

Only the soldered mouth can tell:

Emily Dickinson, M. NourbeSe Philip and the Story that Cannot Be Told

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Note

This paper draws on my current book project. *Poetry and Bondage* is an attempt to write a new history of the lyric, through a focus on both formal and physical constraints. It consists of pairings, bringing together poets whose work seems in retrospect to be formative of ideas of what lyric can be, with contemporary poets who are writing in or against the paradigms those earlier poets established. I will speak a bit more about the project's theoretical frame when we meet. The following is excerpted from the third and fourth chapters of the book.

1. Is Heaven then a Prison?

In August 1870, the abolitionist and essayist Thomas Wentworth Higginson met Emily Dickinson for the first time. He describes how 'I heard an extremely faint and pattering footstep like that of a child, in the hall, and in glided, almost noiselessly, a plain, shy little person, the face without a single good feature'. There was an 'excess of tension, and of something abnormal' here; and Higginson's instinct told him 'that the slightest attempt at direct cross-examination would make her withdraw into her shell; I could only sit still and watch, as one does in the woods; I must name my bird without a gun.' His account of the visit was extremely influential in establishing the myth of Dickinson as the nun of Amherst: at once childish and sophisticated, reclusive and overflowing of boundaries, with a capacity for excess that belied her physical constraints, she must be managed carefully – 'handled with a Chain' (2620), as Dickinson herself would put it.¹

Dickinson's dialectical poetics of constraint and excess manifests itself in the topoi of the prisoner, the hunted animal, and the fugitive. She invokes the prison as a site of pathos, imagining

the whip and the treadmill in shockingly visceral terms. Much as in her Civil War poems, which naturalise military conflict and use its vocabulary to generate universalised lessons about mortality and providence, Dickinson extrapolates from these scenes of bondage to metaphysical reflections on the human condition. The fiction of constraint enables her to depict states of extreme repression, and its overcoming; bondage, prison and execution are at once Gothic literary tropes, and terrible emblems of absolute authority. They also provide opportunities to practice her explosive force. But this naturalisation of bondage also makes it seem as inevitable as death. When she encounters or responds to *actual* enslaved and imprisoned people, Dickinson tends instead to show an aristocratic disdain or whimsical racism that can be difficult to tolerate for those of us who love her verse.

Throughout her poems, Dickinson returns again and again to the figure of a bounded space, whether it is the cellar, the grave, spiders as ‘The Peasants inmates of the Air’ (Fr1174, 1870), a childhood ‘shut... in the Cold’ (Fr658, 1863), a life which feels as if it were ‘shaven, / And fitted to a frame, / And could not breathe without a key’ (Fr355, 1862), or the rituals of seclusion required before she can read a letter (Fr700, 1863). Sent to Boston for treatment on her eyes in 1864, she describes how the physician ‘does not let me go, yet I work in my Prison, and make Guests for myself’. She explains that the conditions would be deadly even for her dog: ‘Carlo did not come, because that he would die, in Jail’ (L90, early June 1864). Everything — life, death, the imagination and sociality — can resemble containment:

They shut me up in Prose —
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet —
Because they liked me “still” —

Still! Could themselves have peeped —
And seen my Brain — go round —
They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason — in the Pound —

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity —
And laugh — No more have I — (Fr445, 1862)

This poem, in 'short metre' (3-3-4-3), has a single line in each stanza which exceeds the constraints and sameness of the rest. The prosody underscores the speaker's distinction from her surroundings; the distinction between the body, shut up in the closet or in prose, kept still, and the wheeling brain which can escape it, like a bird looking down on captivity. The bird needs merely to choose freedom, and he can fly away; so can I, the poem alleges, opposing its imaginative or Stoic liberty to a repressive household. Martha Dickinson Bianchi claims her aunt Emily once mimed twisting an imaginary key in her door, saying, "Matty, child, no one could ever punish a Dickinson by shutting her up alone... It's just a turn — and freedom, Matty".²

Shut up in the quiet decorum of prose, Dickinson chose poetry as her mode of escape: she was able, the story goes, to transcend her constraints through the sovereign power of her imagination, which can expand until it 'touched the Universe', then slides back to nothing but a 'Speck upon a Ball' (Fr633, 1863). This is a Boethian conceit. And yet this claim to expansive liberty is contradicted elsewhere, where Dickinson confesses: 'I was the slightest in the House— / I took the smallest Room —'. She fears she might die 'noteless' (Fr473, 1862): without anyone noticing, but also without making a 'note', a sound or an inscription. Against that fear, the poem

stands as a testimony to her endurance. As Donne wrote, 'if no piece of chronicle we prove, / We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms.' The speaker who has been held in the closet of prose or the smallest room in the house transforms that constraint into the expansive space of the poem.

Sometimes Dickinson presents a speaker so transformed by captivity that she can no longer be released. 'A Prison gets to be a friend—' (Fr456, 1862) explores the means by which captivity becomes consciousness. The poem offers a sympathetic explanation of how the inmate is institutionalised, coming to misrecognise the cell through bodily repetition. The body familiarises the cell in which it is contained, and applies its idiosyncratic physical geometry to 'the narrow Round' measured by its pacing. The subject adjusts herself so thoroughly to the rhythms of institutional life that these displace her own; she converses with the planks of wood which line the floor, finding a sweetness in them which displaces Romantically inflected childhood memory ('As plashing in the Pools— / When Memory was a Boy—'). As a result, the 'Phantasm' of captivity becomes more real than dream of 'the Cheek of Liberty' or the hope of heavenly redemption — even though Dickinson sometimes wondered 'in a lonesome tone— / Is Heaven then a Prison?' (Fr933, 1865), and wrote to her sister-in-law after the death of her nephew Gilbert: 'Immured in Heaven! / What a Cell! / Let every Bondage be, / Thou sweetest of the Universe, / Like that which ravished thee!' (Fr1628, 1883). If Heaven is a prison, then there is no real destination for the Platonic or Boethian promise of escape; the soul escapes the fetters of the body, only to find itself in another, sweeter cell.

Held by the fetter of the page or in the closet of prose, Dickinson represents constraint as the crossroads of the literary, physical and metaphysical. She was drawn to imagery of dark, foreboding prisons and grisly executions, and frequently cites Byron's 'Prisoner of Chillon'.³ She described herself as a "Fenestrellan captive", referring to X. B. Saintine's *Picciola* (1849), in which the imprisoned protagonist nurtures a plant that sprouts between two paving stones (Habegger 224). She invokes prison as a site of romanticised suffering and heroism, an opportunity to perform

extreme love. The suffering of prisoners is a means of celebrating the pleasures of liberty which are appreciated only by the privileged few, the adepts, the artists, the rich. For exclusive friends, 'Bondage as Play — be sweet—/ Imprisonment — Content—' (Fr749, 1863). Her use of the figure of bondage and royalty to represent her bonds to her friends is reminiscent of other coterie poetry by women, such as Katherine Phillips, the seventeenth-century Royalist whose poems transfigured political defeat and loyalty to a dead king into coercive and controlling models of affective solidarity within her group of friends.⁴

...Prison is also a site of formal and physical repetition:

My Wheel is in the dark.

I cannot see a spoke—

Yet know it's dripping feet

Go round and round.

My foot is on the tide—

An unfrequented road

Yet have all roads

A "Clearing" at the end.

Some have resigned the Loom—

Some —in the busy tomb

Find quaint employ.

Some with new—stately feet

Pass royal thro' the gate,

Flinging the problem back, at you and I. (Fr61A, 1859)

This metrically clomping poem considers ‘the problem’ of eschatology that preoccupied Dickinson: what really happens after death? Oddly, the answer she seeks seems to be held in the feet, some of which pass ‘royal’ through death’s gate, others are forced to work even in the tomb. The ‘wheel’ may be a mill-wheel, but that it is driven round by ‘dripping feet’ also recalls the treadmills of nineteenth century prisons. The ‘Loom’ is the mechanism of repetitive domestic, industrial and prison labour. And while the ‘quaint employ’ in the ‘busy tomb’ echoes Marvell’s poem ‘To His Coy Mistress’, the Tombs were also well-known prisons in New York. It also important to recognise Dickinson’s exceptionalism here. Someone’s foot is bound to these machines, constructed to enforce punitive repetition and the semblance of labour stripped of the utility which might make it bearable; but *my* foot is ‘on the tide’ — an alternative, naturalised cycle of repetitious coming and going, an ‘unfrequented’ road, which distinguishes the speaker from the futile activities in which ‘some’ others spend their lives. But although she may celebrate her escape from repetition, that escape is temporary: even her ‘unfrequented road’ ends in the same ‘clearing’ as more heavily travelled ones. Dickinson’s carceral poems repeatedly threaten the subject, however exceptional, with recapture and return to the indistinction of the Majority.

2. True Poems Flee

I never hear the word ‘*Escape*’

Without a quicker blood!

A sudden expectation!

A flying attitude!

I never hear of prisons broad

By soldiers battered down—

But I tug, childish, at my bars—
Only to fail again! (Fr144, 1860)

Dickinson's prisons also offer a setting from which to stage her escapes. Even though she knows she is destined to 'fail again', her poems commemorate the repeated adrenal charge of a body, readied for flight simply by hearing the word 'escape'. The desire to escape is also a compulsion, driven by suffering, excitement, or claustrophobic panic. Dickinson was influenced by Emerson's description of the poems or songs which 'flying immortal from their mortal parent, are pursued by clamorous flights of censures...'.⁵ 'Fame is the one that does not stay —' (Fr1507, 1879);

To earn it by disdaining it
Is Fame's consummate Fee—
He loves what spurns him—
Look behind—He is pursuing thee— (Fr1445, 1877)

'Look behind', according to the poem's metrical scheme, should appear in line three; but it overruns that scheme, catching up with 'thee' who he pursues.

Metrically as well as thematically, Dickinson's poems often feel like they are outrunning the reader. 'True Poems flee—' (Fr1491, 1879), she wrote, spurning their creators and their readers' desire for captive sense, just as true poets refuse to be nabbed by publication. Fleeing Fame and spurning publication, Dickinson explained to Higginson: 'If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me—then—My Barefoot-Rank is better—' (L265, 7 June 1862). Fame is the property which comes to master the owner; its possession will force the poet to abandon her modest qualities and become other to herself. This echoes a conventional abolitionist argument,

that slavery corrupts the slave owner and renders him vicious; so does her invocation of the barefoot fugitive. To be barefoot might suggest a shameful poverty; but it is also to be ill equipped for running away. In Dickinson's figure it is the owner who cannot escape: she therefore chooses not to enter into this property relation with Fame, so as to avoid a relation of compulsion (I could not escape her) or perpetual pursuit (the longest day on the chase).

I'm moving towards the central argument of this chapter, which is that between her nervous disorders, personal seclusion, and the formal and literary mimesis of enclosure or bondage, is a third term — a broken middle, which Dickinson treads with great ambivalence. This is the space of a national conflict that she lived through and seemed reluctant to address directly, and it offers another perspective not just on Dickinson's famous lyric fugitivity, but on how that fugitivity became a model for lyric's resistance to closure and interpretation.

3. Hunted Animals

A wounded Deer — leaps highest —

I've heard the Hunter tell —

'Tis but the extasy of *death* —

And then the Brake is still!

The *smitten* Rock that gushes!

The *trampled* Steel that springs!

A Cheek is always redder

Just where the Hectic stings!

Mirth is the mail of Anguish —

In which it cautious Arm,

Lest Anybody spy the blood

And “you’re hurt” exclaim!’ (Fr181, 1860)

Ecstasy is a word Dickinson uses frequently. According to her lexicon, it is a seizure or crisis in which ‘the functions of the senses are suspended by the contemplation of some extraordinary or supernatural object’. The word’s etymology — ‘to put out of place’ — suggests a state of being ‘beside oneself with joy’, arrested by suffering or pleasure.⁶ As in John Donne’s poem ‘The Extasie’, where the lovers’ liquid souls flow between them while their bodies ‘like sepulchral statues lay’, ecstasy is a paradoxical state both of overflowing, overpowering feeling, and of a kind of paralysis: fugitivity and bondage. In this poem, the deeply sensual ecstasy of dying is expressed as a leap, a gush, a spring, and reddened cheek. The overflowing of ecstatic woundedness is contained by the jaunty short metre, an ironic container for anguish that not only protects the subject but also hides her wounds in a protective suit of ‘mail’. The dying, leaping deer is caught in the ‘brake’ of this form: the leaping tetrameter line ‘Tis but the extasy of *death*’ is surrounded on all sides by the bouncing trimeter.

Martha Dickinson Bianchi recalls that an engraving hung on the wall of the Dickinson parlour depicting ‘The Stag at Bay’.⁷ ‘A wounded Deer’ echoes the mythic transformation of Actaeon; it also calls up the feminised objects and sovereign authorities which the Petrarchan tradition, transmitted in English through Wyatt, associated with sexual desire and resistance. The hunter was a figure for antebellum authors of the masculine ideal, full of ‘prowess, self-control, and mastery’.⁸ In her reading of another of Dickinson’s hunting poems, ‘My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—’ (Fr764, 1863), Susan Howe refers to the New World as a place of destabilising freedom, where ‘communal identity has been lost, time lost, specificity of place lost, sure belief lost, purpose lost. These wayfarers are free—too free’.⁹ This place of loss as freedom releases the poet from the constraints of land ownership, of custom and sovereignty: ‘Who owns the woods? Freedom to roam

poetically means freedom to hunt' (80), as if poetic composition originates in a mastery which turns living things to prey. For Howe, Dickinson's fixity at home is less significant than her enjoyment of an idealised American liberty that allows her to 'hunt after some still unmutilated musical wild of the Mind's world' (105). Dickinson's metaphysical hunting takes possession of a wilderness that Howe depicts as a kind of pristine commons or paradisiacal birthright. If 'a poem is an invocation, rebellious return to the blessedness of beginning again, wandering free in pure process of forgetting and finding' (98), Dickinson embodies for Howe an originary national liberty, meandering through this *terra nullius* and making it her own.

It seems relevant that, at a family gathering in Amherst in 1883, a display of Dickinson family photographs and flags was set up, along with a rifle which Habegger notes 'was said to have been "used in killing Indians and wolves"' (84). As Betsy Erkkila has argued, Howe's Eurocentric mythopoetic readings of Dickinson displace 'the land as the actual site of historical struggle between indigenous cultures and their European conquerors with the symbolic wilderness of white mind and white writing'.¹⁰ Howe represents indigenous Americans as they appear in settler literature: as restless, warlike people who pose an existential threat to white settlers, rather than as displaced victims of genocide. She imagines Dickinson in a 'predatory old/New World of hunter and hunted', extracting from Dickinson's imagery a version of American creative liberty which depends on the erasure of indigenous peoples, who were both stewards of the land and prey of settler colonists.

There is another contemporary context in which the human was transmuted into an animal to be hunted, captured or killed: the Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, which 'gave slave agents an open hunting license to travel the free states to re-capture "escaped property"'.¹¹ This is not a political situation upon which Dickinson comments directly. When Dickinson talks about ownership of bodies, branding, and fugitivity, she is usually making a point about mortality or publication rather than the torture and exploitation of enslaved people. For example, she portrays

the corpse of an (ironically named) 'Indolent Housewife' as locked in by death. Although the body has now yielded its labour power at last, Dickinson describes it as marked by torturous use:

How many times these low feet staggered—
Only the soldered mouth can tell—
Try—can you stir the awful rivet —
Try—can you lift the hasps of steel! (Fr238, 1861)

The staggering feet are contained in two staggering lines: the feminine ending in the tetrameter lines one and three are followed by an inverted foot in line two, and the trochaic lines three and four with the heavily stressed first word 'try' as a hypermetrical, almost interrupting command. Karen Sánchez-Eppler emphasises the poem's satiric commentary on the 'body's inability to express the self as a breakdown in the domestic order'.¹² And certainly, protofeminist discourse in this period drew problematic comparisons between slavery and women's domestic labour and lack of self-determination.¹³ Here Dickinson's language advances the simile between the 'housewife' and the slave, the subordinated subject and the possessed object, and elides the physical affront of natural death to a riveted, hasped, scarred body which resembles the wreckage of a fugitive slave, recaptured and displayed as edifying public spectacle.

Descriptions of this kind filled the newspapers. Charles Dickens, who was entertained by Dickinson's neighbour and friend Samuel Bowles, published some of the advertisements in his book *American Notes*, which Dickinson's father added to his library in 1844.¹⁴

"Cash for negroes" is the heading of advertisements in great capitals down the long columns of the crowded journals. Woodcuts of a runaway negro with manacled hands, crouching

beneath a bluff pursuer in top-boots, who, having caught him, grasps him by the throat, agreeably diversify the pleasant text.¹⁵

American Notes reproduces sample ads, describing the scars and mutilations which could identify runaway slaves, e.g.: 'Ran away, a negro girl called Mary. Has a small scar over her eye, a good many teeth missing, the letter A is branded on her cheek and forehead' (271). These carceral inscriptions are not texts only to be read in newspapers, but also on the bodies of enslaved and freed people, where they constitute what Hortense Spillers calls a 'hieroglyphics of the flesh'.

4. Naturalising Slavery

Around the same time that she wrote 'A wounded Deer' in August 1860, Dickinson had an argument with Samuel Bowles about women's rights. She later wrote to apologise :

I am much ashamed. I misbehaved tonight. I would like to sit in the dust. I fear I am your little friend no more, but Mrs Jim Crow.

I am sorry I smiled at women.

Indeed, I revere holy ones, like Mrs [Elizabeth] Fry or Miss [Florence] Nightingale. I will never be giddy again. Pray forgive me now. Respect little Bob o'Lincoln again! (L223, early August 1860)

Despite her ironised 'reverence' for the Quaker prison reformer and the famous nurse, Dickinson seems to have taken up her father's disdain for feminism; and her rhetorical adoption of blackface as a symbol of humility infuses her coy apology with a tincture of white supremacy.

Such instances can be found throughout her letters, where her scant references to slavery and to the working classes tend to be ironic or whimsical.¹⁶ Her household included Native

American, African American, and later mostly English and Irish servants. She mimicked their speech in her letters, for example writing to her brother a 'foundling hen into whose young mind I seek to instil the fact "Massa is a-comin!' (*Letters* 92). When an African American gardener was hired in 1881, Dickinson writes of 'what [her nephew] Gilbert calls the "Cloudy Man"': We have a new Black man and are looking for a Philanthropist to direct him, because every time he presents himself, I run, and when the Head of the Nation shies, it confuses the Foot—' (JL721), staging a familiar racist spectacle of the white woman (head of the body politic) terrorised by the Black man (the foot). In 1852, when she was 21, Dickinson wrote casually to Austin about the family's African-American stableman: 'Wells Newport has disappeared, and our horse is now under the care of Jeremiah Holden, who seems a faithful hand'. The phrase seems not to convey any alarm, even in the context of the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁷

The Dickinsons lived near to the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, a utopian commune of which Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass were members. Another member was David Mack III, whose father bought the Dickinson Homestead and who was a Yale classmate of her father Edward.¹⁸ The Association was influenced by Fourier's socialism and Transcendentalist philosophy, and had strong abolitionist commitments. In a letter, Dickinson referred jokingly to the radical movements of this kind :

But the world is sleeping in ignorance and error, sir, and we must be crowing-cocks, and singing-larks, and a rising sun to awake her; or else we'll pull society up by the roots, and plant it in a different place. We'll build Alms-houses, and transcendental State prisons, and scaffolds - we will blow out the sun, and the moon, and encourage invention. Alpha shall kiss Omega - we will ride upon the hill of glory - Hallelujah, all hail! (Habegger 235)

Here she elides reformist goals (charitable institutions, reformed prisons) with impossible desires (to blow out the sun and moon), ridiculing revolutionary intentions as magical thinking.

Dickinson does not express any sympathy for abolition. It is not a subject which is addressed in her letters to her friend Higginson, a radical abolitionist who in 1854 broke down a courthouse door in Boston, attempting to free the fugitive slave Anthony Burns; and who in 1856 helped arm antislavery settlers in Kansas.¹⁹ In 1862, when she first began corresponding with him, Higginson had accepted the position of colonel to the First South Carolina Volunteers (the first regiment of freed slaves mustered into the service of the U.S. during the Civil War). Dickinson must have read Higginson's description of the regiment in an essay for *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1867. Higginson's article is the first published transcription of 'Negro Spirituals'. In her correspondence with him, she mused that 'War feels to me an oblique place', and compares her garden to the Sea Islands, and his cultivation of soldiers from freed Black men to blackberries (L280, February 1863).²⁰ These reference allow John Shoptaw to read her poem 'The Black Berry— wears a Thorn in his side —' (Fr548, 1863) as a tribute to the 'Brave Black Berry' of Higginson's regiment, which for him 'should lay to rest any doubts about Dickinson's allegiance to the causes of abolition and racial equality'.²¹

Even if Shoptaw's interpretation of 'The Black Berry' is correct, Dickinson is commenting on slavery very obliquely indeed. And it is difficult to square 'allegiance to the cause of abolition' with her remarks in her letters and poems. Dickinson wrote several poems in which she invokes 'Domingo' (Saint-Domingue or contemporary Haiti), which she uses as a token of sultry exoticism: 'Butterflies from St Domingo, / Cruising round the purple line, / Have a system of aesthetics / Far superior to mine' (Fr95, 1859); 'I could bring You Odors from St Domingo— / Colors — from Vera Cruz —' (Fr726, 1863).²² She poses as an experienced aesthete for Higginson: 'Your letter gave no drunkenness, because I tasted rum before. Domingo comes but once; yet I have had few pleasures so deep as your opinion, and if I tried to thank you, my tears would block my tongue' (548). When

her poems resort to racialized language, they at best participate in Orientalist stereotypes, at worst reveal a perception of people of colour as bound by their physicality, lacking in reflection or imagination.²³ She also translates the actual proprietary relationship of masters over their slaves into a generalised metaphysical condition :

I am afraid to own a Body—

I am afraid to own a Soul—

Profound—precarious Property—

Possession, not optional—

Double Estate, entailed at pleasure

Opon an unsuspecting Heir—

Duke in a moment of Deathlessness

And God, for a Frontier.

(Fr1050, 1865)

For Dickinson, this commodification of the self is activated in a particularly dangerous way by publication, what she calls 'the Auction / Of the Mind of Man' (788). Benjamin Friedlander has interpreted the references in that poem – written in 1863, soon after the Emancipation Proclamation – to auctions, the 'White Creator' and the 'Disgrace of Price' as drawing on abolitionist rhetoric. In his reading, the snowy white page, stained by ink or desecrated by circulation, is a racialized figure of privilege. Friedlander concludes that the poem argues against slavery, but resists a militant abolitionism which has led to war.²⁴ But the poem chiefly expresses privileged resistance to publicity and ignorance of the fact 'that being bought and sold, like starvation itself, is rarely a choice: that the poem advances such an extreme position unjustly shames all of those for whom writing was a professional necessity — who published in order to survive.'²⁵ Dickinson

could have empathised with authors of slave narratives such as Louisa Picquet, who feared that the commodification of their stories to support the abolitionist cause was a re-enactment of their own sale on the auction block.²⁶ She could have; but there's no evidence she did.

5. The Wound

It may seem perverse to attend to what Dickinson, this prolific and sometimes miraculous poet, *didn't* write, to sympathies she *didn't* express. But I am following Toni Morrison's important work in *Playing in the Dark*, to argue that focusing on the Africanist presence in Dickinson's poetry, and the way she metaphorises penal bondage and slavery, can elucidate the lyric as she practiced it and which she has come to represent. In one of her poems, Dickinson describes how an untreated wound – a psychic or physical injury – can lead to death :

A not admitting of the wound
Until it grew so wide
That all my Life had entered it
And there were troughs] beside—]was space • room
(Fr1188, 1870)

While the wound could signify any of a number of things in Emily Dickinson's poem, I regard bondage –in the historical form of chattel slavery – as such a wound, an unspoken, repressed or omitted fact like a gaping 'trough'. I am reminded of another wound, in the autobiography published in 1845 by someone who lived for a time just down the road from her. Frederick Douglass describes how 'My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.' Douglass returns the abstracted reading mind to the historical writing body: his foot, scarred by the depravity of slavery, is made contiguous with his hand holding

the pen; while the present can represent the wounds of the past, the past also contains the present, like a pen nestled in the gash.

6. The Story that Cannot Be Told

Dickinson's poetry holds in tension two dialectical forces: the centrifugal desire for flight, and the centripetal compulsion towards bondage or constraint. These tensions are enacted also in her use of hymn metre. But, despite her frequent use of the tropes of the prisoner, the slave and the fugitive, Dickinson makes almost no direct reference to abolition or the enslaved and freed African Americans in her midst. This brings me to the second part of this paper.

In 1781 a Dutch ship sailed from west Africa for Jamaica with a cargo of 442 slaves. When the ship became lost and provisions ran low, the shipmates threw around 150 people overboard, and later attempted to recover the market value of this 'cargo' against the insurance policy. A case in England at the Court of the King's Bench, *Gregson v. Gilbert*, followed. It was publicised by the abolitionist movement and became the much-discussed subject of JMW Turner's painting *The Slave Ship*.²⁷ M. NourbeSe Philip reads this paradigmatic moment as part of the continuous history of slavery, what Christina Sharpe has referred to as 'wake time'.

Philip has argued powerfully that 'erasure is intrinsic to colonial and imperial projects. It's an erasure that continues up to the present. The idea of mutilation and the violence it implies also resonates with [...] Dickinson and the violent edges of her poetry—and perhaps the violence at the edges of her poetry.'²⁸ She describes *Zong!* as made of the 'language of the limp and the wound' (205). Like Dickinson, she inhabits the wide, unadmitted wound, which for Philip is both the historical legacy of slavery, and its damage to language. Philip enters the 500-word legal document *Gregson v. Gilbert*, submitting voluntarily to its constraint in the way that Wordsworth enters into the sonnet in 'Nuns fret not' – but not as 'pastime'. Rather, she intends 'to use the text of the legal decision as a word store; to lock myself into this particular and peculiar discursive landscape'.

Through the 'imposition of the limitation of the text on myself, I have been able to find a lot of freedom within those limitations. I believe that this is a lesson poetry offers us – freedom within limitation.'²⁹ But Philip also recognises poetic autonomy as illusory: 'we believe we have the freedom to choose any words we want to work with from the universe of words, but so much of what we work with is a given' (*Zong!* 192). The confinement in the particular textual constraint offers freedom, but confinement in the prison house of language is restrictive. *Zong!* also cycles through some of the key tropes of lyric – the autonomy of the lyric poet, writing in isolation and enclosed within the cell of the text; the poet's ability to synthesise the particular and represent a subjectivised universal – but without finding satisfaction. Finally it must turn away from the printed letter, to lived, embodied and collective performance: to song. And this turn may tell us something about the limitations of lyric, even in its most committed forms.

Philip calls *Zong!* 'this story that must be told; that can only be told by not telling' (194); a poem of 'boundaries' and 'silences' (195). The trope of unspeakability can be found frequently in abolitionist literature; in contemporary history it resonates with Adorno's dictum about poetry after Auschwitz. It raises questions about representation and aesthetics which focus on the narration of horrific events, and the relation of the viewer or reader to that narration. The slave narrative, for example, 'tried to connect its audience to the foundationally divisive social relations that underwrote the slave experience' across the distance of personal experience by making 'the agony and moral illegitimacy of slavery palpably present'. It did so, Avery Gordon argues, 'by producing a morality of verisimilitude, by forging a congruence between realism and sympathy.'³⁰ Philip's book is in part a rejection of verisimilitude, which interrupts the pleasures of looking and the desire to identify with the victim.

Philip does not permit the reader to enjoy a triumphant reflection that these incidents are past. Her work starts in 'the wasteland between the terror of language and the horror of silence':³¹

As a writer and poet the impulse is always to words. The question is, do you—should you—turn the horror of a particular history into something beautiful, because of course it is that beauty which will make the work ultimately digestible. I confess to being disturbed by texts which attempt to deal in this way with aspects of slavery.... For me the more seductive the language, the more I distrust it—with a centuries-old distrust. (*Black* 59)

Despite this distrust, there are seedlings of narrative scattered throughout *Zong!*, which might – but for the derangement of form – seduce the reader. Fictionalised European subjects (sam, dave, eva, miss clara) emerge from *Gregson v. Gilbert*. Some are listed in the ‘Manifest’ as crew members; others – like kate, ‘clad / in fur the / ring how many / carats / you ask’ (*Zong!* 101) – are the ‘women who wait’. Philip has revealed that the work ends with a European man who ‘takes his own life. The African man, Wale, asks him to write a letter to his wife, Sade, who, of course, has been separated from him along with their child, Ade; he then eats the letter and jumps overboard. Then the man himself—the European—also throws himself overboard.’ The voice of the white, European male that emerges in the text disturbs it: ‘ordinarily I would never have been interested in that voice, and for good reason.... I would think, “Shut the fuck up already, we’ve heard enough about and from you!”’³² But Philip insists that the voice ought not to be silenced, because it emerges from the compositional process ‘of allowing the voices space to tell their own stories’. The man’s death also shows that ‘for the world to live, that spirit of conquest, destruction, and domination that Columbus represents has to die.’ (Saunders 75)

7. A Formal Feeling

It would be possible to scour the text for similar stories and scenes, but this would I think be misleading. *Zong!* is not primarily descriptive; reading for the story is not really what *Zong!* demands. Philip wants to resist ‘my urge to make sense’ (*Zong!* 193), and encourages the reader

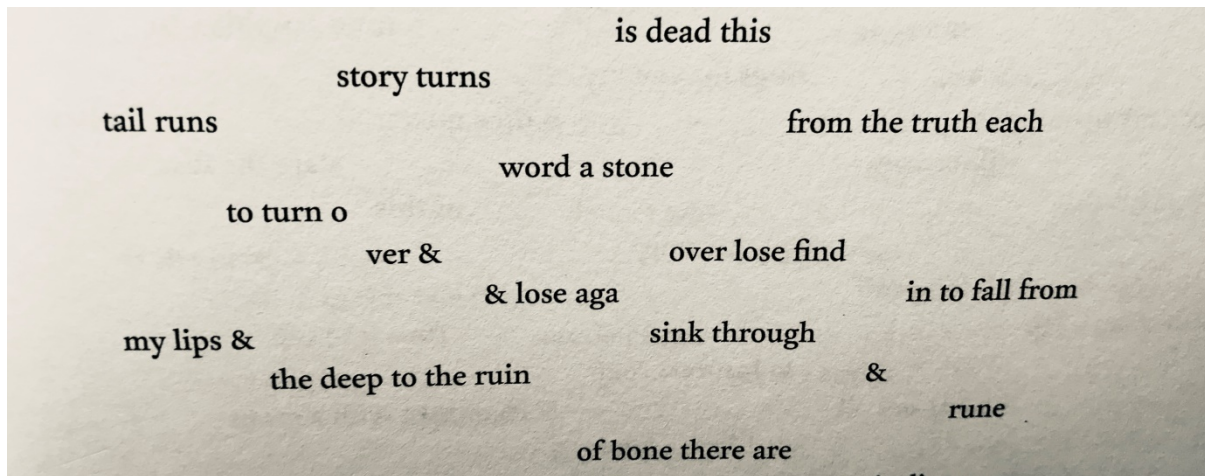
also to disobey the instinct to discern patterns, narratives and rhythms from *Zong!*'s fragmented ensemble. Piecing together the poem's asyndetic fragments, we 'become implicated in, if not contaminated by, this activity' (*Zong!* 198). Philip draws an analogy between the (synthetic, rationalising, aesthetic, embodied) labour of reading the poem or co-creating it in performance, and the labour of upholding the slave trade: 'we are, none of us, innocent or absolved of our contamination.'³³ The reader co-creates and continues the story of slavery in the text, as we do in our present lives. This analogy also raises some difficult questions about the gap between formal derangement and actual suffering, questions which emerge most powerfully – as I'll conclude – in the relation between mimesis and re-enactment.

Zong!'s critique palpitates as form, in the gaps, surpluses, waste products, and drifting phonemes that Philip exhumes from her source text. The poem's form forces the reader to make a choice: do we work to restore some conventionally meaningful propositions from this violent *sparagmos*, or do we dwell with the torn and turned scattering of language and subjectivity that Philip has so carefully composed? Is our readerly restoration, taking the scattered words or parts of words and making them whole again, coagulating them back into sentences, a minor restitution for the violent scattering, of families, societies, bodies, that was the slave trade? Or is it an analogue for that murderous exploitation – our participation in the ordering, classification and redistribution of parts? Anthony Reed argues that the text's fragments 'do not give us enough to allow us to do much more than witness the unravelling of this tale'.³⁴ But the text confronts the reader with exactly this question of what more we can do than witness: can we ravel the tale back up again? Should we?

'This story turns tail, runs from the truth, each word a stone to turn over and over: lose, find, and lose again, to fall from my lips and sink through the deep to the ruin and rune of bone.' This statement, an unusually extended and complete formulation, appears on page 111; it seems to describe the reader's experience of desertion in the face of the horrific truth *Zong!* is telling. The

turning over of the stones of truth recalls the creation myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, repopulating the world devastated by an inundation; and a work of archaeological excavation, searching the ruins of a burial site. But if the truth is a stone lost in the sea, it will sink before it can be inscribed with an epitaph.

However, this statement does not really appear on page 111. Instead, this does:



The learned habit, in English, of reading from left to right, top to bottom, grates against the clustering of the words, proposing a multitude of different gatherings: 'my lips & the deep to the ruin' is possible, 'to turn over & & lose aga sink through & rune' is also a way of tracing a falling line of thought, dropping to the seabed. These fragments – and this is not yet the most atomised section of the poem – make it difficult to stitch the poem together, and force the reader's haste to yield to a feeling of slowness, indeterminacy and slippage: what belongs to or with, relates to or with the other? This slowness is part of telling, and postponing the brutality of telling, the story of Black death. Criticism is too fast: remembering that criticism derives from the Greek *kritēs*, or judge, I am also aware that my mutilating transcriptions of the text which I provide for the sake of space are a kind of critical injustice that re-enacts the misrepresentations in the legal judgment.

Adrift among phonemes, the reader can feel lost. Sometimes the letters are so densely packed they struggle for breath and articulation; sometimes so isolated and widely spaced that they

become mere particles, sounds severed from the groups which could convey meaning: g, ru, se, ev, ee. This compaction (Philip calls it 'crumped', *Zong!* 205) and dispersal retard our reading, and teach us to approach the text in a non-linear or non-sequential fashion. The eye starts to lose its ability to perceive the leading between lines, or kerning of letters; it is drawn to form sequences and clusters from letters that have been left behind. As the poems move from widely spaced texts through more densely populated pages to the concluding section *Ebora*, in which words are both overprinted and greyed out, it is as if the book is a ship being loaded to a point of terrible compaction. Similarly, the gaps between words suggest bodies and things scattered on the sea, as well as the lacunae in the historical record. I am tempted to rush across these voids, to tack abandoned letters onto their amputated suffixes and make the words whole again; it is difficult, frustrating, tedious to dwell in the gaps. Fighting against this instinct to resolve difficulty reminds us, perhaps, of how far off restitution is, and how painful dwelling in the interstices of this history can be.

The ethical-formal difficulties the poem presents are cumulative, and the labour of moving through the text is a reminder of the painful difficulties of achieving literacy which was central to Frederick Douglass' emancipation.³⁵ They also make *Zong!* very much a poem of and about *print*. Like Charles Olson, who used the typewriter as a mechanism for replicating finely nuanced variations in the breath, Philip's exacting form depends on the precision of print.³⁶ In her case however, the typewriter gives way to the aleatoric magic of the printer:

Having completed the first draft of one section I attempted to print it; the laser printer for no apparent reason prints the first two or three pages superimposed on each other—crumped, so to speak—so that the page becomes a dense landscape of text... I have never been able to find a reason for it and my printer has not since done that with anything else I have written' (*Zong!* 206).

This unexplained intervention is one way that the poem challenges print's precision. Another is the insertions in an italic font that looks handwritten. Manuscripts are perceived by modern readers as documents of intimacy: we sense that the text we are reading was produced through the work of an individual hand whose labour can be traced in the stray marks, mistakes and perfections of the letters. *Zong!* includes many references to the author's writing hand, mediated through an italic font: 'an oration he asks that i / these words / come that I write from his lips / though my hand shapes why / are we here dear / clair I / write this / for / sam who / is / by / my side'; 'my hand / writes / we seal the deal the sale of / negroes' (*Zong!* 85). These insertions are the excess or remainder that challenges the precision and rationality of the printed text. They are similar to a signature in that they mark the text with 'the eccentricity of the individual whose steady or unsteady hand traces the marks... of the soul within itself, for the hand that scripts the text marks the frailty of all flesh in the very materiality of the text.'³⁷ The presence of these marginal queries and observations suggest an authorial presence pushing for clarity against the poem's granular structure and decay into noise.

Philip takes words from the legal judgment, spreading them across the page, sometimes in the columnar formations of bookkeeping, other times dispersed in formations that suggests flotsam on the surface of water. Her composition by field would also bear comparison to Olson's mythopoesis of Gloucester and the American polis, as would their common attention to the sea and the breath. I experience *Zong!*'s expansion over the page not as the enjoyment of the word in the potentially limitless space it colonises but as a way of inscribing the silences and gaps between those words, and all the dead which they might contain. Though Philip's poetics is rooted in the mimetic possibilities of form, unlike Olson she would not subsume form as 'never more than an extension of content': form does something for Philip that content cannot.³⁸

Philip describes her relation to the legal text as mimetic of the violences of slavery:

I am, metaphorically, at sea, having cut myself off from the comfort and predictability of my own meaning... Like Captain Collingwood, I am now fully launched on a journey.' ('Notanda', *Zong!* 190)

'My intent is to use the text of the legal decision as a word store; to...lock myself into this text in the same way men, women, and children were locked in the holds of the slave ship *Zong!*' (191)

'The eye trying to order what cannot be ordered, ...which is what it must have been like trying to understand what was happening on board the *Zong!*' (192)

'The legal text parallels a certain kind of entity—a whole, a completeness which like African life is rent and torn' (192)

'This [literally cutting up the text] was most similar to the activity of the random picking of African slaves' (193)

'I mutilate the text as the fabric of African life and the lives of these men, women and children were mutilated' (193)

'I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs...' (193)

'The poem... is revealed only when the text is fragmented and mutilated, mirroring the fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetrated on Africans' (195)

Through these acts of linguistic mutilation, the 'silences' within the words, and the poem within each of those silences, is cracked open (*Zong!* 195). Nonetheless, Philip's contentions that her bondage by the text was 'the same' as the bondage of people in the holds, and that her authorial activity is also identical to the atrocities perpetrated by the slave traders, are startling and problematic.

8. The Ghost Dance

Those contentions can perhaps be partially explained by thinking of this work not as a formal mimesis but as the magical language of hex and spell which constitute a ceremony of remembrance. Philip describes *Zong!* as 'hauntological, [...] a work of haunting, a wake of sorts, where the spectres of the undead make themselves present' (*Zong!* 201).³⁹ *Zong!* is an act of witnessing and remembering that history to which everyone is subjected, in its generalised form of capitalist exploitation, or more specific, epigenetic one of transgenerational trauma.⁴⁰ I will return later to the way that history is embedded in the body. It is possible to read *Zong!* through Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, which Philip cites as an important influence. But the work also exceeds the deconstructive framing of history as hauntology (the 'spectral turn') that became popular in the late 1990s. *Zong!* is not theory: 'I want the bones' (*Zong!* 201), she says, the matter. As a ritual invocation of the ancestors, *Zong!* does not just remember the dead; it seeks to make them actually present.

The "end" of the ghost dance', Gayatri Spivak argues, is 'to make the past a future': 'it is 'an attempt to establish the ethical relation with history as such, ancestors real or imagined. You crave to let history haunt you as a ghost or ghosts, with the ungraspable incorporation of a ghostly body,

and the uncontrollable, sporadic, and unanticipatable periodicity of haunting, in the impossible frame of the absolute chance of the gift of time, if there is any.' And while Spivak is sceptical about the ghost dance as political *praxis*, it is, she says, 'the only way to go at moments of crisis; to surrender to undecidability'.⁴¹ Philip inhabits the court documents, and is herself inhabited by the dead – the by-line for the book says 'As told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng', and Philip has described herself as the amenuensis for an ancestral voice she names Abiswa. In Philip's understanding of African cosmology, 'the Ancestors, albeit no longer alive, are a living force.'⁴² Philip visits Ghana to talk with spiritual elders and seek 'permission' from the ancestors; she summons and honours them by performing magic rituals, burning incense, and jangling cowrie shells – the latter were a form of 'coast money' traded for slaves in coastal African countries; 'the shells, so it is said, came from off-lying waters, where they fed on the cadavers of less desirable slaves thrown into the sea as their food. The bodies, or sometimes dismembered limbs, when pulled ashore were covered with attached cowries.'⁴³ These magical but also materialist procedures signal the difference between this poem and a work of documentary poetics that relies on found materials and historical research. Philip works with three archives: 'the legal archive of Gregson vs. Gilbert, ...the liquid and sound archive of the Atlantic ocean and, most importantly, the genealogical and spiritual archive of the Ancestors.' Simultaneously opening herself, in the manner of a shaman or keeper of secrets, to the irrational realm of spirit, and enclosing herself within the supposed rationality of the legal judgment, Philip is both 'censor and magician': 'As censor, I function like the law whose role is to proscribe and prescribe, deciding which aspects of the text will be removed and which remain; ...as magician, however, I conjure the infinite(ive) of to be of the "negroes" on board the *Zong'* (*Zong!* 199). Her procedures draw out the irrationality of the judgment and the occult nature of the law, with its instruments of 'civil death', as Colin Dayan's scholarship has powerfully documented.

9. Biting my Tongue

Philip's desire to cede authorial intention to the ancestors, or to language itself, opens the poem to accidents and discoveries which are ostensibly beyond the author's own knowledge; and seems to disavow the author as the embodied and located beginning of the text. In channelling the ancestors, Philip might make herself as spectral and immaterial as they are: it is their language, their bodiless voices, which do the work of making *Zong!*, not Philip. But such a reading would be at odds with the persistent traces of an authorial body in the text. Before concluding this paper with a discussion of the continued production of *Zong!* as embodied, polyphonous performance, I want to elaborate on Philip's notion of the physicality of language: not just as a mark made by a Black woman's hand, but also as a substance encoded in the cell and shaped by the musculature of the tongue.

In *She Tries Her Tongue*, Philip refers to edicts which instructed slaveowners to ensure that 'his slaves belong to as many ethnolinguistic groups as possible' to prevent them from fomenting revolution, and recommended amputating the tongues of rebellious slaves. This suppression of African languages was intended to ensure 'that the exploitative plantation machine could be more efficiently run'; but 'It spoke of my non-being. It encapsulated my chattel status. And irony of all ironies, it is the only language in which I can now function.' (*Black* 50-1). Philip's relation to her language is one of violent deprivation and mourning:

And I weep openly for the loss, the deep loss, I always feel when I visit Africa and hear and see how language bears culture and culture feeds language. It is a condition I will never know because English is not my mother tongue. It is my father tongue and one which meant me and my mother no good. But it is my mother tongue and father tongue all wrapped together in some kind of ghastly embrace—or is it a struggle? Or perhaps both?⁴⁴

Here, Philip does not seem to share the ambivalence towards the idea of a 'return' to Africa as an origin and site of plenitude that can be found in Dionne Brand's image of 'the door of no return' or Saidiya Hartmann's book *Lose Your Mother*. Africa is a site where the relation of language and culture is maternal, productive: breeding and feeding.

Philip reflects on rape as a weapon of slavery, and as a metaphor for linguistic prohibition, through the image of the nightingale. The forced marriage between African and English tongues' makes the poet's work 'incestuous': she submits to the father's language, the language of the colonial oppressor, and makes something new from it. Philip's symbolisation of language within the incestuous dynamics of the Oedipal family begins in her 1989 book *She Tries Her Tongue*. In 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' she asserts that English, her 'mother tongue', is actually 'a foreign anguish' and 'father tongue': 'I have no mother / tongue / no mother to tongue / no tongue to mother'; 'I must therefore be / tongue / dumb' (*STHT* 30). It is a theme which recurs throughout in the book: the poet speaks in 'absencelostears laughter grief / on any language'; she is a 'tongueless wonder' whose 'blackened stump of a tongue' is torn out, withered, petrified, burnt (*STHT* 66). She invokes the Ovidian myth of Philomela, turned into a nightingale in compensation for being raped, imprisoned in the tower by Tereus and having her tongue amputated:

When silence is
Abdication of word tongue and lip
Ashes of once in what was
...Silence
Song word speech
Might I... like Philomela... sing
continue
over

into

...pure utterance

(*STHT* 72)

Philomela's song is metonymic (via Keats, among others) for poetry itself. But this desire for a poetic song of 'pure utterance' is defeated by the violence which the poem itself documents. *Zong!* could similarly be seen to be cutting up and amputating the legal text in retaliation against the amputation of the mother tongue, and to Fanon's description of the self as socially amputated, but nonetheless experienced as a soul 'immense as the world'.⁴⁵

Philip attacks the enforcement of English language use as a form of sexualised violence, the imposition of the law of the father (given the painfulness of paternity within a slave regime based on rape).⁴⁶ However, there is also a suggestion of the mother's failure or inadequacy: her inability to nourish the child and preserve her in language. 'Somewhere' else, 'another mother's tongue / tongues / licks / into nothing / the prison of these walled tongues' (53): but not here. Like the cultural plenitude of an idealised Ghana, this lost, phantastic 'mother tongue' shadows and impugns the father tongue, the colonizer's English. The mother tongue is an oppressive part object. 'Universal Grammar' concludes with the imperative to:

Slip mouth over the syllable; moisten with tongue the word.

Suck Slide Play Caress Blow—Love it, but if the word

gags, does not nourish, bite it off—at its source—

Spit it out

Start again (STHT 41)

Here, Philip repudiates the ritual in which the mother blows her nourishing words into the infant's mouth and instead focuses on the child's aggressive feeding: the vengeful child, having suckled on language, should attack it if it does not 'nourish' her: should yank, pull, tear, root/out, chop the tongue into pieces (54), dislocate and destroy that language until 'it begins to serve our purposes' (85). Philip describes the source text for *Zong!* as the 'matrix - a mother document' (200), drawing on the denotation of matrix as womb which both nourishes and withholds, is caressed and bitten off. Doing violence to the legal text offers a kind of violent revenge for the histories that enforced this forgetting; but it cannot restore what is lost.

10. Destroying Lyric

If English is a tool of colonial oppression, so too is the lyric - particularly in the liberal formation I've discussed in this book (solitary, autonomous poets performing as if oblivious to the audience that overhears them). Philip often refers to Wordsworth's daffodils as emblems of the ridiculousness of an English poetic curriculum translated to the Caribbean. In her early writings, Philip 'saw the lyric voice as one of the tools used to further the ends of colonialism' (*Black* 58). She describes how she

began with wanting to subvert—to destroy the lyric voice. I felt it could not bear the weight of my history. All this was presumptuous perhaps, but that was how I felt. I also questioned the tradition of the solitary voice of the poet—often male, a white male, who embodied the wisdom of the society, and who spoke for, on behalf of and to *his* society and culture. In a voice of authority. Although he might be marginalized and he often was, his words were valued—he had a role to play even as outcast and had the authority to do so. (57)

In *Zong!*, as I've explained, Philip does invoke such a voice – that of a white European man who narrates a series of sexual crimes and uses deeply racist language. By speaking for and through this subject position, Philip can challenge the liberal model of lyric personhood that emerges from it – and then force it into the sea. Philip also works within a hostile tradition to 'rewrite' history 'according to *my* dictates—*my* memories... And if the reader stumbled, stopped and started again, if s/he choked, and gagged on the words, then it was successful' (*Black* 58). Here, Philip herself provides the maternal part-object that leaves the infantile reader choking and gagging on its abundance. This is not an image of nurturing, but of pain and anger. Philip described the pleasure of writing one of the final sections of *Zong!*: 'there was the sense that I was really fucking with the language at its most intricate level. It was as if I was finally getting my revenge on something that had fucked me over for so long, that I felt that this broken, stumbling thing that "Ferrum" is, is my very own language. For the first time in my writing life, I felt, this is my language—the grunts, moans, utterances, pauses, sounds, and silences.'⁴⁷ The individual finds her autonomy in an individualised language, which is also not a language, but a set of sounds – of physical exertion, of feeding, or animal life – and their absence.

Finding 'my language', an embodied language which includes the gaps and silences representative of a history of catastrophic loss, requires new methods. Philip argues in her earlier work that the African artist must 'give voice to this split i-image of voiced silence. Ways to transcend that contradiction had to and still have to be developed, for that silence continues to shroud the experience, the i-image and so the word' (*STHT* 82). In writing of 'i-mages', she uses an orthography which she relates to the Rastafarian practice of privileging the 'I' in many words (*STHT* 78): "I" is often used to replace 'the subservient "me" ("I and I" is the plural of "we"), ...and has come to replace the first syllable of numerous words: "Ivine" (divine), "Ital" (vital)' etc.⁴⁸ The Rastafari 'I' refers not only to the divinity of the individual, but also to the group of which the individual is a part. As participants in the divinity of Haile Selassie, the Rastafari self 'is transformed from "my",

“me” and “mine” to “I”. This “I” is an individuating as well as unifying notion of identity and it is easily identified with communitarian social philosophy’ such as the African concept of Ubuntu: I am I through another person.⁴⁹ As Paget Henry explains, ‘membership in this I-worded spiritual community has been the basis for the primordial self that Rastafarians have been able to affirm in spite of social contempt, police violence, and other forms of socio-historical denial.’⁵⁰

Philip’s ‘i-mages’ are paradigmatic of a tension which arises from her apprehension of lyric, as the privilege of a (white, male) authority figure, or field which must be destroyed so that other forms of subjectivity might flourish; and as a site for the expression of new collectivities through the energetic performance of the author who channels the ancestors. This coinage also represents the first-person lyric speaker as *magus*, magician and wise woman:

The power and threat of the artist, poet or writer lies in this ability to create new i-mages, i-mages that speak to the essential being of the people among whom and for whom the artist creates. If allowed free expression, these i-mages succeed in altering the way a society perceives itself and, eventually, its collective consciousness. For this process to happen, however, a society needs the autonomous i-mage-maker for whom the i-mage and the language of any art form become what they should be—a well-balanced equation. (*STHT* 78)

Philip mourns the destruction of African i-mage-making in the New World, and describes Caribbean identity as identified by ‘a significant lack of autonomy in the creation and dissemination of i-mages’ (*STHT* 79). It is the job of poets to repair that lack through their own lyric autonomy, restoring society’s ‘essential being’ and self-perception through the fabrication of ‘i-mages’. Philip argues that the words of the poet, story-teller, singer or balladeer can help society to ‘accept, integrate and transcend its experiences, positive or negative’ (80):

The African in the Caribbean could move away from the experience of slavery in time; she could even acquire some perspective upon it, but the experience, having never been reclaimed and integrated metaphorically through the language and so within the psyche, could never be transcended. To reclaim and integrate the experience required autonomous i-mage makers and therefore a language with the emotional, linguistic, and historical resources capable of giving voice to the particular i-mages arising out of the experience. (STHT 81)

But it is surprising to find Philip, who is repelled by the white, male, solitary voice of the lyric poet, using these terms – the autonomy of the lyric poet, who speaks to the essential being of the people; ‘transcendence’ for the many through the insights of the individual – which seem to come straight out of Hegel’s *Aesthetics*.

11. Read it with Me

The making of ‘i-mages’ in Philip’s early poetry was largely a page-based activity. *Zong!* led to the discovery of the way that form could also be relational, engaging the reader in acts of integration or reclamation of meaning from scattered phonemes. But later, as Philip’s performance practice developed, *Zong!* also allowed the formation of relations in the context of living, embodied ritual. In a recent essay, Philip describes how, when a student asked her to read ‘Universal Grammar’, she could only answer: ‘I will, if you read it with me’. This led to a profound realisation of the need for collective performance:

I wanted to destroy the lyric voice. As a Black, female, colonised subject, what was the source of my authority, and was such authority necessary—indispensable perhaps?—to

speech, public speech? To poetry? Being neither male nor white and without an observable or tangible source of authority, could I even speak? Or would I only speak a silence?

What I hadn't realised until "I will, if you read it with me" was that in shifting the lyric voice, in at least forcing it to share the page with other voices, with other histories—moving it from centre stage and page; in clearing a space—I had allowed for other voices to be heard. A multivocal, polyvocal discourse could now be heard. It was the chorus of the unheard, the not-heard, the barely whispered. This to me was closer to the discourse of women. To the call and response of African speech. [*Black* 61]

If lyric is the possession of a solitary, privileged speaker who has often been coded as white (and, perhaps less often, as male), then its abrogation for a Black female subjectivity involves violence – destruction. Silence and destruction are the beginning of her process of remaking lyric, a process that leads to other voices. This discourse is present in *Zong!*'s polyphonic structure – Philip compares it to Thomas Tallis's 40-part motet *Spem in Alium* – which rouses a multiplicity of voices, dissonant and harmonic, from the voice of the white European man she refuses to suppress to the voices of enslaved African men, women and children, sometimes speaking singly and sometimes in concert, sometimes in the antiphonic mode of African call-and-response song. Paul Gilroy has argued that antiphony 'symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others.'⁵¹

The choric nature of *Zong!*, and the relation of its fracturing to the deconstruction of lyric authority, emerges most strongly in performance, where Philip encourages the audience to read the text along with her. Philip has performed with musicians and audience members in collective,

durational readings on the anniversary of the massacre since 2011. These readings, Philip says on her website, 'attempt an unfragmenting':

These soundings, for that is what they are, allow for the noise and music of us collectively reading, not necessarily in unison but together; they build, even if temporarily, a community of collective sound that echoes through time. It is the sound of resistance, survival, joy and even flourishing, no matter how transitory. It is the *S/Zong!* that is a shout to the pastFuture and futurePast that is simultaneously Presence. Of the present. Here. Now.

'Sounding' is an important metaphor, which brings together the collective sound-making of the poet and other performers; the preliminary, improvisatory gathering of ideas and opinions before an action is taken; and the measuring of the depth of the sea, often with a *line*. *Zong!* is not just a book whose 'gatherings' are made from a 'quire' of paper, not a fascicle, but a different kind of gathering of a choir, a commemorative moment whose temporality of performance enfolds the extended historical temporalities of death and life, the ancestors and the heirs of this present.

12. Singing in the Wake

In one such 'watch night' from 2015, Philip performs alongside percussionists, a bassist, flautist, at least two singers (one performing the text in a high, lilting soprano; the other a mournful contralto intoning the text as sorrow song), and a dancer dressed in white.⁵² Philip herself reads in company, in the background, and other voices join hers in speaking the text, overlapping different tempos and motifs. The reading takes all night; in the early hours before dawn, as most participants have left and those remaining drift in and out of sleep, the drum keeps the readers going through the exhaustion which is already formally inscribed in 'Ferrum'.⁵³

The endurance required to sustain this wake work is physical and psychic, drawn out in conversation with the drum, an instrument which is already present in *Zong!*: 'captain their pain / wind / strum s the air / he strums the oud / the ship / cradles our longing'. The song 'calms me', 'but then / the drums' rouse me; it makes the air 'dangerous' (81). In African-American tradition, the drum can summon the dead, give voice to their speech, and ensure they return safely to the grave.⁵⁴ The drum is also a trans-historical echo that links these traditions to their African roots: 'When you reach down for the sound, it is touched off like a drum; it releases itself and reaches as far as you wish' (*STHT* 46). The drum evokes contexts of collective performance, of bodies singing and moving together through their labour and into the night of its momentary relief. Its regulation during slavery also demonstrates its power as an instrument of communication and insurrection.⁵⁵ John Mowitt draws out the connections between drumming and medical tapping, patting *juba*, and violent flogging, scourging, and whipping. Percussion, he notes, involves slapping the skin of the hand against an animal's skin to produce a sound that moves through the bodies of others. Mowitt describes the drum as a 'richly catachrestic instrument' that 'must be abused to be played'; 'in possessing a body, a skin, a head, and a voice, the drum has long represented the expressive interiority that we call the subject, the human being insofar as it intones "I."⁵⁶ If in the memorial performances of *Zong!* the abuse of that body stands in for the abuses of enslaved bodies in the Middle Passage, the drum is also the instrument of a 'trans-subjective dynamism' in which the community assembles in the popular memory embodied in the drum and the dance (76-7). Philip represents the enslaved Africans playing the harp of their ribcages, emptied skulls as gourd, skin as drum, bones as flutes or drumsticks. Through this literal transformation of their bodies from the instruments of capitalist labour into musical instruments, they overcome their historical silencing and unseal the grief locked in memory. These embodied instruments make art from violence and desecration, and remind us of Philomela's amputated tongue, creating a new sound at the site of a loss.

Finally, the title *Zong!* is close to song – ‘And Song is what has kept the soul of the African intact’ (207). Lyndon Barrett argues that song and dance are the ‘means by which African Americans may exchange expended, “valueless’ selves in the “New World’ for productive, recognised selves’ (91). Withdrawing their labour, spending their bodily energy, refusing their instrumentality within a slave economy, the dancers establish ‘the *rule* of the self in circumstances that provide very little opportunity to do so’. Dance ‘proves the indirection of work’: ‘in dance, the capacity to work is recreated in a novel, subtly meaningful and satisfying form’ (88). And it does so collectively, revealing the weakness of the solitary individual which Adorno construes as the unit of maximum resistance to capitalism.

For Philip, song and dance can hold and express historic violence, even after the memory of ancestral languages has been lost: ‘that body should speak’, and limbs dance so that ‘body might become tongue’ (*Zong!* 72). Linguistic memory is embedded in the body, such that when the magic words are heard – ‘Leg/ba’, ‘O/shun’, ‘Shan/go’ – the ‘heart races / blood pounds / remembers / speech’ (*Zong!* 37). The repressed histories of the African diaspora are not irrecoverable, because they are still present in the body, and can be tapped in song and dance:

Even the mere determination to remember can, at times, be a revolutionary act—like the slave who refused to forget the dance... Often in contestation with history, memory has a poetics that history lacks, appearing to reside in our bodies and not solely in the mind.

(*Bla_K* 66-7)

Song and dance are modes of memorialising the past, and resisting the present. Philip has described attending a funeral in Ghana, and being told by an elderly mourner: “We sing for death, we sing for birth. That’s what we do. We sing.” Singing affirms life, and helps Philip to put down the burden of the dead. ‘As I say in “Notanda,” *Zong!* is song—the song we have always sang ,

particularly when we were brought here to the land of untelling. I think that that's the gift, isn't it?—if we can get to that place of Song and Zong. It's the reward for going through the grief. It's the other side.'⁵⁷ Song is the testimony of life even at the gates of death, which releases itself and reaches as far as you wish; it is a reminder of 'another world where we could become truly embodied, with embodied addresses, so to speak. When I perform *Zong!* the distance between these two worlds becomes smaller.'⁵⁸

13. Conclusion

Gregory Nagy has shown that in archaic Greece, *mimesis* was not imitation, but re-enactment: songs are re-composed through their performance, the *chorós* engages in dramatic re-enactment or impersonation. Only after this dramatic context was lost, he says, did the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* as imitation begin to dominate.⁵⁹ He goes on to argue that:

Just as every performance becomes a potential re-creation in *mimesis*, that is, a virtual recomposition, so also the very identity of the performer stands to be re-created, recomposed. When the performer enacts an identity formerly enacted by previous performers, he or she is re-creating his or her own identity for the moment. That is to say, a performer's identity is recomposed *in performance*. (214)

The choric nature of *Zong!* is a discovery Philip makes by passing through the liberal lyric. Having at first coveted and wished to destroy the authority of the white, male lyric poet, she then considers whether the song of destruction is the true lyric of the Black, female, colonised subject. But she arrives at what to me is an impasse: the idea that the lyric poet can offer the community a set of images which bridge the traumatic past and future participates in the liberal valorisation of the individual subject. Finally, through performance and ritual exchange with the ancestors, in the

rhythms of dub and calypso, the liveness of performance and moving, dancing bodies which find life and meaning and value in the group, in the polyphonic chorus, not necessarily in unison but together, Philip finds a different way to overcome the privilege of white lyric authority.

Zong! works at the recovery of the past, not through a realistic re-enactment of the scene of the massacre as experienced by those who participated in it but through a combination of formal mimesis, occult and aleatoric procedures, durational performance, and an aesthetic and ethical receptivity to the voices of the ancestors. The text reveals indeterminacy in a legal, social, and economic space where the human and non-human are overdetermined. Philip names the Middle Passage as the *Maafa*, a Kiswahili word meaning “terrible occurrence” or “great disaster”, ‘that which is both an end and a beginning’ (*Black* 31). But the *Maafa*, or African Holocaust, is also ‘the condition for the emergence of African being, just as grammar conditions the emergence of speech’, as Frank B. Wilderson puts it;⁶⁰ as such it is a sacred initiation,

being birthed for a second time from the belly of the ship, into what we, emissaries of the Ancestors and ancestral memory, still don’t fully know. Who knew what we would or could create? Other than life. Unwritten, because the palimpsest of the *Maafa* is the “sea (which) is history.”

Like Édouard Glissant, Philip describes the Middle Passage as both womb (matrix) and abyss: the hold and the salty water as figures for the mother’s belly, as well as an extrusion unto death, both literal death, and the death of language, culture, and human being which was enforced by chattel slavery.⁶¹ And while *Zong!* is a work of mourning, it also looks towards that which we ‘still don’t fully know’: the living work that follows devastation. This is the poem’s tidalectical orientation toward past and future, destruction and creation.

Philip has compared the legal text to 'a gravestone': 'and in shattering that gravestone the voices are freed'.⁶² As Sonya Posmentier writes, 'there is no bleaker artistic imprisonment, no greater catastrophe than this one – the poet inside the body of enslaving discourse, replicating its murderous logic. Evoking and transforming this violence becomes the poem's curiously optimistic project.'⁶³ That optimism is affirmed by Philip herself, who in an interview wondered:

What if? What if the Ancestors intended some other purpose for us to have been brought to this part of the world, entirely apart from the European lust for profit. It seems to me that just asking that question puts us in a different position and releases a tremendous amount of energy. In honoring our own dead, as I said before, by focusing on ourselves and what the experience of slavery has meant and can't mean, even just embracing all that, somehow helps to contain the experience so that we can benefit from the memory rather than being crushed by it.⁶⁴

This is not a utopian fulfilment of the horrific past, but a radical openness to the contingency of the present. It recalls Ian Baucom's description of the 'labor of an engaged philosophy of history', which is 'not to free the present of the violence of the past but to discover in the very brutality of what-has-been the responsibility and promise of a transverse, relational now-being' (317). Rather than restitution, Christina Sharpe has suggested that *Zong!* does the work of 'aspiration': 'the word for keeping and putting breath back in the body', for 'imagining and for keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather'.⁶⁵ Aspiration is violent and life-saving: it is used to describe a drive for self-improvement, a wish to do or be better, and a strong intervention that forces air into the defunct body. In my book I discuss another genre of lyrics – the sorrow songs, collective and anonymous compositions whose oral forms seem to resist re-enactment and so fade into historical silence – which are in a way also violent and life-saving. Philip's poems claim a

genealogical link to these collective songs, which Dickinson probably read about but does not acknowledge, as the echoes of a transcendent African spirit. But her poetry also acknowledges that they were part of a murderously coercive regime, extracted as proof that the enslaved people were content and healthy, or keeping up a good working rhythm in their rows.

This is the challenge that the image of bondage poses to committed lyric. How do we hold open the collective possibility of revolution and restitution, while also residing in forms whose history is inscribed by liberal individualism and all its damages? *Zong!* offers no answer other than its practice. Following the book as process, from archive and constraint through excess into the shared, living space of performance, past to future, Philip tests lyric's offer of freedom through bondage. But real freedom could not be found without subverting the liberal individualism that makes lyric a soliloquy whose fiction of isolation still persuades us even when the work is rationalised and printed on hot-pressed paper. I started this chapter by telling the story that Philip says cannot be told – that is to say, I laid out the numbers, the bare facts. And in telling a story, there is a temptation always to supply a happy ending. Here, that happy ending would be this: that Philip cycles through the history of lyric, from the songs and memories held in the bodies of the enslaved Africans aboard the *Zong*, through a constrained engagement with a legal text, and a solitary process of composition, into a printed book, back into the body, first through the hand, and then through performance; from a collective to an individual and back again, arriving where lyric begins, with song. But I have learned enough from reading *Zong!* to be sceptical that such endings are happy, or even really endings.

Zong! refuses to subsume linguistic or historical violence as melancholy or triumphant overcoming through the rituals of contemporary performance. Saidiya Hartman has written,

The recognition of loss is a crucial element in redressing the breach introduced by slavery.

This recognition entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of a simulated

wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body in its amputatedness, in the insistent recognition of the violated body as human flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in the anticipation of its liberty. In other words, it is the ravished body that holds out the possibility of a restitution, not the invocation of an illusory wholeness or the desired return to an originary plenitude. (74)

Even as *Zong!* aspires to song, Philip does not fantasise about a reparative mother who could restore the damaged organ to an originary completeness. Instead, she emphasises the infant's already-present instinct to attack the breast, the part object which dispenses its satisfactions through the action of the infant's tongue. There is no real possibility of return to a dreamed-of plenitude or fullness. There is, instead, 'only one memory. A single memory. Of loss. Loss, loss, and more loss. The challenge for me is to write from that place of loss. Of nothing, if you will. To make poetry out of silence' (*Black* 60). But the poetry she makes from the silence of a summary argument, from a history of erasure, begins and ends with sound: *Zong!* is speech dragged 'through oath and through moan, through mutter, chant and babble, through babble and curse, through chortle and ululation' (*Zong!* 196). These sounds are the sounds of a body promising and uttering, complaining and enchanting, babbling and mourning: a voice at the beginnings and endings of life, singing its deathless song across a severed tongue.

¹ Jean McClure Mudge, *Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home* (Amherst: Amherst University Press, 1975), 6.

² Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1971), 65-6.

³ See L293, to Vinnie, 1864; Leyda 2:91, 145; L29 to Samuel Bowles, 1862; L1029, to Sue, 1886; L1042; and Jack L. Capps, *Emily Dickinson's Reading 1836-1886* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 79; Marcy L. Tanter, *The Influence of Nineteenth-Century British Writers on Emily Dickinson: A Study of Her Library and Letters* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2014), 43-9.

⁴ Andrea Brady, 'The Platonic Poetry of Katherine Philips', *The Seventeenth Century* 25.2 (January 2011): 300-322.

⁵ Dickinson received a copy of Emerson's *Poems* from her mentor Benjamin Newton in 1830 (L30, to Jane Humphrey, 23 January 1830).

⁶ Dickinson used Noah Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Her lexicon is reproduced as *Renovated Online Edition of Noah Webster's 1844 American Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Cynthia Hallen (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2009), <http://edl.byu.edu/index.php>.

⁷ Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1971), 34.

⁸ Nicolas W. Proctor, *Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 61.

⁹ Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 70.

¹⁰ Betsy Erkkila, 'The Emily Dickinson Wars', *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11-29 (21)

¹¹ Brenda Wineapple, *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 7.

¹² 118. Writing about the 'dungeon and manacles' in 'Let Us play Yesterday', Sánchez-Eppler also notes that they 'do not necessarily, or even primarily, refer to physical bondage. These markers of warfare and social control remain distinctly metaphoric, and so apolitical' (126).

¹³ See Tricia Lootens, *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Kari Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Eleanor Heginbotham, "'What are you reading now?': Emily Dickinson's Epistolary Book Club", *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 126-60 (133, 142); Leyda 1:84.

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation and Pictures from Italy* (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d. [1866?]), 270-1.

¹⁶ Domhnall Mitchell, 'Emily Dickinson and Class', *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 191-214 (201).

¹⁷ Nor does this poem:

The Lamp burns sure - within -
'Tho' Serfs - supply the Oil -
It matters not the busy Wick -
At her phosphoric toil!

The Slave - forgets - to fill -
The Lamp - burns golden - on -
Unconscious that the oil is out -
As that the Slave - is gone.

¹⁸ Alice Eaton McBee II, *From Utopia to Florence: The Story of a Transcendentalist Community in Northampton, Mass. 1830-1852*, *Smith College Studies in History* vol. 32 (Northampton, MA: George Banta Publishing Company, 1947), 32-3, 49, 62-3

¹⁹ Brenda Wineapple, *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 4-5.

²⁰ Erica Fretwell, 'Emily Dickinson in Domingo' *J19* 1.1 (Spring 2013): 71-96 (76).

²¹ John Shoptaw, 'Dickinson's Civil War Poetics: From the Enrollment Act to the Lincoln Assassination', *Emily Dickinson Journal*, 19.2 (2010): 1-19 (8).

²² On Dickinson's Orientalist sensuality, see Vivian Pollak, 'Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness', *Emily Dickinson Journal* 9.2 (2000): 84-95 (86).

²³ Daneen Wardrop reads other poems by Dickinson as referring obliquely to slavery, including 'One of the ones that Midas touched', and 'Civilization spurns the leopard!' (276). "'That Minute Domingo": Dickinson's Cooptation of Abolitionist Diction and Franklin's Variorum Edition', *Emily Dickinson Journal* 8.2 (Fall 1999): 72-86 (75).

²⁴ Benjamin Friedlander, 'Auctions of the Mind: Emily Dickinson and Abolition', *Arizona Quarterly* 54.1 (Spring 1998): 1-25 (11-20).

²⁵ Domhnall Mitchell, 'Emily Dickinson and Class', *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 191-214 (201).

²⁶ Kari Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 36.

²⁷ On the history of poetic responses to this painting, see Manuela Coppola, "'This is, not was": M. NourbeSe Philip's Language of Modernity', *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 2(2013): 67-82 (73). Claudia Rankine's book *Citizen* also discusses it.

²⁸ Andrew David King, 'The Weight of What's Left [Out]: Six contemporary erasurists on their craft', *Kenyon Review* (6 November 2012): <http://www.kenyonreview.org/2012/11/erasure-collaborative-interview/>

²⁹ Patricia Saunders, 'Trying Tongues, E-raced Identities, and the Possibilities of Be/longing: Conversations with NourbeSe Philip', *Journal of West Indian Literature* 14.1/2 (Nov 2005): 202-219 (218).

³⁰ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983), 143.

³¹ M. NourbeSe Philip, *Bla_k: Essays & Interviews* (Toronto: Bookthug, 2017), 53. Subsequent references to *Bla_k* will be included in the text. The title of this book could be written as *Black*, but I have observed the typography also to draw out the resonance with Lindon Barrett's discussion of 'bla(n)ckness' in *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which suggests it 'embodies a profound scepticism concerning boundaries' (137).

³² Patricia Saunders, 'Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip', *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 63-79 (75).

³³ From *Set Speaks*, Philip's blog which documents her dispute with the Lebanese artist Rana Hamadeh: <http://www.setspeaks.com/about/>

³⁴ Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 57.

³⁵ On the literacy of enslaved and freed people, one of the most influential essays is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Literary Theory and the Black Tradition', *Figures in Black* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-58; see also Barrett 72-8; John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame. The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 164-7. On Douglass's literacy, see Valerie Babb, "'The Joyous Circle": The Vernacular Presence in Frederick Douglass's Narratives', *College English* 67.4 (Mar 2005): 365-377; Lisa Yun Lee, 'The Politics of Language in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*', *MELUS* 17 (1991-92): 51-59; Teresa A. Goddu and Craig V Smith, 'Scenes of Writing in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*: Autobiography and the Creation of Self', *Southern Review* 25.4 (1989): 822-40; Eric Sundquist, 'Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism', *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William L. Andrews (Englewood, NJ: Prentice, 1993), 120-32; and Houston Baker, 'Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave' in the same volume, 94-107.

³⁶ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 239-249 (245).

³⁷ Marlon B. Ross, 'Authority and Authenticity: Scribbling Authors and the Genius of Print in Eighteenth-Century England', in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Martha Woodmanee and Peter Jaszi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 231-58 (232), cited in Barrett 71. Philip refers to Barrett's book so there is a good possibility that she read this passage during or before the process of writing *Zong!*.

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- ³⁸ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 239-249 (240).
- ³⁹ On *Zong!* as hauntology in relation to other Caribbean artworks, see Guillermina De Ferrari, 'A Caribbean Hauntology: The Sensorial Art of Joscelyn Gardner and M. Nourbese Philip', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (2018): 1-24.
- ⁴⁰ Philip has argued, in relation to the unauthorised appropriation of *Zong!* by the Lebanese visual artist Rana Hamadeh, that the *Gregson v. Gilbert* judgement 'for better or worse...is now irrevocably linked' to *Zong!*. However, Philip would not lay claim to an exclusive ownership of the pain embedded in those documents: the poems acknowledge that 'there / exists / a span / of pain / such / that / the / poet ... / can / not own' it as property (*Zong!* 87).
- ⁴¹ Gayatri Spivak, 'Ghostwriting', *Diactirics* 25.2 (1995): 65-84 (70-1).
- ⁴² Paul Watkins, 'We can never tell the entire story of slavery: In conversation with M. Nourbese Philip', *Toronto Review of Books* (30 April 2014)
- ⁴³ Jan Hogendorn and Marioni Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 156. Quoted in Baucom 92.
- ⁴⁴ M. Nourbese Philip, *Bla_k: Essays & Interviews* (Toronto: Bookthug, 2017), 31.
- ⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 140.
- ⁴⁶ Denise DeCaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 206.
- ⁴⁷ Patricia Saunders, 'Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. Nourbese Philip', *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 63-79 (71).
- ⁴⁸ Frank Jan van Dijk, *Jahmaica: Rastafari and Jamaican Society, 1930-1990* (Utrecht: ISOR, 1993), 31. Thanks to Matt Smith who passed this book on to me at the NHC.
- ⁴⁹ Lawrence Bamikole, 'Livivity as a Dimension of Identity in Rastafari Thought: Implications for development in Africana Societies', *Caribbean Quarterly* 63.4 (Dec 2017): 451-466 (458). I am grateful to Njelle Hamilton, who (in conversation at the University of Virginia) helped me to rethink my argument on this point.
- ⁵⁰ Paget Henry, 'Rastafarianism and the Reality of Dread', in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 157-64 (161).
- ⁵¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 79. Describing the polyphony of imprisoned African-American singers, Alan Lomax suggests that 'call and response' is an inadequate term: 'it was composed of many intertwined parts improvised by the singers joining and leaving the chorus as they pleased, stroking in tones, part phrases, and harmonies just where they were needed to round out the blend. Moreover, the leader and chorus parts overlapped rhythmically as the chorus came in under the leader and replaced him until he was ready with his next line. He, in his turn, overlapped with the chorus, as they held their last note, thus creating moments of polyrhythm.' Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (London: Minerva, 1993), 260.
- ⁵² *Zong!* Durational Reading 2015: Behind Closed Doors. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU74xqLn4vw>
- ⁵³ Paul Watkins, 'We can never tell the entire story of slavery: In conversation with M. Nourbese Philip', *Toronto Review of Books* (30 April 2014): <https://www.torontoreviewofbooks.com/2014/04/in-conversation-with-m-nourbese-philip/>
- ⁵⁴ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19-20.
- ⁵⁵ Dena Epstein cites slave acts of 1711 and 1722 in St Kitts, which banned slaves from holding assemblies or 'from communicating at a distance by beating drums or blowing horns'. Drums and loud instruments which 'may call together, or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs or purposes' were also prohibited by the South Carolina Slave Act of 1740 (59-60).
- ⁵⁶ John Mowitt, *Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 6.

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- ⁵⁷ Patricia Saunders, 'Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip', *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 63-79 (79).
- ⁵⁸ Paul Watkins, 'We can never tell the entire story of slavery: In conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip', *Toronto Review of Books* (30 April 2014).
- ⁵⁹ Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54.
- ⁶⁰ Frank B. Wilderson III, 'Grammar & Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom', *Theatre Survey* 50.1 (2009): 119-125 (119).
- ⁶¹ 'This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. ...This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death.' Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 6.
- ⁶² Patricia Saunders, 'Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip', *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 63-79 (69).
- ⁶³ Sonya Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 219.
- ⁶⁴ Patricia Saunders, 'Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip', *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 63-79 (69-70).
- ⁶⁵ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 113.