonies. Significantly, two years after the book's publication, slavery was abolished in the British colonies, in 1833).

Like much of the abolitionist literature that some of you may know from American Studies (e.g., *Incidents in the Life of Harriet Jacobs* or Frederick Douglas's narrative), Pringle's story makes repeated and calculated use of body-focused description to convey the horrors of slavery. One question to ask is how factoring in her embodied travel to England (and, before that, other signs of mobility earlier in the narrative) come into play in this text, and why. Also, consider how the marks on her body serve as testimony—testimony that must be authenticated in a range of ways in order to secure credibility.

Much of the scholarship on Prince's narrative has explored the relationship between Prince and Pringle, as well as between her authorial (and personal) *voice* and his. See, for example, Allen and Simmons, in the supplemental reading list below. Further, by building in part on interpretive frameworks that were developed by US scholars for studying US-based slave narratives, a good deal of the criticism on this text in the 1990s and 2000s sought to apply the "black letter in a white envelope" metaphor. Banner helpfully surveys this scholarship in her 2013 *Callaloo* article. Accordingly, a number of studies argued for the need to resist Pringle's packaging of Prince's story (which Banner dubs "editorial infiltration"—299) and, instead, to seek traces of a more authentic voice within Mary's core narrative, while at the same time peeling away features of Pringle's editorial process that obscured her agency (both personal and rhetorical). Interestingly, however, Banner sees drawbacks to this theme in the scholarship based in "an authenticating impulse" (300), particularly a tendency to reify and oversimplify the black speaking agent whose voice is being recovered (cast as "the 'real' slave's suppressed but still locatable presence" [300-301]). Instead, she urges us to note the performative nature of Prince's narrative (and others in the genre) so as to recover a strong sense of its literary features as "artistically compelling" (303).

For your reading, then, you'll want to seek a balance between the critical enterprise of unpacking the tensions around the Pringle and Prince authorial markers—between the antislavery publishing agenda and the singular "voice" of the transatlantic black subject—on the one hand, and an appreciation of the narrative, in the form in which it was published, as a forceful entry into the highly politicized literary marketplace for abolitionist literature of that time.

In the latter context, part of our own discussions of Prince's narrative will focus, like our reading of Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, on the cultural and historical context that shaped the initial publication. We'll also want to take a look, as we did with the Norton edition of *Charlotte Temple*, at the packaging of Prince's narrative that Penguin has provided for us. You will find intriguing, by way of comparison, the critique mounted (in our assigned reading by Baumgartner) of the edition prepared by renowned African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., whose editorial work Baumgartner implicitly compares to that of Pringle! Watch for that analysis near the end of her essay.

Missing from most of the scholarship on *The History of Mary Prince* has been a critical examination of another person involved in this collaborative writing: Susanna Strickland, whose contribution Pringle treats rather dismissively. One exception to this critical neglect is Gillian Whitlock's thoughtful portrayal of the relationship between Prince and Strickland as an example of "Volatile Subjects" interacting in complex ways on the basis of shared gender identity, while also having their interactions shaped by race and class differences. Watch for the occasional (but,

Whitlock argues, significant) signs of this process within the text; Whitlock urges us to pay as much attention to this relational pairing as to that between Pringle and Prince. Another exception to the pattern of erasing Strickland from the equation is the secondary reading we've asked you to do: Barbara Baumgartner's "The Body as Evidence: Resistance, Collaboration, and Appropriation in 'The History of Mary Prince.'" *Callaloo* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 253-75. Thus, one question we'll want to address in class is this: What does this line of analysis, bringing Strickland into the picture, add to our reading of Prince's story, and how?

In foregrounding Strickland more than has been typical for most secondary scholarship, we also introduce you to a figure who herself will ultimately be defined, in part, by transatlantic travel. Having married John Dunbar Moodie soon after serving as Prince's amanuensis, Strickland (with Moodie) migrated to the backwoods of Canada, where she found a distinctive writing voice of her own, first in a series of periodical sketches on life "in the bush," to use the language of the day, and later by collecting her sketches into a book that drew intrigued readers on both sides of the Atlantic. Today, both Canadian scholars and creative writers (no less than Margaret Atwood!) credit Susanna Strickland Moodie as one of the major founders of Canadian literature. We'll read parts of her book later in the semester, when you'll want to keep in mind this earlier part of her personal and authorial history.

To sum up, then, for some points of examination in your reading of the Prince narrative, you'll want to keep these questions in mind:

- how to characterize and critique the narrative's authorship, overall, and its various authorial voices (both evident and [partially?] suppressed);
- how to connect that authorial practice and the narrative's actual content with the transatlantic anti-slavery movement of the 1830s, in Britain and elsewhere;
- how to link our study of this text to concepts of the "Black Atlantic" and the African diaspora as central to transatlantic studies;
- what we gain by setting this text and its publication context in dialogue with the EBB poem and its publication context. As one example, both these texts—EBB's poem and Prince's narrative—use the female body [specifically, a traveling body] as one discursive space for depicting the horrors of slavery. Do you see specific similarities in the textual features linked to this strategy in the two readings?

IV. Alan Rice's essay online in the workspace

Professor Rice is one of the UK-based contributors to the book. He's been actively involved in transatlantic studies for quite a while; hence, we suspect, his high comfort level with building pedagogical strategies that explicitly draw on the field's strengths. (His essay, in fact, is one of the most directly focused on classroom teaching approaches that we have in the collection.)

As you read his chapter in the online workspace, consider how he draws on key concepts of transatlantic studies in his teaching techniques for introducing students to the slave trade as connected to and impacting the entire Atlantic basin. Also, consider ways in which you might draw on his approach in your own teaching—for this and other topics that push against traditional national boundaries. In addition, since one of our topics this week will be to examine VOICE in writings by nineteenth-century writers (and editors) addressing slavery culture, identify aspects of his writing voice as a scholar-teacher and how he uses that voice to advance the agenda of recovering (or at least partially recovering) "lost" historical figures.

Supplementary readings for your future work on this week's topic:

- Allen, Jessica L. "Pringle's Pruning of Prince: *The History of Mary Prince* and the Question of Repetition." *Callaloo* 35.2 (2012): 509-519.
- Banner, Rachel. "Surface and Stasis: Re-reading Slave Narrative via *The History of Mary Prince*." *Callaloo* 36.2 (2013): 298-311.
- Graham, Shane. "Black Atlantic Literature as Transnational Cultural Space." *Literature Compass* 10.6 (2013): 508-18.
- Schaub, Melissa. "The Margins of the Dramatic Monologue: Teaching Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point.'" *Victorian Poetry* 49.4 (Winter 2011): 557-68.
- Simmons, K. Merinda. "Beyond 'Authenticity': Migration and Epistemology of 'Voice' in Mary Prince's *History of Mary Prince* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba*." *College Literature* 36.4 (Fall 2009): 75-99.
- Whitlock, Gillian. "Volatile Subjects: The History of Mary Prince." *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*. Edited by Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. 72-88.