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 10 June 2021

The Curious Female Traveler: Anna Maria Falconbridge's  
*Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone*

Anna Maria Falconbridge “bid adieu” to her “native land” of Bristol, England “perhaps for ever” on January 5th, 1791 “to accompany my husband,” abolitionist Alexander Falconbridge, on their “unusually quick” voyage to the Sierra Leone Colony.<sup>1</sup> The British colony, she explains, was “mostly formed of [formerly enslaved] *Blacks*, founded on principles of *freedom*, and for the *express purpose* of abolishing the Slave Trade [original emphasis].”<sup>2</sup> Her husband Alexander, she further explains, “is employed by the St. George’s Bay Company [the Sierra Leone Company]” and was sent, accompanied by his wife, to form “a settlement” and “to carry out some relief for a number of unfortunate people, both blacks and whites, whom [the] Government sent to the river Sierra Leone” as part of the original colony in 1787, and who now “in consequence of having had some dispute with the natives, are scattered through the country, and are...in the most deplorable condition.”<sup>3</sup> Falconbridge’s “heart was gladdened at the sight of the mountains of Sierra Leone...appear[ing] to rise gradually from the sea to a stupendous height, richly wooded and beautifully ornamented by the hand of nature,” “vastly pleased” by “new scenery almost every moment.”<sup>4</sup> She notes “monkeys playing on the beach and catching small fish at the edge of the water,” “pine apples and lime trees...and a variety of birds.”<sup>5</sup>

However, this initial description of Falconbridge’s journey to the Sierra Leone Colony as part of her 1794 *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone During the Years 1791-2-3*,

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone During the Years 1791-2-3: In a Series of Letters By Anna Maria Falconbridge*, (London: 1794), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,

which provides an epistolary account of her experiences at this newly established colony during her two visits, is from the outset marked by violence and unease. Struggling with “melancholy reflections” and fearing what “fate as awaits me” in “the wilds of *Africa* [original emphasis],” her first night of the journey aboard the *Duke of Buccleugh* is interrupted by “shocking cries of murder.”<sup>6</sup> In “so great a confusion,” she is convinced that the ship is under attack by pirates, who “would put us all to death.”<sup>7</sup> However, her “fears were removed” when she discovers that the disturbance does not come from outside intruders, but instead from “Mr. B,” a fellow passenger whose “intellects were a little deranged.”<sup>8</sup> As he “continued his disagreeable hideous cries the whole night” she “scarcely closed my eyes again” and attempted to return to sleep.<sup>9</sup> Later “at breakfast Mr B— apologized...telling us that his wife had murdered his only child, for which reason he had left her.”<sup>10</sup> ““And””, he tells her,

‘the horrid act has made such an impression on my mind, that I frequently think I see her all besmeared with blood, with a dagger in her hand, determined to take away my life also: it preys upon my spirits, for I want strength of mind to conquer my weakness.’<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a cruel and conflict-oriented marriage introduces Falconbridge’s travel account. She is later inclined to think that “this was only the imagination of a frantic brain...for we were not able to learn any thing more of the story.”<sup>12</sup> However, this revelation that Mr. B’s reaction might be attributed to the fact that he is “a little deranged” only works to enhance the impact of this early scene.

This brief moment in Falconbridge’s first letter introduces several distinctive and important features of *Two Voyages*. In this early example, Falconbridge employs what scholar

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<sup>6</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 9, 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*,

Lynn Festa describes as “sympathetic identification,” a rhetorical practice that manipulates the capacity to connect contingent subjects in shared feeling and imagine oneself in another’s position “for political effect.”<sup>13</sup> With Mr. B, this example of marital violence is used to foreshadow and describe the ideological tension and violence present in her relationship with her husband, “his conduct...[being] so unkind (not to give a harsher term)” given his “irritable disposition” and “addict[ion] to drink.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the situation is employed as part of Falconbridge’s larger objective to draw attention to the conditions of the Sierra Leone Colony, a “deplorable situation” of “anarchy and discord” due to the directors’ mismanagement, thereby criticizing the project.<sup>15</sup> Throughout her narrative, she creates sympathetic identifications between slavery and her experiences of imprisonment, fear, and powerlessness at the hands of her husband and the Sierra Leone Company. The rhetorical use of slavery to metaphorize her own sense of enslavement reveals a pattern throughout her narrative, whereby the enslaved peoples Falconbridge encounters on Bunce Island, a major slave-trading operation near the colony, are used as iconographical tools and metaphors to explore and provoke a response to the powerlessness of the white women settlers, free slaves, Black loyalists, and Falconbridge herself within the context of the colony. Although this strategy allows readers to powerfully identify with others, they are still able to uphold “distinctive cultural and personal identities,” allowing for the selective recognition of the humanity of the enslaved peoples of the Sierra Leone Colony.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Falconbridge offers only a perilous recognition of subjectivity for the Black ‘objects’ of her distress, only so much as they are used to dramatize her own preoccupations. Her

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<sup>13</sup> Lynn M. Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 169-70, 57, 169.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*,

injunction to imagine oneself in another's position is directed at the promotion of a white and gendered authority over the genuine suffering of the enslaved.

Sympathetic identification is thus established as a powerful device in which communities across the Atlantic are socially and empathetically connected to one another in *Two Voyages*, but excessive feeling is marked as disruptive and untrustworthy. Returning to the aforementioned example early in the narrative, the contrast created between Falconbridge's courage and Mr. B's "frantic brain" serves to foreshadow the dangers of excessive feelings, which she characterizes as a "weakness" of the mind.<sup>17</sup> The dangers of excessive feelings are used to denounce both the project of abolition and the fracturing relationship between her and her husband, over the length of her narrative becoming convinced that the excessive and "zealous" passion for abolition is as destructive as slavery.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the contrast developed between her emotional self-restraint and Mr. B's pathological imagination allows her to display an unsentimental approach to the facts of her voyage. She presents her narrative as an "honest" and "uncorrupted" account of her experiences, promising to "paint the true state of things."<sup>19</sup> She represents herself as highly capable and uncorrupted, however, because of her position as a woman she is quick to point out that she did not "experience any of those fears peculiar to my sex upon the water" in a bid to maintain her credibility against English societal views of women as "hysterical" and excessively emotional.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, she must retain her "strength of mind" in a bid to not fall prey to the weakness of her sex. She does this by acknowledging and fulfilling European societal expectations of feminine behavior of the late eighteenth century, speaking to her unique position as a female travel writer in which she must constantly negotiate this identity. She relates her autobiographical events in the tone of an impassioned observer and claims a degree of

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<sup>17</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 149.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 56.

marginality in her text, being “forced to be a spectator,” as opposed to the possessive gaze of the male travel writer. Furthermore, she works within the conventions associated with familiar female correspondence, addressing her letters to an unnamed female friend, in order to legitimize her account and present her observations as implicitly truthful. However, she “candidly confesses” in her preface that contrary to “threadbare, prevailing custom,” she had always intended her account to be published.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Falconbridge constantly works to compensate for and override excessive feelings in her text due to her position as a female travel writer in order for her narrative to be seen as legitimate and “truthful” in the eyes of her English audience. She works within the confines of her position as a woman in a colonial society in order to legitimize and authorize her position.

*Two Voyages* is a vital source in beginning to more deeply understand white women’s unique positions in colonial societies during the era of European colonization. Falconbridge’s deliberate dedication of her text in the preface to “*my dear Country Women* [original emphasis]” works to create an effective relationship with her female readers in order to draw support for her case, more largely a shared female cause, against the masculine abuses of power represented by her husband and the Sierra Leone Company directors.<sup>22</sup> She does this by strategically engaging and claiming the attention of her sympathetic female readership through a series of “shared” emotional experiences centered around events in Sierra Leone. Her narrative revolves around themes of powerlessness, mistreatment, and dispossession felt at the hands of masculinist interests, themes with which her female readership is able to identify. The metaphor of enslavement relied upon heavily in her narrative thus is a powerful conduit through which to explore the social prescriptions of gender and sexual subservience for British women in the late

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<sup>21</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, v.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

eighteenth century. Falconbridge's satirical relation of the Portuguese women at Fayal in the Azores Islands who posit that English women "have more liberty," to which she replies "I assured her they [English women] had their share of thorns and thistles," is employed to make known that English women are constrained by societal gender norms and expectations which emphasize female subordination.<sup>23</sup> Her narrative can be seen as a constant negotiation between the public societal expectations for an eighteenth-century English woman, emphasizing a subordinate subjectivity and passivity, and her attempts to claim literary authority in a colonial environment that marginalizes her.

Falconbridge's connections between the forms of confinement and possession she experiences as a woman in the colony and the incarcerations of slavery are established almost immediately. Although she is miserably uncomfortable aboard the *Lapwing Cutter*, another company vessel which the colonists transferred to from the *Duke of Buccleugh*, her husband refuses to allow her to sleep ashore at Bunce Island, the largest British slave castle on the Rice Coast of West Africa located in the Sierra Leone River. He cites the "diabolical sentiments" of the slave traders at Bunce Island as reason for his refusal.<sup>24</sup> Because "it was not proper for me to contradict him at this moment" Falconbridge "submitted without making any objection to come on board this tub of a vessel."<sup>25</sup> Social conventions regarding the conduct of a respectable English woman forbid her from disagreeing with her husband, so instead she confides in her journal about "the influence of an over portion of wine [that] had *quicken*ed and *disconcert*ed his temper [original emphasis]."<sup>26</sup> She reflects, "I was doomed to suffer, by being imprisoned...in a place so disgusting as this was."<sup>27</sup> She represents his behavior as an "unkind" husband and slave

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<sup>23</sup> Catelyn Vasquez, "Writing in Code: The Travel Narratives of Anna Maria Falconbridge and Elizabeth House Trist," Masters Thesis., (The University of the Incarnate Word, 2009), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

master, traits that she finds absent among the actual slave traders at Bunce Island who are “uniformly civil and polite.”<sup>28</sup> Alexander’s “zealous[ness] for the cause” of abolition has effectively enslaved his wife, socially and politically marginalizing her from other white settlers who are involved in the trade.<sup>29</sup> The parallels between her sense of confinement on the *Lapwing* and the condition of the enslaved is calculated and deliberate. In describing her quarters, Falconbridge speaks in terms that are evocative of abolitionist descriptions of slave ships:

Conceive yourself pent up in a floating cage, without room either to walk about, stand erect, or even to lay at length; exposed to the inclemency of the weather, having your eyes and ears momentarily offended by acts of indecency, and language too horrible to relate—add to this a complication of filth, the stench from which was continually assailing your nose, and then you will have a faint notion of the Lapwing Cutter.<sup>30</sup>

Her husband’s *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* published in 1788 offers a similar description of enslaved peoples enduring the Middle Passage:

They are frequently stowed so close, as to admit of no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks, unless directly under the grating, permit the indulgence of an erect posture... I was so overcome with the heat, stench and foul air, that I had nearly fainted...<sup>31</sup>

By employing slavery as a metaphor for her powerlessness and subordination in her marriage, Falconbridge incites her readership to experience the scene of intense claustrophobia and to conceive of themselves as victims of incarceration through a rich sensory description of imagery, sounds, and smells. However, the real tragedy of her situation is not generated by the terrible conditions which echo those suffered by the enslaved, but rather that she as a white woman should be subjected to those same depredations, especially given her husband’s conviction for abolition.

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<sup>28</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*, (London: 1788), 20.

To further emphasize her husband's irregular and despotic behavior, Falconbridge uses abolitionist vocabulary to describe her encounter the same night with a group of enslaved peoples awaiting shipment across the Atlantic in a slave-yard on Bunce Island. The arrangement of this scene immediately following Falconbridge's description of her own "imprisonment" upon the *Lawing* reveals the sympathetic identification she relies on to reveal and condemn her husband's behavior towards her. While on the island, she goes to dinner at the house of local slave traders against the behest of her husband and "involuntarily strolls" to a window "without the smallest suspicion of what I was to see."<sup>32</sup> Surveying the slave-yard, she is "astonish[ed]" at the "disgusting" scene of "wretched victims" "chained and parcelled out in circles," the inhumanity of their treatment being truly shocking.<sup>33</sup> However, the scene has more than one set of "wretched victims" as Falconbridge implicates herself in the plight of the chained-together bodies through a collapsed distinction between herself as the observer and the enslaved peoples as 'objects' of her gaze. In this moment, she becomes equally constrained to bear witness, her:

Offended modesty rebuked me with a blush for not hurrying my eyes from such disgusting scenes; but whether fascinated by female curiosity, or whatever else, I could not withdraw myself for several minutes.<sup>34</sup>

In this scene of "female curiosity," the body of the enslaved stands as a material metaphor for Falconbridge's entrapment in her "hastily contracted" marriage. Her narration is therefore directed at the denunciation of women's disenfranchisement rather than a condemnation of slavery. But what is interesting is that these bodies are the cause of her confinement on the ship because, as evidence of the slave trade, her husband believes she needs protection from even momentarily viewing them. Thus, she is imprisoned because they are.

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<sup>32</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

That Falconbridge's narrative is more concerned with the condemnation of women's disenfranchisement than the condition of slavery can be seen in her fluctuating response to Bunce Island. Later in the text, she describes Bunce Island as a place of "comfort" and "pleasantry," a site of refuge for her away from her husband.<sup>35</sup> This positive description of a major slave trading operation effectively acts as a counternarrative to the perceptions of abolitionists and works to discredit them. For her, Bunce Island is even a place of entertainment and pleasure where she relates "the adventures of the preceding day" to the "civil and polite" slave traders.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Bunce Island is simultaneously a place of horror where enslaved Africans are "chained and parcelled out in circles," which Falconbridge observes herself in a previous section, and a place of relaxation and escape away from her husband's excessive feelings regarding abolition.<sup>37</sup> The duality of these contrasting realities is a testament to her privileged position as a white European, being that Bunce Island is a site of pleasure instead of horror for her, therefore acknowledging and reasserting difference. Furthermore, her description of her own comfort and pleasure suggests real limits to her concern for the condition of enslaved peoples, allowing for the selective recognition of their humanity but only so far as enslavement's rhetorical and affective significance is used to dramatize her own preoccupations.

Moreover, Falconbridge represents the scene in the slave-yard as compelled by gender, reflecting not just Falconbridge's entrapment in her marriage but her experience as a woman confined by English societal expectations. Her response is informed by these white middle-class gendered ideals and expectations regarding how she is supposed to react to a scene of this magnitude. Her "offended modesty rebuked me...for not hurrying my eyes from

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<sup>35</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

such disgusting scenes” in which she “could not withdraw myself for several minutes” reveals this set of expectations placed on her to retain her “modesty” and assume guilt of the sight of enslavement by averting her gaze in hopes of upholding the image of being a proper, lady-like English woman.<sup>38</sup> How she flinches and withdraws with a detached and distanced attitude, quickly regaining composure and moving on in her narrative, signals that she is expected to forgo an active, possessive, and direct masculine gaze simply because she is a woman. As a woman, she is not supposed to see but instead is meant to be seen, as the ‘object’ of the gaze much like the enslaved peoples, therefore, any reversal of these roles has the potential to be damaging. She takes time to assure her readership that “I avoided the prospects from this side of the house ever after.”<sup>39</sup> The term “prospects” ironically recalls the hegemonic European subject who scans landscapes and fantasizes about their transformation.<sup>40</sup> As that person is male, the desire is possessive, to assume control and ownership over the subject(s) being viewed, so Falconbridge identifies her seeing and desire with her gender (“modesty,” “female curiosity”) as a way to negate the gaze’s possessiveness. That she looks out into the slave-yard from a parlor window is a crucial detail and works to create a distance between herself and the enslaved peoples outside. The window here is a mode of and device for constituting her desired female subjectivity and passivity, making her confrontation as indirect, separated, removed, and detached as it can be. Because seeing violates norms of conduct for her gender, she refuses to possess and is reluctant to know, situated in contrast with the intense and invasive way male surgeons and traders physically inspected and examined enslaved people’s bodies for potential sale.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>40</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “Eros and Abolition,” in *Imperial Eyes: Conquest and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 104.

<sup>41</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 4.

These “overbearing men,” as a surgeon in Kingston, Jamaica calls them, viewed enslaved peoples as “commodities” and “objects[s],” to be assessed for sale to buyers.<sup>42</sup> A Guinea surgeon named James Arnold explains that “the slaves are examined to see if they are physically fit, have healthy eyes, good teeth, stand over four feet high, and if men, are not ruptured; if females have not ‘fallen breasts’.”<sup>43</sup> “They will hide” physical imperfections “from you [surgeons] (if you be not very careful)...But you must not be contented that they seem to be in Health” advises surgeon T. Aubrey on the coast of Guinea in 1729, “take good notice of their Eyes, whether the Whites be not of a livid or russet Colour...or whether they have no Mark in the Groins...or Signs of Ulcers having betwixt their Shoulders.”<sup>44</sup> The variables used to determine the probability of enslaved peoples being sold thus hinge on the invasive inspections of their displayed bodies by male surgeons and traders. Compared to Falconbridge’s above narration of her encounter with a group of enslaved peoples in the slave-yard at Bunce Island, these male writings are direct, active, and involved, seeking out aspects of their bodies the enslaved peoples try to “hide” from them. Whereas Falconbridge’s distanced and indirect view identifies more with the enslaved ‘object’ than the one who is doing the looking, the male writer’s possessive gaze asserts control and dominance over these “object[s]” of desire by seeking out information and claiming sight. Thus, the stark contrasts between these writings make it clear that Falconbridge’s narration of her experiences in the

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<sup>42</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, “The Guinea Surgeons on the Middle Passage: The Provision of Medical Services in the British Slave Trade,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14, no. 1 (1981): 615; Trevor Burnard, “Chapter 9: Collecting and Accounting: Representing Slaves as Commodities in Jamaica, 1674–1784,” in *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, ed. Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 185.

<sup>43</sup> Sheridan, “The Guinea Surgeons,” 616.

<sup>44</sup> T. Aubrey, *The Sea-Surgeon, or the Guinea Man’s Vade Mecum. In Which Is Laid down, the Method of Curing Such Diseases as Usually Happen Abroad, Especially on the Coast of Guinea; with the Best Way of Treating Negroes, Both in Health and in Sickness. Written for the Use of Young Sea Surgeons, by T. Aubrey, M. D. Who Resided Many Years on the Coast of Guinea* (London: printed for John Clarke at the Bible under the Royal-Exchange, 1729), 118-119.

Sierra Leone Colony is deeply gendered and informed by societal expectations of eighteenth century English women which emphasize female passivity and a detached subjectivity.

While Falconbridge is horrified by the conditions of the slave-yard, she is even more alarmed by the status and conditions of the white women living among the Black settlers. These women, she claims, were former prostitutes in Britain involuntarily expatriated to accompany and marry the formerly enslaved Black men as part of the original colony. She utilizes the same conjunction of race, gender, and enslavement to denounce the company's poor treatment of its white female settlers, thereby expressing her doubts about the ideological underpinnings of the project:

Among the outcasts were seven of our own country women, decrepid with disease, and so disguised with filth and dirt that I should never have supposed they were born white; add to this almost naked from head to foot.<sup>45</sup>

Here, she elaborates on the disconnection between the abolitionists' safeguarding of enslaved peoples and mistreatment of their "country women," so profound that it strips them of their identity, their very 'whiteness' (literally and figuratively). She condemns the company's directors because, similarly to her husband, they treat white women the same way the Black settlers are treated, failing to distinguish between them. She anxiously undertakes to clean them up, "I *begged* they would get washed [emphasis added]" and "gave them what clothes I could conveniently spare" in order to try and reassert their inherent difference and establish their superior claims by dressing them in her own clothing and returning them to whiteness by cleaning them up.<sup>46</sup> She demands that her husband treats the women differently by assuring

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<sup>45</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*,

their physical isolation, he has “a hut appropriated as a hospital, where they were kept separate from the other settlers, and by his attention and care, they recovered in a few weeks.”<sup>47</sup>

This sympathetic representation of the white women is employed to shock readers and denounce the behavior of the company and its supporters. In the paragraph following her initial description, the women effectively disappear as she offers a speculative account of their initial abduction for her strategic use. They become “mostly of that description of persons who walk the streets of London,” someone much like herself. She claims they were drugged, abducted, taken aboard a ship, and notably “married to *Black men*, whom they had never seen before [original emphasis].”<sup>48</sup> The women’s difficulties are appealing to Falconbridge because it develops her connection made between marriage and enslavement. Furthermore, Falconbridge finds their sexual exploitation and reduction to a category usually reserved for Black women unacceptable, since she reserves a different, elevated status for white women. When promiscuity and hypersexuality are signifiers attached to white women, Falconbridge believes things have gone too far. In addition, her italicization of “Black men” is indicative of the larger set of white racial fears and anxieties regarding the breakdown of European values and white culture that the threat of miscegenation and sexual intermixing poses to herself and readers. The thought of white women being forcibly married to Black men and one can infer eventually bearing children with them frightens Falconbridge so much that she has to italicize and consequently underline it. Thus, the white women who are the subject of her description embody a threat to white racial purity, undermining whiteness as a marker of difference. Therefore, what is symbolically at stake more generally are racial distinctions, which in turn works to validate and justify the racial separation and superiority in Falconbridge’s eyes. She

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<sup>47</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 64-65.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

cannot believe “it is scarcely possible that the British Government, at this advanced and enlightened age...could be capable of exercising...such an...infringement on human Liberty” by stripping white women of their very ‘whiteness.’<sup>49</sup> She appropriates abolitionist vocabulary to challenge and complicate the “advanced and enlightened” principles of the company through revealing the mistreatment of the “country women” to whom her narrative is addressed. She provokes sympathetic engagement by employing the diseased and filthy body of the white female settler to represent the moral failings and hypocritical nature of the company, marked by their abrupt disappearance from the text. In this way, she warns about the dangers of excessive feeling expressed through the abolitionists’ promotion of social equality among the settlers and ignoring what she believes are inherent racial differences.

Although Falconbridge initially “viewed the Slave Trade with abhorrence—considering it a blemish on every civilized nation that countenanced or supported it,” key scenes in her narrative reveal developing racism that evolves with her experiences in Sierra Leone.<sup>50</sup> Collapsing racial and social distinctions are to her a sign of the company’s incompetence and “fanatical prejudices,” and are harmful to the project of liberty and equality underpinning the colony.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, her understanding of the ‘natural’ and ‘proper’ hierarchy of identity becomes a source of authority for her account over that of the colony’s directors. In another key moment, Falconbridge relays her attempted “rehabilitation” of the regent of the Temne’s daughter Clara, a form of reordering that reveals the power of clothing as a marker of difference. She displays her frustration with Clara and her preoccupation with status when she “endeavoured to persuade her to dress in the European way,” attempting to clothe the elite African woman in European dress, specifically Falconbridge’s clothing, which connotes a

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<sup>49</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 66.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

privileged status.<sup>52</sup> However, Clara, being “impetuous, litigious, and implacable” for resisting the foreign clothing, “would tear the clothes off her back immediately after I put them on.”<sup>53</sup> Unlike the aforementioned scenes of the slave-yard and the white female settlers whom Falconbridge successfully manipulates to function as material metaphors for the incompetence of the colony and her husband, her account of Clara reveals her discomfort with a subject who rejects her desire for control over her appearance and behavior. Deciding that nothing “could be gained” from this failed refashioning, Falconbridge decides to make Clara disappear from the text. She becomes “this *Ethiopian* Princess [original emphasis]” and then is “got[ten] rid of...as soon as possible.”<sup>54</sup> Despite her use of slavery as a metaphor throughout the text, her representation of Clara, much like her mother who Falconbridge earlier observes “was dressed in...a dignified stile, having several yards of striped taffeta wrapped around her waist...; *but she had neither shoes nor stockings on* [original emphasis],” reveals a hierarchy in which white women are accorded greater status than Black settlers and Indigenous peoples.<sup>55</sup> The “failings” for which she criticizes the company are its failure to observe and reassert this critical distinction.

The most explicit and unrestrained condemnation of the colony’s equalization of the white and Black settler’s respective statuses occurs in Falconbridge’s account of a trial near the end of *Two Voyages*. The breakdown of social categories accomplished by the abolitionists is symbolized by the “murder” of a duck. She relates that approaching the shore to “regale themselves” at Bunce Island, some “thoughtless sons of Neptune,” a group of visiting white sailors, “wantonly killed a duck belonging to one of the [Black] Settlers.”<sup>56</sup> They were

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<sup>52</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

arrested, imprisoned, and tried “not by their [white] Peers, but by...a *Jury of twelve blacks* [original emphasis], who, without any evidence...found them guilty of stealing and killing the duck.”<sup>57</sup> One sailor received thirty-nine lashes as punishment, while the others were imprisoned on the *African Queen* until fines were paid to the court. The duck here becomes a symbol of the inversion of just process by the colonial court. Falconbridge reports that the situation is:

one of the most atrocious infringements on the liberty of British subjects, and the most daring extension of arrogated power ... practised by our Colonial Tribunal on the persons of three sailors belonging to the *African Queen*.<sup>58</sup>

She is appalled by the conviction because of the Black settler’s presumption of equal status with the white British settlers of the colony. The imprisonment of a majority of the sailors and the reversal of a Black body being whipped by a white one, “poor Jack was dreadfully mortified at being whipped by a black man,” she insists is an unnatural inversion. Her use of the whip as a symbol, one which is also heavily employed in abolitionist discourse as a symbol of enslavement, is situated against the company as a sign of its own offenses. Thus, a Black man whipping a white man is offered as the result of the company’s misconceived project of freedom and equality which has left the white settlers in a “deplorable situation.”<sup>59</sup>

Falconbridge equates the “sufferings” of the settlers with the condition of the enslaved in order to further condemn the company’s actions and hold them responsible for putting the settlers in this “deplorable situation.”<sup>60</sup> From the beginning of the colonial project, Falconbridge was frustrated with the types of supplies sent to the Sierra Leone colony. Administrators sent tools used by plantation owners and blacksmiths back in England—of

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<sup>57</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 222.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 286, 142.

which they had little use for in the colony—and toy knives and scissors instead of food. Of what little food they were sent there was nothing “but salt beef, so hard we were obliged to chop it with an axe, and some mouldy, rotten biscuits.”<sup>61</sup> However, Falconbridge would routinely go a day or more without eating because there was little food available leaving her “famished”, her hunger being so great “that I could not help satisfying it with some of this beef and bread, uncouth as it was.”<sup>62</sup> In terms of diet, Falconbridge draws parallels between her condition and that of the enslaved Africans she mentions in an earlier letter from Bunce Island, describing how she “reluctantly” tastes the only food afforded to them, “a trough of rice placed in the centre of each circle” of enslaved peoples.<sup>63</sup> Her description of them “greedily devouring all before them” due to extreme hunger and malnourishment aboard the slave ship can be equated to the description of her own hunger due to a similar shortage of provisions.<sup>64</sup> Here, Falconbridge employs sympathetic identification by equating her own condition with that of enslaved peoples in order to express her frustrations with the company. Moreso, she critiques the colonial project for putting her in a situation that blurs the distinctions between the enslaved and the settler, especially considering she is a white woman.

However, Falconbridge continues to assert differences between the enslaved and the settlers by describing the same action of eating in dissimilar disparate ways. While she describes the enslaved Africans “greedily devouring” their food, she instead satisfies her own hunger because she simply cannot help it.<sup>65</sup> Here, Falconbridge’s descriptions are based upon a value judgment in which the enslaved Africans are portrayed as aggressively and hastily, almost animalistically, consuming their food. They do not seem to register the horror of their situation as

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<sup>61</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 58.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 33.

they “thoughtless[ly]” devour the food before them, and due to this lack of awareness, Falconbridge considers them lesser beings.<sup>66</sup> Alternatively, Falconbridge passively and in a fully disengaged manner eats her food, almost as if she is observing herself from an outsider’s perspective, much like the way in which she observes the enslaved Africans. The difference between her use of the verbs ‘devour’ and ‘satisfy’ is that the former connotes an aggressive and uncontrolled activity whereas the latter is more about a mediation of this activity given she is expected by her readership to be a lady-like English woman, even while eating food. Falconbridge describes her eating with thoughts of how it would be read by English readers looking in and inflicting judgment themselves, hoping to appear lady-like and maintain a sense of composure. Here, she attempts to reinscribe and uphold difference between the conditions of enslaved Africans and herself by describing the same action of eating in dissimilar and almost disparate ways, while simultaneously relying on the Black body as a material metaphor in which she writes herself as similarly disenfranchised.

Due to societal gender norms that emphasized female subordination, middle-class women during the late eighteenth-century in colonial societies were normally confined within the private space of the home. The area beyond this private sphere remained difficult for women to access.<sup>67</sup> Societal expectations for female behavior relegated women to the margins and attempted to silence their lives and experiences. Travel writing during this period was thus an important medium through which women in colonial societies were able to express themselves and gain some degree of authority through telling their own stories. Women were able to write against the

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<sup>66</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Catelyn Vasquez, “Writing in Code: The Travel Narratives of Anna Maria Falconbridge and Elizabeth House Trist,” Unpublished Master's Thesis (The University of the Incarnate World, 2009): 4.

societies that attempted to silence them and call into question the traditional limits placed upon their ways of being.<sup>68</sup>

However, female travel writers remained in constant negotiation with the societal expectations of colonial societies, physically leaving their homelands but remaining bound to the expectations of female behavior placed upon them. As writer Karen Lawrence states,

travel literature explores a tension between the thrilling possibilities of the unknown and the weight of the familiar, between a desire for escape and a sense that one can never be outside a binding cultural network.<sup>69</sup>

These travel writers had a lot at stake and needed to negotiate and manage multiple subjectivities through their unique subject position as female, traveler, wife, and often mother.<sup>70</sup> Anna Maria Falconbridge's gendered position as a female travel writer thus necessitated her to uphold societal expectations of feminine behavior in order for her narrative to be accepted by an eighteenth century colonial society and audience. Her interpretations and experiences of people and places throughout her narrative are therefore filtered through the identity of a married, middle-class woman in England. She uses the epistolary form because it was the most acceptable form of writing for women during the eighteenth-century, believed to contain personal connections with which women could identify as an outlet for expressing their feelings. The letterform provides intimacy, legitimacy, and authority for her narrative, presenting the reader with observations deemed implicitly truthful. The letter was an emblem of the private sphere while functioning as a public exchange with the readership, thereby offering Falconbridge an authoritative voice under the guise of intimate, private correspondence. Further, she retains the gendered gaze that must eschew the "objective" and "direct" masculine gaze of male travel

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<sup>68</sup> Benedicte Monicat, "Autobiography and Women's Travel Writings in Nineteenth-Century France: Journeys Through Self-Representations," *Gender, Place and Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994): 61-70.

<sup>69</sup> Karen Lawrence, Penelope Voyages, *Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994): 18.

<sup>70</sup> Kristi Siegel, "Intersections: Women's Travel and Theory," in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004): 3.

writers by talking about things in a specifically removed and passive way. Thus, Falconbridge specifically hedges her authority by asserting her feminine perspective in order to credibly comment on such sights.

Negotiating these cultural parameters and expectations in her writing, Falconbridge addresses topics and expresses viewpoints that were accompanied by social stigma. Her narrative is on one level a condemnation of the practices of the Sierra Leone Company and her husband's "unkind...conduct" due to an ungoverned passion for abolition, however, it is more generally a critique of masculinist organization and thinking tied to excessive feeling, whether abolitionist or plutocratic, which restricts middle-class English women and strips them of their power and agency. Openly expressing this discontent may have kept her narrative from publication due to societal expectations to remain silent about female dissatisfaction.<sup>71</sup> Thus, she explores these social prescriptions of gender and sexual subservience for British women through the indirect material metaphor of the enslaved body. However, the limits to this sympathetic identification only goes so far as slavery's politicalstrategic use in relaying Falconbridge's sense of entrapment to readers. It is not a condemnation of the violence of slavery, but rather is merely provisional, directed at the denunciation of women's disenfranchisement due to masculine abuses of power. These emotive scenes of incarceration and dispossession are calculated to persuade the reader of Falconbridge's, and more broadly middle-class English women's, cause. Therefore, her use of sympathetic identification is directed at the promotion of a white and gendered authority.

Therefore, her account is an attempt to gain personal agency for these middle-class English women by enunciating a controversial public discourse that authorizes their perspective and gives them a voice. Falconbridge was neither the first person nor the first woman to visit Sierra Leone, but she was the first woman to record her experiences there. Other men provided

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<sup>71</sup> Vasquez, "Writing in Code," 12.

accounts of Sierra Leone from both abolitionist or pro-slavery viewpoints. However, *Two Voyages* is an explicitly gendered, revisionary account of the Sierra Leone Colony, offering a new perspective on the historiography of the settlement and the current state of the slave trade. By connecting her experience as a wife and settler to the institution of slavery, she raises doubts about the progress of the colony. She questions the “wise” and “noble intentions” of the Sierra Leone Company, revealing throughout her narrative the hypocrisy of the directors and more largely the British government in championing the cause of freedom and equality for enslaved peoples while mistreating “their own country women” in the colony and at home.