I. A Postbellum Antislavery Novel

Soon after the end of the Civil War, Lydia Maria Child began to think of writing an antislavery novel and, in the fall of 1865, announced the idea to her publisher, James T. Fields (Clifford 278). The result was the publication of *A Romance of the Republic* in 1867. Although Child was confident in her romance and Fields favored it much, the book did not sell as either of them had expected. Carolyn Karcher in her biography of Child presents several reasons for the unpopularity of the novel, but the chief idea common to them might be that Child refocused on the past national sin, slavery, and its consequent price the nation had paid, the disastrous war, when Americans wanted to forget them (510) now that the institution was finally abolished and slaves all emancipated.

Behind Child’s enthusiasm for exposing the injustice of slavery once again to the public at a time when the issue was fading away from the consciousness of the war-weary people, there lay her indignation against the current Reconstruction developed by the then president, Andrew Johnson, whose “lenient” policies allowed the rebel states to drive the freedmen back to the state of “peonage” almost identical to the servitude before the war. Objecting to the bills to help black people, Johnson made it easy for the Southern states to return to the Union (Zinn 199). And under his presidency white Southerners began “searching for a legal means to subordinate the black population and coerce it to produce plantation staples” (Clifford 278). They found a solution to this scheme in what is called “black codes.” According to the historian Eric Foner, the codes authorized blacks’ rights to own property, marry, or sue and testify in the court, but “their centerpiece was the attempt to stabilize the
black work force and limit its economic options apart from plantation labor” (199). With the fair-seeming argument that the U. S. government had no right to interfere with state laws, Johnson connived the anti-black movement increasingly rampant in the South (Karcher <1> 489).

In the eyes of Child who had fought for the universal freedom ever since she took up a pen, the nation was misguided by the president. Comparing America’s body politic to a ship at the mercy of a storm, she expressed her sense of crisis: the “Ship of State” was “drifting into a Niagara-current” apparently toward a catastrophe (Karcher <1> 490). The metaphor of a ship reminds us of Walt Whitman’s “O Captain! My Captain!” in which the poet glorifies Lincoln who led the ship of America through great turmoil to the goal safe and sound. In contrast to this vision, Child’s criticism of Johnson is pungent when she deplores to Fields, “To have for Captain, in a storm, a man not fit for a cabin boy! I feel very anxious and despondent about the prospects of my poor protégées, the freedman” (qtd. in Karcher <1> 508).

As the image of a nation figuratively described above—the ship in a storm drifting toward the Niagara Falls—suggests, Child believed that slavery was not yet solved in a real sense, for it was evident to her that the abolition of the system alone was not enough to realize an egalitarian society and that, as long as racial prejudice persisted, the freed people would never be truly free. She later explained her motive for writing the romance in a letter to Robert Purvis: “[Having] fought against Slavery, till the monster is legally dead, I was desirous to do what I could to undermine Prejudice” (<2> 483). A Romance of the Republic thus is, in fact, an antiprejudice novel of the Reconstruction period as many critics point out. While the romance possesses all the characteristics of an antislavery novel, Bruce Mills remarks, it was meant to be “an antiprejudice romance responding to the cultural concerns surrounding Reconstruction” (132). Child attempts in the romance to demonstrate her abolitionist view of how Americans can surmount the sentiment of white supremacy, how they will be able to incorporate blacks into the nation as equal citizens and, thereby, to attain a truly harmonious and egalitarian society among diverse races and cultures.

Yet A Romance of the Republic is an antislavery novel as well,
for it epitomizes all the sentiments and arguments about slavery and racism that Child had expressed in the form of fiction, document, epistle, editorial, or political petition in her whole career as a writer and editor from *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833) to *The Freedman’s Book* (1865). As she devoted a chapter to the problem of racial prejudice in *An Appeal* (“Prejudice against People of Color, and Our Duties in Relation to This Subject”), her struggle against slavery was, at the same time, a fight against racial prejudice; she seemed to have perceived in the beginning of her authorship that “prejudice” lay in the center of slavery. As for prejudice against the dark race, she had dramatized in her very first romance, *Hobomok* (1824), the “Indian problem” in terms of coexistence when most white Americans regarded the extinction of the race as inevitable. *A Romance of the Republic* is, in this sense, a continuation of her lifelong struggle to end a slavocratic society based on color / racial hierarchy.

And the major theme Child adopted to focus on the subject of prejudice in this last romance was, as in the first, interracial marriage. Dana Nelson states that Child was probably the earliest fiction writer to challenge the theme of cross-racial marriage and “she remained alone in this commitment for almost the entire century” (xvii). The interracial marriage, according to Karcher, was the only theme that nineteenth-century American antislavery writing evaded (<1> 514). Stowe would not directly deal with the theme in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the most popular antislavery novel, which caused Mary Chesnut’s critical comment, “Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot” (168). It is Child who did “hit the sorest spot” of slavery and it is in this untrodden sphere that Child’s postbellum romance contributes to antislavery literature and opens a new arena, in spite of its many conventional devices and stock rhetorics, for postbellum American literature to tackle with.

II. Transcending the Tragic-Mulatto Plot

Contrary to the movement of Uncle Tom, the hero of Stowe’s best-selling antislavery novel, who was sold down the river from Kentucky
to New Orleans, the migration of the octoroon heroines of *A Romance of the Republic* traces the reverse direction from New Orleans to the North or even to Europe across the Atlantic. Unlike black Tom, they can escape what he had to suffer in the last New Orleans plantation: there is no hard work or cruel whipping; they are mostly treated as white ladies so that the early part of the romance assumes an aspect of plantation novel rather than antislavery fiction. The difference perhaps comes partly from the fact that Child foregrounds sexual exploitation in slavery instead of family separation that characterizes *Uncle Tom’s*.

The story begins with a scene of Alfred Royal’s home in a quiet district of New Orleans, where the once wealthy merchant lives with his two beautiful daughters, Rosa (Rosabella) and Flora (Floracita). The description of the place gives an image of tropical paradise: not only is its parlor full of flowers and objects decorated with flowery designs, but the garden outside is also thick with blooms of various plants and trees, among which a little fountain makes a trickling sound. To this dreamy paradise, Alfred King, a young gentleman from Boston, is invited, and is charmed at once by those two “graceful and accomplished girls” (14), particularly by the breath-taking beauty and angel-like singing of Rosa, the elder sister. By giving King no information of their background beforehand, Royal examines how his daughters impress him. Along with King, the reader is also invited to judge the refined girls “by their own merits” (18), not by the social codes attached to “negroes.”

The Edenic image of Royal’s dwelling comes to suffer a drastic change when the Georgia planter Gerald Fitzgerald, King’s rival in love for Rosa, reveals the “taint” in the sisters’ blood—their mother was a quadroon—and degrades the paradise to a sort of Oriental harem by articulating his wish to possess both of them like the Great Bashaw. But King finds himself less attracted by Rosa and feels displeased with the Southern planter’s view of women. Fitzgerald’s look of sexual desire for Royal’s innocent girls, however, implies the reality hidden in the seemingly harmonious family, the patriarchal control over the women connected with sexual exploitation. Royal bought his beautiful wife, Eulalia, from a Spanish gentleman in St. Augustine, who, in turn, had purchased her mother, a beautiful slave, in the French West Indies.
Although Royal insists on mutual love, he cannot deny the fact that he obtained Eulalia by means of money and that, by this act, he was involved in the pecuniary transaction in which the Spaniard sold his own daughter. He had failed, moreover, to manumit his idolized daughters as well as his beloved wife, under the excuse of busy life devoted to business. As is expected in the antislavery fiction, these sisters who can pass as white ladies are to be further purchased by lascivious Fitzgerald when their father suddenly dies bankrupt.

Trading women as property is thus repeated between patriarchal figures, fathers and husbands, from generation to generation. Child seems to illuminate the analogy between the institution of slavery and that of patriarchal marriage: in either system, women are controlled as property by the male “master” under the disguise of protection. In such an equation of a woman and a slave, the male sexual pursuit is easily understood as desire for power over women. When Fitzgerald proposed to marry Rosa, he unwittingly slipped the word “property” which made the proud girl shrink from him for a moment; he later rejoiced in the thought of “[having] acquired complete control of her destiny” (67) by the marriage, which turned out to be nothing but an exclusive possession of Rosa by the act of buying her.

Even Royal, a gentle husband / father, is at the same time a slaveholder, though this stern fact is likely to slip out of the reader’s consciousness because of his fatherly anxiety over the fate of his daughters. As Frederick Douglass affirms in his 1855 autobiography that a good slaveholder does not solve a slave’s suffering and discontent (198), a benign father / husband guarantees no real protection or freedom. Since the scene of the Royal family in New Orleans centers on the smiling aspect of the father-daughter relation, patriarchy is obscured, but its real fang manifests itself when Fitzgerald places the sisters in a cottage at the edge of his plantation. Karcher sharply sees through the parallel between the Royal and Fitzgerald households:

In the Royal household patriarchy had worn a benign face, and the patriarch’s true relationship to his womenfolk had lain hidden. In the Fitzgerald household, the meaning of patriarchy is spelled
out. The patriarch discloses the face of the slavemaster, and the protective husband steps forward as the Grand Bashaw. (<2> 91)

Indeed, Fitzgerald merely copies Royal, though in a far worse way. Both of them construct the “home” based on an illegitimate marriage and conceal the fact that the girls are slaves. While Royal sequestered his daughters from society, taking much care not to expose them to the public, Fitzgerald almost imprisons them, forcing them to hide their faces with veils if they should go out. As Royal’s residence resembles a secret tropical paradise, so does Fitzgerald’s plantation on a secluded island: Lily Bell, his legal white bride, exclaims at the sight of the island, “[It] seems like the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve had it all to themselves, before the serpent went there to make mischief” (127). And as Tulee the black servant hints that there are many snakes on the island to watch out, it is no more paradise than Royal’s retreat surrounded by flowers and orange groves.

Tulee’s caution of snakes to Flora is symbolic, for she is in danger of being snared by Fitzgerald the slaveholder. While his sexual harassment leads Flora to escape to the North, his legal marriage to Lily, the daughter of a rich Northern trader, drives Rosa to extreme madness in which she performs a pivotal action that transforms the story into a kind of mystery; Child does not depict the very scene of her exchanging the two babies, Rosa’s and Lily’s, by the same father, and this invisible action remains a sort of riddle so that the subsequent plot, in a way, develops in solving the riddle as in a detective story.

One of the contemporary reviews of A Romance of the Republic, “Tow Books by Mrs. Child,” published in The Nation, a New York newspaper, finds the book’s merit in the “episode of the exchanged Fitzgeralds,” calling it “particularly artful,” while it expresses sympathy for the authoress because she wrote the novel in a disadvantageous situation, that is, she dealt with “a dead subject,” slavery. About a quarter of a century later, Mark Twain was to employ this literary device in Pudd’nhead Wilson (1894) . He was probably inspired by A Romance of the Republic to reproduce the episode of exchanged babies as the core driving force of the plot of his detective-story-like antislavery novel.
However, the device was not Child’s invention, as Jean Yellin traces its earlier use in Joseph Holt Ingraham’s *The Quadroone* (1841) in which white and black babies are switched (198). Child who was conversant with antislavery fiction may have read the story.

What seems significant here, however, is not the “artful device,” but the fact that Child does not make Rosa a pitiful “tragic mulatto” as she did Rosalie in “The Quadroons” published in 1842. As Child herself admits that the story is “embarrassingly sentimental” (Karcher <2> 84), it aims at readers’ tears in order to induce them to think of the problem of sexual exploitation in slavery: Rosalie was emaciated to death when her illegitimate husband deserted her to marry a white lady, and her daughter Xarifa imprisoned in a tower became insane to find her lover killed by her master. Introducing a similar story, at times borrowing some passage verbatim from “The Quadroons,” into *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*, William Brown altered the tragic mulatto to a heroic one when he let Clotel choose death for freedom from slavery. After *Clotel* and Harriet Jacobs’s slave narrative that she edited, Child no longer leaves her mulatto heroine utterly helpless bathed in tears. Instead, she bestows fury akin to madness on her. When we think of madness as metaphor of women’s oppressed subjectivity and creativity as has been long elucidated by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Goober’s feminist book, *Mad Woman in the Attic*, Rosa’s madness indeed could be the energy, like madness of Cassy in *Uncle Tom’s*, that rescues herself from the state of a slave / concubine of Fitzgerald.

**III. Transcending Racial Prejudice**

*A Romance of the Republic* is, on one hand, an adventure story full of slaves’ captivities and narrow escapes and melodramatic separations and miraculous reunions, but a moral story, on the other, of how white Northerners should learn to overcome their own prejudice against blacks and to invite them to their dominant society as their equal members. The emphasis of the fiction seems to shift from the former to the latter as the two sisters escape from the slavery South. If the book is an antiprejudice
romance, as is already mentioned, then, its protagonists are Alfred King and Lila Delano, another wealthy Bostonian, because their racism is probed through the process of helping Rosa and Flora. This is probably why the sisters seem to cease to be active agents of their own fates.

As Child revealed racial prejudice in the North in *An Appeal*, the target of her criticism is chiefly the Northerners who believe themselves to be liberal and democratic. “[Let] us not flatter ourselves,” she chides them in *An Appeal*, “that we are in reality any better than our brethren of the South” (186), for no existence of slavery does not mean absence of antipathy to black people. “Our prejudice against colored people,” she further goes on, “is even more inveterate than it is at the South” (186). Giving many incidents that reveal prejudice, she tries to prove her points with rational and objective arguments. These analytical arguments are dramatized in *A Romance of the Republic* chiefly in the two New Englanders, King and Delano, through their commitment to fugitive slaves.

Although King appears as an ideal Bostonian who represents the spirit of American republicanism, he still needs to be educated in the matter of race. He considered slavery “a cumulative poison in the veins of this Republic” (24), but knew little of its realities until he visited the South. In New Orleans, quite a foreign world to him, it first bewilders him to learn that such graceful girls as Rosa and Flora are excluded from the society only because of the slight portion of black blood in them whereas they would ornament it under other circumstances. But when he thinks of a possibility of marriage with either of them, he has to admit his hesitation: “My good mother shares the prejudice. How could I introduce them to her?” (14) Being captivated by the charm of Rosa, King revolves the question in his mind if “the impediments [are] really insurmountable” but, once again, he remembers the “iceberg” of Boston relatives (25).

King faces the realities of slavery in its direst sense when he is told that Rose and Flora are slaves and that they are in danger of being sold as property: “Is such a thing possible in this country?” he exclaimed. ‘Girls so elegant and accomplished as they were!’” (163) And he is exasperated, unlike Fitzgerald, at the word “property” applied to the girls, saying, “Property! … Such a term applied to women makes me an Abolitionist”
Here, in the mind of Alfred King, the author’s feminist view and abolitionist view are combined, for he does not limit his antislavery sentiment to Royal’s octoroon daughters alone, but extends it to women in general.

On the ground of royalty to his father’s friendship with Royal, King determines it his duty to protect Rosa, now an opera singer in Europe, from the pursuit of Fitzgerald, who could, if he willed, capture her at any time and take her back to the States as a slave. He spends all his time in guarding her in secret, leaving his business in the hands of his hired men. He wonders what his dead “prudential mother” would say about his devotion to an opera singer who was—and still is—a marketable slave and who was “the victim of a sham marriage,” but he concludes in the end that, since his mother is now in “a sphere of wider vision,” she would see through the “pure, good soul” of Rosa as he does (246). Child here presents the triple obstacle for a gentleman of the upper class to overcome: to marry an opera singer—a career generally “regarded as little more respectable than prostitution” in nineteenth-century America (Karcher <1> 523; Davis 4); a slave woman placed in the bottom of the social and racial stratum; and a victim of sham marriage like the “fallen” heroine of a seduction novel who is likely to be ostracized from society 4. The interracial marriage between King and Rosa, therefore, is Child’s bold challenge for an equation among races, classes, professions, and females conventionally divided between good maidens and bad women deserted, divorced, or “fallen.” But we have to note here that King’s marriage with Rosa becomes possible only when his mother is dead.

If King illustrates a model spouse, Lila Delano does a model mother. Her adoption of Flora, the younger daughter of her past fiancée, Royal, demonstrates how Northern mothers of the upper and middle classes can partake in the nation’s reconstruction. The widowed Delano, possibly like King’s mother, was a member of “the iceberg” of Boston aristocracy, who would have nothing to do with colored people and hold strong aversion to antislavery agitation. Nevertheless, by adopting Flora as her daughter, she becomes deeply involved in what she had shunned before. William Percival, an active abolitionist, expresses his astonishment, “You, Mrs. Delano!” (155) when he learns her sincere
commitment to a fugitive slave girl. Yet she is not a benevolent white person who gives support one-sidedly to the helpless black. In order to avoid this conventional vision frequently depicted in the antislavery fiction by white (female) authors, Child details the process of how Delano acknowledges her own racism and how she becomes “half an Abolitionist” (261) by correcting her biased views.

Picturing Flora’s future husband, Delano inadvertently dwells upon a worldly idea: “what a splendid marriage her adopted daughter might make, if it were not for that stain upon her birth” (149). She realizes the next moment how “mean and heartless” it was to regard Flora’s African heritage as “stigma.” This correction of her prejudice leads her to think further about her own “splendid marriage” arranged by her father that did not make her happy at all; if she had been strong enough not to give up Royal, then a poor man, she continues to think, all the subsequent complications and miseries could have been prevented. At the end of the chains of thoughts, she comes to determine that she “must try to write a better record on the present” (150).

Likewise Delano’s effort to educate Flora in Boston aristocratic manners is, to some extent, checked by the girl’s natural way of acting. When in a gallery of paintings, for instance, Delano’s sense of “conventional propriety” is disturbed by Flora’s spontaneous shouts of pleasure in public at seeing beautiful pictures and she is a little irritated by the attention they attract, but, at the same time, she understands that reproving the child’s behavior also causes bad influence: “If I am always checking the child, I shall spoil the naturalness which makes her so charming” (151). On another occasion when Delano admonishes Flora for her unladylike behavior to talk with a clerk in front of the house, Flora retorts that the clerk, Franz Bluenthal, is an old friend and that her father was also a poor clerk when Delano met him. Flora’s natural communication with others teaches her new Mamita (mother) unwittingly about democratic manners to transcend the class barriers. Thus Delano admits to herself, “That darling child, with her strange history and unworlly ways, is educating me more than I can educate her” (269). And she endorses the marriage of Flora and Blumenthal by helping him financially to be promoted from a clerk to a business partner.
It is interesting that Child shows the sure transformation—and ostracism as well—of Delano by depicting some gossip exchanged between her old acquaintances. Mrs. Ton remarks that it is quite unlikely for Mrs. Delano, who “used to be the most fastidious of exclusives,” to adopt “nobody knows whom” and to help “that nobody of a clerk” (283). Then Mrs. Style reports that her husband saw Mrs. Delano, her adoptée, escorted by the clerk at an antislavery meeting, adding the following sadistic comment:

“Think of her, with her dove-colored silks and violet gloves, crowded and jostled by Dinah and Sambo! I expect the next thing we shall hear will be that she has given a negro party.” (284)

Phillip Lapsansky illustrates how abolitionist women were attacked in caricatured images. Since in such images abolitionism was always equated with amalgamation, Mrs. Style’s “negro party” must have sexual connotation.

Lily Bell, now a widow, is another aristocratic lady who experienced a “splendid marriage” that resulted in utter disappointment. Like Delano, she has to confront the fact that her child has that “stain” in his blood, though she did not know the truth until Rosa confessed her past deed, the exchange of the babies. Unlike Delano, however, she cannot change her old manners and ideas. She would rather keep what she has obtained than redress it according to the newly discovered truth. She refuses to see her biological son, George, grown among slaves, the pure Anglo-Saxon descendant and rightful heir to the estate of the Bells, and insists that Gerald is her only son because she has “educated him to my own liking, and everybody says he is an elegant young man” (386). Although the African “stain” in Gerald is disgraceful to her, she does not mind it as long as it is kept secret. For her, as Karcher says, “appearances and forms are paramount” (<2> 93).

Yet Lily is not a hopeless cold mother, for Child seems to allow some genuine motherly love in her adherence to the young Gerald: “But whatever you may say, he is my son. I never will give him up. He has slept in my arms. I have sung him to sleep. I taught him all his
little hymns and songs” (362). And she does not recoil either at seeing accidentally George’s mulatto wife, Henriet, and her baby, but is rather curious about them and wonders in the end, “What would my father say?” (422) as King once wondered, at the prospect of his marriage with Rosa, what his dead mother would say. There remains a slight possibility of her accepting the quadroon baby as her granddaughter.

Though it is interesting to the modern reader that Lily’s remarks indicate that maternal love is not innate but is formed by history and circumstances, the author’s emphasis probably lies in the appeal to readers, mostly white Christian women, that they are mothers of all children in a large family of the nation and, therefore, responsible to help any poor child, especially a colored one. A Romance of the Republic is indeed full of motherly figures. Like Delano, Madame Guirlande, a French neighbor of the Royal family, plays the role of mother for the orphaned sisters and, with Signor Papanti, their Italian music teacher, adopts and educates Rosa to be independent by the profession of stage singer, and Rosa, in turn, with King, virtually adopts Henriet whom she educates to become a woman fit to the middle-class standards.

This universal motherhood—and also fatherhood, in this context—suggests another significant factor in this novel, that is, the interrelatedness of the fates of Americans under slavery. If Rosa is a victim of patriarch and slavery, so is Lily, who married Fitzgerald without knowing he kept a mistress. And the switched children, Gerald and George, symbolize the complex entanglement of the slave and the slaveholder, of the black and the white, of the South and the North. Gerald was brought up in the North away from slavery, and yet he shares the proslavery sympathy and racial prejudice of his grandfather, Mr. Bell, who makes a large profit out of the trade with the South. When he is told by Mr. Bell to send back the two fugitives, George and Henriet, who attempted to escape to the North on his ship called Cotton King, Gerald feels only apathy to them and is irritated by the trouble they made.

But the new knowledge of his black ancestry compels him to think about his half brother, George, whose position he “usurped,” to use the term of the narrator of Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson, and whom he cruelly drove back to slavery. This is the moment when the pride of
Gerald as a refined gentleman is crushed, as he says, “I shall not find it easy to endure the double stain of illegitimacy and alliance with the colored race” (357). Yet it is the moment when his eyes begin to open to the side of the fugitives, and injustice of racism. He would have been the fugitive himself and sent back to the South as a slave. Under the American system of slavery, he now understands, the white and the black are replaceable. In meeting George later in the Union army as a soldier during the Civil War, Gerald learns from him what he never learned from his grandfather who insisted only on “the rights of slaveholders” (406); he comes to question if they are really “rights” at all when slaves have to give all the wage they earned to their masters. He finds himself, moreover, much less useful and resourceful than George, an ex-slave. Like Delano, he has to admit that a perfectly “cultured gentleman” (Clifford 280) like himself is taught more than he can teach George who received no formal education. This overturns the proslavery discourse of racial inferiority of the black race. It is also important that they look very similar to each other just like a mirror image, for their resemblance intensifies nonsense of racial distinction between black and white.

In contrast to Gerald who tries at least to “be free to become familiar with my new self” (380), his grandfather Mr. Bell cannot change himself. He is a symbol of bigotry of the Northern aristocracy. The most complicated outcome of the exchanged babies converges in the antimony he encounters. When he had his ship’s captain capture the fugitives, the two abolitionists, Percival and Jackson, tried to persuade him not to send them back to the South on the ground of the spirit of the Declaration of Independence that “every man has a right to personal liberty” (315). Mr. Bell counters their protest with the right to property that the Constitution is supposed to guarantee:

I think Southern gentlemen ought to be protected in their property; and that is sufficient. I stand by the Constitution, sir. I honor the reverend gentleman who said he was ready to send his mother or his brother into slavery, if the laws required it. That’s the proper spirit, sir. You fanatics, with your useless abstractions about human rights, are injuring trade, and endangering the peace of the country.
Mr. Bell’s arguments encapsulate the anti-abolitionist sentiments in the North. And it is a great irony that he is to send his own grandson into slavery as he orders Gerald to return the poor fugitives to their slaveholder.

It is probably the most dexterous device of Child’s in this antislavery romance that George marries a mulatto because, by this marriage, it becomes impossible for Mr. Bell to bequeath his property exclusively to a pure Anglo-Saxon descendant. He has to face the dilemma that his property must go either to Gerald with “negro blood in his veins” or to George “who is a slave with a negro wife” (394). Thus the laws concerning property that he has so stubbornly observed proves to be unable to protect his property, nor to prevent his family from amalgamation. As Karcher hints, Child seems to say that “[integration] and amalgamation are inevitable . . . and the Republic’s black children will eventually inherit their rightful patrimony” (<1> 518).

IV. Towards a Harmonious Republic

Unlike Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s, in which a possible war to come was regarded as God’s crusade against the nation’s wrongs, Child’s romance depicts the Civil War as a patriotic human struggle to redress the injustice done to the colored race. This is why, even during the war, King and Rosa are busily engaged in helping George and Henriet in order to prepare for the postwar reconstruction.

However, the romance gives the reader an impression that it is, after all, King’s financial power that solves the entangled knot caused by the exchange of the babies. He redresses the wrong by offering all the money that George might have received as real son of Fitzgerald and as rightful heir of the Bells. The octoroon heroine seems indeed to recede to the background in the reforming except in educating Henriet into a spouse suitable to the position prepared for George. In contrast with enfeebled Rosa, King’s paternal image is intensified. He serves as a
surrogate father to those fatherless brothers, Gerald and George: not only
does he advise Gerald never to “be a gentleman of leisure . . . the worst
possible calling a man can have” (381), but he adopts George, providing
him with the post of an agent at an European branch of his business, and
preaches him a stereotypical Puritan morality that if he is “industrious,
temperate, and economical,” he may possibly become rich (436). As
Karcher points out, his vision of social mobility sounds anachronistic (<2>
98) and his plan to support George and Henriet is one-sidedly decided
without asking the couple’s view of their future prospects (<1> 525). And
he does seem to begin controlling the novel while Rosa degenerates to
helpless dependency (Karcher <2> 96). Yet the author seems to be aware
of the danger of his patriarchal power, for she refers to the “stiffness”
of his character more than once in the story, which reminds us of Daisy
Miller’s teasing criticism of Winterborne. Debased appellations given to
him are “Yankee” and “Puritan.” As if this was not enough, the author
lets him make a great sacrifice in the war. Of all the male characters who
fought for the Union, King is the only returned soldier whose body was
mutilated: he lost the right leg.

The large amount of money he unsparingly uses for George,
therefore, is merely a symbol to illustrate how the wealthy people should
repay for the liberated who had long supported the nation by their unpaid
labor. This is why both King and Delano, the two representatives of
Boston aristocracy, express a similar feeling about money: “Money really
seems to me of very little value, except as a means of promoting human
happiness” (222).

It is perhaps Joe Bright the blacksmith who speaks for the author
sometimes more directly and explicitly than King or the other major
figures of the fiction. Being a working-class abolitionist, he can speak
frankly what the other characters within the middle-class framework
cannot. This may be one of the best merits Child has attained in this
novel. If she could save it from being an “embarrassingly sentimental”
story like “The Quodroons,” it owes much to the creation of Joe Bright.

Bright probably represents the healthy, robust, and cheerful
character of the self-supported plain American that Child idealizes. The
house in Northampton he offers to Flora’s family for the summer is not
“stylish” but neat and comfortable (319). Being a natural-born music lover, he believes that “there’s music hid away in everything,” but that “we don’t know how to bring it out” (293). He is a man who aims to bring out harmony in everything, finding instinctively a certain rhythm in anything he notices. As his name suggests, his sound buoyancy brightens up people around him, humor being the chief element of his brightness. He explains how he became an abolitionist in a humorous way. When he thought of teaching singing in a warm place in the South and looked over Southern newspapers for advertisements of a singing-master, he found instead a shocking advertisement of the runaway mulatto named Joe who “has light sandy hair, blue eyes, and ruddy complexion” (322). The description of the slave exactly fitted him:

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The episode described above runs parallel with that of the exchanged babies. Bright illuminates in plain English the fact that any white person is in danger of being enslaved; as George exemplifies, slavery is not a problem only of the black race.

Bright’s humor is best displayed when he criticizes his rich neighbor named Stillham, a deacon from the South, whom Bright calls “Deacon Steal’em” because the deacon made a huge fortune by slave trade. He reveals in a very simple way the contradiction of the deacon’s proslavery arguments: while “Steal’em” maintains that “the slaves are perfectly contented and happy,” he at the same time insists that, without those cruel laws to control them, they would revolt and kill their masters; though he affirms that “blacks and whites won’t mix any more than oil and water,” he is afraid that, if the slaves should be freed, they would marry white daughters (324). Bright’s quick-witted speeches also illuminate how easily prejudice is formed by circumstances. When the
deacon’s little granddaughter jeers at him, repeating “You’re a Bob-o-lith-o-nith!” (367), he says, “They begin education early down South. Before the summer is out she’ll be talking about the cuth o’ Ham” (369).

Mrs. Bright also shares her husband’s abolitionist sentiments. When she was a nursery governess in the South, she refused to be served by the slaves because she could manage all of her personal things. Like Ophelia in *Uncle Tom’s*, she is proud of her New England independent way and never minds being regarded as no lady: “It’s my theory that everybody ought to help in doing the work of the world” (339). Mrs. Bright’s independent spirit implies a possible way of how Americans can achieve an equal society without slavery or class distinction. And this spirit is exactly what Child aspires to plant in generations to come to support a more democratic nation.

It is, in fact, not only racism but also class discrimination that Bright condemns. He frankly admits that he prefers Flora’s and Rosa’s families, who do not mind touching his rough hands, to Mr. Bell, who “treats mechanics as if he thought they all had the small-pox, and he was afraid o’ catching it” (336-37). By the incorporation of the Brights into the romance, Child attempts to undermine both race and class barriers to hinder from building an egalitarian Republic. Connecting the patriarchal institution thus not only with race or women’s problem but also with class differentiation, Child expands the “dead subject” to the more universal class struggle that is to become increasingly visible in the postbellum America and, thereby, aims also to undermine the restrictions of the domestic novel that centers on middle-class values.

Child concludes her romance with a tableau of the new family. This tableau represents the new Republic after the Civil War:

Under festoons of the American flag, surmounted by the eagle, stood Eulalia, in ribbons of red, white, and blue, with a circle of stars round her head. One hand upheld the shield of the Union, and in the other the scales of Justice were evenly poised. By her side stood Rosen Blumen, holding in one hand a gilded pole surmounted by a liberty-cap, while her other hand rested protectingly on the head of Tulee’s Benny, who was kneeling and looking upward in
The central figure Eulalia (Rosa’s daughter) upholds the emblem of the Republic and her cousin, Rosen Blumen (Flora’s daughter), holds the symbol of liberty in one hand, and, with the other on the head of Benny, indicating that the slaves are liberated. As Jean Yellin rightly points out that the picture is not completely free of prejudice that Child attacks throughout the text: “this assignment of the role of liberator to the light-skinned girl and the role of grateful, kneeling ex-slave to the dark child” can lead to an endorsement of white supremacy (75). Karcher’s critical analysis of the last scene also exposes the similar racial division between the light-skinned and the darker: “Here, the emancipators are themselves children of emancipated slaves, yet the class relations between the two groups persist. And once again, a hierarchy of color has reasserted itself” (<1> 526). Both Yellin and Karcher agree that there are limits to this harmonious vision of racial configuration and that Child fails in presenting a truly egalitarian society.

It is certainly true that *A Romance of the Republic* is still bound by racial prejudice of the time to the vision of the present reader with the vantage of the distance of some one hundred and fifty years. Dana Nelson, referring to the “improvement” of Henriet, states that the “black characters are embraced only as, and precisely because, they (‘an imitative race’) embrace ‘white’ middle-class values like chastity, manners, and republicanism” (xvi). Thus, Nelson maintains that the romance cannot present a radical vision of racial integration which embraces black culture different from the white one (xvii).

Yet Nelson admits that, with all the defects, *A Romance of the Republic* was radical according to the contemporary standards, comparing it with Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Waiting for the Verdict* published in 1867, the same year as Child’s romance, in which Davis denies miscegenation based on natural repulsion between the black and the white (xvii)—the idea that Child attacks in her novel as proslavery discourse. If we remember that interracial marriage was the last sphere that nineteenth-century American writers would dare to tread in, it can be said that Child was, in a way, too advanced to the contemporary readers. In this way of
thinking, the tableau assumes a different aspect.

The whiteness of Eulalia and Rosen is likely to make us forget that they are socially coded black. The two light-skinned girls do not, however, symbolize the white-washed blacks who can pass as white, but the intermixture of races and cultures which makes the color / ethnic division itself meaningless, as Herman Melville’s contemplation on “whiteness” in *Moby-Dick* suggests. From the beginning of the story, Child invites us to a multiracial and polyglot world of the Royal family in New Orleans. Rosa and Flora inherit, besides Anglo-Saxon American legacy of their father, Spanish one from their grandfather, Señor Gonzalez, and the African and French heritage that comes from their grandmother born in the French West Indies and their mother educated in France. In addition, the two girls, though living in a small world, befriend the black servant, Tulee, always with her head covered with colorful turban, an Italian music teacher, Signor Papanti, a French neighbor, Madame Guirlande, and Blumenthal, a German clerk at Royal’s office. This intermixture of diverse ethnicities brings about the multi-lingual and multi-cultural family. Their daily conversation intermingles with phrases, names, and songs of manifold languages and accents. The parrot Guirlande keeps is a comic creature that mirrors and amplifies this polyglotism, while it plays an important role of reuniting the separated sisters in the fiction.

The new generation, Rosa’s daughter (Eulalia) and Flora’s children (Rozen/Rosa, Alfred, Lila) brought up in New England, merge the Northern and Southern cultures, and thus advance the integration of races and cultures of their parents. The new Republic Child presents here in the portrait of a new family may suggest a melting-pot-like utopian harmony, failing in preserving clear characteristics of each culture in the integrated, and yet, unlike *Hobomok* which annihilates almost any trace of the Indian heritage in the child of Mary Conant, the author is at least conscious, in her last romance, of retaining each component of the integrated races and cultures. Eulalia evokes her grandmother with the same name who was a mulatto slave, and Rosen / Rosa, named after her aunt Rosa, retains her dark brown hair and brown eyes. In this context, the tableau proves not to be so simple as it first appears. As Stephanie Smith remarks, if we
read Eulalia as a “white” beauty rather than as confused figuration for “whiteness,” we are to overlook her “African-American” heritage that her name implies (68).

And it is significant, too, that Child ends the grand finale with the singing conducted by Joe Bright, now promoted to a captain, leading the black members. Whereas there is again a racial hierarchy—the white leads the black, Bright’s role here centers on bringing out harmony in the new Republic, as he invites “[all] the family, of all ages and colors” to the singing of “The Star-spangled Banner” (441). Thus Child’s romance of America consummates.

V. A Belated Work of National Literature

A reviewer of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* highly evaluates *A Romance of the Republic*, calling it “the second great novel based upon slavery,” Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* the first, and applauds her achievement as follows: “What Hawthorn was unable to find, Mrs. Child has found in American life, viz.: the material for a thrilling and powerful romance” (qtd. in Karcher <1> 531). The critic of the antislavery newspaper implies that slavery is the real material for American romance.

Abolitionist writers seem to share this idea. Frederick Douglass, for instance, noted in 1855, when he published his second autobiography, that the present would be remembered by generations to come as “the age of anti-slavery literature” (361). And in 1879, Wendell Phillips underscored the importance of biographies of ex-slaves, referring to the remark by Frederika Bremer, a Swedish novelist with whom Child was acquainted, “the fate of the negro is the romance of your history” (qtd. in Mills 141). Naming her last novel, “A Romance of the Republic,” Child responded to this powerful conviction about the “authentic” American literature (Mills 141).

Child defends and glorifies, in a way, her attempt of writing a national romance based on slavery through the words of various characters in the fiction. When the history of the Royal family was first disclosed, Rosa was shocked by the fact that their grandfather sold his
own daughter, while Guirlande made a comment, “The world is full of strange things, my child, —stranger than anything you ever read in story-books” (53). Percival the abolitionist expresses a similar feeling to Delano’s confidential confession about Royal’s white daughters, one imprisoned in a slaveholder’s cottage in Georgia, the other rescued and adopted by her: “I have long been aware that the most romantic stories in the country have grown out of the institution of slavery; but this seems stranger than fiction” (157). Finally, Joe Bright articulates his astonishment at the dramatic reunion of the sisters: “How romantic that you should come here to Joe Bright’s to find your sister, that you thought was dead” (337). And, as if to endorse the author’s writing itself, he assures that he would have written a story of Rosa and Flora if he knew the details of their history. Writing a romantic story of slaves, Child also indicates that she contributes to constructing truly American literature; and she is right in this because a story of slaves is a story of struggle for freedom out of bondage and, therefore, a story of everyone in America as most antislavery writers believed.

If we remember that “the one common denominator” of those writers F. O. Matthiessen canonized in his American Renaissance was “their devotion to the possibilities of democracy” (ix), we can clearly see that Child suits the very principle this distinguished critic prescribes. A Romance of the Republic published soon after the Civil War, a belated antislavery novel, then, is also a belated work that aimed to partake in the creation of national literature of America in the 1850s as the title eloquently tells. And yet, if we reflect that one of the representative works of modern American literature, Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), followed this tradition of antislavery fiction, and that Pudd’nhead Wilson (1894) by the same major writer reproduced the key literary device of Child’s romance, A Romance of the Republic can be regarded as the very medium that bound the antebellum and postbellum American literature.

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Notes

1 Although Child told Fields that she planned to write a novel, she did not let him know what kind of novel it would be (Clifford 278).

2 We can surmise that both Child and her publisher thought that the book would sell from the fact that she chose “ten percent share of the royalties” instead of $1,000 he offered at first for the novel and that he accepted her condition (Clifford 279). And the bitter disappointment at the cold response from her New England friends paradoxically shows her pride that she had written a very good novel, for she confided in her letter to her friend, Louisa Loring, “When I had completed the book, I felt as if I could write another and a better novel, and was full of earnestness to set about it; but the apathy of my friends took all the life out of me, and has made me feel as if I never wanted to put pen to paper again” (Karcher <1> 530).

3 As for the discussion concerning the fate of native Americans, see Maddox (15-49).

4 According to Karcher, Child was sympathetic for those “fallen” women called prostitutes and equated herself with them as sisters (<1> 320-55).

5 It is well known that Child was ostracized by the Boston aristocratic circle when she published her Appeal (Karcher <1> 192).

6 Lapsansky, for example, introduces the following pictures which show how antislavery women are sexually attracted by black men (225-29):

Practical Amalgamation

Abolition Hall
Johnny Q. Introducing the Haytien Ambassadore to the Ladies of Lynn

The narrator actually calls Tom (the false son of Mr. Driscoll) the “usurper” (73).

Works Cited