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TRANSATLANTIC AND THE INVENTION OF WINGS: HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION IN CONTEMPORARY NOVELS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY ON THE JOURNEY TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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*TRANSATLANTIC AND THE INVENTION OF WINGS: HISTORIOGRAPHIC
METAFICTION IN CONTEMPORARY NOVELS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF
INTERSECTIONALITY ON THE JOURNEY TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE*

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In both Column McCann's *Transatlantic* and Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*, the authors take time to delve into the lives of influential historical figures of the 19th century, Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké. These contemporary authors focus on the liberatory power of intellectual voracity, arguing that the historical characters' thirst for knowledge is not only a personal attribute but also a force that affects social change. During the 19th century, the control of knowledge through limiting access to schools or books was a way of conserving political, economic, and social privilege and power. Minorities and women were able to crack open this closed system by exploiting the "benign" notions of self-improvement to more radical ends. McCann and Kidd combine the stories of abolitionism and women's rights and bring into focus the parallel and connected paths of these still operative prejudices. These two contemporary novels, both works of historical metafiction, allow readers to understand the intersection of race and gender exclusion, as experienced by both Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké.

The use of the term "historiographic metafiction," as coined by Linda Hutcheon, creates a space for McCann and Kidd's contemporary novels to be analyzed in the past and present simultaneously. Hutcheon defines the term as a significant part of postmodernism that, "when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional *and* historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past" (Hutcheon 3). Situating the contemporary novels as historiographic metafiction enhances the presence of the past in the current moment. Hutcheon goes on to state, "Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not

equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the world and literature” (Hutcheon 4). Hutcheon observes that history and fiction take on similar, though not equivalent roles in literature. As it pertains to *Transatlantic* and *The Invention of Wings*, Hutcheon’s observation is apt. In these contemporary novels, history and fiction equally re-invigorate each other because McCann and Kidd create both that for which they do not have all of the historical facts, hence, embellishing the historical, while keeping the text grounded in fact. Therefore, in these two works, the fictive is just as important as the historical. Without the equal combination of the two genres in these contemporary novels, the reader would not have the same understanding of the characters’ journey to self-knowledge. Nor can readers have the fictive without the historical. As Hutcheon later argues, “The reason for the sameness is that both real and imagined worlds come to us through their accounts of them, that is, through their traces, their texts” (Hutcheon 10). McCann and Kidd use historical facts to create a new text, a new trace, for their literary characters, Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké. Moreover, their journey to self-knowledge connects, not only the novels, but also Douglass and Grimké, to one another through intersectionality. Intersectionality, as defined by Patricia Hill Collins, “provides a distinctive analysis of social inequality, power, and politics” (444). Kyoo Lee presses the reader to imagine an accident at an intersection of a stop light (466). This image offers the portrayal of multiple different types of oppression coming together and uniting in a singular battle: “Intersectionality, as a materially anchored and layered concept in critical social theory highlighting the mechanism of oppressions in the United States, draws for its theoretical development on the collective experiences and embodied histories of American injustices such as slavery and segregation, among others” (Lee 468). Through

their purposeful alignments of race and gender, McCann and Kidd offer readers the opportunity to see the intersections of multiple oppressions in *Transatlantic* and *The Invention of Wings*.

Essentially, these are works of historical metafiction. They each point to the growth of the character in ethical awareness and sympathy because the characters are placed in situations where they view their own social oppression in a different light. McCann and Kidd use Douglass and Grimké as fictional characters not only to highlight the significance of their leadership roles in abolitionism and women's rights, but also to highlight the links between these two forms of oppression and how they shaped American culture. Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké each have difficult, but ultimately triumphant journeys that begin with the anti-slavery movement and end with women's rights. Similarly, Douglass and Grimké use the power of their words, both written and oral, to convey the importance of equality and freedom. Importantly, in *Transatlantic*, the intersectionality is placed in a global context. Douglass's time in Ireland as McCann renders is told in the midst of a non-linear adaptation of history between the U.S. and Ireland from 1845, Douglass's time-period, to the present day.

Out of the various abolitionists, both black and white, in the 19th century McCann set his sights on Frederick Douglass. McCann states to Elizabeth Strout, "Douglass led me into the book. That was the original impetus. Not many Americans knew about his trip to Ireland and England, but not many Irish people even knew who Frederick Douglass was" (McCann 311). McCann wanted to bring attention to the fact that Douglass's time in Ireland was often over-looked, but he also wanted to highlight similar struggles the U.S. and Ireland were facing. McCann equates the racial oppression and

religious oppression that occurred during the mid 19th century, and more specifically, during the time-period in which Douglass left the U.S. for self-exile in Ireland. While Douglass fled the U.S. searching for freedom and safety from slavery, the Irish were escaping Ireland and coming to the U.S. in search of freedom and safety from religious oppression. Essentially, the enslaved, and the Irish Catholics were in search of freedom from upper, aristocratic classes that held authority over them. Similarly, both groups suffered from continual oppression and various forms of captivity, whether it be physical, mental, or both.

Another important aspect to the oppression Douglass witnessed, would be the assimilation between black women and Irish Catholic women. McCann uses Douglass's descriptions in his letters to William Lloyd Garrison to create an image that intertwines the plight of black and Irish females. Both oppressed groups experienced similar environments and strife, including assimilation into powerful households. One such image, written by McCann, causes the reader to stop and consider not only what McCann writes, but what Douglass witnesses in Ireland in this historical metafictional moment: "A dark young woman picked berries from the bushes: there was red juice all down the front of her dress as if she were vomiting them up one after the other. She smiled jaggedly. Her teeth were all gone. She repeated a phrase in Irish: it sounded like a form of prayer" (McCann 71). Immediately this image evokes a relationship to slavery with her dark skin tone and repetitive speech like chants. The relationship between the woman in Ireland and slavery comes from the description of poverty. In addition, her repetitive speech fictively reminds Douglass of prayer, as he would have experienced while on the plantations during his youth. McCann creates images that insert the reader directly in the

moment. The reader is drawn to the oppressed Irish and the enslaved Africans, while also beginning to see the significance of women's rights to Douglass. McCann bases Douglass's portion of the novel on the premise that seeing other forms of oppression in another land evokes a whole new wave of passion for him to fight for equality. McCann chose Douglass because he wanted to show the significance of his time in Ireland, while explaining how important Ireland was to Douglass. He additionally saw the opportunity to stress the importance of how Douglass experiences different types of oppression and how this affects his journey to self-knowledge.

Before Frederick Douglass made his transatlantic journey to Ireland on a self-exile turned speaking tour, he spent his life in the United States attempting to free himself from slavery. Skin color made little impact on his young childhood while on the plantation. Because of his young age, he ran errands and the majority of his time was leisure time (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 36). Upon his first true introduction into the world of slavery, Douglass witnesses his Aunt Hester being whipped by the master. A scene Douglass recounts three times over in each of his autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, My Bondage and My Freedom*, and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. This bloody instance haunts him for the rest of his life and becomes the starting point of his journey to free himself from slavery: "I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heartrending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood" (*Narrative of the Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 20). Douglass recounts this specific scene to reiterate continually how this was the moment he entered slavery and knew immediately that he must escape.

At the age of eight, Douglass is sent to live in Baltimore with the Aulds. For Douglass, this transfer was a part of life that neither gladdened nor saddened him. He knew that life on the plantation would be difficult and extreme, and that which awaited him in Baltimore could be no worse than staying behind. In his first autobiography, Douglass quotes an interesting proverb, ““being hanged in England is preferable to dying a natural death in Ireland”” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 38). At this point, Douglass felt this way about leaving one place and going to another. Douglass preferred to go to Baltimore, even if it meant death, than staying behind on the plantation to work until he died. The proverb works with the Irish publication of his Narrative, thus creating a self-exile speaking tour in Ireland and England to secure his safety from slavery. Even though McCann focuses solely on Douglass’s time in Ireland, the biography offers an insight to the relationship Douglass has with the Irish. The importance of recognizing that the Irish were publishing his narrative gave him the opportunity to insert the Irish in a way that ties him to the culture before immersing himself within it.

Even so, before Douglass can make his transatlantic journey to meet the Irish publishers, he must first discover that knowledge is the key to slavery. He makes astounding progress with knowledge at such a young age that he is able to eventually succeed in freeing himself. Douglass believes that “going to live in Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway to all of his subsequent prosperity” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 39). And upon his arrival at the Auld's in Baltimore, he was taught the ABC's at the hand of Mrs. Auld. Fortunately, Douglass was able to get all the way through the education of the ABC's before Mr. Auld put a stop to the lessons. Mr.

Auld stressed how unsafe it was to teach a slave to read, as well as, it being illegal to do so, and then of course, the fact that men knew knowledge held power. Despite the ending of his lessons from Mrs. Auld, Douglass gained powerful information by merely being present for her scolding: “I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 41). From here, Douglass devises a plan in order to learn how to read, write, and gain access to restricted knowledge.

Frederick Douglass quickly realizes through his restriction that literacy, education, and knowledge are primary forms of power. His desire for freedom meant learning how to gain access to all knowledge. Thus, Douglass makes friends with the white children in the area. Since these children came from poverty, Douglass would carry bread, a substance their homes were often lacking, in exchange for their knowledge. This was an intelligent move on Douglass’s part because he knew, even at the age of approximately twelve, that in order to get what you want you must first have something to offer. With the help of the young boys, Douglass’s reading opens his mind to the horrors of slavery more and more: “The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 45). Although Douglass despised slavery and his captors, he knew that he could not escape until he was able to write. For this task, Douglass chose the shipyards as his learning place. By reading the letters the predominantly Irish workers wrote on the pieces of lumber, he was able to learn what they meant and how to make them. From there, Douglass employed the white children by challenging their writing skills on the pavement: “I would then make

the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 47-48). Slowly, Douglass is able to comprehend enough to become learned on his own. This self-taught young man knows there is truly only one way out of slavery. Unfortunately, before Douglass can use his knowledge to escape slavery, he must first encounter the “slave breaker,” Mr. Covey. He learns just how strong he is when he faces Mr. Covey. Douglass sticks up for himself and ultimately overpowers Mr. Covey, and he ends up back in Baltimore being hired out to learn a trade. Douglass finds himself in a much more comfortable situation. He learns to calk and work in the shipyard where he is paid for his skills. Knowing that he is good enough to be paid such wages revives in him his desire for freedom. After a time, Douglass devises and carries out his plan to escape slavery on September 3rd 1838. He travels to New Bedford where a true turning point on his journey to self-knowledge takes place. It is in New Bedford that Douglass discovers William Lloyd Garrison.

After obtaining a subscription to the *Liberator*, written and published by William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass begins to idolize him as a prominent figure of the Anti-slavery movement. Douglass reads the newspaper religiously and feels inspired and honored just to be able to read the words. Douglass knew that if he had the chance to meet Garrison he would be thoroughly impressed with him: “He[Garrison] seemed a match for all the opponents of emancipation, whether they spoke in the name of the law, or the gospel. His words were few, full of holy fire, and straight to the point. Learning to love him, through his paper, I was prepared to be pleased with his presence” (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 264). And at a convention held in 1841, Douglass was invited to make his first truly

public speech in front of a large audience. After his speech, Douglass was offered the opportunity to speak regularly on slavery and become a part of the Anti-slavery movement. Douglass's first three months featured him and George Foster speaking in Massachusetts. After awhile, it became apparent that Douglass could no longer continually recite the same story repeatedly. The people wanted the facts, names, dates, and places in which he had been and come from. His audiences were becoming suspicious because Douglass's language did not match up with the hardships he had endured. At this point, Douglass wrote down the facts that the public wanted to know, and this specific piece of writing brings Douglass to Ireland:

The writing of my pamphlet, in the spring of 1845, endangered my liberty, and led me to seek a refuge from republican slavery in monarchical England. A rude, uncultivated fugitive slave was driven, by necessity, to that country to which American gentlemen go to increase their stock of knowledge, to see pleasure, to have their rough, democratic manners softened by contact with English aristocratic refinement. (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 272-273)

Douglass leaves the United States to ensure his safety from slavery, but he also goes to Great Britain to further himself on his journey to self-knowledge. Although he does not consider himself an American gentleman, he still goes to Ireland and gains an abundance of knowledge while meeting many aristocratic families. McCann uses Douglass's autobiographies and words to create the historiographic metafictional text for his time in Ireland.

Accentuating Douglass's time in Ireland highlights the similar struggles the U.S. and Ireland were facing. Douglass has to leave the U.S. to feel like a free and respected

citizen, but upon doing so, he discovers there are other forms of “chattelism” in the world (McCann 311). Therefore, while Douglass enters Ireland and feels he has escaped the clutches of slavery he learns that the Irish are fleeing to the U.S. in order to escape, not only the beginning of the famine, but the lack of rights given to the Irish Catholics in the colonial era of British occupation. Each attempts to escape some form of oppression in an attempt to find solace in the other’s land. While Douglass finds some relief in Ireland, the Irish, who were then oppressed by anti-Catholicism, anti-Irish, and the poverty of immigration, continually searched for a place of non-resistance. In addition, McCann parallels Ireland and the U.S. during the 19th century because of the Irish-Americans and the African-Americans same struggle to assimilate in American society. McCann highlights how Douglass felt like the Irish welcomed him on his visit, but on the other side of the spectrum the Irish-Americans that fled to the U.S. were in competition with the African-Americans for acceptance. Lee Jenkins acknowledges the competition: “Irish-Americans didn’t necessarily want to be singled out as a special interest group in this way—wishing to assimilate into American society, they were wary of causes which appeared to run counter to American patriotism; at the same time, of course, Irish-Americans often competed in the labour market with blacks” (85). Jenkins explains the competition between the African-Americans and the Irish Americans, while McCann exemplifies considerable attention to Douglass immersing himself in the Irish culture in an attempt to educate the Irish and himself. He takes Douglass’s immersion in the culture and emphasizes his attempts to assimilate in Ireland, while coming to see that his freedom is via the sponsorship of the oppressors of the Irish Catholics. The oppression Douglass witnesses ignites a passion in him to fight for others who, like him, have

suffered, or are suffering, tremendously. Hence, intersectionality becomes a key component on his journey to self-knowledge.

Colum McCann's *Transatlantic* focuses on different periods of transatlantic journeys starting in the 1800's and ending in the present day. McCann uses Douglass as his earliest entry point in 1845 by focusing on his self-exile to Ireland. He does not mention Douglass's life before arriving in Ireland, but instead, back fills by letting the Irish talk about and explain Douglass's achievements. In the novel, Douglass arrives in Dublin in 1845 and immediately begins giving speeches in an attempt to persuade the Irish to help raise money for the anti-slavery cause. Douglass's mission was to help spread the word about abolition while simultaneously keeping himself from returning to slavery in the United States. Douglass writes in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison at the beginning of 1846 about the people he encounters during the first few months of his stay in Ireland:

The warm and generous co-operation extended to me by the friends of my despised race—the glorious enthusiasm with which thousands have flocked to hear the cruel wrongs of my down-trodden and long enslaved countrymen portrayed—the deep sympathy of the slave, and the strong abhorrence of the slave-holder, everywhere evinced—and the entire absence of everything that looked like prejudice against me, on account of the color of my skin—contrasting so strongly with my long and bitter experiences in the United States, that I look with wonder and amazement on the transition. (“Frederick Douglass in Ireland”104-105)

The consistent acceptance Douglass writes about, not only as a man of color, but as an

abolitionist seeking support, is a feeling McCann must keep alive in his historiographic metafictional rendering of Douglass's time in Ireland. McCann does so by depicting Douglass as a persuasive man who stays focused on his mission: "He[Douglass] was here now to convince the people of Britain and Ireland to help crush slavery through peaceful moral persuasion" (42). Here, the reader gets both a fictional and historical statement. The carefully intertwined past in the present leaves space for McCann to fictionalize how Douglass was feeling in order to demonstrate his anxiety about making sure to be specific, not condescending, and more importantly, to be mindful of distance (McCann 42). Distance refers to not only the transatlantic space between the U.S. and Ireland, but also between Douglass and the Irish he encounters. McCann accentuates the distance as something to be both closed and as a space to be created. Douglass must close the transatlantic gap between the Irish and himself, while being sure not to swiftly become too comfortable in their presence. McCann sees this distance as an opportunity to call attention to the underlying parallel between Ireland and the United States by recognizing distance as an obligation. McCann must invert Douglass's normal reactions as distinct from what they are in the United States. Distance for Douglas functions as a sanctuary and as a burden. He must learn to accommodate the people of a new land, while seeking safety from the land from which he came. McCann recognizes the significance of distance not only in the novel, but for Douglass as a visitor in another land as a gap that needs attention. McCann captures these feelings by simply making distance a priority Douglass must face. The burden for Douglass begins when he realizes there are various forms of oppression that happen elsewhere in the world. This realization sparks what will become a deeper passion for Douglass on his journey to self-knowledge. Douglass

ultimately strives to educate others in order to change their opinion on slavery. By affecting as many as possible, Douglass intends to stop all forms of oppression with the start of abolishing slavery.

Although Douglass is in Ireland on self-exile, fueled by the mission to speak about the anti-slavery movement, the journey becomes a learning experience. William McFeely states in “Visible Man: Frederick Douglass for the 1990’s,” “In his speeches, as in his three remarkable books, he demonstrated that he had absorbed and incorporated knowledge into his mind. And made himself the master of that knowledge” (18). Part of the effect of McCann’s novel is to position Douglass as one of the most influential thinkers in the 19th century, not only in the United States, but globally. By conquering knowledge, Douglass becomes a powerful figure of the 19th century. Poverty, famine, and women’s inequality become an interest to Douglass while in exile in another land. McCann creates a space where fiction and history collide, not only by describing events, but also by crossing distance in order to make this realization possible. Douglass experiences firsthand the cruelties of slavery in America, but it is not until he arrives in Ireland that he experiences poverty in an entirely different way: “Piles of human waste slushed down the gutter...Men lay collapsed by the railings of rooming houses. Women walked in rags, less than rags; as rags...Douglass was unnerved by what was unfolding around him, but he stared out eagerly, absorbed it all” (McCann 44). McCann describes in detail the streets of Dublin as Douglass takes in the scenery of a new land. Here, Douglass appears as the spectator. He gets to watch wide-eyed from the cart of an aristocratic white man, Webb, as they bounce past the chattel in Ireland. This familiar scene acts as a learning experience for Douglass due to the new insight on poverty and

famine. McCann allows the extreme conditions to consume Douglass outwardly for a moment, but internally, these images become a driving force for his fight for equality. McCann portrays Douglass, true to his character, as a man who constantly finds a way to turn every experience into a knowledgeable event.

As previously mentioned, Douglass chooses not to write about the conditions of the Irish he first witnesses. Instead, he chooses to comment extensively on the welcoming and non-prejudice nature of his hosts. Douglass writes, “My opportunities for learning the character and condition of the people of this land have been very great...I have met with much in the character and the condition of the people to approve, and much to condemn; much that thrilled me with pleasure, and very much that has filled me with pain” (“Frederick Douglass in Ireland” 104). His positivity regarding the conditions of the Irish fades away once he feels he has fully immersed himself within the culture because he begins to experience various types of oppression caused by poverty and famine. In a later letter written to Garrison, February of 1846, he elaborates further on the conditions in Ireland: “I am not going through this land with my eyes shut, ears stopped, or heart steeled. I am seeking to see, hear and feel, all that may be seen, heard and felt; and neither the attentions I am receiving here, nor the connections I hold to my brethren in bonds shall prevent my disclosing the results of my observation” (*Documenting the American South*). Douglass makes note that he will not ignore the poverty and troubles of the Irish just because he is a man of abolition, and more significantly a man who escaped slavery. Similar to the descriptions used by McCann in *Transatlantic* are the details Douglass gives Garrison in this later letter. He goes into lengthy detail about the ragged clothes and wretched stench of the beggars lining the streets of Dublin (*Documenting the*

American South). Here, the parallel and equal combination of historical and fictional becomes prevalent as McCann portrays the streets of Ireland through Douglass's eyes. We can then recognize Douglass as an abolitionist, who through continuous self-education becomes an active voice for others who struggle with oppression. His self-exile in Ireland strengthens his already strong opinions on equality. McCann extends the idea that Douglass's self-exile in Ireland was a life changing experience; one that needs to be documented more efficiently. Therefore, McCann takes it upon himself to begin the documentation with a historiographic metafictional representation of Douglass's journey.

Since knowledge, without fail, plays a role in Douglass's life McCann instinctively inserts moments of inquiry throughout the novel. Douglass's fictional persona merges repeatedly with his historical representation in the complex moments McCann creates, such as, "He[Douglass] would have to inquire: his life these days was much about having to inquire without exhibiting a lack of knowledge. He could not seem ignorant, yet he did not want to be strident either...the essence of intelligence was to know when, or if, to expose even the heart's deep need for instruction" (52). The desire for more knowledge and the willingness to reframe his attitude and expectations become characteristic of Douglass. From a young age, it is evident to Douglass that knowledge plays a central role in power, and more specifically, freedom. Knowledge propels Douglass through his life as he continually seeks and finds a way to access this form of power. William L. Andrews believes that humans are always moving from one platform of knowledge to the next in the consistent search for a higher self-realization:

Human beings, individually and collectively, share a potential toward a higher self-awareness, fulfillment and ethical discernment. Some may be farther

advanced on the path of self-realization than others, but this does not alter the fact that the human condition is perpetually luminal... in transit from one level of knowledge to another. (145)

And this is precisely where Douglass is positioned during his exile in Ireland: in transit from one level of knowledge to the next. McCann highlights this transition by embellishing the emotions he creates for Douglass with historical moments from his letters to Garrison. Bearing witness to poverty and the beginning of the famine would have led to countless questions from a man speaking about the oppressive cruelties of slavery.

Despite his experience in hard times Douglass felt, both fictionally and historically, that the Irish were enduring something entirely different from the conditions of enslavement. The only real difference for Douglass between the oppressed Irish and slaves centers on the term "ownership." Douglass knows that as a piece of property you have nothing of your own. The poor Irish, while oppressed, are still rightfully the owners of themselves. At the end of the day to own even your own thoughts, poor or not, seems to Douglass better than slavery and captivity. This is an ideal McCann captures in the text: "What was beyond toleration was the ownership of man and woman. The Irish were poor, but not enslaved. He had come here to hack away at the ropes that held American Slavery in place" (85). McCann hones in on the fact that Douglass had a mission while on his transatlantic journey, and that was to insist on abolishing slavery. However, when Douglass writes back to Garrison in 1846 he passionately reflects on the various types of oppression: "...though I am more closely connected and identified with one class of outraged, oppressed, and enslaved people, I cannot allow myself to be insensible to the

wrongs and sufferings of any part of the great family of man. I am not only an American slave, but a man” (*Documenting the American South*). His self-exile, while allowing him to escape from the clutches of slavery, more importantly sparked a change in the way he would continue to fight for equality upon his return to the United States. McCann’s historiographic depiction insinuates that there was always someone there to justify the servant, the poor, and the enslaved. For Douglass, Webb and his aristocratic hosts are those that continually justify the oppressive conditions in Ireland.

By bouncing back and forth between historical and fictional statements McCann builds a platform for the strength of Douglass’s knowledge. Douglass’s self-exile in another land displays the beginning of his support in the women’s rights movement. Furthermore, intersectionality functions around the basis of knowledge. The various oppressed groups must rely on not only the knowledge of their own oppression, but the sufferings and environments of those they intersect with (Lee 468-469). Knowledge plays a crucial role in developing Douglass’s involvement in women’s rights, both historically and fictionally. Thus, McCann creates a fictional relationship between Douglass and Webb’s servant Lily, as well as, embellishing his historical relationship with Isabel Jennings. Douglass and Jennings met while he was in Ireland and upon his return to the States remained confidants through countless letters. McCann uses Jennings as a historical female reference in the text as another way of introducing Douglass’s support of women’s rights. The combination of Douglass’s fictional relationship with the servant Lily and his historical relationship with Isabel creates a dynamic representation of his connection to the females he met before his involvement in the women’s rights movement. McCann creates a type of invisibility for Lily that seems to link her and

Douglass together in silence. It appears as though Douglass sparks strength within her without ever speaking to her directly. There are no emotional, rational ties between the two, other than the fact that each feels out of place in their own land. Shortly after Douglass's stay in the Webb household, Lily decides to leave for America. McCann fictionally makes the conscious effort to create solace for one another in a different land. The question here remains, why would Lily suddenly find the strength to leave Ireland for America: "Douglass felt a chill. He watched as Lily moved her mouth but did not seem to say anything. What words went between them? What silence? There was a howl from a nearby shop. The screech of a woman. The thump of a fist... What thoughts trembled there? What fierceness had brought her here?" (McCann 97). McCann illustrates a questioning anxiety from Douglass regarding Lily's sudden need to embark on her very own transatlantic journey. The parallel between the two characters, Douglass and Lily, while subtle, is powerful in this particular scene. Douglass's knowledge of what lies ahead for the girl in combination with his desire to know more about her wish to leave her homeland, shows the importance of knowledge in every situation for Douglass. Because he possesses knowledge Lily does not, his need to know the truth about her leaving Ireland exemplifies the way knowledge represents transition to Douglass. McCann strategically places Douglass's thoughts and realistic actions together to insinuate Douglass's shift towards women's rights.

William S. McFeely, in his text *Frederick Douglass*, elaborates on the way that Douglass and women worked together for not only the anti-slavery cause, but women's rights as well. McFeely explains how Douglass's relationship with women focused on activism and same goal orientated passions:

Something other than his sexual attractiveness drew these women to Douglass; in some way his quest for liberation urged them on in their own repressed quest for their own. Talented and devoted to a worthy cause, these women encountered great frustrations...they were capable of much more, and Douglass, by his attention to them, gave evidence of his understanding of their frustration.

(McFeely 142)

Fictionally, Douglass encourages Lily by simply noticing her existence. Before her departure, McCann creates a portrayal of domestic violence, the plight of the Irish-Catholic woman, and this image is Douglass' "understanding" of female frustration. Moreover, McCann uses historiographic metafiction to draw further connections between Douglass and women with Isabel Jennings. McFeely states, "Isabel Jennings became the first in a long line of women confidants with whom he[Douglass] corresponded" (125). Of course, there is much speculation over the type of relationship between Douglass and Isabel Jennings, however, the nature of their relationship, as outlined by McFeely, appears as one between trusted friends. With Douglass's growing passion to support women's rights, a female acquaintance would be significant to actively pursuing the movement. McCann treads the line of this friendship lightly as he illustrates a fictional moment between them: "He looked at Isabel again. She was thin and ordinary, certainly not pretty. Her eyes were a sharp green, her profile plain, her bearing natural...Her accent was genteel. She was not the sort of woman likely to open the windows of a man's heart, yet there was something about her that daubed the air between them bright" (78). Her straightforward nature captures his attention and an alliance forms between the two. Intersectionality allows their relationship to be seen as more than black and white, man

and woman, but instead as two separate entities intersecting to fight for a much larger cause; the struggle for equality.

The images throughout the text during Douglass's time in Ireland, in conjunction with his speeches' ability to cause a fictional female to leave Ireland and seek solace in another land, support his desire to take part in the women's rights movement. In Douglass's fictional story line, 40 years after Lily leaves Ireland she listens to another speech by Douglass. McCann captures the significance of the speech with his historical fictive representation: "He spread his arms wide allowing a silence. *When the true history of the anti-slavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages*" (McCann 189). The reader becomes both Douglass and Lily in this moment; gaining historical knowledge through the memories of a fictional character. McCann laces the lives of females passing through meetings where Douglass plays an influential role in order to display his active link to women's rights, while still appearing as a primary abolitionist. Remarkably enough, "his visit to Britain, therefore, should be seen as a liberating sojourn for him and also for those abolitionist women with whom he communicated especially well," because the creation of such strong bonds gives him support historically and fictionally (Rice and Crawford 8). With the vast array of knowledge he gains from his transatlantic journey, he returns to the U.S. and aggressively begins his position as an active reformist.

Intersectionality plays a crucial role in the relationship between Douglass and Grimké's lives. Each historical figure passionately rebels against slavery, which in turn enlightens them to various other forms of oppression, especially women's rights. Sue Monk Kidd uses historiographic metafiction, in much the same way as Colum McCann,

to emphasize the significance of Grimké's life as an active reformist. Historiographic metafiction "offers a sense of the presence of the past, but this is a past that can only be known from its texts, its traces-be they literary or historical" (Hutcheon 4). By using diary entries, pamphlets, and letters Grimké wrote, Kidd is able to draw upon the historical documents and then fictionalize them into a context that explored Grimké's consciousness. Hence, moments are created that allow the reader to gain insight on who Grimké was as an individual in relation to her works. Hutcheon states, "The reader is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and limitation of the inescapably discursive form of knowledge, situated as it is 'between presence and absence'" (8). Because Grimké's actual words are both present and absent from the novel, the reader must adapt accordingly. This allows Kidd to fill in the gaps and create fictional representations where necessary, while also giving the reader historical facts to connect the storyline with the text. The use of equal parts of historical and fictional facts used to illustrate Grimké's life is similar to McCann's strategy when portraying Douglass's time in Ireland.

The *Invention of Wings* focuses on a historiographic metafictional rendering of 19th century reformist Sarah Grimké, in conjunction with a fictional recounting of a slave in her family's care. We know that Grimké was gifted a slave at a young age. She became quite fond of the girl, treated her as an equal and a playmate as much as she could under her limitations: "Children are born without prejudice, and the young children of the Southern planters never felt or made any difference between their white and colored playmates. ... Sarah Grimké, to use her own words, early felt such an abhorrence of the whole institution of slavery, that she was sure it was born in her" (Birney 7-8). Much to

Grimké's dismay the young girl grew ill and passed away, thus causing her to refuse another such gift. After much persistence from her mother, Grimké eventually agreed to a dressing-maid at the age of twelve. Hetty and Grimké formed a bond much like that of friends as opposed to owner and owned. Rather than having Hetty perform the usual tasks of waiting-maid, Grimké breaks the law to teach Hetty to read and write. Catherine Birney elaborates on an entry from Grimké's diary that states, "'my great desire in this matter would not be totally suppressed, and I took an almost malicious satisfaction in teaching my little waiting-maid at night. The light was put out, the keyhole screened, and flat on our stomachs before the fire...we defied the laws of South Carolina'" (8).

Fictionally, Grimké frees Hetty from the bonds of slavery and helps her escape north. Kidd reinvents Hetty (Handful) as a prominent inspiration in Grimké's childhood and adult life as an abolitionist. From a young age, Grimké enthusiastically pursues abolition. She begins with the contentedness she feels when teaching Hetty to read and write. Her rebellion against slavery, both secretly and publicly, results in the restriction of her education. Grimké's distaste for slavery leads her to find that this repulsion is a form of higher knowledge. In "The Education of Women," a manuscript she later wrote, she shares a principle most likely spurning from the restrictions placed upon her regarding education:

Knowledge has ever been the lever which has raised man to a higher state....

Difficulties [are] strewn much more thickly in the path of woman, than in that of man. If woman is ready to encounter these trials, to test her strength by conflict, shall she plead in vain for higher educational and industrial advantages? Give her the first, she will open for herself access to the second. (Lerner 77-78)

Grimké acknowledges education affords women the advancement needed to open any door they choose. There is no doubt that her feelings and theory on knowledge in 1852 were strong because of the restrictions she encountered as a young girl. Like Douglass, knowledge becomes a powerful tool to Grimké. Because of its strength, her punishment becomes restriction. Her father, while recognizing her advanced thirst for knowledge, sees it as a threat to her gender. Thus, he establishes limitations on her education, which must be obeyed. These first instances of intersectionality spark a passion inside Grimké that will burn throughout her entire life.

As a child, Sarah Grimké's father at first praises her strong opinions and rebelliousness, but soon realizes her strong demeanor may become troublesome. Once her father limits her education, she begins to wrestle with more than just her distaste for slavery. Suddenly, Grimké's greater purpose to abolish slavery becomes the desire to have equality, not only for different races, but for both sexes as well. Briefly, she gives into societal influences and becomes overwhelmed with the life thrust upon her at the blossoming age of fifteen. She struggles to find a balance between her inner desires and that which society desires from her. For instance, in a letter Grimké writes to Augustus Wattles in February of 1852, she recounts her feelings as a child and how eager she was, even then, to participate in the quest for knowledge: "I looked with longing at my brother's superior advantages and wondered why the simple fault of being a girl should shut me up to the necessity of being a doll a coquette, a fashionable fool-my haughty spirit spurned the idea of being dependent on my father" (Lerner 55). Since Grimké showed signs of great intelligence, as well as diligence and determination, her father and brothers continuously limited her studies by refusing her books, lessons, and

conversation. This leads to her attempt at conforming to standard societal norms in her teenage years. Grimké elaborates on this time in her life in “The Education of Women,”

At gay fifteen I was ushered into fashionable life; there I fluttered a few brief years, my better nature all the while rising in insurrection against the course I was pursuing, teaching me to despise myself and those who surrounded me in this pageant experience. . . . which carries with terrific swiftness many a high and noble nature down the stream of folly to the whirlpool of an unhallowed marriage. . . . I cannot even now look back to those wasted years without a blush of shame at this prostitution of my womanhood. (Lerner 82)

Grimké feels that she lost her teenage years upon giving in to society and the entire notion of love and finding a suitor. She allows herself to be consumed by social influence, which is why she spends the better portion of her adult life rebelling against such norms, specifically when she joins the Anti-slavery Association and finds her voice. After becoming enamored with a suitor, engaging in mindless conversations, only to have the courtship come to an end, Grimké reinvests herself in her previous ideals surrounding unlimited access of knowledge. Her passion centers on the idea of equality.

Grimké’s pursuit and failure to find a husband causes her to reconsider her goals. She felt a constant desire to do more with her life. Kidd fictionalizes this passion with a symbolic silver button: “Where the collar met, she’d stitched a large silver button with an engraved *fleur de lis*. Using the hawk bill opener John had left behind, I sawed it off. Squeezing it in my palm, I prayed, *Please, God, let this seed you planted in me bear fruit*” (Kidd 21). The silver button represents a beacon of hope for Grimké. She feels she must persevere in spite of restrictions. The symbolic button continuously reminds her

why she so passionately decided to pursue her dreams in the first place. Whether it is her first desire to be a juror, or her second wish to be a female minister, Grimké knew there was something great in store for her. Nevertheless, it is not until her father falls ill and they travel to the north that she begins to release herself from her family's restraints. Kidd fictionally depicts a specific moment of freedom where Grimké bathes with the other women in the water on the Jersey shores. She undresses and wades out into the water tentatively at first, and without thought allows herself to let go and become fully submerged in the water: "The water slapped our thighs, tossing us to and fro, a tiny game of Snap the Whip, and then without knowing what I was about to do, I turned loose and strode away from them. I pushed into the seething water, and when I was some distance, I dropped onto my back and floated. It was a shock to feel the water hold me" (Kidd 183). This moment symbolically represents her freeing herself from all former restraints she felt. Floating in the cold open water allows her mind the freedom to wander. When she emerges, it is as a new woman. Like Douglass, water plays a significant role in her transformation on her journey to self-knowledge. Douglass's transatlantic journey and Grimké's experiences with the water of the north highlights the significance of leaving home for each historical figure. The water becomes an uplifting vessel by which each travels in order to find their greater purpose.

Catherine Birney analyzes Grimké's struggles with religion before moving north to fully become Quaker. She feels she has a higher calling in life and after her father's death seeks comfort at a Methodist church in Philadelphia in hopes of finding solace. Despite her attempts, Grimké winds up rejecting the Methodist church and, at first, even rejecting the Quaker's, Of the Society of Friends, which compassionately welcomed her

and her father into their care (Birney 17-19). As Grimké travels back to the south from the north, it is during this passage that her interest in Quakerism begins. Both historically and fictionally, she meets Israel Morris, an avid member of the Quaker church. Morris piques Grimké's interest in converting to Quakerism when he speaks of female ministers within the church: "'Everything is of equal worth,' he [Israel] said. 'Our ministers are female as well as male'" (Kidd 195). Ultimately, Grimké wrestles with her calling to become a minister because she knows the struggles she must endure to speak publicly as a woman. With each meeting at the Quaker meeting-house in South Carolina, she is further compelled to this path, and with apprehension and hesitation she leaves her home in order to set forth to answer the call: "She sincerely believed it was so, and speaks of it as an unmistakable call, not to be disregarded, to go forth from that land, and her work would be shown her" (Birney 19). And with that in mind, Grimké sets forth on the beginning of a journey that would lead her to become a prominent reformist of the 19th century, a fate she herself did not anticipate upon her departure. Historiographic metafiction plays a key role for Kidd at this particular point of Grimké's life. While the novel as a whole represents her journey to self-knowledge, the beginning of her involvement in abolition in society really takes place when she embraces Quakerism. Therefore, Kidd must depict the relationship between Grimké and Morris as a true turning point in both her life and the text. For Grimké, religion frees her from the social influences of the south. She looks at Quakerism as a way to go beyond her limitations as a female. Gerda Lerner recognizes religion as an outlet for Grimké when she states, "Through her visions, she found the courage to defy her family, break with her upbringing, and leave the comfort of home and wealth. Sarah Grimké would leave the

land of slavery and go North to become a Quaker minister” (9). This bold act of rebellion lands her in Philadelphia living with the Morris family, while she solidifies her conversion to Quakerism.

After nine diligent years with the Quakers, with her younger sister Angelina by her side for the remaining few, Grimké still could not find her voice as a female minister. More often than not, she would become overwhelmed with the sudden urge to speak out during meetings, but could not eloquently relay her message. Her internal struggle to voice her opinions increasingly hinders her pursuit as a minister the older she grows. In addition to her personal obstacles, she must also face degradation due to her gender by the male elders of the church, specifically Jonathan Evans. Catherine Birney recounts how Evans disliked Grimké from the beginning of her time with the Quakers in Philadelphia and “had habitually treated her and her offerings with a silent indifference most significant, and which, of course, had its effects on many who pinned their prejudices as well as their faith to the coats of the elders”(75). Although Grimké feels strongly about her role as a minister in the church, she continually faces limitations due to her gender. Therefore, feeling defeated, she takes it upon herself to finally support and join her sister as a part of the American Anti-slavery Association.

At this point in her life, intersectionality begins to play a crucial role in Grimké’s success as an active reformist of the 19th century. Birney authenticates Grimké’s passion for reform: “Ever since the time she was denied participation in her brother’s education because of her sex. It is scarce too much to say that in her mind this question was second in importance to none, and though the word enfranchisement, as applied to woman, had not yet been uttered, the whole theory of it was in Sarah’s heart” (89-90). Birney calls

attention to the fact that Grimké develops her feminist thinking long before it was spoken about aloud. Sarah and Angelina Grimké fiercely voiced their opinions on equality at a time when reform was becoming widespread. Because Angelina wrote, “Appeal to the Christian Woman,” Sarah felt she too could speak out on the cruelties of slavery. At which point Grimké writes “Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States,” vocalizing her opinions opened a completely new variation of rebellion for Grimké. Her stance on abolition never waivers, but rather strengthens as she fights for equality across not only races, but also gender. When she writes *Letters on the Equality of Sexes* and *The Condition of Women*, Garrison published them both in *The Liberator*; the same paper that published Douglass’s works when he first started participating in the movement. She is similar to Douglass in her fervor for what is just, what is fair. Each historical figure represents one oppressed group, and because of their own oppression, they are able to cross over and sympathize with another group. Grimké and Douglass are just two prime examples of reformists using their own personal struggles to fuel the support and recognition of other's oppression. Their involvement with what is now termed intersectionality is a brilliant subject for contemporary writers like McCann and Kidd to use as a focal point. Bringing to life a form of struggle that contemporary readers can learn about both historically and fictionally, is a challenge made easy with such complex characters as Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké. They have lives that stand out on their own, and with the creativity and imagination of today’s authors, their miraculous triumphs remain significant in the present.

Like Douglass, Grimké becomes aware of different forms of oppression not only by experiencing them, but also by finally going beyond societal limitations and

discovering what the rest of the world experiences daily. Their continuous rebellion against conformity offers them the privilege to see the reality of humanity during the time-period. For Grimké, her affiliation with the Anti-Slavery Association gets her involved in women's rights as well. Her bold part in the movement may have been one nationally recognized, but she most certainly was not alone in her triumphant efforts to put an end to slavery and speak about equality, as elaborated by Birney:

All over the country, in almost every town and village, women labored untiringly to raise funds for the printing of pamphlets, sending forth lecturers and for the pay of special agents. They were regular attendants also on the anti-slavery meetings and conventions, often outnumbering the men, and privately made some of the best suggestions that were offered. But so strong and general was the feeling against women speaking in any public place, that, up to the time when Sarah and Angelina Grimké began their crusade, it was an almost unheard of thing for a woman to raise her voice in any but a church-prayer meeting. (Birney 91)

Ironically enough, Sarah Grimké faced a great deal of opposition even in church-prayer meetings. The extent to which society attempted to keep women quiet correlates to the use of knowledge as a form of power. If women were unheard, unseen, and uneducated, white male oppressors were under the impression that they would remain supportive of male leadership. However, like Douglass, Grimké overthrows the chain of command by finding a way to access education and knowledge. As previously mentioned, Douglass agreed that when slavery was looked back upon in textbooks, the women should be recognized for their strenuous efforts in abolition. Gerda Lerner states in her article "The Grimké Sisters and the Struggle Against Race Prejudice," that women were a crucial part

of the anti-slavery movement: “The antislavery women showed a greater awareness of the implications of the prejudice than their contemporaries: their meetings were integrated; they braved mobs frequently and developed the tactic of ‘non-violent resistance’ by walking out of a mob, arm-in-arm, one Negro woman and one white” (Lerner 167). The bravery of the women combined with their compassionate nature makes their presence in the anti-slavery movement historic. Kidd accentuates their strong bonds with a relationship between the Grimké sisters and Sarah Mapps Douglass and her mother, Grace. In the novel, the Grimké sisters take a stance against slavery in the Quaker church and sit on the Negro pew next to Sarah Douglass and her mother. The other women support this act of rebellion and together an alliance forms: “The four of us instinctively slid together on the bench” (Kidd 307). Though it was only the four of them, these women boldly defy not only society, but their church as well. Though the Quakers supported anti-slavery, they continued to keep a separation between whites and blacks; Grimké could never fully comply with such an action. Kidd uses historiographic metafiction to incorporate the importance of women, white and black, coming together in order to abolish slavery. The relationship Kidd creates between Grimké and Sarah Douglass is the fundamental beginning for her involvement in speaking and writing publicly against the anti-slavery movement in the text: an act that compels her to begin actively supporting women’s rights.

Historically, Sarah Grimké had much hesitation when it came time to support and join the anti-slavery movement as a published writer and speaker of the cause. Lerner explains how Angelina made her connections with William Lloyd Garrison first and then after much persuasion Sarah agreed to join her: “Sarah tried her best to dissuade Angelina

from working in public... She feared the inevitable outrage, censure, gossip, and even the possibility of violence...After much inner struggle, Sarah's love for her sister outweighed her scruples...even though she felt no calling for any kind of public role" (13). Grimké takes time to adjust to her active role as a reformist, but in Kidd's text she embraces her role enthusiastically. Although, historiographic metafiction shows that there is no denying that Angelina inspired Sarah to become an active member of the Anti-slavery Society. Both Birney and Kidd state something along the lines of how Grimké went to great lengths to ensure a pleasant upbringing for Angelina, so when it came time for the sisters to join the cause, it was Angelina that guided her older sister (Birney 13) (Kidd 308). Kidd sees this as an opportunity to empower Grimké's role as one of the first female lecturers of the movement. Kidd gives credit to Angelina's fearless first step into the spotlight by accurately portraying the roles of the sisters in the matter: "She[Angelina] was braver than I, she always had been. I cared too much for the opinion of others, she cared not a whit. ...I was a thinker, she was a doer. I kindled fires, she spread them. ...Nina was one wing, I was the other" (Kidd 308). Here, the title of the novel becomes defined eloquently and subtlety as each sister is symbolically represented as a wing. Their strength remains at its strongest when they are working together. Similar to the wings of the Grimké sisters would be the way people of different types of oppression fight the battle for equality together. Their unity in a single battle overpowers the resistance each oppressed group faces singularly. Each sister has her role to play: Sarah being the thinker and Angelina the doer. Together the women enter the Anti-slavery Association. Jami Carlacio describes the resistance the sisters faced when they begin speaking for mixed gender audiences on abolition, "The sisters were constantly on guard from the verbal

attacks by critics who believed that women should not speak in public, particularly when men comprised part of the audience” (252). Despite the abolitionists strong efforts to remove slavery, the fact still remained that women were meant to be seen and not heard.

This resistance only fueled the Grimké sisters to challenge society further. Speaking for the Anti-slavery Society acted as a gateway for the sisters into the women’s rights movement. Theodore Weld, a leader in the Anti-slavery Society, strongly urged the sisters to continue to speak on slavery alone. Explaining that speaking on the cause of women in public could potentially harm the cause of the slave (Birney 20). Here, the concept of intersectionality has clearly not yet been formed. Grimké faces a crossroads now where she is forced to choose between the slave cause, a battle she has been fighting her entire life, or the women’s cause, also a battle she has fought internally her entire life. She feels that each oppressed group demands attention, and to deny one group would be to deny indirectly the other. Lerner describes how Grimké balances her activism,

...but Sarah took the step into social analysis by showing that wherever power is exercised over a group of people someone benefits and someone is exploited. She had learned this from living within the slave system; now she made the intellectual leap of reasoning from the power/oppression model of slavery to the power/oppression of woman. (Lerner 24)

Her ability to shift her experiences from one form of oppression to another lays the beginning ground work for intersectionality. Although not yet a term used in the 19th century, the analysis of Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké and their work with abolition and women’s rights further exemplifies the presence of intersectionality long before there was a word to describe such an overlapping

Colum McCann and Sue Monk Kidd use historiographic metafiction to capture the importance of intersectionality, specifically in the depiction of the 19th century and its attempts at a major reform. Grimké acknowledges in *The Education of Women* that, “Education in its most extensive sense is indissolubly connected with free institutions. Narrow, or circumscribe the limits of one, and you inevitably cripple the other. The tendency of the mind is to progress and whatever widens the avenues of knowledge adds so much strength to our free institutions...” (Lerner 79). Grimké describes how education and knowledge, when limited, are the truest forms of restraint. For her and Douglass alike, the mind is meant to expand and grow, and when restricted all sense of freedom is removed. Whether they realized it or not, Douglass and Grimké were on a journey to self-knowledge because their life’s work was meant to impact humanity for the greater good. Each historical figure recognizes from a young age the essence of knowledge in correlation to power.

In order for McCann and Kidd to represent accurately the strength of Frederick Douglass and Sarah Grimké, they must use historiographic metafiction. By blending historical facts and fiction, these contemporary authors are able to create a space that highlights intersectionality, both in the past and present. It is a concept needed to stress the full representation of self-knowledge, self-improvement, and empowerment in the 19th century. Douglass and Grimké’s radical opinions, bravery, and determination make them opportune candidates to deliver a message about ending prejudice. The lives of these historical figures are more than just characters in contemporary novels, but historiographic metafictional adaptations of two journeys that led to a higher level of the same self-knowledge: that equality is ideally the desired outcome for humanity.

Intersectionality occurs daily, as racism and gender prejudices are still actively an issue. McCann and Kidd display such controversies by using historiographic metafictional characters. These contemporary authors make it known that despite 200 years, we are still fighting the very battles Douglass and Grimké joined the reform to end.

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