

Abolition Poetry, National Identity, and Religion: The Case of Peter Newby's *The Wrongs of Almoona*

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British antislavery poetry spoke with two voices: one seeking to liberate enslaved Africans, and one struggling to maintain a national movement that cultural historian David Turley has described as an uneasy allegiance divided like English society as a whole. So even though eighteenth-century abolitionism appealed to cosmopolitan benevolence for the enslaved, Linda Colley has argued that it also helped forge a "Britishness" complicit with national and imperial domination.¹ Critics such as Moira Ferguson, Tim Burke, and Alan Richardson have investigated how this dual agenda in abolitionist literature shaped cultural models and popular understandings of race, class, gender, and national identity. Ferguson has shown that "in order to successfully propagandize and gain support, white British women writers felt they had to fashion verse in keeping with campaign demands"; these nationalist demands often entailed not only the subordinating representation of Africans as "unproblematized, unvoiced, unthinking, and unnamed" victims but also the promotion of conformist positions on gender and imperialism.² Likewise, Burke and Richardson have critiqued an incipient racialism that distorted abolitionist literature by working-class and women writers from Liverpool and Bristol, respectively.³ These reconsiderations have complicated our understanding of abolitionist literature by showing the ideological ambivalence of marginalized writers negotiating the pressures of nation and empire as well as the interrelated formal complexity of their often neglected works.

This essay expands this revision of abolitionist culture to discuss religious identity, a particularly important but also potentially fractious element of an abolition movement that brought together mainstream Anglicans, nonconformist dissenters, and evangelicals. To elucidate this tense interaction of religion, ideology, and aesthetics, I will focus on *The Wrongs of Almoona, or the African's Revenge* (1788), published in Liverpool anonymously under the pseudonym "A Friend to All Mankind."⁴ A historical narrative poem set in 1655

Jamaica, this provocative text has attracted critical notice amid the recent recovery of abolitionist texts, but the anonymity of its author and its fraught message have rendered it something of a mystery in accounts of abolitionist culture.⁵ By here identifying the author as Peter Newby, an English Catholic poet from Lancashire, this essay seeks not only to deepen our understanding of this particular text but also to consider the role of abolitionist anti-Catholicism in the national and imperial project.⁶ Anti-Catholicism helped secure the abolition alliance and define a sense of Britishness even as the concurrent reform movement for “Catholic emancipation” (the campaign from 1778–1829 to abolish sectarian penal laws and grant civil rights to Catholics) sought to reintegrate Catholics into British civil society. I will argue that Newby’s nervous attempt, like those of women and working-class writers, to meet the nationalist expectations of the abolitionist movement breaks down under the pressure of his own countervailing sense of historical oppression and alienation at the hands of British sectarianism. The result is a textual “split consciousness” at the level of poetic structure that registers the hopes and anxieties of marginalized writers struggling with the nationalist discourse of the abolition movement.

This “doubleness” in *The Wrongs of Almoona* arises from Newby’s experience of what Katie Trumpener calls “internal colonialism,” a critical term that has received relatively little elaboration in studies of British literature from this period.⁷ This essay expands the scope of internal colonialism in two ways. First, while Trumpener examines only Scottish and Irish forms of internal colonialism, figures ranging from Edmund Burke to Samuel Taylor Coleridge also viewed English Catholics as a “nation within a nation” who occupied an equally difficult place in national society and culture. Second, my analysis brings Trumpener’s study of the national tale and its marriage plot’s “act of union” into dialogue with Homi Bhabha’s study of the “forked tongue” or “double articulation” of colonizing discourse. For Bhabha, the colonial project results in a split or “partial” colonized subject that is “almost the same, but not quite.” In speaking or writing back, however, the divided subject’s ambiguity subverts colonizing discourse through “mimicry”—parody, ludic irony, or sly civility.⁸ On the one hand, through its unlikely marriage plot that yields emancipation and reconciliation, Newby’s text articulates its “Britishness,” its being “almost the same.” The case of Newby’s experience of internal colonialism, however, evinces a different form of ambivalence. In *The Wrongs of Almoona*, a disturbing counterplot, the disruptive side of the text (its “but not quite”), does not exhibit self-conscious irony or elusive parody. Rather, a history of woundedness emerges in a second plot of national dis-union. This counternarrative of a “cultural past,” as Fredric Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious*, “like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it.”⁹ In other words, a repressed his-

tory of suffering haunts Newby's otherwise suppliant discourse. Articulating this complex combination of assertion, assimilation, and anxiety, *The Wrongs of Almoona* formally ruptures into two, ultimately irreconcilable, plots—a formal doubleness embodying the broader ideological divisions and struggles within the abolition campaign.

THE ABOLITION ALLIANCE: RHETORIC, NATION, AND CATHOLICISM

Before turning to *The Wrongs of Almoona*, I will further explore the competing discourses of nation in abolition writing and Catholic cultural history that shaped and distorted Newby's text. In *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860*, Turley argues that regional evidence “exposes how often implicit and sometimes explicit negotiation of antislavery coherence was undertaken or attempted within and between local reform communities in order to further national mobilisation.”¹⁰ Newby entered this discursive fray in 1788, a year before the French Revolution would politically divide the movement and delay the outlaw of the slave trade until 1807. Only a year after the formation of the Abolition Society, however, 1788 seemed full of hope. William Pitt and William Wilberforce were making significant political progress as the House of Commons agreed to debate ending the slave trade. Meanwhile, parliament was flooded by over one hundred antislavery petitions, a remarkable figure for the time. An unprecedented literary mobilization to further sway public opinion and influence individual parliamentarians formed an important part of a campaign that seemed poised to change national sentiment.¹¹ The challenge of this 1788 “reform complex” was not only to oppose the slave trade but also to voice a compelling vision that could unify regional branches of the potentially fractious alliance. What maintained the national movement against the major differences in gender, economic theory, class, politics, and religion across London, Bristol, and Liverpool? This section will focus on two cohesive elements: first, abolition literature promised global renewal from a moralized British imperialism, and second, it glorified this British renewal in opposition to the corruption of a Catholic Other.

Despite their critique of colonial abuses, 1788 abolition texts, with rhapsodic optimism and invariable vagueness, portray beneficial effects emanating from the British nation. In “Slavery, A Poem,” Bristol activist Hannah More sees the “spreading influence” of the Angel of Mercy as a “soft contagion,” an antidote to the slave trade's pestilence.¹² In Liverpoolian William Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa*, the “kind contagion” is “Humanity” that ignites a blaze of “Universal love.” The poem's preface states that a “great era is opening on the earth” in which the principles of British liberty will “one day extend from the centre of this island to the extremities of the earth.”¹³ In a domestic image that goes global, London-based Helen Maria Williams portrays Britain weaving a

“finish’d fabric” of expanding freedom that starts with the “strand” of Africa in “A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade.”¹⁴ The embroidery spreads and those nations who do not fall within its net are left to emulate its design. These totalizing visions of worldwide British benevolence enabled abolitionists to overlook individual or regional difference. Helen Thomas, however, argues that such universalizing ideals, religious or secular, constituted a “missionary ideology” that legitimated a revised form of colonialism.¹⁵

Yet, at times, writers on the margins of British society and the abolition movement did express anxiety over such moralized visions of global colonialism. As a Bristol working-class dissenter and woman writer, Ann Yearsley lashes out against the slave trade in “A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade.”¹⁶ Her prophetic denunciation of “ye Christians” redounds upon Britain as a whole. She attacks the merchants of Bristol, undermining any moral mission for British global commerce. Reflecting Yearsley’s marginal class and gender position, her irregular blank verse reaches a higher pitch than More’s contained heroic couplets. Indeed, the problems of class difference, which emerged following Yearsley’s break from More’s patronage in 1786, likewise threatened Bristol literary abolitionism. Given the abolition movement’s appeal to national consensus and moral amelioration, one would expect these differences to give way, irenically, to the righteous cause. The abolition alliance’s investment in the nation-building process, however, magnified rather than sublimated the fault lines of class, gender, and religious politics.

Anti-Catholicism was another major component of “Britishness” in the 1788 abolition campaign. Colley argues that at this historical moment opposition to a Catholic Other united Britons of various class and religious backgrounds. In their campaign against the British slave trade, abolitionist writers reiterate the colonial abuses of Catholics abroad or in history. As Ferguson notes, this rhetoric and ideology was so pervasive that the London Falconar sisters, aged seventeen and fourteen, embark on long digressions about Britain’s religious history in their antislavery poems.¹⁷ They link the slave trade to the time when Catholic “superstition” raised “the sceptre of her power” and left Britain “Deep in monastic solitude entomb’d” and “Drench’d in one fatal stream of martyr’d blood.”¹⁸ More’s imagery suggests that the slave trade is an essentially Spanish, Catholic enterprise whose torturous tools would gratify the “ingenious cruelty” of “an inquisitor.”¹⁹ Roscoe supported Catholic Emancipation while stereotyping and ridiculing Catholics. In an abolitionist pamphlet, he responded to the proslavery arguments of the excommunicated, ex-Jesuit Raymund Harris. The force of Roscoe’s argument comes from his characterization of Harris as one of the subtle “disciples of Loyola” whose writing is a “labyrinth” full of gothic “windings and errancies” that are “totally irreconcilable [sic] to the character of an *Englishman*,” but “perfectly

consistent with that of *a Spanish Jesuit*.²⁰ In addition, the first part of Roscoe's *The Wrongs of Africa* builds to an antipapist crescendo that links the abolition of slavery to the Reformation's expulsion of Catholicism:

Nations of Europe! o'er whose favour'd lands
 Philosophy hath rais'd her light divine,
 (A brighter sun than that which rules the day)
 Beneath whose piercing beam, the spectre forms
 Of slavish superstition slow retire!
 Who greatly struggling with degrading chains,
 Have freed your limbs from bondage! felt the charms
 Of property! beyond a tyrant's lust
 Have plac'd domestic bliss! and soon shall own
 That noblest freedom, freedom of the mind,
 Secure from priestly craft and papal claims!²¹

Amid exclamations, liberty's influence spreads like the rising sun to dispel slavery and "slavish superstition" and to exorcise the specter of Catholic lust, tyranny, priestcraft, papistry, and precommercial feudalism. While this radiating, global vision of British liberty triumphing over Catholic gloom may have helped to unify the 1788 abolition campaign, such discourse also confronted, and potentially alienated, any would-be Catholic abolitionists.

For Catholics like Newby, writer Elizabeth Inchbald, the della-cruscan poet Edward Jerningham, or the radical Biblical critic Alexander Geddes, their awkward place in the Union (to paraphrase Ina Ferris) was not only a rhetorical effect but also a legislative and social reality.²² British Catholics were subject to the penal laws, whose restrictions on voting rights, inheritance, and taxation had reduced the English Catholic population to a remnant. The eighteenth century, however, was a period of dramatic population increase and structural change for English Catholics. Catholic cultural centers shifted from rural, "recusant" manor houses to the industrial cities, and became increasingly Irish and working class.²³ Catholics had received a modicum of relief from the penal laws in 1778, but further relief was delayed following the "No Popery" violence of the 1780 Gordon Riots. Catholic emancipation would wait until 1829. As such, Catholics in the 1780s were a "nation" in transition, torn between a cultural memory of penal laws and martyrs and a hope of integrating with modern, British civil society.

Newby's own aspirations and failures demonstrate his negotiation of this split consciousness. Barred from the English universities, he attended the English Catholic College of Douai in France. After returning to Liverpool, he held an education, obtained illegally, that qualified him for professions denied to him as a Catholic. In the face of poverty, he enlisted as a sailor in the slave trade and journeyed to British-held Jamaica from 1764–66, a period of pitched

slave uprisings. Newby's narrative of a slave rebellion may have been based on witnessing or hearing first-person accounts of these events.²⁴ From 1766, Newby taught, tutored, and translated in the Liverpool area. In 1773, he anonymously published his first book of poetry titled *Six Pastorals* and opened his own illegal Catholic school. He even advertised for students at the end of his 1790 two-volume edition of poems and dramatic tales. After his school failed in 1797, he opened an unsuccessful printing shop in Preston. Until his death in 1827, he spent his life in abject poverty, eking out a living by giving foreign language lessons. *The Wrongs of Almoona* reflects Newby's persistent struggle with the complex issues surrounding emancipation and split identity. These two contradictory contexts posed an obvious difficulty: how could Newby write himself into a national, anti-Catholic movement while he himself remembered and experienced persecution from that very nation? On the one hand, he suppresses that sense of alienation to demonstrate, like many women abolitionists, a commitment to national ideals of liberty. On the other, his status as a "papist" excluded from British liberty haunts his text. In the next two sections, I will argue that Newby mimics abolitionist discourse in an attempt to move from his "nation within a nation" into British civil society. The text, however, also registers the continued English Catholic awareness of past oppression and unfulfilled promises of emancipation.

D'OILEY'S LESSONS: ABOLITIONIST DISCOURSE, NATION, AND EMPIRE

In making his bid for cultural inclusion in the abolitionist movement and British civil society, Newby constructs a pseudohistorical, sixty-six page narrative poem of heroic verse that ostensibly accords with nationalist, protoimperial, and even anti-Catholic discourse. Following an epigraph from and dedication to Cowper, a nervous preface begs the patience of its readers and equivocally leaves the "legality or illegality" of the slave trade to rest with "the silent admonitions" of the slave traders' consciences (vii). This leads Burke to label the poem's stance as proposing "the reformation rather than the immediate abolition of the slave trade."²⁵ The exact political position of the text is slippery and difficult to decipher, but Burke correctly reacts to a characteristic pattern of equivocation in *The Wrongs of Almoona*. In this same preface, Newby recalls "scenes that would have shocked even apathy itself and made the sternest stoic weep" during his own trip to the west coast of Africa and Jamaica on a slave ship, but he protectively declares himself no "defender of the passion of Revenge" (vii, vi).

The poem, however, returns readers to Jamaica and the theme of revenge—a dangerous topic from a member of a feared "fifth column." *The Wrongs of Almoona* portrays a slave revolt during Cromwell's 1655 invasion of Spanish-held Jamaica and the emancipation of the protagonist, an enslaved African

prince named Almoona. As the English invade, Almoona rallies the slaves against the Spanish in the hope of earning manumission. The hero, however, digresses from the military sphere to settle a domestic score with his Spanish master, Alphonso, who has taken Almoona's wife, Teeaina, as a mistress. A short section of abolitionist rhetoric, labeled a "digression," breaks the onrushing story but cannot stop Almoona's honor killing of Teeaina. Although this basic plot structure places *The Wrongs of Almoona* among the many ideologically charged eighteenth-century adaptations of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Newby's tale concludes differently.²⁶ Instead of dying violently like Oroonoko, a grieving Almoona leads the slaves to the English ships and supplicates to the valiant Colonel D'Oiley, who accepts their services on the condition that they eschew personal revenge. On the battlefield, Almoona meets, slays, but then dramatically forgives Alphonso. The victorious British free the slaves, but the widower Almoona cannot celebrate, bewailing "his misfortunes in gloomy solitude" (ix).

Consistent with the abolitionist investment in "Britishness," Newby glorifies the 1655 invasion as a progressive succession of empires. Jamaica passes from the superstitious, malicious, and Catholic Spanish, whose "servants were their slaves, and not their friends," to the benevolent, free, and Protestant British (35). The opening lines offer a panoramic vision of the English military's proffered relief from Spanish misrule:

Wide in the bay the white-cloth'd vessels spread,
 And in proud triumph o'er its bosom shed
 Their eastern shades. The English colours flew—
 Each soldier ready, and elate each crew
 Impatient waited for brave Penn's command,
 To man the boats, and on the Isle to land.
 The tow'ring mast the distant hills beheld,
 Where Slav'ry groan'd in ev'ry sloping field:
 Where the proud *Spaniard* exercis'd the goad,
 And rul'd the wretched with an iron rod:
 Where the poor *African*, from friendship torn,
 The rage of cruelty too long had borne;
 Too long beneath its daily scourge had bled,
 With labour harass'd, and with hunger fed.
 But now a change of fate approaches fast,
 And the worn Slave shall be reveng'd at last. (1–2)

The fast-approaching "change of fate" promises a better empire under "English colours." More describes the same succession of empires by denouncing the murderous Cortez, whose "Conquest is pillage with a nobler name," while lionizing the supposedly bloodless Captain Cook and William Penn.²⁷ These

depictions draw from the anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic “Black Legend,” which depicts Spain as the center of ignorance, bigotry, and superstition and “the Spaniard himself as lecherous, deceitful, and cruel.”²⁸ Both the evangelical More and the English Catholic Newby deploy this anti-Catholic discourse to legitimize British imperialism.

Revising his source material according to the “Black Legend,” Newby represents a foundational moment in this colonial discourse. The invasion of Jamaica was part of the “Great Western Design” in which Cromwell, with support from Milton’s pamphleteering, led the English Commonwealth into a religious crusade against Spanish settlements in the West Indies.²⁹ However, while attacking Hispaniola (modern Haiti and the Dominican Republic), the English forces were “cut to Pieces,” in the words of Charles Leslie’s 1740 *A New History of Jamaica*, Newby’s source for the Almoona story. Leslie’s account of the subsequent invasion of a virtually defenseless Jamaica, then a distant outpost of the Spanish empire, is less than inspiring:

The Generals landed their Men, and marched directly to *St. Iago*, the Capital of the Island, resolving to storm the Place; and to prevent the same Fate they had at *Hispaniola*, by the Cowardice of the Soldiers, Proclamation was made, that he who saw his Fellow run, should shoot him. Something of this kind was necessary; for the Soldiers were become quite heartless and dispirited by their late ill Success; and ‘tis thought on good Grounds, that had the Chiefs in this Expedition known a way how to excuse their Conduct to *Cromwell*, they would scarce have adventured to attack *Jamaica*. But in the Circumstances in which the Island then was, no Place could be more proper for an easy Conquest.³⁰

The dishonorable “conquest” of an “easy” target by a shambolic assembly of fearful conscripts jars with Newby’s depiction of the “glorious sight” of the English military spreading the ideals of professionalism and impartial justice (41).

Newby’s narrative also offers Colonel D’Oiley as the apogee of such sanitized British values and civilization. Almoona approaches him as a representative character of the empire:

“As you’re a Briton—as you come from where,
Bright freedom does her silver standard rear,
You will applaud their deeds—I know you will.” (48)

Colonial control, however, regulates D’Oiley’s offer of “Bright freedom.” He grants Almoona a contradictory commission, “I give thee an unlimited command / To guide them where my orders shall direct” (49). The appearance of unlimited freedom assumes a new form of martial direction, which demands, in tight heroic couplets, leaving behind a barbaric code of emotional revenge.

The turn from “savage vengeance” to the “business” of public duty, not personal wrong, is the major act of disciplining within the text (51). Suppressing a memory of oppression for the good of the nation-state becomes the condition for Union:

“Be cool, *Almoona*, and with patience wait,
 ‘Till some discharges shall allow your fate
 In not unequal balance to be weigh’d;
 ‘Till then ‘twould be imprudent to be try’d.
 But, tho’ your wrongs may urge you to the war,
 Let not revenge be hurry’d on too far.
 You’ve join’d my troops, are under my command,
 And, when I order, you must make a stand;
 Desist from slaughter, sheath the bloody sword,
 And be obedient at the given word.
 We and the Spaniards fight like gen’rous men,
 And, when the war is o’er are friends again.” (50)

The slaves have the choice to follow progress, impartial justice, and the superior civilization of Britain or their own premodern culture of revenge and woundedness. The outcome of the poem hinges on the slaves’ ability to “be cool”—to regulate their savage emotions and to switch allegiance from the clan to modern institutions.

D’Oiley’s division between the savagery of personal conflict and the business of professional warfare echoes theories of civil society and stadial historiography developed by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as William Robertson, Adam Smith, and Adam Ferguson. As part of distancing Scotland from Jacobitism and facilitating cultural and economic union with Britain, Robertson emphasized the obsolescence of personal vengeance in modern civil society:

The savage, how imperfectly soever he may comprehend the principles of political union, feels warmly the sentiments of social affection, and the obligations arising from the ties of blood. On the appearance of an injury or affront offered to his family or tribe, he kindles with rage, and pursues the authors of it with the keenest resentment. He considers it as cowardly to expect redress from any arm but his own, and as infamous to give up to another the right of determining what reparation he should accept, or with what vengeance he should rest satisfied.³¹

In order to modernize and progress, both for D’Oiley and Robertson, personal wrongs must be laid aside. The slaves must forego their communal identity of “injur’d men” bound together by a cultural memory of suffering whose “scars

alone would manifest our wrongs" and whose "shoulders, were they bare, would tell a tale" (20, 45). Robertson also gestures toward the limitations of communal identity and collective memory inherent in the superstitious Catholicism of Europe's Dark Ages. Newby thus deploys a discourse demanding acculturation from slaves, Scots, and Catholics.

Through Almoona's self-regulation and an unexpected homosocial "marriage," the plot culminates in the "savage" Almoona conforming to European modernity. In a striking parallelism ("One arm'd with coolness, one with the haughtiest rage") that seems to overturn an imperial paradigm, Almoona, not the European Alphonso, controls his emotions (58). He puts aside his personal vendetta to embrace impartiality and to embrace, literally, his former master. When a dying Alphonso cries out "do'st thou pardon me, thou injur'd man?," Almoona replies:

"Yes, yes I do" (while tears of anguish ran
Fast down his cheeks) he eagerly reply'd;
(Nor did he strive his soften'd soul to hide,
Which sweet compassion warm'd, as on his knees
He wafted o'er his face the gather'd breeze.)
"May Heav'n forgive thee to[o]—Beyond the grave
Revenge should ne'er be carry'd by the brave." (60)

Almoona pledges forgiveness ("I do"), pours out sympathy, and mimics D'Oiley's message of professional bravery in the closing, axiomatic couplet. Alphonso, however, still needs assurance. Asking for Almoona's hand, he begs forgiveness in the diction of a marriage ceremony:

"Yes, from my very soul," he cry'd, "I do,"
While to his lips his hand *Alphonso* drew,
And said, "be this the kiss of peace—the seal—
Oh! Let it all out mortal hatred heal!" (60)

With the repeated vow "I do" and the consummating "kiss of peace," the revenge plot ends as a marriage plot. In a scene foreshadowing the reconciliatory allegorical marriages of national tales and historical novels, Almoona passes from tribal allegiances to a "Union" with modernity.

The poem's odd marriage plot thus celebrates the spread of the British Empire and modern "Britishness." Amid the chaos of colonialism, the furious slaves, out to "thunder vengeance on their hated foes," will not be able to put Jamaica back together again (13). Only British values and self-regulation can restore order. D'Oiley's greeting to Almoona suggests a new form of benevolent power:

“Your vengeance, I’m inform’d, has been in bounds,
 More honor, therefore, on your feats redounds.
 Receive my thanks, and rest assur’d, my friends,
 That he’ll reward you, who your deeds commends.
 Thou and thy followers are henceforth free—
 You’ve nobly fought, and claim your liberty.
 When peace shall all our warring broils compose,
 And final conquest has disarm’d our foes,
 Then will I portion out some small estate,
 Where from the world, thy sorrows may retreat.” (63)

Almoona and the slaves have been granted liberty only in exchange for replacing the Spanish with the British Empire. In this emancipation, they have become subordinate to the British, as D’Oiley assumes the power to dispense freedom and property. A new hegemony has also won the day as the slaves have brought their behavior “in bounds” of “Britishness.” The composed verse echoes this new boundedness in metrically regular, end-stopped lines that are as contained as the slaves. These transitions and acculturations not only conform to abolitionist and nationalist discourse but also demonstrate that Newby, as a “superstitious” Catholic author, has undergone the same process within the British Empire of letters. No “papist” and only a “true Englishman” could have written this historical poem.

THE JANUS-FACED TEXT: MEMORY, WOUNDS, AND THE HAUNTING OF THE NATION

Despite its overarching argument for inclusion within British society and the abolition movement, however, *The Wrongs of Almoona* does not forget the wounds of the cultural past. While its revenge plot culminates unexpectedly in a “marital union,” Newby’s poem has a second, competing plot, the ceremonial dis-union of Almoona and his murdered wife. The slippery title, *The Wrongs of Almoona, or the African’s Revenge*, signals such doubleness. Does the “or” represent a choice between forgiveness of wrongs versus revenge for personal and communal suffering? Or does the dual title present a complex coexistence of both in the psyche of the protagonist and his community? The text does not provide ultimate answers, but the violent dis-union of Almoona and his wife is not contained or mollified by the emancipatory conclusion.

The story of Teeaina and Almoona recalls a violent history of suffering that D’Oiley’s command over the main plot cannot appropriate. Almoona is no generic slave, no cipher to be filled with projections of sympathy. Rather than the “unproblematized, unvoiced, unthinking, and unnamed” passive African victim, Almoona is a psychologically deep, divided, tragic character who wrestles with the contradictory demands of love and honor. It is a significant

formal departure from other abolitionist texts that *The Wrongs of Almoona* is not a poem *on* the slave trade that emotes pity from an outside and elevated omniscient perspective. Rather, Newby's dramatic poem follows the actions, experiences, and choices of the slaves themselves and narrates from their perspective. It would be difficult to find another passage in abolitionist literature voicing a subaltern rage comparable to Almoona's. In the following speech, he discusses the revenge plot in which he will kill his master Alphonso and, in the name of honor, his wife Teeaina:

"Thou talk'st of vengeance,—yet thou dost not feel
 Those injuries, that this rac'd bosom steel.
 Thou know'st not half so much, as wretched I—
 From thee no wife is torn, that once did lie
 Within thy arms, unspotted as a child,
 Beauteous in form, engaging, tender, mild.
 Thou, know'st her well, and well thou knowest where
 My dear *Teeaina* sheds the scorching tear.
 From me did our curs'd ruler force this wife—
 And, by our Gods, he pays me with his life.
 And yet not he alone—
 Oh! my dear *Zemka*, I have planned a deed,
 At which e'en tyranny itself might bleed—
 But I'm resolv'd—my honor is too dear—
 Tho' sweet the kiss, in vain shall drop the tear." (8–9)

The resistance to the assimilative marriage plot registers in this passage at many different levels. Almoona rebukes the pity of his fellow slave Zemka as he will later do with the sympathetic Colonel D'Oiley. The depth of his pain will not allow the type of instant solution to the colonial problem that many abolitionists, drawing on a sentimental discourse, envisioned. In addition, though the poem generally strives, almost with servility, for formal regularity with constant end-stopped heroic couplets, a competing resentment breaks down the aesthetic drive to unity in this passage on revenge. There are three enjambments ("feel / Those injuries," "lie / Within thy arms," and "where / My dear Teeaina sheds") in the first eight lines of this speech alone. This is followed by a gaping metrical hole in the important line, "And yet not he alone—." Newby has written a line that falls two feet short of the required pentameter and has no appropriate end rhyme. The missing parts of the couplet leave the reader with the question, "Who else will feel the slaves' revenge?" Does this gap leave unsaid something Newby himself would not dare to write? This lacuna yields to a half-line about an unnamed "deed" against "tyranny" with violent metrical force that scans most easily as three spondees: "Oh! my dear *Zemka*, I . . ." This type of disruptive passage contains

“those defects . . . in numbers” that led the reviewer in *The Monthly Magazine* to condemn the poem despite its “benevolent spirit and intention.”³² Almoona’s speech attempts to suppress this irregular vehemence in a line of patterned balance: “Tho’ sweet the kiss, in vain shall drop the tear.” The imagery in this line, however, will not allow metrical harmony to erase its awful content. The “tear” refers back to the “scorching tear” of Teeaina, whom he plans to kill. The rejected kiss not only refers to her pleas, but also symbolically alludes to, and undermines, the reconciliatory “kiss of peace” that Alphonso will offer.

This balanced line is only one of many false resolutions in the poem that rips away at the pro-imperial narrative. Not surprisingly, Almoona’s honor-killing of his wife provides no cathartic consolation, nor even a contingent moral hope. Newby only gives the reader the image of Almoona hovering over her corpse while denouncing the cowering Alphonso:

“See where lies dead, my youthful bosom’s choice.
 Basely thou tor’st her from my happy breast,
 Her blood—her streams of blood will tell the rest.
 Oh! Could I stoop to one unmanly deed,
 This moment would my vengeance make thee bleed.
 What! Dost thou tremble at this dreadful sight?
 Think’st thou thy ghost with her’s shall take its flight?
 Think’st thou her blood with thine shall intermix?” (31)

The mangled corpse’s role in the work does not end with this brutal scene. Teeaina’s blood continues to narrate (“her streams of blood will tell the rest”) and her “ghost” returns to trouble hasty reconciliations. This moment of abysmal female suffering haunts the act of union and the oblivious attempt to “intermix” between Almoona and modernity. Teeaina becomes that haunting “slight ghost,” which Gayatri Spivak figures as the lost subaltern voice.³³

This specter ultimately cracks the conforming narrative of union in *The Wrongs of Almoona*, returning at key moments of colonial encounter to recall a violent history. Almoona remembers her as the slaves march to meet the British (35). When Almoona first sees the British flag, he recalls “former days of love” and feels the “full weight of misery” (36). When he meets D’Oiley, “Teeaina’s image still was hanging there” (43). In a lengthy, balanced speech to the colonel, Almoona attempts to demonstrate that he is worthy of British respect by asserting his own nobility in genteel diction: “Yet think not, chieftain, that I court applause, / Or idly wish to palliate our cause” (45). A recalcitrant memory, however, interrupts. Almoona suddenly swerves to a “dreadful recollection” of his “unbury’d” wife: “Methinks I see her tears—I hear her cries” (45).

The persistent memorial presence of Teeaina then disturbs the kiss that symbolized the possibility of reconciliation with Almoona’s former oppressor.

In the same speech, her dead body temporarily seems to return to life to give its forgotten message of deep suffering:

“I kiss’d her pallid lip—I shed a tear—
And to my bosom press’d her corse still dear—
I saw the parting, bleeding tide of life—” (47)

This persisting kiss of dis-union between Almoona and his dead wife disturbs the unifying “kiss of peace” with Alphonso. Believing the Spaniard’s death will give rest to Teeaina’s ghost, Almoona dedicates the mortal blow to her “shade”:

“Oh! My belov’d, here our destroyer lies,
In agonies he breathes his last—he dies.
I consecrate this blow to thy blest shade,
And for my injuries I’m amply paid.” (59)

With the death of the Spaniard Alphonso, the revenge plot should conclude and the forgiving “marriage” should proceed. However, under the pressure of a subaltern memory (that “dreadful recollection” symbolized by the “slight ghost” of Teeaina), the two plots cannot unite under a *Pax Britannica*.

Teeaina’s ghost, the memory of a cultural past of suffering, troubles the succession of the benevolent British Empire. The climactic act of forgiveness and “marriage” only produces the ruins of a hopeless man haunted by his wife’s death. Almoona unites with Alphonso only to disunite in horror. He recoils, not from Alphonso’s dead body, but from the clashing memories of his quick pardon and Teeaina’s wounds. Bluntly listed, the grave images—“bloody sword,” “dying pray’r,” “promis’d pardon,” “suppliant air”—defy Almoona’s comprehension and pile up on his frail conscience:

He views his corpse, and o’er it weeping stands;
Then tow’rds the skies he stretches out his hands;
Begins to pray; when deeply ’cross his heart
The injuries of his wife resistless dart.
Love, anguish, pity, horror rule by turns,
And his wild bosom with the conflict burns.
His bloody sword—Alphonso’s dying pray’r—
His promis’d pardon, and the suppliant air
Which begg’d that pardon, his rack’d soul assail,
And borne down by them all his spirits Fail. (61)

The “injuries of his wife” split Almoona’s consciousness and language. Her suffering disrupts the masculine, martial union and prevents Newby’s double

plot from unifying to a stable narrative celebration of the British regime. In response to D'Oiley's triumphalist speech, Newby writes a couplet of devastating deflation: "Almoona bow'd his thanks with drooping head, / And thus reply'd—'My wife, you know, is dead'" (63). Almoona lives but hopes only for death. Moral regeneration seems far away.

The somber conclusion does not restore hope or celebrate D'Oiley's triumph. Almoona's final speech calls into question European religion, use of wealth, and humanity, undermining any "missionary ideology." Newby shifts attention to the suffering, the shattered communities, the destroyed families, and the hopelessness of wounded remnants of people attempting to enter a new, commercial era. Almoona concludes by leaving no doubt that the damage done will not be easily undone:

"Oh! may they never know the pangs I feel!
Which even lenient time must never heal!
From my sad, sorrowing soul sweet peace is fled,
And with my wife all future hope is dead." (66)

Dismissing the possibility of healing, Almoona exposes the fecklessness of D'Oiley's polite sympathy ("I wish 'twere in my pow'r its wounds to heal—/ Alas! I only can thy sorrows feel") and an inefficacious, sighing "Compassion" at the conclusion (49, 66). The wounds of Almoona and Teeaina cannot make peace with European modernity. The ambivalent text's version of colonial history has represented a conforming narrative of national progress but also summoned a mangled memory of suffering that erases "all future hope."

SPLIT STRUCTURES: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INTERNAL COLONIALISM

Yet whom does the spectral figure of Almoona represent? Elements of the poem suggest a political allegory identifying the suffering of African slaves with the repression of Catholics in Britain. The emancipation of Jamaican slaves in exchange for their service in the imperial army parallels what Robert Kent Donovan has called the "hidden agenda" of the 1778 Catholic Relief Act—the need to recruit Catholic Irish and Highlander soldiers into an overextended British army. In depicting a rebellion by a "nation within a nation," *The Wrongs of Almoona* also suggests the possibility of history repeating itself in 1788. Such a revolt was feared from the distant island of Jamaica among slaves and from the much closer island of Ireland among Catholics.³⁴ Almoona is thus a figure that in some ways anticipates both Toussaint L'Ouverture and Wolfe Tone. Worries about a fifth column of Catholics would only intensify following the French Revolution, the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion, and the Napoleonic Wars.

In a rhetorical move also made by women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Newby grafts the plight of slaves to the sufferings of marginalized groups within Britain. Newby makes the implicit allegory of *The Wrongs of Almoona* explicit in his 1790 "Ode to Religious Liberty":

Start not, ye Britons—'tis your country's stain—
Thousands, who breathe with you one common air.
Are little less than slaves—they meet disdain,
And ev'ry degradation is their share.³⁵

While the 1772 Mansfield decision pronounced that England's air was too pure for slavery, Newby asserts that this "common air" did not liberate Catholics. Like Wollstonecraft, Newby qualifies this comparison, not conflating the "degradation" of Catholics with the dehumanization of slaves.³⁶ *The Wrongs of Almoona* does, however, identify a divided structure of feeling, common perhaps to Catholics, women writers, and emancipated slaves, who must appeal to national identity to advance reform. In addition, at the level of subjectivity, the text offers an intriguing parallel between the wrongs of Newby and Almoona. At the conclusion, Almoona retires into isolation: "Grief chok'd his voice—with folded arms he bent, / And tow'rd's his widow'd cottage slowly went" (66). His withdrawal resembles Newby's self-description in the preface as writing the work during "lonely, winter nights of solitude, far sequester'd from the social conversation of friendship" (v). Both have made "progress" in entering civil society, but they have also have been hollowed out by a British modernity that isolates them as individuals and suppresses their communal identity and memory.

Although *The Wrongs of Almoona* has not been recognized as a central abolitionist text, I would argue its ambivalence, expressed in a split formal structure of two disunified plots, is central to the cultural changes of its day. In *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790–1830*, Mark Canuel outlines a similar pattern of isolated subjectivity emerging in literature and culture at the turn of the nineteenth century:

This feeling of separation within community—a separation from communal feeling that is itself communal—is . . . a Romantic invention. The ongoing project adopted by these writers is to imagine and support a social order in which the deepest feelings of communal belonging—such feeling ranging from pleasure to sheer terror—might be inspired, paradoxically, by minimizing the importance of having one's feelings shared.³⁷

The Janus-faced icon of Almoona—apprehensive of demands to forget old wounds, grant false forgiveness, suppress emotion, and accept the brokenness of communities—provides another perspective on such an atomized social

order. Newby's text registers and records the cultural trauma of a marginal group, torn between memory and modernity, that must leave behind communal identity and values to conform to British civil society. For such communities and for advocates of a deeper investment in sympathizing with the sufferings of others, this transformation was not easy or entirely benign. While I have examined this trauma in the text of the English Catholic Newby, I would suggest that similarly split structures may be traced in national tales, slave narratives, and the reformist and abolitionist texts of working-class and women writers. A return to these works may not only reveal such traumas but also suggest alternative paths to modernity not passing through D'Oiley's narrow door of Britishness that produced the wrongs of *Almoona*.

NOTES

1. David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860* (London, 1991). Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), 350–61.

2. Moira Ferguson, "British Women Writers and an Emerging Abolitionist Discourse," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 33 no. 1 (Spring 1992): 3, 4. For extended studies of abolition, women writers, and nationalism, see Anne Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaign, 1780–1870* (London, 1992); and Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (London, 1992).

3. Tim Burke, "'Humanity is Now the Pop'lar Cry': Laboring-Class Writers and the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1787–1789," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 42 no. 3 (2001): 245–63; Alan Richardson, "Darkness Visible? Race and Representation in Bristol Abolitionist Poetry, 1770–1810," *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge, 1998), 129–47.

4. *The Wrongs of Almoona, or the African's Revenge* (Liverpool, 1788). Subsequent references are given in the text.

5. Its length (1,400 lines of heroic verse) precluded Richardson from including *The Wrongs of Almoona* in his anthology of abolitionist verse, but Burke includes excerpts in his anthology of eighteenth-century working-class poets. See Richardson, introduction to *Verse*, vol. 4 of *Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation* (London, 1999), xix; and Tim Burke, *1780–1800*, vol. 4 of *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, 1700–1800* (London, 2003), 135–42.

6. For critical and biographical treatments of Newby that include his authorship of *The Wrongs of Almoona*, see Maurice Whitehead, *Peter Newby: Eighteenth Century Lancashire Recusant Poet* (Lancaster, 1980), and Josephine Malone, *Peter Newby: Friend to All Mankind* (Aylesford, 1964). For archival references to Newby's life and the poem, see Peter Whittle, *The History of the Borough of Preston*, vol. 2 (Preston, 1837), 264–68, and *A Literary and Biographical History, or Biographical Dictionary, of the English Catholics*, ed. Joseph Gillow, vol. 4 (London, 1887–1902), 163–64.

7. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997), xiii. For the seminal socioeconomic study of British "internal colonialism," see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (New Brunswick, 1999). For representative postcolonial approaches to Irish culture dating from this period, see David Lloyd, *Ireland after History* (Notre Dame, 1999), and Luke Gibbons, *Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, 2003).

8. Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 85–86.

9. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981), 19.

10. Turley, 5.

11. Newby apologizes in the preface for adding to the "many publications respecting Slaves and Slavery" that came out in 1788 (v). For accounts of the sweeping range of abolitionist activity in 1788, see J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995), 42–56, and James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776–1838* (Jackson, 1986), 105–12. For the importance of the pre-revolutionary 1788 literary campaign in particular, see Midgley, 30–35, and Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, 145–64.

12. Hannah More, "Slavery, A Poem," in *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1997), 43–50, ll. 263–70.

13. William Roscoe, *The Wrongs of Africa: A Poem* (London, 1787–88), 1–2, i, iii.

14. Helen Maria Williams, "A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade," in *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, 237–46, ll. 351–62.

15. Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge, 2000), 65.

16. Ann Yearsley, "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade," in *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, 158–67.

17. Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, 154–55.

18. Maria Falconar and Harriet Falconar, *Poems on Slavery* (London, 1788), 7, 18.

19. More, 1, 173n.

20. Roscoe, *A Scriptural Refutation of a Pamphlett Lately Published by the Rev. Raymund Harris* (London, 1788), 11, 22, 4.

21. Roscoe, *The Wrongs of Africa*, 31.

22. Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), 1.

23. For social changes in English Catholicism, see John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community: 1570–1850* (Oxford, 1976). For the Lancashire Catholicism surrounding Newby, see J. A. Hilton, *Catholic Lancashire: From Reformation to Renewal, 1559–1991* (Sussex, 1994), 70, 72. The son of working-class parents, Newby also appears as an "Under School Master" among "labourers" and "gardeners [sic]" in a 1767 government survey to track the "growth of Papism." See *Returns of Papists, 1767*, ed. E. S. Worrall, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1980), 3.

24. For the 1760–61 Tacky's rebellion in Jamaica, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982), 129, 137–38. For another planned uprising in 1765, see Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennet, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Princeton, 1998), 144.

25. Burke, *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, 135.

26. Laura Brown, in an essay paralleling mine in many ways, argues that Behn, in a fraught allegory, links Oroonoko's death to the death of Charles I and the Stuart cause: see "The Romance of Empire: Oroonoko and the Trade in Slaves," *Early Women Writers: 1600–1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London, 1998), 207–17. However, the mediation of this original political context through the fizzling of English Catholic Jacobitism and the multiple reworkings of the Oroonoko plot in the eighteenth century also would have influenced Newby's work. For instance, the Manchester abolitionist J. D. Ferriar uses Oroonoko to advocate emancipation while also denigrating African religion as "Mumbo Jumbo": see *The Prince of Angola* (Manchester, 1788), v. For an account of the political and racial implications of the eighteenth-century dramatic adaptations of *Oroonoko* by Thomas Southerne, John Hawkesworth, and Ferriar in which Imoinda was transformed into the daughter of a white colonialist, see Joyce Green MacDonald, "The Disappearing African Woman: Imoinda in *Oroonoko* after Behn," *ELH* 66 no. 1 (1999): 71–86. For a survey of the multiple appropriations of Oroonoko and Imoinda's suffering that continue today, see *Troping "Oroonoko" from Behn to Bandele*, ed. Susan B. Iwanisziw (Burlington, 2004).

27. More, ll. 220–46.
28. William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558–1660* (Durham, 1971), 3–4.
29. Maltby, 116–21.
30. Charles Leslie, *A New History of Jamaica* (London, 1740), 64, 61–62.
31. William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of Charles V with a View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, vol. 1 (London, 1772), 51–52.
32. *The Monthly Review* 78 (1788): 440.
33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 207.
34. Robert Kent Donovan, “The Military Origins of the Roman Catholic Relief Programme of 1778,” *Historical Journal* 28 (1985): 84. For the fears of revolt in Ireland over Catholic relief in the 1770s and 1780s, see Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism, and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760–1830* (Notre Dame, 1996), 37–42.
35. Peter Newby, “Ode to Religious Liberty,” *Poems*, 2 vols. (Liverpool, 1790), 1:92.
36. On Wollstonecraft’s comparison of women and slaves, see Midgley, 27; Anne Mellor, “Sex, Violence and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58 (1996): 363–65; and Ferguson, “Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery,” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park, Penn., 1996), 125–49.
37. Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790–1830* (Cambridge, 2002), 268.