

Transforming Borders in William W. Brown's "Narrative"

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William Wells Brown first captured the attention of Americans with his best-selling *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself* (1847).¹ Ranking a close second to Frederick Douglass's narrative in popularity – and in some areas surpassing it – Brown's story had wide appeal for a nineteenth-century audience, its author having gained recognition as an abolitionist speaker and writer, and later as a novelist.² And yet, as Stephen Lucasi has recently observed, Brown's *Narrative* has not yet provoked the sustained critical analysis it deserves.³

Though Brown's *Clotel; or The President's Daughter*, considered the first African American novel, was overshadowed by the best-selling novel of the period, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it has now eclipsed critical attention on his slave narrative. Also possibly giving short shrift to Brown's slave account has been the continued popularity and critical acclaim of his better-known compatriot's work, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Such concentrated scrutiny, though, has unduly obscured Brown's own contribution to the genre. As William L. Andrews has noted, "Perhaps more than any other text of its kind, the *Narrative of William W. Brown* typifies in its subject matter and development the basic plot structure of the antebellum slave narrative."⁴ Because Brown was remarkably well-traveled as a slave and, as the abolitionist Edmund Quincy reminds us in a prefatory letter, additionally had an unusual variety of assigned positions working in the house, in the field, and on the river, Brown can also speak to a wider range of experiences and perspectives within slavery, and, in part for these reasons, his account merits more study.

Scholars indisputably accept the authorship and authenticity of Brown's slave narrative.⁵ The critical response to his account, however, has not been entirely favorable. One of his contemporaries, though acknowledging the narrative's "very wide influence on public opinion," complained that it was one of those that portrayed the Slave States as a large jail, with *all* of the whites conspiring against the slaves for profit or pleasure.⁶ More recently, James Olney has leveled the charge that, except for Frederick Douglass's narrative, even "the most highly regarded of the other narratives [... simply present] conventions untransformed and unredeemed" (158). For some of the slave narratives, such a reading may seem shortsighted, suggesting that former slaves have no personal reason for composing or they merely repeat what other slave narrators have done without any thought or personal investment in their own writing. While a cursory reading allows one to recognize the conventions a narrator follows, an in-depth analysis of Brown's *Narrative* reveals that he not only writes to bolster the abolitionist movement, but he also works out his own freedom and sense of self through tropes of distance and space.

Most recently, in "William Wells Brown's *Narrative* and Traveling Subjectivity," Stephen Lucasi has offered an interesting reading of Brown's account in which he contends that "by foregoing the narration of literary acquisition in his first publication, Brown demonstrates the possibilities for freedom and agency outside of, or by routes other than, literacy" (521). Lucasi wants to re-categorize Brown's account as travel literature, arguing that through his progressive and mainly physical mobility he attains a kind of emancipation. More plausibly, though, it is by means of what William L. Andrews calls "telling a free story" that Brown finds liberation. However, it is not just that Brown tells a free story but, more significantly, *how* he tells the free story that matters. Through his use of tropes of distance and space in the *Narrative*, Brown enlarges his sense of freedom. More than simply wanting to travel across geographical boundaries to distance himself from slavery physically, he shows a concern with emotional and psychological distances. By means

of these rhetorical maneuverings – in particular, through distancing the “I” from the enslaved self; forging connections with his audience; and depicting his slave master, the slave holder, and slavery as Other – he can emotionally and psychologically relocate himself away from his bondage.

Although fellow nineteenth-century American slave narrators Harriet Jacobs and William Craft share with William Wells Brown the experience of having been fugitive slaves at least one time in their lives and accordingly are valuable for comparison, Brown’s vantage point as a slave narrator differs from theirs in significant ways. Writing his account more than ten years earlier, he has not yet been faced with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Consequently, his concept of freedom and his representation of it are not subject to the same kind of re-evaluation and frustration that Jacobs and Craft experience later on.⁷ Moreover, they composed their narratives from safer positions. Whereas Jacobs has gained her legal and physical freedom by the time she writes her narrative, and Craft (though not legally free in America) has removed himself to England where he is legally and physically free, Brown writes from America while still a fugitive. The latter’s precarious position may explain why he chooses not to include the same kind of vociferations as Jacobs and Craft in their narratives. While Brown may not be as outspoken in his writing as some slave narrators, he still demonstrates a desire to regulate the distances between his narrating self and his former enslaved self, audience, and oppressors.

Unlike Jacobs, who maintains a fairly continuous storyline throughout her narrative, both Craft and Brown frequently make use of digressions to distance themselves from their enslaved selves. Craft includes tangential material which does not explicitly involve himself, but he always brings his readers back to his and his wife Ellen’s journey to the North. Brown, on the other hand, uses interpolated stories to which he is indirectly connected, but his account, rather than being about one stage in his life or about the time from his birth through his escape, is largely episodic in nature.⁸ These apparent

tangents, however, form a crucial part of his narrative, for, as Sidonie Smith asserts, "the accumulative impact of the digressive material renders the grim reality of slavery inescapable" and creates a kind of protest literature (8). Brown's digressions enable him to communicate the larger and more variegated picture of slavery, reminding his readers that when he speaks of his own sufferings, he also gives voice to those still in bondage.

Presenting his audience with sketches in which he himself does not appear allows Brown to emphasize certain facets of slavery which he may not have personally experienced to provide himself with an emotional respite from his enslaved self, and to highlight the Otherness that threatens the slave's body and self. For example, his story about John Colburn, keeper of the Missouri Hotel and Brown's new employer to whom his first master, Dr. John Young (yet unidentified at this point in the text), has leased him. He tells of a slave named Patsey who worked for Colburn as a servant. Because one evening she went to see her fiancé, whom Colburn had forbidden her to see, her employer tied her up and whipped her until some of his boarders came out and begged him to stop. Brown notes that supposedly he had forbidden her to see this man because he was jealous, having a "regard" for her himself. Despite working for Colburn for some length of time, Brown records this and another story of Colburn's abuse of slaves but does not mention any incident involving himself. He does, however, conclude the Patsey episode with a scathing assessment of his employer's character: "If all the slave-drivers had been called together, I do not think a more cruel man than John Colburn – and he too a northern man – could have been found among them" (33).⁹ By giving these examples in which he himself does not figure, Brown directs his audience's attention to Colburn's actions rather than to himself, who may or may not have suffered abuse from this employer. These digressions serve as a reminder to his readers that when he shows how a slaveholder or slavery supporter has treated him harshly, they should not read these as isolated incidents of abuse, but rather as "mere" samples of the pervasive brutality of slavery. Through

his inclusion of these other cases, he also rhetorically takes himself away from the passive position of his enslaved self, in which he received harsh treatment, and relocates himself in the authoritative position of exposing the Otherness of his oppressors.

In some places in his narrative, Brown effects a distance between himself and his enslaved self by presenting words of reassurance from his family when his audience might otherwise question his actions. One instance of this appears as he narrates a time when, having been rented out by Dr. Young to work for Capt. Otis Reynolds as a waiter on a steamboat on the upper Mississippi River, he thinks of escaping to Canada but cannot bear the idea of leaving his family behind in slavery: “When these thoughts came over me, I would resolve never to leave the land of slavery without my mother. I thought that to leave her in slavery, after she had undergone and suffered so much for me, would be proving recreant to the duty which I owed to her” (35). Brown here displays a keen awareness of his readers’ ideologies. While they may certainly understand his desire to be free, he realizes that they would not condone his leaving slavery without a thought about the family he would leave behind. Speaking of the sacrifices his mother made for him and the duty he owes her shows his audience that he is a grateful and respectful son who is capable of self-sacrifice.

Suggesting that he and his readers have these values in common, Brown strategically sets up the scene that follows and guides his readers’ reactions. In one visit to his family he alludes to a proposed trip to Canada, and his sister tearfully asks whether he is going to leave her and their mother in slavery without a friend. In an emotional response, he declares he will never desert them, but his sister, in turn, appears to have a change of heart:

Brother, you have often declared that you would not end your days in slavery. I see no possible way in which you can escape with us; and now, brother, you are on a steamboat where there is some chance for you to escape to a land of liberty. I beseech you not to let us hinder

you. If we cannot get our liberty, we do not wish to be
the means of keeping you from a land of freedom. (36)

While this scene, at the end of which Brown renews his pledge "not to leave them in the hand of the oppressor," contains some changes in attitude and may not seem to accomplish much in practical terms for Brown as a slave, it serves a few important functions in his narrative. In part, he directs this conversation toward his audience, for contrary to racial stereotypes, it demonstrates that slave families experience emotional pain and agony when their members are separated from each other, whether separation is initiated by themselves or their oppressors. Depicting his family as caring, loving, understanding, and united, he presents a picture with which his readers can identify, thereby moving himself closer to them psychologically. Because he eventually leaves his sister behind when she is "sold down river" while he escapes slavery, this scene also may be read as Brown's attempt to distance himself from his enslaved self. He could so easily have briefly summarized this scene or eliminated it, but it would not have the same effect as it does now. Her words are worthy for Brown to quote because she implores him to seek his freedom and not miss chances to escape on her account. In sharing his sister's words, he alleviates the feelings of helplessness he experienced as a slave when he said his last farewell before she was sold farther south, knowing that she herself did not believe they could escape from slavery together. Moreover, he psychologically moves away from self-recrimination for leaving his family behind by reminding himself and his audience that he had his sister's blessing.

Brown distances himself from his enslaved self in a similar way when he narrates his visit to his mother in jail after their failed attempt to escape from slavery. Having finally convinced his mother to flee with him despite her strong reservations about leaving her other children behind, she now sits in jail before being taken to New Orleans. Brown begs her forgiveness, thinking he was to blame for her present situation. In his mother's response, however, he finds words of reassurance:

My dear son, you are not to blame for my being here. You have done nothing more nor less than your duty. Do not, I pray you, weep for me. I cannot last long upon a cotton plantation. I feel that my heavenly Master will soon call me home, and then I shall be out of the hands of the slave-holders! (55)

Through recording this scene, Brown accomplishes several important tasks. The dialogue appeals to his audience's emotions because it vividly shows slavery's strangulation of the family and the victims' sense of powerlessness. Brown is aware that his readers may want to hold him partially responsible for his mother's fate, but he puts himself in a better light by exhibiting his feelings of guilt and regret and repentance for any harm he may have caused. In presenting his mother's urging, "Now try to get your liberty!" (56), he insulates himself and makes himself impervious to reproach for fleeing slavery without his family. His mother's words assuage his guilt for her present condition and further remove himself from his actions and feelings as a slave.

As with other slave narrators such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Brown uses humor to separate himself from his enslaved self – though his narrative contains fewer and briefer instances. For example, he describes the daily ritual of prayer that his first master, Dr. John Young, observed after he "got religion." Brown's master and mistress, who at this point lived in St. Louis, Missouri, were "great lovers of mint julep" and would have a pitcher of it made up each morning before prayer time, which as a house servant, he was compelled to attend:

After drinking freely all around, they would have family worship, and then breakfast. I cannot say but I loved the julep as well as any of them, and during prayer was always careful to seat myself close to the table where it stood, so as to help myself when they were all busily engaged in their devotions. By the time prayer was over, I was about as happy as any of them. (37-38)

This description provides some light-hearted relief from Brown's sufferings in slavery, and it communicates a few salient ideas as well. While on the surface this scene looks jovial, Brown subtly points to a more sobering underside – the 'religion' of his master was doing less for him than the mint juleps were. He implies that for him to come anywhere near the level of happiness of his master's family would mean that his state of consciousness would have to be so altered that he would forget his position as a slave. Fittingly, Brown here demonstrates an alteration in thinking. By incorporating humor into his story, he moves his narrating self away from a subservient position and shows that he commands his history.

Brown occasionally employs humor for strictly personal reasons, without directing criticism toward any slaveholders, such as in his description of a time when, during his flight from slavery, he had to ask for food at a farmhouse near Dayton, Ohio because he had used up his provisions and was faint with hunger. In telling of how, though the husband refused him, the wife came to the door and, at the risk of upsetting her husband, insisted that they give him food, Brown reveals his gratefulness:

She asked him two or three times to get out of the way, and let me in. But as he did not move, she pushed him on one side, bidding me walk in! I was never before so glad to see a woman push a man aside! Ever since that act, I have been in favor of 'woman's rights!' (67)

In addition to expressing his appreciation for this "angel of mercy," Brown sends out an appeal to a certain segment of his audience, with the implication that the same government which tramples on the dignity of African Americans and slaves also subjugates women. The humor he infuses into this scene further aids him in articulating the difference between the positions of his narrating self and his enslaved self. Choosing a comic tone for describing this situation of having to beg for food when he is utterly dependent upon the mercy of strangers, enables him to remove himself psychologically from his sense of desperation

over his plight. It also attests to his having taken the control of his circumstances away from the slaveholders. As Jacqueline A. Bussie notes in *The Laughter of the Oppressed: Ethical and Theological Resistance in Wiesel, Morrison, and Endo*, “When the ‘weak’ and oppressed laugh, their laughter also affirms autonomy and power, and thereby struggles to be heard over the laughter of the hegemony. The competing laughter of the oppressed serves as counterpart to the dominant laughter, and destabilizes the oppressor’s assertion of dominance” (13). Brown’s laughter here in narrating this otherwise pathetic scene suggests he has removed himself from a position of vulnerability.

Brown most vividly reveals his inclination to separate his narrative persona from his enslaved self when he presents certain schemes he has undertaken which might inadvertently prompt his readers to call his character into question. In one case, he describes how he upset his employer Mr. Walker, “a well-known slave-trader” living in St. Louis, Missouri, by accidentally filling some wine glasses too full, which resulted in his guests’ spilling wine on their clothes. The next day, Walker gave Brown a note and a dollar to take to the jailer. Having found out from a sailor who read him the note that he was to be whipped, Brown tricked a free African American about his same size by paying him the dollar to go get a “trunk” for him at the jail, knowing that Walker knew the jailer and might find out if he did not go there. He further authenticates the charade by paying the whipped man for the jailer’s receipt and wetting his own cheeks before returning to his employer to convince Walker that he has received his punishment. Describing this incident, Brown initially revels in his own cleverness as he demonstrates that although slavery has denied him the opportunity to learn how to read and write and his employer has exploited that disadvantage, he can more than match wits with Walker. By showing his readers that he has beaten him at his own game, he rhetorically effects a reversal in the power structure of the relationship.

While Brown may relish the effectiveness of his scheme, he never loses sight of his audience. By controlling the picture he gives of himself

and Walker, he guides his readers' responses and mitigates disapproval his audience might have for him, as he depicts deception as a means of survival for one subjected to slavery:

This incident shows how it is that slavery makes its victims lying and mean; for which vices it afterwards reproaches them, and uses them as arguments to prove that they deserve no better fate. Had I entertained the same views of right and wrong which I do now, I am sure I should never have practised the deception upon that poor fellow which I did. I know of no act committed by me while in slavery which I have regretted more than that; and I heartily desire that it may be at some time or other in my power to make him amends for his vicarious sufferings in my behalf. (47)

This paragraph serves an important function in Brown's narrative since without it, his readers might view him in the same light as the slaveholders. Brown prevents that, however, by acknowledging his wrongdoing and emphasizing his and other slaves' victimization rather than his lying or meanness. Instead, he distances himself and the character of the Other by justifying his actions.

Such strategies have prompted some critics to link the slave narrative with the picaresque tradition. Raymond Hedin, for instance, identifies Brown as a picaresque slave narrator who "us[es] slave 'immorality' as further evidence against the absurdity and immorality of the slavery system and in support of abolition" (638).¹⁰ Through this reversal of culpability, Brown carefully mitigates the Otherness his readers might perceive in his actions by ascribing those deceptions to the effects of slavery. He argues, as Jacobs does in narrating the Sands episode, that sometimes slaves do things that they do not know are "unacceptable" because they have grown up under the demoralized system of slavery and are sometimes forced to do things that go against their own values or those of the audience. Both narrators encourage their readers to withhold judgment on their own questionable actions by suggesting that because of the slaves' position,

they should not be held to the same ethical standards as free human beings. Just as Brown made use of the free African American to take his whipping for him, he takes rhetorical advantage to fend off censure from his audience and redirect it toward slaveholders. To move himself away from his enslaved self and closer to his readers, he identifies himself as now having a different value system from that which he had as a slave. He courts their approval of his new value system and no doubt gains it by saying that he would now turn away from using deception and in showing his penitence.

The presentation of another deception becomes a means through which Brown can also move away from his position as a slave. He describes how his second and last slave master, a steamboat owner and commission merchant named Captain Enoch Price and his wife, living in St. Louis, Missouri, tried to match him up with a slave named Eliza. Before recounting a few lies that he told them, he guides his readers into a proper frame of mind for viewing his responses, saying that he had determined never to marry until he had his liberty but needed to keep that resolution a secret so that he would not provoke suspicion as to his intention to escape. He prefaces his deception with a defense and then communicates a sense of urgency to his readers: "I must keep upon good terms with Mrs. Price and Eliza. I therefore promised Mrs. Price that I would marry Eliza; but said that I was not then ready" (59). In framing his lie this way, Brown displays an awareness that what he reports might not sit well with his readers. He subtly argues, nevertheless, that his precarious situation justified his reacting as he did, and that, consequently, his audience should bear that in mind and not judge his lie harshly.

Brown suggests the vital necessity of this deception later when he describes how on a boat trip from St. Louis down to New Orleans with the Price family, he alleviates his master's fears about taking him with them back up the Mississippi River and then up the Ohio River and into the free state of Ohio to drop off cargo freight in Cincinnati by saying that he has been to Ohio before but "never liked a free state"; he also takes advantage of his previous lie regarding Eliza:

It was soon decided that it would be safe to take me with them, and what made it more safe, Eliza was on the boat with us, and Mrs. Price, to try me, asked if I thought as much as ever of Eliza. I told her that Eliza was very dear to me indeed, and that nothing but death should part us. It was the same as if we were married. This had the desired effect. The boat left New Orleans, and proceeded up the river. (60)

Although he presents two more deceptions here, he provides no excuses for them. As he justified his other lies, he now requires no explanation to justify these falsehoods when his freedom is at stake, as he persuades the Prices to travel to a free state with him on board. Focusing on the slaves' stratagems for survival, Charles H. Nichols contends that slave narrators constantly analyze the psychological conflicts which their positions generate and achieve moral and psychological renewal by adopting roles demanded by their situations as they cleave to ideals of personal freedom (285). In sum, Brown uses this survival technique when he assumes the persona of a content and lovesick slave in order to further his plans for escaping from bondage.

But more than simply persuading his master to travel to Ohio, he makes a few rhetorical moves to escape his position as a slave, both in the scene and in his narration of it. As he lies about having been to a free state before and not liking it, and about his devotion to Eliza, he disguises his emotions, giving himself space to control his genuine feelings without being subjected to the interpretation and manipulation of his master. Hiding his emotions is a way for him to help regulate his master's response to him. As he narrates this scene, he enlarges the psychological space between himself and his enslaved self by portraying himself as the one who orchestrated all of the events. Because Brown gives his readers an unadorned summary of what he said to the Prices, without recording their responses, he effectively squelches their authority and gives himself the final word. At the same time, he makes them appear foolish and weak – as if they would be so gullible as to believe

that he, a slave, “never liked a free state.” He portrays himself as a discerning, clever individual in control, who denies his assigned subservience and inverts the master/slave relationship.

As with Jacobs and Craft, Brown takes an interest in using names to pull away from his enslaved self. Whereas they appear to find freedom and protection in putting on fictitious names – Jacobs uses “Linda Brent” in her narration and Craft uses “William Johnson” in his escape – Brown creates an emotional space for himself through his strategic placement of a few names. Despite identifying numerous persons by name in the early part of his narrative, Brown does not reveal his master’s name, Dr. John Young, until about a quarter of the way into his story. His reason for not identifying his master may be found in his opening description: “I was born in Lexington, Ky. The man who stole me as soon as I was born, recorded the births of all the infants which he claimed to be born his property, in a book which he kept for that purpose” (28). By presenting his narrative, Brown rewrites his master’s property book and, by temporarily withholding Young’s name, visibly demonstrates that his old master has now figuratively become *his* property. His decision not to disclose Young’s name might also be based on resentment over Young’s denying him the name his mother gave him, for as Sterling Stuckey asserts, a slave associated a new name from his master with “enforced obedience and powerlessness” (197).

A few pages before Brown reveals his master’s name, he tells his readers that when he was around ten or twelve years old, his master changed his first name to give precedence to their infant nephew, William Moore, who came to live with them.¹¹ Significantly, Brown does not mention the name his master forced upon him, “Sandford,” until near the end of his narrative when he describes his escape from slavery and reveals that, at the time, he thought the name change “one of the most cruel acts that could have been committed” upon his rights, for he also was severely whipped for telling people his name was William (63). His reaction to the name change sheds light on his decision to withhold his master’s name for several chapters.¹² This latter maneuver mimics

Young's show of authority in regulating Brown's name and identity and relegates him to a parenthetical note. Similarly, the previous absence of "Sandford" is not an oversight. Brown's particular placement of that name in his narrative enables him to refute and set himself apart from his assigned identity and to deflate the power of the Other, dramatically emphasizing the idea that he has escaped from the tyranny of slavery.

Brown and other slave narrators disentangle themselves from slavery emotionally and psychologically by making a connection with their audiences. This process sometimes begins, as it does for Jacobs and Craft, with the author's preface imagining certain readers. Brown, however, opts not to use an authorial preface but includes a letter from his chosen editor, Edmund Quincy, and a preface by J.C. Hathaway.¹³ Quincy's letter serves several important functions: it indicates that Brown portrays a different phase of slavery from what Frederick Douglass has portrayed, and a range of experiences – having worked in the house, field, and river – that few slaves have had and which no one yet "has been competent to describe" (23). It also claims that Quincy's editing only involved clerical errors and suggestions of "a few curtailments." Creating a sense of trust between Brown and his readers, the letter expresses the idea that this narrative has not been tampered with and that he will be giving them a more complete picture of slavery.

Echoing a few ideas from Quincy's letter, Hathaway – who, as president of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society was also Brown's former employer while the latter was a traveling lecturer – implies that Brown knows and will reveal things about slavery that have been veiled to other people and that the simplicity of his descriptions attests to the veracity of these scenes and his experiences. Hathaway's Preface serves much the same purpose that a preface by Brown would have in directly addressing specific segments of the audience – those claiming to be Abolitionists, Christians, friends of the Bible, and the missionary cause – and imploring them to give evidence of their affiliations by tangibly supporting the anti-slavery cause. Through

Hathaway's Preface, Brown credibly accounts for how he has spent the last three of his fugitive years without appearing prideful.

Although in the narrative Brown does not as forcefully or directly address the readers as Hathaway does in the Preface, he displays a keen awareness of their ideologies and tries to draw near to them emotionally and psychologically by showing that he wants to uphold their values, thus effecting rhetorically a further distance between himself and slavery. He uses one such appeal in the first chapter, the time when as a young house servant he heard his mother, a field hand, groaning and crying out for mercy as the overseer whipped her for being ten or fifteen minutes late in getting into the field.¹⁴ By describing his inability to go beyond the door and being overcome with chills and weeping, Brown directs the readers' thoughts to his feelings of frustration and helplessness. By introducing this scene with a comment on how as a house servant he was better fed, better clothed, and allowed to sleep a half hour later than the field hands, he turns this seemingly better position into a negative one so that his readers will not assume that he had an easy life in the Big House. He also gives greater significance to his own experience by carefully wording his commentary to reflect the larger picture of slavery: "Experience has taught me that nothing can be more heart-rending than for one to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured, and to hear their cries, and not be able to render them assistance. But such is the position which an American slave occupies" (29). This example serves not just to relate an experience of his own and of slaves in general but also to exhibit his own character as loving, caring, and sympathetic, and to show himself as one who puts a premium on the family. Through the relation of this trauma, Brown aligns himself with his audience by essentially arguing that the slave system in practical terms renders the slaves' concern for their families worthless and even detrimental because of the emotional agony slaves suffer in not being able to protect or give comfort to those they care about.

Appealing to his audience later in a related matter, Brown explains one reason he did not want to marry anyone until he was free: "I knew

that if I should have a wife, I should not be willing to leave her behind; and if I should attempt to bring her with me, the chances would be difficult for success" (59). Brown, here, lets his readers know that, like them and in contradistinction to stereotypes about slaves, he takes marriage seriously and would honor the commitment. While he only speaks briefly of his own reason for not marrying, he uses this statement to make more generalized comments about marriage, saying that "there is no such thing as slaves being lawfully married" and that "the man may have as many women as he wishes, and the women as many men; and the law takes no cognizance of such acts among slaves" (59-60). These remarks send the audience the message that slavery encourages polygamy and other practices which directly oppose their own values. With this implied polarization of ideologies, he tries to repulse his readers away from sympathizing with the slaveholders and urges them to stand with him against slavery and such deplorable practices.

Reaching readers closer to home, Brown describes how on a trip to New Orleans he met a young white boy named Burrill whom he knew from St. Louis and who had been sold into slavery. Trying to help his newly widowed mother provide for his siblings, this young boy, about thirteen years old, took a job doing chores for a store owner named Riley and accompanied him on a "visit" down to New Orleans, only to find himself put in bondage. On returning to St. Louis, Riley told Burrill's mother he had died of yellow fever. Brown notes that he felt sad about this young boy's condition, but as they were both slaves, he could not aid him. Although the scene ends without overt commentary, the example contributes to the idea that slavery tears asunder family bonds and suggests that the debauchery of slaveholders and traders has no limits. Brown's choice to end the scene with a stated presumption that this young man is still a slave leaves the readers with an image to ponder, causing them to wonder about Burrill's fate too. More to the point, he prompts them to wonder about the security of their own families as well. By presenting a case of a young white man's being sold into slavery,

Brown demonstrates that slavery poses a threat not only to African Americans but to his white readers as well.

In the process of trying to move himself emotionally and psychologically closer to his readers, Brown occasionally becomes more leading in his commentary that accompanies the narration of scenes that might otherwise be misinterpreted. As he relates his experience of being hired out to work on one steamboat, he anticipates that some readers might overlook the effects of his bondage in the midst of an outwardly positive condition:

My employment on board was to wait on gentlemen, and the captain being a good man, the situation was a pleasant one to me; – but in passing from place to place, and seeing new faces every day, and knowing that they could go where they pleased, I soon became unhappy, and several times thought of leaving the boat at some landing-place, and trying to make my escape to Canada, which I had heard much about as a place where the slave might live, be free, and be protected. (35)

That he acknowledges this job as satisfactory gives greater weight to his expressions of dread and disgust over other labors, and that he immediately, even in the same sentence, qualifies the positive with a negative suggests that he thinks his audience may ease up in their sympathy or compassion. Brown necessarily takes this pleasant situation and casts a shadow on it so that his readers will see that for the slave, even a “good” situation is tainted by his position because it highlights the disparity between bondage and liberty, just as it did for Douglass when he saw the receding white sails on the Chesapeake Bay. The narration reveals that his enslavement goes deeper than legal and physical levels.

Brown’s concern with guiding his readers and bridging the distance between him and them sometimes takes the opposite form, turning what might be perceived as a negative into a positive. One example of this appears near the end of his narrative as he describes his experience of running out of provisions during his escape:

Have something to eat I must; but how to get it was the question! On the first night after my food was gone, I went to a barn on the road-side and there found some ears of corn. I took ten or twelve of them, and kept on my journey. During the next day, while in the woods, I roasted my corn and feasted upon it, thanking God that I was so well provided for. (63)

Although the action Brown describes might be looked upon as stealing, he anticipates his audience's possible disapproval of this and tempers it by using benign language, giving the impression that the corn belonged to no one and that it was his by finder's rights. He not only manages to avoid pushing his audience away by letting them see him as an Other who steals, but he also engineers the description of the scene to pull his readers toward him with the implication that what he did was more than morally correct – it was blessed, for he was accepting and being grateful for God's provisions. Brown subtly argues that God is on his side and that to criticize his action would be to scoff at or question God's grace.

Giving his audience an incentive to show whose side they are on, Brown indicates that some of the slaveholders he has encountered have something in common with many of his readers. He identifies this commonality in a few descriptions of Mr. John Colburn, the Missouri Hotel keeper for whom he worked: "He was from one of the free states; but a more inveterate hater of the negro I do not believe ever walked God's green earth" (32). Brown here can be seen projecting an assumption perhaps many of his readers have, that those who live in or are from the free states would support abolitionism. He summarily destroys that notion, however, and implies that there are supporters of slavery living amidst his audience in the North. For Brown, the fact that Colburn was from the free states seems as important to get across to the readers as the fact that he committed despicable deeds, for he unmistakably reiterates that point at the end of the scene. More than simply wanting to destroy his readers' false assumptions through this scene, Brown desires to move his audience closer to himself emotionally.

Knowing that they would not want to align themselves with the Otherness of Colburn, he draws on a feature common to the backgrounds of both so as to appeal to his readers to show that they are different from the slaveholders and that these cruel Northerners do not typify the feelings and attitudes of all of those in the free states. This bit of geographical information, then, becomes a means by which to relocate his audience into the position of wanting to support him and the abolitionist movement and distinguish themselves as humane.

Brown demonstrates a desire not only to move closer to his readers but also to separate himself from the slaveholders. By exposing the Otherness of his former masters and the rest of the slaveholders, he distances himself from them emotionally and psychologically. While Jacobs and Craft vehemently protest their masters' vileness, Brown, for the most part, calmly expresses his scorn and contempt for them. A primary way he shows the slaveholders and traders as degenerate is through a description of the physical torture they inflict upon slaves, such as in the case of the overseer Grove Cook, who became "more tyrannical and cruel" when Brown's master was absent and left him in charge. Brown draws his readers' attention to Cook's belligerence in telling how he had announced that he would flog any slave who worked under him in the field and how, though the master told him not to attempt to whip Randall, a strong and powerful slave who was "considered the most valuable and able-bodied slave on the plantation" (29), he was determined to do it and so began finding fault with him. Despite Randall's attempts to reason with him, Cook, with three of his friends, ordered him to go with them to the barn. When Randall refused, one of the men shot him, and the others rushed upon him with clubs, beat his face and head, and then tied him up in the barn, whereupon Cook gave one hundred lashes, had him washed with brine, and bound him with a ball and chain.

In narrating this scene, Brown guides his readers to sympathize with Randall by showing him as industrious and reasonable while showing Cook's unreasonableness and barbarism. Highlighting one of the

injustices of the "peculiar institution," this example suggests that working hard and minding one's own business afford the slave no protection against the lash. With observations on how Cook incited this confrontation with Randall, Brown argues that the master or overseer's use of the lash and other physical torments reflects an inner corruption. Brown eliminates his readers' possible hesitations to view Randall as a victim by anticipating how they might misread the scene and make allowances for Cook's behavior. He discounts the idea that Randall was lazy by describing him as "the most valuable and able-bodied slave," who had been given "a very hard task – more than he could possibly do" (29-30). Though Cook told Randall he was going to whip him "because he had not finished his task the day before" (30), Brown shows that if Cook wanted him to work harder, the punishment was too debilitating to accomplish that end. Similarly, if Cook simply wanted to control him physically, the gunshot that brought Randall to the ground was enough to subdue him. Lest his readers think that Randall's master would reprove Cook's actions, Brown concludes the scene with the comment that he was "much pleased to find that Randall had been subdued in his absence" (30), implying he just did not want to "dirty" his own hands. In spotlighting such excessive actions, Brown encourages his audience to conclude that slaveholders are not content to dominate their slaves physically, but seek to break their spirits as well.

Further emphasizing his point that the Others are malicious to the bone, Brown tells of the suffering endured by a slave named Aaron at the hand of his employer, John Colburn, whom he describes as "very abusive, not only to the servants, but to his wife also, who was an excellent woman" (32). In his narration of the scene, Brown calls his readers to observe not the deed but the fiery wrath that followed it: "One day, one of the knives was put on the table, not as clean as it might have been. Mr. Colburn, for this offence, tied Aaron up in the wood-house, and gave him over fifty lashes on the bareback with a cow-hide, after which, he made me wash him down with rum" (32). Later learning that Aaron had complained to his master about this treatment, though to no

avail, Colburn tied him up again and whipped him so severely that he was not able to work for ten to twelve days. Although Mrs. Colburn has no part in this incident, Brown's reference to her as an "excellent woman" serves important functions. By characterizing her in this way, Brown psychologically distances himself from the Other, for he himself recognizes her worth, whereas Colburn not only disregards her excellence but also abuses it. This juxtaposition of wife and husband accentuates Colburn's monstrous behavior and prepares the reader to view him as implacable in the case of Aaron. Brown's use of passive voice to describe the initial deed also diverts attention away from Aaron's culpability and toward the Otherness of Colburn, who victimizes him. While the occupation of Aaron's master may seem immaterial, in identifying him as a lawyer Brown implicitly argues that slaves have no protection or recourse under the law. Moreover, the examples of Randall and Aaron illustrate the idea that the Others work in collusion against the slaves. Brown wants his readers to see that slavery feeds the slaveholders' craving for violence, and that unless they support abolitionism, they in effect condone this depraved mentality.

Addressing a foundational subject his audience holds dear, Brown shows that slaveholders have also manipulated religion for their own ends. One such case involves a "gentleman" named D.D. Page, whom Brown saw one Sabbath running around his yard with a long whip, cutting a slave in an attempt to capture or punish him. When the slave realized he would soon be caught, he stopped abruptly, and Page tripped over him and fractured his own leg, leaving him crippled for life. Immediately after Brown tells of Page's crippling accident, he briefly describes another incident, which guides the readers' reactions to the first scene:

The same gentleman, but a short time previous, tied up a woman of his, by the name of Delphia, and whipped her nearly to death; yet he was a deacon in the Baptist church, in good and regular standing. Poor Delphia! I was well acquainted with her, and called to see her while upon her sick bed; and I shall never forget her

appearance. She was a member of the same church with her master. (38)

Although Brown as usual chooses not to make an overt evaluation of this scene, he provides some oblique commentary. By identifying this day as the Sabbath, he directs his readers toward the disparity between Page's act of cutting the slave and his own lack of godliness, calling to mind the persecution of Christ, the Innocent, who suffered the lash. Without specifying a wrong that the slave may have committed, Brown presents him as guiltless, and conversely Page appears all the more evil. That Brown does not want the readers to sympathize with Page's handicap becomes apparent by how quickly he follows up this scene with a picture of his reprehensible treatment of Delphia. Sandwiched between the descriptions of Page's cruelty and Brown's relationship to Delphia is a comment about Page's position within the Baptist church, which, in its narrative interruption, rhetorically mimics the disturbing nature of his hypocrisy. Just as the clause itself seems unrelated to the sentences preceding and following it, the fact of Page's being a deacon and in "good and regular standing" has no apparent influence or connection with how he thinks of and treats his slaves. His "religion" did not benefit the pursued slave or Delphia. In articulating the incompatibility between Page's nearly whipping a slave to death and maintaining a good standing in church, Brown moves away from the Other psychologically and shows himself to the readers as either more spiritually perceptive or more humane than Page. This episode about Page has the potential for two different readings, both of which make an argument that would unsettle the audience and urge them to action. If Page's church is aware of his treatment of the slaves, his good standing indicates that they tolerate this cruelty. If, however, his church does not know about these abuses, his good standing is a general warning to the readers that because there may not be any readily discernible signs of the Others' depraved characters, they might be hidden within their own churches.

To illuminate another aspect of this distortion, Brown shows his readers that the religious dissimulation of the Others not only enables them

to excuse their physical abuse of the slaves but also allows them to buy and sell humans with an easy conscience. Narrating the foiled escape attempt with his mother, Brown describes being apprehended for a two hundred dollar reward and then taken to the home of the lead bounty hunter:

Before the family retired to rest, they were all called together to attend prayers. The man who but a few hours before had bound my hands together with a strong cord, read a chapter from the Bible, and then offered up prayer, just as though God had sanctioned the act he had just committed upon a poor, panting, fugitive slave. (53)

Although this man is the one with the Bible, Brown spiritually and emotionally distances himself from him and reveals his Otherness by underscoring the slave catcher's discordant piety. In emphasizing this man's lack of compassion, Brown implicitly argues that the religion of the Others is one of form, not substance, that it affects the exterior, not the interior. Presenting himself as a helpless victim in this scene, Brown rhetorically mirrors the situation for his readers and gives them an opportunity to prove themselves and their religion as more sincere and genuine than this man's by supporting abolitionism.

Contending that slavery undermines his and his readers' values, Brown cites numerous cases of how it has torn families apart for the sake of profit or convenience. For example, he describes Solomon, a chained and manacled man whom he encountered while working on a steamboat: "He was a preacher, and belonged to the same church with his master. I was glad to see the old man. He wept like a child when he told me how he had been sold from his wife and children" (56). The description of Solomon's reaction makes the point that slaves feel the loss of family members as keenly as the rest of society. Because Brown's readers consider themselves Christians, the inclusion of this scene's religious background is significant, for it enables him to emphasize that Solomon and his master are spiritually polarized, the former being aligned with the fruit of the Spirit, showing love and gentleness, and the latter being associated with the works of the flesh, propagating enmity and

dissension.¹⁵ Brown wants his readers to see that slaveholders are so immoral that they measure the value of the family unit in terms of dollars.

Brown bases his portrayal of the slaveholders' practice of separating families not on observation alone but, like Jacobs and Craft, upon his personal experience as well. His approach differs from theirs, however, in that he holds his emotions in reserve. In narrating the farewell visit he has with his sister before her new master takes her away, he prepares his readers for viewing his representation of the event as less poignant than its reality: "I cannot give a just description of the scene at that parting interview. Never, never can be erased from my heart the occurrences of that day!" (50). Though he proceeds to give his readers a moving account of his sister's reaction to being forced to part with her family, he says nothing directly of his own response. This rhetorical evasiveness may be for strictly personal reasons, or, as Raymond Hedin suggests was the case for many slave narrators, it may be to assure his readers that he could hold himself under control.¹⁶ In Brown's opening comments he excuses himself from sharing his emotions but at the same time communicates the sense that he was affected deeply. Through these initial statements, he creates a space of protection for himself. Without divulging his innermost thoughts and feelings about the severance of his family and making himself more vulnerable, he takes precautions to ensure that his readers do not see him as unfeeling. At the same time that he fosters a relationship with readers by showing that he too holds the family unit dear, he emotionally distances himself from the Others by evading an acknowledgment of their control over his life. He necessarily raises this example and similar cases, however, to hold the Others figuratively accountable for the devastation they have wreaked on both individuals and families.

Brown implicitly encourages his readers to see the Otherness of slavery as an epidemic of evil. When he narrates the time he ran away from his abusive employer Major Freeland, an "inveterate drunkard," he describes being caught and then tied up in the smoke-house and severely

whipped by him.¹⁷ Freeland then had his son Robert, whom Brown calls “a chip off the old block,” give him a smoking from a fire of tobacco leaves, causing him to go into coughing and sneezing fits. Significantly, Brown notes that Robert told him that this is what his father used to do to his slaves in Virginia. Through this comment and his epithet for Robert, Brown shows that Otherness is passed down from one generation to the next, just as slavery is transmitted by inheritance. The inclusion of the claim that Major Freeland has used this torture on slaves not just in Missouri but also in Virginia, suggests the pervasiveness of this depravity. Contributing to the idea that slaveholding nourishes a diseased nature are Brown’s numerous examples of the Others’ not only committing abhorrent acts upon the slaves but also forcing them to join them in their detestable deeds. For instance, Brown tells of being hired out to the “soul-driver” Mr. Walker and being ordered to prepare the old slaves for market by plucking out their gray hairs and applying blacking to their heads:

These slaves were also taught how old they were by Mr. Walker, and after going through the blacking process they looked ten or fifteen years younger; and I am sure that some of those who purchased slaves of Mr. Walker were dreadfully cheated, especially in the ages of the slaves which they bought. (40)

By specifically telling his audience that he was ordered to perform these deeds and that he feels the buyers were defrauded, Brown reveals how deceptive the slaveholders and traders are and clears himself of blame, thereby distinguishing himself from the Others psychologically and morally. Through his description of this scene, Brown directs his readers to see the depravity of the slaveholders and traders as a contagion not just confined to them but which threatens to infect the slaves as well. While the readers might not be particularly disturbed at the idea that the traders and masters swindle each other, through this point Brown argues that the social ill of slavery results not simply from its legalization but, moreover, from a contaminated mentality.

Further highlighting the moral turpitude of the slaveholders, Brown brings to light cases in which slaves have been compelled to participate in their debauchery, with threats and acts of violence if they refuse. He describes the situation of a beautiful quadroon slave named Cynthia who, though bearing an "irreproachable character for virtue and propriety of conduct" (42), was subjected to "base offers" by her master Mr. Walker. Despite being told that if she did accept his "vile proposals," he would make her his housekeeper, and if she did not, he would sell her as a field hand to the worst plantation, Cynthia rejected them and, after being raped and made to bear four children by him, was sold into "hopeless bondage" to make room for his new wife.¹⁸ As usual, Brown provides no overt evaluation of this scene but rather leaves his commentary implicit in the description.¹⁹ In addition to showing the lasciviousness of some slaveholders, this example underscores the idea that while slavery tolerates the iniquity of the masters, it discourages the slaves from embracing righteousness, often preventing them from practicing virtue. Knowing his readers consider themselves Christians and would want to reinforce moral excellence, Brown here tries to draw them toward him by an appreciation for those same values – having indicated that he "comforted and encouraged" Cynthia before her master carried out his threats – and by raising their ire against the Others, who sabotage their ideologies. At the same time he shows sympathy with his audience's values, he widens the moral and psychological distance between himself and the slave masters.

While he suggests that Others such as Cynthia's master think they can sell away the consequences of their depravity or commit heinous deeds with impunity, Brown in writing his account prevents that from happening, figuratively holding them up for contempt and making them stand accountable. Through the process of distancing himself from them emotionally, morally, and psychologically, he enables himself to gain control over his own history and to deny his slave status. Writing his story, then, becomes a way of marking out a psychological terrain of freedom. Whereas in slavery his masters and employers dictated the

parameters of his movements, in his *Narrative*, William Wells Brown displaces them from their position of power and puts boundaries around them by exhibiting them as Others. Drawing on his unusually wide array of experiences as a slave, Brown tells a complex and variegated personal account of bondage and triumph that not only expands the larger story of slavery but also sheds light on the challenges of forging an identity through affliction.

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Notes

¹ W. Edward Farrison gives an even more thorough profile of Brown's life than does the *Narrative*. Gathering information from several of Brown's own letters, published works, and secondary materials, Farrison records biographical information about Brown's enslavement, his self-education, and his reception on the lecture circuit, including details about the Harwich, Massachusetts anti-slavery meeting in which his two fellow lecturers were mauled and he was picked up and thrown over the back of the stage and then beaten. Edward M. Coleman also offers a biographical sketch on William Wells Brown and provides a useful though brief historical analysis of each of his writings.

² William Wells Brown is author of the novel *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (based on the speculated relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings). Featuring a story of the new evidence that seems to substantiate the genetic links between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings' descendents, *U.S. News & World Report* headlined their 9 November 1998 issue with "Jefferson and Sally: After two centuries of controversy, new DNA evidence reveals that he fathered a child by one of his slaves," with Barbra Murray's accompanying cover story "Jefferson's Secret Life: Did the author of the Declaration of Independence take a slave for his mistress? DNA tests say yes" (Vol. 125, No. 18).

³ Speculating on why this slave narrative has not provoked much critical investigation, Stephen Lucasi observes, "The reason that Brown's

Narrative remains marginal in literary history and criticism, usually receiving only passing references rather than sustained analyses, may be its failure or refusal to correspond directly to the generic constraints identified and imposed both by abolitionist editors and by 20th- and 21st-century literary critics" (522-23). In his article "William Wells Brown's Narrative & Traveling Subjectivity," Lucasi contends that to see how Brown has created possibilities for agency, one must read his *Narrative* as a hybridization of the slave narrative and the travel narrative.

⁴ William L. Andrews, ed., "Introduction," *From Fugitive Slave to Free Man: The Autobiographies of William Wells Brown* (University of Missouri Press, 2003), 5.

⁵ Marion Starling notes that Brown had sent his third owner, Captain Price, a copy of his narrative when it was first published. Price then wrote a letter back to the editor, Edmund Quincy, declaring, "Now I see many things in his book that are not true, and a part of it as near true as a man could recollect after so long a time" (138). Brown included this letter in his fourth edition and, in a note to the reader, points out that he only lived with Price three months, which only took up a few pages in his narrative, so he would not expect that Price would know anything about the truth of his history except in regard to that part dealing with himself (138).

⁶ In a contemporary review, Reverend Ephraim Peabody finds fault with the narratives of Lewis and Milton Clarke, William Wells Brown, James W.C. Pennington, and Frederick Douglass because he believes they portray the Slave States as one large prison-house, with whites only concerned with exploiting slaves for their owners' advantage. He identifies Josiah Henson's narrative as the best picture of the evils peculiar to the slave life on the plantation.

⁷ Paul Jefferson notes that under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, fugitive slaves could be apprehended with a federal warrant. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 threatened the security of fugitive slaves and free African Americans as well because it allowed putative slaves to be apprehended simply by oral affidavit. Brown, having traveled to the

British Isles in 1849 as a lecturer in the abolitionist circuit, was advised, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, to extend his stay or run the high risk of recapture. He and his family stayed in England until 1854, when a British couple purchased his freedom for him.

⁸ Although the slave accounts of Briton Hammon, John Marrant, Olaudah Equiano, and Venture Smith may bring to mind the traditional picaresque, the likeness results from the slaves' own lives rather than from a shaping of their represented lives to fit a literary objective. In contrast, William Wells Brown, Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Solomon Northup, and James W.C. Pennington are some of the slave narrators who overtly employ the picaresque mode to subvert slavery's logic in regard to morality.

⁹ All citations from Brown's *Narrative* are from the second edition and will be cited parenthetically.

¹⁰ Hedin discusses how the fear of insurrection and the Southern backlash to the abolitionist onslaught of the 1830s caused many of the formal and informal slave codes to be tightened. Feeling even more victimized, many slaves took to flight, which involved cunning, deceit, and violence. Consequently, many of the behaviors that had previously been questionable at best, appeared more frequently in the slave narratives during the same period in which morality became a central part of the anti-slavery argument (636).

¹¹ For further discussions of the importance of names to the slave, see Peter Wood and Herbert Gutman.

¹² In his essay "Slips of the tongue," Sigmund Freud has commented that the twisting or simple distorting of names, whether conscious or unconscious, should be seen as acts of aggression (83-84).

¹³ Joseph C. Hathaway was president of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society and a Garrisonian. See Paul Jefferson's Introduction for a well-detailed account of Brown's relationship with Edmund Quincy.

¹⁴ Claiming this passage has the effect of a witness's courtroom testimony, Frances Smith Foster in *Witnessing Slavery* asserts that

Brown's concern with creating a particular response in his audience prevails over any concern with narrating a specific event from his personal life. While she incisively assesses Brown's audience adaptation, she underestimates the importance of his narrated actions and emotions. Rather than simply presenting the readers with a picture of the brutality inflicted upon slaves, Brown subtly delineates his own character to establish a kinship with his readers.

¹⁵ Wilbert E. Moore provides a thoughtful discussion of the "problem of conversion" in slavery. Because heathenism was one of the early legal justifications of slavery, slaves who became converted began claiming freedom. With the stated purpose of "preventing damage to masters" on that basis, legislation was passed in Maryland and Virginia in the mid-1600s that stated that the conferring of baptism did not alter the condition of such persons in regard to their bondage or freedom. Moore notes that these early laws, which other colonies began passing too, were also to prevent masters from refusing to let their slaves become converted (175). The justification of slavery on the condition of heathenism eventually shifted to a justification of the original heathenish state of blacks in Africa, which also provided the "basis for a distinctively American legal justification: inherent racial inferiority of the Negroes" (177). Brown may be using the cases of Delphia and Solomon to call the readers' attention to this early justification of slavery and to emphasize the irony between the slaves' and the masters' apparent spiritual conditions.

¹⁶ Hedin argues that because pro-slavery Southerners were attacking the narrators on issues of factual accuracy and reliable character, it was thought that the best way for slave narrators to protect their integrity was to write in a simple, direct style and a calm voice. With this even-toned literary realism, narrators also could assure the readers that they were capable of maintaining control of themselves – an especially important idea in light of Southern claims that blacks were sub-humans who needed to be restrained (635-42).

¹⁷ Jane and William Pease identify temperance as one of the reform movements which Northern free African American leaders used for

themselves and their communities to achieve dignity and freedom, not because alcoholism was a problem particular to their race but because abstinence so well represented the “moral uplift and social control” which was at the center of reform (“Seeking Economic Advancement” 124-43).

¹⁸ For information on the legal non-existence of a slave’s father, whether white or black, along with its implications, see Elkins and McKittrick (111-31).

¹⁹ See Stephen Butterfield’s “The Use of Language in the Slave Narratives” for a discussion of Brown’s use of understatement (74).

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