

ENTERTEXT

A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative

Author: Maria Helena Lima

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Abstract

The essay explores the role of neo-slave narratives in creating and transforming history, inviting a contemporary audience to see the past in terms of the present. Reading *The Long Song* (2010) against the conventions of the neo-slave narrative foregrounds its desire to reclaim the humanity of the enslaved by (re)imagining their subjectivity. When contrasted to other neo-slave narratives, Levy's novel imagines its ideal audience as fully literate, never disavowing the literary mode, as it seeks to rediscover and rewrite a significant part of history that has been deliberately forgotten and/or denied. Rather than the conventional white frame vouching for the authenticity of the narrative, Levy has the formerly enslaved woman's son, a successful printer/publisher in 1898 Jamaica, introduce his mother's story. To highlight the extent to which slave narratives were founded upon a fundamental lack of knowledge, Levy chooses metafiction for her neo-slave narrative, a retrospective narration that foregrounds narrative itself as a process, forever incomplete, of gathering the material that both is and is not her character's experience. As readers follow July's story in its sometimes conflicting versions, we are reminded that even under the most horrible conditions, agency and strength characterise Afro-Caribbean subjectivity. Because in a way fiction that calls attention to itself in the telling *is* the most realist genre, *The Long Song* leaves us with the unflinching humanity of enslaved peoples as they have managed much more than survival: July seems almost superhuman in her optimistic unwillingness to see herself as a victim.

A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative¹

Maria Helena Lima

At a conference in London, several years ago, the topic for discussion was the legacy of slavery. A young woman stood up to ask a heartfelt question of the panel: How could she be proud of her Jamaican roots, she wanted to know, when her ancestors had been slaves? I cannot recall the panel's response to the woman's question but, as I sat silently in the audience, I do remember my own. Of Jamaican heritage myself, I wondered why anyone would feel any ambivalence or shame at having a slave ancestry? Had she never felt the sentiments once expressed to me by a Jamaican acquaintance of mine? 'If our ancestors survived the slave ships they were strong. If they survived the plantations they were clever.' It is a rich and proud heritage. It was at that moment that I felt something stirring in me. Could a novelist persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story?

—Andrea Levy²

While reviewers of *The Long Song* (2010) have played around with several generic labels—historical novel, fictional memoir, metafiction—and these possibilities definitely underscore the range of Andrea Levy's creativity, the author wants to leave no doubt as to the occasion for her story, as my epigraph indicates. Levy joins a distinguished group of writers across the African Diaspora who, since the last decades of the twentieth century, has attempted to recover elements of the narrative structure and thematic configuration of slave narratives.³ The widespread rewriting of the genre in the post-abolition era has served to re-affirm the historical value of the original slave narrative and reclaim the humanity of the enslaved by (re)imagining their subjectivity. For a long time, slave narratives were considered unreliable as a historical source, mainly due to the nature of history writing itself (top down) and ideological differences (to put it mildly). However, as more slave narratives were discovered and republished, mostly in the late sixties and seventies in the United States, the rewriting of such stories has become central to a contemporary effort to re-imagine that history from the point of view of the subaltern. More importantly perhaps, (neo-)slave narratives still need to be written to expose systemic inequality and the unjust treatment of black peoples everywhere. As Lars Eckstein writes, "while most colonial testimonies of slavery have long disappeared from the working memory of today's Black Atlantic societies, the prejudices and stereotypes they conveyed have not."⁴

For slave narratives were propelled by the Enlightenment demand that a 'race' place itself on the Great Chain of Being primarily through writing. As Henry Louis Gates notes, the earliest texts by black writers in English were "the central arena in which persons of African descent could establish and redefine their status within the human community."⁵ Although the Enlightenment was predicated on man's ability to reason, as Gates writes, it also made the "absence" of reason the criterion by which to circumscribe the humanity of the people and cultures of colour that Europeans had been "discovering" since the

Renaissance.⁶ Of course no one questioned then the premise that reason (and history) could only be found in writing. If slave narratives affirm the democratizing potential of print literacy, equating, to quote Gates again, "the rights of man with the ability to write," the African-American literary tradition has been initially galvanised by the faith that literature can make the case for full black participation in American democracy. Revisiting the historical era of slavery, the neo-slave narrative takes us back to the origins of the African Diaspora and the African-American literary tradition and reassesses, from a contemporary vantage point, the promises of literacy. The neo-slave narrative thus participates in a widespread re-evaluation of the legacy of modernity, especially as this is ratified by the ideologies and institutions of print literacy. Novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*⁷ reconsider the dawning of the modern legacy from the perspective of a present moment when its political promise is widely felt to have been exhausted and betrayed. Most contemporary African-American neo-slave narratives not only signal their scepticism through a strong discomfort with their own literary modality—the ability to write has not granted African Americans full citizenship—but also remind readers of the complex subjectivity of the formerly enslaved.

While I do not want to conflate the history of slavery in the United States with the three hundred years of slavery in the British Caribbean, most of the theorizing on the neo-slave narrative has been done in the Americas. I would even dare to claim that perhaps one of the reasons for this silence since many black British neo-slave narratives have been published recently is the unwillingness of the academic establishment to come to terms with that part of British history: Britain's "Heart of Darkness," to borrow a title. At a recent public reading by Andrea Levy, one of my students asked the author whether perhaps in thirty years or so there won't be a need for a separate category of 'Black British Writing,' "whether British Literature would indeed include everyone." Levy answered that she doubted thirty years would be enough to end inequality in Britain: "and a separate category is necessary to mark that difference, to remind people of the existence of inequities."⁸ The passage from the novel that Levy chose to read on this occasion to a standing-room only audience—the conversation between Miss July and Clara—reminds us of the multiple words Jamaicans have been using to avoid being black.⁹ Because the novel ends with a plea for news of Emily Goodwin (July's mulatto child with the last overseer at Amity Plantation), Levy brings readers' attention to the present century. She has received more than one letter of descendants of "an" Emily Goodwin who did not know their great-great-grandmother had slave ancestry, and how grateful they were for *The Long Song*.

To go back to the novel, then, *The Long Song* initially eludes generic classification. Like Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) which, according to Vincent Carretta, can (and has been) read as "a spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, travel book, adventure tale, slave narrative, rags-to-riches saga, economic treatise, apologia, testimony, and possibly even a historical fiction,"¹⁰ reviewers did not know what to call the book when it first came out. Rather than the conventional "white frame" vouching for the authenticity of the narrative, Levy has the formerly enslaved woman's son, a successful printer/publisher in 1898 Jamaica, introduce his mother's story. While Thomas Kinsman's

Foreword emphasises the urgency in the factual telling (the remembered and the known horrors of slavery), readers also come to expect artistic merit in the narrative, as he would “make her tale flow like some of the finest writing in the English language.”¹¹

The Long Song further emphasises the need for a type of story that would instil pride rather than shame in the younger generations. When Levy wonders why the young woman in the audience feels “any ambivalence or shame” at having slave ancestors,” she introduces the possibility—though crucially framed as a question—that “a novelist [could] persuade this young woman to have pride in her slave ancestors through telling her a story.” The fact that Levy phrases it as a question is important, I think, because it speaks to her own sense of discomfort with the binary. While her initial impulse seems to be simply to turn the narrative of oppression on its head, to replace a story of shame with a story of pride, that initial impulse gives way to something else—the recognition that the story cannot follow such simple teleology. Her story has to be metafictional to avoid precisely the trap of such binaries.

The Choice of Metafiction

Do the slave narratives in fact represent a distinct literary genre? If not, why not? If so, what are its distinguishing characteristics? Are these characteristics relatively uniform throughout its history? What are the sources of variation and change? Is change great or small during that history? Are the narratives a popular or an elite literary form? Do they represent a species of autobiography? Why (and how) do they begin? Why (and how) do they come to an end? Such questions converge in the cluster of meanings implicit in the term *authority*: the condition of begetting, beginning, continuing, and controlling a written text. In Hegelian terms, the issues are parentage, propriety, property, and possession.

—John Sekora¹²

While the initial questions John Sekora asks of antebellum slave narratives can be starting points in the exploration of almost any literary genre, he identifies the issues of authority and property as applying mostly to the writing that had freedom as its immediate telos. Indeed, slave narrators often took great liberties in the telling of their presumably distinct and peculiar stories of bondage and escape, moulding their narratives in such a manner as to produce the greatest political and emotional effect. Even if some of the narrators did not own their own bodies, they managed to have some authority in constructing the version of their lives they wished known. Because of such silences in slave narratives due to authorial compromises to white audiences and to self-masking from a painful past, Morrison characterises her role in writing *Beloved* as “a kind of literary archeology.” As she writes, “on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply.”¹³ Morrison felt the need to access the interior life of slaves via her imagination to bear witness to “the interior life of people who didn’t write [their history]

(which doesn't mean that they didn't have it)" and to "fill in the blanks that the slave narrative left."¹⁴

To highlight the extent to which slave narratives were founded upon a fundamental lack of knowledge, Levy chooses metafiction for her story, a retrospective narration that foregrounds narrative itself as a process, forever incomplete, of gathering the material that both is and is not her character's experience. As readers, we follow July's tale in its sometimes conflicting versions, and are reminded that even under the most deplorable conditions, agency and strength characterise Afro-Caribbean peoples. Metafiction enables Levy to enjoy the authority of mimetic realism through a postmodern subjectivity. While self-consciousness is as old as the storytelling tradition itself, the term "metafiction" is new. William Gass defines it as "fiction which draws attention to itself as artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."¹⁵ Self-consciousness has been central to African diasporic literatures if we consider Equiano's narrative as one of their first manifestations. Whether he was born in the United States or in an African village, Equiano speaks to the book, raising it to his ear to hear its answer, a moment Gates argues amounts to "a fiction about the making of fiction."¹⁶ The trope of the Talking Book, a strangely insistent metaphor that appears in many of the eighteenth-century black texts published in English is, according to Gates, our best evidence that the earliest writers of the Anglo-African tradition were self-conscious readers of each other's texts.¹⁷ Black Atlantic writers after Equiano have made their concern with writing central to their work, portraying the enslaved's painful journey to freedom as parallel to the journey from orality to literacy. All stories seem to connect reading and writing with freedom and equality.¹⁸

Gates' argument in *The Signifying Monkey*—that black literature has always theorised about itself—is central to my reading of *The Long Song* as a metafictional neo-slave narrative. Levy seems particularly interested in writing against existing literary, generic, and/or aesthetic traditions. The narrator-author inscribed within the text openly acknowledges to the reader her presence and her power of manipulation. The subject of artistic invention is a thread running through her thematically self-conscious tale that is neither parody nor an acknowledgment of literature's exhaustion, to use John Barth's term,¹⁹ that usually characterise "white" metafiction. Instead of a site of negation, *The Long Song* conjures up limitless possibilities. Levy's narrative emphasises personal and collective memory and the continuous interplay of past and present as an alternative to chronological linear time. Madelyn Jablon notes that metafiction is not a refusal to confront reality but an insistence that such a confrontation must start with the redefinition of the term and renewed attention to the language used in its description.²⁰

While passages interrupting the temporal flow of the narrative are also part of the conventions of the original genre and its antislavery appeal, Levy's telling is consistently metafictional, calling attention to the writing itself and the choices involved throughout. The antebellum slave narrative is primarily told in the past tense, which is then punctured by a different time frame describing a less remote past when the formerly enslaved obtains information that she did not have during the escape itself. Richard Yarborough suggests that the absence of the first-person point of view in African American narratives

before the twentieth century can be accounted for by the audience for which these books were written. These writers were primarily addressing a white-middle-class audience and did not want to establish the kind of intimacy and self-disclosure that the first person point of view requires. Yarborough notes a change with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, “one of the single most important steps in the evolving conceptualization of the black self and the changing presentation of that self in narrative form.”²¹ He also notes that “more recent writers have seemed especially interested in dramatizing the tension between perception and reality, between the exposition of self and the masking of self,” but only in passing does he acknowledge that several of the books mentioned “appear to be modeled after slave narratives.”²² Levy’s narrator/writer initially wants her readers to believe they are reading someone else’s story: that she and July are not one and the same.

Levy’s narrator is playful in her masking of self, to use Yarborough’s words, teasing us to awareness. The novel starts with a rape scene that does not sound like a rape since the white man’s penis, like the yellow and black cloth offered in exchange, is “a limp offering.” Kitty seems more upset about the gift than the “rude act.” After the one-paragraph description of the rape, the narrative stops for the first time:

Reader, my son tells me that this is too indelicate a commencement of any tale. Please pardon me, but your storyteller is a woman possessed of a forthright tongue and little ink. [...] Let me confess this without delay so you might consider whether my tale is one in which you can find an interest. If not, then be on your way, for there are plenty books to satisfy if words flowing free as the droppings that fall from the backside of a mule is your desire.²³

Here readers familiar with the slave narrative will remember Lydia Maria Child’s editorial preface to Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents* where she seemingly apologises for presenting a narrative that is so frank about sexuality—she may be accused of “indecorum”—but in the narrative itself, Jacobs turns the issue of propriety against her white readers, emphasizing that the standards for chaste female behaviour cannot be applied to a slave girl. Like Jacobs’ protagonist, July chooses her lover. It is July who attempts to seduce the new overseer, Robert Goodwin, using the book about Scotland as an excuse. “Neither a ruffian nor a drunkard,” Goodwin was a gentleman, “the son of a clergyman with a parish near Sheffield,” whose father had the “highest contempt for white men who abuse their position with negroes.”²⁴ Insisting further, July tells him she is “a mulatto, not a negro”—that it would not be wrong for them to become lovers since his father is not even there—to no avail at that point in the story.²⁵ Of course the narrator is quick to whisper to her reader the truth that “that is not the way white men usually behaved upon this Caribbean island.”²⁶

In addition to warning about the tale’s propriety, the narrator is also educating her readers as to what constitutes good writing. Her narrative is not what readers at the time may have been accustomed to, and she uses a bold image to convey her feeling about the literary conventions of her time. Readers unfamiliar with Levy’s humour may be turned off by the ethos of the passage, but we soon realise that the playfulness of the

different versions of July's birth—"a further version had a tiger, with its long, spiky snout and six legs, sniffing at the baby July, thinking her as food"—serves to prepare readers for what is to follow. She's "speaking fact, even though the contents may seem equally preposterous."²⁷ By resisting mimetic representation, Levy prevents us from feeling what I'm going to call conventional pity (for lack of a better word) for the enslaved people at Amity Plantation.

It is only when talks of freedom end up in a full-fledged war that readers of *The Long Song* realise the extent of the unfriendliness of Jamaican planters. John Howarth, the owner of the plantation named Amity and for many years "the saddest widower upon the whole island,"²⁸ is driven to suicide by what he witnesses during the 1831 Christmas Rebellion. But it is not the sight of the bodies of the slaughtered slaves "rotting in the sun for a few days," or the punishment for running messages to rebel slaves, a small boy "sealed into a barrel [...] roughly pierced with over twenty-five long nails hammered into the shell [...] rolled down a hill" that makes Howarth "question his God for allowing such barbarity within a world he knew, and gasp at the cruelty of his fellows."²⁹ It is witnessing a fellow *white* man, a missionary, being defiled in front of his wife and children that drives Howarth over the edge:

a righteous anger fermented within his belly until he felt sickened, ashamed and disgusted [with] the sight before him now: nine white men dressed as women. Nine gentlemen dressed in a clutter of bonnets and petticoats urged to humiliate, torment and torture a fellow white man before his children, before his wife. Tarring and feathering a man of God. A missionary. A Christian soul! To John Howarth this was cruelty beyond all reason. This was shame.³⁰

Levy chooses metafiction not because of the limitations of realism in representing slavery (in Sherryl Vint's argument), but due to the haunting nature of a past that has been repressed and still needs to be confronted.³¹

When contrasted to other contemporary neo-slave narratives that attempt to conjure, again in Morrison's words, "an illiterate or preliterate reader," Levy's novel imagines its ideal audience as fully literate, never disavowing the literary mode and the emancipatory promise of print literacy. Like Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (1851), which borrows heavily from classic British literature and the narratives of other escaped slaves, *The Long Song* gives readers a sense of a person educating herself in what she considers to be a proper literary style.

In a way, we read July's narrative to witness her self-education, but we are never to forget that her son, who is editing the text, has had the privilege of a British education becoming one of the finest printers upon the island of Jamaica:

But my mama began her life as a person for whom writing the letters ABC could have seen her put to the lash, for she was born a slave. The undertaking of committing her tale to words that might be read and set into printed form was, at first, quite alarming for her poor soul. [...] My particular skill is an ability to find meaning in the most scribbled of texts. Give me writing that looks to have been made by some insect crawling

dirty legs across the paper and I will print its sense, clear and precise.
Show me blots and smudges of ink and I will see form.³²

Thomas Kinsman's life conforms to the rags-to-riches paradigm of the optimistic Enlightenment. By the time he was twenty-one, he was no more an apprentice, but employed by Linus Gray as a journeyman printer and, like him, of the deistic belief.³³ Gray bequeaths "all his real and personal property" to "the negro Thomas Kinsman, so that he may walk within this world as he deserves—as a gentleman."³⁴ Moving to Jamaica, Kinsman attends Church with the hope one of the white men there will give him work, but it is "a Jew who had never once attended [...] St. Peter's who goes to his office to require a press for the first edition of a newspaper he was to publish which was to be called *The Trelawney Mercury*."³⁵ Here we are again reminded of the author and her power in re-imagining Jamaica's past: it is an Isaac Cecil Levy who gives Thomas his first big job.

Reading *The Long Song*, then, does not allow us to forget that a vibrant journalistic tradition developed alongside the tradition of slave narratives and novels. Indeed, as Robert Reid-Pharr notes, "there was an impressive amount of cross-fertilization between different genres of black writing in early national and antebellum America."³⁶ Likewise, the earliest traditions and techniques of intellectuals and authors across the African Diaspora may not have been so much lost as ignored. We "forget" that there were pioneers of the Black Atlantic unless we read the *Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment* (1772-1815) edited by William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and realise what has been left out of literary history. Levy is able to reshape our understanding of the past not only by blurring generic boundaries, but by consistently calling attention to the writing itself. She also makes us question the embedded ideologies found in both the writing of history and the historical narratives that supposedly offer realistic representations of slavery.

The Rewriting of History

"Slavery is a long day of the master over the slave and of nights turned to days. But how long can the master's daylight continue to rule our nights?"

"Forget. Memory is pain trying to resurrect itself"

—Fred D'Aguiar³⁷

Simply by rewriting the stories of lives and events of a distant past, authors of neo-slave narratives want to explore the closely woven bilateral relations between individual history and national history, also typical of the historical novel. But contrary to the traditional historical novel, neo-slave narratives do not conform to either official historiography or bourgeois ideology. These narratives mean to be innovative as they seek to rediscover and rewrite a significant part of history that has been deliberately forgotten and/or denied. Neo-slave narratives are Sankofa texts, to extend Frances Smith Foster's conceptualisation: "Sankofa—an ancient Akan concept with direct bearing on the question of what's fiction, what's real, what's important—translates as the following

imperative: 'We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; so we can understand why and how we came to be who we are today.'³⁸ Sankofa invites us to listen to the stories of our past, to select what is good, and to use that good for positive growth. Sankofa, Foster writes, is "the benevolent use of knowledge. For it to work right, we have to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion; or, as [her] grandmother would say, we have to 'consider the source.'³⁹ Despite the pain, July must go back and remember as much as the black British need to know their history before Windrush.

Levy's narrator often interrupts her tale with her son's questions and her resulting confusion:

'But this is the time of the Baptist War, Mama,' he tell me. 'The night of Caroline Mortimer's unfinished dinner in your story is the time of the Christmas rebellion, when all the trouble began.' [...] I must write all I know of Sam Sharpe, the leader of this rebellion—of his character and looks. I should make it clear how every negro believed themselves to have been freed by the King of England [...].⁴⁰

The narrator addresses her readers directly, claiming it is not indolence that prevents her from a fuller account. She wants us to remember that news "did not travel as it does today," urging us to search for other versions of what happened at the time. We should peruse the pamphlet "written by a Baptist minister named George Dovaston with the title, *Facts and documents connected with the Great Slave Rebellion of Jamaica (1832)*" although she has not witnessed any of the events described there. We should avoid the pamphlet written by the planter John Hoskin, "for the man is a fool who does blame only the sons of Ham and men of God for what occurred."⁴¹ Readers are taught a hermeneutic of suspicion, again to invoke Foster, as they are confronted with competing versions of history rather than one hegemonic account. Who tells history? In whose name? To what purpose? These questions are central to Levy's narrative, her interrogation of the past from an ex-centric position. The history of slavery was neglected for a long period not only because the world's premier historians privileged a white-European version, but also the descendants of Africans initially tried to forget slavery when combating segregation and fighting for civil rights. The figure of the slave was generally perceived as a symbol of black inferiority and subjugation. Only the past prior to the Middle Passage was valued. Slavery in the new world was considered a long dark period during which blacks were denied individuality and even their humanity. Reduced as they were to the condition of chattel, enslaved Africans could not possibly be perceived as cultural or historical subjects.

But reading many of the books Levy acknowledges at the end of *The Long Song* allows us a different understanding of enslaved Africans while obviously making us better readers of her novel. We find in James Walvin's *Black Ivory*, for example, a historical materialist context for the Baptist War depicted in the novel. According to Walvin, "planters were right to fear black Christianity, for in the British West Indies it led the slaves to resistance and ultimately to the campaign for black freedom."⁴² Bringing the enslaved within the Christian fold would complete the process of de-Africanisation: the more the British *talked* about black freedom, the more the news of that debate filtered back to the

slave quarters to encourage black aspirations. The Baptist preachers are the ones to persuade the negroes that “they are as worthy as white man” and that the King himself has given them their freedom.⁴³ Walvin describes this period of transition as follows:

What we can see, increasingly, in the slave islands was a growing body of Christian slaves, no longer joined by ‘raw’ Africans, encouraged to think of freedom by news from Britain, but faced by a resistant plantocracy. Moreover, the planters had to work their slaves harder, often at tasks the slaves did not like, because the supply of Africans had dried up. As long as the slave trade continued, Africans could be thrown into the fields—the shock troops of the plantocratic system—to do the hard work. After 1808 many slaves who might (because of their ‘Creole’ status) expect better, more favored work, found themselves reassigned to manual work. Disgruntlement spread rapidly.⁴⁴

When revolt broke out in the west of Jamaica, during Christmas 1831, it involved more than 20,000 slaves mostly from areas where the Baptists had their followers and their chapels. As leader of the first revolutionary war (as the rebellion is now called in Jamaica), Sam Sharpe was the master of his audience. According to Walvin, those who heard Sam Sharpe speak never forgot his voice or his message. A bright man, described by one who met him as ‘the most intelligent and remarkable slave [he had] ever met with,’ Sharpe preached that “whites had no more right to hold black people in slavery, than black people had to make white people slaves.”⁴⁵ Black preachers seized upon the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as grist to their mill; the language, imagery and tales of oppression, of freedom, of promised lands, of salvation to come were ideally suited to a suggestive reinterpretation. Paradoxically, Christianity was both oppressing and liberating by providing the enslaved with such narratives of freedom while demanding that they forget where they came from. Walvin adds that the “fourteen white deaths, and material damage amounting to more than one million pounds, were avenged by more than 500 killings and executions, including Sam Sharpe.”⁴⁶

But depicting the excessive retaliation for the Baptist War is only part of the critique the novel offers. Levy’s neo-slave narrative also sets out to recover the culture of resistance born and developed inside the plantation economy. Take, for example, the figure of the obedient house-slave. Within a given plantation, one could distinguish the slaves who worked in the fields from those who worked in the master’s house. The stereotype of the house-slave depicts her/him as an obedient servant who accepts her/his condition happily, wants to please the master at all costs and is even ready to betray other slaves in order to obtain a few privileges. Such stereotypes have even been reproduced in the slave narratives themselves. This figure is connected to the master’s point of view and to the latter’s psychological and moral need to reinforce his benevolent and paternal role. The house-slaves were probably less inclined to rebellion than the field-slaves, but they adopted subtle ways of resistance, perhaps less explicit and open, but nonetheless effective. In Levy’s novel, an example of covert resistance can be found in replacing fine quality linen with simple cotton bed-sheets for the Christmas dinner table. Even July could smell “Godfrey’s mischief.”⁴⁷ Against the belief that “Niggers cannot render civilised music,” Levy depicts the Amity plantation fiddlers “playing in the

yard for the servants' gathering" as "no more clatter or unrecognizable tune—the sound of a sweet melody came whispering through the open window. For [...] it only amused them to play bad for white ears."⁴⁸ More daring, perhaps, is Nimrod's justification for stealing: "whatever is your massa's, belongs to you. When you take property from your massa, for your own use, him loses nothing. For you be his property too. All is just transferring. Everything you now hold is still your massa's property. You just get a little use of it."⁴⁹ Even John Locke would not be able to argue with the logic of such redefinition of property.⁵⁰

Neo-slave narratives further detach themselves from historical novels in that they give more importance to re-imagining historical memory than to linear narration per se. In their effort to re-present unwritten history, neo-slave narratives are part of a broader context characterised by the importance and necessity of remembering, testifying and passing on those parts of history that are so negative, horrible, and traumatic that they seem unreal. What July remembers cannot be found in history books. Not only is the novel a memoir of July's experience, but it is also introduced as a narrative based on memory. History and memory are never completely merged, however, due to the metafictional nature of the telling. We must remember that while the original slave narratives aimed to recover history, neo-slave narratives are based on re-imagining the subjectivity of the enslaved. In *The Long Song*, history and memory function to deconstruct and rebuild the concepts of community, home, and family.

Alternative Endings: A Sankofa Aesthetics and Forthcoming Sequel

When a griot dies, it is as if a library has burned to the ground. The griots symbolize how all human ancestry goes back to some place and some time, where there was no writing. Then the memories and the mouths of ancient elders was the only way that early histories of mankind got passed along [...] for all of us today to know who we are.

—Alex Haley⁵¹

Slavery breaks July's family in more ways than the obvious separation of a mother from her children. That July is lucky to be reunited with her first born—whom she abandons in the hope that he be given more opportunities than the life of a slave—does not mitigate the fact that her baby girl is stolen from her by the child's white father and his English wife. On the surface, with the *Long Song* Levy seems to be offering a belated response to the African-American neo-slave narratives by women which were, according to Elizabeth Beaulieu, "designed not merely to reclaim their enslaved maternal ancestors' stories and reposition their role in American history, but also to refute the stereotype of the enslaved women as breeder."⁵² Beaulieu emphasises that the significance of American neo-slave narratives in the 1980s was not merely literary and historical.⁵³ The women writing neo-slave narratives then were responding to the stereotypes that much of black popular culture reproduced by focusing solely on a black male subjectivity at the expense of real black women. Like Levy, such writers were also concerned both with the past and with the future: "their special talent rests in their ability to use the past [...] to evoke the promise of the future."⁵⁴ While *Beloved* seems to ask the question of what motherhood

could mean under slavery, however, Levy's character becomes a writer, not a midwife. It is only July's mother, Kitty, who exhibits conventional maternal behaviour, placing her child's life above her own. When July runs away after witnessing the overseer shoot Nimrod once in an attempt to blame him for Howarth's suicide, Kitty reappears in the story as a Nanny Maroon figure, who flies to save her daughter's life. Although no one has actually seen what happened, it is Kitty's superhuman strength that allows her not only to save her daughter, but to revenge the many times Tam Dewar raped her.⁵⁵ Kitty's execution for killing the overseer painfully resembles a lynching:

When the flap finally dropped on that straining scaffold July, hidden within a corner of the square, watched as Kitty, kicking and convulsing at the end of her rope, elbowed and banged into the two men that dangled lifeless as butchered meat beside her. Her mama struggled. Her mama choked. Until, at last stilled, her mama hung small and black as a ripened pod upon a tree.⁵⁶

Such descriptions are common in neo-slave narrative as they are to evoke the "strange fruit" images used during the Civil Rights Movement to call attention to lynching and other forms of genocide taking place in the United States at the time. Historical novels may function as counter-memory (to borrow a term from Michel Foucault), enabling the process of reading history against its grain, of taking an active role in its interpretation rather than a passive one.⁵⁷ Reading Levy's *The Long Song* as counter-memory allows us/her to intervene in history rather than merely chronicle it. July's story offers a better understanding of the past with the goal of strengthening possibilities for a more meaningful, richer, black British present and future (remember that young woman in the audience in my first epigraph).

For Levy sees her writing as rooted in an inextricable unity of ethics, politics, and aesthetics, unlike David Dabydeen who continues to champion the realm of the aesthetic over any political and/or ethical claims. As Lars Eckstein describes, Dabydeen sees art as "an initially autonomous, self-justifying domain."⁵⁸ Dabydeen's 1984 celebration of a slave's unbroken spirit becomes, in my reading, a celebration of his uncolonised sexuality: evident in the speaker's sexual fantasy about the slave owner's wife in "Slave Song" as well as the depiction of the white woman's secret desire to be raped in "Nightmare." Dabydeen's claims in the introduction to the 2005 edition of *Slave Song* have not made the poems more palatable:

The poems in this volume [...] are largely concerned with an exploration of the erotic energies of the colonial experience, ranging from a corrosive to a lyrical sexuality. Even the appetite for sadistic sexual possession is life giving, the strange, vivid fruit or racial conquest and racial hatred.⁵⁹

One does not even have to be a feminist to be troubled by the way in which the rage of the cane cutter is assuaged by fantasies of abusing and/or mutilating a white body.

I'll mention two more recent neo-slave narratives that manage to avoid such stereotypical representation. Joan Anim-Addo retells Aphra Behn's story from the point of view of the African princess, significantly changing the plot of *Oroonoko*. When newly transplanted, Africans lost language, status, culture and family; they had to find a way to

survive in a hostile environment. Anim-Addo's *Imoinda*, then, uses Behn's story only as a point of departure for, in her version, both mother and baby survive. Following the birth of her daughter, a child of rape by the white overseer, Imoinda mourns the circumstances of her child's birth, but Esteizme, her maid, claims the child is "hope for new life again."⁶⁰ Imoinda's child thus represents the emergent nation, the Caribbean nation. Imoinda remembers her humanity, her capacity to love, however much slavery has sought to break her. Because Oroonoko is unable to adapt to his new circumstances, his only prideful solution is to kill himself. *Imoinda* denies conventional representations of the enslaved as the mute subaltern which dominated the history of both pro-slavery and abolitionist literatures. Dorothea Smartt's *Ship Shape* (2008) also evokes the trauma of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade by a creative excavation of the unmarked grave of an African boy buried at Sunderland Point, Lancaster.⁶¹ Like an archaeologist, in a multitude of voices, she invokes the spirit of this young boy by creating an identity, family, history, culture, religion, a home for him: from 'Sambo' to Bilal, a Fulani Muslim boy whose body the poet inhabits to give him full humanity. Whether fictional, poetic, performative, or visual, neo-slave narratives demand that we re-evaluate not only a vexed history of trauma and violence, but also urge us to re-consider the modern history of the representation of black bodies and selves.

The privileged position Levy affords her narrator also separates her novel from other neo-slave narratives. Positioning the narrator of her story of slavery first as an actual character in the drama and consistently removing her from the narrative do not allow readers to forget the fact that she is *writing* rather than telling her story to someone else. Levy thus establishes an intimacy between readers and a narrator who has absolute authority over the story, something not found in other neo-slave narratives. The narrator's first attempt at ending her story with an allegorical funeral for colonial slavery that "died July 31, 1838, aged 276 years" seems the logical place for July to stop her tale, as the date marks the end of the apprenticeship system, officially granting full freedom to the formerly enslaved.⁶² Thomas Kinsman does not allow his mother to end the story there, however, demanding to know more about the circumstances of his birth. When July "did look upon this tiny newborn," she thought of him as "the ugliest black-skinned child she had ever seen."⁶³ July stops using "fiction" to revise, in a sense, her life-story since from this point on the narrative is consistently in first person. She commands her readers to "ask *my* son to tell you of those days"⁶⁴ (emphasis added), not lamenting the loss of his mother but rejoicing at the English preacher and his wife's upbringing: Thomas was a freeman from his second year. And true to the Enlightenment's mission, knowledge does make the "savage" virtuous:

'The salvation of the savage' was Mr Kinsman's mission. He believed that even the blackest negro could be turned from sable heathen into a learned man, under his and God's tutelage. My son was given a Christian education within his school and Mr Kinsman was pledged to write a paper upon the progress of his learning for the *Baptist Magazine* in London.⁶⁵

Although July wants us to believe that it is to spare her readers that she wants to end the narrative, she does not want to be forced to remember and suffer “every little thing again.”⁶⁶ When slavery ends, July stays with Caroline Mortimer, who refuses to sell her property despite her neighbours’ generous offers—she wants to make Amity the most prosperous estate in Jamaica to revenge her brother’s suicide. When Caroline realises the pitiful conditions within the dungeon at Amity (used to keep the slaves in check), she orders it closed and starts to teach July how to read and write to engage her as her assistant until she hires a new overseer to manage the plantation. Robert Goodwin tries to restore their confidence by treating the formerly enslaved fairly, for he has learned from his father that “England [...] must be cleansed of the abominable stain that slavery placed upon it.”⁶⁷ But “you must prove to the Queen, the people of England, and your mistress,” he tells his workers, “that you are worthy of the kindness that has been shown you.”⁶⁸ The new overseer’s kindness makes July fall in love with him. Although Goodwin seems to be in love with July, he marries Caroline to take July as his mistress since his father had instructed him “a married man might do as he pleases.”⁶⁹ It is the portrait entitled *Mr and Mrs Goodwin* that reveals to Caroline whom her husband truly fancies: “So furious was Caroline that the artist had caught her husband’s folly, that she insisted he take back the portrait to his studio to rectify this error.”⁷⁰ Caroline looks strangely sad in the portrait because her husband has only come to her bed twice in a whole year of married life despite the fact that she wants children. It is the negro that the artist Francis Bear includes to “[add] a reliable touch of the exotic” to the work that bears her husband’s affectionate gaze.⁷¹ July gives birth to a “fair-skinned, grey-eyed girl” later named Emily.⁷² She feels as if she is Robert’s real wife and believes her basement apartment to be truly home.

This illusion is shattered very soon, as Goodwin loses control of the Amity Plantation workers, who refuse to work more than the forty hours a week required of them by King William and the law of England now that they are “free”: “We no longer slaves and we work what suits.”⁷³ Rather than bringing in the crop at Christmas time, the workers’ energy is focused on their old provision grounds and gardens, “for those lands that once they had been forced to tend as slaves so there might be food enough to eat, within the liberty of their freedom now flourished, with produce and profit.”⁷⁴ Failing to receive the gratitude and devotion he expects from the workers, Goodwin institutes measures that smell of desperation: even “[t]o fish the river is no longer permitted.”⁷⁵ Because he wants to charge “a full week’s wage in rent for every acre of land worked,” and no one “could ever earn sufficient to pay it,” they take a solemn oath that “No one would pay the rent upon their houses,” and “not one person amongst them would work even a day for Robert Goodwin.”⁷⁶ Without their labour, much of the land at Amity Plantation falls to ruin.⁷⁷ Such devastation brings on a nervous breakdown, and it is only July’s baby that is able to bring Robert back.⁷⁸ The Goodwin’s are reassured that boatloads of hard-working coolies are on their way to have their plantation working again. But the doctor does prescribe a “long visit back home, to England, so he might better convalesce away from the source of his unease.”⁷⁹ Robert does not want to see July anymore and even begins to have loud sex with Caroline: “Faster and faster, the bed had bumped upon her ceiling. And although

July blocked up her ears with her fists, the missus did not think to stifle Robert Goodwin's mouth when he at last discharged his final cry."⁸⁰ When departure day arrive, Molly sides with the masters and steals Emily from her mother, saying she's going to feed her, and leaves for England with them.

Here the editor of July's narrative interrupts her yet another time, challenging the happy ending she attempts to sketch, another attempt at preventing her readers from feeling sorry for her:

'Mama, this is not written in truth,' says he. [...]

'You wish your readers to know that after Miss July's baby had been cruelly seized from her by Robert and Caroline Goodwin and taken to England, that she then went on to manage a shop within the town entirely untroubled, and there grew old making first, preserves and pickles, before becoming the mistress of a lodging house? [...]

'Then can you perhaps tell me who was that woman—that half-starved woman—with the stolen chicken under her clothes?'⁸¹

For it is on a day he is on jury duty that Thomas Kinsman runs into his mother, who has since then lived in his household. It is Thomas who urges July to write down her story so that her "precious words" would not be lost to all. Although her son wants to know of those years since his sister was stolen from their mother, to the moment he finds a starved July in the courtroom, she refuses to depict the troubles and the harassment from planters free negroes have had to endure. July chooses what stages of her life she wants known:

But for me, reader, my story is finally at an end. This long song has come full up to date. It is at last complete. So let me now place that final end dot...

Perhaps, I told my son, upon some other day there may come a person who would wish to tell the chronicle of those times anew. But I am an old-old woman. And, reader, I have not the ink.⁸²

When reading July's allusion to the title of her narrative readers are reminded that *The Narrative of the Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* identifies slave singing as "testimony against slavery": "slaves sing when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of the heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears."⁸³ July is done telling the story of her life and of everything she has both witnessed and endured in a Jamaican plantation.

The end of the novel also reminds us of an earlier exchange about the possibility of representing truth in art or, to say it better, on the question of whose reality actually gets represented: "Observing the artist painting the view of the lands of Amity into the background of the picture, Dublin Hilton, the old distiller-man, observed that he had not included the negro dwellings. 'But they are there before you,' [...]. At which the artist barked upon him, that no one wished to find squalid negroes within a rendering of a tropical idyll."⁸⁴ Despite the attempt at exposing the "untruth" in the painting, the artist ultimately has control over his creation. In a way, Levy creates her own aesthetics by

conceptualizing writing as both a means of self-discovery and transformation—as an artefact of consciousness. She begets her narrative, to go back to my second epigraph, and the novel's afterword even prepares us for a sequel, certainly another Sankofa text:

If any readers have information regarding Emily Goodwin—her circumstance, her whereabouts—I would be very obliged to them if they could let me know it. A letter to my print works here in Kingston, addressed to Thomas Kinsman, would always find me. [...] But here I would also give one word of caution to any wishing to eagerly aid me with this request. In England the finding of negro blood within a family is not always met with rejoicing. So please, do not think to approach upon Emily Goodwin too hastily with the details of this story, for its load may prove to be unsettling.⁸⁵

For we have already been warned that “the tar brush [...] is quick to lick.”⁸⁶ *The Long Song* continues the author's project of rewriting British history to include her ancestors—to use narrative as way to re-imagine identity. For instead of thinking of identity as an already established fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, Stuart Hall urges us to think of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted *within*, not outside, representation.⁸⁷ Given the skewed structures of growing up in diasporic societies, of attempting whatever social rank or position in the racial colour structure, according to Hall, it is not surprising that Caribbean people of all kinds, of all classes, experience the question of identity as an open question.⁸⁸ I guess the title I chose for an earlier essay on Levy's fiction, “Pivoting the Center,” would still apply here: “[*Small Island*] is much more than a social history of Black people in Britain at a pivotal point of the country's economic and political development. The novel pivots the centre, for very little of hegemonic whiteness is left at the novel's end—and this is not the reason we cry.”⁸⁹

Levy chooses metafiction in response to a specific crisis in narrative, not the generalised crisis in narrative, but a more profound challenge that has to do with the relationship between racial subjectivity and the uneven development of modernity. Because in a way fiction that calls attention to itself in the telling *is* the most realist genre, *The Long Song* leaves us with the unflinching humanity of enslaved peoples as they have managed much more than survival: July seems almost superhuman in her optimistic unwillingness to see herself as a victim. Levy tells us that “instead of a sense of horror, [she has] emerged from the experience of writing the book with a sense of awe for those millions of people who once lived as slaves.”⁹⁰ If history has kept them silent, Levy concludes, “then we must conjure their voices ourselves and listen to their stories. Stories through which we can remember them, marvel at what they endured, what they achieved, and what they have bequeathed to us all.”⁹¹

Notes

1. I'm indebted to Wendy Knepper, Rob Doggett, and Stephanie Iasiello for insightful suggestions for revising this essay. The flaws that remain are mine.
2. Andrea Levy, "The Writing of *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy": <http://www.andrealevy.co.uk> [accessed August 8, 2011].
3. Neo-slave narratives include such diverse works as Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings* (1979) and *The President's Daughter* (1994), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990), Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge* (1991), J. California Cooper's *Family* (1992) and *In Search of Satisfaction* (1994), Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1994), Louise Meriwether's *Fragments of the Ark* (1994), Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994), Lorene Cary's *The Price of a Child* (1995), Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle and Yarico* (1996), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), Valerie Mason-John's *Borrowed Body* (2005), Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda* (2008), and Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2008), to name only a few.
4. Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006, 113.
5. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Introduction: The Talking Book," *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772-1815*. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and William L. Andrews, eds., Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998, 2.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.
7. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
8. Andrea Levy, Reading at SUNY Geneseo on April 29th, 2011 (Milne 201 at 4 p.m).
9. *Ibid.*
10. Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano: African British Abolitionist and Founder of the African-American Slave Narrative," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Audrey A. Fisch, ed., Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 48.
11. Andrea Levy, *The Long Song*. London: Headline Review, 2010, 3.
12. John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (Summer 1987): 482.
13. Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. William Zinsser and Russell Baker, eds., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998, 112.
14. *Ibid.*, 192; 93.
15. William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*. New York: Knopf, 1970, 25.
16. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 158.
17. Gates, "Introduction," 3.
18. Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 153.
19. John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *The Atlantic* (August 1967): 19-33.
20. Madelyn Jablon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997, 7.

21. Richard Yarborough, "The First-Person in Afro-American Fiction," *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*. Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Patricia Redmond, eds., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, 115.
22. *Ibid.*, 119.
23. Levy, *The Long Song*, 7.
24. *Ibid.*, 165; 204.
25. The reversal of roles in this passage reminds me of Cindy Weinstein's reading of sentimental fiction against the antebellum slave narrative to demonstrate how the two genres intersect with and challenge one another. For Weinstein, the emphasis on hiding as opposed to revealing is a consequence of one genre being "factual" and the other "fictional," but she acknowledges there is more to the difference than that. Sentimental novels, she writes, are "committed to restoring a transparency about character and relationships as they try to create, at least in the endings of their novels, a coherent, domestic, middle-class world, where children know who their fathers are and husbands and wives know the make-up of one another's blood type" (Weinstein 121). In the world the slaveholders created, where fathers would not acknowledge the children they had with the slaves, there were to be no such assurances. See Cindy Weinstein, "The Slave Narrative and Sentimental Literature" *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Audrey A. Fisch, ed., Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 115-34.
26. Levy, *The Long Song*, 207.
27. *Ibid.*, 10; 11.
28. *Ibid.*, 57.
29. *Ibid.*, 113.
30. *Ibid.*, 113-14.
31. Sherryl Vint, "'Only by Experience': Embodiment and the Limitations of Realism in Neo-Slave Narratives," *Science Fiction Studies* 34 (2007): 241-61
32. *Ibid.*, 2.
33. *Ibid.*, 298.
34. *Ibid.*, 300.
35. *Ibid.*, 302.
36. Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "The Slave Narrative and Early Black American Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, 140.
37. Fred D'Aguiar, *The Longest Memory*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1994, 137; 138.
38. Frances Smith Foster, *'Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, xvii.
39. *Ibid.*, 5.
40. Levy, *Long Song*, 77.
41. *Ibid.*, 78.
42. James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994., 274.
43. Levy, *Long Song*, 67.
44. Walvin, 274.
45. *Ibid.*, 276-77.

46. Ibid., 277.
47. Levy, *Long Song*, 64.
48. Ibid., 66; 72.
49. Ibid., 87.
50. Caroline Mortimer had chosen to grant July an education in the great house, so she would know what it feels “to be a white man’s child” (Levy, 38). Although her father, the overseer Dewar, never truly recognizes her as his child, July feels she belongs in the great house. As Levy describes her, “July had gone from being a filthy nigger child—used only to working in the fields—into the missus’s favoured lady’s maid, who boasted her papa to be a white man even though it was Molly that had the higher colour” (Levy, 44). July is described at sixteen as “an excitable young woman with crafty black eyes, a skinny nose, and narrow lips that often bore a smile of insolence” (Levy, 45). At this point in the narrative, however, July only attracts the attention of a free black, Nimrod, who is described as “black as sin, ugly, sly, rough, rude, and no taller than a girl,” and who fathers July’s first child (Levy, 87). As in Levy’s other novels, skin colour will never guarantee either decency or evil in her characters, and readers can expect to find redeeming traits in all the human beings she creates.
51. Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976, viii.
52. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, 149.
53. Beaulieu’s argument that black women writers chose to author neo-slave narratives to reinscribe history from the point of view of the nineteenth-century enslaved mother focuses on Sherley Anne Williams’ *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), J. California Cooper’s *Family* (1991), Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979).
54. Beaulieu, 156.
55. Levy, *Long Song*, 130.
56. Ibid., 135.
57. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977.
58. Eckstein, 156.
59. David Dabydeen, *Slave Song*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005, 10.
60. Joan Anim-Addo, *Imoinda: or She Who Will Lose Her Name* (a play for twelve voices in three acts). London: Mango Publishing, 2008, 92.
61. Dorothea Smartt, *Ship Shape*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008.
62. Levy, *Long Song*. 139.
63. Ibid., 143.
64. Ibid., 144.
65. Ibid., 144-45.
66. Ibid., 147.
67. Ibid., 167.
68. Ibid., 171.
69. Ibid., 217.
70. Ibid., 227-28.
71. Ibid., 222.
72. Ibid., 227.

73. Ibid., 236.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 241.
76. Ibid., 241; 244.
77. Ibid., 263.
78. Ibid., 265.
79. Ibid., 266.
80. Ibid., 270.
81. Ibid., 281.
82. Ibid., 304-05.
83. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892) with an introduction by Rayford W. Long, ed., New York: Collier Books, 1962, 58.
84. Levy, *Long Song*, 232.
85. Ibid., 308.
86. Ibid., 186.
87. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford, ed., London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 222.
88. Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," *New Left Review* 209 (January/February 1995): 7.
89. Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black: Write British: from Post Colonial to Black British Literature*. Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib Publications, 2005, 79-80.
90. Levy, "Writing of *The Long Song*."
91. Ibid.

A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative. Jan 2012. 135-153. Maria H Lima. Lima, Maria H. "A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative." *NeoSlave Narratives* is a study in the political, social, and cultural content of a given literary form--the novel of slavery cast as a first-person slave narrative. After discerning the social and historical factors surrounding the first appearance of that literary form in the 1960s, *NeoSlave Narratives* explores the complex relationship between nostalgia and critique, while asking how African American intellectuals at different points between 1976 and 1990 remember and use the site of slavery to represent the crucial cultural debates that arose during the sixties. View. Show abstract. Narrativ... In *The Long Song*, Andrea Levy explores her Jamaican heritage more completely than ever before. This sensational novel--her first since the Orange Prize--winning *Small Island*, recently adapted for the BBC--tells the life story of July, a slave girl living on a sugar plantation in 1830s Jamaica just as emancipation is juddering into action. As well as being beautifully written *The Long Song* is a thoroughly researched historical novel that is both powerful and heartbreaking. Lianne Kolirin, *Daily Express*. "This is a huge leap of the imagination." Verified Purchase. Andrea Levy's story of slavery and the slave rising in Jamaica is told in the rich voice of July, born as a baby to a slave mother, separated from her mother at a young age, reared as a house slave to a British planter and his sister. Andrea Levy FRSL (7 March 1956 – 14 February 2019) was an English author best known for the novels *Small Island* (2004) and *The Long Song* (2010). She was born in London to Jamaican parents, and her work explores topics related to British Jamaicans and how they negotiate racial, cultural and national identities. Levy was of primarily Afro-Jamaican descent. She had a Jewish paternal grandfather and a Scots maternal great-grandfather. She said in a 2004 article: "Jews went to Jamaica in the 1600s. My Introduction: Andrea Levy's Dislocating Narratives Author: Wendy Knepper Source: *EnterText*, Special Issue on Andrea Levy, 9 (2012): 1-13. Overview for the Special Issue This special issue on Andrea Levy, the first of its kind, considers how the politics of place as well as the dislocations associated with empire, migration, and social transformation figure in the author's work and shape her approach to narrative. Maria Helena Lima's "A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative" examines the ways in which *The Long Song* responds to and reworks the conventions of the genre. A neo-slave narrative is about more than enslavement. Novels within this genre use histories of slavery to query race, gender, sexuality, place, and to debate the degree to which past practices remain current. Part of what the genre asks is, still? Neo-slave narratives provide a means of seeing a frequently represented institution differently. They go beyond the binaries of slaves and masters, victims and victimizers, to show the pervasiveness and complexity of a social system. Johnson again explicitly calls attention to the writing process in having the novel take the form of a diary. While keeping it, Rutherford engages in metaphysical contemplation of his life, his race, and the human situation. A self-confessed inveterate liar, a rascal, his only allegiance is to himself.