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Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Volume 35, Number 3, July 2023, pp. 331-353 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press

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Abstract

The jettison of enslaved people occurred with shocking regularity during the transatlantic slave trade. While this practice has been cited as a quintessential symbol of Black abjection within contemporary scholarship on the African and Black diaspora, it was also formative to the inception of Black literary culture. In this article, I track the representation of jettison across the earliest publications in English by Black writers. I focus on how Black authors writing in English embraced the affordances of literary style when addressing jettison. Although the forced ejection of Black life at sea is rarely represented directly in these texts, it is invoked using literary modes that convey the lived experience of such unspeakable violence. After identifying how figurative renderings of jettison emerge as a foundational trope within the Black literary tradition in English, I explore in greater detail its application in Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative* (1789), which inverts this trope to mediate the text's emancipatory aims.

At no point in Olaudah Equiano's harrowing account of the Middle Passage, nor in his subsequent experiences at sea, does the abolitionist recount the jettison of an enslaved person.[1] Given the frequency with which men, women, and children were ejected from slave ships—roughly one in six of the 12.5 million people transported across the Atlantic went, in Édouard Glissant's words, "straight from the belly of the slave ship

1 In addition to documenting a white slaver's burial at sea, Olaudah Equiano recounts witnessing three people jump off the slave ship that was transporting him across the Atlantic. However, throughout the text of the *Interesting Narrative*, he consistently refrains from explicitly or openly discussing the jettison of enslaved people taken from various African regions. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, ed. Angelo Costanzo (1789; Peterborough: Broadview, 2001). References are to this edition.

Eighteenth-Century Fiction 35, no. 3 (July 2023)
ECF ISSN 0840-6286 | E-ISSN 1911-0243 | doi: 10.3138/ecf.35.3.331

into the violet belly of the ocean depths"—such an omission stands out as a notable editorial choice for a text that was intended to publicize the horrors of slavery.[2] This is not to say that the practice is altogether absent from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789); on the contrary, deep-seated fears of being thrown overboard haunt the pages of Equiano's autobiography. The forced ejection of Black life at sea is only represented indirectly in the text, invoked through a series of vignettes that intimate the practice without naming it.

Take, for example, Equiano's oft-discussed recollection of his first voyage on a slave ship, during which the young Equiano is brought on deck after becoming too ill to remain in the wretched conditions of the cargo hold: "In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would put an end of my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself" (73). Equiano relies on the rhetorical convention of circumlocution, using vague and indirect language to call attention to what is implied but never stated: the jettison of his companions.[3] We can deduce that the individuals who are "brought upon deck" and the "inhabitants of the deep" are one and the same, yet how they move from the deck to the deep is left unspoken. Rather than minimizing the impact of the scene, the absent referent invoked by Equiano's circumlocutory description serves to amplify the terror he would have felt as a witness to such an act. While the *Interesting Narrative* is often noted for the "directness and simplicity" of its style, Equiano tactfully employs nuanced and ambiguous language to represent this otherwise unspeakable act.[4] Throughout the *Interesting Narrative*, the

2 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (1990; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 7. See "Estimates," Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates.

3 For other uses of circumlocution to discuss topics pertaining to slavery, see Anna M. Foy, "The Convention of Georgic Circumlocution and the Proper Use of Human Dung in Samuel Martin's *Essay upon Plantership*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 49, no. 4 (2016): 475–506, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2016.0032.

4 Paul Edwards, *Equiano's Travels: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1967), xvi. On "literary" Black writers, see Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); and Ramesh Mallipeddi, *Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016). I am also mindful of Srinivas Aravamudan's contention that attributing literary merit to postcolonial subjects

residual trauma associated with watching other enslaved people thrown overboard finds expression using similar conventions, such that jettison becomes an unmistakable, yet ultimately unwritten, presence in Equiano's autobiography.[5] Accordingly, the spectre of this practice courses through the text, implicitly evoking the abject disposability that defined Equiano's experience as a Black man in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

Among scholars studying the African and Black diaspora, the disposal of Black life along the Middle Passage has been firmly established as a constitutive element in the formation of Black identity. Jonathan Howard, for example, situates the "1,818,681 splashes into oblivion" as "ground zero of black *ab-jection*"; Christina Sharpe refers to Black consciousness as being "in the wake," a concept that explicitly invokes the victims that trailed slave ships after being jettisoned.[6] To be sure, the extent to which jettison has shaped the cultural memory of slavery is clearly evident across scholarship of the African and Black diaspora.[7] The practice, however, has yet to be formally recognized as a constitutive feature of Black literary culture. In what follows, I examine how jettison figures as a foundational trope and a catalyst behind the formation of the Black literary tradition by tracking its representation across eighteenth-century Black autobiographies. Indeed, Equiano is not alone in invoking the figure of jettison through such excursions in style.

often only reinforces the colonial perspective. Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 22–23. My aim is not to "credit" Equiano and his counterparts for their literacy but to explore how and why these writers turned toward the literary.

5 The evasive rhetoric Equiano uses to portray jettison is a common strategy in slave narratives. See Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 83–102.

6 Jonathan Howard, "Swim Your Ground: Towards a Black and Blue Humanities," *Atlantic Studies* 19, no. 4 (2022), 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2021.2015944. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

7 See also Glissant, who begins *Poetics of Relation* by imagining the remnants of jettisoned African people as a fitting analogy for the position of Blackness within modernity (6). Likewise, Hortense Spillers invokes the jettison as a representative example of how violence against enslaved Africans was enacted first and foremost on the "flesh" rather than the "body." Centralizing the flesh as a "primary narrative," argues Spillers, attends to the "seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard" experience of enslaved peoples." Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206.

Across the early Black autobiographical tradition, attempts to document the routine disposal of Black life at sea similarly turn to stylistic measures that simultaneously conceal and expose the act of jettison. So central to the experience of the Middle Passage was the threat of being thrown overboard that the autobiographies composed by Black writers prior to the passage of the 1807 Slave Trade Act include—almost without exception—figurative renderings of jettison. Whereas many of the early publications in English by Black authors were written as ostensibly straightforward testimonial accounts of slavery and the slave trade, the pivot toward figurative language when addressing this practice marks a stylistic departure that warrants their classification as literature. Although the practice is almost never represented explicitly in these texts, it is repeatedly summoned by way of metaphor, euphemism, and periphrasis, which is to say, by way of literary techniques and conventions. I argue that a distinct Black literary tradition in English begins in earnest amid these attempts to articulate the horror of jettison. Because the "scenes of subjection" witnessed along the Middle Passage could not be articulated by direct representation alone, Equiano and his peers embraced literary expression as a more effective means to convey the lived experience of jettison.[8]

Accumulation by Disposal in the Middle Passage

Accounts of sailors throwing people overboard do not, of course, begin with the transatlantic slave trade. Written records describing the practice can be found in the era of Phoenician dominance in the Mediterranean Sea, between 1000 BCE and 600 BCE. Arguably, the most storied tradition involving the jettison of a human body occurs in the book of Jonah, when God sends a "furious tempest" to afflict a ship unwittingly harbouring the disobedient Jonah. After attempting to first "lighten the ship" by throwing "its cargo into the sea," Jonah offers to let the crew cast him overboard to appease God.[9] It is, however, within the lexicon of colonial capitalism that the practice takes on its modern character. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first recorded use of "jetsam" to 1491, on the eve of Columbus's voyage, while "flotsam and jetsam" first appear alongside one another in *The Interpreter* (1607),

8 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2022).

9 Jonah, in *The New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Press, 1970), 799–800.

John Cowell's early law dictionary.[10] Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, these terms appear frequently in legal treatises and dictionaries, occupying a central role within debates on property and appropriation that underpinned Britain's colonial efforts.[11] Heightened interest in the topic was due in large part to the expansion of transoceanic shipping, when the extraction and transportation of resources increased exponentially. Furthermore, beginning in the late seventeenth century, a "pricing revolution" driven by privatization led to England's emergence as the world leader in marine insurance, which resulted in the widespread use of insurance underwriters on commercial voyages.[12] The value of freight lost at sea could be reclaimed from the insurers, leaving sailors more inclined to part with their commodities if circumstances required. In the age of marine insurance, dumping cargo at sea could be a profitable enterprise; as a result, systemic discarding of human beings became commonplace on seafaring vessels.

Of the documented cases of jettison on slave ships, there is no more emblematic instance of the accumulative logics underpinning this practice than the *Zong* massacre. Over the course of several nights in late 1781, the crew of the slave ship *Zong* threw 132 men, women, and children into the Caribbean Sea and then proceeded to file insurance claims on the jettisoned people, valued at £30 each. While the crew justified their actions as necessary to the survival of the ship's crew and passengers, the consensus historical explanation is that they discarded the individuals who were unlikely to turn a profit. Those who arrived in the West Indies weak or ill were often hard to sell, while those who died on the voyage from starvation, disease, or suicide were not eligible for insurance payouts. Eager to satisfy the ship's stakeholders, Captain Luke Collingwood was incentivized to jettison the enslaved passengers who were sick or weak and then justify the decision as a necessary measure to ensure the survival of the others.[13]

10 *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "jetsam, *n.*1.a.," https://www.oed.com.

11 See Wyndham Beawes, *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva: or, The Merchant's Directory* (London, 1754), Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO); and James Park, *A System of the Law of Marine Insurances* (London, 1787), ECCO.

12 See A.B. Leonard, "The Pricing Revolution in Marine Insurance," working paper presented to the Economic History Association, September 2012, https://eh.net/eha/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Leonard.pdf. See also Hannah Farber, *Underwriters of the United States: How Insurance Shaped the American Founding* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

13 On the *Zong* massacre, see Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and

While incidents like the *Zong* massacre are often framed as disturbing outliers—heinous crimes committed by evil men—the jettison of Black life was standard operating procedure in the Atlantic world, a calculated economic strategy that was employed deliberately and frequently. "Human 'wastage' was simply part of the business," historian Marcus Rediker says of the slave trade, "something to be calculated into all planning."[14] Slave ships were funded and stocked under the assumption that a certain percentage of the cargo would go overboard, making the disposal of these individuals imperative to the financial success of each voyage. Accordingly, the profitability of a slave ship and the jettison of its human cargo were indissociable in the eyes of the slave trader, explains Rediker: "the killing was planned, as [slave merchants] calculated how many would go on the 'dead list' in order to make [their] profits."[15] The millions of men, women, and children subjected to the horrors of the Middle Passage were perceived to be as expendable as any other cargo. Thomas Cooper's *Letters on the Slave Trade* (1787) describes the indifference that accompanied acts of jettison, noting that "slaves are thrown overboard *without any scruple*" in the event that "any tempestuous weather arise during the voyage, or should provisions run short in any degree."[16] Likewise, the abolitionist pamphleteer known as "Africanus" remarks, "A cargo of slaves, like a cargo of lumber, may have foundered at sea *without exciting a sight*, if it were but insured."[17] Throwing enslaved people overboard was a common part of life on slave ships, occurring so regularly, argues Sowande' Mustakeem, that the heinous act eventually felt "inconsequential to many sailors."[18]

Some of the victims jettisoned from slave ships were already deceased when they were thrown overboard, but many were still alive. One early nineteenth-century British Royal Navy officer, surveying the slave trade industry, estimated that some "3,000 negroes, men, women, and

James Walvin, *The* Zong*: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

14 Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: Viking, 2007), 5.

15 Rediker, 155.

16 Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the Slave Trade* (London, 1787), 14 (emphasis added), ECCO.

17 Africanus, *Remarks on the Slave Trade, and the Slavery of the Negroes* (London, 1788), 2 (emphasis added), ECCO.

18 Sowande' Mustakeem, "'She must go overboard & shall go overboard': Diseased Bodies and the Spectacle of Murder at Sea," *Atlantic Studies* 8, no. 3 (2011): 309, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2011.589695.

children" were thrown into the sea each year, "of whom more than half are thus sacrificed, whilst yet alive, either to escape from visits of cruisers, or because, worn down by their sufferings, they could not be sold to advantage."[19] The notion that enslaved people were still alive when thrown overboard was particularly shocking to contemporary audiences and proved to be a focal point of abolition efforts, most famously as the practice is reflected in J.M.W. Turner's "Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon Coming on" (1840). The living people who were cast overboard were killed for any number of reasons, some discarded because they were sick or dying, some to lighten ships that were being pursued, and others as part of fraudulent schemes carried out to cash in on insured cargo. Thomas Clarkson recounts an incident in which a ship's surgeon "reported a slave to be dead, and caused him to be thrown overboard, when there was life in him" so that the surgeon's mates "might get rid of the trouble of attending [him]."[20]

Whatever state these individuals were in when they hit the water, the sheer number of people cast overboard along the Middle Passage makes the act of jettison an emblematic image of the transatlantic slave trade, one that was unmistakable to those subjected to its violence. Anxieties surrounding the forced ejection of Black life are palpable in eighteenth-century Black autobiographies, even though the practice is almost never represented directly in these texts, but only figuratively. As such, the problem of jettison functions as a catalyst for the inception of the Black literary tradition in English more broadly. It is to these narratives that I now turn.

Overboard Life and the Origins of Black Autobiography

In the final pages of *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785), John Marrant briefly recounts his experience as a Royal Navy sailor, describing his participation in the

19 This testimony was recorded in the *Twentieth Report of the Directors of the African Institution, Read at the Annual General Meeting, Held on the 19th Day of May, 1826* (London, 1826), 62–63; quoted in Walvin, 200–1. After Britain outlawed the slave trade in 1807, a squadron of British Royal Navy ships, known as cruisers, increasingly patrolled the western coastlines of Africa and major Atlantic shipping routes. These cruisers pursued slave ships in an attempt to suppress the slave trade; slaver ship captains, when chased by RN cruisers, would throw their passengers—the payload—overboard to lighten their ships for escape.

20 Clarkson, *The Substance of the Evidence of Sundry Persons on the Slave-trade, Collected in the Course of a Tour Made in the Autumn of the Year 1788* (London, 1789), 75–76, ECCO. References are to this edition.

Siege of Charleston and the Battle of Dogger Bank. At one point in Marrant's account, he has a near-death experience aboard a ship caught in a storm. As the vessel is pounded by waves, he ends up overboard three separate times:

> I was washed overboard, and thrown on again; dashed into the sea a second time, and tossed upon deck again. I now fastened a rope round my middle, as a security against being thrown into the sea again; but, alas! Forgot to fasten it to any part of the ship; being carried away the third time by the fury of the waves, when in the sea, I found the rope both useless and an encumbrance. I was in the sea the third time about eight minutes, and the sharks came round me in great numbers, one of an enormous size, that could easily have taken me into his mouth at once, passed and rubbed against my side. I then cried more earnestly to the Lord than I had done for sometime; and he who heard Jonah's prayer, did not shut out mine, for I was thrown aboard again; these were the means the Lord used to revive me, and I began now to set out afresh.[21]

Marrant takes more creative liberties in this episode than at any other point in his autobiography, describing an improbable scene in which he is repeatedly cast into the turbulent sea, only to be washed back on deck each time. On the surface, the scene is merely an extension of the spiritual autobiography Marrant spends most of the text constructing. But, alongside the figure of the unmoored Christian fighting to stay afloat amid the tempestuous sea of sin, Marrant invokes an image that had powerful connotations in the late eighteenth century: the jettisoned Black body. Written in the immediate aftermath of *Gregson v. Gilbert* (1783), the highly publicized case that litigated the *Zong* massacre, Marrant's portrayal of a Black man cast into the sea would have been suggestive of the enslaved peoples jettisoned from the deck of the *Zong* and other slave ships. Marrant's fictionalized account tacitly invites such associations by including descriptive flourishes like circling sharks, which notoriously trailed slave ships waiting for discarded bodies, and a stated affinity with Jonah, the archetypal jettisoned body of biblical lore. While never enslaved himself—Marrant was born free in New York City and grew up in Georgia and South Carolina—his experience in colonial America was shaped by his Blackness, as pointedly indicated in his book's title. As such, the fanciful portrayal of his experience overboard aligns his plight with the very real experience of the millions subjected to the Middle Passage.

21 John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (London, 1785), 35–36, HathiTrust.

Marrant's *Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings* has been identified as a significant text in the formation of Black literary culture. Literary scholar and historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. credits the autobiography with "inaugurat[ing] the black tradition of English literature," which, for Gates, does not mean Marrant was its "first author" but rather "the tradition's first revisionist."[22] As Gates points out, discrete literary traditions can be identified not by similar storylines or shared perspectives but by the revision and reapplication of common tropes. Citing Marrant's adoption and inversion of the trope of the "talking book" from Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (*A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself*, 1772), Gates identifies a self-conscious tradition appearing with the publication of Marrant's autobiography. Gates, of course, does not relate this claim to Marrant's account of his repeated ejection into the sea, but the presence of this figurative rendering of jettison offers an additional foundational trope—one with origins that predate Gronniosaw—that Marrant was equally committed to revising and extending.

Jettison, after all, figures prominently in the first publication in English by a Black writer, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man* (1760).[23] The event that sets Briton Hammon's autobiography in motion, beginning a twelve-year odyssey in which he is taken captive by Florida Indians, imprisoned in Spanish Cuba, and conscripted into the Royal Navy during the Seven Years' War, features an English merchant captain deciding whether to jettison his cargo or his crew. Hammon, an enslaved Black man who had been loaned out to work on a vessel transporting timber, opens his narrative with an account of the ship's grounding on a reef off the Florida coast. Stranded at sea, ship's captain John Howland is "advised, intreated, and beg'd on, by every Person on Board" to jettison "but only 20 Ton of the Wood" from the hold (4). Despite the consensus among the crew that lightening the ship would free it from the reef, Howland refuses to discard the precious freight. He opts instead to send the crew on what amounts to a suicide mission to mainland Florida, deterred by neither the crew's pleas nor the

22 Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 145.

23 Briton Hammon, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man* (Boston, 1760), ECCO. References are to this edition.

presence of hostile Spanish colonists and Indigenous peoples inhabiting the region. Along with the ship's only passenger, a wealthy plantation owner, Howland remains on board while Hammon and the crew are "order'd" off the ship (4). The decision would prove fatal. Before the crew can make it to shore, several dozen Indigenous people overtake the boat; they are brought back to the ship where the entire crew—save for Hammon—is lined up and shot.

Unwilling to dump the freight, Howland jettisons the crew, overruling their consensus and forcing them overboard by way of decree. While the crew was made up of white, mixed-race, and Black sailors, the "jettison" is presented from the perspective of Hammon, an enslaved man, aligning the act with the discharge of captives from slave ships and thus symbolically recreating an encounter that was commonplace between white sailors and their captive passengers. The use of this violent practice against enslaved Africans remains latent in the text, but its presence is nevertheless felt through Hammon's suggestive framing of such experiences "overboard." That the first publication in English by a Black writer begins as it does speaks to the significance of this practice to the inception of a distinct literary tradition. Using Gates's rubric for demarcating the inauguration of a literary tradition—the redeployment of an established trope—we might therefore expand the scope of Marrant's revisions beyond that of the "talking book" trope to include the figurative jettison first represented in the opening pages of Hammon's autobiography. This opening scene's rehearsal of the trope is striking and unmistakable: Hammon doubles down on the image by presenting a second "jettison" that reproduces and immediately follows the formal structure of the first, when Hammon escapes being killed with the rest of the crew by jumping overboard.

While in this instance it is Florida Indians who drive Hammon into the sea, the ambiguous description of his new captors suggestively aligns the two "jettisons" as products of the same power imbalance. Karen Weyler points out that Hammon portrays the Indigenous people in a way that is uncharacteristically devoid of racial language: "Descriptions of skin color, often used in captivity narratives in a derogatory fashion … are absent"; "Hammon's Indians are 'barbarous' and 'inhuman,' yet these labels are stripped of racial characteristics."[24] By limiting his

24 Karen Weyler, "Race, Redemption, and Captivity in the Narratives of Briton Hammon and John Marrant," in *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, ed. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), 44.

description to their actions, Hammon depicts his Indigenous captors as racially uncoded, which is further complicated when they identify themselves as British. As Hammon and the crew make their way toward the shore, the Indians approach them in a fleet of canoes flying the British flag, "at the sight of which we were not a little rejoiced" (5). This sighting leads the crew to row directly into their captors' hands, only realizing they had been tricked when they were "so near them we could not possibly make our Escape" (5). Combined with their ambiguous racial description, the approach of the Indigenous pursuers under the British flag aligns Hammon's old captors and his new ones, and his ensuing jettison at the hands of the latter symbolically recreates his earlier jettison at the hands of the former. The circumstances that prompt Hammon's two ejections from the ship differ dramatically, but what remains constant is that the parties that force him overboard both do so while flying the King's Colours. In this way, the racial dynamics reflected in Hammon's allegorical accounts of jettison offer a template for those that would follow and thus position his autobiography as a foundational text in the Black literary tradition.

Reorganizing the Black literary tradition around a maritime trope is fitting since each of the six Black writers who published English-language autobiographies in the eighteenth century were sailors.[25] The figure of jettison is reflected in different ways across these texts, ranging from allegorical treatments in Hammon and Marrant to narratives written by Venture Smith and John Jea that employ euphemism and periphrasis to invoke the practice. Anxieties stemming from jettison manifest quite obliquely in Smith's autobiography, showing up in the form of his concern for his children going to sea. In *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa* (1798), Smith recounts hiring out his eldest son, Solomon, to a businessman named Charles Church, hoping the experience would be an apprenticeship of sorts for the young man.[26] Unbeknownst to Smith, Church fits out a whaling expedition and, "being in want of hands" to crew the ship, "induce[s]" Solomon to join. Smith panics upon learning his son has been coerced to work on the ship and "immediately set out to go and prevent it if possible" (26). He is unfortunately too late, arriving as the vessel is

25 W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

26 Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America, Related by Himself* (New London, 1798), ECCO. References are to this edition.

"almost out of sight going to sea," never to see Solomon again, who dies on the voyage (26). Smith's consternation on hearing that Solomon was going to sea is curious given his own occupation as a sailor. At the time of his son's departure, Smith is captain of his own boat, "a sloop of about thirty tons burthen" that he uses to conduct trade in New England (27). His concern for his son could not simply be caused by a fear of the sea but is more likely drawn from his understanding of the tenuous position of Black life aboard vessels captained by white men. Smith had, after all, traversed the Middle Passage as a child on a slave ship that suffered close to 25% mortality after a smallpox outbreak (13).[27] The young Smith likely witnessed the ejection of these victims, a traumatic experience that may explain his reaction when informed that his son had been forced onto the ship. Tragically, Smith's fears are realized when his son's body is presumably jettisoned like so many of the countrymen with whom he had travelled across the Atlantic. Smith provides little detail concerning the circumstances surrounding his son's death, merely that he "died of scurvy," an evasion that calls attention to the unspoken fact that the young Black man's body was almost certainly cast overboard without ceremony (26). Like other early Black writers, Smith leaves the disposal of Black life at sea tacitly understood and conspicuously unspoken.

The threat of jettison is slightly more perceptible in *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher* (1811). Jea portrays his enslavement as a crewmember aboard *The Superb of Boston* as an experience defined by an ever-present concern that he would be thrown from the ship.[28] While forced to work aboard the vessel, Jea is regularly attacked and threatened by the crew, who "so ill-used and abused me, and swore they would throw me overboard, or beat me so that I should jump overboard ... [and] called me by way of derision, a Jonah" (51). The sailors' threats against Jea vary, but all project the same outcome with Jea overboard. The different variations on the theme of jettison expressed by the sailors, including their reference to Jonah, indicate they knew exactly which threats would frighten the young Black man. Shortly thereafter, following the conclusion of his tenure on

27 Children were typically kept on deck during such Middle Passage voyages, so they were often spared the horrors of the cargo hold; nevertheless, they were forced to witness the events unfolding above deck.

28 John Jea, *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher, Compiled and Written by Himself* (1811; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). References are to this edition.

the ship, Jea sums up the experience by reflecting on his awful treatment at the hands of the crew, who, he notes once again, "swore they would beat me till they made me jump overboard ... and sometimes they would call me a Jonah" (55). Despite being written decades after his voyage on *The Superb of Boston*, the specific nature of the threats made against Jea remain imprinted on his memory. Jettison is never enacted in the text, but the narrative repetition regarding the sailors' claims that they would toss Jea overboard make plain how resonant such a threat was. His description of the "ill-use" and "abuse" is otherwise nondescript: what sticks with Jea is the trauma associated with the constant threat that he might be thrown off the ship.

Refusing Abjection in "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano"

The same obliquely expressed anxieties around jettison that animate these lesser-known autobiographies are unmistakable in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*. Of the publications in English by Black writers during the eighteenth century, Equiano's is the most influential and widely read, which make its relentless attention to jettison all the more important. By the time Equiano was writing the *Interesting Narrative*, the jettisoned African was already a powerful image within abolitionist discourse, appearing in visceral detail in the investigative reports on the slave trade written by Cooper, Clarkson, and Alexander Falconbridge in the two years preceding the publication of Equiano's text.[29] As a leading voice in the abolition movement in the 1780s, Equiano had certainly read these accounts and ran in the same abolitionist circles with Cooper and Clarkson, both of whom purchased subscriptions of the *Interesting Narrative*. Equiano had, moreover, played a central role in publicizing the *Zong* massacre. Were it not for Equiano, who first alerted Granville Sharp that the British courts were litigating the actions of the crew not as murder but as the destruction of property, the incident aboard the *Zong* might have been quietly forgotten. The publicity brought to the *Zong* case by Equiano and Sharp marked a turning point in the abolition movement in Britain, captured the attention of the public, and inspired the foundation of pro-abolition organizations like the

29 Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa, by Alexander Falconbridge, Late Surgeon in the African Trade* (London, 1788), ECCO. See also Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce, and the General Disposition of Its Inhabitants* (London, 1788), 128–29, ECCO.

Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which published the *Interesting Narrative*. Along with the publication of the diagrams from the slave ship *Brookes* in 1788, the dozens of enslaved Africans jettisoned from the *Zong* stood out as a crucially affective image fuelling the abolition movement in Britain during this period.[30]

Despite the resonance of jettison in the 1780s, the *Interesting Narrative* is surprisingly opaque in its representation of the slave trade's most notorious practice. The *Zong* massacre, for instance, does not receive a single mention in Equiano's autobiography. That he personally witnessed such violence is implied, as I noted earlier, but the forceful ejection of Black life at sea is far from explicit in the text (73). While Equiano's fear of being jettisoned is palpable throughout the *Interesting Narrative*, the extent to which his subjection to the practice shapes his experience is most discernible at the level of the symbolic. Consider, for example, when Equiano follows the account of his baptism with that of his near-death experience almost drowning in the Thames River. In a stream-of-conscious succession of thoughts, Equiano moves from the story of his baptism at St. Margaret's in Westminster to memories of "playing about Westminster bridge," which in turn calls to mind the incident on the Thames (93):

> On one of these occasions there was another boy with me in a wherry, and we went out into the current of the river: while we were there two more stout boys came to us in another wherry, and, abusing us for taking the boat, desired me to get into the other wherry-boat. Accordingly I went to get out of the wherry I was in; but just as I had got one of my feet into the other boat the boys shoved it off, so that I fell into the Thames; and, not being able to swim, I should unavoidably have been drowned, but for the assistance of some watermen who providentially came to my relief. (94)

Equiano's account of the scene recreates the asymmetrical relations of domination that he and other Africans had been conditioned to associate with life at sea, the young English boys occupying the role of the slavers who routinely pushed enslaved African people into the sea. The moment's proximity to the baptism—they occur in the same paragraph, in immediate succession—highlights the similar power dynamics at play in the performance of the Christian sacrament, which

30 For more on the iconography and fallout from the *Brookes* diagram, see Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

features Equiano's submersion at the hands of yet another white man. The parallels between these successive submersions subtly express Equiano's awareness of his juridical position within British society.[31] Even after surviving the Middle Passage, Equiano remains firmly "in the wake," to borrow Sharpe's phrase, always at risk of being ejected.

In these more stylistic digressions, where Equiano turns toward literary conventions to convey his experience, it becomes clear how significantly jettison shapes the trajectory of the author's identity formation. John Bugg argues that the rhetorical purchase of the text's "trifles"—the interludes and anecdotes sprinkled throughout the *Interesting Narrative*—has traditionally been undervalued, noting that critics have often assumed Equiano to be either too naive or too unskilled to employ metaphor and figurative language in any meaningful way. As a result, some scholars have downplayed the literary merit of the text; yet, the *Interesting Narrative*'s trifles, argues Bugg, "show us Equiano at his most serious and his most thoughtful. They demand our attention."[32] While the forced ejection of Black life evades direct representation in the text, the figure achieves an unmistakable presence in the *Interesting Narrative*'s trifles.

Among the first trifles Equiano recounts after surviving the Middle Passage is a series of anecdotes in the third chapter that attest to the young boy's lingering fear of being cast overboard. Not long after arriving in Virginia by way of Barbados, Equiano is sold to a merchant captain of the sloop *Industrious Bee*, who is preparing to sail to England with a shipment of tobacco. During an otherwise uneventful voyage, some of the more quotidian occurrences of life at sea trigger the young Equiano's fear of being jettisoned. In one such instance, a white sailor mistakenly falls off the ship, sparking chaos among the crew as they try to save the man:

> One night we lost a man overboard; and the cries and noise were so great, in stopping the ship, that I, who did not know what was the matter, began, as usual, to be very much afraid, and to think they were going to make an offering with me, and perform some magic; which I still believed they dealt in. As the waves were very high I thought the Ruler of the seas was angry, and I expected to be offered up to appease him. (81)

31 See Peter Jaros, "Good Names: Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa," *The Eighteenth Century* 54, no. 1 (2013): 1–24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23365023.

32 John Bugg, "Equiano's Trifles," *ELH* 80, no. 4 (2013): 1051, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2013.0042.

Only able to speak a "smatter" of English at this time, and still disoriented by his new condition, Equiano interprets the panicked noises as a sign that he himself would be cast overboard. His arrival at the conclusion that he would become an "offering" is not unique to this particular event but was apparently a "usual" conclusion. The frequency with which he reacts in this way is apparent in the anecdote that immediately follows, in which the sight of dolphins swimming alongside the ship leads Equiano to deduce that he will be "offered up" to the strange creatures, whom he believed to be "the rulers of the sea" (81). Across these successive anecdotes detailing his early experiences at sea, Equiano struggles to situate the violent application of jettison, opting for explanations that invoke pagan sacrifices to the angry sea gods. The competing rhetorics of sacrifice deployed by Equiano and his contemporaries, who saw in themselves the jettisoned biblical icon Jonah, call attention to the extent to which anxieties about "being offered up" informed the forerunners of the Black autobiographical tradition, nearly all of whom express an affinity with the sacrificial figures of Christian and pagan religions alike.

Much like his account of the baptism and near drowning in the Thames, Equiano is confronted recurrently with the terrifying prospect of being thrown overboard in these successive trifles detailing entirely different experiences. The events that unfold aboard the *Industrious Bee* are presented as the fanciful musings of a disoriented child, but Equiano's own attention in his political organizing to the regularity with which enslaved Africans were cast into the sea indicates that his depiction of these events and how they are internalized by survivors is done with care. That these scenes appear when they do, immediately following his account of the Middle Passage, suggests the degree to which his experience on the slave ship came to shape how he perceived his disposability in colonial society. Equiano's expectation that he will be cast overboard by white Britons associates his racialization with an expendability that defines other, non-human cargo in imperial trade. Equiano's identification as cargo in this respect is presented in the ensuing portrayals of jettison—this time of non-human cargo—that close the third chapter. First, while working on the *Namur*, Equiano recalls that "many things were tossed overboard" as part of the ship's preparations for an engagement with the French in the English Channel (90). The *Namur* wins this battle, but then runs aground on the Isle of Wight, prompting the crew to further lighten the ship by "starting our water, and tossing many things overboard" (91). Through the repetition

of jettison-oriented terminology, the description of Equiano's service on the *Namur* mirrors that of his time on the *Industrious Bee* and other, earlier experiences when he was, or believed himself to be, the one vulnerable to being disposed of. The tension he builds by forecasting his suspected fate at the start of the third chapter is thus resolved by chapter's end, though the jettison he fears for himself is projected onto the inanimate cargo with which he shares space.

By bookending the chapter with scenes of anticipated and actualized jettison, Equiano highlights the shared position of enslaved passengers and cargo as potential objects of this colonial practice. Equiano did not perceive himself as being "ejected from the system," but was rather, as Sharpe puts it, "the ejection, the abjection" itself.[33] Having closely followed *Gregson v. Gilbert* after the *Zong* massacre, Equiano was keenly aware of the juridical categorization of the enslaved not as people but as cargo. Throughout the trial, Chief Justice Mansfield repeatedly reminded the plaintiffs that "the case of the slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard," ensuring there was no confusion regarding the crime at hand.[34] Mansfield was emphatic that the case was a property dispute and not a murder trial. Equiano gestures at this ontological overlap attributed to enslaved people and cargo when explaining the exchange of goods that he witnesses on St. Eustatia: "After we had discharged our cargo there we took in a live cargo, as we call a cargo of slaves" (153). Still enslaved at this point, Equiano is fully aware that he occupied the same juridical position as the "live cargo" he is describing. The notion that Equiano perceives some affinity between himself and the inanimate cargo on the ship has been addressed by Gates, who contends that Equiano "enjoys a status identical to that of the watch, the portrait, and the book. He is the master's object, to be used and enjoyed, purchased, sold, or *discarded*, just like a watch, a portrait, or a book."[35] Like the cargo with whom he so closely identifies, Equiano could be "discarded" at any moment, and this stylized disposability functions as a central feature of the identity he constructs in the *Interesting Narrative*.

33 Sharpe, 29.

34 The words of Chief Justice Mansfield in May 1783 are recorded in a manuscript held at the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich, UK): Documents Relating to the Ship *Zong*, 1783, REC/19. Granville Sharp commissioned the manuscript account of the legal hearing related to the *Zong* case; this document is often referred to as the *Sharp Transcript*. Quoted in Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 46; and Walvin, 153.

35 Gates, 156 (emphasis added).

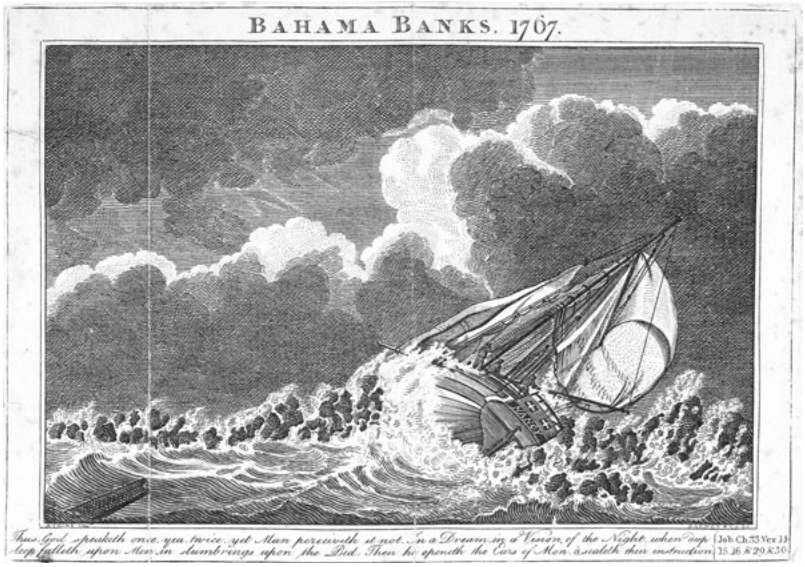

Figure 1. Engraving depicting the wreck of the slave ship *Nancy* on the Bahama Banks in 1767 (1790). Royal Museum Greenwich. The digital reproduction of this Public Domain image is reproduced by permission.

Human and non-human cargo alike are cast overboard by British traders, and under this callous indifference, an affinity between Equiano and jettisoned objects foments in the text. Equiano's conscious identification with such discard materializes most visibly in the frontispiece of the *Interesting Narrative*'s second volume. The engraving by Samuel Atkins portrays the slave ship *Nancy*, upon which Equiano was a crewmember, as it is wrecked on the Bahama Banks (see Figure 1). The piece shows the *Nancy* listing dangerously in rough surf. The chaos of the scene makes it easy to miss the single plank of wood in the foreground of the engraving. Because the *Nancy* is the focal point of the image, the ship has understandably dictated how scholars interpret the engraving's inclusion in the text—being read, for example, as Equiano's fantasy of divine retribution for the slave trade. Although at first glance the solitary plank appears unremarkable, I suspect Equiano was drawn to the floating debris, perceiving in the jettisoned object something akin to his own legal status and social position.

Appearing at the beginning of the *Interesting Narrative*'s second volume, which details Equiano's manumission and life as a free man, the frontispiece offers a subtle reminder that although the author

would attain his legal freedom, he remained disposable in the eyes of British society. Such an interpretation becomes more plausible when the frontispiece to the second volume is examined in relation to the identity-building project Equiano had begun in the first volume's frontispiece. Much has been made of Equiano's efforts to cultivate a specific image of himself in the portrait he commissioned for the first volume, which features the author dressed in fashionable European clothing and holding a Bible.[36] Displaying himself through these details as equal parts African and European in the image, Equiano presents what Vincent Carretta calls his "dual identity" at the start of the narrative.[37] If we read the second volume's frontispiece as an extension of Equiano's effort to represent his identity visually through tropes and emblems, the foregrounded detritus emerges as a potent symbol of the writer's perceived social status. The fantasy of integration and acceptance suggested in the portrait of Equiano and pursued throughout the text is undermined by the floating plank in the Atkins artwork. Paired together, the two frontispieces reveal the tenuous nature of Equiano's position in British society. Despite his best efforts to conform as a European, his Blackness renders him disposable, perpetually at risk of being set adrift.

The kinship Equiano feels with discarded objects extends to his unique classification as a "refuse slave," a status given to enslaved people who, because of age, infirmity, or disposition, could not be sold. After arriving in Barbados, the sickly Equiano and a few others are deemed "not saleable amongst the rest, from very much fretting," and are immediately sent to Virginia where they would be put up for sale again (77). His designation as "refuse" saves him from the backbreaking plantation labour waiting in Barbados, but the prospects for enslaved people who could not be sold were remarkably precarious. Refuse slaves were physical and financial burdens to traders, who were often forced to sell at a loss or perhaps not at all. In one of the few inquiries into the history of refuse slaves, Mustakeem notes that these "unsaleable" Africans were subjected to extreme cruelty and violence, and they were regularly thrown overboard if a buyer could not be found.[38] According

36 See Adam Potkay, introduction to *Black Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas*, ed. Potkay and Sandra Burr (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 13–14.

37 Vincent Carretta, "'Property of Author': Olaudah Equiano's Place in the History of the Book," in *Genius in Bondage*, 139–40.

38 Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 46–53.

to one slave trader, it was "common practice to kill all ... unsaleable slaves by tying a stone to their necks and drowning them in the river during the night."[39] Whether physically thrown overboard or ejected from the primary networks of circulation in Britain's triangle trade between England, west Africa, and the Caribbean, enslaved Africans deemed "unsaleable" were intimately familiar with the experience of jettison. In this sense, the figure of the refuse slave sits at the intersection of the metaphorical and literal ejections that defined Black life in the slave trade, such that Equiano's status as "refuse" amplifies the sense of disposability at the heart of his self-representation.[40]

Equiano's use of veiled language and metaphor to evince his abjection throughout the *Interesting Narrative* is curious given the public outrage elicited by reports of jettison on slave ships. Based on its frequent use in contemporary reporting on the slave trade, one might expect the image of the jettisoned African, as metonym for the cruelties of the slave trade, to be more forcefully renounced by Equiano in his autobiography. Yet it is not. To conclude this essay, I will propose that Equiano's ambiguity extends from his recognition of the accumulative logics with which jettison was associated during the eighteenth century. Equiano was, as many scholars have noted, a vocal proponent of laissez-faire capitalism and famously concludes his autobiography by arguing that Africa would be more valuable to the British as a partner in free trade than as an undeveloped supplier of resources and labour.[41] To

39 Sierra Leone Company, *Substance of the Report of the Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company, Delivered to the General Court of Proprietors, on Thursday the 26th of February, 1795* (Philadelphia, 1795), 97, ECCO.

40 Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005). Equiano's offhand remark about being a refuse slave takes on greater rhetorical weight if, as Carretta claims, Equiano was not born in Africa. Drawing on shipping manifests and baptismal records that list Equiano's birthplace as South Carolina, Carretta argues that, in early chapters of the *Interesting Narrative*, Equiano included descriptions of Africa and the Middle Passage for rhetorical effect. The notion that Equiano's early years were fictionalized makes his decision to imagine himself a refuse slave particularly notable. If Carretta's theory was accurate, Equiano's self-characterization as a refuse slave would appear to be a deliberate descriptive flourish in which he once again associates himself with the refuse of English commerce.

41 See Joseph Fichtelburg, "Word between Worlds: The Economy of Equiano's *Narrative*," *American Literary History* 5, no. 3 (1993): 459–80, https://www.jstor.org/stable/490001; Ross J. Pudaloff, "No Change Without Purchase: Olaudah Equiano and the Economies of Self and Market," *Early American Literature* 40, no. 3 (2005): 499–527, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25057420; and Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, "The Spirit of Trade: Olaudah Equiano's Conversion, Legalism, and the Merchant's *Life*," *African American Review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 635–47, https://doi.org/10.2307/2901242.

readers in the twenty-first century, Equiano's simultaneous rejection of slavery and advocacy for the forms of political economy that depended on the slave trade presents a glaring contradiction that courses through the *Interesting Narrative*.[42] The presence of this contradictory logic in Equiano's writing—what Geraldine Murphy calls his "dissident colonialism"—is also visible in his handling of jettison throughout the text.[43] As traumatic as the practice was in the context of eighteenth-century Black identity formation, Equiano recognized its political and economic value and therefore withheld from renouncing it altogether.

Like other writers in the early Black literary tradition, Equiano spends much of his autobiography contending with his social and juridical status as disposable cargo. Yet he departs from these other writers by integrating jettison as a practice he might employ himself as a way to serve his emancipatory aims. Throughout the *Interesting Narrative*, Equiano's advocacy for the abolition of slavery is measured, often using reason and pathos to appeal to his eighteenth-century audience. Many scholars have pointed out that Equiano was deliberate in how he presented his arguments for abolition, making sure not to alienate his readers with violence or threats of retribution and instead using religious and ethical arguments to build his case.[44] But he moves toward a more militant response to slavery when debating whether he should jettison the captain of a slave ship. This occurs when the *Nancy* runs aground and Captain William Phillips, whose incompetence had caused the grounding, "ordered the hatches to be nailed down on the slaves in the hold, where there were above twenty, all of whom must unavoidably have perished if he had been obeyed" (167). Fearing the ship was going to sink, Phillips determined that drowning the enslaved Africans on board was preferable to giving them any opportunity to escape. Clarkson recounts a similar occurrence, detailing how the

42 Equiano's support for capitalist modes of production was not unique to him, either. David Brion Davis argues that the broader abolition movement in the eighteenth century "reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order." Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 350. See also Lisa Lowe, "Autobiography Out of Empire," *small axe*, no. 28 (March 2009): 101–9, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/261522.

43 Geraldine Murphy, "Olaudah Equiano, Accidental Tourist," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27, no. 4 (1994): 551–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/2739439.

44 See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); and Susan M. Marren, "Between Slavery and Freedom: The Transgressive Self in Olaudah Equiano's Autobiography," *PMLA* 108, no. 1 (1993): 94–105, https://doi.org/10.2307/462855.

captain of a slave ship stranded off the coast of Cuba had intended to make his captive passengers "'walk the plank,' (i.e.) to jump overboard," and thus collect insurance on them, rather than row them to safety (*Substance of the Evidence*, 14).

In the *Interesting Narrative*, Equiano's experience at sea is primarily defined by his inferiority within the ranks of maritime society. Yet when he is ordered to drown the captive people trapped in the *Nancy*'s hold, he renounces his subordinate position. His resistance begins when he asks Phillips, "Why?"—a question that stands out as his first direct challenge to the ruling class (167). Deeming Phillips's response insufficient, Equiano proceeds to escalate his rebuke of the captain's order to the point of mutiny: "I could no longer restrain my emotion, and I told him he deserved drowning for not knowing how to navigate the vessel; and I believe the people would have tossed him overboard if I had given them the least hint of it" (167–68). The scene that began with the white captain ordering the drowning of his captives ends with Equiano threatening to drown the white captain. Acknowledging that the crew would have carried out such an order had he "given them the least hint of it," Equiano thus secures de facto command of the *Nancy*. Once again, the jettison is not enacted in the text, remaining unwritten to the end, but Equiano assumes control of the vessel when he realizes his authority to throw Phillips off the ship. Whereas Gates claims that Equiano's subjectivity is established in the very act of writing his autobiography, itself a performance of Enlightenment reason, I would add that this formal assertion of autonomy is complemented by Equiano's acknowledgement in the text of his ability to jettison the ship's captain. During the eighteenth century, sovereignty at sea was most visibly exercised by deciding who or what could be thrown overboard, making the usurpation aboard the *Nancy* a significant moment in Equiano's liberation. By taking control of the power to jettison the slave ship captain, he offers his most radical challenge to the racial hierarchies of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world and most explicitly asserts his subjectivity.[45]

Accounts of jettison from Black writers during this period are nearly always from the perspective of the victims thrown overboard. The trauma of witnessing their peers cast into the dark waters of the Atlantic manifests, through literary technique, as a tangible presence

45 On Equiano's defiant actions aboard the *Nancy*, see George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173–200.

conditioning daily life in the autobiographies published by Black writers in the eighteenth century. And yet, Felicity Nussbaum argues, Equiano "refuse[s] to be limited to the incommensurable elements [he is] assumed to embody."[46] By employing the signature technique of racial domination against the ruling class, Equiano offers a powerful rebuke to the supposition that his experience is strictly that of discard. Cognizant of just how significantly Black life was shaped by the weaponization of jettison, Equiano appropriates the method to his own ends as a device through which he depicts not only his bondage but also his liberation. In his capacity as a formerly enslaved subject and a burgeoning capitalist, Equiano is at once traumatized and enticed by the instrumentalization of jettison, and thus his autobiography both critiques and reifies the introduction of this foundational trope.

46 Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Being a Man: Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho," in *Genius in Bondage*, 57.