

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

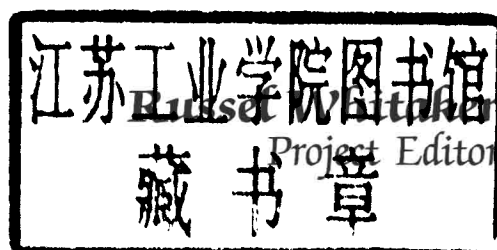
**NCLC**

**141**

Volume 141

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

*Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other  
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800  
and 1899, from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations*



THOMSON  
★  
GALE

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 141

**Project Editor**

Russel Whitaker

**Editorial**

Jessica Bomarito, Kathy D. Darrow, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Ellen McGeagh, Joseph Palmisano, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Lawrence J. Trudeau

**Data Capture**

Francis Monroe, Gwen Tucker

**Rights and Acquisitions**

Edna Hedblad, Emma Hull, Sheila Spencer

**Imaging and Multimedia**

Robert Duncan, Lezlie Light, Kelly A. Quin

**Composition and Electronic Capture**

Kathy Sauer

**Manufacturing**

Rhonda Williams

© 2004 Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson and Star Logo are trademarks and Gale is a registered trademark used herein under license.

*For more information, contact*

Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
Or you can visit our internet site at  
<http://www.gale.com>

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the product, submit your request via the Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

**Permissions Department**

Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
Permissions Hotline:  
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006  
Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Thomson Gale neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Thomson Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 84-643008

ISBN 0-7876-6929-6  
ISSN 0732-1864

Printed in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

## Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

## Organization of the Book

An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting

those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

## Indexes

Each volume of *NCLC* contains a **Cumulative Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *NCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *NCLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *NCLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook*, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## Citing *Nineteenth-Century Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association style.



The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Guerard, Albert J. "On the Composition of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 8, no. 1 (fall 1974): 201-15. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 119, edited by Lynn M. Zott, 81-104. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

Berstein, Carol L. "Subjectivity as Critique and the Critique of Subjectivity in Keats's *Hyperion*." In *After the Future: Postmodern Times and Places*, edited by Gary Shapiro, 41-52. Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 121, edited by Lynn M. Zott, 155-60. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Guerard, Albert J. "On the Composition of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 8, 1 (fall 1974): 201-15. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 119. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 81-104.

Berstein, Carol L. "Subjectivity as Critique and the Critique of Subjectivity in Keats's *Hyperion*." *After the Future: Postmodern Times and Places*. Ed. Gary Shapiro. Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990. 41-52. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 121. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 155-60.

### **Suggestions are Welcome**

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Project Editor:

Project Editor, Literary Criticism Series  
Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)  
Fax: 248-699-8054

## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *NCLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 141, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:**

*African American Review*, v. 26, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Donald B. Gibson. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*American Literature*, v. 65, December, 1993. Copyright © 1993, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher.—*American Studies*, v. 35, 1994 from “Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass” by Winifred Morgan. Copyright © 1994 by Mid-American Studies Association. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*American Transcendental Quarterly*, v. 9, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by The University of Rhode Island. Reproduced by permission.—*Discourse*, v. 19, winter, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by Wayne State University Press. Reproduced with permission of the Wayne State University Press.—*Duquesne Review*, v. 12, fall, 1997. Edited by Joseph R. Morice. Copyright © 1967 by Duquesne University. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—*Eighteenth-Century Life*, v. 25, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Griot*, v. 14, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by *Griot*. Reproduced by permission.—*History*, v. 85, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishing.—*Journal of British Studies*, v. 25, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by The University of Chicago. Reproduced by permission.—*The Journal of Narrative Technique*, v. 16, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by *The Journal of Narrative Technique*. Reproduced by permission of Eastern Michigan University.—*Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, v. 27, 1980. Copyright © 1980 by *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*. Reproduced by permission.—*Legacy*, v. 15, 1998 for “‘Silent Eloquence’: The Social Codification of Floral Metaphors in the Poems of Frances Sargent Osgood and Emily Dickinson” by Elizabeth Petrino. Edited by Karen Dandurand and Sharon Harris. Copyright © 1998 by The Pennsylvania State University. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*Lumen*, v. 13, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Lumen: Selected Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Reproduced by permission.—*Man and Nature*, v. 6, 1987. Copyright © 1997 by *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Reproduced by permission of *Lumen*.—*MELUS: The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, v. 17, 1991-92. Copyright © 1991-92 *MELUS: The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 1991-92. Reproduced by permission.—*New Hibernia Review*, v. 5, spring, 2001 for “Frederick Douglass in Ireland: The Dublin Edition of His Narrative” by Patricia J. Ferreira. Copyright © 2001 by *New Hibernia Review*. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*New Letters*, v. 43, 1977 for “Animal Farm Unbound Or, What the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Reveals about American Literature” by H. Bruce Franklin. Copyright © 1977 by H. Bruce Franklin. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, v. 19, 1995 for “‘The Care of the Poor is Her Profession’: Hannah More and Women’s Philanthropic Work” by Dorice Williams Elliott. Copyright © 1995 by *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., and the author. <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>—*Papers on Language & Literature*, v. 36, fall, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by The Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Reproduced by permission.—*Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism: History, Theory, Interpretation*, v. 32, 1999 for “Read Here thy Name Concealed: Frances Osgood’s Poems on Parting with Edgar Allan Poe” by Mary De Jong. Copyright © 1999 by *Poe Studies*. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Studies in Short Fiction*, v. 12, 1975. Copyright © 1975 by *Studies in Short Fiction*. Reproduced by permission.—*Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, v. 43, 2001 for “Hannah More and the Problem of Poverty” by Jane Nardin. Copyright © 2001 by the University of Texas Press. Reproduced by permission of The University of Texas Press and the author.—*Western Humanities Review*, v. 42, 1988 for “Learning to Write: The Narrative of Frederick Douglass” by John Burt. Copyright © 1988 by The University of Utah. Reproduced by permission of the author.

### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 141, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:**

Bennett, Michael. From “Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery,” in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Edited by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace. University Press of Vir-

ginia, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission of the University of Virginia Press.—Blight, David W. From “Introduction: ‘A Psalm of Freedom,’” in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. Edited by David W. Blight. Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1993. Copyright © David W. Blight. Reproduced by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.—Demers, Patricia. From *The World of Hannah More*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The University Press of Kentucky. Reproduced by permission.—Donkin, Ellen. From “The Paper War of Hannah Cowley and Hannah More,” in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1661-1820*. Edited by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski. Ohio University Press, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by Ohio University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Ford, Charles Howard. From *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*. Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 1996. Copyright © 1996 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Gates, Henry-Louis, Jr. From “Binary Oppositions in Chapter One of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself*,” in *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*. Edited by Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto. Modern Language Association of America, 1979. Copyright © 1978 by The Modern Language Association of America. Reproduced by permission.—Gibson, Donald B. From “Faith, Doubt, and Apostasy: Evidence of Things Unseen in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*,” in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*. Edited by Eric J. Sundquist. Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge Press, 1990. Copyright © 1990 by Cambridge University Press. Reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press.—Hubbard, Dolan. From “‘Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around’: Reading the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*,” in *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism*. Edited by Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar. Duke University Press, 1993. Copyright © 1993, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Used by permission of the publisher.—Keane, Angela. From “The Anxiety of (Feminine) Influence: Hannah More and Counterrevolution,” in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*. Edited by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke. State University of New York Press, 2001. Copyright © 2001 State University of New York. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the State University of New York Press.—Myers, Mitzi. From “Hannah More’s Tracts for the Times: Social Fiction and Female Ideology,” in *Fetter’d or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*. Edited by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski. Ohio University Press, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by Ohio University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—O’Meally, Robert G. From “The Text Was Meant to Be Preached,” in *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*. Edited by Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto. Modern Language Association of America. Copyright © 1978 by Modern Language Association of America. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Rowe, John Carlos. From “Between Politics and Poetics: Frederick Douglass and Postmodernity,” in *Reconstructing American Literary and Historical Studies*. Edited by Gunter H. Lenz, Hartmut Keil, and Sabine Brock-Sallah. Campus Verlag, 1990. Copyright © 1990 in Frankfurt am Main by Campus Verlag. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Stepto, Robert. From “Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control,” in *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*. Edited by Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto. Modern Language Association of America. Copyright © 1978 by the Modern Language Association of America. Reproduced by permission.

#### PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 141, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Douglass, Frederick, photograph. The Library of Congress.—More, Hannah, photograph. Getty Images. Reproduced by permission.—Title page for *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, by Hannah More, 1809. Special Collections Library, University of Michigan. Reproduced by permission.—Title page for *Poems of Mrs. Osgood*, by Frances Sargent Osgood, 1846. Courtesy, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD. Reproduced by permission.—Title page for *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Copyright © by Bettmann/Corbis. Reproduced by permission.



# Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

**Barbara M. Bibel**  
Librarian  
Oakland Public Library  
Oakland, California

**Dr. Toby Burrows**  
Principal Librarian  
The Scholars' Centre  
University of Western Australia Library  
Nedlands, Western Australia

**Celia C. Daniel**  
Associate Librarian, Reference  
Howard University  
Washington, D.C.

**David M. Durant**  
Reference Librarian  
Joyner Library  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

**Nancy Guidry**  
Librarian  
Bakersfield Community College  
Bakersfield, California

**Steven R. Harris**  
English Literature Librarian  
University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, Tennessee

**Mary Jane Marden**  
Collection Development Librarian  
St. Petersburg College  
Pinellas Park, Florida

**Heather Martin**  
Arts & Humanities Librarian  
University of Alabama, Sterne Library  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Susan Mikula**  
Director  
Indiana Free Library  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

**Thomas Nixon**  
Humanities Reference Librarian  
University of North Carolina, Davis Library  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**Mark Schumacher**  
Jackson Library  
University of North Carolina  
Greensboro, North Carolina

**Gwen Scott-Miller**  
Assistant Director  
Sno-Isle Regional Library System  
Marysville, Washington

**Donald Welsh**  
Head, Reference Services  
College of William and Mary, Swem Library  
Williamsburg, Virginia

# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Frederick Douglass 1817?-1895</b> .....	1
<i>Entry devoted to Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1845)</i>	
<b>Hannah More 1745-1833</b> .....	161
<i>English nonfiction writer, playwright, poet, essayist, and novelist</i>	
<b>Frances Sargent Osgood 1811-1850</b> .....	316
<i>American poet, essayist, and children's writer</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 369

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 467

NCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 479

NCLC-141 Title Index 483

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*

## Frederick Douglass

The following entry presents criticism of Douglass's autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845). For information on Douglass's complete career, see *NCLC*, Volumes 7 and 55.

### INTRODUCTION

The *Narrative* is the most famous of the more than one hundred American slave narratives written prior to the Civil War.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Douglass, whose mother was a black slave and whose father was an unidentified white man, possibly his master, was born around 1817 in Tuckahoe, Maryland, as Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. He was separated from his mother in infancy and raised by his maternal grandmother on the estate of his master, Captain Aaron Anthony. His childhood was relatively happy until he was transferred to the plantation of Anthony's employer, Colonel Edward Lloyd. In 1825 Douglass was again transferred, this time to the Baltimore household of Hugh Auld, whose wife began teaching Douglass to read until Auld insisted that she stop. Douglass became convinced that literacy provided an important key to achieving his freedom and secretly began learning to read on his own.

In 1838, Douglass escaped to New York where he became a prominent figure in the abolitionist movement. In the 1840s he began speaking publicly as a lecturer for William Lloyd Garrison's Massachusetts Antislavery Society, and wrote the *Narrative*, his account of his experiences as a slave, in response to those critics who doubted that such an eloquent orator had ever been in bondage. Concerned that he could be returned to captivity under the fugitive slave laws, Douglass traveled to England and Ireland, where he was well received by local social reformers. He returned to America in 1847 and bought his freedom from his former master.

In a break with Garrison and his abolitionist paper *The Liberator*, Douglass founded his own weekly paper, *The North Star*. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s he continued his work as a writer and speaker for the abolitionist movement, and in 1863 he served as an advisor to President Abraham Lincoln on the use of black soldiers in the war effort. After the Civil War, Douglass became involved in diplomatic work, including an assignment as consul-general to the Republic of Haiti. He published two more versions of his life story, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). He died in 1895 at his home in Washington, D.C.

### PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is a detailed, firsthand account of slave life and the process of self-discovery by which Douglass recognized the evils of slavery as an institution. Douglass began his story with his birth and immediately ran into a problem specific to the life of a slave. Although he knew where he was born, he had no exact knowledge of the date, a fact that set him apart from the white children of the plantation who knew their ages and could celebrate their birthdays. Slaves, according to Douglass, "know as little of their age as horses know of theirs." His awareness of his status as a slave and of the meaning of slavery as an institution was furthered when he witnessed his aunt being stripped to the waist and savagely beaten. One of the more famous episodes in the book involves Douglass overhearing his master, Hugh Auld, rebuking his wife for her desire to teach the slave to read and declaring that literacy "would forever unfit him to be a slave." Douglass gleaned two valuable lessons from this experience. He first concluded that keeping slaves ignorant and illiterate was an important element in their subjugation, and resolved to teach himself to read. Second, by observing Mrs. Auld's transformation from a kindly woman with no previous experience as a slave-owner to a harsh mistress under her husband's tutelage, Douglass learned of the institution's effects on even well-intentioned whites.

Douglass's growing dissatisfaction with his condition led to the pivotal incident in which he was sent to Edward Covey, a notorious "slave-breaker," to be disci-

plined. Initially reduced to little more than a brute by endless work, Douglass finally refused to submit to Covey's "discipline" any longer. The two engaged in a violent fight and Douglass, in the end, overcame his tormentor, resolving that "however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact." From that point, Douglass was firmly on the road to freedom although it would take him some time before he was able to accomplish that feat. He avoided going into detail on the specific means of his escape, because to do so would "run the hazard of closing the slightest avenue by which a brother slave might clear himself of the chains and fetters of slavery."

## MAJOR THEMES

One of the most prominent themes in the *Narrative* involves the association of literacy with freedom. The acquisition of the one precipitated the desire for the other, which was, for Douglass, a two-edged sword. He had occasional regrets about the knowledge that literacy afforded him because without the ability to change his status as slave, he was more miserable than ever. Nonetheless, Douglass's ability to tell his story in his own words firmly refuted the commonly held belief at the time that slaves were incapable of communicating through the standard conventions of American literature. Douglass not only displayed his facility with the dominant literary modes of his time, but he also incorporated folkloric elements from both black and white cultures into his text. Robert G. O'Meally points out that Douglass drew on the tradition of the African-American sermon, itself grounded in folklore, and that the *Narrative* was meant to be preached as well as read.

Douglass's ambivalent relationship to Christianity is another important theme of his story. The *Narrative* exposed the hypocrisy of individual Christians whose treatment of slaves was cruel and inhumane, and of organized Christianity as a whole which, with few exceptions, supported the institution of slavery and even claimed that it was sanctioned by God. Douglass believed that the more religious the master, the more cruel he would be, and claimed that "of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst." Douglass's harsh criticism of Christianity was tempered by his later writings, including the Appendix to the *Narrative*.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Of the many slave narratives produced in the nineteenth century, Douglass's has received the most critical attention and is widely regarded as the best. H. Bruce Fran-

klin notes that "from Ephraim Peabody and William Wells Brown to the present, all students of the slave narrative have agreed that the masterpiece of the form is Frederick Douglass' first autobiography." David W. Blight claims that "what sets Douglass's work apart in the genre . . . is that he interrogated the moral conscience of his readers, at the same time that he transplanted them into his story, as few other fugitive slave writers did." But despite the *Narrative*'s preeminent position within the slave narrative genre, until the 1970s it received little attention as a literary work, and was out of print from the 1850s until 1960. Franklin complains that the work has been neglected by literary historians and that Douglass, "one of the most important authors in nineteenth-century America, has remained a virtual nonentity outside the academic ghetto of Afro-American studies."

In the years since Franklin's essay, however, the text has received increasing scrutiny from a wide variety of perspectives. Scholars have focused on Douglass's participation in various discourses, both black and white, including those associated with folklore and with Christianity. Kelly Rothenberg discusses Douglass's use of elements from black folklore that warn against the dangers of resistance to slavery, although he himself rejected the advice those tales offered and tried to escape despite the risks. A. James Wohlpart explores Douglass's double challenge: to the institution of slavery and also to the institution of the Christian Church that supported slavery. Douglass, claims Wohlpart, operated within the discourse of white Christianity at the same time that he subverted it. John Carlos Rowe examines Douglass's text in economic and political terms, claiming that the author was "clearly developing his own understanding of the complicity of Northern capitalism and Southern slave-holding in the 1845 *Narrative*." Lisa Yun Lee also explores the politics of language in the text, noting that in the first half of the narrative Douglass is silent and powerless, but as he acquires the ability to speak within the dominant discourse, he becomes increasingly powerful and increasingly vocal. According to Lee, "the delineation between the experience of silent marginalization and speaking presence is so thoroughly presented that the binary nature of the two halves of the *Narrative* must be purposefully drawn." Winifred Morgan has examined Douglass's narrative in conjunction with Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, claiming that there are basic gender-related differences between the two texts. According to Morgan, what distinguishes Douglass's story from Jacobs's and indeed from most other slave narratives, is the author's emphasis on his existence as an individual who achieved both literacy and freedom almost entirely on his own. Morgan believes that Douglass "sets up two contrasting frames: he presents himself as someone who is 'one of a kind' and at the same time 'representative.'" Gwen Bergner discusses

Douglass's narrative as a tale of masculine subject formation with parallels to the theory of the Oedipus complex established by Freud. Bergner examines Douglass's description of the whipping of his Aunt Hester whereby he became painfully aware of slavery as an institution. Bergner explains that "while psychoanalytic theory explains—by way of the Oedipus complex—how the subject apprehends sexual difference, Douglass's whipping scene demonstrates how an individual also learns racial difference." Michael Bennett explores the link between anti-pastoralism and African-American literature and culture beginning with Douglass's narrative. According to Bennett, the usual terms of the city/country dichotomy were reversed in the *Narrative* because urban spaces offered a certain amount of freedom from the worst abuses of plantation slavery practiced in isolated rural areas. "For Douglass," Bennett reports, "the city is not just relatively more free than the country, it is also a place that offers hope of the ultimate freedom: escape."

---

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (autobiography) 1845  
*Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5<sup>th</sup>.* 1852 (speech) 1852  
*The Heroic Slave* (novella) 1853  
*The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered* (speech) 1854  
*The Anti-Slavery Movement* (speech) 1855  
*My Bondage and My Freedom* (autobiography) 1855  
*Men of Color, to Arms!* (essay) 1863  
*What the Black Man Wants* (speech) 1865  
*John Brown* (speech) 1881  
*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (autobiography) 1881; revised edition, 1892  
*The Race Problem* (speech) 1890  
*The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass.* 5 vols. (letters, speeches, and essays) 1950-75  
*The Frederick Douglass Papers.* 6 vols. (letters, speeches, autobiography, and essays) 1979-

---

## CRITICISM

**H. Bruce Franklin (essay date spring 1977)**

SOURCE: Franklin, H. Bruce. "Animal Farm Unbound Or, What the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* Reveals about American Literature." *New Letters* 43, no. 3 (spring 1977): 25-46.

[In the following essay, Franklin explores animal imagery in the *Narrative* and the role of Douglass's story in

refuting the commonly held belief, particularly in the South, that slaves were incapable of producing literature.]

Prior to the Black urban rebellions of 1964-1968, what the academic establishment defined as American literature included about as many Afro-American achievements as major-league baseball did before 1947. The subsequent token integration of our anthologies, curricula, and departments has not fundamentally altered the canon of American literary masterpieces, nor the criteria for choosing that canon and the critical methodologies applied to it. By and large, we are still acting as though American literature were a mere colonial implantation, no doubt modified by local conditions but in essence an offshoot of European literature.

But insofar as American literature is a unique body of creative work, what defines its identity most unequivocally is the historical and cultural experience of the Afro-American people. At long last we have come to understand that this is obviously true for American music and dance, and we are on the verge of recovering our lost comprehension of the interrelations between music and poetry. When we grasp the significance of this truth for American literature as a whole, we will be forced radically to change our critical methodologies, our criteria for literary excellence, and our canon of great literature—or perhaps even the entire notion of a canon.

At least until the middle of the Civil War, the dominant American view of Blacks was that they were an inferior kind of being, perhaps even a sub-human species. This view was codified into law and the founding Constitution, implemented thoroughly in social practice, and deeply imbued in the outlook of most American writers. Here is one widely disseminated expression of that view:

The situation of the slave is, in every particular, incompatible with the cultivation of his mind. It would not only unfit him for his station in life, and prepare him for insurrection, but would be found wholly impracticable in the performance of the duties of a labourer. . . .

Inert and unintellectual, he exhibits no craving for knowledge; and prefers, in his hours of recreation, indulgence in his rustic pleasures to the pursuit of intellectual improvement . . . the negro never suffers from the thirst for knowledge. Voluptuous and indolent, he knows few but animal pleasures; is incapable of appreciating the pride and pleasure of conscious intellectual refinement. . . . The dance beneath the shade surpasses, for him, the groves of the academy.

*The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia, 1836)

In the literature of the south, or rather in literature by white southerners, this view was virtually unanimous. William Gilmore Simms, still widely touted as the great-



est writer produced by the "Old South," argued in "The Morals of Slavery" (1837, 1852) that "there are few people so very well satisfied with their conditions as the negroes,—so happy of mood, so jocund, and so generally healthy and cheerful." The most venerated writer of New England, Nathaniel Hawthorne, shared this view. In his fiction, Black people exist only as stereotyped faithful body servants, such as Caesar in "The White Old Maid," Scipio in "Egotism," or that other Scipio whose stock role provides comic relief in *The House of the Seven Gables* (just like Jupiter in Poe's "The Gold Bug," Scipio is scared of a ghost that comes to "frighten a poor nigger"). The only distinct Black character is also a stereotype, the stock "nigger" of "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," a mulatto who turns from "yellow" to a "ghastly white" when confronted with a crime he was too cowardly to commit. Twice Hawthorne explicitly stated his views on slavery. In "Old News" (1835), he characterizes "slave labor" in eighteenth-century New England as "a patriarchal, and almost a beautiful, peculiarity of the times." "The slaves," he thinks, "were the merriest part of the population," and all runaway slaves "would have been better advised had they stayed at home, foddering the cattle, cleaning dishes,—in fine, performing their moderate shares of the labors of life, without being harassed by its cares." And nine years before the Civil War, Hawthorne lashed out at all anti-slavery "agitation," which, he asserted, threatened "the ruin of two races which now dwell together in greater peace and affection . . . than had ever elsewhere existed between the taskmaster and the serf." (*The Life of Franklin Pierce*, 1852).

In response to this view and to the system it defended, there emerged a literary genre whose form and content is uniquely American—the narrative of the escaped slave. The slave narrative is the literary creation of those "inert and unintellectual" bodies without minds, those happy serfs, those "voluptuous and indolent" animals with no human aspirations. The racist mentality of William Gilmore Simms and Nathaniel Hawthorne, of Edgar Allan Poe and James Fenimore Cooper, is not unique to America; it was, and still is, generally characteristic of European societies and the colonialists exported from Europe to the Americas, Asia, and Africa. The slave narrative, however, is truly American. In fact, it was the first genre the United States of America contributed to the written literature of the world.

This event in literary history was recognized in print as early as 1849, by the Reverend Ephraim Peabody, who put it this way in his article "Narratives of Fugitive Slaves" in the *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*: "America has the mournful honor of adding a new department to the literature of civilization—the autobiographies of escaped slaves." In *Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-Slaves' Account of Their Bondage and Freedom*, the pioneering twentieth-century history of

the genre, Charles H. Nichols demonstrated the vast popularity and influence of these autobiographies by Black Americans. (This study was published in 1963, in Holland, revealingly enough; it was not until 1969 that it finally achieved publication in America.) The genre produced several of the greatest works of nineteenth-century American literature. In 1863 an escaped slave who had written one of these narratives, the man now once again being recognized as America's first Black novelist and playwright, William Wells Brown, included a history of the genre in his vanguard study, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*.

In less than a century, however, this literary achievement had been effectively expunged from the study of American literature. By the time of the 1954 Supreme Court decision against apartheid in education, as Arna Bontemps pointed out in *Great Slave Narratives* (1969), only one example of the slave narrative was in print. But since then our history has prepared us to understand both the social and the artistic significance of these works.

The slave narrative was usually told by a fugitive slave whose escape from slavery was perceived, quite accurately, as a threat to the entire system. Those who defended slavery argued, like Simms and Hawthorne, that Negroes were happy to be slaves. Every escaped slave was a living refutation of that argument. Another defense of slavery, one underlying the first, was that Negroes were not thinking human beings. Every author of a slave narrative was a refutation of that argument. And if the slave narrative could transcend the literature being published by the apologists for slavery, it would embody even more radical implications—about human potential, about the meaning of culture, about the relations among social classes.

The audience for the slave narrative was generally the reading public of the northern states, overwhelmingly white and relatively "cultured." An odd relationship existed between the authors and the readers, one exacerbated by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The audience was part of the body of citizens whose lawful duty was to help ferret out the authors and return these runaway pieces of property to their rightful owners. The narratives were frankly polemical, and, whether actually written by the slaves themselves or, as in some cases, ghost-written by their abolitionist friends, generally used the polite literary language and style expected by their audience. But the experience being rendered was brutal and sordid beyond the imagination, not to mention the direct experience, of most of these readers.

From Ephraim Peabody and William Wells Brown to the present, all students of the slave narrative have agreed that the masterpiece of the form is Frederick

Douglass' first autobiography, published in 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*. And even if the rest of the genre did not exist, the *Narrative* standing on its own is still, as Jean Fagan Yellin has called it, "a classic American autobiography." Nevertheless, the book has received scandalously little critical attention as a work of literature, and Douglass himself, one of the most important authors in nineteenth-century America, has remained a virtual nonentity outside the academic ghetto of Afro-American studies.

*Articles on American Literature, 1950-1967* (Duke University Press, 1970) includes not a single article on Frederick Douglass, though it lists over fifty articles on Jonathan Edwards, James Kirke Paulding, and William Wirt. The omission cannot be explained by the fact that Douglass' works are mostly essays and autobiographical narratives, for there are 459 articles listed on Henry David Thoreau. Douglass' books are not even included in the standard *Bibliography of American Literature* compiled by Jacob Blanck. The standard history of American literature is *Literary History of the United States*, by Robert Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, Richard Ludwig, and William M. Gibson. In 1974, a greatly revised fourth edition was published, with 1,555 pages of facts and analysis in small print. There are three chapters on the literature produced in the South through the Civil War; all this literature is by whites. The authors discussed include such eminent apologists for slavery and literary giants at Hugh Legaré, William Wirt, and George Fitzhugh, author of *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters*. Nowhere is there any discussion of the slave narrative or slave poetry. Not even the name of Frederick Douglass appears, though Stephen A. Douglas is mentioned at least four times. The *Bibliography Supplement* (1972) has bibliographies for 218 individual authors, including John C. Calhoun, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, James Allen Lane, and Allen Tate—but not Frederick Douglass. In other words, the white academic establishment still pretends that Frederick Douglass does not exist as a literary artist or that, like Satchel Paige, he is not good enough to play outside the Negro leagues.

Douglass' *Narrative* has been discussed in book-length histories of Afro-American literature and the slave narrative; Benjamin Quarles did a valuable introduction, mostly historical, for his 1960 Harvard University Press edition of the book; in 1972, two extremely insightful brief analyses appeared in critical books, Jean Fagan Yellin's *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863* (NYU Press) and Houston Baker's *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture* (University of Virginia Press). There have been, to the best of my knowledge, prior to this only two published articles on the *Narrative*, and

both appeared in *CLAJ* [*College Language Association Journal*], a publication devoted to Afro-American literature (Nancy T. Clasby, "Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*: A Content Analysis," *CLAJ*, 14 [1971], 242-250, and Albert E. Stone, "Identity and Art in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*," *CLAJ*, 17 [1973], 192-213).

I shall be exploring here the wider significance of one theme and set of images in the *Narrative*, using some methods we customarily deem appropriate to a short story by Poe or Hawthorne, a poem by Whitman or Dickinson, or an autobiographical narrative by Thoreau or Henry Adams. Frankly, a subsidiary part of my intention is to show that individual early Afro-American works of literature merit the kind of close attention we usually reserve for works of the canon. It is curious that such a demonstration should be necessary for the slave narrative, for it is, of all forms of early Afro-American literature, the one which most thoroughly accepts the dominant European literary conventions.

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* is a book created by a being who was once considered an animal, even by himself, for an audience that remains unconvinced that he is in fact a fellow human being. So it should come as no surprise that animal imagery embodies Douglass' deepest meanings.

In *Long Black Song*, Houston Baker notes that animal metaphors "appear in most of the chapters of the *Narrative*." Baker offers several explanations. He observes that "Douglass is aware of American slavery's chattel principle, which equated slaves with livestock, and he is not reluctant to employ animal metaphors to capture the general inhumanity of the system." He makes an intriguing suggestion about overtones in the *Narrative* from the animal tales of Black slave culture. And he emphasizes the appropriateness of the animal imagery to "the agrarian settings and characters." Albert Stone disagrees with Baker, arguing that Douglass' "images of ships and the sea" are far more central than animal imagery, forming a pattern which "connects and defines all stages of his personal history." Stone's sensitive exploration of the nautical imagery is a valuable contribution to our appreciation of the artistic richness of this book. It is, however, the animal imagery that is crucial, and in ways far more significant than even Baker perceived.

These images not only structure the development of the *Narrative*, but also locate the book on the front lines of a major ideological battleground of the 1840's and 1850's. Douglass is asking, and answering, one central question in the *Narrative*: What is a human being? That is, within his historical context, how is a human being different from animals (or machines) that can perform labor? This was also the central philosophical and sci-

entific question of his time, a question that all our subsequent history has been trying to resolve. While Douglass wrote, Darwin and Marx were both wrestling with precisely the same question. And in America, natural science and its definition of what was human was in the process of coming to focus most narrowly on "the Negro."

Slavery, as we now recognize, went through a fundamental change around 1830, completing its evolution from a predominantly small-scale, quasi-domestic institution appended to hand-tool farming and manufacture into the productive base of an expanding agricultural economy, utilizing machinery to process the harvested crops and pouring vast quantities of agricultural raw materials, principally cotton, into developing capitalist industry in the northern states and England. Prior to the 1830's, as George Fredrickson documents in *The Black Image in the White Mind* (N.Y., 1971), open assertions of the "permanent inferiority" of Blacks "were exceedingly rare." In fact, many eighteenth-century and earlier nineteenth-century apologists for slavery defended it as a means of "raising" and "civilizing" the poor, benighted, child-like Negro. But in the 1830's there emerged in America a world view based on the belief that Blacks were inherently a race inferior to whites, and as part of this world view there developed a scientific theory of Blacks as beings half way, or even less than half way, between animals and white people. This was part of the shift of Blacks from their role as children, appropriate to a professedly patriarchal society which offered them the means of eventual development into adulthood, into their role as subhuman beasts of burden, the permanent mainstay of the labor force of expanding agribusiness.

By 1833, this world view had been scientifically formulated in Richard Colfax's *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists, Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes* (New York, 1833). In his researches into the skulls and facial angles of Negroes, Colfax prefigured the developed science of the 1840's and 1850's known as the "American School of Ethnology." He argued that "the acknowledged meanness of the Negro's intellect only coincides with the shape of his head." This can be readily seen in the Negro's "facial angle," which was "almost to a level with that of a brute." Colfax concludes that Negroes are half way between animals and white people: "the Negroes, whether physically or morally considered, are so inferior as to resemble the brute creation as nearly as they do the white species." (Fredrickson cites this and many other works prior to 1845 making the same biological case against the Negro.)

Colfax did not further develop the concept of Negroes as a distinct *species*, but by the late 1830's this next logical position was achieving its first systematic pre-

sentation in a body of scientific literature dedicated to demonstrating "that the black man was a member of a separate and permanently inferior species." In the early 1840's came the theory of polygenesis. Dr. Samuel George Morton proved scientifically in *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia, 1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (Philadelphia, 1844) that Negroes did not descend from Adam but were a distinct and subhuman species originating in southern Africa. (Frederickson, pp. 74-77. Carolyn Karcher has shown how Melville satirized this "science" in her "Melville's 'The 'Gees': A Forgotten Satire on Scientific Racism," *American Quarterly*, 27 [1975], 421-442.)

Frederick Douglass had lived the social reality which these scientific theories were adduced to perpetuate. He had begun life as a farm animal. Looking back, he traces the course of his development into a conscious human being, threatened all along the way by the danger of being reduced once again to a beast. Using the most brilliant manipulation of his audience's literary conventions to display the particularities of his own experience, Douglass is able to show what it means to be a human being in an age and society dominated by racist ideology and maintaining its basic productive activities through the use of one class of human beings as work animals by another class of human beings. For Douglass, as for Karl Marx, writing the previous year in what we now call the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, human beings are distinguished as a species by a creative consciousness which derives from the circumstances of their existence; this consciousness gives us the potential freedom to change those circumstances to meet human needs and desires, and it is in the struggle for that freedom that this consciousness develops.

The first paragraph of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* is concerned with the basic circumstances of his birth—place and date. Douglass has no problem locating the place and he does so, in the first sentence, establishing at once the artfully restrained, almost unemotional, matter-of-fact style which is to be the underlying norm for the entire narrative: "I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland." (P. 23 in the edition by Benjamin Quarles, Harvard University Press, 1960, which reproduces the text of the first edition, published in Boston, 1845; further references are indicated parenthetically by page number to this edition.) But the second sentence poses a problem for this precise, non-nonsense narrator: "I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it." In dryly explaining his predicament to the reader, Douglass can only compare himself and his fellow slaves to other farm animals: ". . . slaves know as little of their age as horses know of theirs." This is the



starting point of his consciousness, something like a human, something like a beast.

Like most slaves, Douglass never knew his father. He learns, however, that his father was a white man, quite possibly his master, one of those who made the satisfaction of his "lusts" both "profitable as well as pleasurable" by increasing the number of his slaves (26). So Douglass himself apparently was created through the sexual union of the two "species" of beings defined by those scientists of the 1840's, and one of these—the loftier—would probably gain a profit from the transaction when the little suckling became marketable. Following the "common custom," his mother is deliberately separated from him while he is a small baby: "I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life; and each of these times was very short in duration, and at night." (24)

The little boy's first consciousness of the meaning of slavery comes through the spectacle of his beautiful aunt being whipped by his master, apparently because of sexual jealousy. The master "stripped her from neck to waist," tied her hands to an overhead hook, and then proceeded to "whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood":

The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing.

(28)

The words the master uses over and over again to define Douglass' aunt while he flagellates her cannot be repeated to the polite readers of the *Narrative*. Douglass has to record them as "'you d—d b—h'" (29-30). But their meaning is clear enough, for they signify the essence of the slaveowners' views of their Black slaves. The human master is merely punishing a female animal.

As for the little boy, he was but "seldom whipped," as Douglass tells us in a passage that I believe stands as one of the most brilliant achievements in style and content of nineteenth-century American prose:

I was seldom whipped by my old master, and suffered little from any thing else than hunger and cold. I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would

crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out. My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.

(51-52)

After the first two sentences, simple but meticulously balanced, the style becomes stripped and stark, almost as naked as the little boy it describes living, or rather existing, on the level of brute survival. On the surface almost laconic, the passage virtually explodes with artfully arranged, highly volatile tensions. The first great disparity is between the little boy and the man writing his story, who is the little boy grown up. The two worlds in which they live are brought into direct physical contact as the writer takes his pen and lays it in the frost-cracked gashes on the boy's feet. By using the tool with which he is communicating to his polite audience as the implement of yoking in these two worlds, he also forces that audience to join him in contacting the boy. And in that conjunction, he brings his readers face to face with the first of many moral inversions: to survive, the slave must violate the property rights defined by society; he must steal a bag intended to help produce profit. In all this, we are forced to sense a tremendous disparity between the emotional level of the prose, running on that matter-of-fact norm, and the potential rage and violence implicit in the slave's situation. This is all part of Douglass' patient preparation for the climax of his *Narrative*, and for his final warning to his audience.

Douglass next describes how he ate: "our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called *mush*. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush. . . ." (52) In the very next paragraph, Douglass tells of his leaving this plantation. He thus establishes the juxtaposition which will provide one underlying dialectic for the rest of the narrative, the dialectic between rural and urban existence. Here we see most clearly an opposition of values between Douglass' vision, which is generally representative of his Black contemporaries, and the vision dominant in most of the white literature of the period.

The movement from country to city, and the conflict between the values of these two worlds, was of course a highly conventional literary theme in ante-bellum America, with its rapid industrialization and urbanization. This is, most typically, envisioned as a fall from rural innocence and natural freedom into the artificialities of the infernal city, as in Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and Melville's *Pierre; Or, The Ambiguities*. Outside the city is the Eden to which the conscious person may wish to return, rarely with as much success as in the visions projected by Thoreau.

For Frederick Douglass, the movement primarily means the opposite. The city to him represents consciousness