

The Report committee for Joanna Leigh Thaler

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:

**“Forg[ing] Chains for Others”: Hannah More’s Poetics and Rhetoric of
Control**

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Supervisor:

Lisa L. Moore

Coleman Hutchison

**“Forg[ing] Chains for Others”: Hannah More’s Poetics and Rhetoric of
Control**

by

Joanna Leigh Thaler, B.A.

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**“Forg[ing] Chains for Others”: Hannah More’s Poetics and Rhetoric of
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Joanna Leigh Thaler, M.A.

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SUPERVISOR: Lisa L. Moore

While scholars have carefully and rightly noted the profound influence that More’s abolitionist writings had on both the abolition movement and the developing women’s rights movement, they omit what is an essential examination of her poetics, particularly the self-conscious poetic form that she develops in her poem, “Slavery, A Poem” (1788). In conjunction with noting the rhetorical and textual devices that More implements in “Slavery” to illustrate the art of self-conscious poetics, this paper explores these same devices in a later satirical essay of More’s entitled *Hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade, in the Cities of London and Westminster* (1804), arguing that, by comparing the rhetorical points of overlap in these two pieces, we can identify that More’s contribution to her contemporary literary culture transcended mere female participation and publication. More importantly, through “Slavery” and *Hints*, More develops a unique rhetoric – a poetics of control – with which to discuss the physical constraints of slavery, the trope of the individual versus the

collective, and the essential poetic and rhetorical practice of blending authorial creativity with conventional constraint.

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“The work to be done...is a work more prosodic and technical than we might imagine. It is the work of knowing the prosodic conventions and of manipulating them so as to induce appropriate responses and illusions in an audience that knows them too. The individual talent is speechless without the conventions. And without an almost equal understanding of them, the audience, for all its intelligence and good will, hears nothing.”

-Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*¹

“Forg[ing] Chains for Others”: Hannah More’s Poetics and Rhetoric of Control

In 1965, Paul Fussell exposed the ideological limits of the claim that poetic convention “suggests images of a shriveled orthodoxy, of a reactionary obsession with past usages which is necessarily at war with originality, with freedom, with naturalness, and with invention,” complicating the notion that all poetry lives through creative invention and not through artistic control and an inherent structure. His claim that poetry gains its form not during “bursts” of productive inspiration but after hours of unromantic desk labor and the absorption of past poems, argues against Romantic assertions of poetry as solely the “growth of a poet’s mind.”² Some early female abolitionist poets, amid not only Britain’s controversial involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, but also alongside the rise of early women’s rights movements, wrote under the influence of both sudden inspiration and lengthened study. Lost in tracing both women’s rights’ early writings and feminist discourse on abolition, many critics of women’s eighteenth-century abolitionist

¹ Fussell, Paul. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. New York. Random House Inc., 1965.

² See William Wordsworth, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet’s Mind: An Autobiographical Poem*. EDITION

poetry have removed discussions of poetic form *as form* from their studies and, in so doing, have missed the real “art” of poetry for which Fussell argues – conscientious control of poetic form *and* content influenced by both convention and creativity – an art that many female poets adopted to address the contentious contemporary issue of slavery. These women poets were, as Paula Backscheider notes, part of “a deliberative body, a group that perceived their writing, and were perceived themselves, as having a right to intervene in national life and its debates.”³ In so being, they adopted comfortable convention to address an uncomfortable ideological problem.

Hannah More wrote as one of these poets. The daughter of a charity schoolmaster, co-founder of a conservative school for girls, passive victim of a failed engagement, and later successful author of many didactic writings, More was a practical and fairly formally conventional writer.⁴ Her writings include plays, essays, poetry, and one novel, all of which invoke stoicism, complicity with Britain’s patriarchal system, and sound Christian principles. More’s outspoken devotion to the abolitionist cause in the late eighteenth century won her popular attention and has earned recent critical attention among historians and literary scholars of both the abolition and women’s rights movements. Arguably, More’s most famous and studied piece of writing in both abolitionist and feminist discourses is “Slavery, A Poem” (1788), which depicts the horrors of both the Atlantic slave trade and its British endorsement. Scholars like Moira Ferguson and Patricia Meyer Spacks have rightly drawn attention to “Slavery” as a work

³ Backscheider, Paula. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre*. Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. P. 8.

⁴ See Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2003.

that simultaneously emblemizes the horrors of the slave trade and opens the public sphere to women as a viable platform from which to voice their opinions.⁵ Others, such as Donna Landry, Alan Richardson, Carol Bauer, and Lawrence Ritt, emphasize “Slavery” as an essential teaching tool for cataloging a history of the discourses of both feminism and colonization.⁶ While these considerations of More’s poem contribute greatly to an historiography of eighteenth-century women who were emerging as prominent figures in the women’s rights movement and abolitionist cause, their limited uses of its general tone and theme impacting broader global problems displace the real art of her writings – her admiration and careful implementation of control. In other words, with scholars focused almost solely on the content of “Slavery” and its implications for future women writers, More’s mastery of poetic form and consciousness has eluded critical notice. Emphasizing “Slavery’s” awareness of its form as form, and acknowledging the power of existing expressions of poetic form to dictate and manipulate reader expectations, More reinvents poetic and rhetorical consciousness with a new rhetoric of abolitionist poetics. While structurally and metrically attending to established and respected poetic conventions of her poetic predecessors such as

⁵ See Moira Ferguson, “The Parliamentary Campaign: New Debates,” in *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*. New York. Routledge, 1992, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, “‘Ever’y Woman is at Heart a Rake,’” in : *The Past as Prologue: Essays to Celebrate the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of ASECS*. New York. AMS Press, Inc., 1995. See also Lilla Maria Crisafulli, “Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More’s and Ann Yearsley’s Poetry of Freedom,” pp. 110-124 in: Kaplan, Cora; Oldfield, John, *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan; 2010

⁶ See Donna Landry, “The Resignation of Mary Collier: Some Problems in Feminist Literary History,” in: Nussbaum, Felicity and Laura Brown, *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*. New York. Methuen, Inc., 1987. pp.99-120; Alan Richardson, “Women Poets and Colonial Discourse: Teaching More and Yearsley on the Slave Trade,” in: Behrendt, Stephen C.; Linkin, Harriet Kramer, *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*. New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America; 1997; and Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism*. New York. Pergamon Press, 1979.

Alexander Pope, More establishes this new rhetoric to discuss the popular and political issue of slavery. By addressing the physical limitations imposed on African slaves using carefully constructed textual devices and self-conscious form, More simultaneously develops and restrains, a unique poetics of control that obeys standard poetic convention and simultaneously allows for artistic originality and invention. Indeed, More is inventive in applying her newly created rhetoric – I will also examine the rhetorical and poetic tropes found in “Slavery” in relation to a lesser-known satiric piece of More’s, entitled *Hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade, in the Cities of London and Westminster* (1804).⁷ *Hints* is a short but potent polemic against the nominal conflation of women’s oppressed submission to the “tyrant,” Fashion and the rhetoric of slavery. Viewed in tandem with “Slavery,” *Hints* proves that More’s obsession with the rhetoric of control continues even sixteen years after her publication of “Slavery.” Despite the dramatic change in content and tone between the two pieces, More uses similar textual and rhetorical conventions in *Hints* to those she used in “Slavery,” including a distinctive employment of footnotes, parenthesis, and pronoun shifts, to critique a rhetoric of nominal enslavement and comment on the tensions between an identifiable individual and a faceless collective. My reading of More illustrates that, in both “Slavery” and *Hints*, a controlled freedom, a poetic and rhetorical liberty permitted to operate within well-established conventional constraints, allows for not only a didactic and poignant thematic, but also for a poetic creativity that rightly honors those conventions under which it is allowed to exist. Conversely, unbridled

⁷ See *The Christian Observer*. March, 1804. pp. 151-154.

liberty, particularly the free use (or abuse) of the rhetoric of slavery and control, results in a kind of rhetorical chaos that represents not total and liberated freedom, but a self-enforced cognitive enslavement that proves intellectually and physically dangerous for an individual and his or her relationship to a larger national collective.

In the winter of 1787, More was charged with the task of writing a poetic appeal to Parliament to end British involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Members of the Abolition Committee trusted this task to More because she was an evangelical, sentimental, and socially conservative.⁸ The poem needed to walk the line between a feminine sentimental disavowal of the cruelties of slavery and a more formally controlled and ostensibly masculine representation of the dangers that slavery posed to national security and international perception. Such a task may have inspired a wavering confidence in More, and whatever confidence the Abolition Committee expressed in More's poetic ability, she occasionally doubted herself. In a letter to her sister, More writes

I am now busily engaged on a poem, to be called 'Slavery.' I grieve I did not set about it sooner ; as it must now be done in such a hurry as no poem should ever be written in, to be properly correct ; but, good or bad, if it does not come out at the particular moment when the discussion comes on in Parliament, it will not be worth a straw.⁹

⁸ See Stott, 86-95, and Charlotte Sussman, *Eighteenth-Century English Literature: 1660-1789*. Malden, MA. Polity Press, 2012. p. 153-55. "One of the most popular and successful writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, More was also one of the most conservative."

⁹ More, Hannah. *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*. Ed. William Roberts. New York. Harper & Brothers, 1855. Vol. I. p. 281.

More was sharing public literary space with other abolitionist writers who meant to jar Parliament into effecting a decisive end to British involvement in the slave trade.¹⁰ Using conventional self-dismissal of her poetic ability, More ironically establishes in the early lines of “Slavery” the value of her powerful intrusion into this confined rhetorical space.. She desires to write on a “congenial theme” as anti-slavery playwright Thomas Southerne and other active abolitionists, but More says that her Muse fails as she

...burns to emulate [Southerne’s] glowing page;
Her [Muse’s] failing efforts mock her fond desires,
She shares thy feelings, not partakes thy fires.
Strange pow’r of song! the strain that warms the heart
Seems the same inspiration to impart;
Touch’d by the kindling energy alone,
We think the flame which melts us is our own;
Deceiv’d, for genius we mistake delight,
Charm’d as we read, we fancy we can write.¹¹

More here emphasizes the “pow’r of song” to “deceive,” “charm,” and inspire “fancy” in its listeners, commenting on the deceptive, yet inspirational, qualities of persuasive verse and language, and adding an irony to the “failure” of her Muse. Her self-depreciatory rhetoric was common for women writers at the time, but the very placement of More’s self-dismissal signifies her consciousness of her own poetic strength.¹² She places it

¹⁰ For example, John Newton’s *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, and the Covent Garden Theater’s production of Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*. See The Norton Anthology of English Literature Online. *The Middle Passage*. 2010; and Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works*. Ed. Janet Todd. Penguin Group, 1992. Aphra Behn’s novel was published in 1668, and details much of what was first-hand experience with the slave trade.

¹¹ More, Hannah, “Slavery, A Poem.” London : printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, M.DCC.LXXXVIII. 1788. l. 40-48. In this essay, line numbers reflect the original publication. I have accessed this through Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO).

¹² Despite her alleged worries about her poem’s construction and reception, it was, to say the least, structurally impressive, considering the time constraint under which it was formed. “Slavery” boasts 274 lines of iambic pentameter and 137 separate heroic couplets. Although More asserts that a “good” poem requires *time*, and she acknowledges that she had to write “Slavery” in “such a hurry as no poem should

after a lengthy and complex opening section, in which she establishes the essential separation between poetic control and poetic freedom. More utilizes this popular trope to comment not only on necessary poetic and personal restraint, but also on the relationship between an individual's adoption or rejection of this self-restraint, and on its impact on a national collective.

The textual and rhetorical devices that More employs in both "Slavery" and *Hints* are at once familiar and innovative, allotting her and her audience a comfortable foundation from which to build a new and appropriate abolitionist rhetoric to discuss slavery in the British eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. More's framework for her abolitionist rhetoric and poetics – what I will argue is a poetic and rhetorical license constrained through proper limits— is better understood by first engaging the literary and political environment in which she composed *Hints*. Even as England was nearing the end of its official involvement in the slave trade, More still obsessed over slavery's influence on national ideology, and she was particularly concerned with its influence on the evolving views of women. In 1804, More saw a popular conflation of abolitionist and feminist rhetoric. Rhetoric of containment and physical restraint, particularly literal slavery itself, was being utilized by women

ever be written in," that it may not be received as "proper" or "correct" or, to use her odd phrasing, "properly correct" the poem adheres to the popular (and poetically conservative) Popian convention of iambic pentameter using heroic couplets for the overall poetic structure. A model of poetic control, Pope inspired much of More's writings and characters, as opposed to more Romantic writers like Wordsworth. More's "Slavery" makes clear the influence that this control over one's poetic construction has on her own poetics.

writers to battle the apparent subjection of British women to Britain's heretofore socially acceptable patriarchal system. Mary Wollstonecraft had used such abolitionist rhetoric frequently in her popular *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).¹³ In one instance she writes that "Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature" (103).¹⁴ More took a particular dislike to Wollstonecraft's argument. In her own *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), More attacks Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*:

Who can forbear observing and regretting, in a variety of instances, that not only sons, but daughters, have adopted something of that spirit of independence, and disdain of control, which characterize the times? And is it not too generally obvious, that domestic manners are not slightly tinged with the prevailing hue of public principles? The *rights of man* have been discussed, till we are somewhat wearied with the discussion. To these have been opposed, as the next stage in the progress of illumination, and with more presumption than prudence, *the rights of woman*. It follows, according to the natural progression of human things, that the next influx of that irradiation which our enlighteners are pouring in upon us, will illuminate the world with grave descants on the *rights of youth* – *the rights of children* – *the rights of babies!*¹⁵

¹³ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1993.

¹⁴ Other instances of Wollstonecraft's rhetoric of slavery and liberty include "...as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing" (90); "But were [women's] understanding once emancipated from the slavery to which the pride and sensuality of man and their short-sighted desire, like that of dominion in tyrants, of present sway, has subjected them, we should probably read of their weaknesses with surprise" (112); "Why do men halt between two opinions, and expect impossibilities? Why do they expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?" (114); and "let me return to the more specious slavery which chains the very soul of woman, keeping her for ever under the bondage of ignorance" (225).

¹⁵ More, Hannah. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education: with a view of the principles and conduct prevalent among women of rank and fortune* in: *The Works of Hannah More*. New York. Harper & Brothers, 1855. Vol. VI. p. 74-75.

More pointedly argues against the “rights of woman” in this polemic, and argues that such rhetorical “independence” marks an ominous “disdain of control,” suggestive language for More in confronting a rhetoric of liberty. The popular conflation of the plight of individual African slaves with that of white British women frustrated More, whose writings had been, over many successful publications, impressing British women with the necessity of national unity and hence, social complicity with patriarchy.¹⁶ Her abolitionist tendencies balked at the idea that the white female British upper and middle classes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suffered any torment substantially similar to that suffered by African slaves. More did not, however, scorn to adopt this popular situational conflation rhetorically; she satirizes it in *Hints*. *Hints* attacks the nominal conflation of slavery and women’s rights that other budding female writers had lovingly assumed by using the very rhetorical conflation that she condemns. Originally published anonymously, the piece is signed “AN ENEMY TO ALL SLAVERY,” and was not revealed to be an essay of More’s until 1818 when it appeared in later collected works, under the title, *The White Slave Trade*.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Strictures* is, perhaps, most emblematic of this claim. While some scholars, like Crisafulli (see note 7) have suggested that More’s “Slavery” paved the way for women writers in the late eighteenth century, More herself certainly did not aspire to create such inspiration. She writes in *Strictures* that “Neither is there any fear that [the *Strictures*] will convert ladies into authors. The direct contrary effect will be likely to be produced by the perusal of writers who throw the generality of readers at such an unapproachable distance as to check presumption, instead of exciting it” (p. 92). See Kevin Gilmartin, “‘Study to Be Quiet’: Hannah More and the Invention of Conservative Culture in Britain.” *ELH* 70.2 (2003) 493-540.

¹⁷ I include this note not to suggest that More shied away from the attack she makes in *Hints*, but rather to demonstrate yet another instance of her sincere and subtle plays with words. She may, indeed be “an enemy to all slavery,” the “real” slavery endured by Africans, and the false slavery she perceives as the “plight” of the white “slaves” in Britain.

More associates abuse of abolitionist rhetoric with a loss of poetic and rhetorical control, and hence, a limited physical capability. The openings of both “Slavery” and *Hints* emphasize the critical differences between total license and a responsible control, the former of which results in chaos and the latter in poetic and rhetorical power. “Slavery” opens with the figure of LIBERTY, aligned with the sun, whose rays are partially constricted and “op[p]ose[d]” (6) and “arrest[ed]” (8) by unnatural “obstacles” (7).

IF heaven has into being deign'd to call
 Thy light, O LIBERTY! to shine on all;
 Bright intellectual Sun! why does thy ray
 To earth distribute only partial day?
 Since no resisting cause from spirit flows
 Thy penetrating essence to op[p]ose;
 No obstacles by Nature's hand imprest,
 Thy subtle and ethereal beams arrest;
 Nor motion's laws can speed thy active course,
 Nor strong repulsion's pow'rs obstruct they force;
 Since there is no convexity in MIND,
 Why are thy genial beams to parts confin'd?¹⁸

LIBERTY's “genial parts [are] confin'd” (12) by some unidentified “obstruct[ive] pow'rs” (10), and she here appears a passive victim of these powers, who receives all action from unknowable controlling forces. Her “penetrating” essence cannot fully penetrate because it is opposed (6), unnatural obstacles arrest her beams (7-8), “motion's laws...speed [her] active course” (9), “strong repulsion's pow'rs obstruct [her] force” (10), and her beams are “to parts confin'd” (12). LIBERTY's actions are controlled in this stanza but, despite this constriction, she ends a positive figure. Only briefly

¹⁸ “Slavery,” l. 1-12. All future references to “Slavery” will be noted by line numbers parenthetically.

described physically, LIBERTY is “In smiles chastis’d, and decent graces drest” (20).

She is *within* chastis’d smiles and decent graces, enclosed poetically in a safe space. This smiling and “decent” figure of LIBERTY immediately precedes another, less appropriately “drest” figure,

that unlicens’d monster of the crowd,
Whose roar terrific bursts in peals so loud,
Deaf’ning the ear of Peace: fierce Faction’s tool;
Of rash Sedition born, and mad Misrule;
Whose stubborn mouth, rejecting Reason’s rein,
No strength can govern, and no skill restrain;
Whose magic cries the frantic vulgar draw
To spurn at Order, and to outrage Law;
To tread on grave Authority and Pow’r,
And shake the work of ages in an hour:
Convuls’d her voice, and pestilent her breath,
She raves of mercy, while she deals out death:
Each blast is fate; she darts from either hand
Red conflagration o’er the astonish’d land;
Clamouring for peace, she rends the air with noise,
And to reform a part, the whole destroys (21-36).

This “unlicens’d” figure of liberty resists all control. She acts, where LIBERTY receives action. She is a “monster” who “roars” (22), “deafens” (23), “rejects” (25), “draws” the frantic vulgar (27), “raves” (32), “deals out” (32), “darts” (33), “clamours” (35), “rends” (35), and “destroys” (26). This final action is perhaps the most poignant of the long list, because whatever power propels the action of this form of liberty, the absence of passivity inherently corrupts and ultimately destroys “the whole” (36). However, while More makes certain that, as this “monster” of liberty spurns Order and Authority, she herself retains poetic control. The only moment in this description of unlicens’d liberty where More’s iambic pentameter lines are disrupted is when monstrous liberty “clamours” for peace (35). However, in this rare 11-syllable line, “clamouring” is yet

another instance of More's awareness of form's conscious relationship to its content – struggling and “clamouring” clumsily is reflected in the irregular line – so while uncontrolled liberty threatens “the whole,” More asserts her own whole control over this figure, and thus, asserts poetic control in the earliest moments of the poem.

Such authorial control is also in the opening paragraph of *Hints*. As More's control in “Slavery” could relate to Parliament's power over British involvement in the slave trade, we may read even Parliament's power diminishing in the presence of an all-powerful rhetorician. The opening sentence of *Hints* certainly emphasizes the power of prose – it makes up the first full paragraph of the essay.¹⁹ More ostensibly allows Parliament the power to effect change, as she does in “Slavery,” but, structurally, removes that power as the sentence transitions from the “profound,” “benevolent,” and “meritorious [labour]” of both houses of parliament to end the African slave trade, to the suggestion of a kind of slavery that ominously moves beyond the scope of their control, that more directly impacts their apparent domestic tranquility: “a slavery which, in some few instances, as it is to be feared, may be found to involve the wives, daughters, aunts, nieces, cousins, and grandmothers even of these very zealous African abolitionists themselves.”²⁰ More emphasizes, just as in “Slavery,” that governing forces act ‘indefatigably’ internationally only to allow domestic

¹⁹ While this lengthy style is not uncommon for the eighteenth-century, More attends to and deviates from stylistic convention in interesting ways. Her most sarcastic moments often appear in drawn out sentences with twisted syntax. Rarely does she write in quipped sentences, except in a few noticeable moments.

²⁰ *The Christian Observer*, Vol. 3, 1804 – which is the volume that originally published *Hints* – can be accessed through Google Books, to which my citations refer. Future references to *Hints* will be noted by page number parenthetically.

failure. She strips from these “grave legislators” the power to affect change and gives it to both this essay’s author and the printer:

it is, therefore, humbly proposed, that whilst these benevolent senators are thus meritoriously laboring for the deliverance of our black brethren, the printer will, as in duty bound, insert these loose hints of a bill for the abolition of slavery at home;²¹

More removes Parliament’s responsibility for enforcing domestic freedom, and “binds” the printer with the duty to publish this essay, forcing both the power and authority of emancipation on both the printer and herself, as the author.

More’s obsession with control surfaces in the textual elements of both “Slavery” and *Hints*. She is careful to distinguish between what she views as the legitimate complaint of physical limitations imposed on African slaves and the imagined, and therefore illegitimate, ones of white female “slaves” of *Hints*, succeeding in this distinction through two textual devices – the footnote and the parenthesis. More’s use of footnotes in these two works is confined to “Slavery,” but that “restriction” actually allows More creative expansion of an African slaves’ documented experience and his or her movement throughout the text. In fact, though suffering the literal chains of slavery, African slaves transcend verse constriction and move into More’s footnotes, gaining at least a momentary literary freedom. In one instance, a footnote supplements the literal chains of slavery in the verse, in which the “sharp iron wounds [a slave’s] inmost soul” (173) along with his body. More disrupts this painful image with a footnote, indicated by

²¹ Reprints of *The Christian Observer* tend to insert “the Christian Observer do” for “the printer will,” though, in *The Weekly Entertainer*, which published More’s essay in August of 1805, leaves “the printer will.” See *The Weekly Entertainer, or agreeable and instructive repository. Containing a collection of select pieces, both in prose and verse; curious anecdotes, instructive tales, and ingenious essays on different subjects*. Vol. 45 (Aug. 12, 1805). Pp. 621-625).

a “*” after “iron,” visually forcing an adjustment in sight and also forcing a cognitive shift while reading. She says of the wounded soul that

This is not said figuratively. The writer of these lines has seen a complete set of chains, fitted to every separate limb of these unhappy, innocent men; together with instruments for wrenching open the jaws, contrived with such ingenious cruelty as would shock the humanity of an inquisitor.

Although this African slave remains in a state of torture in the footnote, More allows his escape from the verse which constrains him physically in its meter. She emphasizes the power of a poet to expand rhetorical limitation by supplementing verse with her own physical presence in the footnote (“the writer of these lines has seen”) – identifying the poet as an entity existing both within and outside of the verse itself, an entity also with the power to allow such movement for others. We know from an earlier instance of footnoting in “Slavery” that More sees rhetorical movement and control over one’s own physical movement as essential for honest archival preservation. One of the poem’s most oft-quoted moments begins at line 83, with a lament that a slave named Qua-shi, as noted by abolitionist James Ramsay in his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784), will be remembered by “No Muse”:

No Muse, O * Quashi! shall thy deeds relate,
No statue snatch thee from oblivious fate!
For thou was born where never gentle Muse
On Valour’s grave the flow’rs of Genius strews;
And thou wast born where no recording page
Plucks the fair deed from Time’s devouring rage.
Had Fortune plac’d thee on some happier coast
To thee, who sought’st a voluntary grave,
Th’ uninjur’d honours of thy name to save,
Whose generous arm thy barbarous Master spar’d,

Altars had smok'd, and temples had been rear'd (83-94).

The suggestion that “No Muse” shall relate Qua-shi’s deeds seems puzzling, since both Ramsay and More relate his story in writing, but More distinguishes here between a *poetic* commemoration and a prosaic one. The verse fails to include Qua-shi’s history, instead bewailing the limits of poetic and archival confinement. “No statue,” “Valour’s grave,” “no recording page,” an “altar,” nor a “temple” will contain and preserve Qua-shi’s story. In other words, no archive, including written poetry, succeeds in preserving Qua-shi’s history. More’s here highlights her interest in physical space, an important feature that we see in her efforts to, at least rhetorically, release African slaves from their physical constraints. Attending to the ability of an archive to “snatch” and “pluck” away an enslaved African from his or her constraints, More suggests that an African slave faces an inescapable archival conundrum based solely on his involuntary spatial placement. Qua-shi has no choice about if or how his story will be told, since “Fortune” placed him in an immobile condition, but More insists that there is more to it than what verse allows. Her footnote allows movement for Qua-shi, as she modifies his story from Ramsay’s *Essay*. Ramsay’s version, as it appeared in 1784, follows (Figure 1):

QUASHI, on discovering him, ran on, and the master, who is a robust man, pursued him. A stone, or a clod, tripped Quashi up, just as the other reached out his hand to seize him. They fell together, and wrestled for the mastery, for Quashi also was a stout man, and the elevation of his mind added vigour to his arm. At last, after a severe struggle, in which each had been several times uppermost, Quashi got firmly seated on his master's breast, now panting and out of breath, and with his weight, his thighs, and one hand, secured him motionless. He then drew out a sharp knife, and while the other lay in dreadful expectation, helpless, and shrinking into himself, he thus addressed him. "Master, " I was bred up with you from a child; " I was your play-mate when a boy; I " have loved you as myself; your interest " has been my study; I am innocent of the " cause of your suspicion; had I been guilty, my attachment to you might have " pleaded for me. Yet you have condemned " me to a punishment, of which I must " ever

" ever have borne the disgraceful marks; " thus only can I avoid them." With these words, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead without a groan, on his master, bathing

Figure 1

More summarizes Ramsay's note in "Slavery," and none of her changes greatly alter it.

She writes

It is a point of honour among negroes of a high spirit to die rather than to suffer their glossy skin to bear the mark of the whip. Qua-shi had somehow offended his master, a young planter with whom he had been bred up in the endearing intimacy of a play-fellow. His services had been faithful; his attachment affectionate. The master resolved to punish him, and pursued him for that purpose. In trying to escape, Qua-shi stumbled and fell; the master fell upon him;

they wrestled long with doubtful victory; at length Qua-shi got uppermost, and, being firmly seated on his master's breast, he secured his legs with one hand, and with the other drew a sharp knife; then said, 'Master, I have been bred up with you from a child; I have loved you as myself: in return, you have condemned me to a punishment of which I must ever have borne the marks: thus only can I avoid them;' so saying, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master's body. Ramsay's Essay on the Treatment of African Slaves.²²

While the verse fails to accommodate Qua-shi and, in fact, keeps him immobile, her generic shift from verse to prose, and her inclusion of his story in a footnote, permits both physical movement for Qua-shi and an expansion of her own rhetorical and poetic limitations. The comprehension of this moment in "Slavery" depends primarily on a reader's familiarity with the Qua-shi story, suggesting that either the story actually *is* well-known and remembered, despite the lament of the verse, or that the poem's paratextual elements will provide it for readers anyway.²³ In both of these footnoted instances, an African slave escapes verse confinement and extends his presence beyond the physical limitations of verse into More's footnotes, because she, as the poet and writer, desires and allows such an escape.

²² Essential changes include a greater emphasis on Qua-shi's "faithful" and "affectionate" relationship with his master prior to this incident. This slight change may have served to dramatize the incident even more for her contemporary readers, though many might have been familiar with Ramsay's essay as it originally appeared.

²³ See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, translated from the French *Seuils*. Editions du Deuil, 1987. In his discussion of discursive notes – the type of note which More here uses – Genette argues that "there would be nothing absurd about incorporating this kind of note into the actual text... Nothing absurd, to be sure, but I will nonetheless add (if this is the place for a brief defense of the object we are discussing): incorporation into the text would entail some loss or impairment" (327-8). Of course, "incorporating" a full prosaic digression into verse *is* absurd and would create an "impairment" to poetic form, but More incorporates the footnote with the "*", which only minimally distracts the reader from the verse while simultaneously creating a connection between verse and prose, therefore expanding the physical limits of poetic convention. This is not the only instance that More inserts provocative, and I would say necessary, footnotes, others of which I discuss in later moments of this essay.

More refuses such an allowance to white slave owners and the white female “slaves” in *Hints*, but limits their movement through a different textual device – the parenthesis. Where the footnote marked a physical escape from true slavery, More’s parenthesis denotes a forced physical containment within a falsely constructed slavery, a containment that More sees as wholly justified based on the intentional cognitive disillusion performed by white “slaves” and slave owners. Because More uses the parenthesis to compress the space within which white slave owners and white “slaves” move, this is, perhaps, one reason that *Hints* has no footnotes, since it targets the supposedly enslaved white British women of the early nineteenth century. The parenthesis restricts movement for those More sees as abusing the rhetoric of control and freedom – white slave owners and white “slaves” – while the footnote offers greater movement within and around a text, movement that More wants to give to African slaves. In “Slavery,” the parenthesis marks the mask that white slave owners wear when constructing *their* misleading version of the African slave trade:

(For shou’d they paint eternal Mercy’s reign,
Where were th’ oppressor’s rod, the captive’s chain?) (199-200)

“They” refers to white slave owners, who here “paint” a history of the African slave trade, one couched in rhetoric of mercy and benevolence, but one also that is revealed to be a mask, through the presence of the parenthesis. Of course, the literal “rod” and “chain” of slavery are visually emblemized by the opening and closing marks of the parenthesis, but, even more importantly, the “painting” that

white slave owners create loses its art because of its falseness. Challenged by a rhetorical question and enclosed within constricting physical boundaries, this painting is limited to only the space allowed in these two short lines. What More sees as an abuse of rhetoric – the false history of the African slave experience – she contains within punctuation that reflects such limited intellect. She even encases Britain’s “specious crimes” against Africans in a parenthesis:

Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame,
(For these are specious crimes) our rage inflame? (125-6)

Again, the visual re-emphasis that the crimes of slavery are “specious” actions, nominally justified only in terms of expanding the British Empire, is marked by the opening and closing ends of the parenthesis. Even if enshrouded, the very shroud of Britain’s involvement in the slave trade suggests its false motives. I want to return to this stanza below, in discussing how More frames the bulk of her abolitionist rhetoric through these textual devices, but I first want to note the only use of parenthesis in *Hints* to further illustrate More’s emphasis on this mark as indicative of literal and metaphorical physical containment. In *Hints*, because white “slaves’ s” chains are imagined, the parenthesis is less physically constricting, though it ostensibly holds the “slaves” in place; in actuality, the white “slaves” rhetorically blame physical slavery for their condition while they impose cognitive enslavement on themselves. We are told that white “slaves” not only “hug” their chains (156), but that they choose to remain in them even beyond their necessity, after the chains have disappeared. For many “aged slaves...at

other tables, the labour of the slave is most severe; and though you cannot perceive their fetters, yet they must undoubtedly be firmly chained to the spot, as appears by their inability to quit it; for by their long continuance in the same attitude one can hardly suppose them to be at liberty” (157). More suggests that white “slaves” invent these invisible chains who do not wish to quit their position as such, though they could if they wanted to. She writes that

Many of these elderly female slaves excuse their constant attendance in the public markets, (for it is thought that, at a certain age, they might be emancipated if they wished it,) by asserting of their attendance, ‘till their daughters are disposed of. They are often heard to lament the hardship of this slavery, and to anticipate the final period of their labours; but it is observable, that not only when their daughters, but even their grand-daughters, are taken off their hands, they still continue, from the mere force of habit, and when they are past their labour, to hover about the markets” (157).

The chains in this excerpt have been removed entirely, except those that are produced by white “slaves” themselves. In some re-printings of this essay, the above punctuation is used, with a comma falling inside the parenthesis mark, allowing for another implementation of what I have argued More is best at – a self-reflexive writing form.²⁴ The comma allows for the textual escape from the enclosed parenthesis that the text alludes to, and which is very much within the white “slaves” sphere of movement. The parenthesis marks the chains that keep the elderly female slaves in the markets. However, since this “hovering about the markets” is voluntary, the comma allows for an exit or self-enforced “emancipation” – one, however, of which advantage is never taken.

²⁴ One such example is in the *Selected Writings of Hannah More*. Ed. Robert Hole. London, William Pickering, 1996. P. 38-39). Hole’s is one of the few relatively recent re-printings of *Hints*.

The parenthesis in both “Slavery” and *Hints* indicates the self-enforced cognitive enslavement of white slave owners and white “slaves.” More suggests that while the British invoke the rhetoric of slavery and abolition to construct and explain their own histories, such an invocation abuses the rhetoric and the real slave experience of Africans. The abuse of the rhetoric of abolition, suggests More, has national implications that threaten the very control that Britain claims to have over its own movements, both physical and political. Returning to the “specious crimes” earlier addressed, I want to address the implications that the full (though quite short) stanza carries for British control. It reads

Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame,
(For these are specious crimes) our rage inflame?
No: sordid lust of gold their fate controls,
The basest appetite of basest souls;
Gold, better gain'd by what their ripening sky,
Their fertile fields, their arts and mines supply. (125-130)

This stanza, though it is one of “Slavery’s” shortest, introduces the most serious national implications for Britain’s complicity in the Atlantic slave trade – Britain is a nation suffering from a complete loss of control. Rather than Britain controlling her involvement in the slave trade, she has allowed the “sordid lust of gold [its] fate [to] control” (127). Empire has taken over and has removed Britain’s ability to think and move for herself, or even to rule herself. Britain’s complicit participation in the slave trade casts a globally recognized shadow of “ruthlessness” (113) and hypocrisy on the nation, dethroning Lady Britannia and allowing “OPPRESSION” to reign over Britain’s “wither’d landscapes” (252), “ruin’d scenes” (279), and “blasted Nature” (280). Britain herself actually

becomes the “WHITE SAVAGE” with an “uncontroll’d lust of gold and lust of conquest” (211-12):

Shall Britain, where the soul of freedom reigns,
Forge chains for others she herself disdains?
Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nations know
The liberty she loves she will bestow;
Not to herself the glorious gift confin’d,
She spreads the blessing wide as humankind;
And, scorning narrow views of time and place,
Bids all be free in earth’s extended space. (251-58)

Britain, in all its hypocritical savagery, becomes the object of global scrutiny and may only redeem itself by emancipation from its own enslavement to the slave trade. This stanza likely appealed to More’s targets in Parliament, since it puts power back in Britain’s hands, now suddenly again capable of bestowing a gift of “liberty,” expanding and not “confin[ing]” literal freedom.²⁵

The textual devices More employs stress the important distinction to be made between literal and imagined slavery, between individual and national implications of freedom and constriction. This distinction, for More, is seen in the trope of the individual experience versus a collective one. Two passages, one from “Slavery” and another from *Hints*, illustrate More’s utilization of this trope, and while thematically similar, the passages’ differences, particularly their distinct treatments of individuals, further emphasize More’s disgust with the falsely constructed plight of white “slaves” that is being touted by her contemporaries in relation to the real horrors endured by African slaves. In

²⁵ This line marks another of More’s rare 11-syllable lines, reflecting her own attention to the line’s explicit “non-confinement.”

“Slavery,” More describes an African mother being torn from her child by slave traders:

Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes,
Horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise;
I see, by more than Fancy's mirror shewn,
The burning village, and the blazing town:
See the dire victim torn from social life,
The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife!
She, wretch forlorn! is dragg'd by hostile hands,
To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!
Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,
The sole sad heritage her child obtains! (95-104)

The poet “sees,” and therefore so too does the reader, the horrors depicted in this individualized account of human suffering. The subject, an “agonizing wife,” a “wretch forlorn,” is easily a subject of pity, who is “torn,” “dragg'd,” “sold,” and must transmit only “miseries” and “successive chains” as the “sole sad heritage” to her only child. This potent account of the literal chains of slavery and individualized suffering contrasts sharply with its sister in *Hints*, in which there

are great multitudes of beautiful white creatures, forced away, like their prototypes in Africa, from all the endearing connections of domestic life, separated from their husbands, dragged from their children, ‘till these last are old enough to be also engaged as slaves in the same labour;” (156).

In *Hints*, the individual sufferer, the “agonizing wife” is replaced by collective “multitudes of beautiful white creatures.”²⁶ Despite the thematic and linguistic similarities between the two passages, the former almost certainly informing the latter’s construction, these two instances of forced slavery could hardly be more

²⁶ Interestingly, these white creatures are allowed “children” rather than the one “child” of the African wife, suggesting a possible future for the white “slaves” that is not given to African slaves.

structurally and affectively distinct. Though the passage in *Hints* takes readers through the same circumstances of the forlorn African wife of sixteen years past, its account is passionless and completely divorced from relatable individual experience. Yes, white “slaves” are “forced away” and “dragged,” but the absence of passion, especially terror and anger, and of individualized suffering makes this passage less affecting than the one in “Slavery.” White “slaves” are faceless “creatures,” not people, and therefore set at a distance from the reader. The rhetoric of the collective continues throughout *Hints*, More only referring to white “slaves” in terms of “they,” “them,” and “their,” rather than the “she” and “he” of individuals in “Slavery.” She separates white slaves from any individuality, as “a multitude of fine fresh young slaves...annually imported” (157). They are described as chattel, and forced to “suffer” from overcrowding, in a syntactically strange construction of More’s which, again, emphasizes her own disdain for the rhetorical abuses being performed by her contemporaries:

One strong argument brought to prove the impolicy of the African slave trade is, that it is a most improvident waste of the human species. What devastation is made in the human frame among our white slaves, by working over hours, by loss of sleep, want of clothing, fetid atmospheres, being crammed in the holds of smaller ships without their proper proportion of inches – what havoc, I say, is made by all those and many other causes, let all the various baths and watering places, to which these poor exhausted slaves are sent every summer to recruit, after the working season is over, declare” (158).

The “argument” and the “declaration” in the passage frame the plight of white slaves, but neither the argument nor the declaration are actually made. The argument *against* slavery in this passage refers to the *African* slave trade, not the

white slave trade, and More asks that the “various baths and watering places” “declare” the devastation and havoc to which she alludes, so *she* is not declaring it herself, nor is anyone. And while More mentions devastation and havoc without question marks (“What devastation...what havoc...”), readers know that these questions are being asked seriously. The only real devastation that occurs because of the white slave trade, according to More, is a kind national degeneration that “injur[es] commerce (158). More writes that the “time spent in training and overworking these fair slaves might be better spent in promoting the more profitable articles of health, beauty, simplicity, modesty, and industry; articles which many think would fetch a higher price, and by which traffic, both the slave and the slave-owner would be mutually benefited” (158). Instead, what Britain suffers from is a deteriorating population: “youth and beauty, by this promiscuous huddling of slaves together, failing to attract attention; but moreover youth and beauty are so soon impaired by hard labour, foul air, and late hours, that those who are not early disposed of, on the novelty of a first appearance, soon become withered, and are apt to lie a good while upon hands” (158). While this moment in *Hints* emphasizes More’s politics that she addresses in other writings, regarding female education and worthy feminine pursuits,²⁷ it also subtly identifies her concerns with the importance of individual contribution to a national coherence. The inverted construction of the “devastation” sentence performs More’s disdain for the misplaced, yet apparently nationally adopted,

²⁷ Most particularly, *Strictures* (1799).

rhetorical invocation of slavery of which many of her contemporaries are guilty, in its inability to properly “declare” women’s oppression to patriarchy as achieving any substantial similarity to the plight of African slaves.

The relationship between individual slave experience in “Slavery” and a collective one in *Hints* can, in fact, be clearly seen in each account’s treatment of the literal chains of slavery, structural entities that More recycles to comment on the national abuse of the rhetoric of abolition. Earlier, More constructs slavery’s image by perpetually placing supplementary pictures before the reader’s eyes, as she describes the “wretched” African wife and mother. Each image builds upon the one before it through More’s “eyes” and by “seeing” each image succeeding the one before it. The repetition not only in dependent heroic couplets, but also in More’s phrasing in “I turn my eyes,” “I see,” “See” creates an increasingly detailed image of slavery itself – we move from “Afric” to a village, to a town, and then to the “victim,” “She, wretch forlorn!,” gradually narrowing our focus to an individualized and graphic depiction of slavery, and finally ending with slavery’s chains themselves. The appearance of the chains toward the end of this stanza is important, as though they’ve been produced through the preceding narrowly focused images of slavery. The African wife and mother’s relationship with these chains is most important; She transmits her miseries reluctantly to her child, forcing the same physical constriction on the child that has been forced upon her, continuing the uninterrupted sequence of forced enslavement. The verse here constructs slavery – “Slavery” really *is* a poem. Its structural and

textual elements, particularly those reflecting physical containment, indicate More's creation of a new rhetoric of slavery and abolition. In this creation, More manages to be both conventional and inventive, developing a new abolitionist poetics that establishes a mimetic relationship between form and content.

The tangible chains and physical enslavement felt by the African mother are contrasted with the invisible and invented chains and self-enforced "slavery" of the white slaves in *Hints*. Not only do the "aged" white female "slaves" invent chains for themselves, as noted above, but More says that white "slaves" actually

hug their chains, and because they are gilt and shining, this prevents [slaves], not from feeling, but from acknowledging that they are heavy. With astonishing fortitude they carry them about, not only without repining, but as their glory and distinction" (156).

Slavery here loses its essential restrictive qualities, which is only appropriate for More's purpose. While slavery was constructed line by line in "Slavery," *Hints* deconstructs the institution by removing all of its power of physical restraint. White "slaves," rather than being clasped by their chains, "hug" them to themselves, effectively enchaining the chains and removing their restrictive abilities and, hence, destroying their essential force. The placement of this sentence in *Hints* informs its power as well. Occurring early in *Hints*, it destabilizes misused abolitionist rhetoric before any significant images of white slavery appear at all, so any subsequent images of physical constraint can quickly be dismissed as false, or, rather, "invisible" images. Indeed, according to More, if a minority of white women "manfully resist" the chains of Fashion, the "tyrant,"

they immediately disappear, “no one envies them an exemption from chains, and their freedom is considered only as a proof of their insignificance” (152). Put another way, white “slavery” enjoys a false existence, but, in the minds of white slaves, those who resist the false invocation become invisible themselves and are quietly absorbed into the toxic society around them as “*people whom nobody knows*” (152, More’s emphasis).

Rhetorical invisibility, whether the cause of it is one’s unchangeable congenital situation in the case of an African slave, or a self-enforced submission to fashionable yet fleeting social constrictions for white “slaves,” restrains the physical and intellectual movements of individuals, and, consequently, of entire nations. More critiques contemporary rhetorical invocations of slavery not only because their exaggerated applications to menial social situations distort the horrors of the physical restraints experienced by African slaves, but also because those who invoke the rhetoric of constraint and control remove the constructive and destructive powers of a rhetoric of control. More corrects this error by constructing a new rhetoric of control, one that self-consciously attends to poetic and rhetorical form *as* form, blending the art of authorial creativity with a constructive submission to conventional restraint. Through the textual devices and tropes she applies in “Slavery” and later adopts and adapts in *Hints*, More creates what she understands to be the only appropriate and solid rhetorical foundations for a conversation as widely dispersed throughout the world as the conflict over slavery. These devices offer More roots for creative

experimentation with rhetorical and physical control, elements necessarily implied in any abolitionist rhetoric, and they provide both visual and metaphorical “spaces” within and around which More constructs her new rhetoric of space. While scholars have attended to More’s unquestionable impact on both women’s increased participation in public spheres and the abolitionist cause, they largely limit their critical focus to the thematics of “Slavery” and the tone of *Hints*. By joining these two pieces and cataloguing points of rhetorical overlap, we see how each work informs a reading of the other in an examination of More’s attention to rhetorical and poetic control. “Slavery” may not be solely the “growth of [More’s] mind,” as it was inspired by a commission to write and time pressure, but we certainly see More’s unique creation of a careful poetics of control in this poem which is developed and perfected in *Hints* sixteen years later. By first visually constructing slavery poetically, linking lines of verse like the bonds of chains in “Slavery,” and creating visual and physical restrictions with these links, More establishes her own poetic control and rhetorical mastery of abolitionist discourse about slavery. In *Hints*, this rhetorical control escapes More’s contemporaries, who, while they attempt to conflate their complaint with the physical restraint forced on African slaves, instead create invisible chains – or false control – to which they cling, inflicting an imagined physical restraint on themselves that only emphasizes their intellectual limitations. Abusing the rhetoric of control, then, leads to the breakdown of cognitive capability. More establishes that an effective rhetoric and poetics with which one may discuss

physical restraint and its mental impact, specifically any issue regarding slavery,
is created by a self-conscious form that is both thematically inspired and
controlled by conventional restraints.

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