

The Criticism of Slavery in Women’s Poetry of the Early American Republic: Sarah Wentworth Morton’s “The African Chief”, Lydia Huntley Sigourney’s “To the First Slave Ship”¹

This paper analyzes and compares two notable anti-slavery poems – Sarah Wentworth Morton’s “The African Chief” and Lydia Huntley Sigourney’s “To the First Slave Ship” – written in the early American Republic (between the American Revolution and the Civil War). Within our analysis we show that both “The African Chief” and “To the First Slave Ship” can be interpreted through a three-layered metaphysical social hierarchy made up of God, white slave-holder, and black slave. In both poems the roles awarded to each of the members of the hierarchy are the same – the black slave appears as the earthly martyr, the white slave-owner as the earthly master, whereas God assumes the role of mankind’s righteous heavenly judge poised to redeem the unjustly dehumanized Negro. However, though following the same general pattern, the two poems differ in how they specifically depict each of the three members of the hierarchy. The differences between the two poems in their respective images of God, white master, and enslaved Negro lead us to conclude that “The African Chief” contains a stronger criticism of slavery. The paper ends in a subjective statement that Wentworth Morton’s poem, due to the more pronounced sentimentalization of its black protagonist, is more likeable than Huntley Sigourney’s.

Keywords: Sarah Wentworth Morton, Lydia Huntley Sigourney, metaphysical social hierarchy, slavery, sentimental poetry.

Introduction

Slavery was a major political issue in the early years of the American Republic. As a problem inherited from Britain, the most powerful slave-trading nation in the late 1700s, it was destined to trouble the Americans throughout the first eight decades of their independence, up until the atrocious Civil War (1861–1865). However, much before 1865, when “the organic sin”² (a phrase denoting slavery, coined by America’s eighteenth-century clergymen) was finally banned across the whole of the United States, there were public calls for abolition from American politicians and literary figures alike. Female intellectuals too joined the movement, though only as writers, since the Christian patriarchal ideology of the colonial period, still predominant in the late eighteenth-century American society, not only disallowed women to

wield any political power but also dissuaded them from exerting themselves as authors. However, in spite of relatively strong opposition to female intellectualism, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a number of successful and socially established women writers³ resolved to point to the fact that, quite contrary to America's 1776 Declaration of Independence, all men were still not created equal.

The most notable of those talented women, whose success rested solely on their sheer literary prowess, were Sarah Wentworth Morton (1759–1846) and Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791–1865). Both women came from the northern states, where the emancipation of slaves began soon after America's separation from Britain, which, as it is well known from history, was not the case in the south of the United States.⁴ In accordance with their socio-political background, both poets (poetry was their favored literary genre) reflected the general feeling of their fellow-citizens that the African slaves should be released from bondage and allowed to integrate into the American society as free men. Empathizing with the oppressed members of the falsely egalitarian and democratic United States of America, each of the two writers produced a sentimental anti-slavery poem of considerable literary value, thus giving artistic support to the cause of ever-growing abolitionism. While Wentworth Morton published "The African Chief" as early as in 1792, Huntley Sigourney wrote "To the First Slave Ship" in 1827. These two poems are the subject of this analysis.

The objective of this paper is to show how Wentworth Morton and Huntley Sigourney criticize the institution of slavery in their respective poems. In pursuing this goal, we assume that although the two poets promote the same abolitionist values, they do so in mutually different manners. We also assume that the selected poems can best be analyzed through a three-layered social hierarchy as found in both "The African Chief" and "To the First Slave Ship". The hierarchy in itself is metaphysical because, apart from the two earthly classes of the slave-holding community, it also includes God as the heavenly judge of all humanity. Therefore, the metaphysical hierarchy we are referring to is made up of the following three categories (in the order of potency, from the most to the least powerful): 1) God Almighty as concerned with both white and black man's morality, 2) the white slave-holder as abusing the African slave, and 3) the African slave as downtrodden by white man's slave-owning system. In this paper we strive to show how differently the two authors present each of the three layers of the metaphysical social ladder, whilst simultaneously conveying the same abolitionist message. Our last assumption is that the image of the African slave, as the most denigrated member of the above-mentioned hierarchy, is the most important character of both Wentworth

Morton's and Huntley Sigourney's anti-slavery poems – a character more thoroughly described than either God or the white slave owner.

In accordance with the publication chronology, we first deal with Wentworth Morton's "The African Chief", as the earlier of the two poems, and then we analyze Huntley Sigourney's "To the First Slave Ship". The analyses are eventually followed by a conclusion, where we present our final results.

Sarah Wentworth Morton's "The African Chief"

"The African Chief", one of Wentworth Morton's chief works, was inspired by the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). The poem, which first appeared on June 9th, 1792 in *The Columbian Centinel*,⁵ describes one of a myriad of skirmishes comprising the lengthy struggle of Haiti's enslaved Africans for their personal freedom and independence from France.⁶ According to her own notes to the poem, Wentworth Morton depicts the misfortunate fate of a Negro rebel "taken in arms, fighting for his freedom, and inhumanly butchered by his conquerors".⁷ The event from the poem took place in 1791, at the earliest stage of the war.⁸

Although the plight of the African slave is not set in the writer's homeland, but rather in a Franco-Spanish⁹ Caribbean island, it is, judging by an essay accompanying her 1823 edition of "The African Chief",¹⁰ probable that the poet also meant to warn about the possibility of the same scenario on American soil: "We may depress those who serve, but not with impunity, for in some way they will certainly recriminate".¹¹ Given the fact that a horrifying civil war did eventually befall the United States over the issue of African slavery, we may conclude that Wentworth Morton's warning had, in a way, been quite reasonable; for The Civil War, though not simply fought between the blacks and whites as in Haiti, eventually claimed around 635,000 lives, thus becoming the bloodiest war in America's entire history.¹²

"The African Chief" consists of fifteen four-line stanzas, each stanza rhyming *abab*. It describes the ordeal that an African Negro goes through from the moment of his violent capture in Gambia to the moment of his gruesome death at the hands of the French in Haiti. In between the Negro's capture and execution, the poem also describes the enslaved man's humiliation as he is first sailed across the Atlantic, and then forced to toil on Haitian plantations for his masters. "The African Chief" is, more than anything else, a sentimental work of literature, and its sentimentality is contained in the fact that the heroic uprising of Wentworth Morton's slave is contrasted with the savagery of her falsely civilized Europeans. According to the chronological order of the events it presents, the poem can be divided into three parts – the first one depicting

the African before his rebellion (stanzas 1–6), the second relating the slave’s defiance to his oppressors (stanzas 7–12), and the third referring to the Negro’s ultimate failure (stanzas 13–15).

Wentworth Morton begins with the image of a slave ship carrying in its hull the poem’s main protagonist:

See how the black ship cleaves the main,
High bounding o’er the dark blue wave,
Remurmuring with the groans of pain,
Deep freighted with the princely slave!¹³

The poem, as it is obvious from its first stanza, directly addresses the reader, so from the very outset the author establishes a strong connection with the reader, thus trying to mold their view of the matter in question. From the image of a slave ship cleaving the sea, it becomes clear that her stance is that of a compassionate sympathizer of the heavily abused slave. To be more specific, the ship being cleft by the black ship (the color of the ship alludes to the color of its slave) and repeatedly making painful noises is a metaphor for the humiliated Negro, while on the other hand, the cleaving vessel as the inflictor of pain metaphorically stands for the exploitative whites. So, by means of a vivid metaphorical personification (both the ship and the sea assume human qualities) Wentworth Morton begins to build up an atmosphere of pity for the enslaved Negro, which is to endure throughout the poem.

Moreover, the slave is spoken of as ‘princely’, which points to his social status in Africa prior to falling into captivity. That is to say, before the whites seized the Negro, the latter had been a respected chief in Gambia, a West African region rich in gold and slaves, and in the late 1700s dominated by both France and Britain.¹⁴ So, the slave is shown as victim to severe social degradation. In addition, the mere paradox of the phrase “princely slave” is further intensified by a contrast between the slave’s former elevated status of a war-party leader and guardian of his tribe’s poor (“the lord of generous power, / by whom the foodless poor were fed”),¹⁵ and his present misfortune, perhaps not so obvious from his own plight as from the plight of his friends and family members:

Has not his suffering offspring clung,
Desponding round his fetter’d knee;
On his worn shoulder, weeping hung,

And urged one effort to be free?

His wife by nameless wrongs subdued,
His bosom's friend to death resigned;
The flinty path-way drench'd in blood;
He saw with cold and frenzied mind.¹⁶

As we can see, the slave is presented as incapable of sitting with his arms crossed while his dearest suffer the worst of white man's terror, and it is for this reason, in addition to his own personal anguish, that he decides to rebel at any cost. Therefore, there is, it must be admitted, a tinge of genuine selfless heroism in the "African chief", for his uprising stems primarily from his desire to avenge the wrongs trespassed against his loved ones. Also, the horrors inflicted upon the enslaved – the protagonist's fettered legs, his ill-treated children crying for help (a particularly touching detail), his wife's "nameless wrongs subdued" (probably sexual harassment), and the death of "his bosom's friend" (either by beatings or undernourishment) – are all the things a true African slave would have commonly endured from the moment of their capture, to the Middle Passage,¹⁷ to the moment of their arrival in the Caribbean (i.e. Haiti), where the slaves would have eventually been brought to toil on the fields of sugar cane. Of particular interest with regard to this is the phrase "flinty path-way", which probably stands for a trail paved with stone, and thus bears a kind of universal toponymic reference. That is to say, the image of bloodshed on stone paved trails alludes to both West African shore, where slaves endured their first maltreatment at the hands of their captors, and the shores of Haiti, where Negroes would have experienced the last stage of their suffering. Both settings, as we assume, would have been sporadically streaked with stony (perhaps even cobbled) paths, thus reflecting the fact that, as having been discovered by European explorers over two centuries before the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, both regions were undergoing an intense civilizing process in the hands of the eighteenth-century French. It naturally follows from this that Wentworth Morton's descriptions stay true to history.

Apart from the humiliation of his closest friends and relatives, the slave is also stirred to action by the egalitarian philosophy of the Enlightenment Age. The Negro, as suggested by Wentworth Morton, believes that all men are born equal, so that slavery and social oppression are against the laws of Nature. It is in the following manner that the chief muses while enduring white man's ignominious injustice:

Does not the voice of reason cry,
“Claim the first right that nature gave,
From the red scourge of bondage fly,
Nor deign to live a burden’d slave.”¹⁸

The Negro, clearly, follows in the footsteps of Rousseau and the French bourgeois revolutionaries who, seeking for an end to the old feudal aristocracy, had commenced an uprising of their own just two years before the insurrection of Haiti’s African laborers. In fact the two revolutions were inextricably linked, for it is in the French 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” that Toussaint L’Ouverture found philosophical support for his racially egalitarian ideals.¹⁹ So, when Haitian insurgents went on a rampage destroying the palaces and plantations of their rich masters, they were only doing what their white counterparts in Paris had already paved the way for in Paris. Both violent movements held Rousseau in high esteem and opined, just like the Genevan philosopher, that “man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains”,²⁰ so that a real modern utopia can be achieved only by restoring the primitive equality of all human beings. In presenting the dark-skinned rebel as aware of Rousseauian ethical principles, the poet obviously abolishes the chasm which had divided the whites and “the colored” ever since the discovery of the New World and Sub-Saharan Africa. For Wentworth Morton, therefore, the African chief is not an inferior half-animal, but rather a noble savage capable of teaching his hypocritical oppressors a lesson in morality.

In the seventh stanza the enslaved chief launches an organized attack on Haiti’s French. “Resolved to burst the crushing chain, / or mid the battle’s blast to die”,²¹ as the poet describes him, the slave puts himself at the head of a mutinous band of Negroes. The uprising, as it turns out, fails, but not before the protagonist manages to pay back for at least some of the plight previously experienced:

First of his race, he led the band,
Guardless of danger, hurling round,
Till by his red avenging hand,
Full many a despot stain’d the ground.²²

While the positive character of the African chief gradually changes, thus growing ever more likeable (from a purely observing princely slave to a combatant in action, winning all the reader’s sympathies), the French whites, on the other hand, from one image to another grow more and more villainous. After being described as treacherous²³ “white tyrants of the deep”²⁴

in the second stanza, they are now called “despots” – another derogatory epithet leading to the accumulation of the Frenchmen’s negative traits. Toward the end of the poem the chasm between the master and slave to the advantage of the latter grows ever bigger and the difference only becomes too evident when Wentworth Morton likens the warring slave to the greatest heroes of both antiquity and the Enlightenment Age: the ancient Messenians, the Roman Decius, the Spartan Leonidas, England’s William III of Orange, Corsica’s Pasquale Paoli, and America’s George Washington.²⁵ In doing so she seems to boldly express her advocacy of anti-racism, since the African chief turns out to be the equal of white war heroes (in the twelfth stanza, the poet even refers to the Negro as being spiritually akin to the generals of European descent). Of particular significance with regard to this celebration of the Negro’s bravery is Wentworth Morton’s mention of “heaven” in stanza 10, for it is at this point that the author introduces the role of God in the chief’s rebellion:

When erst Messenia’s sons oppress’d,
Flew desperate to the sanguine field,
With iron clothed each injured breast,
And saw the cruel Spartan yield,

Did not the soul to heaven allied,
With the proud heart as greatly swell,
As when the Roman Decius died,
Or when the Grecian victim fell?²⁶

Heaven, as God’s dwelling-place, is allied with the soul of the insurgent just like in the case of the great battles in classical history. God, as we perceive, deems the African chief’s rebellion as just and dignified, so we could argue that the image of the supreme divinity in Wentworth Morton’s poem contradicts the image of the conventional New Testament God embodied in the following words of Jesus: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”.²⁷ In other words, rather than supporting submissiveness to their earthly masters and reliance on the Biblical promise of a blissful afterlife for the oppressed, the African chief’s God supports violence and the overthrow of an unjust sovereign. In that sense, it would be correct to say that Wentworth Morton’s notion of God (even though she never explicitly mentions the word “God”) is essentially deist and Lockeian, since, in accordance with the Englishman’s enlightenment philosophy, He lends His support to a just, if violent, revolution.²⁸

However, though standing in support of the African chief's uprising, God eventually fails to guide his oppressed son to final victory. The closing lines of the poem see the recaptured slave undergo excruciating pain on the breaking wheel, an age-old tool of torturous death. The poet urges the reader to pity the slave, for, as she would have us believe, his violence, as opposed to the one committed by the French rulers of Haiti (in terms of both the imposing of forced labor and retaliation for the slaves' uprising), is freedom-seeking and, therefore, humane. The French, who at least for the time being succeed in crushing resistance, are described as "the hard race of pallid hue",²⁹ so that the demonization of the master and the sentimentalization of the slave both reach their peak values. God, according to the last stanza, is, in spite of the slave's defeat, implicitly shown as a benevolent judge embracing the slain martyr:

Let sorrow bathe each blushing cheek,
Bend piteous o'er the tortured slave,
Whose wrongs compassion cannot speak,
Whose only refuge was the grave.³⁰

The grave, that is, the African's courageously earned afterlife, is the only place where he will, through the mercy of God, find his peace and salvation. So the poem ends in the same tone that it began with – as a criticism of white man's remorseless exploitation of Africans. The image of a civilized man's "blushing cheek" overwhelmed with sorrowful tears (Wentworth Morton would obviously like her American readers to respond with not only pity but also shame to how inhumanly a gallant freedom-fighter is treated) is particularly important for the conveyance of the final message. Civilization, as we should suppose, has, right from the start, been grounded on false precepts. It has aspired to achieve a well-organized community oriented toward peace and large-scale exploitation of natural resources. Yet, in doing so, it has endowed some with too much and others with too little power; it has created castes, it has created masters and slaves, and subsequently deprived all human beings of the most valuable thing in their possession – freedom. For, if we give legitimacy to the opinion of America's Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, slavery does not only harm the slaves – it is "an evil institution, which corrupt[s] the master even more than it oppresse[s] the chattel".³¹ This perversity, according to Wentworth Morton, must be mended and humans restored to the libertarian equality of their primitive beginnings. Thus, with its last, heart-wrenching stanza, the poem's egalitarian message reaches its cathartic climax.

All in all, “The African Chief” is both a sentimental and ironic piece of poetry. Its artistic strength lies in the fact that, through the use of highly emotional images, it inverts the stereotypical view of the “civilized” whites and “uncivilized” blacks. The extent to which this inversion is effected is so large that the European is presented as doubly irredeemable (in terms of both oppressing the slave through unrewarded labor and punishing him cruelly for a righteous uprising) while the Negro, on the other hand, is highly romanticized (rather than as a sad, passive toiler, he is shown as a dignified fighter for freedom). As argued by Ali Isani, such a belligerent image of the African slave is comparatively rare in the context of the overall anti-slavery poetry of the late 1700s in America, for the majority of poets of the time considered pathos as “more persuasive than open wrath”.³² In that sense Wentworth Morton differs from the majority of her contemporaries, and as such appears as one of the unique, authentic poetic voices of the early American Republic. God, as we have shown, is not portrayed as a conventional evangelical divinity seeking non-violence in spite of tyranny, but rather as a deist Creator allowing for insurgence when liberty is encroached upon.

Wentworth Morton’s only abolitionist poem is an undying proof of her verse-making prowess as well as a testimony to her unshaken allegiance to anti-racist egalitarianism. So powerful was the anti-slavery message of “The African Chief” in the early and mid-1800s that it would even inspire perhaps the most famous of all abolitionist poets, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892).³³ In this context, it is obvious that women are by no means inherently inferior in intellectual terms, as contemporary conventional wisdom, based on Eve’s (rather than Adam’s) original sin, argued, but instead the equals of men in both arts and philosophy.

Lydia Huntley Sigourney’s “To the First Slave Ship”

Similarly to “The African Chief”, “To the First Slave Ship” refers to a real historical event, and again in similarity with Wentworth Morton’s poem, the event Huntley Sigourney describes is somewhat unspecified. That is, just as the main protagonist of Wentworth Morton’s poem is, in spite of his unquestionable historicity, unnamed (and thus, in strict terms, unidentified as an individual historical personality) from beginning to end, so is the first slave ship that Huntley Sigourney tells about unnamed and equally undetermined in historical terms. In other words, by not mentioning the name of her first slave ship, the poet leaves us wonder whether what she had in mind is the first slave ship to arrive in her fatherland, the United States, or the one that was the first to reach the Americas as a whole. Even if the latter is true, which would necessarily include a reference to Iberian slave traders, and not to the British ones,³⁴ it

is, from the text of the poem, undeniable that Huntley Sigourney primarily intended to denounce her own Anglo-Saxon countrymen for their hypocritical perseverance in the “abominable crime”³⁵ of slavery (again, Jefferson’s phrase).

“To the First Slave Ship” is one of a number of Huntley Sigourney’s abolitionist poems. Unlike “the American Sappho”³⁶ (Wentworth Morton’s nickname), who expressed open bitterness over racist oppression in “The African Chief”, “the sweet singer of Hartford”,³⁷ as Huntley Sigourney was dubbed by her contemporaries, adopted a more conventional means of condemning slavery in her poem. The means in question is rational pathos and as we have already suggested by quoting Ali Isani, pathetic tone usually, though not as a rule, met better reception than unconcealed anger in the early decades of American independence.³⁸ Another distinction between the two poems, as being in close relation with difference in tone, is in the fact that the younger poet, unlike the older one, addresses the reader indirectly, through either “the first slave ship” or the enslaved Negro, thus creating an impression of a somewhat attenuated criticism.

Bearing the latter in mind, we may structurally divide “To the First Slave Ship” in two parts. In the first part, stretching from stanza 1 to 6, the poet addresses the slave ship, while in the second (stanzas 7–12) she addresses the enslaved Negro. Huntley Sigourney’s poem consists of twelve four-line stanzas and follows the same rhyming pattern like “The African Chief” (*abab*).

Huntley Sigourney’s criticism of slavery begins in the same fashion as Wentworth Morton’s – with the image of a slave ship sailing across the Atlantic toward its final slave-owning destination in (North or Central) America:

First of that train which cursed the wave,
And from the rifled cabin bore
Inheritor of wo – the slave
To bless his palm-tree’s shade no more.³⁹

The slave, as it is noticeable, is referred to as the ‘inheritor of woe’, a phrase which unmistakably alludes to the momentous nature of history’s first trans-Atlantic slave-trading voyage. The first Negro to suffer the horrible fate of life-long bondage, therefore, is, metaphorically speaking, a father to all the blacks who, contrary to their freedom-loving nature, will be forced to inherit the accursed state of slavery for centuries to come. The historic dimension of the first slave ship is further elaborated in stanza 5, where the poet, with a note of

denunciation and concealed irony, exclaims regret over the vessel's "unwillingness" to eradicate the abomination as soon as it has come into existence:

Ah! – could'st thou from the scroll of fate
The annal read of future years,
Stripes, tortures, unrelenting hate.
And death-gasps drown'd in slavery's tears.⁴⁰

The concealment of Huntley Sigourney's irony is reflected in the fact that, instead of reproaching the real perpetrators of slavery, the poet reproaches the personified ship, which does not have the power to govern itself but is governed by the white slave-holders. The ship as an inanimate, unconscious servant to the heartless Europeans takes the criticism instead of those with the real power to abolish tyranny, and it is precisely owing to this approach that the author achieves a particularly stunning effect. In other words, the whites as Huntley Sigourney's folk are mocked for the annulment of their own "humanist" values without a single word of explicit derision.

Moreover, the first part of the poem is also notable for its detailed account of the ordeal that the Negro goes through in captivity. To begin with, the phrase from the first stanza that we quoted above reading – "... and from the rifled cabin bore / inheritor of wo, the slave / to bless his palm-tree's shade no more" – probably refers to the slave's degradation of status at the point of his falling into the hands of the enemy. In other words, it is not only the slave that seems to be shown as deprived of his former blissful existence in the jungle, but also the lush greenery of West Africa which, as we are induced to believe, enjoyed just as much the company of the primitive noble savage before the coming of the anti-ecological Europeans.⁴¹ If we are not wrong, what we are dealing with here could be an implicit romanticization of the African savage whose ethical conduct in relation to both his fellow human beings and wildlife was highly favored by many Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century. So Huntley Sigourney, just like Wentworth Morton, must not have been uninfluenced by the European free-thinking ideas which, as we mentioned earlier in the paper, had played a key role in shaping the American nation.

Secondly, the 'stripes' (i.e. flesh wounds from flogging), 'tortures' and 'unrelenting hate' are only the final part of Huntley Sigourney's catalogue of humiliations that the slave experiences during the Middle Passage. All the way from stanza 2 (where the cataloguing of the African's misfortunes commences) to stanza 5 the poet lists a succession of wrongs against

the guiltless slave languishing in the ship's hull (Huntley Sigourney calls the slave a "prison'd freight",⁴² a mere piece of cargo, thus emphasizing his impersonalized position). First, she describes the Negroes as being abandoned by hope; then they are spoken of as crying in agony, whereas the ship's "humid sails are spread with ceaseless sighs from broken hearts"⁴³ (a beautifully pathetic phrase pointing to the oppressive purpose of slave-trading voyages – the sails as the driving "engines" of pre-industrial ships are shown as being powered by dejection of the captives); and finally the author presents the sorrows of solitude that none of real history's transported Africans would have been spared:

The fetter'd chieftain's burning tear,
The parted lover's mute despair,
The childless mother's pang severe,
The orphan's misery, are there.⁴⁴

As we perceive, the slaves' horrors are shown as coming from the severance of family relations. Something similar was seen in "The African Chief", where Wentworth Morton spoke of the chief's inability to control his fury at the sight of his loved ones being humiliated. With regard to this, it is interesting to note that Huntley Sigourney's account is in perfect accordance with historical records, which clearly state that the slaves were often separated from their relatives and treated as livestock, as mere numbers, without any respect to their humanity.⁴⁵ It is precisely because of this unjustified cruelty of the white slave-holders that Huntley Sigourney ends the first half of her poem (stanza 6) with the words: "Down, down, beneath the cleaving main", thus urging the first slave ship to voluntarily sink "rather than ope⁴⁶ the gates of pain for Time and for Eternity".⁴⁷

In the second half of the poem, Huntley Sigourney not only changes her addressee (from the personified ship to the living slave, whom she calls "Afric"), but also introduces religious ideas. First, in the seventh stanza, the poet compares the enslaved Negro with Cain, whom she alludes to through the phrase "Eden's fratricide", whilst emphasizing the fact that the slave, unlike the first Biblical murderer, is unjustly downtrodden and ostracized ("every brother shuns [his] tide").⁴⁸ Then, the author goes on to thoroughly describe the whites as the poem's villains, or more accurately, to debunk the myth of white man's allegiance to the humane teachings of Christ. First of all, she brings to light all the hypocrisy of the falsely Christian slave-holders, who flagrantly transgress Jesus' commandment of love for one's neighbor as the very cornerstone of their own sacred religion:

Poor outcast slave! – Our guilty land
Should tremble while she drinks thy tears,
Or sees in vengeful silence stand,
The beacon of thy shorten'd years;

Should shrink to hear her sons proclaim
The sacred truth that heaven is just,
Shrink even at her judge's name,
“Jehovah”, Saviour of the opprest!⁴⁹

Twice the poet mentions the word ‘shrink’, thus pointing out how small (metaphorically speaking) her American nation is in praising a God who, according to the New Testament, despises racist oppression.⁵⁰ Her white countrymen, as she believes, are far from perfect egalitarianism, and should not consider the success of their Revolution as a comprehensive victory of freedom, but rather as a mere step toward a just society, an achievement that would fully ripen only after inter-racial inequality is done away with once and for all.

The religious zest of Huntley Sigourney (which, as a matter of fact, was her life-long characteristic) is particularly important in the latter stanza, where the poet argues that Christian God carefully records white man's inhumanities, so that the bulk of the American citizenry, though churchgoing and respectful to religious rituals, can hope for nothing but a just punishment in the afterlife. The former stanza, on the other hand, is particularly interesting because it warns about the possibility of a slave uprising. In doing so the author does not spare words of disparagement – she calls her land guilty and, through a highly emotional complex metaphor (contained in the ending two lines in the stanza – while ‘vengeful silence’ stands for black man's pent-up discontent, the ‘beacon’ connotes a conspicuous warning against a possible revolt) argues the Americans should prevent a possible disastrous future from taking place. At this point, Huntley Sigourney obviously resembles Wentworth Morton, but just slightly, for while “the American Sappho” explicitly writes about violence caused by racist oppression, “the sweet singer of Hartford” does so only implicitly, in the form of a vague hint.⁵¹

As a matter of fact, the last stanza leaves no doubt that Huntley Sigourney's view of slavery was by no means as of an issue that can be solved by armed rebellion. If it is to judge by the poem's last two stanzas, the only solution to the problem lies with the oppressors, and

their will to end injustice is entirely absent. So Negroes, as it turns out, have nothing to comfort themselves with except for the hope of eschatological salvation:

The Sun upon thy forehead frown'd,
But Man more cruel far than he,
Dark fetters on the spirit bound:
Look to the mansions of the free!

Look to that realm where chains unbind,
Where the pale tyrant drops his rod,
And where the patient sufferers find
A friend – a father in their God.⁵²

The Lord, though white man's – the slaves brought to America were usually baptized and thus converted from their African paganism – is the only one who promises an end to earthly misery, for according to the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth".⁵³ Just like in "The African Chief", the only place where the unbearable servitude ceases ('chains unbind' and 'the pale tyrant drops his rod [i.e. scepter]') is heaven ('the mansions of the free').

As we can see, Huntley Sigourney's notion of God is, in contrast with Wentworth Morton's, conventionally Christian. The slave is neither depicted as belligerent nor urged to revolt (it is only the whites who are told to beware of the wrath of the wretched), but rather advised to "turn the other cheek"⁵⁴ and stay firmly faithful to Christ's promise of a blissful afterlife from the Gospel. The Negroes' patient suffering – as the poet stresses in her eighth stanza – though "by the world unweigh'd", will not remain unheeded by "that Unforgetful Breast / where all the sins of earth are laid".⁵⁵ As we finally infer, the slave is left with nothing else but to rely on God's just judgment. Since the prevailing circumstances prevent him from hoping for a material, earthly well-being, it is his to seek prosperity only in heaven, in the realm of the immaterial. We may imagine the Negro, while unwillingly heading for the place of his toilsome martyrdom in the "New" World, as being similar to David the Psalmist who, in times of distress, saw his only salvation in the heavenly "Shepherd".⁵⁶ So, just like David, and even more importantly, in accordance with the epistles of Saint Paul, the Negro should accept his status of a harmless "sheep" (in terms of Christian sacrificial allegory) and hope for the Almighty to wisely guide His "flock" to the safety of soteriological paradise.

As we also perceive, the last eight lines of the poem are very rich when it comes to the vilification of whites. They are described as “pale tyrant[s]” and “far more cruel” than the Sun. In fact Huntley Sigourney’s comparison between white man (in the poem called simply “Man” with a capital ‘M’ to denote the Caucasian’s superior position) and the Sun is of particular importance, because it once again, and for the last time, brings to light the hypocrisy of the values of civilization. White man, as Huntley Sigourney says, is worse than nature (represented by the scorching Sun), for unlike wilderness, which simply forces the slave to physically toil for his survival, the slave-holder, with his physical abuse and psychological terror, causes harm to his servant’s both body and mind (“dark fetters on the spirit bound”). Thus, white man turns out to be the most paradoxical being on earth – a creature privileged to have directly received the revelation of true Christian faith, from which, as it is noticeable, he departs far more than the ones who got to learn of it only at second hand.

To sum up, “To the First Slave Ship” is, just like “The African Chief”, sentimental and ironic. Both sentimental and ironic dimensions of the poem are manifested through a three-layered metaphysical hierarchy made up of God, white master, and black slave. The slave as the poem’s central figure is depicted as expecting to attain his freedom not on earth, through a dignified revolt, but in the Kingdom of Heaven, through meekness and patient suffering. God as the supreme judge of human deeds is, in close relation to Huntley Sigourney’s image of the slave, conventionally Christian, or in other words, supportive of patient “cross-bearing” rather than vengeful belligerence. Though in one stanza the author does allude to the possibility of a black uprising in the future, the pervading impression is that neither God nor his oppressed African children will ever engage in a large-scale war against slavery in the United States. Within Huntley Sigourney’s Christian metaphysical system, it is the white masters as occupants of the middle rung of the ontological ladder that receive the bitterest criticism. They are presented as hypocrites basking in their zealous adherence to church rituals, while the practical (moral) side of their religion remains neglected. “To the First Slave Ship” is a highly emotional piece of poetry, and its emotional tones are equally well presented from beginning to end – whether the poet frankly empathizes with debased Negroes, or satirically denounces the lack of compassion among the exploitative slave-owners.

Conclusion

Sarah Wentworth Morton’s “The African Chief” and Lydia Huntley Sigourney’s “To the First Slave Ship” as some of the best works of women’s poetry in ante-bellum United States

unanimously condemn the institution of slavery, a social issue that the American Revolution, much as how egalitarian in itself, failed to abolish. In appealing for a literal, antiracist understanding of the Declaration of Independence both poets refer to the Middle Passage as one of the most horrifying aspects of African slavery. In addition, they also use real events outside of US history (with the exception of Huntley Sigourney's poem possibly referring to the exact first slave ship in the territory of today's United States) to express shame with the fact that their supposedly enlightened fatherland partakes in one of the most ignominious chapters in the history of Christendom. Both authors base their social criticism on a metaphysical social hierarchy made up of God, white master, and black slave. In arguing for the liberation of slaves across the United States (especially in the agricultural south, where slavery was deemed indispensable), both "The African Chief" and "To the First Slave Ship" ascribe to the three members of their hierarchy the following roles: to God, the role of the supreme, omniscient judge of humanity willing to reward the Negro with heavenly salvation for all the injustice endured on earth; to white man, the role of a tyrant and hypocritical Christian bound to face the wrath of vengeance, if not on earth, then unavoidably on Judgment Day; and to black man, the role of a humiliated martyr to be redeemed in the afterlife, in accordance with Christ's promise that "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first".⁵⁷

However, while applying the same pattern of ontological hierarchy, Wentworth Morton and Huntley Sigourney still slightly differ in how they present each of the three layers of the metaphysical ladder. First of all, it is the image of God as the supernatural overseer of the American society that the two poets refer to differently. In other words, while on the one hand Wentworth Morton presents God in deist terms, as a divinity that encourages righteous rebellion (though failing to guide the rebel to final victory), Huntley Sigourney on the other speaks of God in more conventional terms, as of a Christian (New Testament) divinity supporting patient suffering rather than belligerent resistance. Secondly, the two authors also differ in how they describe the white slave-owner, though in this respect their difference is slightest. That is, in both poems the hypocrisy of white man's "civilized humanity" is strongly ridiculed, for while Huntley Sigourney explicitly aims at the Caucasian's both physical and emotional debasement of the blacks, Wentworth Morton reveals how barbarously the whites treat the blacks not only in peace, where they heartlessly exploit their unpaid laborers, but also in war, where they exhibit an unimaginable degree of vengefulness in punishing the (justly risen) insurgents. Even though intense vilification of white masters is clear in both poems, we could argue that "The African Chief" is just slightly more vilifying, for the scene of a black insurgent dying a slow an extremely painful death on the breaking wheel conveys a particularly derogatory message about

white man's notion of knighthood (in contrast, the whites in "To the First Slave Ship" abuse the Negro only in peace). Thirdly and most importantly, Wentworth Morton and Huntley Sigourney differ in how they depict the central character of their poems, the African slave. While the former shows the slave as a dignified, self-respecting defier of white man's despotism, the latter presents him as a peaceful sufferer, with only a dim hint at the possibility of armed hostility.

Although both poems are well written and highly sentimental, and as such stand as a perennial monument to the attempts of early American intellectuals at redeeming the unjustly debased Negroes, we believe that "The African Chief" is more likeable than "To the First Slave Ship". The reason for this does not simply lie in the fact that, prior to the Civil War, the poem was "familiar [...] to every schoolchild",⁵⁸ but also in our personal view that there can be no complete freedom without freedom on earth in addition to the heavenly one as promised by the Holy Bible. Such, after all, was the mindset that in the first place drove the white American colonists to attain their own freedom from Britain's "taxation without representation".⁵⁹

¹ This paper has been written within research project no. 178029 of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia: *Knjiženstvo – Theory and History of Women's Literature in Serbian until 1915*.

No derogatory meaning should be inferred from our usage of the word "Negro" in this paper because that term was not considered to be offensive at the time when the two analyzed poems were written.

² Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, Inc., 1997), 169.

³ The eighteenth century brought the loosening of Puritan moral stringency, so that over the course of it women began to improve their hitherto vastly inferior social status. Although, in the early 1800s, even such a basic social right as the right to vote regardless of gender was more than a century away from coming into force (only in 1920, following the adoption of the 19th Amendment, were women finally allowed to vote in political elections), still the first signs of a new enlightened age would have been quite visible to a judicious observer. Both Wentworth Morton and Huntley Sigourney as intellectual figures were probably too submissive from the point of view of many twentieth and twenty-first century feminists (we are referring to their devotion to family life and Christian faith), but it is precisely them who should be seen as some of the pioneers of womanly independence. For instance, both poets added a surname to the surnames of their husbands (while Wentworth Morton added her mother's maiden name ["Wentworth"], Huntley Sigourney kept her own maiden name ["Huntley"]), just as they were both widely acclaimed as writers, with broader cultural and economic implications (while Wentworth Morton, along with her husband Perez Morton, encouraged the opening of the first theater in Boston, Huntley Sigourney was famous for her considerable writing income). (Nina Baym, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume I, Fifth Edition, (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 843. <https://archive.org/stream/nortonanthology01baym#page/n7/mode/2up>, accessed: May 17th, 2019; Anon. 1, "Lydia Huntley Sigourney", [*Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame*, 2019], <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/writers-journalists/lydia-huntley-sigourney#.XT64uY4zat8> [accessed: July 29th, 2019]).

⁴ Sarah Wentworth Morton was from Boston, Massachusetts, and Lydia Sigourney from Hartford, Connecticut. Both of these states commenced with slave emancipation in the 1780s, while freedom for all African Americans came with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, following the defeat of the pro-slavery Confederacy in 1865 (Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, [New York: HarperCollins Publisher, Inc., 1997], 498–501).

⁵ *The Columbian Centinel* was the most significant newspaper in Massachusetts for half a century following the American Revolution (1790–1840) (Anon. 2, “Columbian Centinel”, [Wikipedia, n. d.], https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbian_Centinel [accessed: May 14th, 2019]). The fact that Wentworth Morton published in it speaks convincingly of how well established this poet was in spite of belonging to the then intellectually underestimated fair sex.

⁶ The Haitian Revolution was the only successful slave uprising in history to lead to the foundation of an independent state free of slavery and ruled solely by the formerly enslaved African-Americans. The debased rebels, mostly laborers on Haiti’s numerous sugar plantations, were spearheaded by the Negro Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803), himself a former slave. The Revolution ended in 1804, with the expulsion of almost all Caucasians from the western part of Hispaniola and the declaration of the Republic of Haiti (Anon. 3, “Haitian Revolution”, [Wikipedia, n. d.], https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haitian_Revolution[accessed: May 14th, 2019]).

⁷ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823), 201, 277, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

⁸ Bob Blaisdell, *The Dover Anthology of American Literature: From the Origins Through the Civil War*, (Courier Corporation, 2014), 91.

⁹ Haiti is part of Hispaniola, one of the first islands Columbus set foot on as he discovered the New World in 1492. At the close of the eighteenth century it was shared by France and Spain, with the former occupying the western portion of the island (Haiti or Saint-Domingue, as it was otherwise known) and the latter holding the eastern part (Santo Domingo – today the Dominican Republic).

¹⁰ In 1823 Wentworth Morton published her last book – a miscellaneous collection entitled *My Mind and Its Thoughts in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*. Among other works, the book also included “The African Chief”, and the reprinted poem was preceded by an essay called “Servants”. In this essay, the author argued that no master can long sustain the command of his servants if he fails to properly reward their labor. (Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, [Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823], 199–200, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> [accessed April 17th 2019]).

¹¹ *Ibid*, 199.

¹² Dennis Brynley O’Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the United States of America*, (Longman Group UK Limited, 1990), 52.

¹³ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823), 201, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

¹⁴ Anon. 4, “Gambia, The: History”, (*The Commonwealth*, n. d.), available at: <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/gambia/history> (accessed: May 7th, 2019).

¹⁵ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823), 201, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ The Middle Passage was the middle stage of the so-called triangular trade in slaves, and it involved the carrying of slaves across the Atlantic. For European slave-traders, the journey from Africa to the Americas (North, Central, or South) was preceded by the “Outward Passage” (journey from Europe to Africa) and followed by the “Return Passage” (from the Americas back to Europe) (Anon. 5, “The Middle Passage”, [Port Cities Bristol, n. d.], <http://discoveringbristol.org.uk/slavery/routes/from-africa-to-america/atlantic-crossing/middle-passage/>[accessed: May 7th, 2019]). Traders came to West Africa exchanging various textiles and items of metalwork (tools, weapons, and dishes) for slaves, then transported their captives to the Americas and used them for unpaid labor on plantations, so as to finally return with the products of slave labor (sugar, cotton, tobacco, rum etc.) to Europe (Kathleen Kuiper, “Middle Passage”, [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018], <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Middle->

[Passage-slave-trade](#)[accessed: May 7th, 2019]). During their trans-Atlantic voyage, the slaves were tightly packed beneath the deck, poorly fed, and treated with merciless brutality (Ibid).

¹⁸ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823): 201, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

¹⁹ Even though the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” made no explicit mention of slave liberation, and dealt predominantly with the idea of equality among whites in France as the center of the French colonial empire, it did inspire the black Haitians to revolt; for the slaves in Saint-Domingue, France’s most prosperous colony and the largest exporter of sugar in the world, saw no reason why the eradication of social inequality should not equally apply to Negroes (C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Second edition – revised, [New York: Vintage Books – A Division of Random House, Inc., 1963], 62–84, available at: <https://archive.org/details/blackjacobins00clrj/page/n3> [accessed: May 22nd, 2019]).

²⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract & Discourses*, translated by G. D. H. Cole, (Everyman’s Library, 1913): 5, available at: <https://archive.org/stream/therepublicofpla00rousouft?ref=ol#page/n47/mode/2up> (accessed: May 22nd, 2019).

²¹ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823), 201, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

²² Ibid, 202.

²³ In the second stanza Wentworth Morton shows the ‘white tyrants of the deep’ (‘deep’ probably alluding to the sea whence the Europeans arrived in Africa) as betraying the African chief “in the palmy grove” (Ibid. 201). It is known from historical records that the violent capture of African natives, or the so-called “raiding” that the poet obviously alludes to, occurred alongside the buying of slaves, previously captured in war by indigenous African chiefs and therefore given away in exchange for various European goods (Anon. 6, “The capture and sale of enslaved Africans” [n. d.], http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/slavery/africa/capture_sale.aspx [accessed: May 29th, 2019]).

²⁴ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823), 201, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

²⁵ The Messenians were an ancient Peloponnesian tribe which threw off the yoke of Spartan hegemony at the Battle of Leuctra (371 BC) after more than three centuries of subordination (Nina Baym, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume I, Fifth Edition, [New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998], 843, <https://archive.org/stream/nortonanthology01baym#page/n7/mode/2up> [accessed: May 17th, 2019]). The ‘Roman Decius’ refers to three early Roman heroes, all of them named Publius Decius Mus (father, son, and grandson), who, as Roman legends have it, died fighting for their country (Ibid, 845). Leonidas (Wentworth Morton refers to him as “the Grecian”) won his immortal glory at the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BC), where he fell with his three hundred men after holding off a vastly superior Persian army for two whole days (Ibid, 843). Washington (1732–1799) commanded the armed forces of American colonists in the Revolution (Ibid). William of Orange (1650–1702) – from 1688 onwards known as King William III – was the key figure in the Glorious Revolution, which marked the beginning of parliamentary monarchism in England (Ibid). Paoli (1725–1807) first liberated his native island from the rule of Genoa in 1755, and later defended Corsica’s republicanism against French invaders (Ibid). As perceived, the poet equals her warlike African chief to not only the fallen, but also victorious, heroes of white man’s history.

²⁶ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823): 202, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

²⁷ Matthew 22:21.

²⁸ In two of his most famous works on socio-political philosophy, namely “A Letter concerning Toleration” (1689) and “The Second Treatise on Civil Government” (1690), John Locke (1632–1704) argues that, contrary to what was commonly held throughout the seventeenth-century Catholic and Protestant Europe, it is lawful to dethrone a king if he turns out to rule his nation unjustly and irrationally. Such a profanation of the monarch was in accordance with Locke’s deist notion of God as a super-intelligent creator who does not provide absolute kings to reign unchallenged, but rather endows humans (the people) with the ability to choose the best (i.e. the most rational) government by themselves (Chuck Braman, “The Political Philosophy of John Locke, and Its Influence on the Founding Fathers and the Political Documents They Created”, 1996, <https://www.chuckbraman.com/political-philosophy-of-john-locke.html> [accessed May 14th, 2019]). Needless to say, Locke’s breach of the divine right of kings would eventually inspire the American Revolution (1775–1783), an immensely important event glorified by many renowned intellectuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, including Wentworth Morton.

²⁹ Sarah Wentworth Morton, “The African Chief”, *My Mind and its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, (Boston: Wells and Lilly – Court-Street, 1823): 202, <https://archive.org/stream/myminditsthought00mortrich?ref=ol#page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed: April 17th, 2019).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, Inc., 1997), 144.

³² Mukhtar Ali Isani, “Far from Gambia’s Golden Shore: The Black in the Late Eighteenth-Century American Imaginative Literature”, (*The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, July, 1979), 361, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1943381> (accessed: May 17th, 2019).

³³ Bob Blaisdell, *The Dover Anthology of American Literature: From the Origins Through the Civil War*, (Courier Corporation, 2014), 91.

³⁴ The Spaniards were the ones to commence with African serfdom in the Americas. The first delivery of enslaved Negroes to the New World (or more precisely, the island of Hispaniola) took place in 1501, whereas the British joined the slave trade in 1562, only to intensify this lucrative business as late as 1619, with the arrival of first Africans in Virginia, the oldest English colony in North America (Anon. 7, “Timeline of Slavery in America 1501–1865” [n. d.], <https://sharondraper.com/timeline.pdf> [accessed: May 21st, 2019]).

³⁵ Anon. 8, “Thomas Jefferson: Liberty & Slavery”, [n. d.] available at: <https://www.monticello.org/slavery-at-monticello/liberty-slavery> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

³⁶ Anon. 9, “Sarah Wentworth Apthorp Morton”, (*Wikipedia*, n. d.), available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Wentworth_Apthorp_Morton (accessed: June 1st, 2019).

³⁷ Anon. 1, “Lydia Huntley Sigourney”, [*Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame*, 2019], <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/writers-journalists/lydia-huntley-sigourney#.XT64uY4zat8> [accessed: July 29th, 2019]).

³⁸ Mukhtar Ali Isani, “Far from Gambia’s Golden Shore: The Black in the Late Eighteenth-Century American Imaginative Literature”, (*The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, July, 1979), 361, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1943381> (accessed: May 17th, 2019).

³⁹ Lydia Huntley Sigourney. “To the First Slave Ship” (1827). available at: <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/first-slave-ship> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ What we are referring to here is Rousseau’s idea that prior to civilization humans desired neither to unrestrainedly exploit nature nor to exploit one another. Therefore, the Swiss thinker saw the tribal natives of sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and the Americas as proof of how uncorrupted the European forebears once must have been. The notion of man as innately eco-friendly and socially egalitarian introduced a revolutionary antithesis to the Hobbesian view of man as an inherently egotistic, power-hungry being (Anon. 10, “Noble Savage”, [*Wikipedia*, n. d.], https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_savage#Reaction_to_Hobbes [accessed: May 29th, 2019]). However, in spite of all the Enlightenment attempts to idealize human nature, Hobbes’s idea that “man is wolf to man” still prevails in anthropological philosophy.

⁴² Lydia Huntley Sigourney. “To the First Slave Ship” (1827), available at: <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/first-slave-ship> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Brendan Wolfe, “Slave Ships and the Middle Passage”, (*Encyclopedia Virginia*, 2018), available at: https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/slave_ships_and_the_middle_passage (accessed: May 17th, 2019).

⁴⁶ Archaic for ‘open’.

⁴⁷ Lydia Huntley Sigourney, “To the First Slave Ship” (1827), available at: <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/first-slave-ship> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The best evidence for Christian egalitarianism can be found in one of the Epistles of Saint Paul, wherein the apostle says: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

⁵¹ Notably, Sigourney’s condemnation of slavery is at its most powerful (i.e. at its most overt) in stanzas 9–10, especially when compared to the concealed irony from the first half of her poem, but it still falls short of the intensity in “The African Chief”, where Wentworth Morton clearly suggests that for the oppressed there can be no freedom, either earthly or heavenly, without dignified retaliation.

⁵² Lydia Huntley Sigourney. “To the First Slave Ship” (1827), available at: <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/first-slave-ship> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

⁵³ Matthew 5:5.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 5:39.

⁵⁵ Lydia Huntley Sigourney. “To the First Slave Ship” (1827), available at: <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/first-slave-ship> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

⁵⁶ David’s full expression of his dependence on God is contained in the following line from the Old Testament: “The Lord is my Shepherd” (Psalm 23:1).

⁵⁷ Matthew 19:30.

⁵⁸ Nina Baym (General Editor), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Fifth Edition*, Volume I, (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998): 841, available at: <https://archive.org/stream/nortonanthology01baym#page/n9/mode/2up> (accessed: May 27th, 2019).

⁵⁹ Dennis Brynley O’Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the United States of America*, (Longman Group UK Limited, 1990), 26.

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Anon. 6, "The capture and sale of enslaved Africans" (n.d.), http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism/slavery/africa/capture_sale.aspx (accessed: May 29th, 2019).

Anon. 7, "Timeline of slavery in America 1501–1865" (n.d.). Available at: <https://sharondraper.com/timeline.pdf> (accessed: May 21st, 2019).

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**Критика робовласништва у женској поезији ране Америчке републике:
„Афрички поглавица“ Саре Вентворт Мортон, „Првом броду с робљем“
Лидије Хантли Сигорни**

Овај рад анализира и пореди две значајне антиробовласничке песме – „Афричког поглавицу“ Саре Вентворт Мортон и „Првом броду с робљем“ Лидије Хантли Сигорни – настале у периоду ране Америчке републике (између Америчке револуције и Грађанског рата). У оквиру анализе показујемо да се и „Афрички поглавица“ и „Првом броду с робљем“ могу тумачити кроз трослојну метафизичку друштвену хијерархију коју чине Бог, бели робовласник и тамнопути роб. У обе песме, улоге додељене свакоме од трију чланова хијерархије су исте – тамнопути роб се појављује као овоземаљски мученик, бели робовласник као овоземаљски господар, док Бог има улогу правичног небеског судије човечанства, који је спреман да искупи неправедно обешчовеченог црнца. Међутим, премда прате исти општи образац, ове две песме се разликују по томе како конкретно представљају свакога од три члана хијерархије. Разлике у томе како једна и друга песма приказују Бога, белог господара и поробљеног црнца наводе нас на закључак да „Афрички поглавица“ садржи снажнију критику робовласништва. Рад се завршава субјективном констатацијом да песма Вентворт Мортонове, због наглашеније сентиментализације њеног тамнопутог протагонисте, завређује веће симпатије.

Кључне речи: Сара Вентворт Мортон, Лидија Хантли Сигорни, метафизичка друштвена хијерархија, робовласништво, сентиментална поезија.