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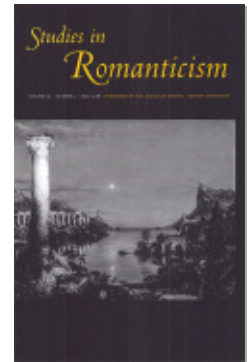
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Romantic Exploration and Atlantic Slavery: Mungo Park's Coffle

IN JUNE 1797, AT A VILLAGE NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER GAMBIA ON the Atlantic coast of West Africa, the Scottish explorer Mungo Park bid farewell to a group of people with whom he had just made a five-hundred-mile journey across western Africa. His book, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799), describes their emotional parting:

I could not part, for the last time, with my unfortunate fellow-travelers, doomed, as I knew most of them to be, to a life of captivity and slavery in a foreign land, without great emotion. During a wearisome peregrination of more than five hundred British miles, exposed to the burning rays of a tropical sun, these poor slaves, amidst their own infinitely greater sufferings, would commiserate mine; and frequently, of their own accord, bring water to quench my thirst, and at night collect branches and leaves to prepare me a bed in the Wilderness. We parted with reciprocal expressions of regret and benediction. My good wishes and prayers were all I could bestow upon them; and it afforded me some consolation to be told, that they were sensible I had no more to give.¹

This group of 34 enslaved Africans, part of a caravan or coffle of 73 travelers, had been marched from the interior to the coast to be sold to European slave traders and shipped across the Atlantic. Park traveled with the coffle by permission of its leader, the African slave trader Karfa Taura. The two had made a deal: on arrival at the coast, Park would pay Karfa “the value of one prime slave.” This “benevolent Negro,” as Park calls him, helped the explorer at the lowest point of his adventurous journey (*Travels*, 234).

1. Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799), ed. Kate Marsters (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 302, hereafter cited as *Travels* in the text. I am grateful to the Oregon Humanities Center for fellowship support and to Professor Lindsay Braun of the University of Oregon History Department.

When he arrived at the slave trader's village, he was wandering, hungry, sick, and alone, after achieving his goal of seeing which direction the Niger River flowed (to the east). Karfa fed, clothed, and sheltered the bedraggled Park and let him join his traveling party to begin the journey home. But the explorer's homeward journey was his fellow travelers' journey away from their homes into New World slavery.

This essay will call attention to Park's dependence on the infrastructure and personnel put in place by the slave trade: both the Atlantic slave trade, still legal and active during his travels, and the internal African slave trade that supplied European ships with human cargo. I will consider Park's book (most often read as an exploration narrative) as part of the archive of enslavement.² Recent approaches to the epistemological and ethical challenges involved in recovering the history of slavery highlight the "generative tension between recovery as an imperative . . . and the impossibility of recovery when engaged with archives whose very assembly and organization occlude certain historical subjects."³ To what extent—if at all—does Park's account of his travels through western Africa give us access to the history of enslavement? What are its limitations of "assembly and organization," when considered from this perspective?

Park's book is distinctive in its attention to the connection between the internal African slave trade—what the historian Walter Johnson has termed

2. Recent scholarly interest in Park has included historians of African slavery, as well as postcolonial critics and literary historians who assimilate Park's book to Romanticism from various angles. See Maria Grosz-Ngaté, "Power and Knowledge: The Representation of the Mandé World in the Works of Park, Caillié, Monteil, and Delafosse," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 111–12, 28, no. 3–4 (1988): 485–511, and Mary Pratt's influential *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). Pratt presents Park as part of the "anti-conquest"—imperialism mystified as harmless. Ashton Nichols contrasts Park's Romantic narrative with the "harder" imperialism and racism of Victorian exploration literature. "Mumbo Jumbo: Mungo Park and the Rhetoric of Romantic Africa," in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture*, eds. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 93–113. See also Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveler and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 170–83; Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, "Mental Travelers: Joseph Banks, Mungo Park, and the Romantic Imagination," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24 (2002): 117–37; Emily Haddad, "Body and Belongings: Property in the Captivity of Mungo Park," in *Colonial and Postcolonial Incarceration*, ed. Graeme Harper (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 124–44; and Scott Juengel, "Mungo Park's Artificial Skin; Or, the Year the White Man Passed," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 47 (2006): 19–38.

3. Laura Helton, Justin Leroy, Max A. Mishler, Samantha Seeley, and Shauna Sweeney, "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction," *Social Text* 125, 33, no. 4 (December 2015): 1. Besides the essays in this special issue of *Social Text*, see Simon Gikandi, "Rethinking the Archive of Enslavement," *Early American Literature* 50 (2015): 81–102, and Deborah A. Thomas, "Caribbean Studies, Archive Building, and the Problem of Violence," *Small Axe* 17 (2013): 27–42.

the First Passage—and the Atlantic slave trade, the notorious Middle Passage. The First Passage, as Johnson points out, too often disappears from academic historians' account of the slave trade, an omission that effectively reproduces the perspective of a European slave trader, focused on the ocean voyage, or an abolitionist, intent on banning the traffic in humans. The "First Passage was integral to the experience of those who eventually made the Middle Passage—to their understanding of what it was that was happening, their emotional condition going into the journey, and their ability to survive it."⁴ Park's account of the enslaved Africans with whom he traveled in Karfa Taura's coffle may yield some insight into these issues. Before and during the trip, he conversed with his fellow travelers, learning how they became enslaved and gauging their response to their captivity. They took good care of the explorer on the way west, as he gratefully acknowledges. With their help and Karfa's, Park—unlike two previous explorers sponsored by Joseph Banks's African Association—made it back alive to the coast and thence to Britain.

Though he was undoubtedly complicit with the slave trade, both European and African, dependent on its infrastructure and personnel to achieve his goal of reaching the Niger, Mungo Park was neither a slave owner nor a slave trader. Indeed, we may speculate that his own experience of captivity among the Moors earlier in his journey, as well as the kindness he experienced from various enslaved Africans along the way, could have sparked empathy for the plight of Karfa's captives.⁵ Park's *Travels* qualifies as what Simon Gikandi calls a "third text": "works written by people who were neither masters nor slaves, observers whose relationship to the institution of slavery was tenuous, and whose intentions were driven by goals that were sometimes at odds with the systematizing function of the archive of enslavement." Gikandi suggests we look to such texts—texts that are not part of the "archive of absolute control" written by slave owners and traders, or on their behalf—for an "opening up of African voices" not found in that archive.⁶

Park's mediation of the First Passage is constrained in another way, however, related to the conventions of exploration narrative as a literary genre. The eclectic category of "voyages and travels" had a hefty share of the print market throughout the eighteenth century; exploration narrative, in particular, enjoyed a kind of golden age between 1780 and 1830. One standard

4. Johnson, "Time and Revolution in African America: Temporality and the History of Atlantic Slavery," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200.

5. Haddad, "Body and Belongings," discusses Park's Moorish captivity.

6. Gikandi, "Rethinking," 93, 95.

convention of Romantic-era exploration narrative was to collect information about the areas explored in interpolated chapters or mini-essays, interrupting the narrative proper. Park's *Travels* presents the information the explorer collected about the peoples, climate and resources of West Africa in four such interpolated chapters, one of which treats African slavery. In it, slavery is contained or circumscribed, set apart from the events of the journey. Later in the book, as Park narrates his journey with the coffle, we get another type of interpolated section: a dramatic story that Park retells, composed, based on recent events, by a group of singing-men, or griots, who were traveling with Karfa's party. It is a story of war and enslavement whose stylized presentation again tends to separate African from European affairs.

The formal and stylistic tension between each of these interpolated sections and the surrounding narrative, I will argue, bespeaks a deep ambivalence on the part of Mungo Park; his sponsors, the African Association; and the British reading public about the system of transnational connections linking the places of the Atlantic rim—Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Park's interpolated sections suggest an Africa that is separate and self-contained, occluding European responsibility for African suffering. The rest of the narrative, however, in particular his journey with the coffle, foregrounds the explorer's interactions with enslaved Africans and the damage done to West Africa by the slave trade. Contradictory impulses in the narrative form of Park's book thus suggest a conflicted stance toward circum-Atlantic connectedness in general and the slave trade in particular. Reading *Travels* as a product of the Atlantic interculture—the broad contact zone stretching from the British Isles deep into the African savanna, and back across the ocean to the slave colonies and young nations of the New World—this essay will examine the ways in which slavery, the slave trade, and enslaved Africans made their way via Park's book into the archive of empire. It will thus advance the process of dislocating Romantic studies: moving the perspective of critical inquiry from the British Isles to another part of the Atlantic Rim, in this case West Africa, a crucial link in the circuits of transport and trade connecting the eighteenth-century Atlantic system.⁷

Mungo Park was a young Scottish surgeon and botanist with the good luck to have a connection, through his brother-in-law, to Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society. In 1788 Banks organized a group calling

7. Paul Youngquist and Frances Botkin, "Introduction: Black Romanticism: Romantic Circulations," *Romanticism and the Black Atlantic*, Praxis Series, *Romantic Circles* 2011, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.youngquist.html>, accessed 29 October 2015.

themselves the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, or the African Association. Its members included Members of Parliament, titled aristocrats, high-ranking army officers, a popular London physician, and even the Bishop of Llandaff, who was Professor of Chemistry and Divinity at Cambridge. Eager to apply scientific curiosity to practical ends—in particular, “what a later age would call the problems of economic development”⁸—they looked toward Africa and saw “the products that unknown interior might reveal, the markets those teeming millions . . . might afford for the products of Great Britain.”⁹ The African Association’s aims combined a search for geographical knowledge with a sense of the civilizing mission that would later be used to justify Victorian imperialism.¹⁰ Each member would contribute five guineas a year to sponsor a series of explorers. Three had gone out by the time Park was hired; just one returned alive, and he hadn’t gotten far.

It is no coincidence that the African Association was founded the year after the founding of another group, the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST), in 1787. Banks and his cronies were far-sighted men who sensed an impending change in Britain’s relationship with the African continent, although Parliament would not enact slave trade abolition for another two decades.¹¹ Up to this point, the British and other Europeans had stayed pretty much on the west coast of Africa, drawn there by the business of the slave trade. British travel writing about Africa was largely by men involved in that business. With the rise of abolitionism and counter-propaganda by pro-slavery interests, travel writing became politicized: the character of Africa became an essential element of arguments for and against slave trade abolition. Was it pastoral and idyllic, a virtual Eden from which the enslaved were torn, or barbarous and full of cannibals, a hell-hole they were lucky to leave?¹² Advocates on either side of the issue would have been happy to enlist a high-profile traveler like Park. By the time he returned to Britain, the expanded membership of the African Association included members on both sides of the slave trade question, from the Jamaica planter Bryan Edwards to William Wilberforce himself, Parliamentary leader of the abolition campaign. Because he was Secretary

8. Robin Hallett, ed., *Records of the African Association 1788–1831* (London and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1964), 15.

9. Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa: European Exploration in North and West Africa to 1815* (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 197.

10. Hallett, *Penetration*, 198, 199–230; Kate Ferguson Marsters, “Introduction” to Park, *Travels*, 9. On Banks’s role as “the shadowy impresario of Britain’s colonial expansion,” see Fulford and Lee, “Mental Travelers.”

11. Richard J. Reid, *History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011).

12. George E. Boulukos, “Olaudah Equiano and the Eighteenth-Century Debate on Africa,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40 (2007): 241–55.

of the Association, as well as a published author, Edwards was appointed Park's writing coach as the explorer revised his notes (stored, during his journey, in the crown of his hat). Circumspection was called for in approaching the topic of slavery and the slave trade as Park wrote up his journey under his sponsors' watchful eyes. Edwards's assistance may or may not have been widely known, but it is clear that the production of *Travels* in the Interior Districts of Africa was a collective endeavor, beginning in Africa and continuing in London.¹³

Park's book was part of a relatively new development in travel writing. The impulse to get beyond the coast and explore the continental interior marked a shift in exploration, around the turn of the nineteenth century, from ocean voyaging to land travel. Banks and others were in the process of creating an official "exploration establishment," working "to institutionalize travel writing in the service of empire."¹⁴ Romantic-era exploration writing was a "composite genre" that could encompass "contrasting and even contradictory perspectives and discourses." Its readers didn't expect unity or consistency. They included "scientists and policy-makers," as well as a broader public that was "sophisticated . . . and largely urban."¹⁵ To advance his sponsors' agenda of gaining government support for further exploration of the African interior, Park's *Travels* needed to make a splash: gain widespread public attention, but the right kind of attention, including respect for the enterprise as well as belief in the narrative.¹⁶ The launch of a second Niger mission in 1805, also headed by Park and financed this time

13. Besides Park, Edwards, and Banks, the publication of *Travels* also involved the geographer James Rennell, who drew the maps included in the book and contributed an essay, "Geographical Illustrations of Park's Journey." See Charles W. J. Withers, "Geography, Enlightenment and the Book: Authorship and Audience in Mungo Park's African Texts," in *Geographies of the Book*, ed. Withers (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 191–220, and see Thompson, *Suffering Traveler*, 172.

14. Nigel Leask, "Romanticism and the Wider World: Poetry, Travel Literature and Empire," *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 273. This contrasts with the "qualities of pedantry and licentiousness characteristic of the 'curious' eighteenth-century travel account," to which Leask assimilates Bruce's *Travels*. See Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 66.

15. Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson, "General Introduction," *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion, 1770–1835*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), 1:xxii, xxv. On subscription lists and readership of *Travels* see Withers, "Geography," 209–12.

16. This entailed a restrained, understated style, especially in the wake of James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790), which drew widespread disbelief with its account of Ethiopians at a banquet eating "collops from live cows" and having sex on the floor. Park also apparently left out some of his more sensational adventures. Qtd. in Leask, *Curiosity*, 56; see Marsters, "Introduction," 9, and Thompson, *Suffering Traveler*, 158–170.

by the Colonial Office, testifies to the book's success in this regard. That mission, however, was not a success, and Park did not return.

Park's *Travels* is organized to hold the attention of general readers while also including specialized information. The most technical geographical material is relegated to an Appendix, though Park occasionally incorporates scientific language, such as the Latin names of plant species. (Of the book's five plates, two depict plants, the shea tree and the lotus.) The information collected in the four interpolated chapters about climate, crops, Mandingo manners and customs, gold, ivory, and slavery keeps the narrative from being interrupted by this relatively dry material. The interpolated chapter convention was a standard feature of Romantic-era exploration writing, discussed in Mary Louise Pratt's classic study, *Imperial Eyes*. Such chapters present indigenous "manners and customs" in what she calls the ethnographic present tense: this is what Africans do, this is how they live, as if they have always lived this way and will always continue to do so. The convention functions to abstract Africans "away from the history that is being made."¹⁷ The very form of such sections suggest that "natives" could be classified like plant and animal species, as a group or generalized stereotype, although the closer encounters recorded in the narrative proper tend to undermine such stereotypes.¹⁸

Although the form of his book is in line with that of contemporaneous Romantic-era exploration narratives, Park's expedition was continuous with the earlier European presence in West Africa in its involvement with the slave trade. This began on his arrival in June 1795 at the mouth of the River Gambia, in the village of Pisania, "established by British subjects as a factory for trade." Park's host, Dr. John Laidley, was one of three white residents who had "the greatest part of the trade in slaves, ivory, and gold . . . in their hands" (*Travels*, 71). Park arrived with a letter of credit on Laidley for £200 and settled in to learn the language while his host recruited his little entourage: a translator, Johnson, who spoke English because he had previously been enslaved in Jamaica, and a slave boy, Demba, who was promised his freedom if he behaved well on the journey. Laidley outfitted Park with a horse, two mules, and various supplies, and authorized credit with African traders, including slave traders, in the interior. Park's expedition piggybacked from beginning to end on the infrastructure and institutions put in place by the slave trade: the British trading station and its staff; the established routes for travel to and from it; and the credit

17. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 64–65. She does not discuss Park's use of interpolated chapters, but analyzes this convention on the basis of John Barrow's *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (1801).

18. Fulford and Kitson, "General Introduction," xxv.

system. When he finally made it back to the coast after two years in the interior (everyone was surprised to see him alive), Park recrossed the Atlantic on an American slave ship, the *Charles-Town*.

Park's logistics make clear that the Atlantic slave trade and the internal African slave trade were closely connected. This is less obvious, though, in the one section of the book that is overtly about slavery. Chapter XXII is one of four interpolated chapters that Park claims to have composed in Karfa Taura's village of Kamalia while awaiting the *coffle's* departure for the coast. Park's chapter on slavery notes features of African slavery that modern historians and anthropologists also emphasize. He differentiates between those born into slavery, who cannot normally be sold, and those born free but later enslaved, who are treated as chattel. He lists four ways in which slaves can be made: war, famine, debt, and crime, or judicial enslavement.¹⁹

His analysis is thus accurate, but it is also written in a detached style and is set apart from the narrative proper. The interpolated chapter convention gives the misleading impression that African slavery was separate from the European slave trade. Park ends the chapter with a disclaimer that reinforces this idea:

How far [African slavery] is maintained and supported by the slave traffic, which, for two hundred years, the nations of Europe have carried on with the natives of the Coast, it is neither within my province, nor in my power, to explain. If my sentiments should be required concerning the effect which a discontinuance of that commerce [that is, abolishing the slave trade] would produce on the manners of the natives, I should have no hesitation in observing, that, in the present unenlightened state of their minds, my opinion is, the effect would neither be so extensive or beneficial, as many wise and worthy persons fondly expect. (*Travels*, 263)

Park refuses to take sides in the political fight over slave trade abolition, although pro-slavery readers no doubt appreciated the last sentence, asserting that slave trade abolition would not necessarily improve "the manners of the natives." The verbose, heavily qualified, circumlocutory style of this section conveys the explorer's disinclination for political involvement.

The interpolated chapter, with its dehistoricized account of African slavery, stands in tension with the rest of the book—Park's narrative of his trip on foot and horseback across West Africa. The map included in the book

19. Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68–90.

depicts a busy, bustling Africa, crisscrossed by trade routes and dotted with towns and villages, very different from the remote, primitive African interior imagined by earlier travel writers, who never got far from the coast. Park records clear evidence of the effects of three centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. We see through his eyes the region at the end of “absolutely the worst century of the slave trade.”²⁰ The Atlantic slave trade grew rapidly starting in the second half of the seventeenth century, when sugar cultivation took hold in the British and French Caribbean. This reoriented African trade circuits from the north (the trans-Saharan slave trade) to the coast. The result was a “violent age of warlords.”²¹ The advantages to the African elite from supplying Europeans with slaves tended to make African states more hierarchical and militaristic. Prisoners of war were a main source of slaves, so that leaders and warriors had an incentive to fight.

This was not very compatible with the agriculture and herding that were the backbone of the West African economy. The disruption caused by war is evident as Park travels through Khasso and Kaarta. At the time he arrives, a war is about to start between King Daisy of Kaarta and King Mansong of the Bambara kingdom at Segou on the River Niger. Traveling through Kaarta, Park sees streams of refugees and passes deserted villages. King Daisy can't guarantee Park's safe passage and suggests he wait until the war is over to continue his journey. Park instead makes a risky detour to the north, is taken captive by the Moors, and loses both his companions. Meanwhile, the war has happened and Mansong has sent 900 prisoners of war to Segou, the source of several slaves in the coffle with whom Park traveled to the coast (*Travels*, 257).

Later Park observes another kind of hardship: a widespread food shortage on the north bank of the Niger. Societies' ability to withstand a natural disaster—a drought or locust infestation—could be impaired by the social unrest that the slave trade caused. Peasant populations cannot work productively in conditions of insecurity, and population loss from slave raiding also reduced the work force.²² Park is delayed in the village of Wonda, sick with a fever. He sees the village leader giving corn to several women and

20. Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.

21. Barry, *Senegambia*, 44. On the slave trade and the history of eighteenth-century West Africa see also Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); Richard L. Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Lovejoy, *Transformations*.

22. Barry, *Senegambia*, 106–7.

asks whether it is charity or an advance on the harvest. Neither, the man answers: these women have sold him their children to get food for themselves and the rest of their families. "Good God," thinks Park, "what must a mother suffer, before she sells her own child! I could not get this melancholy subject out of my mind" (*Travels*, 230).

Park's expedition thus relied on the infrastructure and institutions put in place by the African and Atlantic slave trades, the main determinant of Europe's and Britain's relationship with Africa up to 1795, while his push into the interior marked a new departure in that relationship. The book's treatment of slavery and the slave trade reveals contradictory impulses. On one hand, Park packages in his interpolated chapter a detached and impersonal account of slavery. On the other hand, his narrative records the harm done by the Atlantic slave trade, with its seductive rewards for the African elite, to the living conditions of ordinary Africans.

Park's most sustained contact with the slave trade and enslaved Africans came in the last part of his journey, when he trudged across five hundred miles of rugged savanna in the company of a *coffle*, a traveling party organized to take enslaved people to the coast for sale. His narrative of the *coffle's* trek is not just the story of the adventurous Scotsman's homeward journey, but also that of these captive Africans' journey away from their homes toward the New World. How does Park redact these African travelers' experiences for the metropolitan print market? I will again point out a formal tension between an interpolated section and the surrounding narrative.

Of the *coffle's* 73 members, 35 were slaves destined for sale at the coast; the rest included slave traders, their wives and their domestic slaves. "Among the free men," Park writes, "were six Jillakeas (singing men), whose musical talents were frequently exerted either to divert our fatigue, or obtain us a welcome from strangers" (*Travels*, 280). *Jali ke* is the Mandinka term for the "West African artisans of the word" who have come to be referred to as griots. Griots were genealogists, advisers, spokespersons, diplomats, mediators, interpreters or translators, musicians, composers, teachers and praise-singers.²³ What if we were to think of Mungo Park as a kind of European griot, taking the *dentegi*, or history, of the *coffle* across the Atlantic into British print culture? What happens to the story in the process, especially with respect to slavery and enslavement?

Park includes in his book one story composed by the singing-men. It's a

23. Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Words and Music* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 1, 8–10, 17. When they reach "the first town beyond the limits of Manding," the townspeople gather to hear "our *dentegi* (history) . . . related publicly by two of the singing men" (*Travels*, 282).

story of jihadist aggression, war, and enslavement, a story whose ending tempers poetic justice with mercy. Abdulkader, the Muslim King of Foota Torra, "inflamed with zeal for propagating his religion," sends an embassy to Damel, the King of the Jaloffs: two envoys, each with a large knife on a long pole. "With this knife (said [the envoy]) Abdulkader will condescend to shave the head of Damel, if Damel will embrace the Mahomedan faith; and with this other knife, Abdulkader will cut the throat of Damel, if Damel refuses to embrace it—take your choice." Damel sensibly chooses neither; Abdulkader invades his country, but loses the war and is taken prisoner. Damel does not kill him, but instead keeps him as a slave for just three months. He then decides the zealous King is "no longer dangerous" and lets him go (*Travels*, 291–93).

The stylized presentation, with the emblematic knives on poles, gives us a clear hero and villain and a happy ending of sorts. It presents the war among African groups as being about religion, with no mention of the Atlantic slave trade or the Europeans waiting at the coast to buy captives. Like Park's interpolated chapter on African slavery, this inset story implicitly separates African people and customs from the European presence. Park explains that the story is based on information from a party of townspeople who were on an expedition, bartering iron for salt in Bondou. He believes it because he has heard it circulating orally up and down the coast, among the British on the Gambia and the French at Goree. It has also been "confirmed by nine slaves, who were taken prisoners along with Abdulkader . . . and carried in the same ship with me to the West Indies" (*Travels*, 291, 293). By casually mentioning that the "magnanimous Damel" is selling prisoners of war to the Americans, Park opens the door to a rather different interpretation of the griots' tale. While showing mercy to a king, Damel takes advantage of intergroup warfare to feed the Atlantic slave trade with Abdulkader's humble subjects. Park, the Scottish griot, entertaining his readers with Abdulkader's hubris and its consequences, culled from the common lore of African griots and European traders, embeds the tale in a context that implicitly reintegrates African affairs into the Atlantic interculturalism whose tentacles stretched far into the Senegambian hinterland.

Let us now turn to Park's *dentegi*, his narrative of the coffle's journey, whose protagonists are not kings, but ordinary Africans, escorted under guard to the coast. Park's account of this stage of the First Passage starts at Karfa Taura's village of Kamalia, a holding station where Karfa collects enslaved people for transport to the coast. While Park recovers in Kamalia from the rigors of his journey, the trader goes off to buy more captives at "Kancaba, a large town on the banks of the Niger" (*Travels*, 236). Park has this to say about the people whom the trader brings back:

The slaves which Karfa had brought with him were all prisoners of war; they had been taken by the Bamarran army in the kingdoms of Wassela and Kaarta, and carried to Sego, where some of them had remained three years in irons. From Sego they were sent, in company with a number of other captives, up the Niger in two large canoes, and offered for sale at Yamina, Bammakoo, and Kancaba; at which places the greater number of the captives were bartered for gold-dust, and the remainder sent forward to Kankaree. (*Travels*, 276)

Park has previously described some of the damage done by war to the West African countryside through which he traveled: deserted villages, refugees, food shortages. Here he describes the infrastructure of the internal African slave trade, including transport routes, sites of incarceration, and markets. These victims will eventually—following multiple stages of transport and detainment—be sold to Europeans on the coast.

Before the coffle's departure, Park interviews these unlucky people and reports the conversation to his readers.

They were all very inquisitive; but they viewed me at first with looks of horror, and repeatedly asked if my countrymen were cannibals. They were very desirous to know what became of the slaves after they had crossed the salt water. I told them, that they were employed in cultivating the land; but they would not believe me; and one of them putting his hand upon the ground, said with great simplicity, "have you really got such ground as this, to set your feet upon?" A deeply rooted idea, that the whites purchase Negroes for the purpose of devouring them, or of selling them to others, that they may be devoured hereafter, naturally makes the slaves contemplate a journey toward the coast with great terror; insomuch that the Slatees [slave traders] are forced to keep them constantly in irons, and watch them very closely, to prevent their escape. (*Travels*, 277)

Over the course of the journey, numerous Africans show great curiosity about the explorer, mirroring the curiosity that is Park's stated motive for traveling. These captives' questions are sharply focused and emotionally charged, driven by fear of the future. Though they have come from deep in the hinterland, they seem aware that they are headed for the coast to "cross . . . the salt water." Mixing scraps of information with plausible rumor, their questions convey a view of Park's "countrymen" as profoundly other: probably man-eaters; possibly dwelling not on solid ground, but on the water that bore their ships to Africa. Johnson analyzes the First Passage in terms of differing temporalities, or "way[s] of being in time . . . according to which historical actors made sense of what was happening." The

“historical shape of the slave trade,” he adds, “depended upon the point of entry.”²⁴ Entering the pipeline of human commodities from battlefields in Wassela and Kaarta, via Segou and Kancaba, to Kamalia and beyond, en route to the coast, the people so anxiously quizzing Park glimpse a future filled with dread.

Simon Gikandi, addressing the role of temporality in the First Passage, asserts that the “movement of slaves through time and space was out of joint with the established temporal frames of the . . . discourses of modernity.” European philosophers conceptualized modernity as breaking with the past and privileging the future. In contrast, the “movement of the enslaved spirit was dominated by fear of the future, itself a symptom of an acute sense of regressive time.”²⁵ For Karfa’s captives, the path toward the threshold of modernity is fraught with fear. Fear of cannibalism appears elsewhere in the literature of Atlantic slavery: in Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, for example, when the young boy is sold to white slavers on the coast. Here the irony of casting Europeans in the role of cannibals—a role assigned to Africans by some travel literature and pro-slavery propaganda—garners less emphasis than the emotional intensity with which the enslaved confront their fate.²⁶

Park’s report of the captives’ terror, which makes them a flight risk, has the additional effect of justifying the slavers’ harsh methods: they are “forced to keep them . . . in irons.” Turning people into property, African captives into Atlantic commodities, was achieved through a range of methods including physical and social violence; “shackles were an important element in the arsenal of tools used to physically disable captives during their incarceration.”²⁷ Park describes the traders’ procedure at Kamalia:

They are commonly secured, by putting the right leg of one, and the left leg of another, into the same pair of fetters. By supporting the fetters with a string, they can walk, though very slowly. Every four slaves are likewise fastened together by the necks, with a strong rope of twisted thongs; and in the night, an additional pair of fetters is put on their hands, and sometimes a light iron chain passed around their necks.

Such of them as evince marks of discontent, are secured in a different manner, A thick billet of wood is cut about three feet long, and a

24. Johnson, “Time and Revolution,” 204.

25. Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 86, 87.

26. On cannibalism’s symbolic resonance for the slave trade see Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 112–13.

27. Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 39–40.

smooth notch being made upon one side of it, the ankle of the slave is bolted to the smooth part by means of a strong iron staple, one prong of which passes on each side of the ankle. All these fetters and bolts are made from native iron; in the present case they were put on by the blacksmith as soon as the slaves arrived from Kancaba, and were not taken off until the morning on which the coffle departed for Gambia. (*Travels*, 277)

The dispassionate tone Park uses to describe these elaborate methods of restraint diverges from the more sympathetic attitude of his preceding conversation with the captives. This section reads almost as perverse praise of African ingenuity in metalworking, as well as in methods of cruelty. Its implicit defense of the slave traders' procedure exemplifies Park's "rhetoric of equivocation"—akin to the artful disclaimer that ends the chapter on African slavery.²⁸

The explorer's conflicting loyalties are on display: to his patron, the slave trader, but also to the captives who looked out for him on the journey. "In other respects," he assures his readers,

the treatment of the slaves during their stay at Kamalia, was far from being harsh or cruel. They were led out in their fetters, every morning, to the shade of the tamarind tree, where they were encouraged to play at games of hazard and sing diverting songs, to keep up their spirits; for though some of them sustained the hardships of their situation with amazing fortitude, the greater part were very much dejected, and would sit all day in a sort of sullen melancholy, with their eyes fixed upon the ground. (*Travels*, 277)

The slave traders encouraging the fettered captives to play games and sing songs is reminiscent of the enforced performances that Saidiya Hartman analyzes on the plantations of the southern United States, with their "convergence of pleasure and terror." What a manual on plantation management called "innocent amusements" served to "supplement . . . other methods of managing the slave body."²⁹ Few of Karfa's captives respond to the prompting; most just sit around, staring at the ground. Their melancholy is "sullen"—bearing, that is, the "implication of obstinacy or stubbornness"; an expression of sadness, but with a resistant edge.³⁰ Enslavement "was premised on the forced displacement of human subjects from prior functions

28. Gikandi, *Slavery*, 68. He uses the phrase to describe Park's narrative of Nealee's fate.

29. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42, 43.

30. *OED*, "Sullen," definition A.1.a, www.oed.com, Oxford University Press, 2016, accessed 1 September 2016.

and identities. Slavery was a form of moral and spatial disorientation." Furthermore, "it was melancholia, the emotion of loss and desire, that most effectively provided a language for expressing moral disorientation." If these Africans, at this way station of the First Passage, are still capable of this kind of emotional expression, then enslavement has "not yet numbed the senses and sensations of the slave."³¹ These depressed captives, their "sullen melancholy" serving as a resonant emblem of the psychic damage of the slave trade, can still communicate their plight eloquently, if mutely, to the observer.

The most sustained embodiment of the psychic damage of the First Passage in Park's narrative is Nealee, the "sulky" woman slave whose passive resistance comes to an end when Karfa leaves her behind to die.³² Park does not relay Nealee's words. He does describe, in harrowing detail, the progressive damage to her body on the forced march toward the coast. One morning Nealee refuses to eat her breakfast. Later she starts "to lag behind, and complain dreadfully of pains in her legs." These may stem from having been immobilized in a dungeon for years before Karfa bought her; Park notes that for many of the slaves, "the sudden exertion of walking quick, with heavy loads upon their heads, occasioned spasmodic contractions in their legs." When someone finds a beehive and the people go after the honey, the bees swarm, and a number of travelers are stung. Afterward Nealee is missing. The traders find her lying by a stream, "stung in the most dreadful manner." After they painstakingly pick out the stings, Nealee refuses to go on; they whip her until she does. She tries to run away, but is so weak she falls down. They whip her again and try to put her on a donkey, but she cannot even sit up, so they make "a sort of litter" to carry her further (*Travels*, 284, 280, 285).

The next day the traders try again to put Nealee on the donkey, but her body is so stiff that it just won't work. She is slowing the coffle's progress. At this point, Park writes, "the general cry of the coffle was, kang-tegi, kang-tegi, 'cut her throat, cut her throat.'" The explorer does not care to watch, so he goes to the front of the file. Some time later, one of Karfa's domestic slaves comes up "with poor Nealee's garment upon the end of his bow, and exclaimed Nealee affeeleeta (Nealee is lost)" (*Travels*, 286). Nealee's behavior during the coffle's journey is marked by refusal. She refuses to eat, to get up, to go on: to participate in the process of her enslavement. This enigmatic, doomed woman becomes a synecdoche for the collateral damage of the First Passage—soon to be reduced to "bleaching

31. Gikandi, *Slavery*, 208, 221.

32. Gikandi discusses Nealee at length, juxtaposing her "truncated presence" with the life of Anna Margaretta Larpent, a bourgeois British woman, to explore the relationship between slavery and the metropolitan culture of taste (*Slavery*, 51-73).

human bones” among the many marking “the trails along which . . . dazed, shackled, and abandoned people stumbled westward through African woodlands two and three centuries ago.”³³ The coffle’s collective animus against this high-maintenance member is chilling. The empty garment on the end of the bow poignantly figures a symbolic undressing—another part of the long process of enslavement that would culminate in naked bodies crammed into the hold of a ship. To be stripped of their garments was “tantamount to being stripped . . . of the vestiges of what they used to be, the style . . . of self-presentation that had once marked them as members of a community” or as individuals.³⁴

This episode gets some of its impact from its understatement. Park narrates the captive woman’s physical breakdown and the harsh treatment that hastens it in a manner that is unsentimental, though not unsympathetic, using concrete sensory details to convey the events leading to the empty garment on the end of the bow. We might call this narrative mode realism. It seems especially well suited to represent the day-to-day business of the slave trade—the violent management of recalcitrant, damaged human bodies. The muted realism of Park’s narration in this sequence contrasts with both his stylized redaction of the singing-men’s story and his sentimental account of his parting from his enslaved fellow travelers. We are concerned here with not kings, but commoners; not dramatic events, talked of up and down the coast, but merely the quotidian business of the slave trade. The ending carries no poetic justice, only depressing human waste, though Nealee’s death does make “a strong impression on the minds of the whole coffle.” They hustle to pick up the pace, “every one being apprehensive he might otherwise meet with the fate of poor Nealee.”³⁵ On the day of her death the coffle covers 26 miles of rugged ground; Park himself has trouble keeping up. The slave trade waits for no one. Falling behind can get you left on the trail as prey for wild animals, or carrion—clean-picked bones bleaching in the African sun.

Park’s narrative of the coffle’s journey handles enslavement in contradictory ways. The tale of Damel and Abdulkader, on one hand, gives us their war as an African affair, seemingly untouched by the Atlantic slave trade—until Park’s passing mention of Damel selling his prisoners casually discloses the connection between the war and the trade. On the other hand, narrating his interactions with his “unfortunate fellow travelers”—their deep melancholy, fear of the future, and harsh treatment by their captors—the

33. Joseph Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 4.

34. Gikandi, *Slavery*, 211.

35. Gikandi, *Slavery*, 211.

explorer immerses his readers in an Africa oriented toward the Atlantic slave trade. The griots' tale is formally similar to the earlier interpolated chapters on African manners and customs and commodities: distinct sections, fenced off from the narrative proper, dedicated to information or entertainment. Romantic exploration narrative as a genre was well suited to incorporating the uneasy relation, not just of the author, but also of British reading publics to slavery and the slave trade at this transitional moment in British Atlantic history. Britain was deeply enmeshed in commercial and cultural networks, connected to Africa and the Americas by systems of transatlantic movement, including the forced migration of enslaved people and the flow of goods and profits from their labor. British readers seem nonetheless to have wanted images of separateness—a neatly encapsulated description of timeless African manners and customs, or an exotic melodrama of African war. In Park's book, these textual enclaves stand in tension with their diegetic surround, the explorer's constant interaction with the people whose country he visited.

What might have been the impact on his contemporaries of the formal tensions I have traced through Park's text? Readers did not expect unity or continuity from the composite genre of exploration narrative, but felt free to dip into the parts they liked and ignore others. General readers need not plow through the "Geographical Illustrations" by Major Rennell in the Appendix, nor pore over the fold-out maps, though they might enjoy the illustrations and the song sung to Park by some African women (with words added by the Duchess of Devonshire). Various readers presumably brought varying interests to their reading, and found diverse rewards. The Duchess found the inspiration for her song; race theorists like Samuel Stanhope Smith, William Lawrence, and J. C. Prichard found, or made, fodder for their theories.³⁶ Banks and the African Association got the result they wanted from the book's popularity: the British government agreed to fund the second and larger expedition in 1805 that resulted in Park's death.

A partial report of this second expedition was published in 1815, edited by the abolitionist John Whishaw. In his "Account of the Life of Mungo Park," Whishaw writes, "It is a remarkable circumstance, that while the supposed opinions of Park have always been appealed to by the advocates of the Slave Trade, his facts have as constantly been relied on by their opponents; and that in the various discussions which have taken place upon that subject since this work has appeared, the principal illustrations of the arguments in favor of the Abolition, have always been derived from . . . Mungo Park's *Travels*."³⁷ The rumor that Park supported the slave trade

36. Tim Fulford and Debbie Lee, "Virtual Empires," *Cultural Critique* 44 (Winter 2000): 15–17.

37. Mungo Park, *The Journal of a Mission to the Interior of Africa, in the Year 1805*, ed. John

may have come from his work with Bryan Edwards, the Jamaica planter, his writing coach. But that impression could also have arisen from his close relationships with British and African slave traders on his journey. Whishaw's "facts" include Park's description of the treatment of the enslaved and the impact of the slave trade on the African population—the evidence modern historians of slavery cite in Park's *Travels*. Whishaw's "remarkable circumstance," the dueling interpretations of the book by advocates on opposite sides of the slave trade debate, parallels the equivocal impulses I have traced in the hybrid form of Park's exploration narrative.

Of necessity, Mungo Park's relationship to the slave trade and slave traders was close, if conflicted. He depended on slave traders to accomplish his mission, and he showed a becoming gratitude to those who helped him on his way, including slavers like John Laidley and Karfa Taura, as well as numerous, nameless enslaved Africans. The reason why the explorer had to part from his "unfortunate fellow travelers" in the emotional exchange I quoted at the beginning is because he gave his patron Karfa some business advice. Another coffer reports "little demand for slaves on the Coast"; Park suggests that since Karfa is "not likely to meet with an immediate opportunity of selling his slaves . . . he would find it to his interest to leave them at Jindey, until a market should offer" (*Travels*, 297, 301). The trader takes the advice, makes arrangements to park his slaves in the village, and sets out with the explorer for the coast after the latter has bid an emotional farewell to his enslaved comrades.

Park's equivocal relationship to the slave trade continued during his transatlantic voyage on the American slave ship *Charles-Town*, narrated at the end of his *Travels*. It was an unlucky crossing; before they left the mouth of the Gambia, eight people on board, including the ship's surgeon, had died. Park agreed to step in as acting surgeon, a role in which his language skill came in handy. "My conversation with them, in their native language, gave them great comfort . . . They had in truth need of every consolation in my power to bestow." Not, he hastens to add, that the sailors are needlessly cruel, "but the mode of confining and securing Negroes in the American slave ships, (owing chiefly to the weakness of their crews,) being abundantly more rigid and severe than in British vessels . . . made these poor creatures to suffer greatly" (*Travels*, 305). Park, the helpless witness to their suffering, again makes excuses for the slavers' behavior, making British slavers look good by comparison to the Americans. By the end of the Middle Passage, 22 people were dead. It was a hard crossing on a

Whishaw, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1815), *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, <http://gdc.galegroup.com/gdc/ncco/?p=NCCO&u=euge94201>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015.

leaky ship that never reached South Carolina, but diverted to the Caribbean, where it was “condemned as unfit for sea” (*Travels*, 305).

Read as part of an exercise in dislocating studies in Romanticism, Park’s book looks like neither a triumphant adventure in exploration nor an imperialist “anti-conquest.”³⁸ It is a dispatch from a visitor to a region scarred by war and weakened by hunger, whose elite stood to profit from supplying captive and fettered black bodies to the slave-driven economy of the Atlantic Rim. Park’s *Travels* affords us a reticent, conflicted portrayal of the infrastructure and institutions of the internal African slave trade and a few Africans’ experience of the First Passage. Its representation of these is heavily constrained by the politics of the British slave trade debate, unresolved at the time of its publication, as well as mediated, as I have shown, by the conventions of Romantic-era exploration narrative. Alert to these limitations, students of enslavement and of Romantic literature may glimpse in Park’s text both his fellow Britons’ conflicted attitude to circum-Atlantic connectedness and—more tenuously—the bottomless melancholia of the First Passage.

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- . “Mental Travelers: Joseph Banks, Mungo Park, and the Romantic Imagination.” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24 (2002): 117–37.

38. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 67. In their time and long afterward, explorers were viewed as heroes: tough adventurers, forging into the unknown. Postcolonial critics revised this view to see them as “ethnocentric imperialists.” As Debbie Lee points out, however, Romantic-era travelers in Africa “neither explored anything nor discovered anything . . . they neither conquered anything nor colonized anything.” Instead, they were visitors—sometimes unwelcome, always vulnerable and dependent on the goodwill of local inhabitants and officials. See “Introduction,” *Travels, Explorations, and Empires*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), vol. 5: *Africa*.

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