

Michele D. Smith

*The Economic Exploitation of Mary Prince: A Closer Examination of How Both Slavery and the Abolition Movement Manipulated Slaves*

Economic survival was the primary focus for the British colonies during the eighteenth century. The British Slave Trade was essential to this survival. Slaves were purchased for economic purposes; despite the brutal manner in which the slaves were treated, they were nonetheless investments towards economic prosperity for their slaveholders. Until 1831, few people knew about the ill-treatment suffered by African female slaves in Britain. Thomas Pringle brought the abusive life of a female slave, Mary Prince, to the British public to advocate for the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. His publication of *The History of Mary Prince*, the personal narrative of the first black female slave from the West Indies, had a huge impact on the public perception of slavery in England. Pringle, a known poet and abolitionist, loosely validated Prince's experiences by allowing her the opportunity to voice her grievances about the ill-treatment she endured from her slaveholders, especially Mr. and Mrs. John Wood. However, this essay argues that their actions furthered the cause of the Abolition Movement and both the slave masters and Pringle likely exploited Prince's status as a slave to either sustain or further advance their own economic interests. Moreover, as the first female slave narrative in Britain, it is equally important to analyze the false superiority that scholars, like Audrey Fisch, suggested England displayed after abolishing slavery even while the country continued to enjoy substantial profits from the exploitation of American slaves while disregarding its own history in favor English Nationalism. Given the important reasons for

Prince's desire to publish her narrative, one of them being to educate the English audience concerning the brutal conditions of slavery, addressing the posture of England is relevant.

### The British Slave Trade

Many scholars agree that the first shipment of slaves to a British colony occurred early in the seventeenth century. Also, American settlers made their first effort to procure slaves with merchant ships from Boston and that was essentially the beginning of trading goods for slaves. According to Tom Lansford's article, "The British Slave Trade," the slave trade had become an integral factor in the economic and geographical development of British colonialism and geopolitical hegemony. By the later part of the seventeenth century the colonial legislature had institutionalized slavery and restricted the freedom of Africans. To accommodate the growing British Colonies, the Royal Africa Company<sup>1</sup> was granted a monopoly on the British slave trade (Lansford 3).

Throughout the eighteenth century the British were the largest importers of slaves. Molasses was brought from the Caribbean colonies to New England to make rum and then exported to Africa. Rhode Island had more than 30 distilleries, while Massachusetts had more than 60. New England distilleries reduced the cost of production to enable them to produce the product less expensively. A gallon of rum was sold in Africa for ten times the cost to produce it.

Additionally, the price for slaves in Africa rose from £4 to £5. The slaves were then sold in the Caribbean anywhere from £30 to £80. Next to rum, iron products, firearms, blankets, and small goods such as mirrors and beads were among the most commonly traded goods. Throughout the eighteenth century the price of slaves in Africa continued to increase dramatically. By the end of the century a "typical male slave was acquired for two muskets, shot,

gunpowder, flints, iron pots, several yards of cloth and other clothing, and beads, as well as rum, knives, and cutlasses" (Stubbs 5).

The population of the British Caribbean colonies exceeded 500,000 and 90 to 95 percent of that population was slaves, which resulted in more restrictive slave codes than in the North American colonies. For example, a slave could be killed or permanently maimed for a minor mistake. The British Caribbean colonies acquired a lot of wealth and it was primarily tied to sugar, with Jamaica being the largest supplier producing 77,000 tons of sugar per year (Stubbs 7).

As the British continued to rise in naval power, settling parts of the West Indies as well as North America, some of the British colonies were known for producing guns in exchange for slaves. Seventy-five percent of the sugar produced via the British Caribbean slave labor was shipped to London, England to supply their very popular and prosperous coffee houses. By the early nineteenth century the majority of the sugar was produced by the British and West Indian sugar was omnipresent in Indian tea (Black History.com).

### The History of Mary Prince

In order to properly analyze the plight of Prince<sup>2</sup> and how she was manipulated even in her presumed freedom, it is necessary to briefly address her history as a slave from an economic perspective. Focusing primarily on the economic perspective of Prince's captivity is by no means designed to diminish her personal struggles or the inhumane manner in which she was treated by her slave holders. However, for the purposes of this essay, the focus must be narrowed to the economics of her slave experience. Prince, before being sold to Mr. Wood for thirteen years of slavery, was a chattel to several slaveholders, some of whom leased her services to other slaveholders for profit.

Born into slavery at Brackish-Pond in Bermuda<sup>3</sup>, her first slaveholder was Charles Myners, a farm owner. Since Prince was an infant when Mr. Myners died, she was not used for labor. However, her mother and other slaves were used. Many of the slaves in Bermuda were used not only as servants, but as construction workers and sailors (*The History*: 7-8, 72).

In 1800, Prince's second slaveholder, Captain Darrel, purchased her from the Myners family and presented her as a gift to his granddaughter, whose father was Captain Williams, the master of a vessel. Because he did not have many slaves who could work as sailors alongside him, Captain Williams suffered financial problems and failed to succeed at sea. These economic failures caused him to not only mistreat the slaves (most of whom were children), but his family as well. An inability to turn a profit bankrupted his family and thus Prince's services were leased out to a neighbor, Mrs. Pruden. Sometime later Mrs. Williams died and Captain Williams, in an effort to raise money to remarry, decided to sell the slaves, which included Prince. Captain Williams was a prime example of slaveholders using slaves for economic survival (as opposed to prosperity). When he was unsuccessful at his trade he leased the services of his slaves in order to earn a profit and then eventually sold them in order to support the middle-class lifestyle to which he was accustomed and that his new wife desired. Even slaveholders had a social status to maintain. More importantly, not all slaveholders were affluent. Being slaveholders was a means by which many of them would become prosperous.

Captain Williams offered the slaves at an auction where they were examined as if they were cattle. The other slaveholders bargain-shopped for the best slave(s). Because Prince was young, healthy, a good worker and also prime for breeding, she was sold for a great profit to Captain I. Unfortunately, it was at this point that Prince was separated from her family. Prince, as she recalled the moment, wrote:

He took me by the hand and led me out to the middle of the street, and turning me slowly around, exposed me to the view of those who attended the venue. I was soon surrounded by strange men who examined and handled me in the same way that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words...I was then put up to sale... the people who stood by said that I had fetched a great sum for one so young a slave. I then saw my sisters led forth and sold to different owners...When the sale was over, my mother hugged and kissed us and mourned over us, begging us to keep a good heart...It was a sad parting, one went one way, one another, and our poor mammy went home with nothing (11-12).

As Mr. I's slave, Prince endured hardships that are not relevant for the purposes of this argument. However, some of her duties, which affected the economic status of her slaveholder, included picking cotton and wool. When the slaveholders desired a more substantial profit, they beat their slaves, including Prince, to instill fear and to motivate them to work harder. (11).

After five years as Mr. I's slave, Prince was sold to Mr. D and sent to the Turk Islands to work in the salt ponds. Mr. D was one of the owners and was very well compensated for each slave that he sent to work in the salt ponds. Despite Prince's youth, she was immediately sent to the salt ponds to work for several hours per day. The slaves were compensated with Indian corn, which they used to feed their families. Having several slaves to work in the salt ponds proved very profitable for Mr. D. However, having slaves standing in salt water for upwards of seventeen hours per day had torn away at their flesh and caused illnesses. When the slaves lost their usefulness, they were either beaten to death, shot, or sent out into the woods to die--a process which has been mentioned in many slave narratives, including Frederick Douglas's. Having known this, Prince was reluctant to exhibit signs of diminished capacity. After Prince returned home to Bermuda, she worked planting, among other things, "sweet potatoes, Indian corn, plantains, bananas, cabbages, pumpkins and onions." These crops proved very profitable for Mr. D. (19, 23-24).

In 1815, Mr. D sold Prince to her final slaveholder, Mr. John Wood who, at the time, was heading to Antigua. Her work began in a domestic capacity or what many have come to know as a “House Negro.” But soon after her arrival she attempted to seek a new slaveholder. Since she was often left to attend to the household in Mr. and Mrs. Wood’s absence, she worked to earn money to purchase her freedom. Mr. and Mrs. Wood, perhaps due to her lengthy service of slavery with them or perhaps due to the publisher’s decision, was the primary focus of Prince’s narrative in that she described the inhumanity of these slaveholders more so than any of the previous slaveholders. Prince had reached a point where she desperately desired her freedom as she grew tired of being ill-treated as a slave.

Mr. Wood did not then want to purchase me; it was my own fault that I came under him, I was so anxious to go (to Antigua). It was ordained to be, I suppose; God led me there. The truth is, I did not wish to be any longer the slave of my indecent master (25).

It is not clear if Prince understood that part of slavery included the ill-treatment of slaves. In 1828, Prince accompanied her slaveholders to England where she continued to be beaten and ill-treated by her slaveholders. Prince noted:

Mrs. Wood was more vexed about my marriage than her husband. ... Mrs. Wood stirred up Mr. Wood to flog me dreadfully with the horsewhip. She did not lick me herself, but she got her husband to do it for her, whilst she fretted the flesh off my bones (30).

Before leaving Antigua with her slaveholders, Prince had married a free slave. However, Mr. and Mrs. Wood would not allow her to purchase her freedom nor would they allow others to purchase her in an effort to give her that freedom. Prince, believing it was an act of spite and inhumanity continued her quest for freedom not realizing that her slaveholders’ unwillingness to set her free may have not just been about spite and inhumanity, but also about simple economics. In fact, economic stability may have outweighed the act of enslaving Prince. Approximately five

years later, England abolished slavery. However, Prince's family was in Antigua where slavery had not yet been abolished as it was still very lucrative (34).

According to the article, "Hiring of Slaves by British Officials," the British colonies were expanding so rapidly that there was a major shortage of labor and the colonies were in dispute regarding the exporting of slaves. Many government officials had even begun to hire slaves, but prohibited other colonies from stealing the labor of neighboring colonies, thus causing their competitors to be at a disadvantage. None of these British colonies was eager to meet England's gesture of abolishing slavery as the process was still very lucrative and it would have been nonsensical to terminate the business of slavery ("Hiring" 211).

Furthermore, according to Tristan Stubbs' article, "The Abolition of the Slave Trade," many people associated reform of any sort with the French Revolution of the eighteenth century. British Caribbean plantation economies benefited from the disruption to French sugar exports as a result of the slave rebellion. By the early nineteenth century American protectionism was abandoned. Merchants later shifted away from sugar in the British Caribbean colonies to cheaper sources in the East. These economic factors motivated slaveholders to oppose freeing slaves and any form of abolition as much of their capital was tied up in land and slaves. Many planters demanded and received large payouts when plantation slavery itself was outlawed in British colonies in 1834. Slaveholders therefore had little incentive to voluntarily abandon the slave trade or free existing slaves (Stubbs 12).

#### Exploitation and the Abolition Movement: Meet Mr. Thomas Pringle

Prince was ambiguous about returning to Antigua where her husband and family remained. She knew that she would return as a slave and still belong to Mr. and Mrs. Wood. If

she remained in England, she would be free, but without resources for food and shelter as Mr. and Mrs. Wood were not willing to offer freedom in Antigua. She would also not be able to return home to her husband. While slaveholders may have used slavery for the benefit of their families, the economics of slavery destroyed the families of the slaves, including Prince's family. The choice to be physically free yet alone, versus returning to your family as a slave is not a choice any individual should have to make. Unfortunately, not realizing that both slavery and freedom were less about a physical condition may have led to Prince's decision to remain in England, physically free but in emotional turmoil.

That same year, in 1828, Prince solicited support from the Anti-Slavery office in Aldermanbury. Since Prince had depleted her financial resources and had left the employ of Mr. and Mrs. Wood, she was offered a position as a domestic servant for Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Pringle. Pringle had been employed as the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society for nearly two years when he met Prince.

In the early nineteenth century there were some evangelicals and humanitarians who were advocates for the abolition of slavery, such as William Wilberforce<sup>4</sup> and Thomas Clarkson, who, Earl Griggs' notes in Thomas Clarkson, the Friend of Slaves, developed a six-step process for abolishing slavery in Britain (39). William Wilberforce, in an appeal to the religion, justice and humanity of the inhabitants of the British Empire in 1823, stated on behalf of the Negro slaves in the West Indies:

If the native intelligence and buoyant independence of Britons cannot survive in the dank and baleful climate of personal slavery, could it be reasonably expected that the poor Africans, unsupported by any consciousness of personal dignity or civil rights, should not yield to the malignant influences to which they had so long been subjected, and be depressed even below the level of the human species? (Eversole 4).

Wilberforce was one of the foremost advocates for the abolition of slavery and was widely known for his bold statements. However, not everyone, critics will argue, who joined the movement for the abolition of slavery had an equal agenda. Pringle, a poet and journalist, had written several poems about South Africa, but was not widely known beyond South Africa. Matthew Shum<sup>5</sup> argues in "*The Prehistory of the History of Mary Prince: Thomas Pringle's "The Bechuana Boy*"<sup>6</sup>", that Pringle had a problem with credibility about the abolition of slavery. He claims Pringle exploited the tragedy of a young African male child who was desperately attempting to avoid being taken into captivity and who, according to Pringle's notes, "accidentally fell under" his protection. The poem Shum cites as an example was one of Pringle's popular South African poems, for which he was well known. It is not clear in reading the poem where the exploitation of the child took place and unfortunately, notes were not provided in the argument attacking Pringle's credibility. The poem, does however, demonstrate some sensitivity towards the plight of Africans. As the storyteller, Pringle brings their issues to light. Perhaps if Shum had argued more towards the motives of exploitation for economic gain, the argument, at least as it relates to publishing the poem, may be plausible. There is irony in implying that there is a credibility problem with a scholar who questions another's credibility. And perhaps there is credibility in Shum's argument. The example provided here, however, creates confusion without the notes to support the argument.

#### Stanzas 2-4

With open aspect, frank yet bland,  
And with a modest mien he stood,  
Caressing with a gentle hand  
That beast of gentle brood;  
Then, meekly gazing in my face,  
Said in the language of his race,  
With smiling look yet pensive tone,  
"Stranger -- I'm in the world alone!"

"Poor boy!" I said, "thy native home  
Lies far beyond the Stormberg blue:  
Why hast thou left it, boy! to roam  
This desolate Karroo?"

His face grew sadder while I spoke;  
The smile forsook it; and he broke  
Short silence with a sob-like sigh,  
And told his hapless history.

"I have no home!" replied the boy:  
"The Bergenaars -- by night they came,  
And raised their wolfish howl of joy,  
While o'er our huts the flame  
Resistless rushed; and aye their yell  
Pealed louder as our warriors fell  
In helpless heaps beneath their shot:  
-- One living man they left us not!

(Shum 15).

Mr. Shum further claims that while *The Bechuana Boy* was an anti-slavery poem (his only anti-slavery poem of record), Pringle was not only disinterested in abolitionism, but was likely complicit in the capturing and ownership of slaves. Since Pringle was the head of the Scottish Agriculturalists, he was active in acquiring inexpensive labor, which was usually through slavery (Shum 20). This argument, of course, predates Pringle's tenure with the Anti-Slavery Society, where he may have grown to be more sensitive to the cause of abolitionism.

Furthermore, Pringle struggled most of his writing career; he was forced to move from London to Africa and then back to London due to financial struggles as he could not succeed as a writer. In fact, he made his plight as well as his ambitions apparent in the first paragraph of his letter from London on November 27, 1819:

I will only venture to add that I am anxious to be usefully employed, and if any respectable situation (of whatever description might be found most suitable & expedient) could be obtained for me in the Colony or in the new settlement where I might more agreeably reside among my relations, a very moderate income would satisfy my wishes. All I am very ambitious about obtaining is a secure competence for my family dependant only on my own exertions and the

approbation of Government. My pretensions are not lofty, indeed I can neither boast of scientific knowledge nor of much experience in affairs - I may only venture to lay claim to some little literary experience, and (what is perhaps of more importance in the present case) to habits of attention and accuracy formed during ten years employment upon the Public Records under the superintendence of Mr. THOMSON the Deputy Clerk Register of Scotland, & in the management of a newspaper and magazine for more than two years.

...

Tho. PRINGLE  
(South African Eastern Cape L Archives).

(Pringle 2).

The above portion of Pringle's letter indicates a man's desperation not only to revive his writing career, but a need to provide for his family financially. His desperation is certainly understandable and his desire to work is admirable. However, when desperation is present, individuals often resort to unusual measures to resolve their problems – Pringle's dilemma, income and a writing career. Presumably, Pringle's interests in the abolition movement were genuine on its face, but the reality of the letter's contents unfortunately continues to build upon his critics' arguments of questionable motives. By itself, this letter only speaks to the average concerns of an unemployed husband and father. For his critics, however, this letter joined with other criticisms strengthens their arguments. However, it still does not provide indisputable evidence of conspiratorial behavior.

Because of his South African poetry and an article he wrote about slavery in South Africa, his writing attracted the attention of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1827 and earned him an employment opportunity as a secretary. This job gave Pringle an audience for his poetry as well as his writing, but still he was not very successful. Moreover, his employment with the Anti-Slavery Society concluded in 1834 when colonial slavery was abolished. While Pringle's primary goal was likely not to abolish slavery, but rather to advance his writing career, his

participation was an important part of ending colonial slavery. It is likely that Pringle's motives were questionable, at least according to his critics, but that does not negate his success as an abolitionist.

Having employed Prince as he and his wife's domestic servant, Pringle observed her constant and unrelenting struggle for emancipation and for the abolishment of slavery as a whole. Prince possessed a strong desire to inform her English audience about the atrocities of slavery as she believed that the natives of England were either unaware of how prevalent slavery was and how slaves, especially women, were being treated or they chose to ignore its reality. Pringle published Prince's narrative not only to assist her with sharing her experiences, but as a vehicle to advocate for the cause of abolitionism as well as to advance his career and escape financial despair. He was certainly aware that no other African female slave in Britain had written her narrative and he seized upon an opportunity to address all three issues. Like other publishers of slave narratives, Pringle often contradicted the credibility of Prince's words throughout the supplement by implying on one hand that she was aggressive and argumentative, yet on the other hand she was the victim of horrific circumstances. While appearing to validate her experiences, especially as they related to Mr. and Mrs. Wood, as authentic, he also questioned their validity by suggesting that he could not state the truthfulness of her testimony (Prince 54-55). With Pringle as her publisher, it casted doubt on the legitimacy of Prince's narrative and subsequently led to two libel suits by Mr. and Mrs. Wood and their fellow supporters James Macqueen and James Curtin.

In James Macqueen, Esq.'s letter to Earl Grey, First Lord of the Treasury, he directly references Pringle as a "liar" and referred to him manipulating the words of Prince to suit his own agenda. He accused both Prince and Pringle of desecrating the characters of Mr. and Mrs.

Wood whom he deemed to be honorable citizens of Britain. He reserved his most vile remarks for Pringle, essentially labeling him as an opportunist. (Macqueen 744-50). Of course the fact that Macqueen as well as his cohort Mr. James Curtin, who also declared his support of Mr. and Mrs. Wood, were both acquaintances of the accused and staunch supporters for the practice of slavery, may render their arguments questionable. Perhaps Macqueen hoped to discredit the stories related in *The History* by discrediting its publisher. But their subsequent joint libel suits against *The History* were defeated in 1832, largely due to the overwhelming evidence submitted by Prince on her own behalf and corroborated, in part, by Pringle.

While Macqueen and Curtin's alliances may be deemed questionable, according to A.M. Rauwerda's article, "Naming Agency, and a 'Tissue of Falsehoods' in the History of Mary Prince," other more recent editors, including Moira Ferguson in her 1997 edition of *The History of Mary Prince*, and Sarah Salih in her 2000 edition of *The History of Mary Prince*, also accuse Pringle of changing Prince's voice as well as downplaying the sexual violence that Prince experienced or witnessed. Furthermore, they accuse Ms. Susanna Strickland, Pringle's friend and houseguest, who served as the amanuensis<sup>7</sup>, of twisting Prince's words. (Rauwerda 397-411). Pringle's decision to use Strickland was questionable at best. It does not, however, prove a concealed motive.

It is implied through the many critiques of Pringle by his peers that his motives to assist Prince lacked purity and integrity. They found him to be a desperate man who falsely took up the cause of anti-slavery and used it to advance his career. Arguably, he accomplished this through manipulation and a false sincerity. Despite his motives, which cannot be proven, he published Prince's narrative, helped to abolish colonial slavery and revived his career in the

process. If he had not revived his career and profited financially, perhaps there would be fewer criticisms. But then that would imply hypocrisy on the part of Pringle's critics.

### England: the Abolition Movement Meets the Great Hypocrisy

England abolished slavery in 1833. So it was not a coincidence that approximately twenty years later many African American abolitionists arrived in England. *In American Slaves in Victorian England*, Audrey Fisch examines the people and ideas of the abolitionist campaign in England. She highlights two of the abolitionists, Sarah Parker Remond and Henry "Box" Brown, who are not the most conventional choices for the abolitionist movement. Fisch drew a sharp contrast between the two lecturers, one (Sarah Parker Remond), a light-skinned African American woman who, like her parents, was born free; and two (Henry "Box" Brown), a dark-skinned fugitive slave who escaped from the south to freedom in the north by mailing himself in a box. (72-90). Although Remond wanted to represent the struggling black, uneducated, female slave, none of her predominantly Caucasian female audiences associated her with such an identity. Often, she gained the sympathy of middle- and upper-class white women who detested the poor treatment of white women, which was not Remond's platform. The English Press also wanted to associate her with educated white women. According to Fisch this was "an identity that she often attempted to reject as she was black and that was her individual identity and her platform." Obviously, her unconventional childhood and lifestyle from an upper-class, successful, (free) black family was contrary to that of a black, female, uneducated slave. Brown's lectures were received more along the theme of Negrophilism.<sup>8</sup> And so he and other lecturers joined that long line of typecasting that aided England in its continuing attempt to downplay the atrocity of slavery.

Fisch further directs attention to the reality that the original *Uncle Tom's Cabin*<sup>9</sup> by Harriet Beecher Stowe highlighted problems with slavery in its depiction of the characters and the need to abolish it. “However, after the novel, unprotected, was sent to England, its message was lost and the characters were reshaped” and the cause quickly moved from politics to capitalism, which was always at the heart of slavery (14). Tom’s character, after arriving in England became very popular and known as “Tom-mania” (12). Rather than focusing on the abolition of slavery, which was the novel’s original intent, England stripped it down to a name brand and created, among other things, new and disingenuous editions of the novel, along with wall paper, card games, table linen, and dishware. Englishmen seized the opportunity to capitalize on the slavery just as Pringle may have with the publication of *The History* and the abolition of slavery.

England held up its English Nationalism<sup>10</sup> as the face and voice of freedom and looked down upon America for its role in continuing the practice and advocacy for slavery while it continued to profit from the same process for which it condemned America. England may have abolished slavery in 1833, but the country had not long done so before criticizing America for still practicing the very principles of slavery that were designed to help them achieve economic stability. The difference is that England could likely be accused of doing so behind the veil of a façade. As stated earlier, there was profit to be gained by both the advocacy for slavery and the abolition of it and now, with certain Englishmen, the distorting and sensationalizing of slavery.

England’s countrymen had manipulated the system to appear sensitive to the cause of slavery by inviting Americans to lecture while they sold tickets to the events as if it were a minstrel show. They used only the African Americans they could either manipulate or whom they deemed less credible and more entertaining. They encouraged the writing of slave

narratives as they profited by marketing them and thus selling tens of thousands of copies in multiple languages. The wave of slave narratives that moved throughout England began a new literary movement as the theme dramatically changed from sensual fiction to American slavery, which allowed England to reap substantial profits. England promoted the “dumbing down” of the African American fugitive slaves and profited from their accounts of captivity by commercializing it and controlling the process. Furthermore, they continued to do so while distracting from England’s own brutal history with slavery. Hence, English Nationalism.

Simply stated, even though England presumed to take the high moral ground when comparing its country to America, its actions could be construed as disingenuous and some of its countrymen were the epitome of hypocrisy. In the midst of the abolishment of the slave trade and the later abolishment of slavery itself, England managed to successfully lure the American slaves away from a booming American economy (due to its practice of slavery) to England, seemingly of their own volition. Once in England they lectured as well as sold their narratives all while being dismissed as inarticulate, ignorant African Americans who may have not truly experienced slavery as they testified since neither of the qualifiers could genuinely validate the veracity of their personal accounts. Though African Americans were given the opportunity to share their narratives or testimonies on the lecture circuit, being exploited in that manner would not be considered beneficial. The Caucasian qualifiers were only intended to allow slaves and/or former slaves the opportunity to publish their works, not to argue for or attest to their authenticity.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that Prince struggled with her plight as a slave and was determined to highlight the horrors of slavery to England's natives, it is clear that she failed to realize the purpose of slavery. It was not established out of a demented desire to control Africans and deprive them of their dignity – at least not by way of design. The primary purpose of slavery was to gain economic prosperity via the most practical measures. Africans presented slaveholders with the most viable option available to achieve that goal. Slavery was certainly inhumane and many slaves were brutally treated and lost their lives as a result of this barbarity. And although Prince's testimony was challenged by some of her former slaveholders as well as Macqueen (friend to former slaveholders Mr. and Mrs. Wood), regarding the inhumane manner in which she was treated, no one has or should dispute the economic gains received as a result of her having been a slave.

It can certainly be argued that both the advocacy for slavery and the advocacy for the abolition of it were more about economics and less about humanity. Both groups profited from the push for and against slavery. Although Prince, via the laws of England, had obtained her freedom, it was only symbolic in its form as Pringle (perhaps inadvertently) deprived her of freedom by tweaking her voice (causing others to question her credibility). Prior to the publication of *The History*, Pringle's career had reached an impasse. However, the testimony of a slave presented him with the opportunity to become widely known as a writer, publisher and abolitionist. Even today, when Pringle's name is mentioned, it is usually directly related to the publication of the aforementioned narrative. Ultimately Pringle skillfully used the British Slave Trade to achieve the economic prosperity that the slaveholders desired. He simply manipulated the process from the other end of the spectrum. It would be hypocritical for his critics to fault

him for masterfully working the system designed to enslave. Although he was able to manipulate the system without having to purchase or own a slave, he did, figuratively speaking, accomplish his goals by selling one – Mary Prince (her narrative). He profited by selling a condensed version of her testimony. What is not clear is if Prince was able to discern the reality of escaping one type of slavery only to embrace another. She was likely articulate and certainly capable of advocating for herself. However, unlike other slaves or former slaves, who also wrote their narratives, e.g. Frederick Douglass, it is not evident that she envisioned the concept of what freedom meant for slaves as genuine freedom was not physical, but rather it was mental and unapologetic.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>. A slave transport company that was founded in 1672. The company transported, on average, approximately 5,000 slaves per year. Other companies were charged a 10 percent tax to transport slaves until King William revoked the company's monopoly at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>2</sup>. Figure 1 is the cover of *The History of Mary Prince*.

<sup>3</sup>. Bermuda consists of a group of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean and had been one of many British colonies since the seventeenth century.

<sup>4</sup>. William Wilberforce was one of the most active and influential British abolitionists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wilberforce was born in Hull, England to a prosperous Yorkshire merchant/banking family on August 24, 1759. The Elizabethan house of his birth is now the Wilberforce House Museum.

<sup>5</sup>. Mathew Shum is an English Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. He is currently submitting a monograph on Thomas Pringle to publishers.

<sup>6</sup>. "The Bechuana Boy" is a poem written by Thomas Pringle in 1825 while in South Africa.

<sup>7</sup>. Transcriber or secretary.

<sup>8</sup>. What used to be a sympathetic movement towards the understanding of black Americans morphed into the "blacking-up" and minstrel shows depicting blacks as lazy, ignorant and buffoonish musical idiots.

<sup>9</sup>. Fictional novel inspired by the real life of former slave Josiah Henson, whose autobiography *The Life of Josiah Henson*, (1849) had been read and studied by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

<sup>10</sup>. The love and pride of all things and its countrymen.

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