ABSTRACT

Sympathy is the crucial idea in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century sentimental fiction to absorb the reader's attention and construct a sense of identification between the reader and the character, so that the author can have the message conveyed. Nevertheless, in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*, Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, sympathy functions more than as a bridge between the reader and the character and sympathy is employed to approach female subjectivity and racial difference. Sympathy provides a public stage, a venue for women to assert their self, which is traditionally designated as selfless, when they speak up for the sufferings of racial others. On the other hand, calling to alleviate the violence of "manifest destiny" in removing the Indians from their land, sympathy in both Child's and Sedgwick's stories about the Indian question is revealed to be ambivalent. While Stowe appeals to the reader's sympathy and resorts to "right feeling" in advocating abolition, racial politics is underlined in Stowe's sympathetic representations of slaves. Jacobs's slave narrative is a voice by the subaltern, talking back to white, sympathetic women, and Jacobs's narrative represents the suffering other that refuses to be seen, to be present in the scene of sufferings, and in this way Jacobs's narrative inscribes the unspeakable.

Further, as one sort of affect, sympathy is not politically neutral, and what is entailed in the deployment of sympathy demands more exploration. For instance, in Child's *Hobomok*, though sympathy aims to form a sense of affinity between the white heroine and the Indian Hobomok, sympathy eventually consolidates American

national identity as white and English and thus eradicates the Indian otherness from the genealogy of Americanness. In Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, between different races, speaking different languages, sympathy would be impossible without translation; nevertheless, how translation can avoid eliminating cultural heterogeneity is a question to ask. Indeed, sympathy is a way of translation, as the sympathizer tries to imagine the sufferings of the other by placing him/herself in the position of the other, or in a sense by translating the other's pain into the sympathizer's own language. In Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, sympathy depends so much on the spectacle of the other's body in pain, to the extent that sympathy arouses the voyeuristic pleasure. In Jacobs's *Incidents*, the questions arise as to whether the suffering other can resist the spectacle, keep silent and hold claim to privacy.