
REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY IN LORENE CARY'S THE PRICE OF A CHILD (1995)

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There are few African American women writers for whom the past serves the foundation for weaving their stories. Lorene Cary is one among them, as she represents the history of slavery in her novel *The Price of a Child*(1995), which is confined with specific time frames. She interweaves individual life stories with African American history, making national, communal and individual histories compete one another and at times overlap. Linda Hutcheon(1989) argues that in order to represent history in fiction image, narrative, and ideology play a vital role. So, she handles the technique of mixing historical and fictive representation as a form of historiographic metafiction, where fact and fiction and play a vital role. As historical facts are explanatory, the postmodern narrative emplotments focus on how the past is known at present through factual and fictional form.

This paper intends to analyse Lorene Cary's way of rewriting the history of African Americans through her,*The Price of a Child* (1995). Cary recreates the history of slavery through her fictional character Ginnie Pryor and fictionalizes the constitutional issues such as the Underground Railroad, Fugitive slave act, and Antislavery meeting through Ginnie's life from bondage to freedom. She admits that the novel will encourage reflection about the past and present issues that both unite and divide the history of African American presence in America. Moreover, the history of slavery in Philadelphia is not written by any historians and it is only known through the traces and documents.

According to Baudrillard the real is totally replaced by justification and as a result of this, the possibility of "critical and speculative distance has been collapsed."(Hutcheon 33) So, in the postmodern world with the creation of new science and technologies the models produced to

understand the world have become more real, more sophisticated and more accurate than reality itself. This is one of the main concerns outlined in Cary's novel and this paper aims to re/present and reconstruct the fragmented past in which she introduces history as a form of story and substantiates through her novel.

In postmodern fiction, the representation of the real is mimicked by transforming the real into fictive. The process of making stories out of chronicles, constructing plots out of non-sequences and encoding meaning making through representation projects the uniqueness of postmodern fiction. In both historiographic theory and postmodern fiction, there is an intense self-consciousness (both theoretical and textual) about the act of narrating the past events in the present. Whereas in both historical and literary postmodern representation, the doubleness remains and there is no sense of either historian or novelist reducing the strange past to verisimilar present. For example, in Angela Carter's "The Love of Lady Purple", the puppet mimics the life of Lady Purple as a representation of male erotic fantasies and of male desire. Similarly this kind of technique(historiographic metafiction) is useful for portraying the life of the marginalised people among the dominant. Also the history of marginalised is never been viewed by marginalised people itself and so Lorene Cary comes with the task of writing marginalised history of African American women through her *The Price of a Child*(1995). Though millions of women writers lived in the past, only few of them appear in history, that is, in history texts. So African American women writers started to bring a new version of mixing history and fiction in their work and include them from hidden history. Accordingly feminists are now engaged in the task woman back into history as 'her story' and Lorene Cary is one among them who describes the 19th century history of slavery in Philadelphia through her novel.

Lorene Cary born in 1956 is well known for her works *Pride* (1998), *Free! Great Escapes from Slavery on the Underground Railroad* (2005) and *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Novel* (2011) and also known for her themes race and of its construction. Cary's first novel *The Price of a Child* (1995) is about a fictive character from history, Ginnie Pryor, who is forced to leave her baby behind when she escapes from slavery on southern plantation. Cary mentions that the thirty year old Ginnie Pryor was the fictional counterpart of the real Jane Johnson. She writes that she has known about the railroads and the story of Jane Johnson only through William Still's *The Underground Railroad* (1872) from the library of Philadelphia. The excerpted moments and the partial portraits from Still's collection are the skeleton on which Cary has constructed her novel.

In Cary's novel, Ginnie Pryor encounters rude racism in what she'd hoped would be freer world in the North. Oppressed by guilt, she transforms herself into an abolitionist speaker and calls herself Mercer Gary – thereby repaying her unwritten obligations to her child. Furthermore, the novel entangles constitutional issues in the historical context of Abolitionism. Cary too stated that the novel “is the kernel of the American society. It's another way of looking at who we are as Americans.”

Moreover, *The Price of a Child* exposes the vulnerability and insecurities of slave families and slave children in her representation of the life of Ginnie Pryor, a slave in Virginia shortly before the Civil War. She accompanies her master by whom she is sexually oppressed, to a trip to the North along with her two children. She was, however, forced to leave her youngest child at Virginia as an assurance of her return. Also she knows that trying to get away is dangerous and that the high price of freedom is the child left behind in Virginia who she would most likely never see again.

But in Philadelphia, an abolitionist group promises her freedom and despite her dilemmas over her youngest child, she opts for freedom. And the Quicks family gives her shelter and later changes her name to Mercer Gray to live a freed life. On the other hand she learns with the help of Harriet (one among the Quicks family) and she joins in the abolitionist movement as an abolitionist speaker by relentlessly working to get back her lost child. At times she had feelings over Tyree who helped her get her freedom; instead she controls herself and lives her life as an abolitionist. Though she attends the trial at the court and gets freed by the fugitive slave act of 1850, the people in the United States considered her only as a white man's property. But at the end she moves to Canada as an abolitionist speaker and could not get her child back. The only thing she could get in her life was her child's age which is meant through five slightly charred one-hundred dollar bills gifted by Tyree.

Lorene Cary's main aim is to project the testimonial forms of Slavery. Regions such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, Virginia, Maryland, New York and South Carolina legalized slavery in an explicit way. Also the lawmakers in Maryland accreditates slavery as a long lasting condition for African Americans in 1663 and Virginia classified slavery as a lifelong, inheritable and “racial” status for blacks in 1670. Whereas, the remaining colonies of British North America accredited slavery in the early 18th century. Of the 13 colonies, only Pennsylvania put up any sustained opposition to the use of slavery. Rhode Island had an anti slavery ordinance on the books, but it was openly violated. And Massachusetts, the cradle of liberty, was actually the first colony to make perpetual bondage legal. Nevertheless, the condition of slavery differed significantly from North to South.

The New England colonies played a principal role in the slave trade, but they had little reason to buy slaves themselves. By 1700 blacks amounted to only about 1,000 in a population of 90,000. As the economy of the area was diversified, so too were the occupations of the blacks. Many were skilled craftsmen, and there are records of black physicians. Furthermore, the puritan heritage asserted itself in an Old Testament kind of slavery, which did not deny the slave's existence as a human being. Blacks could own property, they could testify in court against whites, and the law regulated the way a master could treat slaves.

The Mid-Atlantic States were familiar with small slaveholdings; slaves comprised 12% of the population of eighteenth century New York. In addition to labouring on farms, they worked as domestics and craftsmen. Although the Quakers in Pennsylvania passed laws against the slavetrade in 1688, 1693, and 1696- protesting that it violated the principles of Christianity and the rights of man- their statutes were overruled by parliament in 1712. The behaviour of slaves in these colonies was controlled as in the south, by strict slave codes, under which the slaves were stripped of most rights. Slavery may have been mild in Pennsylvania, but the codes were enforced with frightening severity in New York.

Further, across the south, the slave codes flourished codifying the fact that slaves were property, not people. The same slave code is mentioned by Cary when Ginnie was given her freedom by the vigilancecommittee. Pryor shouted hard at them stating that she belong to him. As the majority of the people gathered were blacks, the voice of few white slave owners did not have the power to fight against them. One white man, who thought to be slave owner shouted at them " Let them alone, they are his property." (Cary 49) This situation states that the blacks although not legally property, they were perceived by most whites as inferior.

The colonial south was divided into tobacco-raising provinces of Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina, and the huge rice and indigo plantations thenrisingin South Carolina and Georgia. Since tobacco was often raised on family farms, the slave population of the Chesapeake Bay area never reached the intense concentrations created in the deeper south. Terrified by uprisings, slaveholders devised ever harsher slave codes. According to the newly created slave code, a slave could not own anything, carry a weapon, or even leave his plantation without a written pass.

There were many capital crimes, and small offenses were commonly punished by whipping, maiming, and branding. The capital punishment vindicates on black men or women who tries to escape from white owners through networks such as Underground Railroad and the small offenses defends on the punishments offered by the whites for cheating and disobeying their orders. In the area where 90% of colonial blacks lived, a slave had no rights even to defend

himself against a white man, and, as far north as Virginia, it was impossible for a white man to be convicted of the murder of a slave. Also US legal law were partial towards black people as there was no law for white man murdering black slaves.

The colonists, angered by the restrictions imposed upon them by the crown, were practically forced by the logic of their own struggle to agitate also for the rights of the blacks. These religious and political beliefs took philosophical sail in the ideals of the Enlightenment, which stressed natural rights and human liberty. Sentiments of racial egalitarianism began to permeate the colonies. The movement for independence from the Great Britain was still linked with the problems of slavery and so numerous African Americans attempted to make the Revolution a war for freedom, as both patriots and loyalists. The Massachusetts born Patriot Prince Hall saw the implications of his own struggle as well as that of his nation – he fought for human freedom as well as political independence. On the other side, thousands of African Americans saw the British army- which announced that any slave joining them in arms would be set free - not as a army of oppression but one of liberation. After the war was over, the surging revolutionary ideology set in motion a process that historians have termed the “first Emancipation.” So, as a result of gradual emancipation free blacks occupied a precarious place in American society, somewhere between slavery and true freedom.

The spirit of Revolutionary war that gripped the American continent in the 1770s shook acceptance of slavery. Even the economic structure seemed open to change, for the declining fertility of the tobacco lands of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. During this period only the Quakers had opposed slavery and later their intensified efforts in abolishing slavery proliferated with various the political events. In his *Rights of the British Colonies* (1764), James Otis fearlessly proclaimed the black’s rights to be free.

In 1733, Reverend Isaac Skillman carried the argument to the even more radical assertion that slaves should rebel against their masters. A year later Thomas Jefferson was describing the abolition of slavery as one of the goals of the colonists, and accusing Great Britain of blocking efforts to end the slavetrade. Moved by these arguments, the Continental Congress passed a resolution not to import any slaves after December 1, 1775. Ultimately, Jefferson went so far as to include a violent denunciation of slavery in his first draft of the Declaration of Independence which comprises a factually inaccurate (and antislavery) passage blaming George III for the slave trade- but it was excised by a powerful bloc of southern slaveholders who were perfectly satisfied to make lies out of self-evident truths.

In the meanwhile, racist ideology and laws passed by whites denied free blacks their rights and legitimized their treatment as second – class citizens. Legislation was necessary to end

slavery in the other Northern states. Pennsylvania, which had a large anti-slavery Quaker population, led the way in 1780 with the first “gradual” emancipation statute in modern history. Anti-slavery Quakers settled mostly in Philadelphia and this region is known for massive black population in North America. These “Black Philadelphians” helped in the foundation of schools, Black churches, literary societies and fraternal organizations.

Similar to black Philadelphians, Cary describes about the development and functioning of Quicks (as Quakers) family. The wealthier whites in their neighbourhood had moved out in the forties, leaving poor whites and Negroes with money as home owners and renters. And as the city’s population doubled in midcentury, bringing waves of desperate Europeans, the Quicks along with a handful of other black neighbours, became landlords to Irish tenants. Further, they helped the fugitives and treated them as their family.

In the other new states, many blacks had been given their freedom in return of military service. After the war, manumission and anti-slavery activities increased. Slavery was banned in Massachusetts (1783), Connecticut and Rhode Island (1784), New York (1785), New Jersey (1786) and Pennsylvania (1789). In 1783, Jefferson convinced the Virginia legislature to make it legal for a slaveowner to free his slaves. When the Philadelphia Anti-slavery society was reorganized in 1787, Benjamin Franklin surface as its president and in that same year the Northwest Territory was closed to slavery. Unfortunately, that was the high-water mark.

The constitution, which was written in 1787, was a setback for opponents of slavery. It provided for the extension of the slavetrade for 20 years, for return of fugitive slaves to their owners, and for the famous “three-fifths compromise,” by which five slaves were to be regarded as the equivalent of three nonslaves for purposes of taxation and representation. These deals succeeded in safeguarding pro-slavery interests. Despite these successes, and although there were 59,000 free blacks in the United States by 1790, the antislavery movement lost its revolutionary thrust. The strength of the slave states surged forward in 1793, when New Englander Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. Profits were so high that vast plantations were hacked from the wilderness, and armies of slaves were imported to work the fields. Congress enacted the first fugitive slave law in 1793, and the institution of the Old south began pouring into the rich, virgin lap of the Gulf States.

According to the laws of Pennsylvania, no black person born after that date could be freed from bondage after he or she turned 28. Likewise Cary discusses the situation of Ginniewho is offered a chance from bondage as she is “having been brought into the state by your owner. If you prefer freedom to slavery, as we suppose everybody does, you have the chance to

accept it now” (Cary, 44). This scene describes about the law of Pennsylvania, where a slave of above 25 years have the rights to accept freedom and can be moved by the Vigilance Committee to a safer and freed state. In *The Price of a Child*, the Quicks (Quakers) were able to protect Ginnie like a “lover who lies on the top of his woman’s body and pulls the cover over them both to keep out the cold” (Cary, 83). The Quicks family offers her food and shelter, and later plans for safer place to live.

Fugitive slave Act of 1793 mentions that the owners and their agents have full rights in searching their slave within the border of Free states. Moreover, if the slaves are captured by the slave owner, he has to produce the evidence in order to behold the slaves, and only when the court official is satisfied by the proof he sends the slaves to their home state. Consequently, the abolitionists who helped the slave would be paying the penalty and imprisoned for 3 months. In contrast to this Cary states about Williamson, an abolitionist who helped Mercer (Ginnie) to be freed and he was asked to produce her in the court. As he did not know where she is and so the judge puts “Williamson into prison, for contempt of court.” (Cary, 126)

Further this law led to several arguments and was criticized by the supporters and abolitionists of slavery. Many northern states intentionally neglected to enforce the law and so they decided to enact the personal liberty law which made the runaways to participate in a jury trial and get freed by the statement they have given during trial. In the same way Cary narrates the situation of Mercer (Ginnie) who was asked to tell her version of story to the lawyers who would write it down during trial and “they would swear in the court that it was she who had given the testimony and she who had signed it.” (Cary 161)

Slaves resisted their servitude with sabotage, by running away and in extraordinary cases, by inciting rebellion. Far more slaves ran away and they were captured and returned to their owner. As the nineteenth century came, both the black and white opposers of slavery started establishing a large network to assist fugitives in their escape to freedom. This network came to be known as the “Underground Railroad”.

Levi Coffin is a white American Abolitionist and also an unofficial president of Underground Railroad. Moreover, he ran a Sunday school for blacks and he had never given up his work for Underground Railroad affairs. The Underground Railroad was a movement of antislavery activism where Vigilance Committees played a vital role. These Committees emerged in the cities of North to protect the freedom quenchers from subjugation and to assist them in North or in Canada.

Furthermore, they provide legal assistance, food, clothing, money, employment and temporary shelter. Wesleyan Churches Quakers, Free will Baptists, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Congregants, Anti-slavery societies, Unitarians and many members of Congregational and Presbyterian Churches all worked in the movement to assist freedom seekers. It was the concerted efforts of all antislavery activists, but especially the strategic work of the vigilance committees, that contributed to the success of the Underground Railroad movement.

Then in 1794, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas was organized. The purpose, in the words of the founder Absalom Jones, was to “throw off that servile fear, that habit of oppression and bondage train(ed) up in us.” (*Many Thousands Gone* 252) Gradually withdrawing from white sponsorship and oversight, black churches in Philadelphia formed the nucleus of an independent black denomination, founded in 1816. Though denied ordinations as ministers, African American women like Jarena Lee were allowed to lead prayer meetings. Their motives ranged from escaping American racism, to promoting trade across the Atlantic, to furthering the conversion to Christianity of native Africans. The American colonization society, organized in 1816, also encouraged this “back to Africa” movement, but free blacks overwhelmingly opposed the white run society as plot by slaveholders to coerce them into leaving the country. Cary mentions that “No American organization honoured the sons and daughters of Africa as the black churches did.” (Cary 93) Then in 1829 in Garrison’s own Boston, David Walker, a self taught African American dealer in used clothes, published David Walker’s *Appeal*, the most uncompromising demand yet for an immediate end to slavery. Both free-born blacks and former slaves like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth actively shaped the new antislavery movement that emerged after 1830. When William Lloyd Garrison began publishing his newspaper, the *Liberator* in Boston in 1831, blacks were the majority of his subscribers and financial supporters.

Four years earlier, John B. Russworm, America’s first black college graduate, launched in New York the nation’s first black newspaper, *Freedoms Journal* which also anticipated Garrison’s new militancy. When Nat Turner’s slave revolt erupted in Virginia in 1831, Walker as well as Garrison was blamed by white southerners for incitement. At a time when there was no black higher educational institution in the United States, colleges such as Oberlin, founded in Ohio in 1833, to admit African Americans and to expel a white student who called a classmate “a black nigger” helped to define the moral essence of abolitionism. A shining example of the nineteenth –century American ideal of “the self-made man” who

risers from humble origins to achieve greatness, Frederick Douglass was personified in heroic fashion for his transition from slavery to freedom.

Independent African American churches, according to the Black Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, were “in Alpha and omega of all things” - the vital foundation of free black communities. All eight black founding members of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery society, formed in 1840, were ministers. As with the civil rights movement after World War II, the antislavery movement before the civil war was a spiritual crusade that fused religion and politics. The movement’s objective was to end not only slavery but also racism and to empower blacks as members of the culture of freedom. Under the leadership of Bishop Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church grew from small beginnings to 296 Churches, 776 clergy, and over 17,000 members by 1846.

Cary discusses the Ladies Anti-slavery Society meeting that took place most weeks in a room off the Quaker meetinghouse that the Society shared with a temperance Group. But because the temperance people had planned a special event for afternoon, the Ladies Society agreed to meet at Eliza Ruffin’s house. Harriet’s letter had explained the group to Mercer (Ginnie), by way of convincing her to visit Ruffin. The Ladies Society was not just an outgrowth of a men’s group but their own proper organization. They were Negro and white women together, and one of the colored women together was a co-chairwoman.

In principle, they believed that women who worked together should not be ashamed to entertain each other in their homes. As opposed to many groups that abhorred slavery but cared little for equality, the Ladies Society believed that achieving the “elevation of the freemen” (Cary 163) by fighting discrimination in the North was inseparable, as the promoters of the year’s colored national convention put it, from “the great work of the slave’s restoration to freedom.” They sponsored lectures and informal talks and fairs like everyone else, but mostly they liked their abolition radical.

Cary mentions about the judgment that comes in 1847, where Pennsylvania’s legislature had clearly repealed slave owners’ permission to carry slaves through the state. And from the testimony, the jury agreed with the defense that no abduction had occurred. All six men, therefore, were acquitted of riot. The two who had restrained Pryor from grabbing Mercer were found guilty of assault and battery – but just barely. Although as a rule blacks drew severe prison sentences, these men received one week in jail. Judge Wells, meanwhile, found himself more and more amenable to discuss terms with Williamson’s lawyers. Although the vigilance man offered no fresh information, Wells, after a show of demanding specific new language in his petition, purged him of contempt

Then came the revised law, Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that levied even harsher punishments for interfering in the escape of slaves. This law was enacted in 13 colonies which stated that the slaves who had completed the age of 25 can be free from bondage in the Free State and it increased the penalty and imprisonment for 1000 dollars and six months. In *The Price of a Child*, Cary describes the case of Anthony Burns which happened during the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. Anthony Burns had been arrested in Boston and marched to the jailhouse by federal officers. The plan to liberate him from prison failed, and he was impounded by the government, like so much freight, and sent back. And there was Solomon Northrup, a freeman, who wrote a book that described how he was stolen, sold into slavery, and worked for twelve years, until his wife and friend in the north were able to track him down and free him.

Douglass's eloquent autobiography, the *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), subsequently revised and expanded in many editions, became an international best-seller and the most celebrated of the nearly one hundred such accounts written by escaped slaves. There used to be a tendency by historians and literary critics to treat slave narratives as highly fictionalized accounts, almost on a par with Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). More recently, the pendulum was swung black toward crediting the factual accuracy of previously suspect works such as *Incidents in the Life of a slave Girl* (1861). Written by Harriet A. Jacobs, using the pen name Linda Brent. The first full-length autobiography is of the life of an African American woman. The book frankly documents the sexual abuse of female slaves as well as the coping strategies used by slaves to survive the many forms of exploitation.

During the 1840s and 1850s, African American held numerous black conventions to shape their own political agenda. As positions polarized and battle lines were drawn, the politics of slavery question vaulted into the foreground of American life. The Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the Compromise of 1850, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the Kansas Nebraska Act (1854), the Dred Scott Decision (1857), the Harpers Ferry Raid (1859): these and countless other events were connected with the attempt to resolve the slavery issue.

"Slavery" and "preservation of the union" were the paramount issues of the civil war. It can be said that both question had to be resolved simultaneously, or not at all. However, Abraham Lincoln, elected to the presidency as a racial moderate in 1860, argued that the federal government had no right to prohibit slavery in the south and that preserving the union was the sole issue.

The Complexity of northern attitudes toward race and slavery would continue into the Civil War and beyond. In 1861 President Abraham Lincoln called on the North to defend the Constitution and the Union. He would not lift a finger against slavery, understanding that he had neither the constitutional or legal power to do so, not sufficient political support. Moreover, he needed the border south to remain in the Union. When a clergyman told Lincoln if he freed the slaves he would “have God on his side”, the president allegedly responded, “I would like to have God on my side, but I need Kentucky.”

As tension with the south mounted, Lincoln sponsored the emancipation of slave who had been used for insurrectionary purposes in the south. Within two years, free black regiments were responding to the union slogan that they could at last fight for their own freedom. By May 1862, Lincoln was prepared to move even closer to the position advocated by the Radical Republicans: complete abolition. In September of that year, the President issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation holding out to slave owners the possibility of compensation, and continuing to suggest freedmen the prospect of voluntary colonization in Africa.

Northern troops nevertheless soon found themselves in the role of emancipators, and they rarely denied sanctuary to slave escaping their traitorous masters. General Benjamin F. Butler applied his legal mind to the problem and determined that slaves were in fact “contrabands of war,” and could not be returned to their masters. Lincoln and the North could accept this legal fix until 1862, when the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued, committing the North to ending slavery. Most northerners accepted this, and with it black troops, although some did not.

On January 1, 1863, a further proclamation declared that all slaves living in the seceded states of the confederacy were to be “thenceforward, and forever free”. It conferred legal, though not actual, emancipation on three-fourth of the slave population, yet made no provisions for some 800,000 blacks living outside the south who remained technically enslaved. Constitutional emancipation did not come “for all slaves” until 1865 with the passage of the thirteenth amendment- the single, all embracing legislative enactment which brought the United States steps closer to its motto: “Land of the Free” Which meant neither slavery or involuntary servitude except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to jurisdiction. Therefore, slavery as a legal concept ended in the year 1865.

Riots, especially in New York City, against blacks revealed the deep racism of some northerners. But, the willingness of thousands of whites to serve as non-commissioned

officers and officers for black troops and to fight side by side with them in the last two years of the war also reveals the complexity of northern culture. That martyred Lincoln would be remembered not as the man who held the Union together but as the “Great Emancipator” suggests that slavery and race did matter to most northerners. Hence, the paper justifies that Lorene Cary has used the interpreted character Ginnie Pryor through factual means and represents the history of slavery in her novel.

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