THE MASTHEADS x **The Berkshire Eagle**

artwork by Matthew Kramer

FOLD 6

the place

Sunday, July 22, 2018

Sedgwick and Kemble

On July 3rd, 2018, Professor Meredith McGill of Rutgers University delivered the first Mastheads "Tuesdays on the Terrace" lecture at the Berkshire Athenaeum. She spoke about the Berkshires connection of Stockbridge novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick and British writer, actress, and abolitionist Fanny Kemble. McGill discussed how Kemble and Sedgwick challenged gender norms of the early nineteenth century in their lives and works, and provided an interpretation of Sedgwick's well-known 1826 short story "Cacoethes Scribendi." She ended by asking what difference it would make if we took the friendship between Sedgwick and Kemble rather than the famous meeting between Melville and Hawthorne as the starting point for a literary history of the Berkshires.

McGill is Associate Professor of English at Rutgers University. She is the author of American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1837-1853 (2003) a study of nineteenth-century American resistance to tight control over intellectual property. She has edited two collections of essays: Taking Liberties with the Author (2013), and The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange (2008). She is currently completing a study of poetry and mass-culture in the antebellum U.S.

I want to begin by thanking you all for coming out on this sweltering evening. I also want to thank everyone involved with the Mastheads project—Tessa Kelly, Chris Parkinson, Sarah Trudgeon, and in particular my colleague Jeffrey Lawrence—for the invitation to speak in this series, and for the inspired suggestion that I speak about both Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Fanny Kemble, two remarkable nineteenth-century women I wouldn't have put side by side in but for this invitation. You may know them both as Berkshire writers—they were both Lenox residents and intimate friends with one another (the Sedgwick family's presence is what drew Kemble to purchase property in Lenox at a particularly turbulent point in her life and career). But literary scholars are inclined to trace literary history according to national traditions, and most Americanists think of Fanny Kemble as one in the long series of eminent British visitors who wrote exposés of American culture and manners after returning to England (Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens).

In some respects, Sedgwick and Kemble couldn't be more different from one another. In 1833 when the two of them met for the first time, Sedgwick was 44, a proper Unitarian spinster from an elite Stockbridge family that had made its mark in politics, religion and the law; Kemble was 22, a flamboyant actress from a famous British theatrical family currently touring the US to great acclaim. Sedgwick was already well known as the author of novels, moral tales, and advice books for women and children, but she maintained a careful distance from her readers, publishing her books anonymously in part to preserve her status as a genteel writer. Kemble on the other hand lived her life in the public eye from her theatrical debut at Covent Garden (as Juliet) at age 20 through a scandal-plagued marriage, messy divorce, and lucrative career as a popular platform reader of the works of Shakespeare. But despite their many differences, Sedgwick and Kemble were hugely important to one another. Sedgwick describes her first encounter with Kemble as a kind of dizzying infatuation: she wrote to one friend "I owe her some delightful hours, when I have felt something approaching to the enraptured feeling of youth" (Dewey, 231) and to another, even more fervently, "I remember little of the few days past but those bright points that Fanny K. like a sun has illuminated and made so dazzling as to cast all others into shadow. . . there is infinite zest in her society. I may be disappointed in her, but if it is illusion, I hope it will last" (Kelly, 133). Kemble is less effusive in her fond descriptions of Sedgwick, but she referred to her as "my first American friend" and from the moment she met her, relied on her sympathy and comparative stability. Indeed, the entire Sedgwick family was an anchor for the actress as she extricated herself from her difficult marriage; Catherine's brothers acted as her lawyers in her notorious divorce case while Catherine and her sister-in-law Elizabeth hosted Fanny and her children for long country visits at numerous difficult junctures.

What did they see in one another? I want to suggest this evening that both women seemed to recognize in the other something they craved for themselves—a sense of personal and ethical autonomy—something that was surprisingly difficult for nineteenth-century women to claim for themselves under the system of "coverture," the legal and social doctrine whereby a woman's rights and obligations were subsumed or "covered" first by her father and then by her husband. Sedgwick (like Emily Dickinson after her) never married, despite a number of attractive proposals. Her biographers note that Sedgwick's resolve not to marry was undoubtedly influenced by her mother's unhappy marriage, one that included ten pregnancies and the sole care of seven surviving children during the many months in which her husband, Congressman, Senator, and Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice Theodore Sedgwick, was in Washington DC or Boston on business. Sedgwick also had plenty of time to observe the difficult marriages of her two older sisters Eliza and Frances, the first overburdened with what Sedgwick described as "the painful drudgery of bearing and nurturing twelve children" (Kelly, 23) and the second subject to verbal and physical abuse that the family was powerless to curtail.

Catherine's childhood reaction to her eldest sister Eliza's marriage indicates the fundamental affront to the possibility of self-determination that the institution of marriage came to represent for her. As she records in her memoir, during the ceremony it suddenly dawned on seven-year-old Catherine that Eliza's marriage would break up the family unit as she had known it; she became inconsolable and had to be removed from the room. Sedgwick writes that the event left her with the impression that "a wedding was rather a sundering than a forming of ties." When Eliza's new husband tried to reassure the sobbing girl by telling her "your sister may stay with you this summer," Catherine responded with horror: 'May! How my whole being revolted at the word. He had the power to bind or loose my sister!" (Kelly, 18; 84).

I want to spend most of my time this evening exploring how Sedgwick's early fiction gives shape to what she represents in her journal as an instinctive resistance to patriarchal power. Fanny Kemble will act out this resistance in public, fighting to separate herself from her manipulative, controlling husband even as she struggled to articulate and act on her moral opposition to slavery (as the comic strip in the Mastheads insert in the Berkshire Eagle brilliantly suggests, the two get bound up with one another). Catherine Sedgwick and her extended family offered vital support to Kemble in her very public struggle, but Sedgwick's own hard-won attempt to resist gender norms and to define a sphere in which women might act on their own according to their conscience can be harder for us to see. I will suggest that in Sedgwick's writing, what can look to us like dutiful submission is often a powerful claim to self-determination. The large and still resonant question these women's lives and writing raise for me has to do with the sheer courage it takes to dissent from prevailing gender norms. How might we, like Sedgwick and Kemble, summon the imagination to conjure other worlds, worlds with more freedom than the one we currently inhabit? How might we follow through on these radical acts of imagination?.

…

Literary critics tend to think that it is Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne who put the Berkshires on the literary map, tracing the origins of the "American Renaissance" to an outing in August 1850 when a group of literati climbed Monument Mountain and, when a rainstorm loomed, took refuge, Dido-and-Anaeus like, under an outcropping, sealing their friendship by describing their work-in-progress to one another. But Sedgwick was here before either of them: both literally, in that this famous hike was part of a larger celebration of Sedgwick and fellow Berkshires author William Cullen Bryant; but also figuratively, in that all kinds of authors were drawn to the spot by the literary scene that Sedgwick helped found and nurture. The "bromance" between Hawthorne and Melville—intense and compelling as it was—has long been used by critics to cement an all-male lineage for American fiction, to take these authors out of the company of the women who were their predecessors, contemporaries, and enduring influences. What would happen if we put the friendship between Sedgwick and Kemble at the heart of a canon of American works? It wouldn't exclude these men, but rather would knit a range of authors together through their social, familial, and professional connections: Melville's sister, after all, went to the school run out of Sedgwick's brother's house, a school at which Sedgwick herself did a lot of the teaching; Hawthorne's wife Sophia read Sedgwick's novels as they came off the press and urged the move to Lenox partly out of friendship; Fanny Kemble famously was in the habit of swooping by the Hawthorne house on her horse to take his son Julian on rides through the woods. Writing a history of American fiction that radiated out from networks of women would give us something different than a sequence of disaffected geniuses who hovered above the times, commenting on them. It would return us to the ordinary and familiar struggle of men and women working with and against social conventions, including the constraints of marriage, the struggle to articulate in word and action an ethical relation to an uncertain present and future. Now that's a (scholarly) world I'd like to inhabit.

W.E.B. DuBois and Political Thought in the Shadow of Frederick Douglass

On July 10th, 2018, Professor Neil Roberts of Williams College gave the second lecture in The Mastheads "Tuesday on the Terrace" series at the Berkshire Athenaeum. The lecture, which was co-sponsored by the NAACP, was titled "W.E.B. Du Bois and Political Thought in the Shadow of Frederick Douglass." In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Great Barrington native W.E.B. Du Bois and the 200th anniversary of abolitionist writer and orator Frederick Douglass, Roberts analyzed the two authors' respective ideas about freedom, democracy, and race. He concluded by addressing the legacy of their writing and activism in the twenty-first century.

Roberts is Associate Professor of Africana studies, political theory, and the philosophy of religion at Williams College. He is the author of the award-winning Freedom as Marronage, the collaborative work Journeys in Caribbean Thought, and A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass.

It really is an honor to speak here today as part of this wonderful initiative, the Mastheads, which—as I understand it—is celebrating the heritage of scholars and also activists in Berkshire County. Let's just put the elephant in the room, which is Du Bois, whose hometown is not far away in Great Barrington. This is someone who should be honored. This is someone who schools and parks should be named after. This is someone who should be studied. Just to be very clear—and I tell this to my students—I'm not interested in deification or proselytizing. There are certain individuals, even if we disagree with them, who are generative. That is the point. They spark our social and political imagination even in moments of contestation. And I would argue that Du Bois, like Douglass, and other writers that the Mastheads project is focusing on, is one such figure. So hopefully for those who live in Great Barrington or Berkshire County who are having this ongoing debate, I think it might be helpful to frame it in those terms if it hasn't already been already.

2018 marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Great Barrington polymath W.E.B. Du Bois. It is also the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Douglass. But it's not just simply that there are these two anniversaries. I want to put forth today that in order to understand Du Bois's life and thought, we actually have to understand the legacy of Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century—he really casts a shadow well into the twentieth century and arguably, for those of you who have read his fourth of July oration, it's really almost as if he's talking to us today…

What was the date I said I wanted you to remember? 1895. 1895 has the distinction of being the year when three important things happened. First, 1895 was the date that Frederick Douglass died in Washington D.C. 1895 was also the year that Du Bois finished his doctoral dissertation in the history department at Harvard University on the suppression of the African slave trade. And the third significant thing was the ascendancy of Booker T. Washington…In the wake of Douglass's death, Du Bois and Washington both were vying to be the heir to Douglass. Booker T. Washington and Du Bois had philosophical differences about how in their view the ex-slave population could be integrated within society. Du Bois believed that forms of educational training—secondary and also higher degrees of training—were essential. Booker T. Washington was an advocate for vocational training, technical knowledge, and in 1895 he gave a speech that sometimes is called the Atlanta address and sometimes is called the Atlanta Compromise. Washington not only spoke about what the future of the so-called Negro or black would be in America. But also according to those like Du Bois who saw the speech as a conciliatory measure, it was a problem that Washington did not critique the history of slavery or white supremacy. This led to a feud that would continue for many years. Another thing that has is less well mined is that Du Bois had hoped to write the first biography of Frederick Douglass. This was his major project after he published The Souls of Black Folk in 1903. The editor for the press had the contract on the way. And then Du Bois gets contacted by the editor who says, Oh, well, Willie (that was what he went by then), I know I promised you that you could write that biography, but I sent a message to Booker T. Washington early and I didn't hear back from him, so that's why I wrote to you. And Booker T. when he found out that Du Bois was interested in writing the Douglass biography, ended up saying, I would love to do it. And so Booker T. actually has the distinction of having that first major biography of Douglass, though we now know that Booker T. used a ghostwriter. But part of this was about the competition for Douglass's legacy…

Du Bois was one of the founders of the Niagara Movement—this was the movement founded on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls right before the birth of the NAACP. Before this Du Bois was primarily an academic…But at a certain moment Du Bois was not simply interested in being an academic; he was interested in trying to influence policy. And though he never became a politician on the level of Douglass, he was interested in social movements—one of which was the Niagara Movement and one of which was the NAACP. Du Bois resigned from his post at Atlantic University and became the head of The Crisis, which was and still is the flagship magazine of the NAACP. This is mainly because he saw the power of something he learned from Douglass: not just the significance of magazines and newspapers as forms of writing, but also the ways in which certain issues capture popular audiences, and how popular audiences actually address these issues…

In The Gift of Black Folk, a text of 1924 that I would urge all of you to please read—it's one of the least discussed texts of Du Bois—Du Bois tries to think through the gifts that blacks are giving to the world. Not only in terms of the aesthetic dimension but also in terms of ideas—talking about politics in a world in which many people think that things could not be otherwise. How can that actually be? In some sense what he's asking is, is the condition black people are facing a curse or a gift. And in many regards Du Bois thought that it was a gift. At the end of his life—I gather that one of the big reasons in Great Barrington for the resistance to honoring Du Bois is his membership in the Communist Party USA, his renouncing of his citizenship and moving to Ghana. You know when Du Bois passes away, he passes away the night before the March on Washington in 1963. So Du Bois lives this long life into his mid nineties, someone who like Douglass spent so much of his time not only thinking about negative freedom—the world he didn't want to live in—but the world that we should forge. And at a certain point he says, I've tried everything, I've written books, I've written poetry, I've edited a magazine, I've done everything I can, and he says, you know what, maybe my services are to be utilized elsewhere. So he dies in Ghana right before the March on Washington. And my last point is that I would argue that what we now see with the Black Lives Matter movement—this movement of really young people—is in many regards a new Niagara movement. It is another movement that has cross-racial solidarity, a movement of young people who are trying to think about the state of US society, asking not only about society as it is but also the society that we want it to become…

JULY 22 6am: Fold 6 in *The Berkshire Eagle*	**JULY 23**	**JULY 24** 6pm: Community Conversation: Jaswinder Bolina at the Berkshire Athenaeum *FREE* co-sponsored with Mass Humanities	**JULY 25**	**JULY 26**	**JULY 27**	**JULY 28** 1pm: *Masheads Poetry Map* at the NAACP Gather-In Festival, Durant Park, 30 John Street in Pittsfield *FREE*
JULY 29	**JULY 30**	**JULY 31** 6pm: Closing Reading by the 2018 Mastheads writers-in-residence at Arrowhead, 780 Holmes Road in Pittsfield *FREE*	**AUGUST 1**	**AUGUST 2**	**AUGUST 3**	**AUGUST 4**
AUGUST 5	**AUGUST 6**	**AUGUST 7**	**AUGUST 8**	**AUGUST 9**	**AUGUST 10**	**AUGUST 11** 9am: The Mastheads studios open to the public at Hancock Shaker Village, 1843 West Housatonic Street in Pittsfield *FREE WITH ADMISSION*
AUGUST 12 6am: Fold 7 in *The Berkshire Eagle*	**AUGUST 13**	**AUGUST 14**	**AUGUST 15**	**AUGUST 16**	**AUGUST 17**	**AUGUST 18**

fireside

The following three poems were written by Pittsfield High School students in spring 2018 as part of our Fireside poetry-in-schools program, taught by Sarah Trudgeon, Mastheads Director of Education. The Mastheads runs Fireside in collaboration with the Superintendent's Office of the Pittsfield Public Schools.

Fireside is named after the Fireside Poets, a group of nineteenth-century poets whose work was read around the hearth, both at home and in school. The Fireside Poets include Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, both writers with close ties to Pittsfield, among others. To learn more, visit www.themastheads.org.

Ode to Conte

I wasn't the only friend with just a mom. What are
dad's anyways? When Bernie Mac died, I cried. I

used to pretend that he was my dad when I would
watch The Bernie Mac Show after school. I wasn't

embarrassed to go into school with the same LL Bean
backpack from first grade to fifth, everyone did that-

we were all poor at Conte. We were all poor at Conte
only we didn't know it. It was normal to us. Once, we

had a lockdown cuz there was a sex offender living in
the woods behind our school. We had lockdowns a lot

so it was normal to us. I used to try to talk ghetto to fit in
with my friends. Ghetto started to feel right coming outta

my mouth. We knew proper english cuz we were all smart
kids but none of us used it cuz that slang was what was

normal to us. I was the only brown kid in the sea of black
and brown faces that wore Converse—well, until second

grade when I got my first pair of Air Force Ones. My mom
was white and my shoes were fresh. And white and green

and pink. My sister's dad told me to stuff newspaper in them
at night so they wouldn't crease. Walking funny meant you

got a new pair of shoes so it was normal to us. When we did
DARE every kid had a story to share about the time they saw

their uncle smoking or neighbor passed out drunk. We laughed
at DARE cuz that stuff was normal to us. I loved walking by

the small rooms with big glass windows. ISS, one bad kid per
room. When we went to school store we would all watch them

pace in the room like lions in a zoo. I always wondered why
none of them ever punched the glass to escape. Violence

was normal to us. My best friend was a Muslim from Nigeria.
Me and Abdul never ate meat. Everyone had free lunch and

in third grade only one kid voted for McCain over Obama,
our first black superhero. We all understood each other. We

never had to explain "I'm not adopted, my dad's black" or
"you don't have to be married to have a kid" or even "we

have different dads but she's still my sister" so when we
went our separate ways for middle school being pitied

wasn't normal to us.

-Kamea Quett

[untitled]

I am Isabella, Aitken
I live next to the big church with the loud bells,
St. Charles they call him
I smell the golden fingers from Tahiti Takeout
My backyard is lit up like Fenway Park,
There is a ballgame going on at Wahconah Park
I hear the Housey flowing
Large Pine trees blowing in the breeze
Now its time for my movies
In this yellow old colonial
The big stump is getting ready to be removed for the new pool
I will watch out the window down the wierd hallway for the tree men to arrive
Lenox Ave has potential she needs some TLC
Ponterril is where I caught my first buzz
Oh here comes the Pilgrim Donkey right on time, hello Kevin
Freddy Kruger you are not welcome here
Or your burned face
Katie doesn't like you either even though she has a scar too
Don't worry Vanessa is here she will save me
I will stand guard on the court
While dad gets the Yukon XL
I wear shorts because I peed my pants
The big oak tree fell across the street
Almost brought old 121 to her knees
Her power was out
Gave me time to practice my times tables with my fingers
And as a reward for those digits I covered them in glue
And then picked it off once the power came back on

-Isabella Aitken

Ode to Public Transportation

It's like stepping off an airplane, people watching
And not quite being comfortable enough to ask for directions
But smile back at them anyway
The new faces versus the familiar ones becomes a trend
that is tallied each time we try to get from point A to B
It's a cultural thing ya know?
You won't ever see a pale skinned women clutching
a Prada bag, or pale skinned children
playing games on their *own* phone
But you'll catch pale skinned children playing
With brown skinned children, and
black skinned children too
Like the circus with all these characters
that wouldn't fit in anywhere else
Mr.Frank lets you ride even if you don't have exact change
because he knows you're a single parent putting
Two kids through college-the first in the family
People turn up their head phones
Discreetly
when you tell that same story about how the youngest made high honors
while fighting the bad case of Mono that you think he got
From the water fountains
And people pause their headphones
Discreetly
to listen how La'Quel was actually the father of Shithead's newborn
Who's cute as a mouse
Yet somehow the spawn of a mischievous
Tom cat that lurks through the ghettos, preying on innocent girls
that struggle with their self worth
Hungry bellies bang on tin can drums
Some spinning on TV boxes
Others spitting beats that reflect the struggle
We listen as we ride, we listen as we run through
The big interview, we listen as we hold hands with the
Strangers singing Kumbaya
Because there is that mutual respect
That understanding of understanding we
All understand

-Olivia Nda

thank you thank you thank you thank you

The following people, foundations, businesses, and institutions have supported The Mastheads this season, allowing us to deliver our second year of public programming in 2018.

OUR BACKBONE:

THE FEIGENBAUM FOUNDATION
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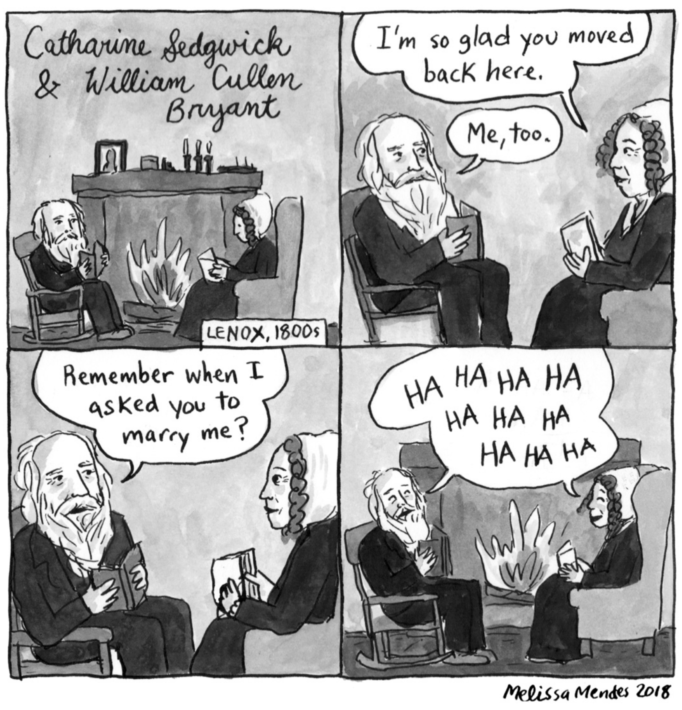
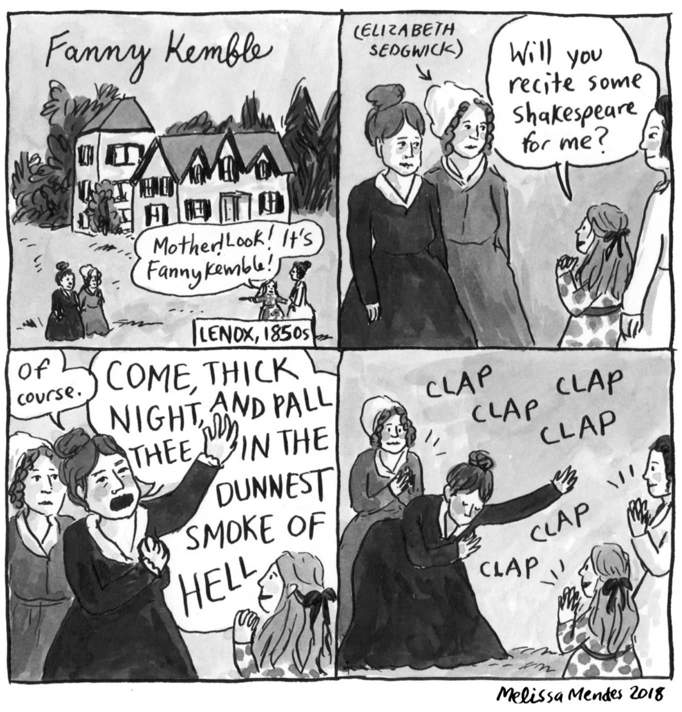
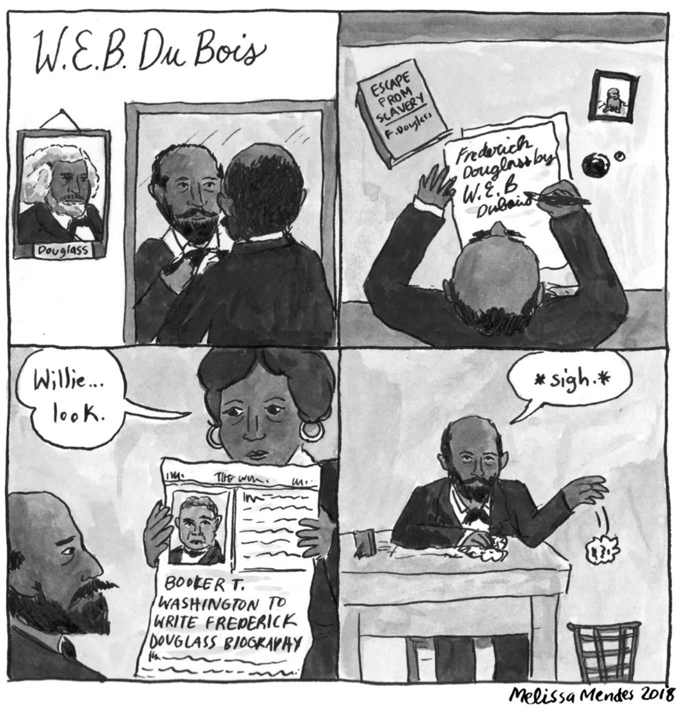

Catharine Sedgwick & William Cullen Bryant
LENOX, 1800s
I'm so glad you moved back here.
Me, too.
Remember when I asked you to marry me?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
Melissa Mendes 2018


Fanny Kemble
Mother! Look! It's Fanny Kemble!
LENOX, 1850s
(ELIZABETH SEDGWICK)
Will you recite some Shakespeare for me?
Of course.
COME, THICK NIGHT, AND PALL THEE IN THE DUNNEST SMOKE OF HELL
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
Melissa Mendes 2018


W.E.B. Du Bois
Douglass
ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY F. Douglass
Frederick Douglass by W.E.B. DuBois
Willie... look.
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON TO WRITE FREDERICK DOUGLASS BIOGRAPHY
sigh.
Melissa Mendes 2018

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Contact us!
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