

Agency: Promiscuous and Protean

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell

In this essay, I propose that agency (1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is "invented" by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently protean, ambiguous, open to reversal. Those claims are illustrated and confounded through an analysis of the text, created by a white woman twelve years after the event, of the speech allegedly delivered by Sojourner Truth at the 1851 woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio.

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In 1980, after President Jimmy Carter had been defeated by Ronald Reagan, I attended an election debriefing at which participants were privileged to talk to some of Carter's speech writers. We were astonished to learn that Carter never met with his speech writers and often gave more than one of them a topic on which to write a speech. The result was drafts with varied purposes from which the president selected what he liked best or, in some unfortunate cases, merged different drafts into a confusing pastiche.

In attempting to address issues of "agency," I feel a little like Carter's speech writers as I search for a way to develop a coherent approach to this difficult topic. The term "agency" is polysemic and ambiguous, a term that can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions, among others. I imagine myself in my speech writer persona rafting down a river filled with rapids named Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault, at the end of which I must navigate a vortex of feminist controversy with Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Michelle Ballif, which lures me toward hidden reefs as I consider whether the phoenix of female agency can emerge out of the ashes of the dead male author.

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I come to this topic via research that began in the 1960s, when I wrote a dissertation in which I attempted to show how a rhetorical theory could be derived from works in which rhetoric and rhetorical theory were not mentioned. My case study was the philosophical works of Jean-Paul Sartre, and as many of you no doubt know, Sartre presented his version of existentialism as a corrective to the determinism he perceived as integral to Marxist theory. He dramatized his ideas particularly well in the rarely performed play *Les Mains Sales* (*Dirty Hands*), which enacts the ethical dilemmas involved in the interaction between one's own agency and that of others, and in the sometimes misunderstood *Huit Clos* (*No Exit*), a play designed to show that action is always possible in life but that once dead, hell is the endless iteration of one's past.¹ His novel *Nausea* dramatizes the power of the material world, depicted as wholly unresponsive to humans, in which we are, in that vivid French phrase, *de trop*, superfluous.

Sartre's work reflects the complexity of this concept and points toward an important historical dimension, that the concern with agency is part of modernity, arising out of the Enlightenment, and developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as Sharon Crowley and Joel Weinsheimer, among others, have argued), and is part of a concept of the individual that did not emerge fully in the West until late in the sixteenth or early in the seventeenth century.²

In an essay on debates about single authorship at the time of Shakespeare, Peter Stallybrass traces the appearance and usage of the term "individual" in English. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, the first usage appeared in 1425 in the phrase the "high and individual Trinity," which, of course, refers to indivisible parts.³ Only as the seventeenth century is dawning do uses appear that have our sense of separate, distinctive persons.⁴ Nonetheless, it is clear that, from its beginnings, there have been concepts of rhetorical agency in Western rhetorical theory, by which I mean a sense that language mattered, that influence through symbolic action in speech and/or writing was possible and occurred, for good or ill, vividly expressed in the works of Gorgias, Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The questions addressed by scholars include: What were the concepts of agency in Greco-Roman theory? How were ideas about agency redefined in the Enlightenment? And what do current debates about agency and authorship tell us about problems in our theorizing, such that we struggle to produce rejoinders to claims about the "death of the author" by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, among others, and to retain a sense of agency that makes sense in rhetorical terms?

In this time/space, I cannot encompass the vast scholarship on these interrelated historical and theoretical issues. Instead, I shall propose a series of propositions about rhetorical agency that I hope will prove provocative. Finally, I shall use an extended example to illustrate those propositions. In a nutshell, I propose that agency (1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is "invented" by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal.

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Whatever else it may be, rhetorical agency refers to the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community. Such competency permits entry into ongoing cultural conversations and is the *sine qua non* of public participation, much less resistance as a counter-public. Those of us who teach public speaking or composition understand that artistry of this kind is craft learning, like the cookery disparaged by Socrates, learned stochastically through trial and error under the guidance of mentors, that emerges ideally as an ability to respond well and appropriately to the contingencies of circumstance.⁵

As understood by the ancient Greeks, such agency was collective, of the *polis*, grounded in *endoxa*, the beliefs that either constituted common sense or were accepted as true because of the *aretē*, the "excellences" or talents of those with demonstrated prowess, as in military leadership. The life of the male citizen was judged by his contribution to the collective, and whatever agency citizens had was derived from and linked to the survival and well-being of the *polis*. This did not preclude debate or disagreement, but it set limits, limits related to collective understandings and collective goals. In that context, an agent literally was a representative of their community, not an independent actor, and as the careers of Socrates and Themistocles vividly illustrate, individual initiative could be punished severely. As studies of women and slavery in classical times also demonstrate, male citizenship came at a price—the oppression and degradation of women and slaves and a culture dependent on their labor.

Michelle Ballif offers a powerful critique of this kind of communal agency, particularly in its links to patriarchy and gendered binaries. She argues that, under these conditions, the speech act "is the sacrificial ritual which maintains the polis and secures the community. . . . [B]y being subjected to gender, the self is sacrificed upon the altar of the polis, offered in the name of solidarity, order, harmony, peace. . . . In this way, the political subject and the speaking subject . . . gain identity—recognition by the polis as legitimate."⁶ Those statements call attention to the extent that agency is constrained by externals, by the community that confers identities related to gender, race, class, and the like on its members and by so doing determines not only what is considered to be "true," but also who can speak and with what force. The problem with the critique is that the condition is unavoidable; in Judith Butler's words, "[T]he agency of the subject appears to be an effect of its subordination" or, referring to Louis Althusser's doctrine of interpellation, "existence as a subject can be purchased only through guilty embrace of the law."⁷

I

Accordingly, my first proposition is that agency is communal, social, cooperative, and participatory and, simultaneously, constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture.

In some ways, this proposition is self-evident. Symbolic action presupposes others who know the words and syntax of a shared language and how to use them—when it is considered appropriate for whom to say what. What contemporary theorists have demonstrated, however, is that subjectivity and agency are anything but simple or

Seriality
pratico inert

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self-evident. As you no doubt know, there is an extensive feminist literature on these issues. What challenges feminist theorists and others in addressing these issues is, first, how to avoid forms of essentialism that treat diverse individuals as if they were identical based on socially constructed categories; second, how to recognize the force of external constraints, such as subject positions constituted by power, a process illustrated vividly by Judith Butler in *Excitable Speech*,⁸ and third, how to incorporate the possibility of resistance into their formulations.

One of the most creative responses to the problem of essentialism is an essay by Iris Young that uses the concept of seriality, developed by Sartre in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.⁹ Young uses seriality as a way to think about gender that avoids essentialism by positing that, rather than an identity or an attribute, gender is constituted for women by their relationships to externals—to laws, institutions, norms, and the ways in which categories such as race and class are constructed and enforced. Sartre illustrates serial relationships with the example of those queued up for a bus or those simultaneously listening to a radio broadcast or participating in the stock market; he also uses “The Jew (as the internal, serial unity of Jewish multiplicities)” to illustrate seriality, which parallels Young’s application of the concept to woman. Individuals in a serial relationship have no set of attributes in common except their shared relationship to an external object, event, or, in other cases, to a law, an institution, a norm, a stereotype and so on.¹⁰ All of these effects of prior human action Sartre labels the *pratico-inert*, the dead sediment, material and symbolic, of past praxis. Young concludes:

Woman is a serial collective defined neither by any common identity nor by a common set of attributes that all the individuals in the series share, but, rather, it names a set of structural constraints and relations to *pratico-inert* objects that condition action and its meaning.¹¹

John
That analysis, I believe, can be extended to the constitution of subjectivity, understood as transient and varying. Louis Althusser’s conception of interpellation has loomed large in discussions of subjectivity. If one thinks of the subject-positions into which we are born, which Althusser notes, and the subject-positions ideologically and materially available to us in the symbolic and material *pratico-inert*, then subjectivity and agency can be understood as the ways in which individuals accept, negotiate, and resist the subject-positions available to them at given moments in a particular culture. In the words of Paul Smith

The human agent ... [is] the place [at] which resistance to the ideological is produced or played out. ... The term ‘agent’ ... mark[s] the idea of a form of subjectivity [that], by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressures is allowed for (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context).¹²

Put differently, these culturally available subject-positions are, simultaneously, obstacles and opportunities, but they are shifting, not fixed, identities. Perhaps the concept of *personae*, particularly as used in drama, comes closest to capturing this

concept of the shifting but central character of the roles that we assume in the plays in which we participate, which, in turn, raises issues about the formation of publics and counterpublics.¹³

II

My second proposition reflects these complex dynamics. First, however, let me say that reports of the death of the author are greatly exaggerated. As should now be obvious, I am not conflating agency with intentionality or with autonomy, nor am I willing to read Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* as if he were a modernist writing about the Cartesian cogito, the enlightenment subject, or the individualistic, psychological rhetorical theory of George Campbell and his contemporaries. Moreover, I am not rejecting the insights of psychoanalysis or semiotics. I am, however, claiming that rhetors/authors, because they are linked to cultures and collectivities, must negotiate among institutional powers and are best described as "points of articulation" rather than originators.¹⁴ In *The Death and Return of the Author*, Sean Burke offers an analogy: "Observing light passing through a prism (though 'we know' that the prism is not the absolute origin of the resplendent spectacle before us), we do not deny its effect upon the light, still less call for the death of the prism." Later, he offers the example of James Joyce, who "in *Finnegan's Wake* ... reconfigure[d] language [in ways] without precedent in the history of writing."¹⁵ As I have noted, authors/rhetors are materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situated subjects; at the same time, they are "inventors" in the rhetorical sense, articulators who link past and present, and find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in time. In this sense, agency is invention, including the invention, however temporary, of *personae*, subject-positions, and collectivities.

The collaborative, participatory, but transitory character of collectivities was captured by Michael McGee, who wrote that "the people," although "made 'real' by their belief and behavior[,] are still essentially a mass illusion. ... That is, they are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end, wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals."¹⁶ At any given moment, "the people" are a materiality brought into being by discourse, a phenomenon that we have witnessed since the attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent rhetoric leading to the ill-fated invasion of Iraq. In that regard, of course, agency is material as well as symbolic, which is true precisely because agency is constitutive of collectivities, whether temporary or persistent, fragile or powerful, just as collectivities are constitutive of agency, however paradoxical that may seem.

Taken together these two propositions are designed to reject absolutely any binary that forces a choice between the autonomous individual and some form of determinism or to separate the individual from culture and context. At the same time, agency manifests itself in the practices of individuals, practices linked to subject-positions and, hence, to agency. As Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have argued, such practices are internalized and become powerful engines affecting and

constraining future behaviors; in Sartrean terms, they become part of the *pratico-inert*. As Judith Butler and others have argued and illustrated, however, repetitions with a difference can be starting points of resistance, including resistance to racism and its soul-destroying epithets, dramatically illustrated, for example, by Ice-T's transformative rap that signifies on and resignifies the meaning of the n-word ("Straight Up Nigga").¹⁷

That agency is cooperative and collaborative is related not just to communicative and cultural competence but also to a shared ability to evaluate, a point made delightfully by Robert M. Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, when his beginning composition students demonstrate their ability to recognize and agree about which themes are better.¹⁸ There are tacit but clearly recognized cultural standards at any given time for performance and for what is experienced as "eloquent," however that term is understood. As Aristotle wrote, that is what makes it possible to identify an art, a *techné*, of rhetoric.

III

That leads to the third proposition, that agency is linked to and effected through artistry or artfulness; it is learned. Strangely enough, in the reading I have done on agency, subjectivity, and related topics, the term *techné* often has been absent. Perhaps some authors consider agency and *techné* synonymous, but I find that troubling. As presented by Aristotle, the *techné* of rhetoric involve the study, training, and experience that enable one to recognize what means are available in a given situation. *Techné* makes it possible to do what is propitious at the opportune moment. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4, Aristotle writes: "Art [*techné*] is . . . a reasoned habit of mind [*hexis*] in making [*poēsis*] . . . things that can be other than they are."¹⁹ In the *Poetics*, when enumerating the elements of tragedy, Aristotle writes: "Third in order is Thought [*dianoia*],—that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. In the case of oratory, this is the function of the political art and of the art of rhetoric."²⁰ These statements reinforce the sense that *techné* is training and practice—"a reasoned habit of mind," a developed "faculty," that is creative and contingent, teaching one how to "Do the Right Thing" at the opportune moment. There is, of course, a gap between acquired skills and practice as potential and their realization in action. The link I have made between agency and artistry also has prompted a critique.

Michelle Ballif draws sharp distinctions between the concepts of *techné* and *logos* on the one hand and *tuchē* and *mētis* on the other. The former pair is linked to Plato's concepts of truth and reason as universal, precise, teachable, and concerned with explanation, whereas *tuchē* is linked to chance, the irrational, and what is beyond human control, and *mētis* with "flair, wisdom, . . . subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism." The latter terms are explained by analogy: "*Tuchē* and *Kairos* both emphasise the one essential feature of the art of navigation: the necessary complicity between the pilot and the element of the sea . . . meet cunning with cunning."²¹ Arguably, those distinctions may be inferred from some ancient

mētis & *tuchē*

sources; however, I reject them. Moreover, the authors on whose work Ballif draws write that "for Aristotle, 'practical intelligence' [*phronēsis*] at least retains in its aims and in the way it operates many features of *mētis*."²² Accordingly, when I refer to artistry or craft, I mean all the heuristic skills that respond to contingencies, and for which there are no precise or universal precepts, although skilled practitioners are alert to recurring patterns. In other words, what I understand as artistry includes stratagem, flair, subtlety, and the like as well as the habits of mind learned through practice. I also want to emphasize that artistry is not limited to a canon of masterworks but emerges equally in apt vernacular speech and everyday talk, a point I shall illustrate later.²³

I offer this proposition, not to deny the power of recurrent practices or habitus, as developed in the works of Foucault and Bourdieu, but to highlight the sense in which *techné* understood broadly is linked to iteration with a difference and with citation that exploits the past, and opens up possibilities for resistance. Here is the agency of stylized repetition that has ironic overtones; the citation that appropriates and alters. Agency emerges out of performances or actions that, when repeated, fix meaning through sedimentation. Agency equally emerges in performances that repeat with a difference, altering meaning.

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IV

Artistry produces agency in still another way, which leads to my fourth proposition, that agency is textual or, put differently, texts have agency. Here, I wish to highlight the power of form. Textual agency is linked to audiences and begins with the signals that guide the process of "uptake" for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is to be framed.²⁴ This kind of agency is related to generic conventions, to allusion, to the pleasures of alliteration and assonance, to the transformations effected by tropes. Form is the foundation of all communication, but it is also a type of agency that has a power to separate a text from its nominal author and from its originary moment of performance, which is of particular note in regard to historical texts. Michael Leff has described the role of classical concepts of imitation in merging theory and practice, that rather than the "mechanistic reproduction of something found in an existing text," imitation "was instead a complex process that allowed historical texts to [become] resources for invention."²⁵ We tend to think of imitation as involving *topoi*, but learning how and when to appropriate such forms as gradatio, chiasmus, antithesis, and the like was at least of equal importance, and the idea of form plays a crucial role in recognizing the nature of the kairoic moment at which a particular stratagem, formal, tropic, or argumentative, will have salience. As I shall illustrate below, narrative-dramatic form has an agency of its own, the performative power to be reenacted.

V

My fifth and last proposition is a reminder that agency can be malign, divisive, and destructive. Agency is the power to do evil, to demean and belittle. The fear and

disparagement of rhetoric are lodged here because rhetoric has an equal capacity for transcendence, resistance, and destruction. I shall be brief because Kenneth Burke has written extensively about the power of division, the force of the cult of the kill, the "rotteness" accompanying the human desire for perfection. Likewise, Nietzsche has explored the power of reversal inherent in *ressentiment*, a concept that finds additional expression in contemporary analyses of "othering." The dynamics of such processes are the foundation for Burke's analysis of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and in analyses of the symbolic dynamics of slavery, misogyny, homophobia, colonialism, anti-Semitism, and racism generally.²⁶

Taken together, these propositions reflect certain assumptions. I reject the view that there is a vast chasm separating classical, modern, and postmodern theories. I am committed to reading and rereading earlier works in light of the insights of more recent theorists, reinventing, if you will, the legacy of the past in ways that fuse these traditions. The more often I teach a survey of rhetorical theory, the more links I perceive. What needs to be resisted is a simplistic, humanistic view of agency rooted in the theory of George Campbell and his contemporaries, and the simplistic approaches to cause and effect that arose out of some social scientific approaches to the study of mass communication, for example.²⁷ What is needed are synthetic, complex views of authorship as articulation, of the power of form as it emerges in texts of all sorts, of the role of audiences in appropriating and reinterpreting texts when they emerge and through time, and of the links of all these to the cultural context, material and symbolic, in which discourse circulates.

At this point, however, I wish to stop playing theorist and become a critic in order to redeem these ideas in practice. Accordingly, I now turn to a fascinating and challenging "text" that illustrates the complexity of rhetorical agency.

Sojourning with Truth

The idea that there is a greatest speech or even that the contemporary rhetorical community could agree about what are the 100 greatest speeches is preposterous, as if all of us were similarly moved by the same words of some group of dead rhetors. Yet behind that impulse lurks a powerful verity, a recognition that some words capture a moment, iconically enacting a powerful idea or feeling.

For many of us, the speech attributed to the former slave who came to call herself Sojourner Truth (c.1797–1883) at the 1851 woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, is such a work. We know from historical records that Truth spoke at that convention, but there is no accurate record of precisely what she said.²⁸ That she was able to speak at all is a miracle. Isabella or "Bell" was an illiterate slave, freed by New York law in 1827, who endured the trauma of seeing her siblings, her husband, and her children sold away from her, and her elderly parents left destitute when freed. She faced other formidable obstacles. Because she originally belonged to a Dutch master, English was a second language, and she remained illiterate. As Lucy Stone wrote of her, "She . . . shows what a great intellect slavery has crushed."²⁹ What we know of her,

then, is filtered, framed, transformed, and translated through the words of whites and the photographs they took of her that she sold as her "shadow."

From the scattered fragments and reports of her speeches in newspapers, now collected by Susan Pullon Fitch and Roseanne Mandziuk, combined with the *Narrative* of her life penned by Olive Gilbert and later republished with materials from her scrapbooks by Frances Titus, she emerges vividly in our imaginations.³⁰ She was a very tall, strong woman of great presence with a commanding voice in speech and song.³¹ There is ample evidence in newspaper reports of her wit, her skill at repartee, her command of metaphor, and her courage in facing hostile audiences.³²

We now know that the familiar text of her 1851 speech is a fiction created some twelve years after the event by a white woman, Frances Dana Gage, an abolitionist and woman's rights supporter who presided at the 1851 Akron woman's rights convention at which Truth spoke. The original publication of Gage's version of Truth's speech on 2 May 1863, may have been prompted by a desire to steal the thunder of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who a month earlier had published an essay on Truth as "The Libyan Sibyl."³³

Moreover, there are two versions of Gage's text; in the earlier, the line we remember reads, "Arn't I a woman?" (1863); in the later, published in 1882 in the *History of Woman Suffrage*, the line reads "A'n't I a woman?" often remembered inaccurately as "Ain't I a woman?" Of note is that Truth allowed Gage's 1863 version of her Akron speech to be included in her *Narrative*, but Truth's illiteracy and her need to sell the *Narrative* to support herself suggest that this might have been a pragmatic decision.³⁴

Frances Dana Gage's Fictive Text³⁵

As described by Gage, the context of the speech is a dramatic encounter in which an old, illiterate, former slave woman challenges religious male authorities in a scene of great tension and hostility because she embodies the controversial link between abolitionism and woman's rights agitation.

1. "Well, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar must be somethin' out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de womin at de Norf, all talkin' 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout?"

The opening paragraph acknowledges the tension and hostility, and the drama escalates. What is immediately apparent is the thick dialect, including extreme indicators of lack of education or mastery of standard English. In addition, note the denigrating use of the n-word here and in a later paragraph. The opening also acknowledges the link between anti-slavery and woman's rights efforts. Note, however, that the anti-slavery efforts are those of African Americans. It ends with a question that invites repartee and audience participation.

2. "Dat man over dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or

ober mud-puddles, or gibs me any best place!" And raising herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And a'n't I a woman?"

This paragraph begins with direct address to a hostile opponent: "That man over there says . . ." and puts into his mouth the elite conception of "true womanhood" in which advantaged women are pampered and privileged. Sound and visual effects are added. That view of womanhood is dramatically contrasted to *her* experience, and we first encounter what will be the speech's refrain, "And a'n't I a woman?" which enacts and embodies the gap between her opponent's words and her reality.

3. "Look at me! Look at my arm!" (*and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power*). "I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman?"

This paragraph confronts us with words and body: "Look at me! Look at my arm!" Then she details the heavy fieldwork she has done, followed by the refrain, which takes on new meaning with each repetition; in this case, see what a woman can do.

4. "I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman?"

That is followed by a comparison to men—working, eating, being whipped, with the repeated refrain, now carrying the meaning of what women like her have had to endure.

5. "I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with [sic] my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman?"

This paragraph documents what she has done as a woman and suffered as a mother—with none to comfort her but Jesus. Note again the contrast to the pampered and privileged women described by her opponent. Note, too, the implied justification for rights that she has earned in production, reproduction, and suffering. Here the refrain challenges us to recognize the physical and emotional proof of her womanhood.

6. "Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head; what dis dey call it?" (*"Intellect," whispered some one near.*) "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do wid womin's rights or nigger's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?" *And she pointed her significant finger, and set a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud.*

This paragraph turns to intellectual issues, enhanced by interaction with the audience that adds drama. The implied argument against woman's rights is that women lack the mental capacity for political and economic rights. She rejects the relevance of this issue to civil rights for women or African Americans. Note that her words presuppose natural rights principles, that rights are not conferred but inhere in persons. The case for equality of opportunity is made with a vivid figurative analogy—even if my cup holds less than yours, are you so mean you won't give me my little half measure?

The scene is recreated again; we are invited to see and hear imaginatively. There is more direct confrontation, followed by audience participation as if they were cheering the combatants on.

7. "Den dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wan't a woman! Whar did your Christ come from?" *Rolling thunder couldn't have stilled that crowd, as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eyes of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated, "Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him." Oh, what a rebuke that was to that little man.*

The direct address identifies her opponent as a clergyman, "that little man in black" (note the echo of "little"), who argues that women should not have rights because Christ was not a woman. Recognize that this is the same argument made today against ordaining women as clergy; as Virginia Woolf wrote, "It is strange what a difference a tail makes."³⁶ Added sound effects enhance the climax construction. The rhetorical question, "Where did your Christ come from?" is repeated. The answer (and rebuke) is the Virgin birth, which presumably is a religious belief accepted by her opponents.

8. *Turning again to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. I can not follow her through it all. It was pointed, and witty, and solemn; eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting: "If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, dese women togedder (and she glanced her eye over the platform) ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now dey is asking to do it, de men better let 'em." Long-continued cheering greeted this.*

The writer intrudes here with comments presumably designed to emphasize the authenticity of her report of the speech and of audience reaction. Truth's words recognize the power of women using scripture, drawing the analogy that if Eve all alone could turn the world upside down, then all these women united ought to be able to set it right, and they're asking to do it, so men better let them. The power of women, which she embodies and enacts, is dramatically reaffirmed.

9. "Bleeged to ye for hearin' on me, and now old Sojourner han't got nothin' more to say."

An abrupt ending that emphasizes her plain-spoken approach to these issues.

This text is a dramatic fiction, but some facts are clear from newspaper reports close to the event. From the Salem, Ohio, *Anti-Slavery Bugle* of 21 June 1851, we know that Truth asked to speak in support of woman's rights at the Akron convention; that she boasted of her ability to do work equal to that of a man; that she used the metaphor of the pint and the quart to argue that whatever one's ability, it should be developed; and that she cited biblical material, particularly Jesus's behavior toward women, as support for woman's rights. According to that report, she challenged men's relationship to Jesus by saying, "And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part?"³⁷ In the reports closest to the event, there is no reference to the memorable phrase, "A'n't (or arn't) I a woman?" but, according to the *Anti-Slavery*

Bugle, she said, "I am a woman's rights," and the *New York Tribune* of 6 June 1851, reported that "she said she was a woman."³⁸ Thus, although Gage's text is a fiction, the arguments, evidence, and metaphors that it includes are supported by contemporaneous newspaper accounts that constitute the fragmentary text that Truth "authored" and that attest to her rhetorical skill.

These fragments also illustrate the communal basis of Truth's agency. As the reports show, Truth reiterated lines of argument already part of the movements in which she was participating, although in creative ways. The extant fragments in these reports indicate that she responded to all of the major arguments (biological, theological, and sociological) against woman's rights, arguments developed at length by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, and spread widely through the regional and national conventions that followed and in the lectures of such speakers as Ernestine Potowski Rose and Lucretia Coffin Mott.³⁹ Even the famous line Gage attributed to her echoes a recurring theme of women's antislavery discourse in which female slaves were given voice through the question, "Am I not a woman and a sister?"⁴⁰

Gage's dramatic text sets the scene as one of great hostility; she wrote that when Truth stood up, "Don't let her speak!" gasped half a dozen in my ear," and "There was a hissing sound of disapprobation above and below," a characterization that is not supported by other accounts of the convention.⁴¹ Truth, however, spent the years 1851–1852 in Ohio working actively with other abolitionists, including the controversial Abby Kelley, a time when abolitionists were reviled, excluded from regular meeting spaces, reduced to speaking in orchards or small shops, suggesting the general hostility to the antislavery cause that Truth embodied.⁴² Moreover, the careers of the Grimké sisters offer ample evidence of resistance to linking woman's rights and abolitionism. As Carla Peterson notes, "In accounts of her public speaking, most especially, emphasis was frequently placed on Truth's grotesque appearance and behavior: 'She is a crazy, ignorant, repelling negress, and her guardians would do a Christian act to restrict her entirely to private life,'" reads a newspaper report included in Truth's *Narrative*.⁴³ Hence, Gage's fiction reflects the hostility encountered by woman's rights activists, abolitionists, and by Truth herself.

What is most disturbing about Gage's text is that in it Truth's words appear in the argot of blackface minstrel shows and the racist caricatures of writers such as Thomas Dixon and Thomas Nelson Page.⁴⁴ Carla Peterson offers a somewhat more charitable explanation for this language, that "Gage wrote her account . . . while living on the South Carolina Sea Islands. . . [and] the speech itself seems to assimilate her [Truth] to the South Carolina slave characterized by a heavy black dialect."⁴⁵ The one extant volume of Truth's scrapbook includes newspaper articles in which Truth complained about those who recorded her speech in dialect.⁴⁶ Other texts and fragments are in standard English with some oddities of syntax. A recent biography concludes:

Her speech—delivered in a robust voice, so deep that some of her enemies suspected that she was a man—evidently consisted of a unique combination of elements, which varied from time to time, including, as different observers understood it, a guttural Dutch accent from her early childhood, the broken English of white

illiterates, black dialect (but not, she insisted, Southern black dialect), and standard English.⁴⁷

Hallie Q. Brown refers to her "African dialect," and Carla Peterson demonstrates the influence of African traditions and Truth's use of elements derived from African and African American oral cultures.⁴⁸ Clearly, Truth did not speak in the language that Gage attributed to her; even her most powerful arguments and apt metaphors were by this language deformed, even ridiculed. Note, too, that this is the only extant text or fragment in which Truth uses the n-word.

Despite the best efforts of biographers and historians to debunk its authenticity, this fictive text rendered in degrading dialect by an ambitious white woman, lives on.⁴⁹ Some years ago, at a National Woman's Studies Association convention, I attended a panel at which I heard a scathing critique of the racism of second wave feminism that concluded with a dramatic performance of much of Gage's version of Truth's 1851 speech, dialect and all, and I pondered the alchemy by which this fictive text in debased language by a white woman could become a vehicle to express the feelings of an angry, contemporary black woman. In her book on Truth, historian Nell Irvin Painter reports a similar experience at the 1995 conference of the Organization of American Historians that left her shocked and angry when this white woman's fiction was used to conclude a paper by a contemporary African American historian.⁵⁰ What Painter fails to understand is that Gage's fiction has a dramatic agency as a performative text that is greater than historians' facts.

We can never recover the authentic voice of the illiterate; inevitably that voice is transformed by those who record it as they hear it, and everyone who heard Truth heard something different. We can never hear the originary moment of the living voice; we can only struggle to recreate its immediacy, and in its dramatic form, Gage's fiction allows us to sense what it must have been like to hear Truth speak. We can quote descriptions of Truth's skill as a speaker, her wit, her clever repartee, her courage in the face of hostility, and her skill in argument; but Gage's text allows us to experience them; in literary terms, it is the difference between showing and telling.

As I have indicated, Gage's fiction is true to much of the substance of Truth's discourse as reported elsewhere, and her fabricated text encapsulates the cry of the most oppressed for equal opportunity and basic rights. Truth embodies the meaning of slavery, the struggle for civil rights for all African Americans, and the even greater struggle for the rights of the most impoverished and ill-treated women.⁵¹ In Gage's text, Truth comes to life; she enacts her authority and her iconic status, as well as her challenge to the classism and racism that have haunted women's rights efforts through time. The speech recreates participation in public discourse that is constrained by debased language, but that finds another kind of agency in vernacular speech and vivid, homely metaphors that speak to all. In an effort to explain this kind of agency, Fitch and Mandziuk compare Truth's style to that of the heroine of the popular domestic novels of Marietta Holley, in which Josiah Allen's wife Samantha, a woman with a lot of "horse sense," debunks the patriarchy using down-to-earth humor and rustic speech.⁵² The comparison is a way to highlight Truth's ability to puncture

pomposity and to speak in tropes intelligible to all. Frederick Douglass described Truth, somewhat uncharitably, as "a genuine specimen of the uncultured negro ... [who] cared very little for elegance of speech or refinement of manners ... [and who] seemed to feel it her duty ... to ridicule my efforts to speak and act like a person of cultivation and refinement."⁵³ Douglass's comments suggest that Truth understood the power of her style. Nonetheless, as John Wideman points out, black dialect always appears "infantile" and, thus, "inferior."⁵⁴

When the text of Gage's version of Truth's speech was published in *Man Cannot Speak For Her*, I removed the dialect that smothers the speech with racist stereotypes.⁵⁵ I now believe that it was wrong to do so, although it could not and should not have been published as originally written without the kind of analysis done here. But agency is perverse: the stereotypes that gave rise to penning the speech in this demeaning argot ironically give the text special force. Admittedly, as Truth herself illustrates, not all former slaves spoke in such language, but the women she most represented, the experiences and history she most embodied, are rendered more perfectly in language that expresses so painfully the terrible costs of slavery—the loss of literacy, the loss of education, the loss of access to public dialogue that, even when overcome, is constrained by being rendered in language that ridicules and demeans.

Conclusion

The "text" I have chosen to illustrate some of the dimensions of agency is complex. It comprises all the fragments of Truth's rhetoric, the newspaper reports of what she said at Akron in 1851, the fictive recreation of her speech by Frances Dana Gage, Truth as an icon and symbol for her slave sisters, and the countless iterations through time of all or part of Truth's words as we imagine her to have spoken them.

As this example illustrates, agency takes many forms. Without the communities represented by abolitionism and woman's rights, the natural rights principles underlying the arguments as reported in the newspaper accounts and incorporated into Gage's versions of the speech would not have been available to Truth. Without the link to Truth as the "author" who embodied and articulated these ideas, however, the words would lose most, if not all, of their power. The *topoi* of the speech echo the *endoxa* of the larger community while using the lives and experiences of slave women to challenge biological binaries and elitist conceptions of "true womanhood." To abolitionists and feminists then and now, Truth embodies the painful question, "Am I not a woman and a sister?" Yet without Gage's artistry, which gave Truth's speech dramatic form, we could not participate in what we imagine to be the originary moment or experience the play of ideas, the metaphors, or the interaction between Truth and her opponents. At the same time, Gage's text contains the malign agency of racist stereotypes that demean Truth and those for whom she speaks. Ironically, I have come to believe that what began as degrading dialect had and continues to have the agency to transform itself into the silenced voices of Truth's most despised sisters.

That is agency—promiscuous and protean.

Notes

- [1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1956).
- [2] Sharon Crowley, *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), esp. 155–69. Joel Weinsheimer, "The Philosophy of Rhetoric in Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric in 1650–1800: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, vol. 1, ed. Kevin L. Cope (New York: AMS Press, 1994). See also Art Walzer, *George Campbell: Rhetoric in the Age of Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).
- [3] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 134. See also Oxford English Dictionary, A1.
- [4] Peter Stallybrass, "Shakespeare, the Individual, and the Text," 593–612, *Cultural Studies*, ed. Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992). See also A. J. Minnis, "The Significance of the Medieval Theory of Authorship," in *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984) in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. Sean Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 23–30.
- [5] See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economies of Linguistic Exchanges," in *Social Science Information* 16 (1978): 648, where he points out that "competence" in linguistic performance does not mean grammatical correctness or clarity; rather, it includes "the right to speech," which is the right to speak "the authorized language which is also the language of authority. Competence implies the power to impose reception."
- [6] Michelle Ballif, *Seduction, Sophistry, and the Woman with the Rhetorical Figure* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 90.
- [7] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 12, 112, passim. Elsewhere, she emphasizes the need "to acknowledge that agency is always and only a political prerogative . . . For if the subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment the subject is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and time again." In "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" 35–57, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (New York: Routledge, 1995), 46–47.
- [8] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
- [9] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: I. Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée (London: NLB, 1976), 256–69; here Sartre uses "The Jew (as the internal, serial unity of Jewish multiplicities)" as an example of a serial relationship (267), which is analogous to Young's application of this concept to woman.
- [10] They can become a group through some transformative event, such as events that precipitate the filing of a class action suit, for example.
- [11] Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective," *Signs* 19 (Spring 1994): 713–38; cited material on 737. I thank Zornitsa Keremidchieva for calling this essay to my attention. This is in contrast to the collective standpoint theory posited by Kathi Weeks in *Constituting Feminist Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), esp. 133–37.
- [12] Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxxv.
- [13] I am struck by a link to Francis Bacon's *Idol of the Theatre* in which individuals are led into error by presuming that the ideology or religion to which they subscribe is anagogic. In *The Self After Postmodernity*, Calvin O. Schrag links narrative, identity, and discourse: "Narratives need to be told by someone to someone. If narrative does not tell a story to someone, then it is not narrative; if discourse is not a rendition by someone, then it is not discourse" (26). Later, using Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992),

147–48, Schrag contrasts *Idem*-identity, an appeal to objective criteria of identification, and *Ipse*-identity, “the identity of selfhood, the sense of identity at issue in the occasioning of personal identity, the sense of identity applicable to a person’s character, which for Ricoeur finds its direct analogue in ‘character’ as a protagonist in a story” (35). Still later, he adds: “The distinctive characteristics that make up self-identity can profitably be analyzed into the performance of roles” (39). I leave the discussion of publics and counterpublics for another occasion. On this issue, see, in particular, Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 1990). See also “The Forum: Publics and Counterpublics,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 410–54.

- [14] I thank Chani Marchiselli for her perceptive discussion of this distinction.
- [15] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 27, 174.
- [16] Michael Calvin McGee, “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 235–49. Cited material on 242.
- [17] Ice-T, “Straight Up Nigga,” on O. G. Original Gangster, Warner Brothers, 1991. I thank Kirt Wilson for introducing me to this.
- [18] (New York: Bantam, 1981), PP.
- [19] George A. Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 289.
- [20] *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), VI.16, p. 29. See the commentary on this passage in Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 263–74, which emphasizes the close relationship between the revelation of character (*ethos*) and thought (*dianoia*).
- [21] Ballif, 43, 190–91, citing Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone, 1978), 3, 224–26.
- [22] Detienne and Vernant, 4. They also write: “Aristotle says that in the art of navigation there can be no general knowledge applicable to every case, no certain knowledge of all the winds that furrow the waters of the sea” (224). The binary Ballif sets up seems to apply only to Plato.
- [23] See, for example, Samuel McCormick, “Earning One’s Inheritance: Rhetorical Criticism, Everyday Talk, and the Analysis of Public Discourse,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 109–31.
- [24] Carolyn R. Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151–67.
- [25] Michael Leff, “The Idea of Rhetoric as Interpretive Practice: A Humanist’s Response to Gaonkar,” 89–100, in *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*, ed. Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), cited material on 97.
- [26] Despite the best efforts of feminists, contemporary US rape laws and their enforcement continue to blame women for sexual assault. See, for example, Stephen J. Schulhofer, *Unwanted Sex: The Culture of Intimidation and the Failure of Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). On homophobia, see, for example, Jacqueline Zita, *Body Talk: Philosophical Reflections on Sex and Gender* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), esp. “Heterosexual Anti-Biotics,” 35–60. On colonialism, see, among others, Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993). On anti-Semitism, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948), or *Portrait of the Anti-Semite*, trans. Eric de Mauny (London: Secker and Warburg, 1948). The idea that the “other” saps or destroys one’s ability to obtain pleasure is a recurrent strand in misogynist rhetoric around the world and currently is an important element in the rhetoric of Shiv Sena, the Hindu Nationalist Party of India, in its attacks on Indian Muslims. Abhik Roy, “Myth, Masculinity, and Hindu Militant Rhetoric: A Case Study of Shiv Sena,” Unpublished paper available from the author at Howard University, Washington, DC.

- [27] See, for example, Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," 56-90, *Society, Culture, and the Media*, ed. M. Gurevitch et al. (London: Methuen, 1982).
- [28] The failure to record the words of women is an example of women's recurring loss of historical agency. Accordingly, we have no texts for speeches delivered to state legislatures by Lucy Stone, Clarina Howard Nichols, and many others.
- [29] "Sojourner Truth," *The Woman's Journal*, 5 August 1876: 252, cited in Fitch and Mandziuk, 19. By contrast, in its report on the Anti-Slavery Convention, Rochester, New York, 15 March 1851, the *Liberator* of 4 April 1851:1 comments: "She possesses a mind of rare power, and often, in the course of short speeches, will throw out gems of thought." In Susan Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story and Song* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 139.
- [30] *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time* [Battle Creek, MI, 1884]. Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her "Book of Life"* (1878; rpt. Salem, NH: Ayer, 1990).
- [31] "Describing the happenings of 1844, historian Charles Sheffield commented: 'Sojourner Truth, the African sibyl, could hold an audience spellbound, and her singing always brought forth applause.'" In Fitch and Mandziuk, 16, citing Berenice Lowe, "Michigan Days of Sojourner Truth," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1956): 127-35.
- [32] See, for example, Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 179-82, 198-200.
- [33] *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 2 May 1863, p. 2; in Fitch and Mandziuk, 103-4. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1863: 473-80. Stowe quoted Truth in southern dialect similar to that used by Gage, creating a somewhat comic effect based on her apparent illiteracy. A reproduction of William Wetmore Story's sculpture, *The Libyan Sibyl* (1861), Metropolitan Museum of Art, which may have been Stowe's inspiration, is reproduced in Carla Peterson, "Doers of the Word": *African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37. This analogy, among other things, she argues, dehistoricized Truth.
- [34] *Narrative*, 1878, 133-35; Fitch and Mandziuk, 40; Carla Peterson cites evidence that Truth understood that all writing involved interpretation. See esp. 33.
- [35] This is the version that appears in the *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1882), 116; in Fitch and Mandziuk, 105-106. I use it because it is the longer and more frequently cited version of the text. Italics added.
- [36] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World/ A Harbinger Book, 1957), 13.
- [37] In Fitch and Mandziuk, 107.
- [38] Cited in Fitch and Mandziuk, 18, 74.
- [39] See speeches by these authors in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, vol. 2 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1989). Similarly, the exclusion of freedwomen from what became the Reconstruction amendments to the Constitution is foreshadowed in her words here, concerns that Truth addressed explicitly in her speeches at the American Equal Rights Association convention in 1867, also in the source cited above.
- [40] See illustration of antislavery token, New Jersey, 1838, in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, ed. Jean Fagin Yellin and John C. Van Horne (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 208. Reporting on a Lecture by Sojourner Truth, Anthony Street, New York City, 7 November 1853, the *New York Tribune* 8 November 1853: 6, wrote that

- "Pendant from the pulpit cushion was a banner of white satin, on which was inscribed: 'Ashtabula County. Am I not a Woman and a Sister?'" in Fitch and Mandziuk, 155.
- [41] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. I, 1848–1861 (rpt. Salem NH: Ayer, 1985), 116–17.
- [42] See Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), for evidence of Kelley's controversial activities.
- [43] Peterson, 46; citing a newspaper account in the *Narrative* (1878), 204.
- [44] The report of the 1851 speech in the *Liberator* of 13 June 1851:4 includes this statement: "The power and wit of this remarkable woman convulsed the audience with laughter." That comment hints at the close relationship between aesthetic pleasure and cultural racism. Dixon was the author of *Birth of a Nation*. Thomas Nelson Page was the author of the novel *Red Rock* (1898) and two volumes for children, *Two Little Confederates* (1888) and *Among the Camp* (1891), and a biography of Robert E. Lee (1911), among others.
- [45] "Gage wrote her account ... while living on the South Carolina Sea Islands ... [T]he speech itself seems to assimilate her [Truth] to the South Carolina slave characterized by a heavy black dialect and the use of the term 'nigger,' not present in the 1851 version nor, I believe, in any of Truth's other speeches" (Peterson, 53).
- [46] See the article from the *Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph* cited in Fitch and Mandziuk, 37–38, and other supporting evidence "that her speech was in fact very similar to that of the unlettered white people of her time" (38).
- [47] Carleton Mabree with Susan Mabree Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 64.
- [48] Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (1926; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15; Peterson, esp. 45–46, 48–50, 54–55, 205–206.
- [49] On debunking, see Mabree and Newhouse, esp. 67–82; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996). For its continuing influence, see, for example, Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), who writes: "Truth's experience serves as a metaphor for the slave woman's general experience ... Slave women were the only women in America who were sexually exploited with impunity, stripped and whipped with a lash, and worked like oxen ... Only black women had their womanhood so totally denied" (161–62).
- [50] Painter, 284–285. She refers to Truth as an "invented great," which includes figures such as Jesus and Joan of Arc, who are "known purely through the agency of others, who have constructed and maintained their legends" (285).
- [51] See, for example, Angela Y. Davis, *Woman, Race and Class* (New York: Random/Vintage, 1981), esp. 3–29, 60–64. "[H]er construction of her own identity derives specifically, as Jean Fagin Yellin has noted, from her historical experience as a slave whose productive and reproductive labor has been owned and exploited by slaveholders" (81). In *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 81, cited in Peterson, 53.
- [52] Author Marietta Holley (1836–1926) wrote a series of 20 domestic novels between 1873 and 1914; her most feminist works are *My Opinions and Betsy Bobbet's* (1873) and *Sweet Cicely* (1885). See also *Samantha on the Woman Question* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913). Her books were very popular. *Samantha at Saratoga* (1887) made the national "best seller" list for the decade 1880–1890, which required sales equivalent to one percent of the US population or approximately 500,000–600,000. See Jane Curry, "Samantha 'Rastles the Woman Question' or 'If God had Meant Wimmen Should be Nothin' but Men's Shadders, He Would Have Made Ghosts and Fantoms of 'Em at Once,'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 8 (1975): 823 n 5. Samantha speaks in a quaint, comical dialect of one who lacks formal education. In the report of an "Address by a Slave Mother, First Congregational Church," New York City, 6 September 1853, the *New York Tribune* of 7 September 1853:5 reports: "Mrs. Truth ... speaks very fluently in

tolerably correct and certainly very forcible style, and the latter quality of her address is rather enhanced by her occasional homely and therefore natural expressions." In Fitch and Pullon, 145.

- [53] Quoted in Esther Terry, "Sojourner Truth: The Person Behind the Libyan Sibyl," *Massachusetts Review* 26 (Summer-Autumn, 1985): 442, cited in Peterson, 29.
- [54] John Wideman, "Frame and Dialect: The Evolution of Black Voice in American Literature," *American Poetry Review* (September/October 1976): 35, 36, cited in Peterson, 31.
- [55] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1989), 99-102.