

“A Place Where the Defiant Lived”: Agency, Power and “Personal Freedom” in Ian Strachan’s *Blind Days*

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Abstract

Using the rape, imprisonment and torture of Kate, the central character in Ian Strachan’s *Blind Days*, and scholarship examining slavery’s destruction of Black kinship ties, this essay critiques power dynamics on the Great Hope Plantation in Crooked Island, Bahamas. Examined through Orlando Patterson’s classification of freedom and Epictetus’s notion of human will, Kate’s imprisonment is framed as a liberating act. Her rebellion is linked to John Boy’s repeated escapes and Harriet’s attempted infanticide to posit that such subversive acts allowed these characters to retain their personhood and achieve psychological freedom despite their enslavement. This paper further examines how stereotypes regarding Black hypersexuality and the trope of the Black Jezebel were employed to justify the rape of enslaved girls like Kate, arguing that since the law refused to protect them from sexual exploitation, while also making them responsible for their own violation, it enacted a double violence on such women.

In examining the ways slavery sought to dehumanize the African woman, French social anthropologist Claude Meillassoux (1983) offers this piercing critique: “femininity loses its sacredness in slavery” (as cited in Spillers, 1987, p. 112). Historian Shannon Eaves (2024) expands Meillassoux’s critique to remind us that once robbed of her humanity, the Black woman could be commodified, traded and reduced to mere chattel. “Into perpetuity,” Eaves says, “enslaved women were to be imagined as conduits for economic production and security. They could also be raped and coerced to gratify white men’s sexual desires without legal consequence. [They] ... had the least formal power of any group” (p. 7). While Eaves’ research focuses

on the Antebellum South, her description of enslaved women as sexually available bodies, mere assets to be exploited, is not unique to the American South. Her words find expression in the woeful tale of Kate, a slave girl on the Moss plantation in Crooked Island. Kate’s story, as told in Ian Strachan’s *Blind Days* (2022), vividly dramatizes the reality of the slave woman’s life.

The ironic name of Kate’s prison house, Great Hope, is not lost on the reader as we are made unwilling witnesses to the torture she endures for 17 days. While much of Strachan’s narrative directs the reader’s gaze to the pitiable figure of Kate and the atrocities she suffers, her story is not just a tale of abuse and torture. In her fight against

oppression, this young girl affirms her right to freedom in a way that wins the reader's respect yet costs Kate her life. While imprisoned, Kate finds unexpected solidarity with John Boy and Harriet. A close study of these three characters reveals that the source of their power is a freedom of the mind no chain could bind nor whip control. Orlando Patterson's (1982) expansive critique in *Slavery and Social Death* helps to contextualize this power. Patterson argues that since slavery strips the enslaved of kinship relations and community, they suffer a social death. Any interior life that survives, any belief systems or moral consciousness, then become a quiet rejection of the total control slavery demands.

Epictetus (50-135 AD), a Greek Stoic philosopher and former slave, argued that even while the body is enslaved, the mind (human will or moral choice, what the ancient Greeks called *prohairesis*) is the one thing no external force can control (Graver, 2025). Epictetus's ideas elucidate Patterson's arguments in *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (1991), a book which came nearly ten years after his seminal reading of power dynamics in slavery. Patterson employs Epictetus to underscore the dichotomy between "sovereign freedom," the master's power to act on the enslaved without restraint, and "personal freedom," the notion that one's inner life is not completely controlled by another (pp. 3-4). Since the value of freedom can only be fully understood by those who intimately experience its absence, not by those who possess it (Patterson, 1991), the mental freedom under slavery that we see in Kate, Harriet, and John Boy becomes the fertile soil from which physical freedom grows. It is precisely because they are bound that freedom can be conceived and dreamt about as something worth having. By nurturing such dreams, the three rebels achieve a psychological freedom that

helps readers to understand what these characters already know. They may be enslaved, but they are not slaves.

Long before Bacchus utters the ominous, "Kate got me worried" (Strachan, 2022, p. 74) to his friend Limerick in the quiet of the night at Great Hope, the reader has already begun to feel the pangs of concern for young Kate. By all reports a beautiful girl, she is the object of Henry Moss's desire and obsession. Since he is master of Great Hope, Kate is Henry's possession to do with as he pleases. His ownership grants exclusive rights to her labour, her children and, as he arrogantly asserts, her body. That there is a conflict of wills and power between them is evident early in the novel. Henry imagines the young Kate denies his advances because of some misplaced feelings of superiority. Such a thought fills him with rage, but he soon dismisses the notion because of the sheer absurdity of it, so assured is he that he is her better in every sense of the word.

Always an astute observer who "watch[es] ... listen[s], and turn[s] things over in [his] head" (Strachan, 2022, p. 36), Bacchus ruminates on the nature of power, bringing Henry's desire for Kate into focus with even more worrying acuity. "Power is a funny thing," he says (p. 67). Earlier in the novel, Bacchus echoes Patterson's (1991) definition of sovereign freedom when he explains, "White man have power cause he take it" (p. 37). While Patterson exposes the hierarchy inherent in sovereign freedom, since it allows one to restrict the freedoms of others or to delegate their power to those who may do as they please with others beneath them, his clarity in articulating how power was taken by force and maintained through violence contradicts Bacchus's later musings. Bacchus explains the slave's lack of power in this way: "Black man gots none cause he give his away" (p. 37). The bitterness and anger we perceive when we first read Bacchus's commentary on power

relations between master and slave, on deeper analysis, reveals the degree to which he has internalized the master's definition of power. In stark contrast, Kate's early utterances in the novel are evocative and strong as she expresses her longing for freedom. When she declares, "I wants to be free" (Strachan, 2022, p. 5), she is expressing a desire for what Patterson calls personal freedom. Under conditions of enslavement, this freedom is imagined by Epictetus as the domain of the mind; it is the sole thing that slavery cannot control or destroy, since, he says, "if you will, you are free" (as quoted in Patterson, 1991, p. 199). Saidiya Hartman (1996), an American scholar and cultural historian whose work centers slavery's afterlife, extends our understanding of the will referenced by Epictetus in this way: "[it] connotes more than simply the capacity to act and do; rather it distinguishes the autonomous agent from the enslaved, encumbered and constrained" (p. 539). When Kate is told "Niggers can't be free," her will drives the conviction and certainty readers hear when she replies, "Sure we could. Why can't we?" (p. 5).

A strong desire for personal freedom, operating counter to the master's sovereign freedom, causes Kate, John Boy, and Harriet to be exiled to the barn. While there, Kate bonds most with John Boy, who, through his escapades, assumes the almost mythical status of a "sperrit" (Strachan, 2022, p. 87), a trickster who derives power not from overturning the master's authority but by out manoeuvring and outwitting him. In slave lore, the trickster's power within social margins reminded slaves that revolt need not involve violence. Subversion could be equally effective when calculated and deliberate. When the narrator says John Boy's escapes "loosed" him from the rules of grownups and made him feel "invincible" (p. 87), the reader is reminded that John Boy's freedom comes from an interior

consciousness wholly outside the master's control. This consciousness is what Patterson (1982) hints at when he warns against the assumption that the enslaved "internalized the degraded conception of him held by the master; or that his person was necessarily degraded by his degraded condition" (p. 100). While John Boy refused to resign himself to his legal status, Strachan's pointed reminder that his freedom is merely psychological comes in the brutal punishments that follow his brief moments of joy. The novel ends with the seemingly idyllic image of John Boy enjoying literal freedom. He is married and raising a daughter whom he names Kate to honour the friend who had nurtured a similar dream. It would be reductive to argue that John Boy's freedom reclaims Kate's vision, however. On the contrary, it registers as a pyrrhic victory that comes at all too great a cost. His choice to memorialize his friend by naming his daughter Kate signals a loss that echoes louder than John Boy's homage.

In expanding on the concept of social death as a consequence of slavery, Patterson (1982) refers to the slave as a "genealogical isolate" (p. 5), one who is effectively cut off from his social and cultural heritage and denied any claims on, or obligations to, his parents and blood relations. Yet, Harriet's attempt to kill her baby affirms a compelling truth for which the law could not account, and, in so doing, complicates Patterson's (1982) theory of natal alienation. The law might claim that a mother had no right to her child, but it could not negate biological fact. As Toni Morrison had done before him, to tell Harriet's story, Strachan draws on the historical account of Margaret Garner, a slave, who, in the winter of 1856, escaped to Ohio with her husband, his parents, and their four children. When slave catchers pursued them into the free state to return Garner and her family to captivity, she made the agonizing decision to cut the throat of her

two-year-old daughter. Garner had, in fact, intended to kill all her children, and then herself, but she was stopped by slave catchers (Carroll, 2019). For the slave catchers, the law was clear. Garner was the property of her master, as were her children. For Garner, slavery was a fate worse than death. Rather than see her children returned to it, she made a decision that laid bare the pervasive violence slavery inflicted upon women like her, for whom maternal protection might, in fact, mean taking their children's lives.

When Harriet reveals to Kate and John Boy that she had been imprisoned in the barn for trying to kill her baby, both are appalled. As Harriet attempts to rationalize the incomprehensible, the depth of her love becomes evident: "I love my child," she says. "I carry it in my belly, I push it out by my lonesome. And I cut the cord. And I hold her in my arms, like I know my mama hold me in herns" (Strachan, 2022, pp. 137-138). John Boy's "But is your baby, Harriet" (p. 138) reveals that he, like Kate, cannot reconcile Harriet's actions with his understanding of maternal love. Neither of them can grasp what Harriet understands all too well. By reducing a mother's protection to violence, slavery becomes the monster, the real evil. Jean Wyatt (1993) envisions the act of infanticide committed by enslaved mothers as an organic extension of the right of self-protection, wherein the mother's right to shield herself from being returned to slavery is extended to her children. Wyatt theorizes that for one who is driven to such extremes, infanticide is not murder in its strictest sense. It is the symbolic act of "folding [her children] back into the maternal body in order to enter death as a single unit" (p. 476), a description that is apt when we consider women like Garner who had intended to kill herself as well as her children.

This idea is staged in Morrison's

fictionalized account of Garner's story, *Beloved*, as she takes the reader into Sethe's subjective consciousness at the moment slave catchers arrive to return her to slavery (1987). Sethe very carefully

collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them ... where they would be safe. (p. 163)

Since Sethe does not see her children as autonomous and independent of her material body, at the moment of death, she gathers the parts of herself back to recreate the whole self.

In her influential 1987 essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers echoes Patterson and Morrison in elucidating just how little power slave mothers really had over their children. When read together, these writers expose the complex social and political forces shaping Harriet's interior landscape. Under conditions of captivity, Spillers explains, "the offspring of the female does not 'belong' to the Mother, nor is s/he 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesses' it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, *and*, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony" (pp. 454-455). When she theorizes that the offspring of the enslaved were effectively orphans since they did not belong to their parents and were not related to their owners, Spillers gestures toward the condition of natal alienation that Patterson (1982) had earlier named. It is precisely this idea that her children are not hers to love, nurture and protect that Harriet rejects.

"Buckra say is theirs," she tells Kate. "All the babies. All the babies what ain't yet born too. They say they own them and plan to make um slave for um, day

and night. Plan to whip um and chain um and put um in stocks. Plan to sell um and handle um like goat and chicken. No damn better, no damn worse." (Strachan, 2022, p. 138)

Though she is speaking of Morrison's Sethe, Barbara Schapiro (1991) applies object relations theory in a way that reframes how reader's experience Harriet's dilemma. Schapiro defines the relationship between Sethe and her baby as a kind of pre-Oedipal fusion, an idea which parallels Wyatt's (1993) reading of infanticide as a reunification. When interpreted in this way, Harriet's attempt to kill her baby presents the reality of the world outside as a literal danger to the child, operating in stark contrast to the safety of the mother's body. This world, as Schapiro points out, threatens "psychic death", a condition which "involves the denial of one's being as a human subject" (p. 195), a much worse fate in Harriet's mind. Unwilling to accept what the law decreed, and unable to keep her daughter safe from "psychic death," Harriet resolves: "She wasn't never gone be no slave ... Slavin was gone end with me" (p. 138).

It would be easy to read Limerick as a counterpoint for Harriet's all-consuming love, since in one of the more harrowing moments in the novel, we see him quite literally take a hand in Kate's torture. Merle Hodge precedes Patterson, Spillers and Morrison in documenting slavery's systematic destruction of the Black family, but Hodge situates her analysis at the locus of Black masculinity and, in so doing, provides a framework through which we read not only Limerick's, but also Jack's betrayal as resulting from their total emasculation. In her 1974 essay, "The Shadow of the Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean," Hodge notes,

the whole humiliation of slavery meant an utter devaluation of the manhood of the race; the male was powerless to carry out his traditional role of protector of the tribe. He was unable to defend either himself or his women and children from capture and transportation, from daily mishandling (p. 115).

When read through such impotence, Limerick's treatment of Kate cannot be dismissed as the actions of an unfeeling father. Rather, his behaviour is rooted in the same kind of desperation that Harriet struggles to articulate, each stroke of the whip betraying his limited agency as the father of not one, but five children, all girls.

Just before Limerick whips his daughter, Kate's interrupted, "Pa you let these—" suggests that she expects her father's protection, not that he too would wield the whip (Strachan, 2022, p. 173). All Limerick could manage before the lashing begins is a choked, "Kate, you shamin me. And you bringin us trouble" (p. 174). That he regards his daughter's defiance as something to be ashamed of suggests that his role of disciplinarian is not lost on him, and insofar as it serves the master's agenda, Limerick is allowed to carry out this function. While Hodge (1974) argues, "the black man in the role of Dispenser of Violence is a descendent of the white slave overseer asserting an almost bottomless authority over the whipped" (p. 114), Eaves (2024) more specifically posits that the Black man playing this role becomes an extension of the master's power to sexually violate the enslaved. In citing John Jacobs (1861), she points out that an enslaved man's wife or daughter could be insulted before his eyes and, not only was he powerless to intervene, he might also be called upon to torture or punish them. While it must be acknowledged that Limerick wielded the whip at his own request, ostensibly to protect his daughter, in whipping Kate to

make her "mind," he essentially acknowledges Henry's power over his daughter and, by extension, Henry's power over him, Jack and the other slaves on the Moss plantation.

Hodge's (1974) claim that slavery reduced "the function of fatherhood ... to fertilizing the female" (p. 115) provides the lens through which we see Jack and Kate's relationship in its proper historical context as well. According to Hodge, by negating the Black man's status as head of the family and denying the reality of kinship ties, slavery robbed him of his function as head of household, positioning the master as a simulacrum of a provider. Kate's suffering at the hands of the men she loves does the double work of exposing Limerick's disempowerment while mirroring the fractured intimacy of relationships between Black men and women even today. This fracturing, as Hodge describes it, is evidenced by a "prevalent pattern of concubinage and male mobility" (p. 115). Jack's betrayal, then, must also be read through the larger hegemonic structures undergirding the institution of slavery. In the end, his treachery becomes synonymous with Henry's assault as Kate's mind makes what Jack had done "just as painful as what Bossman had ... done" (p. 100).

Slavery's structural dismantling of Black kinship bonds is further reflected in the insidious threat of forced sexual relations, "since consensual 'wives' of slaves were obliged to submit sexually to their masters" (Patterson, 1982, p. 6). Through her insistence that her body is hers to control, to share with whomever she chooses, like Harriet, Kate claims an autonomy denied her by law. Her repeated rejection of Henry Moss makes it clear that she does not choose him, although doing so might prove advantageous for her. It appears that Mabel, Kate's erstwhile friend, understands such advantages well, so well, in fact, that she

encourages Kate to use Henry's desire to her benefit. From Kate, the reader learns that Mable engages in sexual intercourse with Delancy, the White overseer. Hartman (1996) rejects the notion of a consensual relationship of the sort Kate suggests Mable and Delancy share. While Hartman does not deny that these liaisons took place, she questions the possibility of consent in such a situation of unequal power. In speaking of the common practice of rape in the American South, she implicates the euphemistic language of the law, which transmogrified rape of enslaved women into sexual intercourse, for the "quotidian character" (p. 543) such violence assumed. This legal fiction, she says, "shrouded [the] condition of violent domination with the suggestion of complicity" (p. 543). Still, Hartman concedes, "[t]he disavowal of rape most obviously involves issues of consent, agency, and will, which are ensnared in a larger dilemma concerning the construction of person and the calculation of black humanity in slave law" (p. 538). Indeed, the problem is not just a semantic one. The language used to describe forced sexual relationships between enslaved women and White masters or overseers revealed deeper issues connected to the legal and social definition of personhood, autonomy and freedom. Ultimately, then, there is no understanding of consent between Mable and Delancy. The same law that robs Mabel of her humanity, by extension, robs her of the capacity to give consent.

Against Mabel's advice, Kate rebuffs Henry's advances, fuelling his passions until he is so obsessed with the young girl that she invades his dreams and torments his waking moments. Overshadowing his raw sexual desire is a longing for power. This longing for power is at the core of Henry's violation, such that the act of raping Kate, in his mind, becomes an affirmation of his superiority and privilege. To the reader, the

reluctant voyeur, the rape becomes the mechanism through which Henry steals that which he lacks. To draw out this distinction, Strachan describes the rape as something wild, animalistic even. Kate is the prey; Henry is the predator. The sexual assault makes him feel powerful and, drunk on this power, he is no longer a "pale little white man then. He was like a hungry, grotesque dog ... And Kate was a smaller, weaker animal ... She was the captive creature" (p. 97). Strachan's juxtaposition of the slave master's power with Kate's weakness heightens the inequity between them, but it also frames Henry's act as an arrogation of power. He must usurp, take by force and maintain through violence (Patterson, 1991) that which he does not naturally possess.

In her book *When Rape Was Legal*, Rachel Feinstein (2018, as cited in Thompson, 2021) rejects essentializing readings of the rape of enslaved girls which foreground sexual gratification as a primary motive. Such acts were meant to control, demoralize, and humiliate. Shannon Eaves (2024) offers a similar critique, noting that by subjecting enslaved women to acts of sexual violence, "white male slave owners ... demonstrate[d] and reinforce[d] their authority" (p. 3). More pointedly, Eaves says, by prohibiting their communities from defending such abused women, masters affirmed their dominion over slave communities at large. Thus considered, one cannot misinterpret Henry's behaviour as the actions of a frenzied lover who cannot control his sexual urges. He does not pause to shut the door, not because he is too overcome with passion; rather, he wants Kate's violation to be a public event. The only person whose presence might give him pause is his wife but, considering her absence, he has no cause for restraint. No other slave on the plantation would dare to intervene, and thus, Henry takes that which he believes to be his by right, leaving the door open for any passerby to witness

Kate's humiliation. Just as she is powerless, so too are they all powerless to intervene. It is this sense of omnipotence that drives him. The pained shock and silence that falls over the house during the rape only intensifies the weight of communal shame and the slaves' collective impotence. Strachan describes this shame as "crush[ing] them because they would not lift a finger to defend her, or to resist him, as she so bravely attempted to do. All were still, all were silent. All except Lucy" (2022, p. 98).

Here, the narrator separates Lucy from the unwilling witnesses, making her a conduit for the slave master's authority. In fact, the language Strachan uses to describe Lucy's treatment of Kate throughout the novel positions her as a kind of proxy, a surrogate empowered to act at Mr. and Mrs. Moss's behest. From the moment she enters the barn to whip Kate, her smile is menacing "as one given license to do whatever she wanted to do in the whole wide world without fear of the consequences" (p. 140). Patterson's (1991) hierarchical layering of sovereignal freedom is especially useful in examining the cruelty Mrs. Moss empowers Lucy to show. Arguably, the power to oppress those with less social power than you is no power at all, but through Lucy's shadowing of Helen, in particular, Strachan invokes Patterson, who does not separate the mistress' power over the enslaved from the slave masters. Further, by foregrounding Helen throughout Kate's ordeal and by having Henry wait until his wife leaves the plantation both times he rapes Kate, Strachan implies that the master is answerable only to his wife. In so doing, he suggests a compelling extension to the slave mistress's authority. We must observe Mrs. Moss's place in this power dynamic, a place Strachan makes clear in pointing out that once Kate had named Henry as the one who tore her blouse, the ensuing battle of wills was between "Kate and Missus and

Bossman" (p. 106). This naming order is not coincidental. Helen makes her anger felt in the days following the rape, directing most of it at Kate, since it is arguably Helen's orders which intensify Kate's suffering during the 17 days she is imprisoned in the barn. Laura Brace (2018) cites Thavolia Glymph's (2003), study of power relations in plantation households, in which she rejects the myth of slave mistresses as trapped in a system that makes slaves of them just as it did Black women. Glymph posits that the relationship between slave mistress and slave must be interpreted as "a kind of warring intimacy" (p. 40) characterized by brutal and disturbing acts of cruelty. Wielding power over life and death as deftly as the slave master, the violence of slave mistresses was critical in upholding the institution of slavery.

While Kate never utters the word "rape" to Helen, the air is heavy with the suggestion. As she stands before her, Helen does not see a powerless girl. Instead, she sees a temptress, a "lying black whore" (Strachan, 2022, p. 106). The work of Mikah Thompson (2021), helps to mine the complex power play and explain Helen's demonization of Kate following this revelation. Thompson points to myths regarding Black sexuality as justification for the rape and forced breeding of slaves. Using the works of West and Johnson (2013) and Yarbrough and Bennett (2000), she interrogates the claim that enslaved women were lustful and promiscuous by nature, ultimately exposing the untenability of the Jezebel stereotype which conceived Black women as immoral, hypersexual and therefore fundamentally unrapeable. Misrepresented as the "bad black girl" (Yarbrough and Bennet, 2000, as cited in Thompson, 2021, p. 5), the Jezebel is an irresistible seductress capable of mesmerizing men and luring them into her bed, or very calculatedly trapping those

whose power may benefit her. Delving deeper to probe the legal framework buttressing such myths, Saidiya Hartman (1996) exposes the tension resulting from this dual identity that slavery forced enslaved women to navigate. She conceptualizes the law as a double-edged sword wielded against the captive to assert her culpability for wrongdoing (when necessary), while also denying the subject of her selfhood and, in so doing, denying the culpability of White masters (when necessary). Since it forces the slave to function as both property and person, the law is able to "wed reciprocity and submission, intimacy and domination" (p. 538). By invalidating the slave's ability to give consent, or assert her agency, indeed making the latter a crime, the law creates a "bifurcated subject" for whom personhood becomes a burden (p. 538).

More than simply casting Black Jezebels as insatiable, myths regarding the Black woman's sexuality made liars out of them all, since the Jezebel is assumed to be dishonest because she is so unchaste (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, as cited in Thompson, 2021, p. 16). Connecting the sexuality of Black women with their believability presupposes that sexual promiscuity is always coupled with a tendency to lie. Thompson concedes that women of all races have traditionally been stereotyped as liars when they make rape accusations. However, she again draws on the work of Yarbrough and Bennett (2000) to suggest that "a hierarchy of credibility existed during slavery" which meant "men [were] considered more credible than women and ... White women [were] considered more credible than Black women" (p. 15). The Black woman's place in this hierarchy does much to explain the ubiquity of such historical myths and, by advancing them, Yarbrough and Bennett argue, male slave owners like Henry were

able to keep up a pretence of sexual disinterest in Black women and convincingly deny any allegations of sexual assault. Not only does Henry deny the assault, his arrogance makes the violation Kate's fault. Framed as a grave injustice done to him, just before he rapes her a second time, Henry casts Kate as agent in her own suffering, suffering which he says causes *him* "such terrible pain" (Strachan, 2022, p. 113).

Unwilling to call herself a liar, Kate remains chained in the barn, making a louder statement with her silence than she might have uttered with words. Just as Limerick fears that the end of Kate's imprisonment will mean death for her, each slave who visits offers almost uniform advice for Kate to stop her seemingly futile rebellion. And, just as uniformly, Kate refuses to surrender in this battle of wills. As the dramatic standoff ensues, Bacchus' earlier musings on the nature of power make the irony of Kate's situation clearer. Once again echoing Patterson (1991) and Epictetus, Bacchus says,

Buckra could whip you. Buckra could chain you. Buckra could muzzle you. Buckra could put you in the stocks. Buckra could sell you. But Buckra can't *make* you rule. You gotta *choose* to rule. Can't no man take your choice away (Strachan, 2022, p. 37).

There, in this gap between force and choice, between being a slave and being enslaved, bound as she was, chained, peppered and whipped, Kate claims what the law sought to deny her. She continues to speak the truth, affirming her innocence and her right to freedom, even as Henry Moss and his wife try to weave a narrative that absolves them of guilt. When Harriet and John Boy are eventually set free, Kate is not. Her mind had long shifted from thoughts of leaving, though. As she reflects on her imprisonment, the barn becomes a kind of liminal space, existing between the reality of her past life and the life she imagines is possible. For her, the barn is no longer a place of "shame and punishment but a place where the defiant lived, even in pain and punishment. A place where being a slave was a problem, not something to be accepted without question" (Strachan, 2022, p. 118).

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