SENTIMENTAL SPIRITS: SAVING THE SOUL WHILE SEIZING THE HEART AND SWAYING THE MIND

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Adam Bradford, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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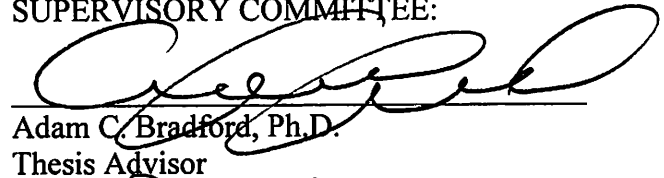

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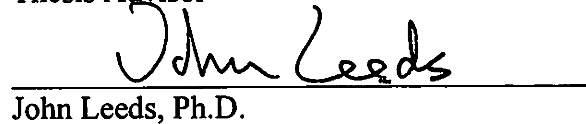

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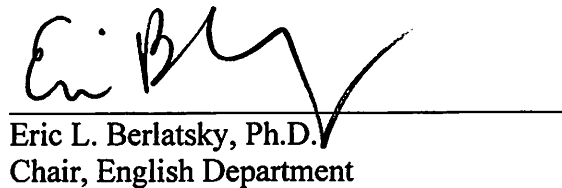

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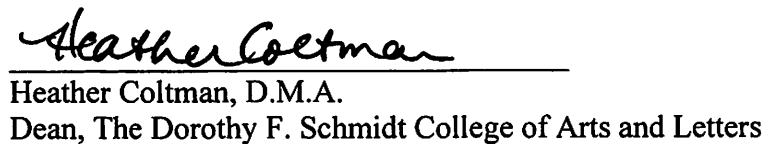

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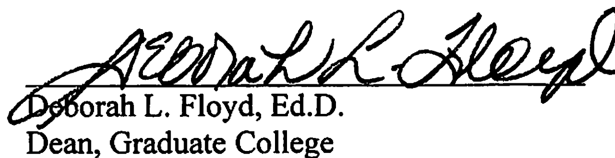

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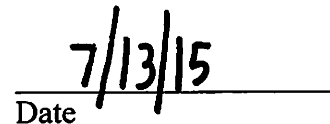

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ABSTRACT

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During the nineteenth century, African American women like Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote wrote narratives of their spiritual conversions. Through their efforts and the efforts of others like them, spiritual autobiographies became not only evangelical tools but also a means of shaping African American culture and American society in general. While some black women were working to claim power for their gender and race by writing spiritual narratives, other women, both black and white, were working with sentimental literature to achieve similar goals.

This research examines the connection between nineteenth century African American feminine spiritual narratives and sentimental literature. The study concludes that women like Lee, Elaw and Foote employed strategies of sentimental literature when writing their spiritual narratives in an effort to convert readers while taking them on an emotional journey designed to change their attitudes about issues such as abolition and female autonomy.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my family and especially to my husband, Rick, who spent countless hours reading drafts and continued to believe in me when I did not believe in myself.

SENTIMENTAL SPIRITS: SAVING THE SOUL WHILE SEIZING THE HEART AND SWAYING THE MIND

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INTRODUCTION

The appearance of spiritual narratives in America began with the first Puritan settlers who came to this country in the 1600s. In an effort to communicate the testimony of their conversion, the Puritans told tales of their salvation which followed the conventional sequence of "sin, preparation, and assurance; conviction, compunction, and submission; fear, sorrow, and faith" (Caldwell 2). Puritan conversion stories relied heavily on scripture and objective self-examination (7). These early narratives were "inextricably bound up with each person's notion of, hope for, and recapitulation of his or her own experience of salvation" (26). Through its depiction of the soul's salvation, the spiritual autobiography exerted cultural influence "by providing a framework within which readers saw secular, or worldly, experience in terms of a sacred, or otherworldly, journey" (C. Brown 9).

Although many of the best known Puritan conversion stories were written by men like Increase Mather, Samuel Hopkins, and Cotton Mather, Puritan spiritual autobiographies were also written by women (Shea xi). *The Experiences of God's Gracious Dealing with Mrs. Elizabeth White, As they were written under her own Hand, and found in her Closet after her Decease* is one example of an early feminine spiritual narrative that was popular in America (Caldwell 1). The primary function of the conversion narrative was to serve as a testimony of one's salvation experience to be related to one's congregation, but some writers, like Elizabeth White, wanted their written excerpts to be left behind for loved ones in the event of their death (2). According

to Louis B Wright, such stories might find their way from someone's personal belongings to a publisher in order to meet the era's demand for "'guides to godliness'" (qtd. in Caldwell 2). Because testimony before and for the benefit of others was such an important part of one's inclusion in the church, the tradition of spiritual narratives was perpetuated in America from the late 1600s, throughout the 1700s, and well into the 1800s.

African American spiritual narratives began to appear in the latter part of the 1700s when the transatlantic African slave trade was at its peak (Andrews, Foster, and Harris 37). There were four significant events that led to the development of the genre. They include an increase in the number of African Americans converting to Christianity, the gradual emancipation of African Americans in the North, educational opportunities and increased literacy for African Americans in the North, and the development of African American churches (37-38). African American spiritual narratives written in the period of time stretching from 1770 to 1830 are hard to differentiate from African American autobiographies in general (38). Nearly all of the African American autobiographies from this time period make some mention of the writer's conversion to Christianity and deliverance from sin (38). Examples of this beginning phase of the genre include publications by men like James Gronniosaw (1770), John Marrant (1790), George White (1810), and John Jea (1811) (38).

A defining moment for the genre of African American spiritual narratives came in the 1830s when African American women began writing their stories of conversion (Andrews, Foster, and Harris 38). The spiritual narrative was one way for African American women, oppressed on account of both race and sex, to write themselves into

being. In his book, *Sisters of the Spirit*, which discusses the narratives of Jarena Lee (1836 and 1849), Zilpha Elaw, (1846) and Julia Foote (1879 and 1886), William Andrews[1] states that "the recognition of one's true identity, unfettered by either the slavery of sin or the sin of slavery, set in motion a process by which early black Christians, and later, black slaves, attained spiritual as well as secular freedom" (1). Upon reaching their goal of salvation, African American feminine spiritual autobiographers felt compelled to share their respective gospels (1). In addition, these women "sought to accrue authority and power via the word" because "for the spiritual autobiographer, appropriating God's word to [. . .] her individual purposes constituted an especially bold form of self-authorization" (1). Andrews asserts that the writing of African American feminine narrators reflects "a remarkable sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and power, despite the traditional spiritual autobiography's treatment of the self as a deceiving antagonist" (15).

Their spiritual narratives made African American women socially significant. As Christians, it was their obligation to spread the word of God, but as African Americans, it was their obligation to depict themselves not as victims with neither the might nor the wisdom to defeat their enemies, but as a group empowered, indeed a group authorized by the Lord "to listen to and act upon their intuitions, their long-suppressed ambitions, [and] their idealized self-images" (*Sisters* 16). Disobeying social authority in favor of following their internal ideals helped shape in African American feminine spiritual autobiographers a spirit of individualism previously denied to them (17). Through this process, spiritual autobiographies became evangelical tools that spread the word of God; at the same time,

[1] As I am citing two books written by Andrews, I will use short titles of his works in subsequent citations.

they became a means of shaping African American culture and American society in general.

When they wrote their stories, African American women asserted their rights as citizens while assuming a place for themselves in the literature of women and African Americans (Houchins xxix). Susan Houchins explains that "in choosing the autobiographical genre to depict their religious conversion and consequent manumission from the bondage of sin, they had entered into a discourse that would produce both a comparable spiritual and a political metanoia in their 'promiscuous' [male and female, black and white] reader-audience" (xxix). In doing so, they began a conversation with a white readership who doubted the humanity of blacks as well as the existence of the black soul and its likelihood for redemption (xxix-xxx). Through their stories, African American feminine spiritual narrators conflated Biblical texts with their account of how the Lord pervaded their spirits and how He transformed their lives into an offering for God (xxx). In telling their stories, black feminine spiritual autobiographers worked against the social and political forces of racism, slavery, and sexism (Houchins xi). Their courage in telling their stories reflects the empowerment they received from God's work in their lives, as does their belief that others, both blacks and whites, would want to hear what they had to say.

While some African American women were seeking avenues of claiming power for their gender and their race by publishing spiritual narratives, other women, both black and white, were working with a different genre of literature towards not wholly dissimilar goals. These were the writers of sentimental literature. Sentimental works were widely popular in America during the nineteenth century (Harris 10). Shirley Samuels suggests

that they were “literally at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture” (Samuels 4). Because, as Jane Tompkins puts it, the most prominent characteristic of sentimental literature is that it “is written by, for, and about women,” the genre gave a certain legitimacy to women’s concerns (Tompkins 125). Through it “there exists, then, a community of expression and interpretation actively involved in examining women’s nature and possibilities—a women’s community in continuous discourse about itself” (Harris 19). Nineteenth-century notions of women’s nature and their role in society prevented women from existing in a world beyond their homes, so women who used sentimental literature to put themselves in that world faced innumerable conflicts (11). They tackled these conflicts by placing their protagonists in situations that caused them to challenge social mores regarding the proper behavior of women.

Frequent topics found in sentimental literature include the discussion of slavery and abolition, two spaces of discourse that frequently excluded women in the nineteenth century. Sentimental literature gave women a place to express their concerns and their opinions about these topics. Works from this genre revealed how the oppressed could function within and without the societal restrictions placed on them (Davidson 134). Many sentimental novels focused on women who had to find a way to work out their lives despite the oppression and limitations they faced (135). The female protagonist, although dominated and often exploited by her society, employs certain defensive strategies that allow her to prevail (117). In the end, the protagonist’s “reward [is] equal to the virtue” she displays (H. Brown 176).

A mutual notion that lies within spiritual narratives and sentimental literature is “that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one” (Todd 4). Similarly,

there exists a corresponding belief that literature teaches individuals how they should behave and how to respond correctly to one's experiences (4). In addition, there is the shared idea that a work should moralize instead of analyze and that the emphasis should not be placed on "the subtleties of a particular emotional state" but rather "on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience" (4). Strategies that aim to affect lives, instruct, and moralize are evident in the works of feminine African American spiritual autobiographers like Lee, Elaw, and Foote, just as they are in popular sentimental works of authors like Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Sigourney, Phoebe Carey, Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, France Harper, and Harriet Wilson, all of whom were writing in the same era.[2]

One way the African American women writers of spiritual narratives accomplished the tasks outlined above is through their use of affective language, one of the primary conventions of sentimental literature. The purpose of affective language is to move the audience emotionally. Consequently, the word choice in affective language is often prescribed. The use of words like *benevolence*, *transport*, and *virtue* indicates "sentimental doctrine" and expects a "sentimental understanding" (Todd 5). Words like *cruel*, *base*, and *unkind* are used to "emphasize the goodness they negate" (5). Additionally, the connection between nouns and adjectives is easily predicted. Words like *honest*, *tender*, and *kind* are associated with the heart, while the words *melting*,

[2] By the same era, I mean to say in the nineteenth century. I acknowledge that Warner, Stowe and Wilson published their best known works after Lee and Elaw published their narratives. When I compare the works of Lee and Elaw to the works of Warner, Stowe, Wilson, and Carey, I do not mean to suggest that I believe Lee and Elaw were influenced by Warner, Stowe, Wilson, and Carey. I simply use the latter's works as touchstones because theirs are the most accessible and familiar works engaging in sentimental conventions, and therefore, seem the most appropriate for helping readers see the kind of connections I am referencing. Sentimental literature was ubiquitous during the antebellum era (and arguably through much of the nineteenth century), and these women would have been exposed to it in newspapers, magazines, almanacs, gift-books, ladies albums, religious tracts, etc.

overflowing, *swelling, disconsolate*, and *despairing* describe feelings (5). These words and others like them appear frequently in both spiritual narratives and sentimental literature. The emotions engendered by this language allow the writer to do more than tell their story. They allow writers to forward religious, social, moral, and political beliefs in a way their nineteenth-century audience could and would accept. Like the sentimental writers of the nineteenth century, the women writers of African American spiritual narratives use affective language to forward their causes and invoke their readers to action.

Language is not the only thing that evokes emotion in the reader. In addition to affective language, sentimental literature relies heavily on certain reoccurring tropes which include scenes of distress and tenderness. Common tropes of sentimental language include the use of children, orphans, slaves, and the unregenerate dying soul, among others. In some situations, more than one trope can apply to a single character as the course of the narrative proceeds (Moody 8). Often, the heroine of the story, who is by definition an innocent, faces a series hardships because of circumstances beyond her control. She could be an orphan, a slave, an African American, or the victim of some man's scheme to exploit her innocence and mistreat her (Baym 22). Sometimes, the heroine's purity and goodness become the tool for the salvation of others. Despite her hardships, the sentimental heroine almost always triumphs over the series of hardships placed before her.

Using hymns, scripture, and narrative interjections are also popular conventions of sentimental literature. By definition, hymns are an expression of extreme emotion. The use of them in sentimental literature provides the reader with a familiar method of

understanding their emotions about God and sometimes about their position in the world. They function similarly in spiritual narratives. The use of scripture in both genres provides the narrator with justification for the actions of the protagonist. The references to scripture are didactic, and because they come from the highest authority, they cannot be challenged by the author's Christian audience (Halpern 35). Narrative interjections (moments when the author speaks directly to the reader) are also popular in both sentimental literature and spiritual narratives. In both genres, the narrative interjections help to reinforce the reality of the events being related (51).

Because they were considered light reading filled with a kind of "domestic 'chattiness,'" sentimental works were often dismissed as emotional rubbish (Tompkins 125). This dismissal is shortsighted, though, because it undercuts the morally didactic message and the political potential found in sentimental literature. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, political figures and novelists alike rely on the conventions of sentimental literature to engage readers' sympathies and to motivate citizens. A sympathetic text could "inspire readers to share the passions of [. . .] others" (Moody 12-13). The premise of literary sentimentalism is "an emotional and philosophical ethos that celebrates human connection [. . .] and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss" (Dobson 266). It is this shared devastation that allowed sentimental literature to become a form of rhetoric that had the capacity to empower all, even the oppressed.

A good portion of feminist scholarship from the last fifty years denigrates the value of sentimental literature while overlooking its merits. Many critics declare sentimental writing as "*inherently* false in sentiment and/or unskilled in expression"

(Dobson 264). Sentimentalism has been regarded with antagonism by those who "have largely overlooked the kinship of political discourse of the Revolution and the American literature that derived from it" (13). Some critics believe this is because sentimental literature challenged the status quo (14). More recently, scholars like Shirley Samuels, Joanne Dobson, and Joycelyn Moody have espoused opinions that portray sentimental literature in a different light. Samuels asserts that mid-nineteenth century sentimental works often served as a "conjunction of feminist and abolitionist discourse" (5). "This crossing point of feminism and abolition," Samuels contends, "foregrounds the problem of 'body politic' in American culture and, centrally, the crucial position of sentimental aesthetics in redefining the politics of the American body" (5). In her writing, Dobson suggests that an understanding of how the sentimental "body of work constructs the literary" is necessary before individual texts can be read "as agents operating within a literary field" (263). Once this happens, she maintains, the genre can be fully and fairly judged (263).

Moody's position is that "American women writers have used the rhetoric of sentimentalism to assert a revised, gender-neutral theory of Christian benevolence almost since the nation's beginning" (14). She is the only scholar I found who makes a connection between sentimental literature and spiritual narratives. Her contention is that "some autobiographies [from the same era] may be rightly said to appropriate sentimental conventions" (15). In Moody's words, autobiography by definition fictionalizes reality. "The autobiographer," she writes, "mediates 'real' experiences through subjectivity, memory, and discourse into ordered verbal articulation" (15). She maintains that "the autobiographical act, the reconstruction of any life necessitates the fictionalization of that

life" (15-16). On this plane, Moody interprets, sentimental literature meets feminine African American spiritual narratives (16). Moody suggests that the truth women like Lee, Elaw, and Foote reveal through their narratives "has more to do with the meaning that an autobiographer infers from her life experiences and with the significance she ascribes to incidents in her life than with the 'factual' details of her life" (16). One way autobiographers can confer significance on their life experiences is through pathos. It is this pathos that allows each writer to bond with readers in a way that helps them understand, and potentially act in favor of, the political and social rights she claims.

By definition, sentimental literature forwards the same "tradition of evangelical piety and moral commitment" (Tompkins 123) that is also found in the spiritual narrative. In their texts, African American women like Lee, Elaw, and Foote who were writing spiritual autobiographies in the nineteenth century employed sentimental conventions in order to voice their societal concerns while establishing their intellectual proficiency in language the prevailing culture valued.[3] Through their works, these women challenge cultural ideologies and enlarge the reader's perception of what constitutes proper female behavior through the promotion of alternatives to traditional female behavior (Harris 200). By employing strategies that expand the societal roles of African American women, they also challenge the audience's preconceived notions of the African American's potential within American society (Tate 66). The goal of these black feminine writers was "to trigger the reader's respective responses of moral outrage and affirmation" through "the heart-rending accentuation" of the feminine protagonist and "the equitable distribution of justice" on her behalf (65-66**).** In combining the conventions of Puritan

[3] Tate makes a similar assertion when claiming that black writers of the nineteenth century "appropriated many sentimental conventions to give expression to their social concerns and to demonstrate their intellectual competence in terms that the dominant culture respected" (64-65).

spiritual narratives with the conventions of sentimental literature, nineteenth-century African American women like Lee, Elaw and Foote found the verbal and ideological registers they needed to create works that function both as conversion stories and as an acceptable form of political agitation that challenge society's treatment of African Americans while forwarding black female autonomy.

CHAPTER 1. JARENA LEE

As is typical of the spiritual narrative, Jarena Lee's[4] work reveals few details about the writer's birth and childhood (*Sisters* 11). Lee was born free in Cape May, New Jersey, on February 11th, 1783. Her parents "were wholly ignorant of God," and consequently, she received no religious instruction from them (Lee 3).[5] Lee was "parted" from her family at the age of seven to work as "a servant maid" (3). Her first memory of God's work in her life took place when she was seven. At her new home, Lee lied to her mistress about completing some task, and as a result, experienced her first message from God. On this occasion, "the Spirit of God moved in power through [her] conscience, and told [her she] was a wretched sinner" (3).

During her teen years, Lee's heart was somewhat hardened to God's word. Despite this attitude she insists, "the Spirit of the Lord never entirely forsook me, but continued mercifully striving with me" (3). Lee's conversion occurred when she was about twenty-one. She went to hear a Presbyterian missionary speak some time in 1804. Of this occasion she writes, "a ray of renewed conviction darted into my soul" (3). A period of time later (she does not provide dates), Lee heard the Reverend Richard Allen[6] preach. Three weeks from the date of that sermon her "soul was gloriously converted to

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4 Lee is Jarena's married name; there is no record of her maiden name.
5 All citations of Lee's narrative come from the 1849 version, which occupies 97 pages in the anthology *Spiritual Narratives*, edited by Henry Louis Gates. The narrative is divided into four sections, each corresponding to a different phase of her life.
6 Born a slave in 1760, "Richard Allen bought his freedom at age 17 and went on to found the first national black church in the United States, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1816" ("Richard Allen.").

God" (5). Eventually, she was sanctified[7], and for the first time, she received a message from God, telling her to "Preach the Gospel" (10).

In 1811, at the age of twenty-eight, Lee married a pastor named Joseph Lee who resided in Snow Hill, a city near Philadelphia. After the wedding, she moved to Joseph's residence and set up housekeeping. Lee had to put her plans to preach God's word aside, which caused her to become "discontented" (Lee 13). Married life did not exactly agree with Lee as she was often sick during this period of her life (14). Ultimately, her prayers and faith in the Lord healed her. By 1817, Lee was a widow with two very young children (14). It was at that time that she dedicated her life to the calling she received from God to preach (*Sisters* 2). Although she describes her role as an itinerant preacher as a "supremely fulfilling experience," Lee accepted her role at a great sacrifice (2). She travelled throughout the country, in both free and slave states, preaching to blacks and whites alike. Doing so required her to leave her children with friends while putting herself in constant conflict with male members of various churches (2).

Sometime between 1833 and 1836, Lee was compelled to publish the details of her religious experience (Lee 65-66). Despite what she calls the "disadvantages of education," in 1836, she paid to have her spiritual autobiography published in tract form (65-66). It was originally titled *The Life and Religious Experience and Journal of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (1). By the time Lee was sixty-six years old, she decided that she had more to add to her story, and a second version of her narrative, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*, was published in 1849. Along with

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[7] Sanctification was an important stage in the Christian's progress. It was seen as a 'new birth' in which the soul becomes "free from the power of sin by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" (*Sisters* 15).

the information from her first publication, the 1849 version of her narrative includes further details of her travels and experiences as an itinerant preacher. In addition to communicating the need for Christian conversion, both versions of Lee's spiritual narrative forward the abolitionist cause while providing an early, detailed account of the role of women in nineteenth-century African American organized religion (2). They also provide a glimpse into the resistance women like Lee faced in challenging a male-dominated church hierarchy. Nothing is known about Lee's activities after the publication of her revised narrative.

Lee's primary focus in writing her spiritual narrative is to convert her readers. Like other spiritual narratives written in the nineteenth century, her story chronicles the circumstances of her salvation, the events surrounding her sanctification, and the role of providence in her life. But Lee obviously has more on her mind than Christian conversion. She has a political agenda, one she hopes will convince her readers to change the way they feel and convert their thinking about certain societal beliefs. As an African American woman writing in the nineteenth century, she has to be skilled as well as careful. She accomplishes this through the amalgamation of her traditional spiritual narrative with components of sentimental literature. It is not just what she says that makes Lee's story successful in this effort to convert her readers; rather, it is the way she tells her story that makes it so efficacious. Through her use of affective language and conventional tropes, Lee employs "the concept of *sympathy*" to influence her audience's emotions (Moody xii). In doing so, Lee is able to achieve one goal of sentimental literature, which is "to keep the reader's cords of sympathy in perpetual vibration" (H. Brown 171). By mediating well-known sentimental conventions "through intelligence,

talent, and imagination" Lee makes her vignettes "come alive for the reader" (Dobson 269). When the scenes she describes come alive, readers become susceptible to the "primary affective sentiments" Lee hopes will create a relationship between them and her text (Dobson 269; Halpern xvi). In combining the qualities of a spiritual narrative with the characteristics of sentimental literature, Lee creates a form of rhetoric that safely allows her to proclaim her gospel while laying the groundwork that is necessary if her audience is to accept her commentary about the poor treatment of African Americans in general and the rights of black women in particular.

Lee begins her narrative with a description of her seven-year-old self that creates a character who is bound to draw sympathy from the reader. She starts by revealing that she was "parted" from her parents at the age of seven to live as a "servant maid" some sixty miles from her hometown (Lee 3). She calls herself "a wretched sinner" who is beset with "feelings of guilt" (3). The words Lee uses to describe her situation are significant. The word "parted" denotes the idea of a permanent separation like a parting of ways. By indicating that she was sent to be a "servant maid," Lee makes her role at her new location clear. She is not going to a home; she is going (at age seven) to a place of employment. Using the word "wretched" before sinner is also indicative of the evocative language of sentimental literature. Wretched suggests that the young Lee is living in a state of misery, misery that is likely caused by the guilt she feels over her sins. The idea that a seven-year-old would have sins to feel guilty over is troubling to the reader. Through this technique, Lee paints the picture of a dejected, lonely soul who was ripped from all that is familiar and is in search of the relief that can only come through salvation.

This depiction is crucial if Lee is to convince her readers that conversion is necessary. It is a technique that would have been quite familiar to Lee's readers.

The depiction of an "unsaved child," "alone" in the world, who is "burdened by sin" was a popular trope in the sentimental novels written around the time Lee's revised narrative was published. In her book *The Wide, Wide World,*[8] Susan Warner describes her ten-year-old protagonist, Ellen, in almost the same language Lee uses to describe herself when she writes "Ellen felt that the root of the evil was in her own heart" (161). Similarly, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*[9] also published in novel form near the time Lee's revised narrative was published, Harriet Beecher Stowe describes her young character, Topsy, as "mighty wicked" (286). The words "wretched," "evil," and "wicked" are frequently associated in the sentimental novel with the soul in its unconverted state. In all three cases, the words highlight humankind's state of being without the Lord. They evoke the reader's sympathy, while emphasizing the need for salvation.

Another common method of implementing affective language to promote conversion was the use of lines from popular hymns or psalms—a method that Lee employs, as well. For Christians, hymns are viewed as the music of intense emotion. As a kind of universal "religious language", they appeal to the Christian's heart. Their presence in sentimental novels was quite common, and they express the author's intent to evoke strong emotion in her readers by giving them what I call a "take me to church" moment. Early in her narrative, Lee quotes the opening verses of a psalm written by Isaac Watts:

[8] Warner's story was first published in novel form in 1850.
[9] Stowe's story was first published in novel form in 1852.

Lord I am vile, conceived in sin,
Born unholy and unclean
Sprung from man, whose guilty fall
Corrupts the race, and taints us all. (3)

Here, Lee uses language to turn sentiment into moral reflection (Todd 7). Through the use of a well-known hymn of that time, Lee is able to convey her own understanding of her unsaved self. With words like "vile," "unclean," and "taints," this hymn perfectly serves Lee's intent to evoke emotion. As a result, her readers are prompted to reflect on their own status as believers. In *The Wide, Wide World*, Warner uses a similar tactic to affect her readers' emotions while prompting self-examination. When the stranger on the ship urges Ellen to accept Christ as her savior, he directs her to read a hymn called "Christ at the Door" (Warner 75).[10] Lines from that hymn state, "Open my heart, Lord, enter in; / Slay every foe, and conquer sin" (75). For Ellen, these words represent the promise of a better day in the only way one can truly find it—through God. These verses force Warner's readers to examine their own relationship with God. Of Isaac Watt's hymn, Lee writes, the words "struck me to the heart, and made me feel in some measure, the weight of my sins, and sinful nature" (4). The word "struck" in relation to her heart suggests that she was not just influenced, but hit with the power of Watt's words. Similarly, the phrases "weight of my sins" and "sinful nature," emphasize Lee's miserable state as an unsaved Christian. In expressing this revelation about her own nature, Lee encourages her reader to question "the rights and wrongs of human conduct" (Todd 7). By depicting herself as a guilt-ridden child who was not of God, it seems likely that Lee's intent is not only to confess her fundamentally sinful nature, but to help readers

[10] This hymn was written by J. Grigg in 1765 (Grigg).

recognize the guilty, wretched sinner in need of potential conversion that lies within them, as well.

Lee goes on to describe her initial interactions with the Spirit of God using the same type of emotionally charged language found earlier in her narrative. She writes of her desire, which was "driven of Satan," to "destroy" herself (4). Obviously, she was contemplating suicide, but using the word "destroy" makes her message clear; to be influenced by Satan is to be on the path to self-destruction. In describing her conversion moment at the age of twenty-one, Lee claims that her soul "was gloriously converted to God" (5). "Great was the ecstacy [sic] of my mind," she exclaims, "for I felt that not only the sin of *malice* was pardoned, but all other sins were swept away together" (5). Lee's use of the word "felt" as she describes her moment of conversion draws the reader into her experience. By saying that she "felt" her sins were washed away, Lee invites her readers to imagine a feeling. She does the same thing when she uses the word "ecstasy" to communicate the absolute, incomparable joy she feels when the shadow of sin leaves her, and God's glory covers her. In order to imagine Lee's feelings, readers must, at least to some extent, feel her emotions themselves.

Lee continues her efforts to emphasize conversion when she describes her unsanctified self as "disconsolate" and "despairing," and she writes that a "distressed condition" affected her heart, which was full of sorrow (Lee 7). She reveals that she was constantly "in agony, weeping convulsively" (7). "Disconsolate," "despairing," and "distressed" are all words related to the state of being inconsolable. This state is further emphasized by Lee's use of the words "agony" and "weeping." Agony is the worst pain imaginable, while weeping is somehow sadder than simply crying. All of these words

paint the picture of a person in extreme emotional pain whose tears fall despite any effort to stop them. The language that Lee incorporates is similar to the language Harriet Wilson employs in her well-known sentimental novel, *Our Nig.* When describing the state of the six-year-old maid Frado, as she is constantly mistreated by Mrs. Bellmont, Wilson uses terms like "greatly wearied," "discontent," "grieved," and "disconsolate" (30; 31; 41). When recounting the condition of Frado's heart as it exists without the knowledge of Christ as her Savior, Wilson also uses the word "desolate" (69). And like Lee, Frado does not cry; she weeps (Lee 7; Wilson 30). Weeping in a sentimental novel usually indicates that some kind of conversion is taking or needs to take place (Halpern xiii). In using such passionately overcharged language to emphasize the need for conversion, Lee jostles her readers from one emotionally evocative moment to another. Invited into such emotional experiences, if only sympathetically, readers thus not only feel "for" Lee—they, in essence, feel "with" her. Their reading of these affective experiences allows them to experience, to some degree, the very emotions she narrates—emotions tied to a recognition of sinfulness. Thus, they cannot help but be affectively influenced, sympathetically drawn into envisioning themselves in the same predicament.

In telling her story of salvation and sanctification, Lee goes beyond the context of the spiritual narrative, employing sympathy to also argue for the abolition of slavery. Lee's relation of her early experiences in being "parted" from her family and community to be sent to work as a "servant maid" at age seven, begins the process of evoking sympathy in her reader that can be used to challenge the institution of slavery (Lee 3). As mentioned earlier, Lee's use of the word "parted" is significant. It denotes the breaking apart of a family when one member of that family is sent away. In no time, the reader

deduces that the separation is permanent—a fact which invites an even greater investment of sympathy on the part of the reader. The term “servant maid” also serves Lee’s purpose. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) indicates that the words “servant” and “slave” were used interchangeably at the time Lee was writing ("servant, n."). Although not a slave, Lee’s situation as a child servant was not so different. Thus, her circumstances would certainly evoke the kind of sympathy in her readers that they would feel for an enslaved child, were they so inclined. Harriet Wilson recognized the power of the broken family to evoke sympathy on the part of the reader when she penned her character Frado, whose circumstances mirror those of Lee’s plight. Frado is deserted by her mother and left to work as a servant (Wilson 24). Like Lee, she is not really in a new home; she is in a place of employment. The trope of the child trapped in servitude is used by both women to challenge conventional thinking about black people. Through their mutual stories of cruelty and mistreatment, Lee and Wilson seem to be relaying the same message—being a black servant in the North is not substantively better than being a slave in the South. The circumstances Lee and Wilson describe encourage readers to acknowledge that servitude is akin to slavery in that it entraps African Americans and robs them of their rights to self-determination. The same kind of sentimental protagonist appears in both works, and through the emotions evoked by the words used to describe the protagonists’ circumstances, the same message about the shadow of slavery in the North is forwarded.

Lee does not provide many details of her experiences with her first mistress, but she describes her soul as poor and her heart as hard during this time in her life. The image of a young child “servant” with a “poor” soul and a “hard” heart is constructed so as to be emotionally moving. Although she does not provide dates, Lee does mention being sent

from that woman's home to a new mistress who prevented her from reading the Bible (Lee 4). In keeping her from reading the Bible, Lee's new mistress, like the institution of slavery, becomes an obstacle to Christianity. As is the case with being sent into servitude as a mere child, this moving from one place to another at another's choosing is similar to the condition of the slave. Lee's position on slavery would not have been lost on her audience. All of America was tainted by the sin of slavery; living in the North did not mean that blacks could escape racial oppression or that whites could escape the shame.

Lee continues to forward her position on slavery and Christianity by relating an incident that took place in her home town of Cape May, New Jersey. She was preaching at her uncle's house when she encountered an old man she describes as a deist.[11] As reported by Lee, the old man "said he did not believe the coloured people had any souls" (19). This was a common belief of whites who believed in slavery, and Lee mentions it to let her audience know that she is well aware of this widely accepted justification for slavery. Lee relates that the man sat very near where she was preaching and "boldly tried to look [her] out of countenance" (19). The man, Lee reveals, "was a great slaveholder, and had been very cruel" (19). She writes that he thought "nothing of knocking down a slave with a fence stake, or whatever might come to hand" (19). In using the word "cruel" to describe the slaveholder, Lee successfully aligns cruelty with the practice of slavery. As she continues her story, Lee explains that she "labored on" with her sermon "looking to God all the while," with "but little liberty" (19). Her use of the words "labored" and "liberty" highlights the hard work African Americans faced in convincing some whites that African Americans possessed souls and that all African Americans should be free.

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[11] The *OED* defines deist as one who acknowledges the existence of a God upon the testimony of reason, but rejects revealed religion ("deist, n").

Lee describes what happened during her sermon in poignant language, writing, "there went an arrow from the bent bow of the gospel, and fastened in his till then obdurate heart" (19).[12] Lee's use of the word "obdurate" reflects her reliance on sentimentality. By using it, Lee suggests that the slaveholder's heart was hardened by sin and that it was a change of heart—a new way of feeling—that catalyzed his reform, rectifying his personal feelings as they relate to slavery and slaveholding.

After Lee's sermon, the old man changes his attitude, reverses his previous ignorance, and admits to her that African Americans do have souls. Lee relates that the slaveholder came back into the house, which was filled with African Americans, and "in a friendly manner shook hands with me" (19). Her use of the word "friendly" in this instance is suggestive. It demonstrates that the man had entered a new emotional state—one in which his whole ideological stance had shifted. Instead of the disdain he previously felt for African Americans, the slaveholder adopted a "friendly" manner (19). His feelings for black people had been transformed. Lee wants her readers to understand that whites and African Americans can be friendly with God's help. In convincing the slaveholder that slaves are generic sinners with savable souls, Lee asks her readers "to look beyond the facts of the slave's individual identity in order to discover his [or her] greater significance as a metaphor of everyone's spiritual struggle" (*To Tell* 67). According to Lee, from the day the slaveholder acknowledged the fact that African Americans do have souls "he became greatly altered in his ways for the better" (Lee 19). In describing the details of this vignette, Lee suggests that Christianity will cause white

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[12] These words are an allusion to the bow and arrow in Zechariah 9.13-14, a reference which would not have been lost on Lee's audience.

people to feel differently about black people, thereby destroying the prejudice that allows slavery. Just a few years later, Stowe would suggest the same idea in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Lee also demonstrates her desire to improve the welfare of slaves by relating sentimental scenes of her preaching for them (Moody 62). One particularly poignant incident occurs in Maryland when a slaveholder asks her to preach a funeral sermon for three of his slaves. The dead consisted of two adults and one child, all of whom had been dead for a year (Lee 39). One of the dead slaves was a woman, whose two young daughters were present at the gravesite. Lee describes an abject scene as the inconsolable children wept over their mother's grave (39). The reader is presented with the image of heartbroken children desperately weeping at their mother's grave. Lee writes, the children "were so affected, it seemed they would go in fits; several persons tried to pacify them, but in vain" (39). The language Lee uses here invites readers to feel sad for the children's loss while at the same time wondering why they are still so inconsolable a year after their mother's death. The image Lee creates of the two young girls crying at their mother's grave is made worse by the reader's knowledge that the fate of the child follows the mother's, meaning that these two distraught children were also slaves. Any protection from slavery that the children had while still attached to their mother is gone. The finality of her death likely exposes them to even greater horrors than the ones they have already known. Through Lee's depiction of the scene, readers are encouraged to contemplate what the children's loss really means and to feel their profound sorrow.

Lee's describes herself as being greatly impacted by the grief-stricken reaction of the woman's children (Lee 39). "It was a solemn time," she maintains, "many were deeply affected that day at the graves" (39). Her use of the word "solemn," along with her

sympathetic and somber tone as she describes this pitiful scene, again invokes the language of sentiment. We are invited to share Lee's profound anguish over the realities of this scene—anguish that grows as we come to a knowledge that the deceased were held in bondage, that the two young children are now motherless, and that they are now fully exposed to an institution that, among other things, allows deceased black people to be held for close to a year before their families can bury them properly (Moody 63). According to Karen Sanchez-Eppler, the success of the sentimental story is measured, in part, "by its ability to translate words into pulse beats and sobs" (100). Lee's rendering of this scene certainly passes the test. Her decision to write down this particular event in her life not only reflects "a sense of duty to her people, particularly since she could expect many whites to read her narrative," but her commitment to allowing those people to feel the plight of the enslaved and share her sorrow over it (Moody 63). The use of such highly "sentimentalized figures of oppression" to illustrate the dehumanizing characteristics of slavery thus reflects her desire to combine her spiritual message with a secular message about the horrors of slavery (63).

In depicting herself as a sentimental subject, Lee creates a character to whom her audience can relate. By the time Lee begins the portion of her narrative titled "My Call to Preach the Gospel," her readers have already sympathized with the early Lee, a young, orphaned servant who does not know God. Similarly, they have formed an emotional and moral bond to the young woman who although converted to Christianity, is spiritually lost without Christ as her Savior. Finally, they can relate to a sanctified woman who, because she is black and female, is marginalized and obstructed at every turn. It is at this point in her narrative, a mere ten pages in, that Lee essentially casts herself as a

sentimental heroine in order to argue her point about the right to autonomy for African American women.

She begins by describing how “the Lord poured forth his spirit” through “the instrumentality of a poor coloured woman” (Lee 18). Lee creates a contrast here between an oppressed figure and someone who is important enough to be a vessel for the spirit of the Lord. In doing so, she implies that while she may be a black woman, she is worthy of the Lord’s work. Later, Lee mentions meeting an elder who treated her “as though he thought my character was not equal to his” (22). She also acknowledges the fact that those to whom she preaches may only respect her message and not “the poor weak servant who brought it to them with so much labor” (23). And she writes that when faced with her critics, she often felt like “a cart beneath it shafts” with a heart so sore it caused her bodily pain (24). By calling herself “a poor colored woman” and “a poor weak servant” with a “sore” heart she again works to evoke sympathy and empathy from her readers. In highlighting the difficulties she faced with the moving language of sentimental literature, Lee forms an alliance with her readers, many of whom were white women who were themselves attempting to conflate their right to autonomy with African American rights. Such readers could easily relate, at least to some degree, to the feelings of oppression that accompanied being a woman, if not a black woman, in the nineteenth century.

Lee’s efforts here are not meant to appear subtle. As Richard Douglass-Chin asserts, “she uses the discourse of white feminism in no uncertain terms, to critique the sexism she encounters in the church” (37). Fittingly, one of the most fruitful and powerful places in which such feminist discourse took place was in sentimental novels.

The sentimental novel, according to Tompkins, is “a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time” (126). “The sentimental agent,” Berlant explains, “aimed to transform the values and practices of domination that went along with life in the patriarchal public” (270). Lee is the sentimental agent in her narrative, and in employing the language and tone of sentimental literature, she successfully forwards the idea that women have the right to autonomy. Her status as a Christian gives her a direct relationship to God that allows her to “bypass men’s authority—to defy men—for God” (Cott qtd. in Foster 70).

Lee was often discouraged by the conflict she faced with the male members of the American Methodist Episcopal church, and she conveys this to her reader through expressive language. Her narrative chronicles her travels across the Northeast, including places in New York and Philadelphia, as well as the slave holding Maryland. It appears that she met with resistance at almost every turn. She reports, “the oppositions I met with [. . .] were numerous—so much so, that I was tempted to withdraw from the Methodist Church” (24). The fact that she considers withdrawing from her church speaks volumes about the difficulties she faced. Lee relates the misgivings she had when confronted, writing that “it appeared that the hosts of darkness were arrayed against me to destroy my peace and lead me away from the throne of love” (25). Lee uses the more sinister phrase “hosts of darkness” instead of simply writing “my detractors” to describe the forces that were against her. In using this term, Lee implies there was an army of demons working against her, which emphasizes the significance of her struggle. She uses the word “destroy,” thereby implying that those against her did not just want her to stop preaching; they wanted to extinguish her.

These renderings of her experiences continue to paint Lee as a sentimental character. At one point, she is homeless, penniless, and sick, and it looks like all is lost. She is the underdog, and the audience is invited to empathize with her. By emotionally recruiting her readers to sympathize with her, Lee prepares them to accept her message about her right to autonomy—a right she asserts with the aid of scripture. She recognizes that many believe it is "unseemly" and "improper" for women to preach (Lee 11). Through the use of the words "unseemly" and "improper," Lee acknowledges the fact that many people of her day saw women preaching as an indecent act. She further acknowledges that people may see her as indecent because of her preaching. Unwilling to accept this fate, Lee asserts her right to preach by aligning herself with Mary Magdalene and referencing the place in the New Testament where Jesus told Mary "go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20.17). In doing so, Lee reminds her readers that the resurrection of Christ is the pinnacle of Christianity and makes her position clear—the fact that Jesus would first appear to a woman after the resurrection and send her to spread His words emphasizes the importance of the role of women in His ministry. Their participation is not only proper—it is significant.

There is a lesson about feminine autonomy to be learned by Lee's readers, but as in the sentimental novel, didacticism is mixed with entertainment. Seeing her "triumph over so much adversity and so many obstacles is profoundly pleasurable to the readers who [have come to] identify with her" (Baym 17). To some extent, Lee's readers see her dilemma as if it were their own (17). They can vent their anger at her enemies while rejoicing at her triumph. More importantly, they can accept Lee's solutions to the

challenges she faces as relevant to their lives (17). And if her solutions are relevant to their lives, then her causes must be equally relevant.

CHAPTER 2. ZILPHA ELAW

Like Lee, little is known of the early life of Zilpha Elaw.[13] According to her narrative,[14] she was born free in Philadelphia in the early 1790s to free parents. When Elaw was twelve years old, her mother died. As a result of her mother's passing, her father was compelled to send her to work as a maid for a Quaker family, the Mitchels (Elaw 53). Any religious instruction she received as a young child stopped when she went to live with the Mitchels. Their religious practices "were performed in the secret silence of the mind" (54). Consequently, the young Elaw "soon gave way to the evil propensities of an unregenerate heart" and "heedlessly ran into the ways of sin" (54). About a year and a half after she was sent to work as a maid with the Mitchels, her father died (53). In her mid-teenage years, Elaw became involved with Methodists who were proselytizing in her community (55). The Mitchels gave her permission to attend the Methodist meetings on Sunday afternoons. These occasions allowed "the divine work on her soul to begin" (55). Eventually, Elaw asked God to forgive her for her sins, and she was converted though what she describes as a vison of Jesus (56). Like Lee, she was eventually sanctified by God.

Elaw married in 1810, but her husband was a non-Christian, which put a terrible strain on the marriage (Elaw 61). The two moved to New Jersey in 1811 and had a daughter one year later. By that time, Elaw would have been in her early twenties. When speaking of her marriage, Elaw tells her readers it would be better to drown themselves

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[13] Elaw is Zilpha's married name; there is no record of her maiden name.

[14] Elaw's narrative occupies 109 undivided pages in Andrew's edition.

than to plunge themselves "into all the sorrows, sins, and anomalies involved in a matrimonial alliance with an unbeliever" (61). Clearly, this was something about which Elaw felt strongly. To her extreme disappointment, Elaw's husband was "hostile to religion" (79). Sadly, his promises about reuniting with the church were empty, and he did not support her desire to spread the gospel (63; 79).

After her husband died in 1823, Elaw and her eleven-year-old daughter were forced to work as domestics (*Sisters* 8). Sometime during the mid-1820s, when Elaw was around thirty years old, she left her child with a relative in New Jersey and traveled back to Philadelphia to begin her career as an itinerant preacher. She preached without a license or denominational sanction, and her decisions as to where to go and to whom to preach were guided by "inner spiritual promptings" (8). These promptings often directed her to slaveholding states, which she calls "regions of wickedness," where the very real possibility of being arrested, kidnapped, or sold into slavery existed (Elaw 99; *Sisters* 8).

According to William Andrews's textual note, Elaw's spiritual autobiography was published at the author's expense in London in 1846 (*Sisters* 23). Andrews writes that Elaw had spent the five years prior to the publication of her work preaching in Great Britain (23). In her narrative, Elaw does not mention the circumstances under which she decided to write down her story or how she ended up in London, but the end of her autobiography suggests she was in England and that she was preparing to return to the United States (Andrews, Foster, and Harris 249). Like Lee's, Elaw's narrative promotes the idea of Christian conversion while forwarding the abolitionist cause. In addition, it also provides insight into the role black women played in organized religion. She, too, was faced with significant resistance as she attempted and succeeded in participating in

an arena that was dominated by men. Nothing is known about Elaw after the year 1846, and her spiritual autobiography had not been republished until Andrews's book, *Sisters of the Spirit*, was published in 1986 (*Sisters* 23).

As is the case with Lee, Elaw's primary focus in writing her spiritual narrative is to motivate her readers to convert, and like Lee, she accomplishes her goal through the art of sympathy. In deploying the affective language and tropes associated with sentimental literature, Elaw creates a form of rhetoric that "positions the reader in relation to the characters" in a way that causes the audience to embrace her message (Halpern xv). The reader forms a bond with the oppressed protagonist they are reading about (xx). This causes the reader to react emotionally to the circumstances of the protagonist and to the societal influences that cause these circumstances. In relating certain incidents of her life, Elaw creates pictures that "go right to the heart, with no detours through the head" (40). These pictures have the power to persuade that mere words do not. Through her technique of sentimental persuasion, Elaw not only forwards the idea of Christian conversion, but she also forces whites to recognize the humanity of African Americans as well as the need for black women's autonomy.

Through the use of sentimental phrases in the early pages of her story, Elaw quickly aligns her narrative with the language conventions of sentimental literature and herself with the characteristics of a sentimental heroine. In describing herself as a young teenager, Elaw reveals that she felt she was "exceedingly sinful," so much so that she was certain she would be condemned by God (54). She imagines the image of God frowning as He looked down on her because of her actions (54). Elaw felt that she had "offended my heavenly Father and that she was not prepared to meet Him" (55). Her "lively and

active disposition" changed as fits of weeping and depression took over (55). Despite the "feeble prayers" she sent up, she relates that "the divine work on my soul was a gradual one, and my way was prepared as the dawning of the morning" (55). She admits that "the convictions of my sinfulness in the sight of God, and incompetency to meet my Judge, were immoveable and distressing" (55). She adds that she "felt a godly sorrow for sin in having grieved [. . .] God by a course of disobedience to his commands" (55). "Many were the tears," she writes, "which overflowed my eyes and indicated the sorrows of my heart" (58). Through these moving descriptions of Elaw's condition in her unsaved state, readers are encouraged to feel her shame and her distress. These shared emotions could cause readers to reflect on their own status as Christians.

The type of evocative language Elaw uses can be found in the sentimental poetry of the nineteenth century. For example, in a poem entitled "Sympathy,"[15] Phoebe Carey speaks of salvation as "the coming of the dawn" (383). In addition, she intertwines "such sorrow for their griefs" with the "distress" of unsaved souls while talking about "the bitter tears of agony" (383). In aligning salvation with the new dawn, both writers emphasize the idea of a new birth through conversion. Additionally, through their focus on words like "sorrow," "distress," "griefs," and "tears," both authors make salvation an evocative experience. Sorrow goes far beyond mere sadness to describe deep despondency, while distress moves far beyond simply being troubled to reflect the state of being extremely distraught, and griefs suggest that some kind of damage is being suffered or imposed. The tears both writers mention are indicative of all of the feelings described above. Used in conjunction, these words suggest that the unsaved subject is terribly sad and distraught at the thought of the damage she is imposing on her Lord

[15] The exact date of publication is unknown, but Carey was born in 1821 and died in 1871 (Griswold 280).

through her disobedience toward His will. Further, they suggest that the only way to avoid this predicament is to ask Jesus for conversion. By asking readers to understand her emotional state, Elaw is causing them to experience her emotions, at least to some degree. These shared feelings work to forge the affective connection between reader and protagonist that Elaw hopes to accomplish. The audience's sympathetic identification with the author becomes the foundation on which she can propagate her views.

Elaw's actual conversion occurs through a supernatural encounter she has with Jesus.

As with her description of the state of her unsaved self, her rendering of this part of her narrative evokes empathy and sympathy in the reader, feelings she hopes will compel her readers to act. She characterizes her meeting with God in moving terms, writing that "whilst singing the songs of Zion, I distinctly saw the Lord Jesus approach me with open arms" (56).[16] In this portion of her narrative, Elaw, like Lee, implements affective language through the reference to hymns, which by their very function as songs of praise suggest strong emotion. As Lee does, Elaw provides a "take me to church moment." The song she was singing reflects a moving plea from the sin-sick Elaw for God's salvation:

> Oh, when shall I see Jesus,
>
> And dwell with him above;
>
> And drink from flowing fountains,
>
> Of everlasting love.
>
> When shall I be delivered
>
> From this vain world of sin;

[16] Surely this is a reference to Psalms 137.3, which encourages believers to "sing us *one* of the songs of Zion."

And, with my blessed Jesus,

Drink endless pleasures in? (56)[17]

Elaw's appeal reflects the desperation of her dire circumstances. She sings, "Oh, when shall I see Jesus / And dwell with him above" (56). This phrasing suggests that she would rather be dead and in heaven than be alive in her present state. She asks, "When shall I be delivered," which implies that her journey here on earth has been long and full of hardships. The word "delivered" suggests that her condition as an unsaved believer carries with it some burden from which she must be freed. The desire to move from this world to God's presence and the idea of soothing the distressed soul with the words of a hymn is found in both Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* As the protagonist in Warner's sentimental novel lies sick in her bed from mistreatment and grief, she asks Mr. Van Braunt to read her a hymn. Similarly, while Stowe's Eva lies dying in her bed, she asks Tom to sing her a hymn. In both cases, the words of the hymn are moving, and they express the idea that the subject is in a situation that causes her to want to leave her earthly existence for a better place. In Warner's book, Mr. Van Braunt speaks of "Jesus the Saviour," who "freely loves, and without end," who "brought [the sinner] to his chosen fold" (214). Likewise, in Stowe's book, Tom speaks of "flying away to Canaan's shore" with the aid of "bright angels" (304). With Elaw, as with Warner and Stowe, the sentimental character's ills are quieted by poignant words about leaving this life to reside in the presence of God's everlasting love for his children. The fact that almost identical scenes and religious rituals are found in historical narratives, like Elaw's, and in sentimental novels from the era clearly reveals a situation in which literary

[17] This hymn comes from sources like *The Methodist Harmonist*, and *A Collection of Hymns, for the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Principally from the Collection of the Rev. John Welsey* (1836) (*Sisters* 240).

practice and the practice of religious ritual have blended, with each influencing the other. The lines between sentimental ritual and sentimental literary expression were blurring, and each was feeding symbiotically into the other.

As Elaw writes about her state after her conversion, she continues to use language that pierces her readers' emotions. Of the time period right after her conversion, Elaw writes, "my soul transported with heavenly peace and joy in God, all the former hardships which pertained to my circumstances and situation vanished" (57). She continues, "my disposition and temper were subdued beneath the softening and refining pressure of divine grace upon my heart" (57). Here, Elaw mentions the change of heart that is necessary for salvation and that can only be achieved through divine grace. It is a reminder to her readers. Just two pages earlier her soul was filled with sorrow for her sins (55). Now, through God's salvation, her soul, in fact her very being, is changed. She writes:

> an overflowing stream of love has filled my soul, even beyond my utmost capacity to contain, and I have thought, when in such ecstacies [sic] of bliss, that I should certainly die under them, and go to my heavenly father at once [. . .] for I could not imagine it is possible for any human being to feel such gusts of the love of God, and continue to exist in this world of sin. (58)

Her choice of words here is poignant. The terms "overflowing stream" and "beyond my utmost capacity" suggest that God's love is endless as well as limitless, while the words "ecstasies" and "bliss" reflect the kind of happiness that Elaw asserts can only be found through God's divine intervention. Through this use of affective language, Elaw invites

her readers to imagine (if not sympathetically experience) feelings of true joy, and she uses that experience to help them understand that such an experience can only be fully theirs if they participate in "real religion," i.e. if they experience their own corresponding conversion (59).

Figures of dejection are popular in sentimental novels, and during the nineteenth century, there was no greater figure of dejection than the slave. Elaw uses this trope in her spiritual autobiography to communicate her position on slavery. She writes about a time she was "led by the Spirit" to preach the gospel in Annapolis, Maryland (Elaw 98). As mentioned earlier, she calls Annapolis and the other slave holding states "regions of wickedness" (99). This phrase reflects her belief that slavery was depraved and immoral, a point that would not have been lost on her readers. In Annapolis, Elaw was succeeded in the pulpit by a local preacher who was a slave. She describes the man as "a poor brother in bonds" who "anxiously sighed for liberty" (98). "His life and spirit," she continues, "his body, his bones, and his blood, as respects this life, were legally the property of, and at the disposal of his fellow man" (98). With these phrases, Elaw paints a vivid picture of the condition of the slave. By calling the man a "poor brother," she aligns him with herself and her readers as a fellow Christian, which serves as a reminder to her readers that slaves can be Christians. The sentence about the man's entire existence being "at the disposal of his fellow man," aligns the man with his owner and further reminds her readers that the only difference between the slave and his owner is the fact that one of them owns the other. Elaw adds that the man's "sighs were heard in heaven by Him who looseth [sic] the prisoners, and the time of his release arrived" (98). The word "sighs" conveys the preacher slave's utter dejection at his situation; he is clearly beaten down by

his burden. By saying that the man's distress was heard by God, Elaw once again reminds her audience that the man in question is a Christian. Later she reveals that the slave became ill and that in days, he "fell asleep in Jesus" (98). In heaven, Elaw explains, "the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor; the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master" (98).[18] The message about slavery communicated by Elaw in this passage is very similar to the message communicated by Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* just six years later. Stowe speaks of slaves, who, like the slave in Elaw's story, seek in death "a shelter from woes more dreaded than death" (Stowe 514). And just as Elaw reminds her readers that all are equal in heaven, so, too, does Stowe when she calls Uncle Tom "a brother man" and a "brother Christian," whose suffering "harrows up the soul!" (480). Near the end of her passage about the preacher slave who dies, Elaw seems to speak directly to her reader, writing that "every case of slavery, however lenient its inflictions and mitigated its atrocities, indicates an oppressor, the oppressed, and the oppression" (Elaw 98). Similarly, in her last chapter, Stowe speaks directly to her reader and explains that there is "nothing to protect the slave's life, but the *character* of the master [. . .] this injustice is an *inherent* one in the slave system—it cannot exist without it" (Stowe 511). Both the language used and the technique of speaking directly to the reader reflect the conventions of sentimental literature. This type of direct address invites the reader to experience the narrative in a very intimate way. It is as if they are the unique recipient of an intimate discourse. This method pulls readers further into the narrative than they might otherwise be drawn. In each case, the author uses personal identification and communication with her reader to

[18] Here Elaw references Job 3.17, where Job says "there the wicked cease *from* troubling; and there the weary be at rest."

advance her political position in a format her nineteenth century American reader would certainly recognize, accept, and understand.

From the start of her spiritual autobiography, Elaw depicts herself in a way that likens her to a sentimental novel's protagonist. She establishes at the beginning of her narrative that she became an orphan at the age of twelve (53). She also talks about her lack of early religious instruction (54). In addition, Elaw acknowledges that at an early age, "I felt myself to be so exceeding sinful, that I was certain of meeting with condemnation at the bar of God (54). Furthermore, she details the events of her conversion in a way that reveals the virtue that resided in the heart of that sinful girl, writing that as "the light dawned on my mind, [. . .] I increased in knowledge daily [. . .] [and] enjoyed a greater peace of mind in waiting upon my heavenly father" (56). Through this strategy, she communicates the message that "sympathy, compassion, and virtue" transcend race (Doyle 167). Like Lee, Elaw challenges the racial prejudices that might have been at the forefront of the minds of her readers. At one point in her narrative, Elaw asserts, "[t]he pride of a white skin is a bauble of great value with many in some parts of the United States, who readily sacrifice their intelligence to their prejudices, and possess more knowledge than wisdom. The Almighty accounts not the black races of man either in the order of nature or spiritual capacity as inferior to the white" (Elaw 85). Contrasting the word "pride" with "bauble" in relation to white skin reduces the worth of having white skin instead of black to that of a mere trifle, some showy, but unimportant thing of no real value, at least not in God's eyes. Further proof of this attempt to defy nineteenth century racial beliefs can be found in Elaw's narrative when she writes of her post-sanctification self. She reports "I clearly saw [. . .] the light of the Holy Ghost" and

"my heart and soul were rendered completely spotless—as clean as a white sheet of paper" (67)[19]. This reference to her "'whiteness within' is clearly linked to Elaw's social/political vision, which erases hierarchies of difference that are man-made" (Bassard 123).

Elaw further articulates her position on the relationship between Christianity and slavery with the language of sympathy when she relates her experiences preaching in slave states. She explains, "Satan much worried and distressed my soul with the fear of being arrested and sold for a slave," a circumstance that was quite possible (Elaw 91). Again, Elaw uses the word "distressed" to describe the state of her soul. This word does the work Elaw intends by communicating the extreme state of despair she experiences when faced with the reality that she could be a slave. It is the state of despair most slaves face when confronted with the reality of their situation. Elaw's experience in this moment of fear becomes a metaphor for all African Americans in the United Stated who faced the yoke of slavery. She mentions that when preaching to her African American congregation, she "had exhorted them impressively to [ac][20]quit themselves as men approved of God" (91). In using the phrase "men approved of God," Elaw references Acts 2.22 where Peter refers to Jesus as "a man approved of God" (Acts 2.22). Her technique in this passage aligns the slaves for whom she is preaching with Jesus, a man who was crucified and killed. Surely, the parallel between his treatment and the treatment of African American slaves was not lost on Elaw's audience. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe successfully evokes sympathy for slaves through the connection she makes between Tom's sacrificial death and Jesus's. Elaw is attempting to do the same. In urging

[19] Elaw is alluding to Ephesians 5.26-27, which talks about Christ sanctifying and cleansing the church "with the washing of water by the word" and leaving it "not having a spot, or wrinkle" or "blemish."
[20] The bracketed information was added to Elaw's "quit" by Andrews.

them to “quit themselves,” Elaw suggests that the members of her congregation should conduct themselves bravely as men of God, which is the only hope for a better day that they can have. This reality would not have been lost on the white members of Elaw’s readership, who might have empathized with the state of the slave, while being forced to recognize their role in this situation.

While preaching to the gathered congregation on the day mentioned above, Elaw says, Satan put the idea into her head that slaveholders would capture her and sell her into slavery (91). She observed the crowd that had gathered pointing at her and chanting “that’s her, that’s her” (91). She felt she would immediately be arrested and sold to some slave owner. She says that this thought filled her with “fear and terror” (91). By using the word “terror,” Elaw communicates the extreme fear and dread felt by the African American when faced with the thought of enslavement. In her moment of terror, Elaw explains, a thought occurred to her: “from whence cometh all this fear?” She writes that she quickly realized it was Satan’s work (91). Suddenly, she says “my faith rallied and my confidence in the Lord returned” (91). In her excitement, she exclaimed, “get thee behind me Satan, for my Jesus hath made me free” (91). In this passage. Elaw paraphrases Mark 8.33 when Jesus says “Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men” (Mark 8.33). This inspiring moment in Elaw’s life is constructed so that her readers are led to experience her intense fear and then her intense faith. As readers experience these things, they are encouraged to feel for Elaw. They understand her emotions, share them, and even experience them to some degree. This helps readers identify with her, which encourages them to see her as a unique individual with impressive individual characteristics. Therefore, the thought of her

becoming a slave is that much more horrifying to readers, which leads them to resist the idea. Elaw successfully recruits her readers to join with her in her desire to resist slavery by making them see a potential slave as an impassioned, thoughtful, faithful individual.

As a writer, Elaw is primarily concerned with her readers and their response to her story. Clearly, the response she has in mind is conversion for her unsaved readers. Because she and her nineteenth-century readers shared "a common Christian moral code," Elaw's message was likely to elicit the desired response (Moody 8). However, Elaw's political concerns were of just as much import to her as her religious ones. Like Lee, Elaw uses "the work of sentiment" to accomplish her third goal, which is to communicate a political message about the rights of black women (Moody 9). Early in her narrative, Elaw provides a scriptural defense of the role women must play in marriage. As she describes it, women are under the control of their fathers until they are surrendered in marriage (61). Her use of the word "surrender" to describe the union of marriage is interesting. It suggests that the woman must give herself over to a higher authority, her husband, but Elaw appears to accept this as the proper order of things as defined by scripture. However, she does not believe this is the proper order of things if the woman is married to an "unbeliever" (62). Elaw explains: "the wife is destined to be the help-meet[21] of her husband; but if he be a worldly man, she cannot, she dare not be either his instrument or abettor in worldly lusts and sinful pursuits" (62). Elaw goes on to say that the entangled Christian believes it is possible to convince a companion "to love and serve God" (62). Then she makes a direct address to the reader by writing, "I am sorry to say, I know something of this experience" (62). As mentioned earlier, the direct

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[21] This is an allusion to Genesis 2.18 where God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him" (Gen. 2.18).

address invites the reader to form an intimate relationship with the author. She mentions "suffering his keenest chidings" and judgement for attending church without him (63). In this case, Elaw uses her trials with her backsliding husband to draw the reader in as a confidant who comprehends, and has perhaps experienced, the difficulties women face in a society that subordinates them.

This idea is supported in later passages. As was the case with Lee, Elaw encountered a significant amount of resistance from male members of the clergy (Moody 59). She writes that shortly after she began her work in the ministry, fellow preachers, all of whom were male, began to discover her "faults" and "imperfections" (83). Soon, she became "a person of no account," writing that, like Paul, "none stood with me" (83).[22] In calling herself "a person of no account," Elaw is able to communicate the difficulty of her situation as a female preacher as she highlights her struggles as a black woman attempting to navigate in a patriarchal world. By writing "none stood with me," Elaw invites readers to experience her isolation. Consequently, readers, especially female readers, reflect on the similar isolation they may face when trying to work against society's dictates.

Elaw reports that as her reputation as a preacher grew, her husband was concerned about her becoming "a laughing-stock for the people" (84). Here, Elaw acknowledges the fact that as a female preacher, she faced ridicule for her actions. This displeased her husband. Of him, Elaw explains, "it appeared to him so strange and singular a thing, that I should become a public speaker; and he advised me to decline the work altogether, and proceed no further" (84). This lack of support from the person she was bound to by God

[22] This is from 2 Timothy 4.16 where Paul says "no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me" (2 Tim. 4.16).

would have resonated with her female readers. The sympathy they felt would have caused them to understand Elaw's predicament as a woman grappling with the decision to disobey her husband. Elaw did disobey her husband, claiming, "my heavenly Father had informed me that he had great work for me to do; I could not therefore descend down to the counsel of flesh and blood, but adhered faithfully to my commission" (84). Through the contrast between the phrase "flesh and blood" and the word "faithfully," Elaw successfully depicts her difficult position as one who is trapped between two worlds, the secular and the spiritual. This struggle was one her readers, especially her Christian readers, would have wrestled with in their own lives. By making this personal connection with her readers, Elaw creates a kind of comradeship that helps them see her as a person, who just like them wants to follow what she believes is her destiny and what she knows is right. Although she would (no doubt) like her readers to choose spirituality over secularity, the fact that Elaw chooses the spiritual world is not the only point she is making. Readers understand that she is asserting the idea that she is an individual who has the right to make autonomous decisions, even if they go against what the patriarchal society she was living in expected.

Elaw continues to affirm black female autonomy when she describes a visit she made to Alexandria, Virginia sometime in the late 1820s. She remarks that she was "a topic of lively interest" to many of the slave holders present. They found it hard to reconcile the idea that a woman who belonged "to the same family stock [as] their poor debased, uneducated, coloured slaves should come into their territories and teach the enlightened proprietors the knowledge of God" (92). The slaveholders found it even more remarkable that this "female drew the portraits of their characters, made manifest the

secrets of their hearts, and told them all the things that ever they did" (92). This put the slaveholders in a "paradox" (92). How could a female who came from the same race as their slaves not only know the word of God, but also know their characters as sinners? They had no shortage of knowledgeable male preachers, "yet the power of truth and of God was never so manifest in any of their agencies, as with the dark coloured female stranger" (92). Elaw gives the glory of her success to God saying He "hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty" (92). In calling herself a "weak thing," Elaw aligns herself with her contemporary female readers who certainly knew what it was like to be viewed as weak. By saying the weak can "confound the mighty,"[23] Elaw causes her readers to feel her empowerment. This shared feeling of empowerment was necessary if her readers were to act in favor of their own autonomy.

[23] This is a reference to I Corinthians 1.27 where Paul says "but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (I Cor. 1.27).

CHAPTER 3. JULIA FOOTE

Julia Foote[24] was born free in Schenectady, New York in 1823 (Foote 166).[25] As her narrative[26] explains, she was born to slaves who had purchased their freedom before Julia was born. We know little of her early life except for the small vignettes she provides that help her forward her causes. Her parents attended "to the ordinances of God as instructed, but knew little of the power of Christ to save; for their spiritual guides were as blind as those they led" (167). Foote's parents always "kept liquor in the house," because it was the custom at funerals and weddings to pass around the alcohol for everyone, including the officiating clergy to enjoy (167). In addition, "every morning a sling was made, and the children were given the bottom of the cup, where the sugar and a little of the liquor was left, on purpose for them" (167). One day, when she was five years old, Foote found the liquor bottle and "drained [it] to the bottom" (167-68). She became "stupidly drunk" (168). As a result, she experienced "[s]ickness almost unto death" (168). Her "life was spared," however, and it is at this point that she makes the first of many references to herself as a "brand plucked from the burning" (168).[27]

Foote's first "religious impression" came when she was about eight years old (169). She went to a 'big meeting' at the church her parents attended. One of the ministers asked her if she prayed. She fell to her knees and began to say the only prayer

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[24] Julia Foote's maiden name is not provided.
[25] All citations of Foote's narrative come from the 1879 version.
[26] Foote's narrative comprises 71 pages in Andrews' edition and is divided into 30 chapters, each corresponding to a different phase of her life
[27] This is a reference to Zechariah 3.2, where Zechariah says, "And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, [. . .] *is* not this a brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech. 3.2).

she knew—"Now I lay me down to sleep" (169). The minister prayed for her "long and loud" (169). Foote says "I trembled with fear and cried as though my heart would break" because she thought the minister was God and that she would surely die (169). Later "a white woman" came to her house and taught her the Lord's Prayer. Foote related that no words could express the joy her "poor heart" felt when she could recite that prayer (169).

Foote was converted when she was fifteen years old (180). As she listened to a minister preaching from Revelations 14.3, she realized her "lost condition" in a way she never had before (180). Foote wrote that no words could relate the agony she suffered. She lost consciousness and was taken home. Later she relates, "a ray of light flashed across my eyes, accompanied by the sound of far distant singing; the light grew brighter and brighter, and the singing more distinct, and soon I caught the words, 'This is the new song—redeemed, redeemed!'" (180). From that moment on, she "was wonderfully saved from eternal burning" (180).

Soon after her conversion (no dates are provided), a young man, George, to whom "she had formed quite an attachment," asked her to marry him (190). A year later, she married George Foote and left her father's house in New York for Boston (191-92). Her husband was not particularly supportive of her religious endeavors. He said she "was getting more crazy [sic] every day, and getting others the same way" (192). He told her that if she did not stop, he would send her back to her father or "to the crazy-house" (192). Soon after, George left for six months. With time on her hands, Foote felt a call to preach the Gospel, so she began praying and exhorting at various houses for those in need of salvation (200). Thus, Foote began her journey as an itinerant preacher.

Foote's spiritual narrative was originally published by W. F. Schneider in 1879 (Foote 161). In her preface, Foote writes that she had written her "little book after many prayers to ascertain the will of God—having long had an impression to do it" (163). Her object, she states, was "to testify more extensively to the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus Christ to save all from sin" (163). As a testimony of her desire for the book to do good in this way, she went so far as to assert that her modest work would be available to those audience members who did not have "the means of purchasing large and expensive works on this important Bible theme" (163). Foote's narrative was republished in 1886 by Lauer and Yost.

Like Lee and Elaw, Foote's primary focus in writing her spiritual autobiography was to encourage her readers to convert to Christianity, and like them, she worked hard to communicate the need for salvation by invoking sentimental tropes and language. Her narrative was published in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a time when some scholars assert that sentimental literature had lost its popularity and its efficacy (Halpern 65), so it is interesting that Foote employed the same sentimental conventions as her predecessors, Lee and Elaw, who published decades before her. Foote's skilled use of affective language and sentimental tropes creates engaging scenes of distress that advocate for the unsaved and the oppressed. She represents essential realities in her society that "*must* be treated with heightened feeling" (Dobson 273). Her readers identify with her characters, but more importantly, they identify with the plights of her characters (Halpern 115). They can see themselves in similar situations. The key component in this exchange between reader and character is sympathy, not only the ability to feel sympathy but also the ability to "feel the sentiments of someone else" (Barnes 599; Marshall qtd. in

Barnes 599). Through the creative intertwining of characteristics of the spiritual narrative with the affective language and tropes of sentimental literature, Foote emphasizes the importance of spiritual conversion while challenging the treatment of African Americans in post-Civil War America and asserting her rights as a black woman.

Foote relies on affective language throughout her narrative. In a passage where she writes about conversion, she cautions her reader about the use of alcohol. She laments drinking liquor for any reason, telling her reader that "the accursed cup [. . .] will send them down to misery and death" (168). The words "accursed" and "misery" highlight her assertion that drinking alcohol is a pastime that will surely end in extreme unhappiness because it is forbidden by God. She continues by referring to the "woes of the drunkard," which lead to "the wailing of poverty-stricken women and children" (168). The words "woe" and "wailing" again emphasize the state of misery that arises from drinking liquor. Similarly, when revealing the details of her conversion, Foote uses convincing language that draws her readers in emotionally. Of her unsaved self, she writes, "No tongue can tell the agony I suffered" (180), adding, "In great terror I cried: 'Lord have mercy on me, a poor sinner" (180). By positioning the "agony" and "terror" she "suffered," against the "mercy" she asks for as a "poor sinner," Foote takes her reader from pain and fear to the relief that comes with mercy. Later in the passage, after she is saved, Foote pulls her readers further along when she describes the "joy and peace" that filled her heart when she realized she was "redeemed" (180). The juxtaposition of her "joy" and "peace" with her earlier feelings of pain and fear, is an affective experience for readers. By taking her readers on this emotional journey, Foote strives to engage them emotionally, perhaps earn their sympathy, and hopefully motivate them to act.

Perhaps one of the most compelling moments in which we see Foote striving to inspire and motivate emerges in conjunction with her employment of one of the most common and powerful tropes in sentimental literature, "the invocation of the [. . .] child as uncorrupted, innocent, and pure—in other words, as inherently salvific" (Moody 133). To understand Foote's use of this trope, we must return to her passage on drinking alcohol. As related earlier, one day when she was just five years old Foote found a bottle of liquor in an unlocked chest, drank until it was gone, and became "stupidly drunk" (168). Although she is the one who chose to drink the alcohol, in the paragraph that follows her portrayal of this event, she depicts herself as an "innocent" victim of poor parenting (168). Her parents, who gave all of their children a bit of liquor each morning, are the ones who encouraged her to enjoy it (168). At the end of the passage about her early experience with alcohol, Foote asks her readers if they have "innocent children, given you from the hand of God [. . .] whose purity rouses all that is holy and good" (168). By creating a sense of familiarity, her use of a direct address here draws readers further into her narrative than they might otherwise be drawn. Through her use of the words "innocent," "purity," and "holy," Foote creates the image of herself as a child, who, through her innocence and purity, is inherently divine and moral. She exposes a situation in which those responsible for the child failed to nurture that innocence and purity, thereby causing her to rely on her own courage and will to overcome her obstacles. In doing so, Foote makes use of a trope with which her audience was quite familiar to set herself up as the sentimental heroine.

Foote takes this trope a step further when she chronicles another event that happened when she was a young girl. At age ten, her parents had sent her to live with and

work for the Primes, “an old and influential family” who lived in the country (171). Mrs. Prime had a brother who was dying of consumption. For a time, this man, Mr. John, was able walk the short journey to the Prime’s house from his father’s house. Foote uses pathos as she describes the man’s journey. She writes, “I used to stand, with tears in my eyes, and watch him as he slowly moved across the fields, leaning against the fence to rest himself by the way” (171). Mr. John tells Foote that he does not have long to live, which worried her “dreadfully” (171). She wondered “if he said his prayers” (171). The image of a ten year old who is “dreadfully” worried about an adult’s state of grace creates a heartwarming moment for the audience. We are invited to feel two things. On one hand we feel the ten-year-old Foote’s profound sadness at Mr. John’s potential death. And on the other hand we feel a sense of appreciation, if not awe, towards the young Foote because of her innocence, purity, and charity towards another.

One day, Foote asks Mr. John if he prays, and she begins to cry as she waits for his answer. His response as he turns and walks away is “You must pray for me” (171). Foote says “I ran to the barn, fell down on my knees, and said: Our Father, who art in heaven, send that good man to put his hand on Mr. John’s head” (171). Foote writes that she “repeated this [prayer] many times a day as long as he lived” (171). After Mr. John died, Foote heard his loved ones say “he died very happy, and had gone to heaven” (171). Her heart “leapt for joy” at this news (171). Through this depiction, Foote becomes “the Christ-like child” (Moody 133) who is used as a tool for conversion. This trope combined with the trope of the unsaved dying soul “has the capacity to convert numerous unregenerate souls to Christianity” through sympathy and empathy for human suffering (Moody 133).

Through her depiction of this scene, Foote aligns her character with Stowe's Eva St. Claire, who represents a Christ-like figure in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[28] Stowe writes that as a Christian, "Eva somehow always seems to put herself on an equality with every creature that comes near her" (204). Later, Stowe refers to Eva and Tom as "she and her simple friend" (302-03). The same dismissal of race and class barriers is true of the young Foote. Mr. John was a white man, and she was a young black girl, yet she treated him simply as a fellow Christian. This is somewhat similar to Stowe's depiction of Eva. At one point, Eva asks her mother if they should not teach their servants (slaves) to read so they could read the Bible (309). "It seems to me," Eva says, that "the Bible is for everyone to read" (309). In much the same way Eva was concerned with the state of grace of those all around her, black or white, Foote was more concerned about Mr. John's salvation than she was about race and class hierarchies. The episode about Mr. John forwards Foote's message about conversion by showing him as suffering in his state of sin and freed from his suffering after Foote's prayers for his salvation. By using a child's prayers as the method by which the unregenerate soul was saved, Foote works to convince her audience that even a child can see that salvation through Christ is the only way to be truly free.

The connection between this depiction in Foote's narrative and sentimental literature is worthy of further elaboration. Like Stowe, Foote recognized that the image of an innocent child seeking the salvation of another individual, regardless of race distinctions, was capable of having a significant impact on her readers. And as with Stowe, Foote relies on this impact to move her readers to a better understanding of

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[28] Moody notices a similar connection when she writes "Foote implicitly compares her narrative self with the figure of the holy child as incarnated in Eva St. Claire, the child evangelist in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (134).

redemption, salvation, and the Christian's responsibility to others. It is interesting to note that Foote's vignette reverses Stowe's imagery. In Stowe's story, a white girl has the power to save a black man. In her case, Stowe uses the sentimental trope to highlight the humanity of African Americans and the importance of salvation for all. But Foote depicts a black girl as having the power to save a white man. This reality not only highlights Foote's and Stowe's shared message about the need for Christian conversion; it also forwards an anti-racist stance by showing the redemptive power that the young Foote's intercession has despite the fact that she is a black girl praying for a white man.

Doyle notes that "the sentimental scene is epitomized in physical signs of response and distress, in sensation-alism—trembling, tears, sighs, swoons, desperate embraces" (167). It consists, she continues, with "[e]motion so strong it 'moves' the body, both literally and toward some kind of moral response" (167). Foote is never more effective at eliciting these responses than when she forwards her position on the treatment of African Americans by the white, dominant society. As with her stance on conversion, Foote uses a combination of affective language and sentimental tropes to do her work.

Foote's use of language clearly demonstrates her position on the treatment of African Americans both before and after slavery. In one passage, she writes about her strong desire as a child for education. She entitles the chapter "Various Hopes Blasted" (184). Foote reflects on the fact that African Americans were often denied educational opportunities, describing a scene where two women who "dared to teach colored children to read" were pelted with "rotten eggs and other missiles" (184). The injustice of this reality remained with Foote throughout her life. She laments, "We were a despised and oppressed people; we had no refuge but God. He heard our cries, saw our tears" (184).

This description of African Americans as a “despised” and “oppressed” people whose only “refuge” was God, surely struck a familiar chord with her readers, as this kind of language is found in many pieces of sentimental literature. Stowe begins her preface by referring to African Americans as an “oppressed” people, a theme she reiterates through her novel, and she depicts Tom as only able to find refuge from his tragically oppressed condition through God (Stowe 9; 482). Along those same lines, an 1872 sentimental poem entitled “Aunt Chloe,” by Frances E. W. Harper, includes words that express the same idea that African Americans can only put their trust in God to relieve their burdens because they will get their “justice in the kingdom” (lines 49-64). Foote’s audience would be familiar with these views because they had been expressed time and again in various pieces of sentimental literature. Considering the fact that her narrative was published in 1879, Foote’s timing would have forced them to question whether times had really changed.

As part of her commentary on the treatment of African Americans, Foote includes a scene in her narrative that seems as though it could come straight out of a sentimental novel. She describes an incident that took place with her mother, who was then enslaved.[29] Foote reveals that both the master and the mistress were cruel (Foote 166). When her mother refuses to sexually submit to her master and reports his demand for sex to his wife, the master whips Foote’s mother (166). “After the whipping,” Foote writes, “he himself washed her quivering back with strong salt water” (166). Foote takes full advantage of affective language here. Like Lee, she uses the word *cruel* to describe the slaveholder, thereby aligning cruelty with the way white people treat African Americans.

[29] This incident took place before Foote was born. By the time she was born, her parents had purchased their freedom (Foote 166).

Similarly, her use of the word "quivering" clearly expresses the pain and fear her mother was experiencing (166). However, in relating the story of her mother and her mother's master, Foote not only uses affective language, she also uses what Doyle calls "the most common sentimental plot [. . .] that in which a humble heroine's virtue is assailed by an evil-intentioned man (often of higher class/race)" (Doyle 167; Moody 131). Foote does not provide dates, so it is impossible to know whether her mother was a young woman or was by that time married to Foote's father, but either way, it is clear that her master was attempting to assault her virtue. A similar situation happens in Frances Harper's sentimental novel *Iola Leroy, Or, Shadows Uplifted*. The title character's master also wanted her "for the basest purposes" (Harper 39). "Marse Tom" is said by the other slaves to keep Iola, who is described as a "trembling dove," "mighty close" because he "meant to break her in" (39). Harper's use of the word "trembling" to describe Iola is similar to Foote's use of the word "quivering" to describe her mother. In both cases the word highlights the vulnerability of the woman being described. As was the case with Foote's mother, Iola's master "tried in vain to drag her down to his own low level of sin and shame" (39). Sadly, Foote's mother had to take a whipping to avoid her master's wishes; Iola, on the other hand, is lucky enough to escape. Although in this particular passage Foote is not the heroine, in using her mother's experience as a tragic figure, Foote invites her readers to experience not only the fear and horror of a woman being forced to sexually submit to someone who owns her body, but also the humiliation that accompanies this type of extreme violation. Later in her narrative, Foote relates an incident in which her own virtue was challenged. She was taking "the canal packet 'Governor Seward'" home from a preaching engagement in Oxford. She had retired to a

berth in one of the ladies' cabins. A man who could not find a berth in the gentlemen's cabin came in to claim a berth with the women. It is safe to say that in nineteenth century America, few, if any, men of sound morals would have thought it proper to look for a berth among the women. It seem likely that perhaps he was looking for something more than a place to sleep. Upon seeing Foote, the man "pointed [. . .] and said, 'That nigger has no business here'" (215). The captain asked Foote to leave, but she refused. The man left, "swearing vengeance on the 'niggers'" (215). It seems entirely possible that in singling Foote out, the man was challenging her presence in the women's cabin because he was hoping he might be able to coerce her into having sex with him—maybe in exchange for allowing her to keep the berth. Then, perhaps when she refused to consent, he followed through on his threat to have her removed from the women's cabin. Foote suggests this possibility when she refers to his treatment of her as "abuse" and calls the man "ungodly" (216). Categorizing those who attempt to challenge the virtue of African American women as being without God is common in sentimental literature. This sentiment is expressed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In a passage that highlights Simon Legree's desire for both Cassie and Emmeline (two of his slaves), Stowe refers to Legree as "godless" (432). Although the man in Foote's narrative and Legree attempted to mistreat their targets from somewhat different positions, both enjoy the white privilege that gives them power over their prey. Through this classification, both authors forward the trope of the "evil-intentioned" (Doyle 167) man of a higher position who challenges the virtue of a woman or women he views as below him. Cassie and Emmeline use Legree's godlessness against him to avoid his base desires. As for Foote, she stands her ground, and like the heroine in a sentimental novel, overcomes her oppressor because her

intentions are pure and her virtue unassailable. Foote's victory causes the reader to admire her strength in character and to celebrate the fact that good overcomes evil. But it is likely that Foote also had another purpose in mind. Perhaps by giving readers a glimpse of this particularly inhumane facet of the relationship between white men and black women, Foote wants to encourage her readers to reject the system that exposes black women to such dangers.

Like her predecessors, Lee and Elaw, Foote was concerned with black female autonomy. To forward this cause, she uses sympathy to form an alliance with her readers through a shared moral code. The use of sympathy produces in her readers "a set of registered impulses," which allows her "to depict social and political agendas in personal [. . .] terms" (Barnes 597). As is the case with the author of the sentimental novel, Foote engages readers in a way that allows them to identify with the protagonist of her story, who just happens to be her (599). Because she was a female preacher attempting to work her way into an arena dominated by men, Foote encountered substantial opposition from male detractors.

Foote relates an exchange that took place between her and her minister, Jehiel C. Beman. She had recently had a supernatural experience in which she was sanctified and urged by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel. Upon hearing of her experience, she writes, my minister "looked very coldly upon me and said: 'I guess you will find out your mistake before you are many months older'" (Foote 203-04). She contends that "his sneering, indifferent way" of addressing her told her most plainly that she did not know anything (204). Mr. Beman's harsh treatment of her, combined with the use of the words "coldly," "sneering," and "indifferent," help to portray Foote once again as a sentimental

figure whose character and intentions are being challenged by a person who is higher in the social hierarchy because he is a man. In this instance, readers are invited to feel pity for her, but more importantly they are motivated to experience Foote's righteous indignation at this undeserved challenge. Despite his harsh treatment, like many of the sentimental protagonists of her day, Foote does not succumb to her antagonist's treatment of her. Instead, she replies, "I can no longer be shaken by what you or any one [sic] else may think or say" (204). Here, Foote invokes a sense of inspiration in her readers. They admire her courage in standing up to an enemy. This encourages readers to see Foote as a resourceful, capable woman as well as to recognize her right to personal autonomy.

Foote furthers her position on black women's autonomy when she relates the story of what she calls a public effort for her excommunication (Foote 205). Despite her strong determination to follow what she believed was God's plan for her to preach, Foote had great difficulty. Once again her character and intentions are challenged by Mr. Beman, who continues to oppose her efforts to preach at his church. His response to a request from some of the elder sisters to hear Foote preach was "No; she can't preach her holiness stuff here, and I am astonished that you should ask it of me" (205). Mr. Beman's astonishment at the request for Foote to preach in his church reflects a common attitude of the era as is evidenced not only by Foote, but by Lee and Elaw as well. Men in the church hierarchy did not believe women had the right or the ability to preach. When another brother opens the church to Foote on a Monday night, she preaches, but she is later "remonstrated" by several church committee members (205). Foote's response to this remonstration was to tell her detractors "my business was with the Lord, and wherever I found a door opened I intended to go in and work for my Master" (205). In

this passage, Foote reiterates her position as a sentimental figure. Both her ability as a woman and her moral virtue are challenged by a man in a higher position. The implications of these injustices evoke pity for Foote in the mind of the reader as she seems to face resistance at every turn, but her response to her situation evokes a sense of admiration for her that again causes readers to view Foote as intelligent and quite capable of handling her own affairs.

Foote continues her narrative by explaining how her resistance to pressure from Mr. Beman caused her more strife. Eventually, she is told she is excommunicated because she refuses to comply with the rules of the church, which according to Mr. Beman forbade her from preaching anywhere in the entire city of Boston. She laments that Mr. Beman covered up "his deceptive, unrighteous course" by spreading falsehoods (206). In using the word "unrighteous," Foote again paints Mr. Beman as a man with bad intentions set out to beset her virtue ("unrighteous, adj. and n."). Seeing Foote as the victim of a supposed man of God who is wicked enough to spread lies about her arouses pity in the minds of readers. Mr. Beman is in a position of power, and it appears he has not only the intention, but the ability to ruin her reputation. This heroine, however, will not go down without fighting, and in line with the sentimental trope she is employing, uses the strength of her moral and religious character to stand up to her detractors. Her response to Mr. Beman and the discipline committee who attempt to prevent her from doing what she believed God had bid her to do is "I fear God more than man" (206).[30] In addition, she asserts her moral rightness in a letter she wrote to a group she calls "the Conference," telling them that there was no one who could "truthfully bring anything

[30] This phrase is very likely a reference to Acts 5.29, which says "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5.29).

against my moral or religious character" (206). Once again, the audience is invited to feel sympathy as they experience Foote's righteous indignation at the treatment she has received from members of her own church. However, Foote's response proves that she is not some submissive or inferior victim. Rather, she is a principled, enterprising, clever woman, who with God's help, is a force worthy of any human opponent.

Foote's depiction of her struggle with the elders of her church and of her attempts to overcome these obstacles manipulates another sentimental trope that would have been familiar to her readers. It is a variation of a trope seen in novels like Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale*, and Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*. Both novels tell the story "of a heroine who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them" (Baym 22). In Sedgwick's novel, Jane, who at first is "lost in the depths of her sufferings" must overcome the obstacles placed in front of her by her aunt and her cousins (Sedgwick 9). She succeeds in doing so because of her faith in God and her determination to do so. In Warner's tale, young Ellen is sadly torn from her ailing mother armed with little more than her Bible and her courage to get her through (Warner 64). She overcomes the unkindness of her aunt and her unfortunate situation through her faith in God and her dedication to His principles. In both cases, the heroine triumphs over her circumstances, which forwards the idea that with God's help, women are, indeed, adept at managing their own affairs. By presenting herself in a way that replicates the heroines of nineteenth century novels, Foote evokes sympathy for her cause, which is the idea that women are not just fully capable of autonomy—they deserve it.

Baym writes that sentimental novels chronicle the various trials followed by the triumph of the heroine (22). Foote's entire narrative reflects a series of trials followed, after some difficulty, with a triumph. As with her predecessors, Lee and Elaw, Foote's primary concern is with Christian conversion for her readers, but her narrative covers far more ground than a simple conversion story. She mixes doctrine with narrative and intellect with emotion to create a work that functions on three planes: religious, social, and political (C. Brown 19). In Foote's narrative, "religious and political ideologies" inform each other (21). Like Lee and Elaw, she poses spiritual and secular questions while successfully forwarding the idea that the ideals of Christianity could solve the social and political problems that she felt plagued nineteenth century America.

CONCLUSION

All spiritual autobiographies "share some basic literary techniques," including "a heavy reliance on Scripture, a certain amount of objective self-examination and an orderly arrangement" (Caldwell 7). Lee, Elaw, and Foote certainly employ these methods in writing their narratives. All three weave Scripture and allusions to scripture through their works. Similarly, in relating the circumstances of their lives before conversion, all three women provide an honest analysis of themselves as spiritually lost and hopeless. The same straightforward analysis continues after salvation and sanctification. Similarly, each woman "recalls profound religious impressions" that took place during her childhood (*Sisters* 11). And all relate conversion experiences that occurred under remarkable circumstances in the conventional sequence that begins with the recognition of sin, then moves from preparation to conviction, to submission, to fear, to sorrow, and ultimately to faith (*Sisters* 11; Caldwell 2).

For Lee, Elaw, and Foote, the journey from being spiritually lost to enjoying salvation chronicles the realization of their providential "destiny in the divine scheme of things" (*Sisters* 10-11). Each woman's account of her conversion provided readers with a glimpse of her new found "sense of freedom from a prior 'self'" and her "growing awareness of unrealized, unexploited powers within" (12). Conversion represented a realigning of each woman's relationship with the spiritual and secular worlds as well as with her individual self (12-13). To negotiate this realignment, Lee, Elaw, and Foote had to come to terms with the fact that "conversion alone would not magically solve the

problems inherent in their lives" (12). They were still part of a marginalized ethnic group, and they were still women. Their political and social status "required them to defend themselves as narrative agents even as they asserted their authorization by God to represent the divine" (Moody 6). The solution was to move outside of their designated sphere and find an alternative way to define themselves in relation to "the people of God and the people of the world" (*Sisters* 14).

Employing the conventions of sentimental literature allowed Lee, Elaw, and Foote to forge an affective bond with their readers through a shared code of theology and Christian morality. This results in an "emotional and moral alliance" between the audience and the text that "is rooted in common cultural assumptions about virtue and piety" (Moody 9). Although their works are autobiographical, the women were not as concerned with themselves as the main character. Rather, they were concerned with the reader and the reader's response to the circumstances of themselves (the women) as main characters. Barnes suggests that "sentimentalism is a manifestation of the belief in or yearning for consonance—or even unity—of principle and purpose" (597). Through their spiritual narratives, Lee, Elaw, and Foote create this consonance by connecting the individual reader to people and causes outside of that reader. This connection is based on certain assumptions about "attitudes toward the family and toward social institutions; a definition of power and its relation to individual human feeling; notions of political and social equality; and above all, a set of religious beliefs that organizes and sustains the rest" (Tompkins 127). Through these assumptions, a sympathetic attachment is formed between the reader and the text, an attachment that allows all three women "to depict social and political agendas" on a personal level (Barnes 597). This personal connection

relies on emotion, and it provides Lee, Elaw, and Foote with a safe, acceptable way of forwarding their causes.

According to Tompkins, the sentimental novel "functions both as a means of describing the social world and as a means of changing it" (135). In addition, she continues, it "offers an interpretive framework for understanding the culture, and, through the reinforcement of a particular code of values, recommends a strategy for dealing with cultural conflict" (135). Lee, Elaw, and Foote recognized that the social world they were living in needed changing. Therefore, they employed strategies that belonged to a form of rhetoric that was already in place to help affect those changes. As saved and sanctified Christians, it was their duty to spread the gospel and encourage the unsaved to accept Christ, so, first and foremost, they were concerned with converting their readers to Christianity. However, they saw Christianity's potential for societal gain, and consequently, their quest for spiritual redemption included hopes for other reforms as well.

The treatment of African Americans was one area in which they saw a need for such reform. When Lee and Elaw were writing, slavery was still widespread, especially in the South. And as their autobiographical narratives demonstrate, the effects of slavery were also present in the North. Both women were battling the myths regarding the humanity of African Americans as well as "the alleged differences between black bodies and white bodies" (Moody 20). Their appropriation of Christian discourse allowed them to forward a pivotal argument for the complete humanity of African Americans and their inherent right to an egalitarian society (20). It is the same argument that Stowe, other sentimental writers, and even Foote would forward in the decades to come. Despite the

fact that her work was published much later than Lee's and Elaw's, Foote also deals with inequalities between African Americans and whites by relating incidents she experienced both before and after emancipation. Her narrative demonstrates how the injustices of slavery continued long after the Civil War was over.

In addition, all three women dealt with the constrictions placed on them by their patriarchal society. As black women trying to work in the male dominated profession of preaching, Lee, Elaw, and Foote faced challenges at almost every turn, but they did not waiver in their belief that autonomy was their God-given right—and they felt empowered by God to demand it. All three women used scripture to defend their sometimes "convention-shattering views or behavior," as they continued to fight for their causes (*Sisters* 16). Their autobiographies reflect "each woman's incipient desire to authorize, through her own example, an alternative role for women within communities of the spirit founded on an egalitarian ideal" (17).

According to Andrews, Lee. Elaw, and Foote "saw themselves as revivalists" who were working with "the most essential principles, the primary locus of the human being, that of the soul" (*Sisters* 22). As they accomplished the work they set out to do with on their readers, these women employed sympathy to forward reformation, not just of the soul, but also of society. All three believed that Christian conversion would lead to the change of heart necessary for the forming of a new society, one that saw blacks and whites as well as men and women on equal ground. And they believed in the idea that moving the audience to action relies upon the sentimental formula, a formula which is based on "a belief in the spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man's original instincts" (H. Brown 176). Lee, Elaw, and Foote believed that when the heart is provoked

by emotion, the mind prompts the reader to act on behalf of the writer's cause. Through the heart, the mind is educated—and through this education, change occurs.

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