The Spark of Kindness: The Rhetoric of Abolitionist Action in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

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Fugitive slave Harriet Jacobs vents, in her 1853 letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune*, her frustration with the inaction of American Christians against the institution of slavery. She writes: "Oh ye Christians, while your arms are extended to receive the oppressed of all nations, while you exert every power of your soul to assist them to raise funds, put weapons in their hands . . . while Americans do all this, they forget the millions of slaves they have at home, bought and sold under the very peculiar circumstance" (Jacobs *Norton Critical* 170). In this text, Jacobs describes the American Christians as physically embracing, emotionally laboring, monetarily supporting, and actively protecting unknown peoples in foreign countries, while the wretched American slaves do not benefit from the same charity. Focusing specifically on the tendency of American Christians to offer help to everyone except to slaves at home, Jacobs argues that slavery endures in America, not because the horrors of slavery are unknown (even by the North), but because these Christians refuse to act benevolently towards those enslaved around them.

Eight years later and now free, Jacobs continued her call for action in her self-published memoir of her anguish in slavery under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. In the preface, she writes that she wishes her narrative to "*arouse* the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South" (3, emphasis mine). She also uses the paratext of her narrative as a call to action, including a verse from Isaiah: "*Rise up*, ye women that are at ease!" (Jacobs 1, emphasis mine). Just as in the letter, her language underscores her narrative's objective and her answer for defeating slavery: positive abolitionist agency from the white women in the North. However, in order to persuade her audience to take up her cause, Jacobs does not structure the narrative around classical notions of pity or nineteenth-century discourses on sympathy as might be anticipated, but rather

on kindness, the only emotion that invokes real action. Furthermore, Jacobs displays throughout the narrative the limits of abolitionist action based on pity or sympathy and constructed solely on an ocular (real or imagined) identification with the slave; it can never provide the activist response that she desires. By writing her story, Jacobs offers up her own "imperfect effort in behalf of my persecuted people" (3). Famously reluctant to publicize her own trauma, Jacobs models for her audience her version of true abolitionist practice, both in the construction of her own narrative and through the story she crafts within it: benevolent action undertaken via kindness.

While scholars have noted how Jacobs seemingly constructs her text to elicit sympathy/pity as well as how she seeks to subvert the necessity of these emotions, they continue to disagree on why Jacobs does so and whether she is effective in her attempts to elicit sympathy from her readers. Moreover, these arguments have overlooked the importance of kindness to Jacobs's text. I argue that Jacobs solicits pity and sympathy while she shows their limits, thus providing readers with examples to emulate that require neither emotion. By focusing on Jacobs's use and reliance on kindness, I suggest a third way of reading her narrative that does not fall into simple dichotomies. While it is true that Jacobs often describes the sympathy of white women characters and directly asks her readers to pity her throughout the narrative, she ultimately demonstrates their failings, offering kindness as a solution for fulfilling the purpose for her memoir that she establishes in her paratext and preface. Simply put, neither sympathy nor pity can drive white women readers to action; therefore, neither can be used as the basis of Jacobs's abolitionist rhetoric. To make this case, I will first examine how Jacobs refutes pity and sympathy as meaningful calls to action, before showing how she provides the readers a model for action through kindness.

Terms and usage

Even though in contemporary usage, sympathy, pity and, to an extent, kindness seem interchangeable, Aristotle delineates each as a separate emotion with distinct purposes. Using his precise definitions, along with those of Adam Smith, I will demonstrate how these differences are necessary for grasping the rhetorical decisions that underscore Jacobs's abolitionist project. In *Rhetoric,* Aristotle carefully defines pity as a rationally and morally constructed emotion that differs

from sympathy. In Book 2, Section 8, of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle provides his definition. He writes:

> Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon…we feel pity when the danger is near ourselves. Also we pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also. (77)

According to Aristotle, pity is felt most strongly by those who witness the sufferer, resemble the viewer in status, and fear that the same fate will befall them soon. Pity relies on a specific type of knowledge about the sufferer. Certain factors must be in place before a decision can be made by the viewer to render the sufferer acceptable to receive pity. Pity is, therefore, not a spontaneous reaction to suffering, but a cognitive decision to feel bad for the anguish of another. Notably, Aristotle makes sure to distinguish between the emotion of the sufferer and the experience of the viewer. Once spectators see someone in distress, they do not share the literal agony of the sufferer; rather, spectators experience pity as a unique pain in response to the suffering of the other. The affective response of pity is not, consequently, identical to the negative emotion of the wounded party. Viewers experience hurt (pain as cognitively rendered), but not the literal agony of the victim. Notably, once viewers resolve to feel pity, Aristotle does not define or describe any action that takes place on the part of the observers to help relieve the burden of the sufferer. Instead he analyzes how the suffering of the other depends on the rational recognition of viewers. Pity, thus, is a selfish emotion that requires inward reflection but no physical action on the part of any viewer.

Importantly, Aristotle does not see pity and sympathy as the same emotion. He writes: "It is our duty both to feel sympathy and pity for unmerited distress" (79). While Aristotle here grammatically links these ideas, he, in fact, rhetorically denotes their inherent differences. The viewer is to feel "both" emotions, inferring that sympathy and pity are not the same sentiment, but must be experienced at different times; they are therefore not interchangeable. David Konstan explains: "Pity, as Aristotle conceives it, is not the same thing as raw sympathy for pain,

for it requires a moral judgment ("Affect and Emotion"). However, in the nineteenth century, sympathy takes on a different cognitive dimension and places greater emphasis on the imaginative energy of viewers to the degree where they mentally replace the sufferer. As Edmund Burke writes that "sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man and affected in many respects as he is affected" (Vol. 24 Part 2). Similarly, Adam Smith states that "by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him" (13-14). Consequently, according to Burke and Smith, the spectator no longer feels pain (pity) at the misery of another; instead the spectator experiences, in many respects, the pain the sufferer truly feels. Whereas Aristotle's pity keeps the spectator and the viewer in separate spaces, nineteenth-century sympathy requires the viewer to imaginatively displace the sufferer. This sympathy does not require the victim's moral worthiness or the rational cognition of the viewer, for even "the greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it" (Smith 13-14). However, like pity: "it is important that sympathy be something that one feels rather than something that one does" (Armstrong 14). Analogous to pity's inert state, sympathy places the emphasis on spectators without requiring them to relieve the victim of any anguish. While pity requires the viewers' rational decision, sympathy can be granted to all. Nevertheless, neither pity nor sympathy as emotions create or motivate action in viewers.

However, Aristotle *does* describe an emotion that is defined by action taken to help those in need. In his *Rhetoric* directly before the section on pity in Book 2, Chapter 7, Aristotle defines kindness:

> Kindness-under the influence of which a man is said to 'be kind' may be defined as helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped. Kindness is great if shown to one who is in great need, or who needs what is important and hard to get, or who needs it at an important and difficult crisis; or if the helper is the only, the first, or the chief person to give the help. (Aristotle 76*)*

Unlike pity, Aristotle does not list any qualifications or mental exercises

for the sufferer to receive kindness such as identification or imagination. Rather, because kindness should be given "not in return for anything," identification cannot influence the giver's decision to extend this charity (Aristotle 76). Furthermore, kindness cannot come from voyeuristic sympathy because it focuses on meeting the demand of the other rather than fixating on one's own experience. It must be noted that Aristotle uses the Greek word, Χάρις (charis) that, though it has been most often translated as kindness, it more precisely means an act of grace (Strong's Concordance). In theological terms, grace is God's unmerited favor towards sinners, and it is offered without a required response except acceptance. In this way, charis/kindness, unlike pity or sympathy, is essentially an action without expectations instead of an emotion with stipulations. As noted, Jacobs tacitly rejects the Aristotelian construct of pity as insufficient to elicit action instead, as I will show, arguing for kindness as a more meaningful call to engagement and agency. The participatory agency of kindness allows Jacobs to provide white women readers with a model of abolitionist practices which do not rely on pity or sympathy and does not need to rely on "shared" experiences between black and white women.

The failures of pity via identification

Initially, Jacobs's efforts to evoke pity from her audience clearly align with Aristotle's philosophy of pity via identification. Aristotle specifies to whom pity should be directed: "We pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also. Here too we have to remember the general principle that what we fear for ourselves excites our pity when it happens to others" (92). Pity is dependent on this identification with the sufferer because it is based on the fear of similar circumstances. Martha Nussbaum explains: "Pity and fear are closely connected: what we pity when it happens to another, we fear lest it should happen to ourselves" (87). To create feelings of pity in her audience, Jacobs relies on multiple levels of identification between herself and her female readers,

that is, identification as mothers and through a presumed common desire to follow cultural and religious morals. Yet, as Jacobs ultimately shows, even with these multiple levels of potential identification, a white woman can never truly identify with a black slave woman. In other words, Jacobs draws lines of potential identification only to illustrate the gap that exists between a northern white woman's life and a southern black woman. Accordingly, Jacobs's audience of northern women will always have limits to their pity because they will never truly experience the trauma of slavery and thus will never experience that fear. "Only by *experience* can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations," Jacobs writes in the preface (3 emphasis mine). Similarly, explaining her emotion after saying goodbye to her daughter, Jacobs, as Linda, says: "I heard the gate close after her, with such feeling as only a slave mother can *experience*" (Jacobs 116 emphasis mine). The pain suffered by Jacobs at having to send her daughter away to try keeping her from a similar fate cannot be understood except by those mothers who are enslaved and not by those who just have children. The term "slave mother" performs exactly the doubleness I am proposing occurs in these instances of pity: Jacobs suggests common ground and difference all at once, with difference ultimately winning. Hence, the pity Jacobs tries to elicit in her audience is always imperfect because the identification necessary for pity is always impossible. Jacobs nonetheless continues to set up potential lines of identification to ultimately subvert them.

Indeed, Jacobs's experiences are largely viewed through this lens of "a poor Slave Mother" to try to establish the deepest level of identification. In a letter to her friend Amy Post, Jacobs writes: "I . . . come to you just as I am a poor Slave Mother—not to tell you what I have heard but what I have seen—and what I have suffered" (Yellin xv). In her narrative, the violence against the slave mother's children and her inability to protect them are established as overarching reasons for white mothers to identify with the female slave's experience. Jacobs generally describes the terror of a slave mother's life saying: "I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction-block. She knew that *some* would be taken from her; but they took *all*. . . . She wrung her hands in anguish and exclaimed, 'Gone! All gone! Why *don't* God kill me?' I had no words werewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrences" (17). In a more personal example,

describing the selling of her uncle and addressing her reader directly, Jacobs writes: "Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons to his wrists; could you have heard her heart-rending groans and seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face vainly pleading for mercy; could you have witnesses that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, *Slavery is damnable!*" (23). In these instances, whether she is sixteen or sixty-two, it is assumed that white mothers will see the moral travesty inherent in the act of separating a mother from her children. Because of the misconceptions about the slave woman's humanity, Jacobs must establish that black women love their children as much as white women. In so doing, she avers that mothers, regardless of race, want to protect their children from harm as well as expressing the pain that all mothers feel when they believe their children's life may be in danger.

However, a slave mother's experience of loving her children is always tainted in ways that importantly distinguish it from those experiences of white women. Describing her own role as mother, Jacobs says: "I loved to watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished that he might die in infancy" (54). Although motherhood is a shared state with her audience, slave mothers cannot love and raise their children as white women do. Linda's relationship to and with her children is always marked by the perpetual fear that she will lose them. Accordingly, Jacobs uses motherhood to demonstrate the limits of pity via identification.

In chapter three, for instance, she re-creates the communal experience of motherhood on a holiday:

> O, you happy free women, **contrast** *your* New Year's Day with that of the poor bond woman. . . . Children bring their little offerings and raise their rosy lips for a caress. They are your own, and no hand but that of death can take them from you. . . . But to the slave mother New Year's Day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns . . . she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies. (Jacobs 16-17 bold emphasis mine)

While Jacobs definitely uses motherhood here to establish a

commonality with white women readers, the experience of slavery, specifically as a woman and a mother, offers horrors that one cannot truly comprehend without having lived that life. By asking her readers to contrast their typical holiday with a slave mother's, Jacobs highlights the impossibility of any real identification and, consequently, the impossibility of the creation of pity. In other words, because white women do not need to live with this fear, pity, in its Aristotelian sense, cannot be produced in the reader.

Another way Jacobs seeks to relate to her gendered audience is by explaining her desire to protect her body from unwanted sexual advances by committing sexual "sin." For most of her slave life, Jacobs faces verbal and physical abuse as well as sexual harassment from her master, Dr. Flint. To keep her master from raping her, Jacobs has children out of wedlock with another white man in the town, against the express order of her master. Anticipating the moral judgment of her audience, Jacobs writes:

> O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor and desolate slave girl too severely!...I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances…I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon of Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. (48)

This passage parallels Jacobs's exposition on motherhood, in both construction and content. The contrast of her experience to that of her white women readers allows Jacobs to highlight the insurmountable differences between them. While Jacobs acknowledges that sexual purity should be what all women (regardless of race) strive to uphold and protect, the circumstances of slavery present different requirements for the judgement of the slave women than white women. Slave women remain entirely vulnerable to sexual violence; white women are largely protected by society and law. Just like motherhood, then, a slave woman's morality remains so fundamentally different from a freed woman's that a white woman cannot possibly identify with the horrors facing Linda in slavery and cannot therefore truly pity her.

Though she expresses her desire to protect herself from the unwanted sexual advances of her master in order to connect with the

morality of her audience, Jacobs's decision to specifically use sex as a means of protection undermines that attempt. Precisely because Aristotle's philosophy on pity through identification relies on the belief that the victim suffers unjustly, Jacobs's sexual promiscuity hinders identification. Aristotle writes: "Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it" (77). Thus, while Jacobs uses her desire to protect her body from the unwanted sexual advances of her master, her choice to shield herself by having sex outside of wedlock threatens that identification.

Even though Jacobs draws parallels between her life as a woman and mother and a white woman's experience as woman and mother, slavery corrupts points of contact. The trauma and violence of slavery make the black female's life truly unknowable to the northern white woman; slavery cannot be fully understood without having been fully lived. While she can communicate all that she has seen and suffered, Jacobs's readers will only observe a facsimile of the terrors of the institution of slavery; she constantly reminds them of this tension. By juxtaposing the ways these white women can and cannot identify with her, Jacobs rhetorically demonstrates the limits of pity as causative for action. Because identification is impossible, pity as a rationally and cognitively rendered emotion cannot be evoked. By showing how pity cannot be created by identification with the victim, Jacobs shows how abolitionist action will need another source to move to action other than pity. Pity has not and will not be enough to generate the true anti-slavery response translated into action that Jacobs craves from the reader. As we will see, sympathy has similar limitations in producing real action.

The limitations of sympathy via imagination

In addition to classical notions of pity, Jacobs responds to her contemporary moment's use of sympathy via the spectacle of the suffering black body to try to motivate Christians to end slavery. As mentioned, during the nineteenth century, sympathy is experienced primarily as a practice of the imagination. Differing from Aristotle's notion of pity, sympathy was defined by the viewer's ability to mentally recreate a similar pain as the sufferer. Smith elaborates:

The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from

> the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation…What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moanings of her infant that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of what it suffers, she joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. (17)

To understand the suffering of her baby, a mother must mentally construct an idea of her child's feelings of confusion and lack of agency. However, this process places the emphasis not on the suffering child, but on the mother's imagination: "the spectator occupies the position of subject in relation to the victim as object" (Armstrong 14). This structure dangerously occludes the damage and violence done to the wounded party. Using Smith's definition in the context of Jacobs's work suggests, women, specifically mothers, were encouraged to place themselves or their family directly in the place of the slave if the "correct" emotions upon viewing suffering did not occur. Via the sight of slaves being beaten or slave children being sold, good Christian women were to attempt to actively feel the pain of the black body. Ultimately, abolitionists argued that this imaginative identification would produce sympathy for their cause. But, this spectacle of suffering eliminates the body and humanity of the slave altogether, as Saidiya Hartman famously argues: "The effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering more visible and intelligible . . .empathy is double-edged, for in making the other's suffering's one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration" (19). Yet, this attempt by white women to sympathize with the condition of the slave, causes white females to subsume the black body through their imaginative process. This method of sympathetic spectacle summons "the repressive underside of morality that insists upon the other as a mirror of the self" since "in order to recognize suffering one must substitute the self for the other" (Hartman 20). Sympathy, created through imagination, allows white women to concentrate on their own ability to emote; this voyeuristic sympathy leads not to action, but inaction, and to an indulgent self-

gratification due to presumed moral superiority. As with pity, the audience of white women readers is Jacobs's focus. And it is precisely the shared state of motherhood that she demonstrates cannot be understood by imagining life under slavery.

Jacobs cautions all readers against using her text as a way of imaginatively replacing her character Linda. Ending her narrative with this emphasis, she says: "Reader, if you have never been a slave, you cannot imagine the acute sensation of suffering at my heart" (160). This conclusion limits the attempts of the reader to sympathetically supersede the narrator through the act of reading about Linda's life under slavery. Through reading, these white women readers might attempt to perform the abjection of the black body, if they endeavor to imaginatively place themselves within Jacobs's tale. Jacobs nonetheless restricts this practice by counteracting the invitation of her readers to take Linda's place, with her frequent reminders that slavery cannot be grasped by mere fancy or even by reading her book.

At another key moment, Jacobs similarly pushes back at the ritual of sympathetic imagination by specifically referring to mothers and slave mothers, this time in the context of pleasure. Describing her happiness at being re-united with her son after a lengthy separation, Linda says: "O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a slave mother" (142). Jacobs here restricts the reader's ability to mentally relive this scene and qualifies the level on which her readers will be able to understand her emotions, both positive and negative. Sympathetic imagination cannot produce a pain that matches the slave mother's life; neither can it produce the pleasures attendant upon that pain. Just as pity via identification fails to create change, sympathy via imagination only internalizes and reorients the focus of the white women back to themselves and their own children—what Hartman refers to as "the consideration of the self that occurs at the expense of the slave's suffering, and the violence of identification" (20). This practice gives the sense that the imaginative play is actually positive work, when in the material world nothing is accomplished to aid the victim of slavery. No abolitionist action is generated from this emotion.

Furthermore, Jacobs illustrates through Mrs. Flint, the jealous slave mistress, how sympathy can be corrupted. According to Jacobs, Mrs. Flint knew of her husband's sexual preference for slave women

before he started harassing Linda, and it is from Linda that Mrs. Flint seeks answers about her husband's conduct (29). As Linda narrates this scene, she believes that Mrs. Flint feels bad because of Linda's pain,

> As I went on with my account her color changed frequently, she wept, and sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief…but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr, but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. (Jacobs 31)

Although Mrs. Flint hears Linda's account of her husband's mistreatment of her, it is not Linda that Mrs. Flint feels sympathy for, but rather for her own situation as Jacobs repeatedly reiterates that it was Mrs. Flint's own pain and embarrassment for which she cried. Linda's story, which should have caused positive action on the part of Mrs. Flint, merely makes Mrs. Flint consider her own mistreatment and pain rather than Linda's agony and suffering. Through Mrs. Flint, Jacobs illustrates how sympathy becomes selfish and can reorient one's perspective back to their own situation.

While Jacobs does outline several instances of people who were sympathetic to her, their sympathy does not lead these white characters to action. Trying to escape Dr. Flint, Linda tells her situation to a white woman in town: "the lady listened with kindly sympathy . . . but it was all to no purpose" (Jacobs 35). She also mentions her lover, Mr. Sands, in a similar manner: "he expressed a great deal of sympathy, and a wish to aid me" (Jacobs 48). However, Mr. Sands lies, and does not set free their children when he says he will, instead giving his daughter to a cousin as a maid (Jacobs 118). While these white characters verbally express sympathy for Linda's situation, it does not drive them to try to alleviate her pain or better her circumstances. In these instances, Jacobs carefully separates the emotion of sympathy from any actual action. That action only occurs via kindness.

Kindness as true abolitionist practice

While Jacobs spends much of her narrative depicting the horrors of life in slavery, she also describes the seemingly unexpected instances of positive action with several white women behaving in a

manner that seems to answer Jacobs's appeal in the beginning of her narrative. Even Jean Fagan Yellin questions these instances:

> We expect to encounter the fiendish neighboring female slaveholder and the jealous mistress. How are we to explain the presence of the white women who defect from the slaveholders' ranks to help Linda Brent? How can we account for the lady who, at the request of the young slave's grandmother, tries to stop her master from molesting her? Even more strange, how can we account for the female slaveholder who hides the runaway female slave for a month? How can we account for the northern employer who entrusts Linda Brent with the baby, so she can flee slavecatchers by traveling as a nursemaid rather than as a fugitive? (xxxiv)

Consequently, the impact of Jacobs's text comes not from the readers' ability to identify with her position nor their attempt to identify with her experience as such. Rather, her juxtaposition of identification and disidentification shows readers that what truly drives positive action is neither pity nor sympathy. Kindness is what drives positive action, and it is kindness that explains why several white women throughout the narrative act in ways that seem to answer Jacobs's appeal in the beginning of her narrative. As she demonstrates the limits of pity and sympathy, Jacobs provides a model for her readers of the type of activism she desires to see them enact, which she presents as a way for Christian women to prove the reality of their faith: the answer is kindness.

In the nineteenth century, Evangelicalism emphasized the necessity to verify one's faith through one's actions; accordingly, Evangelical Christians were taught that "the glorifying of God with one's talents was to be done mainly through beneficent action" (Taylor 395). Furthermore, this Christianity then promised "extrinsic rewards for altruism in the hereafter" (Taylor 398). For example, in a sermon about the Good Samaritan published in 1885, entitled "Who is My Neighbor?", Reverend A. M'miel argues that acts of kindness reveal a person's true state of heart. Remarking on the hypocrisy of the priest who passes by the hurt Jewish man in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, he says: "All his religion was in his head, not in his heart" (*The Christian Recorder*). He then goes on to describe the actions of the Samaritan saying,

> The Samaritan did not pull a long manuscript out of his pocket and preached [*sic*] a long sermon to the young man, nor, as some people think that a long roll of manuscript and long sermon are all needed. No, no. We need more hands, more feet to carry the gospel by the *acts of kindness*. He did not go on to show the poor man that science was better than true religion or a long address on geology; no; what he wanted was help. (*The Christian Recorder* emphasis mine)

It is important to note that Reverend M'miel does not focus on the need of the Good Samaritan to identify or imagine what the victim suffers; rather, he underscores the actions taken to relieve the suffering. He also delineates between sympathy and kindness, reminiscent of Aristotle's definitions discussed above. Reverend M'miel says: "Well, what do they need? you ask. I will answer; sympathy, tenderness, gentleness and kindness" (*The Christian Recorder*). While he acknowledges the presence of sympathy, Reverend M'miel identifies what indeed constitutes an act of kindness—not merely empty words spoken to the air or hollow words written down on paper, but a physical deed, "acts of kindness."

In her narrative, Jacobs also refers to this biblical story, describing the Reverend Pike and other white slave owners as: "long-faced Christians, who see wounded Samaritans, and pass by on the other side" (60). Notably, in her example, Jacobs refashions the biblical parable and makes the Samaritan the injured party instead of the Jewish man. In other words, she recasts the outsider (the black slave) as the person now in need of help. Jacobs thus highlights the hypocrisy of Christians who continually pass by or, worse even, cause the suffering of those they consider outside their social circle. While the original moral suggests that everyone deserves help, it is nevertheless the Samaritan, the societal outsider, who assists the accepted member of society, the Jewish man. Jacobs's reversal illustrates that a wounded outsider has no one to turn to help him, emphasizing the need for her audience of northern white women to help the suffering southern slave women.

Jacobs presents examples of white women acting with kindness in ways that prove their true religious beliefs, and in actions that her readers can emulate. Consequently, Jacobs delineates between Christians who are sincere and those who merely feel pity and sympathy and evince no acts of kindness to her or other slaves. For example,

Jacobs describes a young female slave owner who "had some reality in her religion. She taught her slaves to lead pure lives, and wished them to enjoy the fruit of their own industry. *Her* religion was not a garb put on for Sunday, and laid aside till Sunday returned again" (Jacobs 44). Furthermore, before her death "to the last, she rendered every kindness to the slaves that her unfortunate circumstances permitted," which included freeing certain slaves in her power (Jacobs 45). What makes this young woman different is that her actions on behalf of her slaves fully embody the faith she claims. In another example, Linda recalls the moment when her grandmother was sold by Dr. Flint because of her advanced age. However, it turns out her grandmother is bought and freed by an elderly white woman. Linda remarks of the white woman "she could neither read nor write; and when the bill was made out, she signed it with a cross. But what consequence was that when she had a big heart overflowing with human kindness" (Jacobs 14). Linda judges this white woman, not by her status or literacy, but by the kindness of her actions that freed her grandmother from the tyranny of Dr. Flint. Through these two examples, Linda links true Christian kindness with aiding or endeavoring to free the slave.

Jacobs also takes the time to narrate specific instances of kindness directed towards her experiences in slavery. In order to escape from her master, Linda relies on a family friend, a white woman who owns slaves herself. The unnamed benefactress hides Linda in her house for a month; she cares for Linda physically and emotionally and even lies directly to Dr. Flint about where Linda is hiding. Linda describes her thankfulness saying: "How my heart overflowed with gratitude! Words choked my throat; but I could have kissed the feet of my benefactress. For that deed of Christian womanhood, may God forever bless her!" (Jacobs 85). Jacobs does not cite reasons of pity or sympathy that might underlie the activities of this family friend, but rather she emphasizes her benefactress' deed as the efforts of a true Christian woman. What distinguishes these white women from others in Jacobs's narrative is how they behave towards slaves in general and, particularly, toward Jacobs—their benevolent action sets them apart.

Perhaps the best example of true Christian kindness is Mrs. Bruce in New York. Once Linda arrives in New York City, she still faces the terror of the Fugitive Slave Law, since Dr. Flint, who continues to hunt her, can legally bring her back to slavery. After some

time, Jacobs obtains employment with Mrs. Bruce, a prominent white woman. When Linda receives word that slavecatchers have tracked her down, she tells Mrs. Bruce of her predicament:

> I immediately informed Mrs. Bruce of my danger, and she took prompt measures for my safety. My place as nurse could not be supplied immediately, and this generous, sympathizing lady proposed that I should carry her child away . . . how few mothers would have consented to have one of their own babes become a fugitive, for the sake of a poor, hunted nurse. . . . When I spoke of her sacrifice she was making, in depriving herself of her dear baby, she replied: "it is better for you to have the baby with you, Linda; for if they get on your track, they will be obliged to bring the child to me, and then, if there is a possibility of saving you, you shall be saved." (Jacobs 158)

The extraordinary action of Mrs. Bruce, which allows her to place her own child with Linda in order to secure her safety, is almost inconceivable. For although Linda describes Mrs. Bruce as "sympathizing," she stresses not the emotion of Mrs. Bruce, but her action. Mrs. Bruce meets Linda's great need with an incredible expression of kindness, placing Linda's safety even above her own child's well-being. In this way, Mrs. Bruce acts as a mother towards Linda, reaching out to help without expecting anything in return, for Linda has nothing to give.

Jacobs describes the actions and emotions of Mrs. Bruce similarly throughout the end of her narrative. Linda says: "Mrs. Bruce was a kind and gentle lady and proved a true and sympathizing friend" (Jacobs 138). She remarks on "the considerate kindness of her excellent mother [Mrs. Bruce]" (Jacobs 143). Furthermore, Linda adds: "She has been a true and sympathizing friend," calls her "this generous, sympathizing lady" and states that "Mrs. Bruce and every member of her family were exceedingly kind to me" (Jacobs 155, 158, 159). While Jacobs does refer to Mrs. Bruce as sympathetic to her position as a fugitive slave, she always qualifies the authenticity of her sympathy with her actions. Put differently, Mrs. Bruce does not allow her sympathy to be dictated by her imagination, but rather she focuses on what Linda needs and seeks to fill that gap with her actions. It is Mrs. Bruce's kindness to Linda that proves her true Christianity and the authenticity of her sympathy.

Perhaps the most impactful example of Mrs. Bruce's actions

is when she offers to purchase Linda's freedom. Initially, Linda rejects this idea, saying "I felt grateful for the kindness that prompted this offer, but the idea was not so pleasant to me as might be expected" (Jacobs 162). However, Mrs. Bruce goes against Linda's wishes and purchases her freedom anyway. Aristotle describes such acts as real kindnesses: "Things that cause friendship are: doing kindnesses; doing them unasked; and not proclaiming the fact when they are done, which shows that they were done for our own sake and not for some other reason" (8). Mrs. Bruce explains that she did not buy Linda's freedom to abuse or use her for her own personal gain, but that "I should have done just the same, if you had been going to sail to California to-morrow" (Jacobs 161). This kindness deepens the relationship of Linda and Mrs. Bruce and the latter kindness to her creates a deep bond of friendship between the two women. Linda explains:

> God had raised me up a friend among strangers, who had bestowed on me the precious, long-desired boon. Friend! It is a common word, often lightly used. Like other good and beautiful things, it may be tarnished by carless handling; but when I speak of Mrs. Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred. (Jacobs 164)

Friendship is not possible without kindness and the proof of Mrs. Bruce's action is the ensuing relationship that develops between them. Therefore, Mrs. Bruce perfectly exemplifies the discourse that makes Jacobs's narrative successful rhetorically. While subverting pity via identification and sympathy via imagination, Jacobs provides her readers an example to follow that requires neither. Through the sacrificial actions of Mrs. Bruce, a northern white woman, readers, who are themselves northern white women, might picture themselves acting as Mrs. Bruce has done. White women readers do not have to identify with Mrs. Bruce to act because they *are* essentially a type of Mrs. Bruce, or "a fictional representation of virtuous action" if they act (O'Connell 39). The difference lies in their response (or lack thereof) to the needs of the black slave women—real Christian women act with kindness. Jacobs masterfully subverts the notions of identification through pity and sympathy via imagination, using them to get her readers' attention while simultaneously showing their shortcomings.

Reading Jacobs's narrative through the trope of kindness rather than sympathy or pity allows for a rhetoric of abolitionist action

that does not depend on a white reader's identification or imagination for her to act on behalf of those in slavery. This is an important shift in discussions surrounding slave narratives and even current political movements (Black Lives Matter) where the rhetoric for action is often found in relating the worthiness of black people to the experiences of white people. But as Jacobs so powerfully demonstrates, action need not and should not be grounded in pity or sympathy, because these emotions merely reflect onto the white reader or viewer. Rather, anti-racist action, understood as kindness, means that contemporary white activists and Jacobs's northern white female audience should respond because it is necessary, not because they think they relate to or understand those whom they might help.

Hence, the reader of Jacobs's time—and readers of today—should follow the example of the various women who aid Jacobs throughout the narrative. These women do not imagine themselves in Jacobs's place or condition only to subsume her. Instead, they see Jacobs's pain—recognizing her need without having to have lived it. This choice to support, figuratively and literally, transfigures their affect from stagnant and abject to force and freedom. Praising the Christians who act thus, Linda says: "There are noble . . . women who plead for us, striving to help those who cannot help themselves. God bless them! God give them strength and courage to go on! God bless those, every where, who are laboring to advance the cause of humanity!" (28). Jacobs's goal for her narrative is always for women to move, to perform, to demonstrate kindness directly to these slave women. The "flame of compassion (kindness)" is an active, vibrant, participatory agency. Through the experiences of these white women, Jacobs shows readers how they should and could act. While Jacobs's lays out the limits of identification in pity and fights against selfish sympathy, she articulates how acts of kindness can better serve the suffering slave woman and enact her freedom.

Notes

[1] See Robyn R. Warhol and Chiou-rung Deng for specific readings of Jacobs's use of sympathy and pity. Both authors offer interesting and helpful perspectives on how Jacobs does and does not appeal to sympathy in her work.

[2] David Konstan clarifies: "Pity differs from a response such

as surprise precisely in the degree to which it necessarily involves judgment and other cognitive operations that are learned and socially conditioned, and it accordingly demands an approach that takes account of beliefs and values as well as of physiological excitation" (*Pity Transformed* 8).

[3]Elizabeth Belfiore comments: "pity and fear affect emotions unlike themselves" (261).

[4]Konstan adds: "Greek pity, then, and modern sympathy . . . are not identical sentiments. Sympathy is a capacity to put oneself in the position of another." He goes on to cite Burke and Smith as examples saying: "Such descriptions of sympathy have little to do with Greek pity, and its origins lie elsewhere" ("Affect").

[5] Pity and sympathy require mental work on the part of the viewer. Aristotle's pity places boundaries on the ability of the viewer, while Burke and Smith invite a form of emotional bonding. However, Aristotle's pity which he bases on the moral conduct and unmerited nature of the evil against the sufferer warrants its own criticisms.

[6] Additionally, Jacobs conditions the slave mother's spiritual experience writing: "Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery" (54). Not only are Linda's literal experiences tainted by slavery, but spiritual ones as well.

[7] Jacobs even cites an example of how another black woman cannot recognize her emotional distress because she does not have children. Linda says: "She had never had little ones clasp their arms round their neck...how could she realize my feelings?" (Jacobs 86). Therefore, Jacobs shows how being a mother transcends racial distinctions. Additionally, towards the end of the narrative, Jacobs calls out Mrs. Hobbs as a mother who should have treated her better instead of attempting to keep her daughter from her: "How *could* she, who knew by experience the strength of a mother's love . . . how *could* she look me in the face, while she thrust such a dagger into my heart" (137).

[8] Jacobs delineates between pity and decision to act twice in her narrative saying: "Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader!" (Jacobs 49). Later on, in a letter to her grandmother, she writes, "pity and forgive me" (Jacobs 107). In both of these examples, Jacobs distinguishes between the emotion of pity and a response she hopes

will come in addition to that pity. Pity alone cannot create or drive her readers or her grandmother to act in the way that Jacobs needs. In Mark 9:22, a man asks Jesus to take the demon out of his son saying: "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jacobs's appeal mirrors the biblical language.

[9] See Elizabeth Clark "The Sacred Rights of the Weak": Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America" and Sally Gomma "Writing to 'Virtuous' and 'Gentle" Readers: The Problem of Pain in Harriet Jacobs's 'Incidents' and Harriet Wilson's 'Sketches'" for excellent examinations into nineteen-century use of pain and spectacle.

[10] Conversely, abolitionists during Jacobs's life built directly on new discourses of sympathy when trying to get readers to feel pity for the slaves. Clark observes: "In antebellum thought, sympathy was a complex process in which the observer's willed attentiveness to another's suffering gave rise to an intuitive empathic identification with the other's experiences. The habit of sympathy was a part of many Christians' religious practice, a habit that abolitionists drew on in their presentation of the suffering of slaves" (456). This rhetoric of sympathy dangerously encourages the viewer to assume that her fanciful imaginings equal the horrors of reality.

[11] While Aristotle defines pity as negative emotion at the sight of another's suffering, sympathy according to Smith can be for positive or negative emotions. He writes: "Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (15). Jacobs displays how slavery breaks sympathy not only in painful circumstances, but also in the happy ones.

[12] As in the title of Reverend M'miel's sermon, Jacobs refers to that commandment and to the hypocrisy of her mistress who "did not recognize me as her neighbor" (11). This observation highlights the hypocrisy of the white women slave owners who called themselves Christians but failed to act in a way that would support their beliefs.

[13] Jacobs also gives multiple examples of supposed Christians who act terribly. Writing about the treatment of a cruel slave master to a slave woman ironically named Charity, Linda says: "He . . . boasted

the name Christian, though Satan never had a truer follower" (Jacobs 44). A consistent example of duplicitous Christian womanhood is Mrs. Flint. Jacobs writes: "She was a member of the church but partaking of the Lord's supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind" (14). Jacobs also describes Mrs. Flint saying: "I knew I could not expect any kindness" (31). These instances of the actions of true Christians and the inaction of false believers infers for the white women readers in the North what they should do if they want to be categorized as a real Christian; Jacobs's rhetorical message becomes true Christians act with kindness towards slaves, false ones do not.

[14] There are two different women referred to as Mrs. Bruce. The first Mrs. Bruce dies shortly after Linda works for her, but both Mrs. Bruce(s) are described similarly and together represent the type of action by white women Jacobs seeks to create through her narrative.

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