

FREDERICK DOUGLASS CREATES TENSION IN *LIFE AND TIMES*

by

SEAN JOSEPH McAULEY

(Under the Direction of R. Baxter Miller)

ABSTRACT

In his autobiography *Life and Times*, Frederick Douglass promotes logic, responsibility and moral accountability. By exonerating his former owners, however, Douglass contradicts these foundations, thereby creating an unresolved philosophical conflict between free-will and determinism. The conflict reveals an overarching struggle between Douglass's consciously constructed rational identity and the unconscious emotional one. The source of the struggle is located in his desire for family. Finally, the combination of the two identities elevates the human quality of the text, thereby allowing Douglass to succeed in his mission to inspire his people.

INDEX WORDS: Frederick Douglass, Life and Times, Logic, Responsibility, Morality, Family, Auld, Autobiography, Conflict, Binaries, Emotion, Reason, Identity, Conscious, Unconscious, Construction, Free-will, Determinism

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SEAN JOSEPH McAULEY

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SEAN JOSEPH McAULEY

Major Professor: R. Baxter Miller

Committee: Kristin Boudreau
Jonathan Evans

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Frederick Douglass's skills as an orator have resulted in a heavy focus on his rhetorical strategies. Many scholars identify imitation as a technique common to his rhetoric. The related concepts of appropriation and assimilation are applicable to my study here. Bacon addresses the former, asserting, "the oppressed can gain rhetorical power by appropriating the discourse of the oppressor" (271). Rhetorical power then leads to political power and ultimately freedom. Similarly, Wilson discusses the quality of social imitation that leads to assimilation. He notes that Douglass promotes imitation as a tool for black success in America (102). I disagree, however, that Douglass promotes imitation per se. In the quotation Wilson emphasizes, Douglass declares that the success of black individuals lies in their integration into the American government, body politic, and society in order that they might achieve an interracial commonality of vision (102). Imitation suggests an abandonment of one's identity. Douglass asks only that the black individual claim the rights of the American Republic. To do so is not to abandon African-American culture, nor is it to join racist white culture. Hence, I agree with Bacon that Douglass appropriates rather than imitates such culture.

Walter criticizes Douglass's *Heroic Slave* for supporting "the primacy of Eurocentric historical and cultural perspectives [and] the belief in America's glorious origins" (237). Moreover, she criticizes his downplaying of the "importance of racial or ethnic chauvinism as a key component of nationalism" (237). One might make the same argument against *Life and Times*. Douglass promotes nationalism and downplays race; however, he does so because he bases his nationalism in a future, integrated America. Nationalism may lend itself to racism or ethnocentrism, but it does not necessarily serve either role. At worst, Douglass is guilty of discerning the advantages of Republicanism and of wresting it from the hands of its racist

initiators. Jones argues against Walter's perspective, claiming that the slave can indeed wield the master's tools successfully. Douglass's mission in *The Heroic Slave*, according to him, is to "portray African-American slaves as genuine heirs to that tradition of liberty, to claim what he believed to be every American's legacy despite the color of his skin" (86). Douglass promotes the idea in *Life and Times*. As an example to other African-Americans, he appropriates the literary, political, and cultural skills he sees.

Jones views Douglass's *Heroic Slave* as an appropriation of the literary properties of Southern romance. The genre, briefly defined, promotes the myth of the vital and moral slaveholder of "aristocratic blood [who] loyally upholds the white upper class's notions of social hierarchy, chivalry, and slavery" (80). Jones argues against the idea that Douglass reinforces the plantation ideal during his appropriation of the genre.

Other scholars of early African-American narrative identify the quest for literacy as a property of African American autobiography (Grandt 4). The general academic consensus is that Douglass's final version moves beyond being only an autobiographical quest. Though most scholars dismiss *Life and Times* (1892) in favor of the rhetorical performances of *Narrative* (1845) and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Grandt, who emphasizes the historicity of the autobiographer's final effort, criticizes the scholarly tendency to overshadow history. In *Life and Times*, Douglass seeks to create a textual identity that will "(re)connect with a realm *outside* of language" (Grandt 4). Grandt focuses on the question of the authentic blackness of Douglass's text. *Life and Times*, however, locates an authentic self outside the text. The autobiographer's mission, therefore, is to establish blackness through an engagement with history (Grandt 4). This is not to suggest that Douglass questions his own cultural membership in African-American

community. Douglass presumes himself to be someone who can authenticate historicity. He writes,

To those who have suffered in slavery I can say, I, too, have suffered. To those who have taken some risks and encountered hardships in the flight from bondage I can say, I, too, have endured and risked. To those who have battled for liberty, brotherhood, and citizenship I can say, I, too, have battled. And to those who have lived to enjoy the fruits of victory I can say, I, too, live and rejoice (479).

Douglass answers the challenge to his blackness. His sufferings under slavery testify to his membership within the African-American circle. He is therefore qualified to lead his people out of their bondage into their inheritance of American citizenship. The brotherhood of which he speaks is interracial. Giles states, “Douglass began to deploy a transnational perspective in order to turn nationalism against itself, to demystify national identity as a reified idea” (783). Douglass means to destroy the reified nationalism of a racist America order to reconstitute it as his own American ideal. Only then will African Americans be able to delight in the fruits of the American Republic. DeLombard claims that Douglass “seeks to exchange the embodied subjectivity of the slave for the universal [or disembodied] subjectivity of the (white) freeman.” She asserts that he abandons the silent witnessing of the South for the vocal testimony of the North (246). Sometimes the autobiographer would simply transcend it all. But his path to wisdom certainly would not lead through the critic’s implied preference for self-denial in the guise of racial transcendence.

Rather, Douglass combines visual and verbal senses to create a truly African-American identity. To him, the new American citizen is a self-voicing black. In *Life and Times*, Douglass creates an identity of rationality and self-emancipation in order to inspire his people to success

(479). Though his historical identity means a communal legacy, his personal identity represents an accomplished literacy. Eventually his textual identity conflicts with his historical one, but the process only highlights the personal challenge to make his text humanly whole

Giles acknowledges that the “ideological force of [*Narrative*]...derives from the way it brilliantly brings together different conceptual categories---transcendentalism and African-American politics, sensationalism and didacticism, power and obscenity” (786). Likewise, Henkel offers the insight that the autobiographer represents meaning as binaries (89). Reality, in other words, exists somewhere between the two poles. One may explore such implications more fully. It is ultimately the battle between emotion and reason that signifies the humanity of *Life and Times*. The apostle Paul defines the struggle of the human soul as the ability to reason out the correct path only to have the passions subsequently redirect the spirit toward the opposite direction (Ro 7:15-24). Hence, the self pushes the autobiographer one way, but the environment pushes him another. In a final meeting with Thomas Auld, Douglass subverts the text of personal responsibility while promoting a conflicting text of determinism (441). The autobiographer’s unconscious identity of irrational emotion surfaces to join the consciously rational construction, through which Douglass would lead Americans to freedom. He creates a personal connection with his readers across the centuries.

ARGUMENT

The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself is a work dedicated to logical reasoning as well as personal and collective responsibility. Douglass argues against the practice and spirit of slavery in particular and racism in general. He declares the existence of an ultimate government of God to which individuals as well as nations are held responsible. The last of his three autobiographies summons Americans to recognize slavery as an immense evil. Yet, the work blames slaveholders implicitly for their individual crimes. By his exoneration of the slaveholders Sophia and Thomas Auld, Douglass contradicts his textual representation of logic, responsibility and judgment.

By establishing the curious duality of the autobiographer's reasoning carefully, I want to explore initially his irreconcilable conflict between human and divine order, hence setting into play a powerful discord between the narrator's idealistic desire of moral forgiveness for his vicarious white family and his textual demand for poetic justice. The Douglass text, second, violates its own biblical demand for personal atonement by the Aulds. It is such an unresolved conflict that, third, enables the autobiographer himself to express an artistry of human wholeness. Finally, his major process for doing so is the revelation of human imperfection.

The autobiographer structures a complementary set of figurative binaries: divine order set against human corruption; rationality, illogic; hope, despair; morality, immorality; forgiveness, justice. Concurrently, a human progression underlies such complementary contrasts; just as slavery gives way to freedom, so does illiteracy to literacy, or Naïve Child to Wizeden Elder. Ignorance precedes knowledge, as childish fear does for manly courage. Ultimately, the human ideal and the human struggle become in themselves a binary opposition

so manifest in the final meeting between Douglass and his former master Auld. By the end of the narrative the autobiographer achieves the conscious role of victorious freeman but the unconscious one of the subjugated slave boy who the narrator has never vanquished from subconsciousness. A complete human text emerges from the confusion. Finally, the man must face the cowed boy within his own memory, therefore inspiring the human reader.

My discussion begins with Douglass's establishment of the philosophical foundations of reason, responsibility and judgment, all of which form a natural linear progression. Once foundations are established, the conversation covers Douglass's deconstruction of logic by his exoneration of Sophia and Thomas Auld. Subsequent discussion of biblical dimensions points out the philosophical and textual irony of the autobiographer's forgiveness. Hence, the analysis roots itself in the world of historical ideas, yet the imperfection of human logic. It subsumes the conflicts of thought and morality into autobiographical form.

The literary approach taken here is mostly a New Critical one. I extrapolate patterns of meaning from the part to the whole. My reading is post-structural, however, in that two apparent logics within the text actually conflict with each other. The apparently literal order of the text evinces a deeper and more hidden disorder and tension. Such a reading is psychoanalytical as well. In *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, Rivkin and Ryan, paraphrasing Freud, assert, "literary texts are like dreams; they embody or express unconscious material" (125). *Life and Times* represents Douglass's mind and emotion within the conscious as well as the unconscious present. The psychoanalytic method signifies the human voice encapsulated within it. As Grandt notes in "The Authentic Blackness of Autobiography," historicity is the "vital substance" of the text (11). This substance is the combination of Douglass's conscious and unconscious identity revealed in the text.

Much of the extensive body of research on the three Douglass autobiographies—*Narrative* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times* (1892)—moves away from this human aspect of the text, addressing rather the interplay of figurative patterns, historical positioning, and literary dynamics of power. Anderson deplors the literary community's common neglect of Douglass's work as art (57). The New Critics, Post-Structuralists and Psychoanalytics focus attention on the human quality of the text as a self-contained work of art, namely an expression and extension of the human mind that is therefore independently complex, subsequently informative or uninformative of itself. Douglass creates a work that “seeks communion with those outside of the text” (Grandt 13). The author establishes a textual identity within an historical framework, associating himself with people and places within an episode of history. Stone identifies this process as authentication (199-201). The historically verifiable “other” authenticates the author's own historical identity. The autobiographer uses not only lists of events but literary devices to create and reinforce his textual self. Douglass, for example, employs the first-person point of view to personalize the narrator to the reader. Recurring imagery, such as the autobiographer as ship, sailor or ship-builder symbolizes and solidifies his identity as a free soul (Stone). The autobiography's success lies in its ability to convey the man behind the struggle and therefore connect more immediately and convincingly with the living reader.

To inspire his people, Douglass builds in his text several strong foundations, one of which is rational thought. Placing logic in high esteem, he exhibits disdain for inconsistencies in reasoning. He self-creates himself as one who expects sound reasoning from the world around him. As a child in Sunday school, whipped into learning the Lord's Prayer, he laughs at the inconsistency of “blending prayer with punishment” (43). Instructed that God made “black

people to be slaves and white people to be masters,” he finds that his mind cannot therefore reason that God is as good as portrayed. In publishing his first autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the autobiographer sets out to portray the evils of slavery to a public unfamiliar with its realities and to validate his own slave experience (218). Despite his great passion as an orator, he is above all else a man of reason. A moral philosopher, he uses visions of violence and degradation as a basis to formulate the Christian paradox of slavery. Yet, it is more than his conscious method that builds the foundation within his text. His abolitionist motivation derives from his logical faith that the American people will “hasten to the work “of eradicating slavery if they ever know it as he does (226). He assumes a communal reasoning on the part of his abolitionist audience.

Of the Confederacy’s call on the slave to fight its battle, he observes, “desperation discards logic” (362). Prejudice, he says, “sets all logic at defiance” (601). As an alleged criminal who has practiced non-violence against slaveholders, he recognizes his white friend John Brown to be the logical consequence of slavery (303). Regarding the resistance by slaveholders of Jamaica and Virginia in allowing the baptism of blacks, he says, “they [the masters] were logical in their argument, but they were not logical in their object” (382). There is no valid biblical argument to justify Christians keeping fellow believers from baptism. Slavers therefore negate their own attempts at logical discourse, an action that invalidates their ethics. Douglass even reprimands President Andrew Johnson for his specious argument against the enfranchisement of the newly freed black men (384). Logic certainly binds Douglass’s textual world together; hence, he offers a reasonable account for his own seemingly illogical actions.

Headed for starvation during his first internment under Thomas Auld, he decides to steal food in order to survive. But he must remain logical and moral in order to be an example of the

same for others (104). Actually, an explanation of the whole discursive process lasts for two pages. “Slaveholders,” he reasons make it almost impossible for the slave to commit any crime... [as] freedom of choice is the essence of all accountability” (106). The slave has no choice but to eat what the master gives him. If the amount proves insufficient, the slave must steal or die of starvation. Dying is illogical, thus theft is good. His stealing is therefore both logical and amoral.

For the most part, his reasoning is a carefully deductive vantage point from which he attacks the inconsistencies of the world around him. Focusing on the religion of the South, his basic premise is that the daily life of the Christian must “conform to the requirements of the gospel” (123). He does not expound upon the requirements, but a brief glimpse at the Bible helps define his stance. The Gospel as explained in Luke 24:46-47, is that “the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.” To repent, in the context of Christianity, means to feel a profoundly spiritual regret for having committed a wrong of which one is now quite enlightened. Repentance derives in part from the spiritual commitment to accept and act according to divine will. As Jesus says in John 6:29, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent,” and to believe in the Messiah means to follow him, to be his disciple (Mt 16:24). Thus, fruitless faith is dead, as even demonic beings “believe” (Jas 2:19). Christ’s ethics are to love others as ourselves and God with all our mind and heart (Luke 10:27). Paul instructs Christians, therefore, to imitate God as Christ did (Eph 5:1-2). The requirements of the Gospel, then, are sequentially to turn away from and accept Jesus’ payment for sin, thereby clearing the path to follow him. One must then take the path. The slaveholders therefore fail the text of divine imitation as well as artistic re-creation.

Douglass thinks of the professing Christian Thomas Auld, “I saw in him all the cruelty and meanness *after* his conversion which he had exhibited before that time” (112). If Auld were a Christian, he would follow Christ and therefore live a life of love toward others. Since Auld does not do so, he is a hypocrite. To Douglass, slavery and Christianity are incompatible. All slavers are complicit in the larger crime, and even the so-called kind slavers violate the God-given rights of life, liberty and property. Covey, the Negro breaker and professed Christian (123), compels his unmarried slaves to fornicate with each other. The author labels it a sin of sexual immorality (124), from which Paul commands Christians to run (1Co 18-20). Likewise, Thomas Auld’s blaspheming of God while tying and brutally whipping a crippled woman betrays his lack of faith (112).

Douglass’s fabric of logic goes beyond even his conscious efforts to establish the groundwork of sound reason. There is, for example, a moment of implicit logic and a show of reason over emotion within his text. He declares that Nature laughs to scorn the doctrine of God sanctioned slavery (157). When a child, the autobiographer would stand by the poplar trees at Col. Lloyd’s plantation and listen to the redwing blackbirds. He says that they all belonged to him as well as to Colonel Lloyd (41). Douglass develops the figure of birds later, explaining that the music awakened within him deep aspirations (448). In a sense, he *is* the blackbird.

The logical argument is thus: God has given the birds to humankind. As a man, Douglass owns the birds as much as the Master does. Hence, their song confirms the equity of human brotherhood. Douglass confirms that “Nature never intended that men and women should be either slaves or slaveholders” (81). Because slavery is unnatural, it is therefore wrong. The birds are a figure of freedom that serves to unify the text across two-thirds of its reach. Though the first mention of the birds comes early in the book when the young, enslaved Douglass

achieves an epiphany about the sin of slavery, the second description shows a wizened, self-emancipated man (448).

The more salient examples of Douglass's preference for reason over emotion lay in his tendency to analyze objectively the system of slavery while despairing over its cruelty. Family, as we will see later, is of great importance to him. The trauma of separation from his grandmother and the grievous pain of knowing so little about his mother make for a strong desire for familial relationships (33, 36). For all of his attachment to family, he can look at slavery's practice of divorcing mothers from their children and coolly regard it with rational detachment as an act "in harmony with the grand aim of the system of slavery" (28). At a moment when Douglass might bemoan his broken heart, he possibly errs on the side of objectivity, narrating an instance in which an overseer beats one of his female cousins so badly that her neck and shoulders are covered with newly made scars, her bloody head gashed horribly by a hickory club (46). When the bruised and abused girl appeals to her owner, Captain Anthony, for protection from the overseer, he reprimands her. Having threatened her with another beating, the master now sends her back to the overseer. Douglass, who explains that he did not initially comprehend Anthony's actions, admits that encouraging such appeals would have caused significant loss of time for slavers and left the overseer powerless to enforce obedience (47). It is not that Douglass is waxing sardonic in this instance. His tone is convincingly analytic. Often when emotions run high, he is his most logical self.

When Douglass first arrives in Baltimore, Sophia Auld becomes quickly a mother figure to him (77). Over the course of a few years, however, she abandons her kindness toward him. At first she encourages his path to literacy. But when her husband rebukes her for the action, she relents according to his wishes. Now obstinately opposed to the slave's pursuit of literacy, she

displays wrathful tendencies toward him whenever she finds him reading (82). Hereafter, Sophia begins increasingly to see Douglass as property. The loss of his mother, causes still more pain. Auld's abuse, he says, is the inevitable result of her convictions. She had to "seek to justify herself *to herself*" (82). As in the case with Captain Anthony, he philosophizes about the scenes, drawing out the rational aspects.

Of Hugh Auld, the man who effectually stole his adopted mother, Douglass writes, "[he] clearly comprehended the nature and the requirements of the relation of master and slave" (79). He affords Auld the same philosophical treatment as Mrs. Auld. Though Douglass appreciates his master's logic as a virtue, there is a deeper strain. In the direct altercation with the Aulds, he realizes that knowledge leads from slavery to freedom (79). Yet, Douglass appropriates more than the master's language. If the master will use logic to challenge his attempts to become a literate man, then he, Douglass, will appropriate the logic of the oppressor. Therefore, he advances from the logically manipulated slave to the logical master of language. He adopts an attitude of condescension toward his Mistress Auld while providing a rational explanation for her actions. In fact, he adopts the role of a superior male toward her as does Hugh Auld, who required that she cease educating the slave (79). Unfortunately, he is unable to read the similar paradigms of racial and gendered oppression so as to deconstruct both of them at once. Yet, he wields successfully his attained logic despite his patriarchal tendency.

When recounting the break up of his Sunday school by his supposed Christian brothers, Douglass recalls how armed men rushed ferociously upon his Sabbath school while threatening the slaves with whipping if they would not disband (152). No longer would he consider Garrison West, a perpetrator of the event but one who had instructed him in Christian piety, to exemplify righteousness. Yet, he commends the aggressors' logic. "I do not dispute the soundness of the

reasoning. If slavery is right, Sabbath schools for teaching slaves to read are wrong, and should be put down. The Christian class-leaders were, to this extent, consistent” (152). If Douglass is to promote the virtue of logic, he must recognize it in the enemy. In doing so, he can then make the distinction that one may be logical but immoral. In the autobiographer’s economy, such logic is as wasted as the bravery offered by Confederate soldiers (414-15). For, logical means do not justify an immoral end.

Douglass disdains the emotionally charged and senseless religion common to the contemporaneous black culture (587). An uninhibited emotion that hampers reason is therefore anti-progressive (507-8). He does not seek to eradicate religion but to free his people from that particular black sect that is under the sway of “superstition, bigotry, and preistcraft” (480). In a jab at those who would or do not adhere to his sentiment, Douglass writes, “that better day, for which the more thoughtful among us have...labored...is near at hand” (507-8). Those under the sway of emotionalism would remain enslaved but for the African-American intelligentsia. The foundation of logic is well established. Now, the discussion turns to Douglass’s use of logic to drive a wedge in the midst of the common ground of American Christianity. No Christian would fellowship with a violent, blaspheming Auld, a fornication-promoting Covey or the system that both men serve. Hence, the autobiographer asserts that Christians have a responsibility to oppose actively the peculiar institution.

Douglass promotes both collective and individual responsibility. The United States has a responsibility toward its citizens. At the time, of course, the category clearly did not include his people who were represented as only three-fifths a man. Douglass, naturally, sees otherwise. Of the postbellum U.S., he declares “there is a growing recognition of the duty and obligation of the American people to guard, protect, and defend the personal and political rights of all the people

of all the states, and to uphold the principles upon which the rebellion was suppressed” (434). He notes that the U.S. is a nation founded upon declarations and protections of equality (261, 553). He appeals to the Christian principle the nation so widely claims, recalling that “of one blood God has made all the nations to dwell on the face of the earth” (553; Acts 17:26). His rhetoric binds the United States politically and spiritually, asserting an immutable moral law to which all nations owe allegiance (480). Moreover, he likens the rebellious nation to the individual in danger of losing her soul for the sake of temporal gain (594). Jesus teaches his followers to seek God over material gains; indeed, what profit is there in gaining the whole world? Self-centeredness violates divine law (Luke 12:18-30). Therefore, a desire for material things hampers entrance into God’s kingdom, as people become selfish and envious because of their lust for objects (Mt 19:24; Jas 3:14-16). Conversely, trust in God causes a soul to become “peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (Jas 3:17). Douglass’s “whole world” is the non-oppressed American’s desire for comfort. In the interest of her own convenience, the isolationist will not confront problems as long as they do not infringe upon her comfort. In the interest of personal economic gain, the greedy man will ignore or promote problems indiscriminately as long as treasures continue to fill his barns. Complacency in the ruling class, despite the ruin of its fellow citizens, damns a nation. A national soul must continuously reaffirm its authority through the constitutional rights of all its people (594). Ironically, the end of Douglass’s ‘national soul’ derives from his allegiance to all the nation’s citizens. Drawing from the Biblical metaphor, the United States is in a position of allegiance to God’s government, more so since the nation was founded upon the divine principle of equality. God is speaking to the nation through the mouth of the prophet Douglass. The book of Leviticus painstakingly details the responsibility that the nation of Israel holds toward God as

well as the judgment that will come for rebellion (Lev 26:14-39). Accordingly, the American nation has a moral responsibility to uphold the precepts of freedom. Flouting God's requirements will provoke judgment. Because a nation, a political rather than spiritual entity, is not an eternal soul, God may send a prophet to warn a nation of impending judgment (Jer 1-52). But God often speaks directly to the individual.

Paul writes in Romans 2:14 that when the "Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law...they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts." God has clearly revealed his existence and divinity through creation, so that men cannot claim ignorance to his law (Ro 1:19-20). Creation, therefore, serves to bring men to God and ultimately right standing with the divine (Tertullian 38; Basil 39; Gennadius 40).

To write his law on the human heart is to leave his inscription there. When those who are morally ignorant perform moral works, they evidence to all (most importantly themselves) the existence of God. Thus, they cannot claim ignorance of their responsibility toward God's moral government.

To return to the blackbirds, the gift of their song equalizes the roles of the slave and the freeman. Nature itself subverts the philosophy that slavery is in harmony with the moral universe (Douglass 157). Because God has "interposed an insuperable obstacle to any such result" (Douglass 300), the slave owner will never have peace. If slavery were allowed to bloom, the slaveholder's soul would remain in turmoil. For, "in every pulsation of his heart, in every throb of his life, in every glance of his eye, in the breeze that soothes, and in the thunder that startles, would be waked up an accuser, whose cause is, 'thou art verily guilty concerning thy brother'" (Douglass 300). Douglass alludes here to the experience of Joseph's brothers in

Genesis 42. The slaveholder's conscience, which holds God's requirements, makes him ever aware likewise of his sin against the brother.

Jesus declares that the totality of scripture rests on the commandments to love God and humanity completely (Mt 22:37-40). In order to love God, the Christian must follow His commands (John 14:15). Thomas Auld, after claiming conversion to Christianity, should act in accordance with the faith (108). Douglass asserts that "the highest evidence of his acceptance with God which the slaveholder could give the slave, was the emancipation of his slaves...and not to do this was...wholly inconsistent with the idea of genuine conversion" (109). Auld shirks his responsibility. So does Covey, the Negro-breaker completely estranged from the mercy of Christ (123). Douglass maintains no double standard in the regard. His own conversion is the standard by which he judges the slaver's (108), and the autobiographer's conversion brings a concomitant love for all (90), thereby proving faith through obedience (Luke 6:46). Yet, Douglass does not leave emancipation solely in the hands of the slave-owner. The slave, too, shares the burden of the eradication of slavery.

"[Hugh Auld] wanted me to be a slave; I had already voted against that," writes Douglass (79). He will not suffer the philosophy, especially from Blacks, that God requires the slave to submit humbly to the whip. The weakness of such persons tests Douglass's patience (85). The bondsman, and even the freeman, is bred from childhood to accept the holy superiority of the master class. Douglass, who assumes the responsibility of freeing himself from the slave power, writes as an inspiring example as liberator (145, 479). Individuals can blame only themselves for their position in life; liberty must be taken forcefully from the hands of those in power (479-80). He insists that African-Americans, and all people for that matter, can have no success without "self-reliance, self-respect, industry, perseverance and economy" (480). Furthermore,

“no power outside of himself can prevent a man from sustaining an honorable character and useful relation to his day and generation, [and] neither institutions nor friends can make a race stand unless it has strength in its own legs” (479). Here, he views the conflict between natural and human order, but fails to account for human limits or evil. It is quite possible, on the contrary, to do one’s best and fail, especially if an enemy opposes one’s efforts. A logic of self-reliance does not always displace one of determinism, no matter his preference.

Just as naturally correct behavior leads to improved conditions in the world, so morally correct behavior accomplishes the same for the self. Both Romanticism and the Enlightenment express a human bond with nature. Romanticism places humankind outside Nature, suggesting a need for reunion. Wordsworth evidences this sentiment in his assertion that the man closest to nature is the most pure (1438). The Enlightenment projects the human mind as being only an extension of a natural logic. In other words, humanism celebrates humankind as the pinnacle of nature (Abrams and Greenblatt 317-8). Romanticism suggests, on the contrary, that humanity’s only hope lies in mediating a perfect order of nature, which will awake ultimately the moral order in man. The conflict, then, lies in human evil of which it remains uncertain whether the culprit is Nature or humankind.

Douglass affirms the eighteenth century stance that reason is humankind’s path to success. But the paths of eighteenth century reason and of nineteenth century imagination—the mirror and the lamp—diverge. The autobiographer maintains the Romantic assertion that humankind is positioned outside of nature. The natural and human orders within the text exist as divides within a divine order. The human order is corrupt, though it maintains some semblance of the divine morality. Nature reveals the superior order more closely, but it is not itself divine. That is to say, it is incapable of leading man in religion, as Emerson might suggest (3, 18). As

we have seen, its purpose is to manifest the Creator for the express reason of convicting rational man of his sin in regards to the moral law that God has written on his heart (Ro 1:20).

Humankind must interpret nature's example and subsequently redirect its imaginative focus beyond nature to the Creator. Thus, Douglass's resolution lies ultimately in man's voluntary submission to God's moral government. He therefore asserts the doctrine of individual responsibility. But his logic cannot account for human evil.

Though Douglass declares himself a believer in the general goodness of human nature, he cannot deny the selfishness of humankind (403). But denying a human lust for power is naive. Regardless of African-American merit, the White supremacist will conveniently reason himself to be superior, to the detriment of the black race. Considering the larger picture of African-American philosophy, if one views Douglass's concept of Black responsibility as being an anticipatory one of Booker T. Washington's assertions of merit a generation later, it is surely flawed (*Up From Slavery* 192), insofar as people act primarily out of self-interest. Though Douglass declares merit to be the advantage of any race, he does not concede the characteristic to be the final answer (479). Merit, despite its value to the race, will never guarantee liberty, as slaveholders will never willingly relinquish power. Hence, the consequence of human evil is addressed (it must be combated), while the cause is left undetermined.

Douglass therefore practices and praises responsible behavior. In keeping with his own integrity, he represents himself as an educated man, despite strong advice on the contrary (218). For the depositors of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company, he insists on making the institution solvent. With the other depositors, he suffers financial loss when he might have easily saved his investment (405). As Minister to Haiti, he refuses for his office to "further selfish

schemes of any sort for the benefit of individuals” (596). He worthily performs his duty to his fellow citizens.

He praises the same principled behavior in his African-American successors. Mr. Ebenezer Basset and Mr. John Mercer Langston, he declares, perform their assignments with wisdom, increasing the “faith of all in the possibilities of their race, and make it easier for those who are to come after them” (418). People enjoy a self-evident right to live free under a law of God’s superior government. Perhaps the moral and historical worlds exist in parallel universes of which the one points to the other. The autobiographer positions humanity in rebellion against a divine government (90). The result of human non-compliance is therefore a consequently divine condemnation.

The autobiographer holds himself consistently to the standard by which he measures others. When imprisoned for a foiled escape plot, he expresses no resentment toward jailer or fellow conspirator. Rather, he views the scene of his loneliness as his just reward (174). Though Southern justice is a farce, he understands the logic of its illogic—the reasoned will to power that violates divine law. With such insight, he shifts skillfully from accused to accuser. What Southern justice would judge him for in terms of its unlive morality, he judges it for as well, but righteously. Faced with a criminal who will never repent, Douglass calls for active condemnation of slavery and slaveholder. Unequivocally he decries the “hell-black system of bondage” as “unnatural and murderous” (72-3). Slavery is the “foulest crime against human nature” (62, 371). Slavery is the figurative criminal whom the writer condemns to the future jury of readers (Miller 94), and penance must be paid.

His declaration of the master’s guilt toward his black brother presents the slaveholder as condemned just as the biblical Joseph’s brothers (300; Ge 42). According to the story, the older

brothers hate the younger Joseph for his favored status. Once the youth angers them for revealing his visions of superiority over them, the others overpower and sell him into Egyptian slavery. But his dreams of status come true. He predicts and prepares Egypt for a regional famine that will drive his disloyal brothers to him in search of food. Rather than punishing them for their evil, he tearfully renews his fellowship with them. In part, the biblical analogue breaks down because the slaveholders in *Life and Times* hardly acknowledge the narrator as a man—let alone as a figurative brother or son. Yet, even to the end of his narrative Douglass cannot relinquish the biblical tale. Indeed, to him, it stands as the epitome of literary pathos (584). The figurative dream for reconciliation with his vicarious family remains ever one-sided, as the Aulds remain unrepentant. According to the texts of poetic justice and personal responsibility, judgment must happen.

A second biblical analogue underlies likewise the personal narrative. God gave Balaam the gift of prophetic vision that the protagonist uses to satisfy his own lust (Nu 22-24). The prophet, riding a donkey, journeys forth to help defeat God's chosen people. En route, the angel of God blocks the way three times, but the donkey alone sees the divine presence. Each time, Balaam beats the animal for stopping, until God gives the beast a human voice to reprimand the abuser. Despite the warnings, the prophet remains unrepentant and therefore condemned.

To return to the Douglass texts, Sophia Auld becomes the blind and greedy abuser who for her own gain has turned from the God she once knew (87). The autobiographer portrays himself as the prophesying beast of burden that receives the miraculous ability to speak the language of the Master while rebuking him to no avail. But in the Douglass text, the human autobiographer contained a latent potential for expressing a liberationist language all along. His transformation is less a miracle than a personal self-actualization, the miracle of humanity itself.

The pro-slavery individuals who abuse him in prison are “fiends” and “imps” (174). It is as if one were imprisoned in a gothic castle of Evil. Covey the Negro Breaker becomes a “serpent” and a “monster” (122, 129). Each designation marks creatures that oppose God’s universal law (Mt 25:41). Douglass describes the lustful Thomas Auld as such (47). He compares pro-slavery preachers and politicians to the Satan-spawned Pharisees whom Jesus denounced as murderous liars (213, John 8:44). To Douglass, the merging of anti-black political forces in the Capitol is akin to driving “the Almighty presence from the councils of the nation” (296). By comparing pro-slavery forces to the biblically condemned, Douglass invokes the judgment mentioned in Jude (Henkel 91). Since individuals are responsible for the systems they create, God will mete out judgment (Douglass 106). Because human law stands imperfectly for divine law, the slaveholder stands as a criminal before divine government.

So the violator of both divine and human law is twice-criminal. As suggested above, the autobiographer declares that all slaveholders are thieves deserving punishment (86, 87). Thomas Auld deserves God’s judgment for his blasphemy (112) and humankind’s for his robbery of slave fellows’ earnings (105, 112). Auld is an extortionist, and those who would enforce the Fugitive Slave Law are murderous kidnappers (281). The slaveholder is therefore the enemy of God and the human race and one to be executed just as “any other pirate or murderer” (312; 487). By presenting the case from the perspective of God’s government as well as man’s, Douglass has created a two-fold argument against the slaveholder.

To reiterate the autobiographer’s reasoning, the historical world derives from logically empirical truths. Logic is therefore a fundamental basis of human success. Douglass’s appreciation for logic supersedes emotion, and a spiritual basis underlies his own logic. God’s moral government demands moral behavior in human relations. Humankind is logically and

naturally accountable to such a government. Negligence therefore demands the judgment and punishment as described. But Douglass subverts the very ethical foundations he has built by exonerating Sophia and Thomas Auld without atonement on their part.

His earlier efforts to write Sophia into a *family* role of loving mother makes him violate her *textual* role of condemned figure, breaking with the artistic demand for poetic justice. As mentioned previously, the gentleness of Sophia Auld spurs Douglass to regard her as “something more akin to a mother than a slaveholding mistress” (77). If she assumes vicariously the position of mother in his personal realm, Sophia rescinds the relation, replacing it with her stance of aggression and abuse (82, 86-7). She is a failed mother who refuses to help her adopted child learn to read. Though she is complicit in the criminal institution of slavery, the autobiographer refuses to condemn her for her crimes. Rather, he defends and finds fellowship with her as a victim of slavery’s “overshadowing evil” (87). Similarly he apologizes for Thomas Auld, whose cruel whippings and brutal castigations of the crippled cousin are so graphically conveyed. Here, Douglass violates the text of poetic justice, since Auld has not textually merited either forgiveness or redemption. Logically, exoneration of the leader would automatically excuse all contributors along the great slave chain of being. For, if each slaveholder is complicit in the larger crime, then each must be exonerated with the one. One cannot separate the individual from the group. Yet, one might argue that Douglass is following faithfully the text of biblical forgiveness.

“Religious Nature Awakened” presents the autobiographer as a forgiving Christian. Douglass reads biblical pages strewn in the street’s dirty gutters (90). He is a true Christian in the ideal rather than corrupted sense because his religious profession means love toward all

[includes women], “slaveholders not excepted” (90, 108). Christ teaches his disciples to love their enemies and forgive others unconditionally as God has forgiven them (Luke 6:28; Mt 6:14; 18:21). Yet, there is a distinct difference between the Douglass/Auld exchange and biblical model of forgiveness.

First, the extension of forgiveness does not equal forgiveness received. Half of the equation is repentance on the part of the sinner. Christ who declares, “if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him” (Luke 17:3), stresses the role of repentance in a parable. A self-righteous Pharisee boasts about himself while disparaging a tax collector. Conversely, the tax collector maintains an attitude of humility, looking down and striking his chest in anguish over his sin (Luke 18:9-14). Only those who come to God repentantly are forgiven. Upon the forty-year return by Douglass to the Eastern shore of Maryland, moribund Auld says he always meant to free his slaves (441). By then talk is cheap. What Thomas Auld actually did was sell Douglass to Hugh Auld, his own brother. Regardless of Douglass’s desire for reconciliation, the exchange is incomplete. Auld’s lack of repentance therefore excludes him from the possibility of forgiveness.

Second, Christian forgiveness does not preclude willful sin on the part of the forgiven; rather, it occurs without excuse made for sin. From the cross, Messiah declares “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). He is in the ultimate attitude of forgiveness, but he is not declaring his enemies guiltless. Indeed, forgiveness demands sin, a point that Douglass sidesteps philosophically. Years earlier, Douglass had written of Amanda Sears, Thomas’s daughter, “I have no heart to visit upon the children the sins of their fathers” (395). Sometimes he is reluctant to blame even the fathers themselves. Douglass exonerates Auld whom he sees as “a victim of the circumstances of birth, education, law, and custom”

(441). Such people are reduced to being the products rather than producers of their lives. Beyond diverging from the biblical standard, the philosophy does not square with Douglass's assertions of responsibility and self-reliance: "We had both been flung, by powers that did not ask our consent, upon a mighty current of life, which we could neither resist nor control" (441). Similarly, he forgives his former mistress Sophia Auld because the "overshadowing evil" of slavery overpowered their wills (87). But he cannot have it both ways; his text most disingenuously deconstructs itself.

Consider again his assertion that both he and Auld were "flung...upon a mighty current of life, which [they] could neither resist nor control. By [that] current he was a master, and I a slave" (441). He suggests rightly that neither he nor Auld was free at birth to choose sides. Nevertheless, he errs in saying that personal choice cannot alter either man's fate. In fact, he contradicts his assertion that the Freedman can determine his own successful future through diligent practice of "patience, industry, uprightness, and economy" (504). Douglass's very position as autobiographer opposes his deterministic solution. Though he would help lead the world down an abolitionist path, while taking the moral high ground, Auld lived out most of his own days while content in going the other way. Of the two, only Douglass lives out the textual demand for ethics.

For a moment, I would return to the matter of theft. In a clever turn of logic, Douglass rationalizes his stealing as a mere transference of property. "First he owned [the food] in the tub, and last he owned it in me" (105). The autobiographer reasons that "to make a man a slave is to rob him of moral responsibility, [for] freedom of choice is the essence of all accountability" (106). In declaring Auld's course a pre-determined one, he makes Auld a slave to fate and robs him of his free will. But it is precisely such free will that makes the narrator himself feel guilty

even as a slave. Despite his own philosophy of free will, then, Douglass exonerates Auld on grounds of determinism. There can therefore be no call for justice. Indeed, in a deterministic world who is accountable save the Creator? To follow such a line of reasoning would excuse slavery as God's will. Hence, the very suggestion of determinism certainly poses a moral dilemma. For, if no power outside of the self can prevent one from showing an honorable character (Douglass 479), yet one is paradoxically unable to control one's actions or destiny, all previous assumptions of self-determination must be reexamined.

Perhaps it is nearly impossible for the narrator to reconcile his fidelity to his failed vicarious family with his textual demands for moral retribution. Presumed truths of the heart and of literary art are not necessarily the same. But the man and his text are nevertheless inseparable. Though Douglass labors to establish his textual persona as a logician, he allows some emotion to leak out. Indeed, a "family" emotion seems almost to intrude upon reason (assuming reason is not an emotion). Particularly striking is his recollection of standing on the shores of Chesapeake Bay to trace "with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean" (125). The contrast of the free ships sailing and his tearfully chained existence on the bank contrasts with the comfortable home of his free white "family." As part of his self-deprecating envy/desire for them, he believes that thousands of additional slaves would have escaped slavery except for bonds in African-American communities (193). Even as wizened man, he still remembers his grandmother and mother dearly. But he allows the abusive white family to substitute for the authentic African-American one, the result being a rejection and hurt that would exist outside of a surer self-acceptance.

The *family narrative* that would seem to justify forgiveness belies the *textual narrative* that reveals penitence never happened. Douglass, who in a manner of speaking is burned twice,

comes to regard Sophia Auld as “something more akin to a mother than a slaveholding mistress” (77). She provides the motherly affection he so desires. Despite her betrayal of him, he seeks out her countenance; hence looking for the surrogate mother whose nurturing mission she could almost never fulfill (87). His reaction and his sentiment toward her suggest that he at least has retained his familial relation toward her, regardless of her stance. Furthermore, Douglass solidifies her maternal position by adopting her son Tommy as his own brother (178). Together they help make up his curiously imaginary family, though he naively seems to erase racial difference from the equation. His emotional bond of kinship persists beyond their rejection of him, therefore impugning his self-esteem. When relations with the Aulds turn sour, he notes that his “attachments were now outside of *our family* (emphasis mine)” (101). Completing the family unit is Thomas Auld, the vicarious father. But the world between slave and master is arbitrarily distinct. Polite narrative about one’s integrated family during the time of one’s enslavement within it is absurd. Were the fantasy real, why would one need abolition at all?

In their final meeting, Marshall Douglass of the United States requests that Captain Auld address him as Frederick, as he used to call him (442). Auld keeps his own title. Hence, the autobiographer preserves the previous Master’s designation while apparently forfeiting his own. Moreover, the autobiographer is distressed significantly at seeing the once strapping Auld now a feeble old man. The author, waxing nostalgic over the glory days of Auld, expresses himself within Southern Romantic tradition. Herein, the narrator of a Southern gothic tale returns figuratively from a man-made hell to be reborn into freedom. Douglass’s emotional journey has come to its apex in the meeting with Auld. Accordingly, the hero should now find freedom where once was slavery.

Yet, no true restructuring of any moral hierarchy actually happens here. Douglass still plays the role of slave child to Auld's nobly genteel part as guiltless patriarch. The undertone of Douglass's presumed white father, (36) bolsters the characterization of Auld in a paternal light. Douglass's narrated logic simply collapses here. Whatever his vow to help deliver Blacks from the superstition that supports a subjugation (480), he has unwittingly accepted the old hierarchy of power—the white patriarchal figure—the very enemy against which he struggled. Is his apparent subversion of the white fatherly text ever really complete?

Initially, Douglass completed the 1845 *Narrative* to reveal the slave experience. Its necessity was to authenticate publicly his claims to slavery (218), but it was also to expose the monstrous criminality of the slave system in order to expedite emancipation (511-2). *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times* (1892) move beyond the authentication of his own history. The literary critic Stone notes that though Douglass's *Narrative* includes an introductory seal of authentication from white abolitionists; the autobiographer appropriates their narratives into his own. In doing so, he assumes control for authenticating not only his own identity but the white abolitionist's as well (199-200). Similarly, the autobiographer appropriates the logic and language of Hugh and Sophia Auld in order to assume a superior intellectual position over them. Though Stone laments the burying of the autobiographer's identity beneath the history in *Life and Times* (212-3), Douglass comes to restructure as an author the same history that once recorded him as a slave. He is transformed, in other words, from the status of object to the one of subject. He becomes a beacon of racial uplift.

Except for instances of family, he often succeeds by minimizing emotion. He wants his people to take initiative in their own cause, hence his devotion to personal responsibility. A self-made man, he has achieved the American dream by way of reasoned initiative. By his own

effort he has freed himself (505). Nearly three-quarters of a century later, W.E.B. DuBois would declare that autobiography is not a “final and complete authority,” but rather the “Soliloquy of an old man on what he dreams his life has been...and what he would like others to believe” (*A Soliloquy* 13). In *Life and Times*, Douglass desires similarly that his “story be told as favorably towards [himself] as it can be with a due regard to the truth” (514). Whatever the great effort at rational discourse, his reason is incomplete. Yet, his disguised emotion makes his human text whole. In a way, ideological works actually succeed by failing, implying a greater complexity of imagination and reason than they would confess (Rivkin 241). Even in seeming failure the autobiographer succeeds, for his incoherence is as real as the human frailty he voices. In *Leaves of Grass*, the narrator sings, “this is no book / Who touches this touches a man” (Whitman 235). So too, the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* encapsulates the man.

APPENDIX

Rivkin and Ryan single out the school of New Criticism as guilty of informing its study of literature with Christian theology (7). Likewise, one might argue that the study here imposes a moral theory upon the text. Imposition implies a lack of textual evidence, which is certainly not the case in *Life and Times*. References to Judeo/Christian scripture are common and consistent throughout the work. Douglass infuses Biblical morality into his text. Throughout the text, the autobiographer advances into his role of Christian man, though the adjective expresses the ideal inadequately. Douglass entertains first the idea that a cholera epidemic is the judgment of God against the South's evil (89). Slavery is then "dashed against the condemning brand of God's eternal justice" (157). Stronger still, slavery will not end without bloodshed because it opposes God's righteous judgments (275, 363). Finally, the autobiographer declares that there is a God-led moral government of the universe (546). The one hundred plus Biblical references ground the autobiographer's moral theory in Christianity. But one might argue against too strong a focus on the Biblical allusions because the text must speak for itself. The autobiographer's literary and cultural art hardly requires a theological blessing to vindicate its African-American voice.

Such a critique is centered in the Biblical references as part of African-American folk conventions within a larger American culture. As such, the autobiographer employs them rhetorically to relate to an audience steeped in the Christian exegesis. He uses the references as social illustrations rather than vehicles of moral dogma. Moreover, he may be using the references to assert his blackness, the existential state of his existence. He declares the primacy that the Bible holds in his heart (213). Douglass, declaring a universal and Christian based moral law—the conflation of which may be too ideologically rigid—draws heavily on the scriptures.

As mentioned, Giles argues that *Life and Times* shifts from a personal, moral and anthropocentric philosophy to an impersonal, morally ambiguous and non-anthropocentric one (801). The moral base, though seemingly harsh in its judgments, offers hope as personal redemption. Whatever the collapse in the autobiographer's logics, the human struggle still resonates with meaning. Douglass's tone indeed turns grim near the end of the work: "the lesson of the vanity of all things is taught in deeply buried places, in fallen columns, in defaced monuments, in decaying arches, and in crumbling walls, all perishing under the silent and destructive force of time and the steady action of the elements, in utter mockery of the pride and the power of the great people by whom they were called into existence" (588). But the episode ends nevertheless in a fruitful landscape as the autobiographer asserts his own humanity. The focus on the Biblical allusions and the moral theory reinforces the autobiographer's mission to convey personal hope amid the struggle of life.

A psychoanalytic reading brings with it inherent idiosyncrasies; its scientific (if not philosophic) legitimacy is dubious. Such a reading explains the text as an organic extension of the artist's mind. As an autobiographer, Douglass is creating a textual identity. His aim is to encourage his people (479). His metamorphosis from historical figure into written autobiographer is ever incomplete.

His autobiography reveals an unconscious richness through which one reads the figures of emotion and meaning, reason and desire. These human qualities inform the very liberating power of his language. A psychoanalytical reading confirms the text as an extension of his mind, thereby allowing the reader to delve beyond the textual surface. The autobiographer's efforts to convey himself are therefore successful. *Life and Times* is ultimately a text of hope.

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Throughout his life, Frederick Douglass struggled to resolve the American dilemma, the contradiction between the ideals professed by the nation's Founders and the practice of denying human rights to black Americans and other minorities. During the next decade, as tensions over slavery between the North and the South pushed the nation to the brink of civil war, Douglass delivered hundreds of speeches throughout the North calling upon the federal government to abolish slavery in the South. Late in life, in his third and final autobiography, composed at his home in the Anacostia estate of Cedar. Time and events have summoned me to stand forth both as a witness and an advocate for a people Frederick Douglass published three autobiographies. The first autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, catapulted him to fame and invigorated the abolitionist movement. Of Douglass's many speeches, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" was perhaps one of the most well-known. What was Frederick Douglass's legacy? Cover illustration for *The Fugitive's Song*, a music score by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr., with words composed and respectfully dedicated, in token of confident esteem, to Frederick Douglass, 1845. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Make educational timelines or create a timeline for your company website. How to make a timeline? Well, it's easy as toast! Frederick Douglass escapes to Canada to avoid being arrested as an accomplice in John Brown's plan to seize Harper's Ferry and sails to England. Jan 1, 1864. Frederick Douglass served Abraham Lincoln's. In 1898 Frederick Douglass received the first monument ever given to a black man, located in Rochester. You might like