

A Paradox of Love: Motherhood and Evangelical Faith in Kate Drumgoold's Autobiography: *A Slave Girl's Story*

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Abstract

This paper explores the portrayal of motherhood in Kate Drumgoold's autobiography *A Slave Girl's Story* (1898). Drumgoold's narrative stresses her sacred experience partly contributes to its shortage of secular life stories. Drumgoold constructs a world of love in the narrative. She got love from her white mothers, from God, and she got a different type of love from her birth mother. Drumgoold might be the first female slave narrative writer who depicts her white mistress as her mother. But Drumgoold's depictions of white maternal love partially conceal the violence and suffering that she and her family had suffered in slavery. This paper argues that Drumgoold's narrative demonstrates ambivalences in depicting the world of love and the hardships she and her family had to overcome. Drumgoold's helplessness and weakness in slavery induce her to turn to God and God's love, which helps her find an anchor in her white mother who might extend kindness to her. But Drumgoold also praises her own mother who strived to take care of her children and taught them to fight for freedom. This paper also investigates Drumgoold's thoughts of the morality of motherhood as she relates that a mother would be rewarded by God when she takes responsibility for mothering work.

Keywords

Kate Drumgoold, Women's Slave Narrative, Evangelical Faith, Motherhood

1. Introduction

Motherhood has been one of the core issues of feminism since the 1960s. For African American feminists and women writers, motherhood is attached importance not only in political dimension but also in daily experience. Black women writers have made it a vital literary tradition in contemporary women's writing.

On the portrayal of enslaved mothers in African American slave narratives by women, William L. Andrews proposed that “the slave mother, more than the female narrator herself, plays the hero’s role in most early black women’s autobiographies.” (Andrews, 1989). But can Andrews’s statement be justifiably applied to all slave narratives by African American women? And can these writings, then, be said to be the foundational texts for modern ideas about the importance of African American motherhood? Looking at the portrayal of motherhood in nineteenth-century women’s slave narratives helps to investigate to what extent it actually is of key importance to the self-definition of African American women in the nineteenth century within this genre. Kate Drumgoold’s narrative *A Slave Girl’s Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* (1898) is worthy of study since it depicts motherhood in a different way from other women’s slave narratives. A study of the portrayal of motherhood in Drumgoold’s narrative will help to enrich the studies of the writing tradition of African American women.

2. Telling Her Own Stories: Kate Drumgoold’s Life Writing

Kate Drumgoold, in her short autobiography, records her life experience, from an enslaved girl to a freed black woman, especially her success in obtaining education and eventually becoming a teacher. Drumgoold’s narrative, moreover, offers a portrait of her movement between the highly urbanized New York City and the rural South. Drumgoold’s autobiographical story is a postbellum narrative that writing reveals more about her religious experience than her secular life. Referring to Drumgoold’s personal life, some details remain mysterious since the incidents included in the narrative are selective and some blanks are obvious throughout the narrative. Drumgoold was born into slavery around 1858. There is no existing evidence clearly telling Drumgoold’s exact birth date. Drumgoold’s life story ended in 1897, when she was about 40 years old, as the narrative was published in 1898. It is noted that Drumgoold had been enslaved for about seven years when she was emancipated and moved to Brooklyn in 1865. The narrative describes Drumgoold as a pious Christian who put her trust in God by detailing a number of incidents within a strongly religious context. To some extent, Drumgoold’s narrative concentrates on demonstrating a former slave woman’s praise and gratitude to God rather than an in-depth presentation of her enslaved life or her life after emancipation. The stress on sacred experience partly contributes to the narrative’s shortage of secular life stories. Moreover, the narrative does not tell whether Drumgoold had ever married or whether she had ever had any children.

Kate Drumgoold was born a slave in Virginia. She perhaps once lived with her mother and sisters before her family was separated. But we know nothing about her father or whether her father had lived with them. Young Drumgoold might have lived a happy life for a period of time since she mentioned that she was not troubled during the Civil War period (Drumgoold, 1898). Drumgoold called her mistress Mrs. Bettie House her white mother, and she described Mrs. House as a

loving mother, who extended love to her (Drumgoold, 1898). To Drumgoold, Mrs. House not only satisfied her different needs, like sending her various presents, but also took care of her when she was sick. Unfortunately, Mrs. Bettie House died at the beginning of the war. Drumgoold's slave mother, after the death of Mrs. House, was sold to the South by her master to get money to employ a poor white man to go to the battle-field in his stead. Drumgoold was separated from her mother until three and a half years later when, with the end of the Civil War, her mother came back to find her children. With the help of Major Bailey, the headman sent by the North to deal with the welfare of the newly emancipated negroes of the South, Drumgoold, her mother, and her nine sisters reunited and then were sent to Brooklyn in 1865. Drumgoold and her sisters started to work in different homes in the new city. With the work income the girls could help their mother and the family survive in the city. Drumgoold stressed that she lived in a female family, without a father, and her only brother was taken to the war. Drumgoold worked in a number of white families in Brooklyn, and she sought for chances to learn to read and write while working. Drumgoold appreciated that when she lived with the Bailey family, she could be taken to church and attend Sunday-schools (Drumgoold, 1898). With the hope of getting formal school education, Drumgoold worked several jobs to save money to pay for school fees. In the years afterwards, Drumgoold attended some boarding schools in Washington D. C. and Brooklyn (Drumgoold, 1898). She also went to the school in Harper's Ferry and stayed there for four years. But during the years of pursuing her education, Drumgoold sometimes had to halt her study to work for a while so as to save money to continue her education. Drumgoold sometimes identified herself as a feeble girl because of her sickness. Drumgoold, with the belief that she would be of some use to her people, devoted herself to working as a teacher for nearly eleven years. As a pious evangelist, Drumgoold appreciated her conversion to God, and, working like a preacher, Drumgoold devoted herself to helping her mother, her grandmother, and some of her own relatives convert to Christianity.

Generally speaking, critics have examined Drumgoold's narrative from the perspectives of black feminism, black women's agency, and black women writing tradition. Critics have mainly focused on looking at Kate Drumgoold's rise from slavery, family separation, black women's contributions to racial uplift, and Drumgoold's disability. Miya Hunter-Willis investigated slave narratives written by Mattie J. Jackson and Kate Drumgoold in her thesis "Writing the Wrongs: A Comparison of Two Female Slave Narratives." Hunter-Willis maintains that both narratives depict African American women who successfully challenged the system that tried to keep their race enslaved by using their knowledge of white society. The two narratives, according to Hunter-Willis, as typical women's slave narratives, challenged the Cult of True Womanhood and formed a legacy of the importance of the pursuit of formal education, which enabled them to survive, to improve their status, and to help others in the racial uplift movement.

Hunter-Willis also points out that the affinity between Drumgoold and the white people, especially her attachment to Mrs. House, whom Drumgoold called her white mother, could be recognized as Drumgoold's positive efforts to heal the trauma caused by forced family separation, especially mother-child separation (Hunter-Willis, 2008). Caitlin Hays Black, in "Mothers, Daughters, and 'Young Girl's Ambition': the Reconfiguration of Women's Slave Narratives" maintains that in the narrative of Kate Drumgoold, like the narratives of Louisa Picquet, Old Elizabeth, Mattie Jackson, Bethany Veney, and Lucy Delaney, the narrator portrays herself as a child throughout a significant portion of the narratives. And these narratives centre more on the young women narrators who explore opportunities and seek for independence after obtaining freedom. These narrators, as Black has maintained, usually portray themselves, their mothers, and even their white mistresses and, by so doing, these characters move the action of the narratives into a distinct female space. Black also points out that the shift from depicting a heroic mother to a heroic daughter, "mirrors the narrators' struggle to grapple with the cultural and personal changes that occurred for all freed African Americans." (Black, 2011). African American women's life writings, like the narratives of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Ann Jacobs, Lucy Delaney, Kate Drumgoold, Angela Davis, as Pradhan Bismita has noted, offer a powerful impetus to black female agency, and they strike at the ideological roots of patriarchy. Particularly, Bismita notices that Kate Drumgoold's narrative glorifies her mother, a matriarchal figure striving to support the family. Kate's admiration for the gentle white folks, especially her white mother is also a highlight of her narrative and is associated with her in alienable faith in God. All these former black slave women, whether born free or enslaved during the days of slavery, demonstrated anchored faith in Christianity (Bismita, 2015). Reviewing H. A. Williams's book *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* in "The Violence of Family Formation: Enslaved Families and Reproductive Labor in the Marketplace", Kendra Field believes that Williams provides a powerful example through introducing Kate Drumgoold's story of mother-children separation to support the concept of "ambiguous loss," the moments in which enslaved individuals had no knowledge of their loved ones' whereabouts or condition, life or possible death (Field, 2014). Drumgoold's separation with her mother is an unspeakable loss to her since her mother was sold without warning. Drumgoold's reactions to the separation opine that she constructed new worlds out of pain as she grappled with the dislocation brought on by her mother's abrupt disappearance (Field, 2014).

It is noticed that Drumgoold's narrative is usually studied together with other women's slave narratives so as to compare their similarities and differences on certain arguments. Referring to the perspective of motherhood, some critics have studied the maternal identity of Drumgoold's mother, Drumgoold's relationship with her white mother, and mother-children separations under enslavement. But more study needs to be done to look at the tensions between Drumgoold's de-

scriptions of her white mother and her own black mother, which is a key part of Drumgoold's narrative. Besides, it seems that a mother-daughter relationship is used as a trope by Drumgoold to mark the rather satisfying relationship with white mistresses. Drumgoold perhaps is the first former slave woman to call a white mistress her dear white mother, and she seems to be the first of the few black women who claims that they develop a mother-daughter relationship with their white women employers. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the complexities of Drumgoold's depictions of mother-daughter relations.

3. Obtaining Authentic Voice and Reconstructing Evangelical Writing Traditions

In the narrative, Drumgoold declares her authorship and the autobiographical credibility through the testimony that "God knows my heart and He will bless the work in my hands, as the writer of this book." (Drumgoold, 1898). At the very beginning of the narrative, Drumgoold reveals her belief that she "[has] endeavoured to fill the pages with some of the most interesting thoughts that my mind is so full of, and not with something that is dry." (Drumgoold, 1898).

Drumgoold seems to have been literate and, as a pious Evangelist, and, at the same time, a relatively successful former slave woman, seems to be confident in sharing her experience with readers. Besides, as a member of the Baptist Church, Drumgoold might have been supported by the church or some religious groups. Drumgoold reveals that she was once asked to publish a speech she made by the church, and this speech was selected in the narrative. Drumgoold recalls: "A speech to a crowded church, in the year of our Lord 1888, in Talcott, Summers Co., W. V. I was asked to have this published out there, but I wanted to have it brought to my home in Brooklyn. I was into so much work out there, and my people were not there to see what the Lord did help me to do." (Drumgoold, 1898).

Though we are not sure whether the church took part in the publication of the narrative, Drumgoold's narrative is possibly a very rare narrative in that it does not seem to have an editor and comes across as rather unpolished. The narrative's structure, style, and language contribute to the narrative's originality. For one thing, compared with many popular slave narratives, Drumgoold's narrative demonstrates a series of differences. The narrative contains no appended illustrations printed on the title page, like some lines selected from a poem, verses of the Scripture, or authorial remarks. Besides, the narrative contains no testimonies, such as a preface written by a celebrity or the editor's remarks, or any other examples of the "apparatus of truth" which usually were put before the main part of the narrative. Drumgoold's narrative begins directly with the body of the story. Besides, no appendix, supplementary explanations, or letters of testimony, are found in the narrative. Drumgoold's narrative, in this sense, might have much freedom in relating her life stories and demonstrating the dynamics of her values and life philosophy, as it seems free from the normal editorial constraints, though she is heavily influenced by evangelical discourse.

Drumgoold sets up her authority over her narrative with the declaration that her narrative is the crystallization of her thoughts on life. “Once a slave girl,” Drumgoold recalls, “I have endeavoured to fill the pages with some of the most interesting thoughts that my mind is so full of, and not with something that is dry.” (Drumgoold, 1898). It seems that Drumgoold had planned her narrative and taken charge of selecting incidents which would match her plan. But sometimes it is difficult to understand Drumgoold’s reason for writing. Drumgoold argues that “No subject can surely be a more delightful study than the history of a slave girl, and the many things that are linked to this life that man may search and research in the ages to come, and I do not think there ever can be found any that should fill the mind as this book.” (Drumgoold, 1898). This is a rather large and somewhat naïve claim. The narrative does point out that it has a moral purpose, though, and a target audience: “This sketch is written for the good of those that have written and prayed that the slaves might be a freed people, and have schools and books and learn to read and write for themselves.” (Drumgoold, 1898). At this point, freedom and education in the era of post-emancipation are what Drumgoold seems to care about most.

As an evangelical narrative, Drumgoold’s descriptions of her conversion to God and the relationship between her religious belief and her secular life help to enrich the writing tradition of slave narratives. Perhaps for the first time in slave narrative writing, Drumgoold’s narrative reveals an apparent celebration of a love relationship between white people and former black slaves and the love of God. Drumgoold’s piety, the emotions of sympathy and sentimentality, and the descriptions of intimacy with the whites are stressed. Specifically, the narrative’s depictions of love between Drumgoold and her white mistress, her white mother, in the words of Drumgoold, might not have been politically acceptable to many black readers. To Drumgoold, the recalling of the past, especially her experience with white people, is described as a memory full of love and appreciation. William Andrews observes that “The postbellum narrator’s attitude toward the slave past, in sum, is remarkably open to the proposition that something positive, something sustaining, could be gleaned from that past, even from the whites of that past.” (Andrews, 1989). For Drumgoold, the enslaved past brings her warmth, comfort, and love, which is prominently described in the narrative. Though the narrative reveals lingering memories of trauma in slavery through recalling the experiences of Drumgoold’s mother and sisters, the positive feelings towards the past outweigh the negative ones in the narrative. To this extent, we could say that the narrative is unbalanced. Possibly, it is because of Drumgoold’s intention to follow her genuine feelings and judgement based on her own experiences. But we should not ignore the fact that Drumgoold’s religious piety contributes to construct her values of understanding the world and the relationship between people. Drumgoold is depicted as a woman to whom love is the primary rule of interaction. Indeed, the word “love” appears eighty-two times in the narrative. To a large extent, “love”, beginning with the love of God to the love of the white mistress, constructs Drumgoold’s world view.

Unlike other well-known slave narratives, like the narratives written by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Drumgoold's narrative cannot be regarded as a very sophisticated, especially concerning writing skills. Instead, Drumgoold's narrative is somewhat chaotic. Generally, the narrative is a first-person narration. As Jennifer Fleischner has noted, the narrative, not entirely chronologically, stops and restarts several times (Fleischner, 1994). The narrative line is repeatedly interrupted by insertions of different events, which contributes to the incoherence of storytelling. To pull readers back to Drumgoold's stories, the narrative repeatedly uses a number of indicative phrases. Such phrases include "to my story of a life of slavery" (Drumgoold, 1898), "well, to my story" (Drumgoold, 1898), "to my story of child in House's family" (Drumgoold, 1898), "to my story of work in the City of Brooklyn" (Drumgoold, 1898). Though readers' attention might be distracted from time to time, these indicative phrases might demonstrate features of the tradition of oral storytelling. Drumgoold, possibly without compositional training or editorial assistance, composed her narrative following her own way of storytelling.

These indicative sentences work to remind readers to pay attention to her story, especially when a transition from a previous part of the narrative to the next one is required. Although these remarks indicate the features of oral storytelling, these "stops and restarts" sometimes interrupt the narration rhythm and cause narrative fragments. For instance, the story of Drumgoold's white mother is told in different parts, while among these parts, the narrative inserts the story of Drumgoold's brother. The recurring talk of the white mother reminds readers that Drumgoold develops a strong intimacy and affection toward her white mistress as Drumgoold stresses the presence of her white mother. But at the same time, Drumgoold might be trying to balance the proportion in the narration of white figures and black figures instead of rendering her white mistress as the primary figure. But from the perspective of oral tradition, the narration seems to follow the stream of human thoughts which sometimes skips and flows spontaneously. Moreover, the structure of knitting different figures' stories together responds to Drumgoold's intention to relate "the most interesting thoughts" (Drumgoold, 1898) in her mind.

Moreover, Drumgoold's narrative, to some extent, is not a well-written one regarding to its grammar, words choice, and its expressions. Sometimes three or four sentences expressing different meanings are blended in a long sentence in the narrative. It relates:

When in 1886 I went out for good, that I might be of some use to my own people I started in the strength of the Lord, and He did give me the greatest victory as a school teacher, for all of the people sought me to take their children in my school and give them a start. I had my hands full of work, but I let them come in for the Board always sent them to me find out if I could find room and time, and I always made the time for when scholars find that a teacher loves them they will do any amount of hard studying (Drumgoold, 1898).

In the first sentence, a bunch of short sentences with different subjects are mixed together, juxtaposing the words but blurring the meanings. Referring to word choice, the narrative uses a large number of words and phrases with absolute tone, like “all of”, “the greatest”, “always”. Another case in point is that:

I can call to mind when she the blessed one, that I call my white mother, went to get me some shoes and a fine hat, and the one that sold them told her, as she looked at a hat I wanted, that its price was twenty dollars, but I was not thinking of the prices then as I do now, and I cried to have that hat and did not want any of the others, and he told my white mother that was too much for to spend on a hat for me, but she told him nothing would cost too much for her to get for me, and she got that fine hat for me and he had his money; so you can see how much she loved me. And now that dear one is gone from me, and it seemed the dearest one on this earth, and I did not think then that I could have lived without her whom God had given to me for this world, but God, in His wonderful love for me and to me, raised up friends for me and helped me to find favor in the sight of all the people, for they seemed to love me for her sake, and I did not get well for a long time (Drumgoold, 1898).

Grammatically, some of the sentences in the above part are not properly written. Those short sentences are mixed together with frequent changes of subjects, which contributes to chaos in writing and reading the narrative. These writing defects demonstrated in the narrative possibly help to verify the narrative’s free of editorial intervention.

4. White Mothers, Birth Mother, and Spiritual Love in Kate Drumgoold’s Narrative

4.1. Constructing a World with Love: Evangelical Belief and Maternal Affection

In some postbellum slave narratives, especially those narratives depicting a final reunion of former slaves and their masters, some former slaves usually recall moments of humanity and kindness from their former mistresses and masters, though they do not or choose not to define these relationships as family ties. But Drumgoold in her narrative called her white mistress Mrs. House her white mother (Drumgoold, 1898). In fact, Drumgoold calls Mrs. House a white mother fourteen times in the narrative. Moreover, Drumgoold recalled that some of the white mistresses, who employed her as a houseworker, treated her like a mother. Referring to a mistress named Mrs. Sarah Potter, Drumgoold tells that “It was there that I met Mrs. Sarah Potter. She has been all of a mother to me to give me all the encouragement she could bestow on me.” (Drumgoold, 1898). Similarly, Drumgoold relates that “Miss C. L. Franklin’s mother, who is a lovely woman whom we all love as a mother, for she had many of the students at her house to board, like Mrs. William Lovett, and she was so very kind to all of them that

she will be remembered by us all, for we love those in our school life that would say a kind word to us.” (Drumgoold, 1898). Drumgoold, on another occasion, tells that she “learned to love [Mrs. Haseltine, a lady from Boston] as a mother.” (Drumgoold, 1898). But we might question the actual strength of these relationships in reality as opposed to them being a rhetorical description.

In a sense, the white-mother-black-daughter bond depicted in Drumgoold’s narrative might be forged on the basis of Drumgoold’s evangelical belief that God loves her, and she could love and help others by following God. A prominent feature of Drumgoold’s narrative is that the account of the white maternal bond is connected to lines of Evangelical remarks on love. Drumgoold remembers her white mother Mrs. House with her praise of God in the following part.

The subject [Drumgoold] was only a few years old, when she [Mrs. House] saw her heart so fixed that she could not leave me at my mother’s any longer, so she took me to be her own dear, loving child, to eat, drink, sleep and to go wherever she went, if it was for months, or even years; I had to be there as her own and not as a servant, for she did not like that, but I was there as her loving child for her to care for me, and everything that I wanted I had; truly do I feel grateful to my Heavenly Father for all of those blessings that came to me in the time that I needed so much of love and care (Drumgoold, 1898).

To Drumgoold, God is the one who grants maternal caring to her. Maternal love is the embodiment of the love from God. Drumgoold constructs her values of living in a world of love based on her belief in God. According to Drumgoold, though she expressed her sorrow on the death of her white mistress, she held the belief that she did not lose God’s love. Drumgoold reveals:

And now that dear one is gone from me, and it seemed the dearest one on this earth, and I did not think then that I could have lived without her whom God had given to me for this world, but God, in His wonderful love for me and to me, raised up friends for me and helped me to find favor in the sight of all the people, for they seemed to love me for her sake, and I did not get well for a long time (Drumgoold, 1898).

Drumgoold insists that she would be treated well in the world since she had been loved by her white mother. It seems that a religious philosophy of finding favor in the sight of all the people turns to be Drumgoold’s living priority. Drumgoold stressed that “The Lord helped me to find love and favor with all after my white mother was gone from this earth, when I felt that I would soon follow the darling one to the blessed mansion.” (Drumgoold, 1898). And Drumgoold did follow her principle of finding love in the people she met. Drumgoold also took Mrs. Sarah Potter as a white mother. In detail, Drumgoold relates why she calls Mrs. Potter a mother and her appreciation of God’s love:

She [Mrs. Sarah Potter] has been all of a mother to me to give me all the

encouragement she could bestow on me. For all of this kindness I am more than grateful to my Heavenly Father, for I know that all goodness comes from Him. He surely has shown His love to her in sparing her to see me go from her home to Washington to school and spend three years and then go to Harper's Ferry and spend four years, and to see me out in the world teaching for eleven years, and to break down while at my post and now at home to serve in another way. Is not this not God's love to me, as a poor, humble servant of His? I should never forget to give the love and honour due Him (Drumgoold, 1898).

Drumgoold might have found encouragement, or kindness from Mrs. Potter, and she took such kindness as maternal love. Again, this goodness from a white woman, and her following experience of pursuing education could all be attributed to God's love.

Moreover, apart from Drumgoold's depictions of white maternal love, Drumgoold insists that the two most important issues to former slaves—the emancipation from slavery and the progress in getting education—should also be attributed to God's blessing and love. "We, as the Negro Race, are the free people," Drumgoold relates, "and God be praised for it." (Drumgoold, 1898). Also, God should be praised for the opportunities that are opened to the race, and "we feel like giving God all the praise." (Drumgoold, 1898), Drumgoold claims this, because many have done well in trying to get education though "there are many that have lost their lives in the far South" in obtaining education. But the narrative reveals that Drumgoold did not just find love from others but was devoted to extending her love to others. Drumgoold claims that "I used to feel glad that I, although a working girl, could be of some love and comfort to someone, and it makes me feel glad to-day that God in His love to me and for me can own such a feeble one." (Drumgoold, 1898). Drumgoold identifies herself as a weak working girl and a feeble former slave girl, but she feels proud of herself that she could be loved by God.

On the one hand, it might be reasonable to understand that Drumgoold took Mrs. House as her white mother since she lived with Mrs. House up to the age of about three when Mrs. House died, and her mother was sold. "I shall always remember my dear white mother," Drumgoold records, "of whom I spoke of in the first part, and whom I shall call your attention to in many more pages of this little Life Book, and shall always remember her with love and the kindest feeling." (Drumgoold, 1898). According to the narrative, Drumgoold seems to have been taken good care of by Mrs. House. For instance, Drumgoold recalls that "She had watched me in my cradle and longed for the day to come when I should be able to walk, for she knew that I would follow her everywhere she should go." (Drumgoold, 1898). The narrative reveals that Mrs. House took Drumgoold as her own child. In detail, Drumgoold depicted that she was even been spoiled by her white mother who took her to the church on a horse back, bought her a horse and anything Drumgoold wanted to have. In a sense, the kindness that

Drumgoold had experienced might have strengthened her connections to Mrs. House.

But the credibility of Drumgoold's descriptions of many of these incidents describing the love of her while might be questioned, especially as memories if the first three years of life are highly unreliable. For one thing, it is doubtful whether a three-year-old child could pray properly since Drumgoold claims that she would "stand and talk and preach for some time for them" (rich white people in the neighbourhood) (Drumgoold, 1898). Drumgoold does not reveal how she learned to pray as a little slave child since no detail shows that she might have been influenced by her family and her family is not described as being religious. To some extent, it seems that Drumgoold's memories are subordinated to the narrative role. Besides, the narrative records some experiences in an exaggerating way, which might cause doubt on the credibility of the events. Drumgoold recalls her experience with a horse in the following text:

She [Mrs. House] was a member of the true Methodist Church and was never seen by her darling child from the House of God since I could remember, for I was with her at all times on the family horse, Kimble, and when I got large enough to ride alone she bought me a fine black that had all the metal that a horse could have, and his name was Charlie Engrum, and she paid a large price for him, and he was the grandest horse I ever saw, and it was my delight to be near a horse or horses when I was a child, for I did not have any fear of any kind of horse, and I would take a ride the first thing in the morning, even before I would have my breakfast, and my dear white mother would save it for me as she knew that I would have that ride first, for it always made her feel proud to see how well I had learned to ride, and she was the one that had taught me how to ride, for she had me on the horse when I was three years old and from that time until she went home to come out no more forever (Drumgoold, 1898).

It might be quite rare in the nineteenth century for a white mistress to take a black slave girl to church on horse-back, and it might be incredible that a slave girl could own an expensive horse bought by her mistress at such a young age. Though Drumgoold recalls in detail how she got the horse and learned to ride a horse taught by her mistress, it is still hard to believe that a three-year-old girl could be given this latitude.

More details show doubt that Drumgoold might exaggerate her descriptions on some of her experience. Drumgoold recalls that "I was three years old when I was leaving my own dear mother's home to go to my new mother's home, or I should say to my white mother's home, to live with her, and I left my mother's as happy as any child could leave her own home, for this lovely lady was always at my mother's to see me ever since I could remember anything, and she was the joy of my little life and I seemed to be all the joy of her sweet life. She had learned to love me from the time that I came into the world." (Drumgoold, 1898). Drumgoold, who went to live with Mrs. House at age three, only to return to her

mother a few months later when Mrs. House died, and then lost her mother shortly afterwards when she was sold, may very well be projecting her adult fantasies of this period onto Mrs. House. Drumgoold might have constructed her stories partly based on exaggeration and possibly her own imagination. Another case in point is that Drumgoold's depiction of her family's move to the city seems to go beyond credibility. With the help of Major Bailey, who was appointed by the North to look after the welfare of lately emancipated negroes of the South in that area, Drumgoold, her mother, and her sisters went to the city. Drumgoold tells the story:

This gentleman's name was Major Bailey, who was a gentleman of the highest type, and it was this loving man that sent my dear mother and her ten little girls on to this lovely city, and the same time he informed the people of Brooklyn that we were on the way and what time we should reach there; and it seemed as though the whole city were out to meet us. And as God would have it, six of us had homes on that same day, and the people had their carriages there to take us to our new homes (Drumgoold, 1898).

It is highly unlikely that Mr. Bailey did tell the people of Brooklyn that a former slave family was heading for the city and that the citizens indeed went out of their homes to meet the Drumgoold family. The possibility that people of the whole city came to meet the black family is highly questionable, but it fits a vision of a world governed by universal love.

4.2. The Paradox of Religious Piety and Secular Dilemma

As a slave narrative, referring to slavery, Drumgoold's narrative mainly presents her mother and her sisters' experience in slavery. The narrative reveals their efforts in getting rid of bondage, especially the mother's determination and sacrifice in saving her children from enslavement. The narrative reveals that "for all of my mother's children were like herself in the love of freedom. My mother was one that the master could not do anything to make her feel like a slave and she would battle with them to the last that she would not recognize them as her lord and master and she was right." (Drumgoold, 1898) to fight against enslavement. Drumgoold relates that "mother, not feeling good over the past events, had made up her mind that she would take her children to a part of this land where she thought that they would never be in bondage any more on this earth." (Drumgoold, 1898). About slavery, Drumgoold recalls that she has experienced the separation with her mother, the separation of the family, the death of her brother, and the hardships of her sisters in obtaining freedom.

It seems that there should be some conflict in the narrative's depictions of Drumgoold's faith in the love of God and Drumgoold's views of slavery. The narrative reveals that life under slavery is never easy through her own mother's story. According to Drumgoold's descriptions, Drumgoold once lived with her family, her mother, her mother's husband, and her sisters. Her mother seemed to give birth to seventeen girls and a boy. Drumgoold's mother was sold at the

beginning of the war leaving her children behind. Some of the girls might have been hired out and some of them perhaps lived with the House family. Though Drumgoold praises God's help, she still reveals that the family especially the seventeen girls had to battle through life. Actually, the narrative sometimes defines the life, both under slavery and after emancipation, as the life of battle which required them to fight. Though Drumgoold tells that "I can never tell anyone how many happy hours that I had, for the only trial that I had was that of sickness, which caused me to be of a great care to her all of her life." (Drumgoold, 1898), she on another occasion took the enslaved experience as the trials. The sickness which causes Drumgoold to stop working might be a trial, but it might not cover all the trials that Drumgoold had experienced. Moreover, the narrative reveals that, to Drumgoold and her mother, it was not all love in real life but the harsh reality of survival. "My dear mother had four of her children called home to heaven within a short time." (Drumgoold, 1898), Drumgoold recalls. Drumgoold did not describe the death of her sisters in detail, but she relates that "Some of them I never saw more after landing in this city, but I shall see them and know them when I shall have fought the blessed battle on this side." (Drumgoold, 1898). It seems that to survive hardship is a battle, though she might hold the idea that she is loved by God.

Though Drumgoold depicts herself as a pious evangelist, she is also a fighter who could teach another Christian to fight. The narrative reveals Drumgoold's teaching a boy to fight to resist what she believes to be injustice.

Mrs. Sarah W. Potter was the beloved wife of a sea captain, Mr. William Potter, and he owned a ship that sailed the Indian Ocean, and he was washed overboard one night while his wife, Mrs. Potter, was sick, and she did not know that he had a watery grave until the next day. They had one son, who is now married, by the name of Frank, whom I held as an idol, as he always called to me when in trouble, for his dear mother taught him the love of the Bible, and he would not fight any boy, let them do him as they would. He knew that I would go after the boys for blocks, as I was one of those soldiers that was not afraid to fight. As he grew older I told him that he had to go out into the world to fight his way and I wanted him to begin it at once, and he did learn to battle for himself (Drumgoold, 1898).

Drumgoold was not content that Frank did not fight back based on his religious belief that he should not be allowed to. Drumgoold identified herself as a soldier who was never afraid to fight, and she would fight her way in the world. Though the narrative depicts Drumgoold as a pious Evangelist who was loved by the whites and sought for love in the world, it also includes traces of Drumgoold's fight for life. Drumgoold's dilemma of living a life both with love and conflict, to some extent, elucidates the discrepancy between an idealized evangelical existence and the actual conditions of life.

Facing the dilemma, it might be Drumgoold's answer that "Well, I did not

know what I should do, so I made up my mind that I had done all that lay in my power.” (Drumgoold, 1898). On the one hand, Drumgoold chooses her belief in God as she might find love from her belief, and on the other hand, she chooses to fight. As she mentioned in her speech “Why should we give up the fight and lay our armor by when there is so much for us to do? No, no, we cannot and we will not lay the grand old armor down, for the Lord is on our side and we shall surely conquer if we look to Him whose arm is so large and strong. Then let us take fresh courage and march on until we reach the goal.” (Drumgoold, 1898). The state of living with God’s love while not giving up fighting might be the proper way of healing oneself and moving forward.

5. Conclusion

Even given this conflict, the notion of an idealized, loving motherhood suffuses the narrative. It seems that Drumgoold’s conception of ideal motherhood is so powerful that even God is gendered as a mother. Motherhood and evangelical belief are fused together, and it seems that the events of the narrative need to conform to this belief. This may explain why there is a tension between the pacific portrayals of Drumgoold’s white, Christian, mothers, and that of her birth mother, who had to battle, but was not a Christian. Drumgoold constructs a world of love in the narrative. The love she got from her white mothers, the love from God, and a different type of love from her birth mother. In Drumgoold’s words, she hopes that her readers would find love depicted in the narrative and read it with a love for humanity. Drumgoold might be the first female slave narrative writer who depicted her white mistress as her mother. To some extent, thus, Drumgoold’s narrative counteracts the writing traditions of women’s slave narrative, which usually depict cruel white mistresses, thus offering a new, evangelic conceptualization of universal motherhood under a God who is both mother and father. Drumgoold’s narrative describes warm connections with the white women and what she called love from her white mother. But it seems that Drumgoold’s depictions of white maternal love partially conceal the violence and suffering that she and her family had suffered in slavery. To this extent, Drumgoold’s narrative demonstrates ambivalences in depicting the world of love and the hardships she and her family had to overcome. According to the narrative, Drumgoold’s helplessness and weakness in slavery induce her to turn to God and God’s love, which helped Drumgoold find an anchor in her white mother who might extend kindness to her. But Drumgoold also praises her own mother who strived to take care of her children and taught them to fight for freedom. In a sense, the narrative also revealed Drumgoold’s thoughts of the morality of motherhood as she relates that a mother would be rewarded by God when she takes responsibility for mothering work.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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