JACOBS AND SLAVE LAW: PSYCHOANALYZING INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE
OF A SLAVE GIRL

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DEDICATION

For my loving husband, Randy, and my dear mother, Sybil, who have inspired me to write this thesis. Thank you Carl, my daddy, for your strength.
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SECTION I

SYMPATHETIC NARRATION AND THE DILEMMA OF COMPASSION

AN INTRODUCTION

Conventionally the antebellum slave narrative carefully unfolds the private life of the former slave while making a strong argument against slavery. I suggest that the author meticulously discloses a personal crisis only to propose that the process of telling about one’s trials in nineteenth-century slave narration does not simply involve speaking about the evils of slavery in a nonsensical and irrational manner. The narrator takes on the responsibility of a moral agent instructing the reader how to feel appropriately about situations where the enslaved has suffered sexual exploitation and inhumane acts of cruelty. Feeling “appropriately” about the narrator’s sufferings suggests that the reader’s emotional response is the fuel by which the audience may bring about social change to alleviate the narrator’s hardship. Therefore “sympathy has recently become the subject of recent analysis in critical and historical studies on American literature and culture, especially about works in the antebellum period” (Hendler, 115). Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself, by author Harriet Jacobs under the pseudonym Linda Brent, serves as an appropriate example of a didactic sentimental narrative revealing a justification for the abolishment of slavery.1 The protagonist, also the narrator, makes a

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1 Read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin as discussed by critic Jane Tompkins in her essay, “Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Politics of Literary History,” Glyph 2 (1978). Since both texts contain “structures of feeling,” Stowe and Jacobs’ work are often compared to one another as complex texts that produces
plausible case for this political agenda conveying how she feels about her sufferings residing in a slave milieu. As Glenn Hendler says in his book *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* on the logic of sympathetic narration, the readers are instructed how to feel for and with the protagonist. More specifically what "one must feel is the suffering of others" (Hendler, 3). In order to do this, the reader must feel compassion for the protagonist; it is the "primary emotional goal of sentimental narration" (Hendler, 3). Therefore to "feel compassion as opposed to mere pity, one must be able to imagine oneself, at least to some extent in another's position" (Hendler, 3). The politics of affect however reaches its limit the moment the audience is reminded that there is an experiential difference between themselves and the narrator. In short, the reader will not feel for the protagonist if they cannot sympathetically identify with experiences the narrator discloses in the narrative. Therefore, in addition to being a moral agent, sentimental narration also entails bridging the gap of difference between the protagonist and the reader.

Since the former slave uses personal accounts to justify the abolishment of slavery, this essay specifically deals with making sense of the moral tensions embedded in Jacobs’ decision to recount the details of the “deliberate calculation.” In order to meet the objective of a sentimental narration, Jacobs must gain sympathy from the audience in a situation where she must anticipate and alleviate complex issues surrounding her sympathetic affect in the reader to “pity and pardon” the protagonist’s defiance of slave law in flight in order to fit a political agenda for the abolishment of slavery. According to Tompkins’ analysis of sympathy, appealing to the audiences’ emotions was a crafty way for both authoresses to manipulate the readers’ feelings to move them to action against slavery. Conventionally, this is the primary purpose for including structures of feeling; teach the reader how to feel properly in order to bring about change. Definitively, the writing style of an author usually includes didactic language that informs or tells the reader how to feel appropriately about the depiction of an incident.
strategy to avoid rape. In light of the aforementioned facts, Section I demonstrates how Jacobs draws on the logic of sympathy to bridge the gap of difference between the narrator and the reader. This section also shows why Jacobs faces “dilemma of compassion” while revealing herself as a victim within an infrastructure she describes as gothic. Section II utilizes Saidiya Hartman’s interpretation of slave law to take a closer look at the legal position of the enslaved woman by addressing the question of will and choice. Moreover, this section shows why Jacobs continues to present herself as a victim despite the fact that she faces aforementioned dilemma. Section III of this essay explicates Freudian psychoanalysis and trauma theory with respect to slave law to make suggestions about how Jacobs’ expressive rhetoric empowers her with the ability to maintain narrative authority in order to produce affect in the readers. In short, section III also shows how Jacobs’ sentimental articulation of the “deliberate calculation” suggests a particular kind of suffering, I call trauma. A psychoanalytic interpretation of her language also reveals a successful navigation through “dilemma of compassion.” It thereby enables the reader to imagine oneself, to some extent, in the position of a slave woman. As a result, this paper describes Incidents, as a sentimental narrative that contains a didactic message communicating the sufferings of the enslaved woman to meet a political agenda for the abolishment of slavery.

In his Introduction of Public Sentiments Hendler says of Philip Fisher, that “compassion is of course, the primary goal of sentimental narration. Compassion exists in relation to suffering and makes the suffering the primary subject matter, perhaps the exclusive subject matter of a sentimental narrative (Hendler, 3). That is, the purpose of the sentimental text is to produce a particular kind of emotional response in the reader, namely compassion. The narrator relies on compassion as a sort of power to move the
audience to feel sympathetic about a specific incident in order to bring about political change.

One important function of slave narratives and other critical depictions of North American slavery was to generate compassion in their audiences, provoke a kind of feeling that would incline readers to help relieve suffering and oppose evil (…) the ex-slave Harriet Jacobs, writing under the pseudonym Linda Brent, expresses hope that she can ‘kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered.’ (Spelman in Incidents, 353).

Jacobs invokes gothic tropes, which I discuss in more detail in section II of this paper, to speak against what Spelman calls the “evils” of slavery. According to the convention of sentimental narration, the reader’s knowledge of this “evil” should spark or “kindle a flame of compassion” in the “hearts” of the audience. The narrator therefore depends on the emotional response of the reader and their ability to feel for her. The protagonist who is also the narrator, must then make a case showing why and how they suffered. For Spelman, the objective of the sentimental narrative then takes two objectives in addition to producing compassion in the reader. One, the narrator must tell the story of duress using the logic of sympathy so that reader somehow feels that they share a responsibility in thwarting the narrator’s pain. Two, the narrator’s language must convince the audience that they have the power or the ability to “relieve” Jacobs’ victimization. Hence the reader is actively relating the self to the condition and the experiences of the narrator. According to what Hendler calls the logic of “sympathetic identification,” the reader is able to identify, or think of oneself as being like the narrator, if difference between the narrator and the reader is diminished. If Jacobs’ emphasis on her suffering as a woman completely rested on “experiential difference” between black and white females, “sympathetic identification” collapses the moment the white abolitionist female reader insists she is “not quite like” the black enslaved woman.
According to Hendler, being “culturally marked” or an “affirmed difference” can limit “sympathetic identification” (Hendler, 3). Jacobs attempts to meet the objectives outlined by Spelman’s, sentimental narration must rhetorically create unity between white female readers and herself by naming them “sisters.” The use of this word is a linguistic strategy implying that the reader and the narrator share or should share the same rights and experiences of womanhood and sexuality. In Jacobs’ sentimental narration the

female readers are asked to identify themselves as women on the basis of the assumption that they are emotionally equivalent to the novel’s female protagonists, that they too are both capable and worthy of sympathy. Sympathetic identification thus works through a logic of equivalence based on affect. Any being capable of feeling, ostensibly regardless of social differences such as race and age, can evoke sympathy, especially from a female character or reader who has comparable feelings herself (Hendler, 115).

Sympathy therefore, is an emotion that holds the power to unite women across race and social class if the reader feels empathetic towards the experiential sufferings of the narrator. Whereas black and white women are considered unequal in an antebellum society, Jacobs relies on sympathy and the use of the word “sister” to guide the reader on how to relate to her sufferings. Applying sympathetic identification to *Incidents* brings the limitations of affect on race and gender difference to the forefront. Jacobs attempts to diminish the line of difference between white and black women using gender and sympathy as a common ground. Jacobs therefore is aware that her female audience must understand that as enslaved woman, she has undergone a traumatic experience that resulted in sexual exploitation. Although her experience is different from that of her reader, she appeals to their femininity and ability to feel empathy, to take on the task of expounding on the “painful” sufferings she lives by affirming and resisting ideologies on
black female sexuality. Her use of the words “pity” and “pardon me” suggest she has a keen insight into the power of sympathy and compassion.

In telling her story of suffering, she has throughout the narrative, tried to shape the reader’s affective response to structure the forms of identification that the novel evokes. Spelman’s comment suggests Jacobs is aware that there are constraints around portraying herself, through Linda, as a helpless victim of sexual exploitation. She needs to have the members of her audience understand that she and others are suffering, but she is highly attuned to the power that their knowledge of her suffering can give them, and so she simultaneously instructs them how to feel. She insists on her right to have an authoritative—though not unchallengeable—take on the meaning of her suffering” (Spelman in Incidents, 354).

Spelman hits on two important points found in Jacobs’ sentimental narration: one, Jacobs values the power of compassion since it enables her to send out a didactic message to her readers. Two, contextual knowledge of narrator’s suffering empowers the reader with the ability to morally judge the participatory actions of the narrator if she identifies herself as not being completely helpless. Sentimental narration does in fact empower both the narrator and the reader in different ways. Jacobs holds the power to instruct the audience how to feel appropriately about her hardship; the reader then believes action can “relieve” the suffering of the narrator. Both the reader and the narrator access this power through compassion and the reader’s imagination. This section however, is only concerned with how Jacobs uses the logic of sympathy to help readers imagine her position as an enslaved woman so that they may feel sympathetic toward the pain she endures in slavery hoping to motivate her audience to political action.

2 Public Sentiments, 3. Although Hendler applies the concept of sympathetic identification to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, it is a similar to Incidents because it is a sentimental narrative with the same goal: to create compassion in the reader for the enslaved person for the abolishment of slavery.
Jacobs uses language to convey how she feels about her own sufferings. In doing so, she ties the reader to her emotionally through empathy. Before revealing the nature of suffering she professes that the “remembrance” of the “deliberate calculation” “fills” her with “sorrow and shame.” She calls the moment of the “deliberate calculation” “a period in her unhappy life,” which she would “gladly forget” if she could with the exact intent to tell her readers why they should feel sorry for and with her (46). Next she confesses that has told “the truth honestly (…) let it cost me what it may” (46). As a cunning narrator of her time, Jacobs is fully aware that the “cost” of disclosing the “deliberate calculation” a plan that resists ideology of female sexual purity, involves the risk of losing narrative authority and ability to guide the reader’s emotions. The “cost” means that she could possibly suffer harsh judgment and scorn from her reader. She therefore, instructs her reader how to feel about a particular kind of suffering she endures as a slave by employing gothic imagery and expressive rhetoric.

(... all my prospects had been blighted by slavery. I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstance, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery: and the monster proved too strong for me. I felt as if I was forsaken by God and man; as if all my efforts must be frustrated: and I became reckless in my despair (46).

I describe Jacobs’ use of the words “monster” and “demon” to depict the nature of slavery as gothic because it accurately portrays what Spelman calls the “evils” of slavery. Gothic imagery compels the reader to imagine that Jacobs’ is actually grappling with a creature that is too strong for her to overcome. Although the experience of white northern women is different from the enslaved woman, Jacobs’ however, is able to tell the story of her suffering by appealing to common knowledge of sexual purity usually applied to women in the nineteenth-century. Women of her time were taught to remain pure until marriage. According to Ann Taves, author of “Spiritual Purity and Sexual
Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Jacobs,” the narrator complies with a religious ideology and “implicitly defines purity in terms of sexuality; sex outside of marriage, in her view, leads to impurity or defilement” (Taves in Incidents, 216). Jacobs “wanted” to “keep” herself “pure” meaning that she was a virgin until she encountered the realities of her condition as an enslaved person. So the gothic also illustrates that the “deliberate calculation” was a kind of sadistic unnatural force that contaminates the enslaved woman against her will. Section II scrutinizes the aforementioned assertion in detail. Jacobs therefore, describes the “deliberate calculation” as a kind of traumatic experience. She does not present herself as a trauma victim but a victim of society: “The influences of slavery had the same effect on me as they had on other young girls; they had me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did and I did it with deliberate calculation” (46).

Before disclosing the intricate parts of the “deliberate calculation,” the narrator says that “slavery” had an influence on her ability to practice sexual purity. For her, the political and social institution of slavery frustrated her attempt to keep herself chaste. Slavery is therefore evil and corrupts young girls. Hence “the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders them impossible” (47). The reader then is prepared to hear Jacobs’ recount of her sufferings. They are now morally equipped to feel for her explanation for an action that resulted in the affirmation the Jezebel image while resisting rape. Consequently, disclosing details about the “deliberate calculation” forces her to make a case as to why she is deserving of compassion. In doing so, the narrator faced what we might call the dilemma of compassion: she could keep to a minimum the information necessary to invoke compassion, relying on stock images of trembling fugitives and kindly rescuers, and hence risk playing into the master-slave relationship she deplored; or she could reveal herself much further, in hopes
of presenting herself as more than a mere victim, but at the risk of incurring hard questions about her behavior. That is, on the one hand she could try to invoke the aid of others without providing much contextual information. But this invites people to think of you only in terms of how you have suffered or been victimized; it risks forfeiting the possibility of establishing other facts about yourself that you don’t want your audience to lose sight of, such as how you are not a victim but a moral agent (Spelman in *Incidents*, 359).

Here Spelman implicitly states that there are constraints placed around the narrative flow of the “deliberate calculation.” The above passage explains why Jacobs took great rhetorical efforts to describe why she deserves sympathy before disclosing an incident that may spark an inquiry about a behavior that may be viewed as unethical. In short, if Jacobs were to describe herself as a mere victim in the “deliberate calculation,” she would only receive compassion in so far as the audience perceives her to be completely helpless. If she depicts herself as completely “helpless” she forfeits her right to make a moral critique of the slave system. The audience feels compassion for a wretched and helpless person, not for an enslaved woman who has suffered from a legal injustice. On the other end of the spectrum, if she reveals that the meaning of her suffering simply affirms a promiscuous personality, then she may receive scorn for acting outside of the dominant ideology of sexual purity. She will then lose compassion from the audience entirely. Both instances distance the reader, as one cannot imagine a higher purpose for the narrative other than what the dilemma reveals. If Jacobs’ language does not illustrate a medium between the politics of compassion, then she may not act as a moral agent empowering the reader with the opportunity to share the responsibility of “relieving” the stress of the narrator. Since Jacobs is aware of the power of sentiment and compassion, she ventures to convey “contextual information” about the “deliberate calculation” in order to successfully navigate through the tensions of compassion later explained in Section III. In short, retelling her suffering in a particular way provides her with the
opportunity to instruct her readers why and how they should feel compassion for her.

Hence expressive language takes on a double initiative: one, to convey her traumatic experience; two, to provide moral instructions about how slavery may confuse the practice of “all principles of morality, and, in fact, render the practice of them impossible” (47). In order to maintain this authority, Jacobs tells the account of her traumatic experience giving careful attention to the explication of her feelings so that the audience may empathetically identify with her pain:

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate (46).

Jacobs confesses she “deliberately calculated” that if she conceived a child while having an affair with Mr. Sands, another white male in the community, he would buy their child and set it free. In turn, Jacobs would evade her master’s attempts to rape her. Sure that her master, Dr. Flint, would grow intolerant with her insolent behavior and sell her; the narrator also discloses that Mr. Sands agrees to purchase her with the intent of giving her freedom as well. The narrator however, does not lay out this scene in her life as direct as I do. There are pauses and breaks in this recount. In such areas of inconsistencies, Jacobs interjects expressive rhetoric telling the audience three particular facts: One, that she suffered a type of traumatic experience. Two, due to slave law, it is “impossible” for the enslaved woman to maintain sexual purity. Three, the reader should “pity” and “pardon” her actions. Compassion however, reaches its limits when the audience cannot relate to the narrator. Understanding slave law provides a way through

\[^3\] Incidents, 47
which the reader is able to comprehend the legal position of the enslaved woman and the
question of will and choice. Hartman’s interpretation of slave law therefore provides a
means to indicate how the reader may imagine the condition of a slave woman so that it
is possible to “feel like the fictional character,” Linda, but also “feel with the fictional
figure” (Hendler, 121). Therefore, narration of this event begins by laying the culpability
of her sufferings at the doorstep of slavery explained in section II.

Jacobs successfully navigates though the dilemma of compassion by suggesting
that slavery compromises the moral integrity of the enslaved woman. The law of society,
slave law to be exact, as we have seen in the narrator’s gothic imagery, frustrates all
attempts for the slave woman to remain sexually pure. The narrator invites the audience
to imagine what it is like for a captive woman to be unprotected by law. They are
instructed to think about what life would have been like for her if she too had a “home
shielded by laws,” if slavery had been abolished she would not have had to endure the
“pain” of revealing herself as a victim. For her, not only is slavery a “monster” out to
compromise her virtue; it is legalized subterfuge. In order to meet the goal of nineteenth
century sentimental narration, that is, to produce compassion in the reader to bring about
social and political change, the narrator makes the case that slave law causes suffering
because it accommodates and legalizes sexual immorality. Section II of this paper
reveals subterfuge in slave law making the position of the slave woman transparent.
Through this, the reader is able to imagine the slave woman’s condition and feel
sympathy for her.
SECTION II

SUBTERFUGE IN THE SLAVE SYSTEM

This section explicates Saidiya Hartman’s interpretation of slave law and Jacobs’ use of gothic tropes to describe the incessant evil nature of slave society. Both are signifiers that Jacobs has survived a traumatic experience. In light of the narrator’s choice to give a contextual account of the “deliberate calculation,” it seems plausible to suggest that she needs the reader to imagine why slave women have no legal rights to exercise a choice or will to remain sexually chaste. Thus, this section endeavors to make the legal position of a woman under slave law transparent. It discloses a concealed stratagem which explains why it is “impossible” for an enslaved woman to remain sexually pure. As a result, the reader may better understand the dire circumstances Jacobs faced so that she may create plausible grounds for the abolishment of slavery. In addition to understanding her legal position, the protagonist also hopes to bring about this change by identifying with her female audience and teaching them to feel compassion toward her “helpless” and “unprotected” body.

Under slave law, the slave is the property of the master in body and mind; the captive then does not possess a will and cannot therefore, exercise a choice other than the will of his or her master. According to slave law, if the master demands sexual intercourse of the enslaved woman she can, under our interpretation of morality, suffer sexual exploitation but not rape. Nell Irvin Painter, author of “Three Southern Women
and Freud: A Non-Exceptionalist Approach to Race, Class, and Gender in Slave South,” finds that the slave woman in particular were victims of sexual exploitation due to the nature of slave law.

So far as slaves were concerned, slaveowner’s sexual relations with their women slaves constituted of several varieties of victimization of slaves by men whose power of their slaves was absolute. Slaves of both sexes were oppressed by class and by race, and women slaves suffered a third, additional form of oppression stemming from their gender. Slaves were victims times over, and extorted sex was a part of a larger pattern of oppression embedded in the institution of slavery (Painter in *Incidents*, 307).

Like Jacobs, Painter realizes the pattern of sexual oppression the slave woman will inevitably face. Therefore, Jacobs’ “deliberate calculation,” to have an affair with Mr. Sands rather than suffer rape, was an attempt to escape the typical destiny of a legalized master-slave relationship. Her plan to a skirt captive woman’s fate, according to Hartman, may not be seen as demonstration of Jacobs’ will or choice; especially since Jacobs herself says that she loved another—a free Blackman, her “choice.” Jacobs’ decision to sleep with Mr. Sands was not a “choice” but a space created where she may exercise a “form of choice” (Hartman, 110 my italics). Part of Jacobs’ traumatic experience, is that she believes she possesses a “will” since she took the initiative to secure freedom for herself and her posterity. She believes herself to have played an active role against the demon slavery but only to suggest that her actions were made within the constraints of a slave society.

An interpretation of Hartman’s explication of slave law further highlights political implications of Jacobs’ resistance to rape. In addition to Hartman’s reading, I use her argument to show in this section and in section III that Jacobs has interpreted her actions to be a product of her society. According to Hartman, since Jacobs is both “property and person” she is “absolutely subject to the will of another,” or in this case, her master---Dr.
Flint (Hartman in Callaloo, 1). On the issue of will, Hartman highlights tensions generated by slave law on sexual assault and rape, an act Jacobs clearly attempts to avoid by implementing the “deliberate calculation” against her master.

In 19th-century common law, rape was defined as the forcible carnal knowledge of a female against her will and without her consent. Yet the attempted rape of an enslaved woman was neither recognized nor legislated by law... The cases of State of Missouri v. Celia and George v. State averred that the enslaved, in general, and captive women in particular, were not appropriate subjects to common law, and thus not protected against rape (Hartman in Callaloo, 1).

By law, the enslaved woman had no rights nor was she considered an “appropriate subject” having an autonomous right over her body. According to congress, the slave was only considered 3/5th of a person and therefore, not fully human. Re-interpreted through racist ideology however, this passage translates that an “appropriate subject” is a white woman, not a black one. Especially since, in an antebellum society, white woman were not captive persons. Hartman’s reading of the unspoken subterfuge behind slave law is that the enslaved could not be legally raped since her “will” is not recognized by common or slave law. Property can have no will. Furthermore, a slave can and must carry out the will of the master only. If the enslaved woman has no “will,” she is therefore, by law, perceived always willing. If the captive woman must always yield to her master’s will the legal impossibility of rape of an enslaved woman continually exists. The crime of rape is therefore repressed and injury to the black female enslaved body becomes denial in slave law. The apparent crime, although not legally recognized as a crime in this era, is perpetuated and becomes a generational curse for black enslaved

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In the case of State of Missouri v. Celia 1885, Celia premeditated to murder her master, who repeatedly raped her for years. She bashed him in the head with a stick about as large as the upper part of a chair. Celia was jailed and immediately hanged succeeding the trial. According to Hartman, the issue of will is not recognized in rape cases, only in unethical situations that lay white culpability at the doorstep of blacks. Hence, the will of the enslaved is only recognized in black criminality.
women. Culpability is erased. Hence, law therefore becomes the scapegoat and origin of the Jezebel image imposed on black female sexuality. Jacobs is therefore, “will-less” meaning she possesses no will and has correctly described this sinful system as a “monster called Slavery.” The victimized enslaved body becomes a site where the will is erased, leaving the captive woman powerless against white male sexual domination.

Since by law she is always willing, victimization becomes promiscuity. Jacobs, by law, has no rights, no power, and cannot legally refuse her master or any white male access to her virgin body.

Thus binding passions of the master-slave relations were predicated upon the inability of the enslaved to exercise his/her will in any ways other than serving the master, and, in this respect, the enslaved existed only as an extension or embodiment of the owner’s right of property. To act outside the scope of will submission was to defy the law (Hartman in Callaloo, 2).

In Jacobs’ case, verbal defiance was a criminal act since common law compels her to perform Dr. Flint’s wishes, no matter how base. Hence Jacobs relies on gothic tropes to describe an “evil” antebellum.

Gothic images function in the narrative as an implication of the sinful and sadistic nature of slavery. She defines it as a “monster” with a hegemonic control over everyone in an antebellum society—an incessant perpetual cycle of all sexual sin including fornication, adultery, sodomy, and incest. The writing style of the succeeding passage

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5 Jezebel is the Biblical high priestess who sought to kill all of God’s prophets. It was believed that if a man had sex with her, all of his sins would be forgiven. She is therefore the image of the seductress, temptress, and all sexual sin. Refer to Darlene Hine’s essay on “Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex” found in Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Pub., 1994).

6 Incidents, pp. 47. Jacobs often refers to gothic imagery of demons and serpents to illustrate the evil nature of the slave system. According to Justin D. Edwards, author of Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic (Iowa City: University
draws the female reader into the narrator’s experience. Although making a point about racial and experiential difference, the narrator’s use of the gothic compels the reader to feel as if one has an inside look into the horrors of slavery. Since sexual purity is a dominate ideology of her time, Jacobs invites the reader to identify with humiliation of not being able to affirm that ideology. Not only is the gothic used to describe political and social relations in the slave system, it is also described as an infectious disease that clouts moral judgment and the ability of a society to function ethically:

(...) slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation (45).

Hence, the gothic is the infrastructure contaminating all of those within its domain including whites, blacks, male, female, young, and old. “American gothic politicized the genre by moving it from the supernatural sphere to the political arena” (Edwards, xix). The gothic is mutable since “it can adapt to various political agendas” (Edwards, xxiii). Jacobs’ dark imagery illustrates that the gothic has manifested and spread creating an environment where women, men, blacks, and whites are, as Jacobs describes, inevitably sexually exploited. The demons and monsters symbolize the peculiar institution of slavery contaminating the private and public sphere. Jacobs has thus rhetorically formed an social structure where slavery dirties everyone, including the reader. This tactic supposes that one will feel a sort of responsibility to clean up the system in order to redeem the narrator and oneself. Moreover, the gothic becomes a textual form or tool through which Jacobs breaks the silence of sexual subjugation to speak out against the “Serpent Slavery” that has infected slave masters with a lust to inevitably utilize the

of Iowa Press, 2003). He suggests that Jacobs’ narrative may be categorized as a gothic slave narrative.
female enslaved body as an object to fulfill sexual fantasies of rape, or seductions of adultery:

Every where the years bring to all enough sin and sorrow; but in slavery the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows...Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children...will become prematurely knowing evil things. Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master’s footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God had bestowed beauty on her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens degradation of the female slave...some are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position; but many slaves shrink from the memory of it. I cannot tell how much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs, nor how I am still pained by the retrospect” (26, my italics).

According to Jacobs, slavery is a “curse” and an “evil” force that overshadows all functioning in this social system. The gothic slave system causes one to “tremble” at the threat of rape and sexual exploitation. Jacobs says that this is the inevitable destiny of all captive women. The gothic system is perpetuated by slave law and causes all emotional and physical anguish. Jacobs admits she suffers “pain” thinking about what life was like for her living in the dark system of slavery. Using gothic imagery, Jacobs asks the reader to imagine that it is “impossible” to maintain sexual purity.

Apparently the threat of rape and her battle with this demon left such a negative impression on her mind that her writing reflects that she is “still pained by the retrospect.” That is, the mere thought of being trapped in the haunting slave system compels her to relive the moment where she believes rape is just about to overtake her helpless body. In conjunction with Hartman’s interpretation of the law, it is apparent that Jacobs understands the incessant cycle of sexual exploitation within slave law. However, her interpretation of her own actions to resist this system becomes limited when she analyzes her success in evading rape but not sexual exploitation. Imagery in the text suggests that she wants her readers to understand moral confusion and sexual misconduct
are attributable to slave law. Slavery prohibited her from affirming a Christian ideology of sexual purity. She suffers because this event, for her, was described as a traumatic experience. Jacobs however, continues to act as a moral agent with a didactic message against the institution of slavery so that she may not be reduced to a completely helpless and emotionally crazed person with the purpose of maintaining narrative authority. As Hendler asserts, the reader who identifies herself as woman, feels compassion for the enslaved woman since she possesses no legal right to maintain sexual purity. Based on that fact, it is not hard for the reader to feel humiliated for and with the narrator. Jacobs has therefore, successfully bridged the gap of difference by asking the reader to relate to her experience as a woman who, like the reader, highly esteems the value of sexual purity.
SECTION III
FREUDIAN TRIPARTITE MODEL AND TRAUMA THEORY

In accordance with the logic of sympathetic identification, Jacobs must reveal the particulars of her sufferings so that the reader may imagine the condition of the enslaved woman, thereby evoking sympathy and compassion for the narrator’s hardships. As we have seen in sections I and II, the narrator suffers sexual exploitation because she has no legal right to her body. Relying on a psychoanalytic interpretation of the language used to describe the emotional aftermath of the “deliberate calculation,” we can speculate that the protagonist feels she has endured a traumatic experience: “her acknowledgements that the memory was still painful and humiliating and that she could only refrain from judging herself in the calmer moments suggest that a more complex process was occurring at an emotional level” (Taves in *Incidents*, 217). The manner in which the narrator conveys the reality of wanting to remain pure and not being able to seems it was hard fact for her to accept. Using the Freudian Tripartite Model to interpret linguistic trends of how Jacobs’ confesses the painful account of the aforementioned scene, allows us to conclude that she has undergone a experience that may be described as traumatic. Fear of rape and the loss of her virtue was, for her, a shameful, “humiliating,” “painful” experience. Through the logic of sympathy, Jacobs explains why she discloses her feelings about the “deliberate calculation” not to suppose that she is a trauma victim, but to teach her audience how to make sense of her suffering so that they may feel compassion for her and take on the responsibility to make a political and social change.
So while Harriet Jacobs was in part hoping to arouse compassion and concern in an apathetic and neglectful white audience, (...) she was aware that appeals for compassion could be politically problematic. *Incidents* is a political text not simply because it is meant to get its audience to challenge existing institutions but also because it constitutes an ex-slave’s struggle against readings of her experiences of slavery that would reflect and reinforce a master-slave relationship. Indeed, we cannot adequately understand the plea for compassion in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* unless we look at Jacobs’ ongoing attempts throughout the text to assert and maintain authority over the meaning of her suffering (Spelman in *Incidents*, 354).

I agree with Spelman’s assertion that *Incidents* has a two-fold purpose: indeed, it has a political purpose but, also Jacobs discloses niceties of the “deliberate calculation” to define the meaning of her suffering without affirming, as Section II describes, the Jezebel stereotype, also known as the “master-slave relationship.” Jacobs’ continues to interject “sophistry” as she confesses to the audience the details of her sufferings as she carried out her plan. According to Spelman, this is evidence that Jacobs demands the right to maintain authority of how the reader should respond to her sufferings. She tells them that they should “pity” and “pardon” her actions. Since Jacobs directly addresses her audience and instructs them how to feel about the meaning of her sufferings, it is then also important to the audience understand what kind of suffering Jacobs says she endures.

Word choice and language are the best indicators to explicate the type of suffering Jacobs describes to her readers. Therefore, inconsistencies and contradictory language, I call double-talk, provides a means to explore how Jacobs continues to maintain narrative authority acting as a moral agent to successfully face the “dilemma of compassion.”

Psychoanalytic literary criticism, “…can reveal contradictory tendencies in literary texts. This is precisely what modern psychoanalytic interpretations aim for: not to replace existing interpretations, but to render visible additional layers of meaning that together with the traditionally established meaning or meanings make up the complexity of the text as a whole” (De Berg, 87). Psychoanalysis serves as a literary device that
assists in the analysis of her incongruous language to explain how she is able to maintain narrative control over the meaning of the traumatic experience. The goal behind this stratagem is to evade scorn from her readers because the “deliberate calculation” resulted in a loss of virtue. Consequently, psychoanalysis also helps us to imagine Jacobs position as an enslaved woman and her endured pain so that we may feel for and with her. Thus understanding her speech, we may suppose that “the unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech that is determined in the development of the effects of speech; consequently the unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 149). By examining her enigmatic language, psychoanalysis makes the meaning behind her sufferings transparent. Jacobs’ language used to explain her purpose for exercising sexuality as a form of resistance therefore becomes an insightful tool to speculate why she felt an anxiety about rape and confesses this plan to avoid it and outwit her master. Evaluating the inconsistencies in her language illustrate how Jacobs is able to shape the audiences’ affective response about her perils in order to meet her political agenda.

On the one hand, Jacobs explains that her “tyrant” met her “at every turn” and “dogged” her heels. She invokes fantastic images of demons, monsters, and serpents describing the institution of slavery to show that she was weak and could find no other way of fighting sexual exploitation. On the other hand, Jacobs admits that this “calculation” was a way to outwit her master proving her intellectually superior to him. This contradiction is what Jacobs’ describes as “sophistry.” Jacobs confesses that

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7 *Incidents*, pp. 47. Jacobs often refers to gothic imagery of demons and serpents to illustrate the evil nature of the slave system. According to Justin D. Edwards, author of *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003). He suggests that Jacobs’ narrative may be categorized as a gothic slave narrative.
although she did “wrong” but, she quickly adds that had no other choice.\textsuperscript{8} Explicating the drives id, superego, and ego, makes sense of linguist binaries that manifest in Jacobs recount of the “deliberate calculation.” In short psychoanalysis will show why Jacobs on the one hand describes the “deliberate calculation” as the only way to escape rape, but then also admits that she suffers humiliation in the process. It would seem that if there were no other way, then she should not feel guilty about her decision to evade rape. In another instance she says that her mind endures mental “agony” but also relishes the fact that she proved herself intellectually superior to her master. She also confesses that there may be “sophistry” in the way she explains why she carried out the “deliberate calculation” but then poses as a helplessness victim “forsaken by God and man.” These contradictions may force her to answer what Spelman calls “hard questions about her behavior.”

According to De Berg’s interpretation of Freud’s tripartite model of mind,\textsuperscript{9} the Id \([\text{das Es}]\), Ego \([\text{das Ich}]\), and Superego \([\text{das Uber-Ich}]\), possess three different processes. Since it is impossible to see into the mind of a narrator, we can only suppose which drive dominates the other two drives based on the actions and language of the narrator.

![Diagram of Freud's tripartite model of mind]

The id constitutes the lustful, aggressive [in Freud’s terminology], sexual part of

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Incidents}, pp 48-9.

\textsuperscript{9} This figure was taken from De Berg author \textit{Freud’s Theory and Its Use in Literary and Cultural Studies: An Introduction}. (Rochester: Camden House, 2003).
one's personality. It has pleasure-seeking urges that are with us when we are born and
wishes obsessions, and other affects derived from or associated with them. It is
not a region of the mind, but a process made up of drives which are always
operative, constantly pushing for satisfaction and constantly being pushed back
(repression), diverted into cultural activities (sublimation), acted out (temporary
satisfaction), or discharged in other ways (dreams, faulty actions). The id does
not argue or deliberate, possesses no values or rules, and respects neither common
sense nor logic. It is pure craving…finding expression only in short-lived and
apparently unconnected actions, the true nature of this part of our personality
remains in the dark. Freud therefore describes the id as being unconscious
(unbewuft) (De Berg, 50).

Under circumstances of normalcy, the three processes function in harmony; the ego
continues to compromise between the drives of the id and ego. It functions in cultural
activities through one’s language, actions, and personality maintaining an emotional
balance. Jacobs’ narrative however, is filled with highly charged emotional language.
From this, as Taves asserts, it may be suggested that Jacobs has emotional reservations
about carrying out the deliberate calculation. If she felt that slavery was completely
responsible for the loss of her virtue, all culpability should have remained at the doorstep
of slave law; Jacobs and her audience would find that her autonomy continued to be
oppressed. Jacobs’ ego would then interpret that the audience would not scorn id’s
deliberate calculation as a way of functioning within an oppressive situation.
Consequently, the superego would fully process that the audience would realize the
impossibility of a captive woman’s inability to practice sexual purity rather than having a
vague notion of it. Hence, the ego would successfully maintain harmony of Jacobs’
speech; she would anticipate that the reader could imagine Mr. Sands, like Dr. Flint, had
also taken advantage of her as an enslaved person.

Language in the text reveals quite the contrary. Since the “deliberate calculation”
was performed outside of ethics on purity, Jacobs’ superego began to dominate the id and
ego’s processes in order to avoid harsh judgment from her reader. In short, because Jacobs felt she should hold the right to sexual autonomy within a slave society, she must get the audience to interpret the “deliberate calculation” as a product of sexual exploitation rather than performing a choice. Due to Hartman’s interpretation of the law, this paper shows that Jacobs’ holds herself to a higher Christian standard shared by white female readers rather her legal rights than outlined by slave law. Jacobs’ feelings for her “lover,” the man she wished to marry, are repressed and “diverted into cultural activities.” Slave law compelled her to repress emerging feelings experienced for her first love, the free black man, as well as blooming sexual desires for him. Therefore, the audience must understand that he was her “choice.” Jacobs “longed” to experience the joys of marriage which encompass sexual relations. Her master’s envy prohibited them from marrying. Thus, newly emerging sensual feelings that could have been explored in marriage are now pent up. Since Jacobs is forbidden to marry her lover, she seeks other avenues to carry out her sexual desires to escape rape. This is where the Jacobs’ superego comes into play. Jacobs tries to find the most moral avenue to explore her newfound feelings without being sexually abused. Wishing to comply with Christian ethics, Jacobs narrative suggests that she did not want to be an adulteress, raped, or her children to be slaves. This is where Jacobs’ superego attempts to maintain moral standards inculcated by her mistress and grandmother.

Consisting of the norms, values, and conventional ideals that upbringing and education have instilled in us, the Superego does not coincide with our conscious. Having its origins in childhood, it contains many elements that we are no longer aware of which may be in conflict with our current ethics which, on an unconscious level, constantly influence us.
This is apparent in the guilt we feel about actions which we rationally do not consider to have been wrong. Freud says that ‘normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows.’ Finally the superego is a more socially oriented agency than the id…in its own way it is just as selfish, pushing for ethical perfection in the same uncompromising manner that the id pushes for erotic pleasure (De Berg, 50).

Compliant with Hartman’s interpretation of Jacobs’ deliberate calculation, Jacobs’ sentimental invocations are a product of her superego’s drive. As a result, she begs the audience to “pardon” her actions while making a confession to her grandmother. The structure of feeling is a product of the superego’s pull toward ethical perfection and reprimanding her for affirming what others would deem as the sexually promiscuous Jezebel. According to Hartman, the narrator’s tears are an indication of her need to maintain narrative authority as well as an illustration of social guilt, a structure of feeling. Trying to comply with the ethical standards and dominant ideology of sexual purity suggests that Jacobs is trying to comply with the drive of her superego. It compels her to admit that she did “wrong” and that her behavior was “reckless” and “desperate.”

Jacobs’ admits that her actions are erroneous since fornication with Sands is seen as a social product of religious sin and unethical—“reckless.” In accordance with Ann Taves’ interpretation of Jacobs’ shame, the tripartite model explains why the superego dominates Jacobs’ narrative and she undergoes “subjective shame,” fearing what her grandmother and even her young daughter would think about this incident of her life. She also admits that she made an oath: “I had resolved to be virtuous, though I was a slave, I had

10 Ann Taves’ essay” found in Incidents, “Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Jacobs,” includes Helen Lynd’s assessment on shame. It has two forms, subjective and objective. “Subjectively, it is experienced as a wound to one’s self esteem, a painful feeling or sense of degradation excited by the consciousness of having done something unworthy of one’s previous idea of one’s own excellence. Objectively, shame is the result of an action which “incurs the scorn or contempt of others.” It is relational to a ling of one’s loss of self-esteem and scornful contempt of others. pp. 212
said, ‘Let the storm beat! I will brave it till I die.’ And now, how humiliated I felt!’” (48)

Based on this dramatic oath, it is plausible to say that Jacobs’ superego drives toward satisfying social demands of sexual chastity until she marries. Analyzing the process of the ego however, will highlight that a balance of repression between the superego and id were not maintained. Jacobs explains that she has suffered a traumatic experience making her a victim of slavery and public humiliation since the superego—the moral center of perfection, urges her to try and maintain sexual purity even though it is “impossible.” It also serves as a rhetorical strategy to maintain narrative authority over the meaning of her suffering.

Since Jacobs has no will in slave law, she may suffer sexual exploitation from any white male and he will go unpunished. Jacobs’ superego dominates the id and ego; she therefore, anticipates that her audience may mistakenly conclude that she can maintain purity. Subsequently, she verbally confesses that she is a victim of slavery. This is where Jacobs most directly faces the moral tension of the text. Double-talk reflects a struggle between the id and superego so she may maintain narrative authority. Wielding through the dilemma of compassion meant that she had to shape the readers’ affect as they could incorrectly assume that she willingly performed a choice in the affair with Mr. Sands, but as we have seen in Section II, the affair was also a form of sexual exploitation. Psychoanalysis shows how Jacobs was able to act outside of sexual ideologies of purity while resisting rape.11

The id and the superego strive for immediate satisfaction without regard to the individual’s well-being as a whole. The ego however functions as a compromiser.

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11 Read Hazel Carby’s “‘Hear My Voice Ye Careless Daughters’: Narratives of Slave and Free Women Before Emancipation” in *Reconstructing Womanhood the Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* which explains that the “deliberate calculation” is not to be considered moral or amoral, but outside of an ideology sexual purity.
The id represents an unconscious pressure on us to live in complete accordance with our own innermost wishes; the superego represents unconscious pressure on us to live in complete accordance with the wishes of other people (first and foremost parents and teachers) have instilled in us; and the ego tries to find a healthy balance between our own wishes and those of others. Additionally, the ego is engaged in the interactions with the outside world (De Berg, 50).

Jacobs’ ego is in interaction with the outside world. The process of the superego illustrates that the reader values sexual purity in an unmarried woman. But the id does not care that her actions may be scorned; it is, at the moment of the “deliberate calculation” only concerned with avoiding the threat of rape. So, carrying out the deliberate calculation is the drive of the id. Her plan and the explication of why she carried it out is a compromise between the superego and the id implemented by the ego: “I reflected I was a slave, and that the laws gave no sanction to marriage of such, my heart sank within me. My lover wanted to buy me; but I knew that Dr. Flint was too willful and arbitrary a man to consent to that arrangement (…) my lover had no power to protect me from my master” (37).

I wanted to keep myself pure, and under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone (46).

“I wanted to keep my self pure” and “tried hard to preserve my self-respect” insinuates that the superego dominates her speech. The “but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery and the monster proved too strong for me” indicates that the ego, for a short time, is willing to accept a proposal from the id. At this point, in order to avoid pain and seek pleasure, she resolves to sleep with a white unmarried man who has shown sexual interest in her, in exchange she bargains for the freedom of her unborn child. Once born, he would purchase the child and set it free.
Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported; and in this case I was certain I would obtain the boon. I also felt quite sure they would be made free. With all these thoughts revolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping the doom I so much dreaded, I made the headlong plunge. (47)

This passage illustrates that the ego, for a time, negotiates with the drive of an id without respect to the superego. Apparently a bond of trust and favor was established in this barter of sex for purchase and freedom thereafter existed on Jacobs’ behalf. There are two instances pointing to the satisfaction of the id. One, the id is satisfied in so far as she does not have to suffer sexual violation with a married man. Two, the id is further satisfied since she does admit to having some form of passion or pleasure from her sexual encounters with Mr. Sands: “by degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart.” She describes him as sort of an unconventional hero since she could have her children “well supported.” He was an “educated and eloquent gentleman…” Meaning he was respected and “intelligent,” qualities she used to describe her “lover” (34). Her ego’s devised a deliberate calculation, a “compromise” showing that she found a way for the id to

12 Favor from a white male meant that he could possibly buy their children and set them free. Rarely were free black men able to purchase their wife and children since their master held an entire black family unit as invaluable and potential chattel to be sold for monetary gain.

13 Contrary to Carby’s assertion that Jacobs’ “made no reference to sexual satisfaction, love, or passion, as such feelings were not meant to be experienced or encouraged outside of marriage” Jacobs does disclose her personal feelings for Mr. Sands just before she “confesses” the deliberate calculation: “So much attention from a superior person was flattering for human nature, it is the same in all” meaning her ego was stroked, she felt good about all the “flattering” words he wrote to her. Since “it is the same in all” it is safe to conclude that flattering words aroused “such feelings” Carby says she does not admit to having. Further Jacobs calls him a “friend” with whom she later discloses as having not one, but two children from out of wedlock. Perhaps the first child would have seemed permissible as Jacobs behaving “reckless” as she admits. The second child, by the same man clearly indicates that she implies that her ego successfully made a deal with Mr. Sands.
experience pleasure and avoid pain.

The ego seems to be actively negotiating the threat of rape since her master could sexually treat her as “rudely as he pleased” and the “wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man.” The ego has, for now, satisfied the demands of the superego—seeking morality, and the id—seeking pleasure. Yet feelings of security about this negotiation, or compromise are only “temporary.” Soon after admitting to her master that she will become a mother, Jacobs’ is flooded with feelings of shame, humiliation, and despair. The once neatly calculated plan becomes traumatic experience for Jacobs. She recounts that her “self-respect was gone!14” In this instance, the id is no longer working to seek pleasure. It is no longer functioning satisfactorily with the ego’s compromise called the “deliberate calculation,” the process of the superego seems to fully dominate. Fearing what her family could now think of her “good character” and harsh judgment from the audience, she begins to develop what she calls an “anxiety.” Since she can only tell the “truth,” to her reader to gain their compassion, we may infer that emotional “anxiety” is due to her superego’s inability to refrain from embellishing the truth. Thus she feels “humiliated.”

As said by De Berg, “if our unconscious defense system did not on occasion embellish the truth a little, we would become completely overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and frustration about the many mistakes and weaknesses that are the inevitable result of man’s imperfection” (De Berg, 51). Humiliation suggests that she may to attain moral perfection for personal as well as social reasons. Jacobs’ attests that she will not screen herself from the reader: “It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may.” In this portion of the

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14 Incidents, 48
analysis is important again to understand what this “cost” may entails. Jacobs superego drives her to confess that her actions as “wrong” and “reckless” to avoid judgment by the public and to instruct them how to feel about the traumatizing effects of being sexually exploited. Hence she admits that she continues to live in the haunting memory of fornication.

Although she knows that she is helpless and unprotected by slave law, from the tripartite model, it is evident that Jacobs varying speech illustrates that the ego continues to on the one hand admit a that the id “triumphed” over her master but, the superego confesses that her victory was “wrong.” As a result, Jacobs’ has lost a sense of self worth. She claims that she deserves “pity” for what she has done and implores her reader not to judge her actions harshly, but to “pardon” them. Her sentimental word choice indicates however, superego demands that she feels guilty, rather than “triumph” for her deliberate calculation in order to gain sympathy from the audience.

Freud’s tripartite model adds that the honest “truth” she conveys is evidence that the unconscious defense process of the superego did not embellish moral flexibility. She did not only appeal to sentiment for abolitionist political agenda, her language also shows an apparent domination of the superego over the id and ego. This “is why psychoanalysis seeks to bring into consciousness as many counterproductive ego, id, and superego processes as is realistically as possible” in order to alleviate internal conflict and mental anguish (De Berg, 51).

Although she claims to be morally confused and a victim in the grasp of slavery, Jacobs’ superego made a demand that she make an oath of purity and chastity, a demand she felt she could not uphold as a slave—it was “impossible.” Still acceptance of this
compromise was only tolerated long enough for Jacobs to carry it out. Dr. Flint orders her to go to the cottage he built for her. She replies,

“I will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother. He stood and looked at me in dumb amazement, and left the house without a word. I thought I should be happy in my triumph over him. But now that the truth was out… I felt wretched.”

Consequently she is left with feelings of self-reproach, disgust, and fear. Jacobs’ language shows that she has suffered a particular kind of peril called trauma. Those who have endured a traumatic experience of sexual exploitation usually “feel not only ‘helpless’ but also ‘sullied and tarnished in the process’” (Bouson, 135). In order to feel for and with the protagonist the narrator must convey that her suffering resulted in a situation that was out of her control while anticipating their assumption that she may have behaved inappropriately. Jacobs’ however continues to make the case that because of slavery, it was inevitable that she would be exploited by any white male: “I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly as I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day” (48, my italics). She maintains authority over the meaning of her suffering by asserting that “the slave woman ought not be judged by the same standards as others” (48) If Jacobs’ truly believes that she did “wrong” her rhetoric signifies that her superego continues to “haunt” her mind demanding that she remain virtuous. Although she claims to “calmly” look over the events of her life, she also admits she will be haunted by the recollection of this memory until the grave. Jacobs’ “account of her ‘rememory’—that is, her uncontrolled remembering and reliving of

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16 According to Bouson, Lawrence Langer on Holocaust victims “insist that the humiliations they suffered was ‘worse than death’ and points to the toxicity of what Langer calls ‘humiliated memory’” pp.135
emotionally painful experiences—recalls descriptions of a visual form of memory that trauma investigators refer to as a traumatic memory” (Bouson, 135). Whereas gothic imagery indicates sexual exploitation is a traumatic experience in which she lost self-respect, she continues to make the case for the condition of the enslaved woman as being helpless since sexual autonomy is compromised in slave law. Jacobs makes the assertion that slave law perpetually manipulated the enslaved woman into sexual abuse.

Jacobs “speaks the unspeakable” and “dares to penetrate into to the dark and disremembered sources of the humiliated and traumatic memories and feelings that continue to haunt the African-American cultural imagination, like a lingering bad dream, in our race-conscious and race-divided American society” (Bouson, 162). In this way her narrative becomes more than a way to meet a political agenda by appealing to her audience, it is a literary and therapeutic strategy “to exorcise the demons of personal history as there are individuals haunted by ghosts of psychic fragmentation (…) autobiographical testimony proved to be a powerful tool in the process of reconstructing the beleaguered subject and remembering the self shattered by the traumatic experience” (Henk, 144). Since she admits that she will be “haunted” by the memory of what we call the ego’s compromise, according trauma theory, we can suppose she is an “individual haunted by ghosts” and that the narrative is also an “autobiographical testimony” of the “traumatic experience” of an enslaved woman who suffered sexual exploitation at the hands of slavery. Jacobs’ confession to the grandmother reveals that she wants her

17 Bouson uses trauma theory to explicate Morrison’s psychoanalytic approach to characterizing Sethe’s encounters with the ghost of her daughter Beloved in his essay “Whites Might Dirty Her All Right, but Not Her Best Thing”: The Dirtied and Traumatized Self of Slavery in Beloved. Morrison’s depiction of slavery is indeed gothic as Jacobs, except her Incidents actual accounts of her life rather than fiction based on a true story.
readers to understand how “humiliated” she felt because slavery would not allow her to marry a man she loved and was, instead, sexually “tarnished.” The degradation of her sin is incommunicable and she becomes mute:

I thought I should be happy in my triumph over him. But now that the truth was out, and my relatives would hear of it, I felt wretched…Now, how could I look them in the face? My self-respect was gone…I went to my grandmother. My lips moved to make confession, but the words stuck in my throat (… I prayed to die (48).

According to Bouson’s analysis of Van der Kolk “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event,” remarks Cathy Caruth in her description of the ‘haunting power’ of trauma (Bouson, 3). Because traumatic experiences are too overwhelming to be ‘integrated into existing mental frameworks,’ they are ‘dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences’¹⁸ (Bouson, 134). This means that functions such as speech become fragmented and inconsistent making it hard for the sufferer to speak about the experience. In the aforementioned scene with the grandmother, Jacobs was tormented with the thought of confessing her sexual misconduct. Jacobs herself admits that she is “haunted” by anxieties caused by the mere thought of rape.¹⁹ The audience may then conclude that Jacobs was indeed victimized by slave law. Sympathy therefore, serves as a tool Jacobs utilizes to make the reader feel they have the power to alleviate her torment.


¹⁷ Read Brooks J. Bouson author of Quiet as It's Kept Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 133. According to him, Morrison is intent on investigating not only the “collective memories of the physical traumas the slaves endured but also the internalized and abiding psychic wounds caused by racial shaming in a white supremacist system of differentiation that imprisons African-Americans.”
In light of Hartman’s interpretation of slave law, it is important to realize that the deliberate calculation would only work if Jacobs gave herself to another white male; it is the will of the white male that could potentially subjugate any captive woman. The cycle of sexual exploitation continues to create what nineteenth-century ideology of sexual purity would define as sin. Anxiety over such an inevitable destiny would cause duress for any female. Jacobs’ sentimental “confession” of the deliberate calculation signifies that she may be doing more than appealing to the emotions of her audience. She could be working out emotional duress in the aftermath of resisting rape.\textsuperscript{20} This interpretation does not, for me, compromise her integrity. It only further proves that she is a phenomenal woman who has broken a different sort of shackle in her fight for freedom.

If I had more time to evaluate this text, I would explore the aforementioned point and how she was able meet her political agenda while using textual information to suggest that she continues to fight the demons of her past during the writing process of this text. Relying on a Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation, I could suggest that the image of sin, perceived by the superego continued to press its drive on her linguistic capacity to communicate humiliation and guilt\textsuperscript{21}. Relying on Ann Taves, author of “Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Read Susan Brison’s \textit{Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), which describes the physical and psychological abuse rape and trauma victims have suffered and continue to relive while telling their stories. Like a rape victim, Jacobs also undergoes psychological abuse by developing anxieties over the threat of rape by her master Dr. Flint. It is also clear Jacobs experiences anguish while retelling the story to her audience.

\textsuperscript{20} For more psychoanalytic readings of slave narratives, refer to Gwen Bergner’s essay “Myths of Masculinity: The Oedipus Complex and Douglass’s 1845 Narrative” found in \textit{The Psychoanalysis of Race} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 241.
Jacobs,” I would further explore why Jacobs “still found it difficult to accept the choices she had made while enslaved” (Taves in Incidents, 222).

In conclusion, this thesis has shown how Jacobs successfully constructs a narration that guides the reader on how to feel for and with her as an enslaved woman suffering sexual exploitation. The narrator also shows that she can shape the affective response of the reader by diminishing difference. Understanding slave law helps us to imagine the legal rights of the enslaved woman, in order to sympathetically identify with the narrator. In light of the psychoanalytic portion and trauma theory, it is also evident that her mute confession signifies more than a feeling of shame. Her expressive rhetoric and feelings further assists the reader to imagine the position of a slave woman in law and why she felt anxiety about the traumatic experience of being sexually unprotected by the law. Consequently, the audience is able to feel compassionate towards her vain attempts to preserve her chastity. The evil and sadistic nature of slavery, as she explains in gothic imagery, exposes the incessant cycle of sexual abuse she and other “sisters” in bondage try to resist. As a sentimental narrative, Jacobs faces the dilemma of compassion to maintain narrative authority and make the case for the abolishment of slavery.
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