*Michael J. Drexler and Ed White*

# Canon Loading



IN THE PAST TWO DECADES, A CANON OF BLACK WRITING HAS emerged to become codified in any number of American literature anthologies. This canon extends from a cluster of late eighteenth-century writers—above all Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley—and culminates in the writings of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Between these poles one finds a fairly consistent constellation of secondary figures—David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, Nat Turner, William Wells Brown, and Martin Delany—but attention seems focused on the two poles of origin and fulfillment, foundation and capstone. Meanwhile, in contrast to the steady persistence of this canon, the past decade has witnessed the continued valuable scholarship of reclamation evident in a number of important collections: Vincent Carretta's *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (1996); Robert J. Cottrol's *From African to Yankee: Narratives of Slavery and Freedom in Antebellum New England* (1998); Yuval Taylor's two-volume anthology of slave narratives, *I Was Born a Slave* (1999); the Library of America's new volume of *Slave Narratives* (ed. W. Andrews and H. L. Gates, 2000); *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (ed. R. Newman, P. Rael, and P. Lapsansky, 2001); *"Face Zion Forward": First*

*Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785–1798* (ed. J. Brooks and J. Saillant, 2002); William L. Andrews's anthologies of *Classic African American Women's Narratives* (2003) and *North Carolina Slave Narratives* (2003); and Robert S. Levine's *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader* (2003).

Judging from other cycles of canon expansion, whether that led by feminists or the attempt to include a Native American presence, we might speculate that these more recently reclaimed works will remain texts for the specialist and will neither enter nor significantly modify the newly established canon. This is more than a historical and analytical problem of improved understanding, for while this simplified and truncated canon may seem to some a quantitative matter (there are only so many pages in an anthology, only so much time can be granted African-American writers, etc.), it more profoundly betrays a pedagogic desire for a unified national story of heroic writer figures, with a concomitant set of fixed problematizations. Put more simply, the teaching canon serves a function at times opposed to our very goals in the classroom, privileging representative extremes over nuanced complications. This reified use of the early African-American canon becomes clearer when we examine the semiotic system anchored by two pairs of writers: Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley in the late eighteenth century, and Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs on the eve of the Civil War. Equiano and Douglass each signal the articulation of an ostensibly typical and predictive African-American subjectivity, with the transition from the former to the latter essentially tracing a series of changes characteristic of the more traditional canon. Thus the common shorthand narrative traces a shift akin to that from Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Franklin, here the move from Equiano's religiously charged language and more limited social engagement (e.g., the narrower definition of abolition), to Douglass's more secular and patriotic subjectivity, for which politics (now an expanded sense of abolition) is itself the sign of a broader program of consciousness-raising and national (or racial) pride. The assumption of this narrativized canon, of course, is that Douglass is something of an archetype, a position influentially articulated two decades ago in James Olney's essay " 'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." There Olney insisted that the reader of slave narratives "is sure to come away

dazed by the mere repetitiveness of it all" (46), before asserting that Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass . . .* was "at once the best example, the exceptional case, and the supreme achievement" (54).[1] Accordingly, any number of texts, slave narratives or otherwise, represent this gradual move toward the exemplar. Intermediate narratives are fine-tunings on the way to Douglass, while Garnett's 1843 address or Walker's "Appeal" is to be read as a public and collective manifestation of a "protest" consciousness more richly accessible in the autobiographical mode.

Alongside these patriarchal poles, however, stand two necessary supplements. At the originary point, Phillis Wheatley's poetry becomes the epitome of the frustrations and limitations of engagement with a Euro-American tradition of writing, signaling either the tremendous obstacles and subsequent failings of the early Black writer or the inaugural gestures of signifying against the "white" literary tradition. At the other end of the timeline, Jacobs becomes the bridge figure between antebellum white women and the Douglass trunk, and thus a crucial moment of feminist critique of a by-now-distinctive African-American tradition. The status of the women, then, is all too apparent: they are variants or complications of their male counterparts, as if, in a critical division of labor, Equiano and Douglass assured the integrity and autonomy of the tradition while Wheatley and Jacobs embodied the practical-critical problems of interpretive resistance. And as their male counterparts do, they situate the intermediate texts in a sequence that moves from the compromised and hegemonized Wheatley (captured in the image of Wheatley's examination by white male elites) to the unexpectedly assertive voice of Jacobs (exemplified in the late critical discovery of her authorship). Much as we need not read a Moses Roper or Henry Bibb, thanks to Douglass, we can likewise extrapolate and bypass readings of Sojourner Truth or Jarena Lee by situating them in this trajectory.



*Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African-American Literature* takes as its starting point precisely this familiar disconnect between the teaching of, and the research about, early African-American letters. We do not mean to suggest that most or even many teachers of these writers and works have these views and perhaps could more accurately reframe what we have described as a disconnection between scholarship and

teaching as one between centripetal and centrifugal interpretive strategies, the former simplifying, streamlining, and encoding the tidy narratives of cultural development, the latter problematizing the same. Indeed, far from being the site of simplification, the classroom may be the space in which we are most acutely aware of these conflicting tendencies, as the conventional survey form, the massive anthology, and especially the comparative essay question together affirm and reinforce the very national narratives we want to challenge. But if we have so far placed the onus of simplification on classroom practices, opposed to an imaginary field of nuanced research, we should now turn to the tacit streamlinings that occur in the critical vocabulary of scholarship.

A useful exhibit here is the roundtable Historicizing Race in Early American Studies, prepared by Sandra M. Gustafson for a recent issue of *Early American Literature* and featuring position statements from Joanna Brooks, Philip Gould, and David Kazanjian. Each participant was presumably chosen for having written a recent monograph treating "race,"[2] but all seem to have been selected as well for their divergent methodological views. Indeed, it is tempting to imagine that the positions of this discussion were offered as an implicit narrative, in which Brooks, with her emphasis on the *experience* of race, occupies a primal position, followed by Gould's discursive problematization, and concluding with Kazanjian's attempts to split the difference.



Brooks takes as her starting point a definition of race as the effect of organized social relations of domination—that is, race is first and foremost a matter of "how it is *experienced* by people of color" rather than "imagined or intended by white people" (313, emphasis added). Any legitimate study of race must thus be one that "repositions people of color as the subjects of their own histories and intellectual traditions" (315). If racial concepts were crafted by whites and then "imposed upon people of color," that imposition was ultimately less a discursive transfer than one dimension of an amalgam of brutal practices of exploitation and domination (316). In the face of such harsh realities, people of color reclaimed, redetermined, and renovated racial concepts, asserting ultimate ownership as those who experienced race (315, 316). There is no doubt that this analytic insists that we keep our attention on the often nontextualized realities of enslavement, colonization, resistance, and

community formation. It likewise has the virtue of insisting on a dialogue with contemporary ethnic studies scholarship and politics, as evidenced by Brooks's citation of more than three dozen twentieth-century academics, many of them theorists of race and ethnicity.

But one may also notice in this critical framework two suppositions that shape any application of these insights. Temporally, this experiential framework assumes that cultural reclamation and renovation *follow* earlier stages of experiential solidarity in the form of recognition of shared vulnerability and the initiation of collective action. As a result, the details of the difficult formation of this literary tradition may be somewhat muted. Spatially, it similarly follows that the collective social experience will trump the occasional individual aberration: in insisting that we "concentrate on the ways early Black and Native texts mattered to communities of color" (315), we are committed to a kind of feedback loop in which general orientations take precedence over particular articulations (315). The consequences of these assumptions perhaps become apparent when Brooks quotes Olaudah Equiano's narrative at the moment when he writes that not only was "slavery dreadful; but the state of a free negro appeared to me now equally so at least, and in some respects even worse" (317). Presented as a clear political position, the passage prompts a factual gloss, explaining other injustices experienced by Equiano and reminding us of "the enslavement of millions of Africans and the enslavement, death, and expropriation of millions of indigenous peoples in the Americas" (317). To highlight other elements of the passage—a fragmented sense of Black experience, for example, or possible contradictions with Equiano's Central American venture—would seem to border on an ethical breach.



It is in the space of such details that the next position, the discourse analysis here in the roundtable represented by Gould, joins the discussion. If Brooks had read the African-American tradition as a series of experience-based reclamations, Gould saw the critical construction of the tradition itself as a reclamation of a particular sort, often misreading earlier moments in its presentation of a unified story. That story, one in which eighteenth-century writings were but the stirrings of an African-American literary tradition that would reach fruition in the twentieth century, applied the "vocabularies of race and racism backwards" to find

an aesthetic foundation and draw diachronic connections (322). Consequently contemporary critics, theoretically bound to notions of " 'ethnic' authenticity" (quote and scare quotes from Paul Gilroy), betrayed a commitment to strong misreadings that could be corrected only when they became attuned to critical "dissonance" (324, 322). Thus Gould's final statement on the matter: "I trust my archive more than their politics" (327). What exactly constitutes this broader and more complex archive? For one thing it would have to include white writers addressing race, an examination that would show how "language traded on the categories of race and culture" (323). In *Barbaric Traffic,* Gould had specifically explored the ways in which the discourses of race and slavery, on the one hand, and commerce and manners, on the other, were mutually "imbricated." The consequent instability or "elasticity" of terms, far from mitigating our sense of early American racism, reveals its broader constitutive presence. But at the same time it puts an almost fatal pressure on the notion of a "Black public sphere" separable from its white counterpart (324), and thus conceived as if language referred solely to experience and not to other language.



The contrast with Brooks's position is stark and is perhaps illustrated in the title of Gould's contribution, "What We Mean When We Say 'Race'," the scare quotes in this case calling as much attention to *Say* as to *Race* itself. In place of Brooks's experiential position, Gould stresses speech or print acts that differ in the degree to which they annunciate strong claims of contiguity linking commerce and slavery, race and manners. In the public sphere, these speech/print acts function as *memes,* each tangling with others as salient constellations of meaning, inclusive of both strategic elisions and ideological oversights, take form. If Gould's piece offers brief but nuanced discursive analyses of the kind that Brooks does not venture—for instance a reading of an 1808 sermon by the African-American minister Peter Williams (325)—it nonetheless takes the discursive field for granted as the only game in town and itself sidesteps the problem Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls "the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*)" (26). Thus if Gould offers interesting reflections on Phillis Wheatley's use of the phrase *sable race,* comparing it with later usage in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (326), the critic's gravitation toward this expression, and the comparative archive it

implies, is not a problem to be posed. Put more bluntly, the emphasis on the archive almost precludes discussions of the non- or less discursive practices of slavery that Brooks rightly emphasizes. If Gould may legitimately ask Brooks about the archive of her politics, she may in turn ask Gould about the politics of his archive.

In our view, neither of these positions may be dismissed, and we suspect that in the classroom both positions seem necessary and compelling. As we suggested earlier, the major pedagogical challenge may be the mediation of these two tendencies so convincingly enacted in scholarship. Kazanjian's attempt to find a position between two well-established theoretical positions begins with an endearing admission of uncertainty—he offers a critique of his own work, *The Colonizing Trick,* as a type of "obsessive recording of mastery"[3]—while explicitly treating the challenges faced in mediating experience and textuality. Kazanjian is clear in his hesitations toward Brooks's experiential approach, citing Miranda Joseph's critique of the "community" concept and Saidiya V. Hartman's analysis of the construction of the subjectivity of the enslaved (330). The skepticism toward Gould's discourse-analytical position is less clear, expressed as mystification at "a certain mechanistic and antiquarian conception of history," and an equally vague and rhetorical questioning of archival choices (331). More lucid, though, is his account of his own theoretical project, grounded on the "imbrications"—a term that recurs frequently in his essay—of "emergent, modern conceptions of race, nation, and equality" (331). Here Kazanjian is not far from Gould, who had similarly stressed the imbrication of racial concepts with those of commerce and trade. But where Gould had taken imbrication as a discursive quality of intersection, Kazanjian, whose project sought "to theorize the mode of that imbrication," argued that the connections between racial discourses and nationalism required a fundamental rethinking of both, for the combination of these discourses in a "racial nationalism" simultaneously created a "process of subjection" *and* "the very condition of possibility for the formal and abstract notion of equality" (332). In short, "equality was not restricted or contradicted by racial nationalism" but was rather "animated *by* and articulated *with* racial nationalism" (332). These two discourses were not contradictory, but rather complementary. This position then posed its own challenges

to the experiential approach of Brooks, by insisting that experienced racial identities were paradoxically the effects of racial nationalism—effects the ramifications of which its created subjects often did not appreciate or perceive.

As for Gould's commitment to the archive, this was answered in Kazanjian's choice of texts "from social movements on the geographic borders of the early American empire" (333)—here a relatively unknown 1834 letter from one Samson Ceasar, an African-American émigré to Liberia in 1834. Ceasar seemed, at first glance, to reiterate certain racial stereotypes concerning unmotivated and unsuccessful immigrants from rural plantation slavery (334). But at another level, his account indirectly expressed the inseparability of slavery and freedom—"intimately and differentially related" (335). Tied to its Liberian situation, texts like Ceasar's revealed the "meanings—both explicit *and inchoate*"—of freedom for Black Americans (336, emphasis added). If we should not trust the seemingly straightforward statements of experience, we should be equally cautious about seemingly unified texts, for their gaps and juxtapositions provided keys to the structures of their own creation. If Kazanjian began with an emphasis on the imbrication of different discourses, he ended with a slightly different focus on "improvisation," the term capturing the interplay between experience and text without the naïve commitment to either (336). Thus he answered Gould's appeal to the archive by privileging an archive attuned to experiential disruptions: one would have to be as wary of ostensibly unified texts as of ostensibly unified experiences.



We can return to our earlier discussion of the African-American canon with a few tentative observations. Not only do the Brooks and Gould positions—one stressing the particularities of African-American experience, the other stressing intertextual connections and the processes of cultural construction—capture the two dominant critical positions of today's academy, but one can imagine most teachers committed to both of these positions in the classroom. The typical teacher might in fact attempt to strike a careful balance between, on the one hand, locating a Wheatley or an Equiano within an emerging and strong countertradition and, on the other, discursively linking them with a national (or transatlantic) narrative and the still problematic formula-

tion of "race." In this light, Kazanjian's attempt to mediate these two positions, while harder to translate into a corresponding pedagogical practice, seems an attempt to escape these binary positions. Two concerns seem to guide his ventured resolution. On the one hand, he advocates a reading practice focused on symptomatic disruptions, which could perhaps suggest a reading of African-American authors as crucial bridging figures; a John Marrant might articulate a distinctive Black tradition *and* connections with the European-American canon but he would be significant above all as an interpretive key to the tensions in the canon at large. On the other hand, Kazanjian's dual interest in geographically remote *and* social movement texts (here the letter of Liberian colonization) suggests a very different classroom practice in which the more historically individuated material context becomes an integral component of analysis. What emerges, when we put these two emphases together, is something of a cultural mapping of specific mediations, attuned to the uneven contours and conduits of culture while abrogating the national framework within which this binary best functions.



It thus turns out that Kazanjian's third position, far from being a simple compromise between identity politics and discourse analysis, in fact calls on discourse analysis to aid in the clarification of African-American experience. We might even say that it evokes that seemingly musty tradition of "literary history" that in earlier incarnations focused on regions, schools, and movements. Here we might reflect on the uneven situation of American literary history, such that a number of reformulations of the overall canon still tend to overshadow the recuperative and relatively neglected histories of African-American letters. This unevenness is abundantly apparent if we juxtapose any number of literary-historical syntheses (Tompkins's *Sensational Designs,* Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations,* or the various and recent encyclopedic works like the multivolume *Cambridge History of American Literature*) with works like Blyden Jackson's *A History of Afro-American Literature* (volume 1, 1746–1895, published in 1989) and Dickson D. Bruce Jr.'s *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680–1865* (2001). While the latter do indeed offer strong readings of the African-American canon, comparatively situating works in relation to one another, it remains difficult to see either the impact of such histories on anthologization or signs of a familiarity,

among generalists, with the issues at stake in defining the smaller canon. An older collection, Dorothy Porter's impressive but now neglected *Early Negro Writing* (1971, rep. 1995), illustrates what is at stake in its differentiated literary history: sections focused on "Mutual Aid and Fraternal Organizations, 1792–1833"; "Societies for Educational Improvement, 1808–1836"; "Significant Annual Conferences, 1831–1837"; "To Emigrate or Remain at Home? 1773–1833"; "Spokesmen in Behalf of their 'Colored Fellow Citizens,' 1787–1815"; "Saints and Sinners, 1786–1836"; and "Narratives, Poems and Essays, 1760–1835." The recent anthology of *North Carolina Slave Narratives,* edited by William L. Andrews and colleagues, is similarly illustrative in this respect. Noting that "no other southern state can match the contemporary impact or continuing import of black North Carolina's contribution to American literature during the slave era," the editors "hesitate to speculate" on why this is so (14). While the problem may seem hopelessly old-fashioned, a throwback to state-based literary histories, it nonetheless underscores a set of determinants (coded here as "North Carolina") yet to be examined. Teachers who have never read Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, or Thomas H. Jones may rightly wonder how their sense of "the" African-American canon might be challenged. The lesson would seem to be that the African-American canon, a conceptual fiction like its Euro-American counterpart, emerged gradually and with important differentiations, engaging "white" and other texts in different ways at different moments in time. Failing to note such differentiations simply drives us back to streamlined, artificially constructed canons.



We want to conclude, then, with a brief discussion of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative,* taking into account its canonization, pedagogical position, theoretical encoding, and potential for reopening the problem of literary history. How we teach Equiano's *Narrative* illuminates our assumptions about the African-American canon, given that the author seems, in various guises and at various points in the text, exemplary African, aspirant Afro-British, pietist Christian, Caribbean and North American entrepreneur, Central American capitalist, and African emissary. And there is the suggestion, made by Vincent Carretta, that Equiano may have been a native North American.[4] Absent a richer lit-

erary history to situate Equiano's tremendous mobility or his participation in various social movements (Huntingdonian Methodism, British and plebeian naval service, colonization projects, or Igbo traditions, either in Africa or in the Carolinas), the most innovative classroom strategies may assume the feel of utilitarian or strategic bad faith. An instructor might begin, for instance, with an identitarian gambit, allowing Equiano to speak for the Middle Passage, before playing the discursive trump card, suggesting Equiano's American nativity and focusing attention on the author's rhetorical skill and cultural literacy. While such a pedagogical strategy may elicit admirable critical reflections among students, the result may also be that the mediation of substantial theoretical and critical problems is yielded to students as a matter of opinion or inclination, and thus abandoned as unsolvable.

There is no escaping the conclusion that this pedagogical bind is tacitly underwritten by most anthologizers when they include only the early chapters of the *Interesting Narrative,* a surprisingly consistent preference whether Equiano is included in (a) general surveys of American and British literature (including more chronologically focused surveys of early American literatures), (b) anthologies of African-American literature, or (c) more specialized collections informed by Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of the "Black Atlantic" or Ira Berlin's "Atlantic Creole."[5] Thus the selections in Carla Mulford's *Early American Writings,* one aim of which was to highlight "the diversity of interests and peoples" (xvii), underscore Equiano's formative African experience and feature the first-person narration of his encounter with the slave ship and the horrific Middle Passage (chapters 1 and 2). Henry Louis Gates makes similar choices in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (chapters 1 and 2, with brief excerpts from 3 and 4), but here, alongside an emphasis on the lineal roots of a literary efflorescence, there is also an effort to trace the development of the literary tropes and genres that later continue to animate African-American writing. Both collections thus declare a fealty to a multiculturalist agenda in notating distinctive markers of ethnically authentic difference. Equiano's place in both American and British surveys of eighteenth-century and romantic literature points even more broadly to the challenge of fixing Equiano's "true" identity to any single national or ethnic tradition. One might then expect collec-

tions that foreground the "Black Atlantic" to open a more complicated portrait, but, as Gesa Mackenthun notes in her brief survey of the literary anthologies that include *The Interesting Narrative,* its "anthologization . . . has largely followed suit in excluding the transoceanic element of Equiano's life."[6] Of all the anthologies, only Carretta's *Unchained Voices,* for instance, includes substantial passages from Equiano's travels postdating his manumission. When push comes to shove, and when space is limited, anthologizers generally opt for the conventionally teachable, but indisputably derivative, material from the beginning of the text, leaving teachers to decide whether and how to address the challenging questions raised by the now widely circulated if still relatively specialized knowledge concerning both Equiano's nativity and heavy reliance on Anthony Benezet's descriptions of Guinea.[7]

How, then, would one activate the rich potential of the *Interesting Narrative*? How could the narrative be something other than a text abridged and parsed for anthologies, and instead become a sort of anthology in itself? What, we wonder, would be the result of teaching more segments of the text—not just the African and Middle Passage chapters, but also, say, the chapters treating Central America and interactions with slaves and Indians, Equiano's religious conversion and proselytizing efforts, or his experiences in Savannah, Georgia. The purchase of such an approach would be more than a detailed familiarity with Equiano, rather opening up a number of traditions within Afro-Atlantic writing that, in turn, could illuminate and destabilize the Euro-American canon. Of course, one of the challenges of teaching Equiano are the idiosyncratic, if not exceptional, *experiences* he narrates. With students whose knowledge of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade is generally thin and circumscribed by depictions of U.S. antebellum plantation culture, there is a strong impulse to explain how Equiano's life was atypical, the vast majority of African slaves transferred to brutally regimented and dehumanizing labor camps in the West Indies. As long as we expect Equiano to channel the experiences of plantation slaves, or conversely sidestep that connection, then we are stuck between two monolithic positions: Equiano as generic eyewitness or Equiano as idiosyncratic speaker. An alternative approach would find in Equiano an encyclopedia of nodal points where discourse and experience meet. If

Equiano did not experience the Middle Passage, he surely emerged from a community in which that experience was richly articulated. Nevertheless, this one node is not exhaustive. No one of Equiano's disparate experiences ought to sustain alone a singular or even representative identity; rather, his travels and affiliations should serve as resonant material conditions from which his multiple personae emerge, and they structure how these identities were made legible, were disseminated, and ultimately were received.

If Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* has the potential to highlight the multiple originary points of African-American literatures, it could also invite us to rethink the tradition of the fugitive slave narrative itself. If critics have been challenging the hegemony of that tradition in recent years, this has been as much a reaction against its critical streamlining (as per the Olney framework mentioned earlier) as a commentary on any actual generic continuities. Indeed, the impetus for this collection was our own pedagogical experiences substituting or adding different slave narratives in American literature surveys. Teaching William Grimes's 1825 *Life,* a fascinatingly litigious narrative ranging from Virginia to New Haven, and relatively untouched by the abolition movement, gave to students a very different sense of African-American literary interventions than the more familiar Douglass story. The same was true with the enormous "Charles Ball" narrative, *Slavery in the United States* (1836), a massive ethnographic narrative chronicling the migration of the peculiar institution to Georgia; or the Lewis and Milton Clarke narratives (1846), with their elaborate satirical appendixes and a very different Kentuckian orientation to abolition; or Henry Bibb's 1849 narrative of flight, return, flight, and return, centered on his relationship with his wife; or the amazing narrative of Sojourner Truth, with its details about New York slavery and religious innovations; or Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), which recounts his life as a free man in New York before being kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana.[8] One could mention as well the narratives of Moses Roper, William Wells Brown, Josiah Henson, William and Ellen Craft, or Jacob Green. Any one of these texts, in the classroom, reorients the very presentation of "American literature," becoming much more than a minor variant of Douglass. And venturing away from Douglass, about whom a surprising

percentage of students have already learned the canonical interpretation, usefully disrupts the notion of the representative writer.

A more charitably descriptive approach to slave narratives also suggests ways to be less prescriptive about which texts belong in the representation of the African-American literary tradition. Later, Xiomara Santamarina describes a cohort of African-American texts whose orientation is not determined by the movement politics of abolitionism. A more generous approach invites these narrative experiments back in from the margins, makes space for them in the various traditions of the early African-American canon. As we are encouraged to explore the fascinating travels of Nancy Prince to czarist Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, we may also make space for other literary experiments outside the U.S. experience as well into the antebellum and postwar periods and yet still within the field of study designated nominally as African-American writing. Notable here is the republication of Maxwell Philip's *Emmanuel Appadocca, or The Blighted Life* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) and the anonymous *Adolphus, A Tale* (University of the West Indies Press, 2003), two novels written in the 1850s in Trinidad that, while self-consciously responsive to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in the United States, also explore caste-stratified social and cultural identities in the post-emancipation Caribbean. As William E. Cain writes in his introduction to *Emmanuel Appadocca,* connecting that novel not only to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Moby-Dick,* its contemporaries, but to Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), and plays such as Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* (1935) and Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964), *The Slave* (1964), and *Slave Ship* (1967), "it is, again, a different kind of book, one that both does and does not derive and develop its meanings from slavery and abolition" (lv, xxxvii).



In compiling *Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African-American Literature,* we sought essays reflecting upon the developing canon, considering more thoughtful course design, perhaps even suggesting anthology reform. In the spirit of practical innovations, we invited our contributors to use this forum to draw on specialized scholarly expertise to address fellow teachers of American literature. The first three chapters of *Beyond Douglass* work at the intersections of religious expression

and communal identity. Katherine Faull presents the interpretive difficulties scholars face when they enter the archive of early African-American writing. Her exploration of two Moravian funeral memoirs, each written by a former Black slave, attends to questions of genre, mode, polyvocality, and reception. Faull shows us that African-American autographs are most fruitfully explored as *practices.* The autograph is neither the passive receptor and conduit of norms for subjective expression, nor wholly empowered to speak in her own voice. Instead, the "speaking subject plays with signifying, by means of the rhetorical strategies of displacement and metalepsis, but that same subject is also . . . played with. The Black autograph extends and subverts the dominant discourses of European culture, but . . . these discourses still define the process of self-differentiation" (27). We are grateful not only to be able to present Faull's work to a new audience—her essay first appeared in a publication directed at Germanists—but to print for the first time together and complete Faull's transcriptions and translations of the memoirs themselves. Handwritten in German and stored in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the memoirs of Andrew and Magdalene are now available for broader scholarly and pedagogical use.[9]



April Langley extends Faull's account of rhetorical practices to show how biblical literacy empowered Black authors actively to participate in exegesis and hermeneutics. Phillip M. Richards connects African-American writing to the task of social formation, a link between writing and materiality that unearths surprising parallels between the communal strategies employed by white Protestant pietists and their dissenters and African-American clerics and later secular Black reformers. Commenting on the Black elites' cultivation of charismatic legitimacy and their appropriation of the voices of the "wretched" Black masses, Richards explains that early writers sought a "political fulfillment grounded primarily in institutional achievement" (85). This characterization runs against the tendency of reading Black writing as making more generally universalistic or humanist claims. Barriers to full civic participation and communal integrity ultimately led Black authors toward "proto-romantic interpretations of their contemporary African American condition" (89). Richards suggests the thematic comparison

of nineteenth-century Black writing to the romantic alienation expressed in the work of Emerson and the young Karl Marx. "The black minister-writers initiated a tradition in which African-American intellectuals recognize a similar objectification in their own experience, an alienating process stemming from a dehumanizing estrangement from civic and social life" (90).

The next group of chapters make for an interesting pair. They consider African-American, or, to cite Ira Berlin, Atlantic Creole writing, within multiple discursive, cultural, and material circuits of exchange. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould clearly have affinities. Both reject the narrowness of a literary canon defined by national belonging, preferring the more capacious category of the trans- or circum-atlantic. Both suspect the ascription of value to early Black writing with reference to a later canon formation whether based on ethno-traditional, aesthetic, or national foundations. But Carretta's insistence on "language, period, phenotype" retains an identitarian prescription that Gould's references to William Cowper, Henry David Thoreau, and William Lloyd Garrison mitigate. This difference is perhaps exaggerated here to highlight more subtle distinctions. Both Carretta and Gould feature, in Carretta's words, "primacy of chronology," that is, treating Black writing with reference to the historicity of production and reception. To be fair, it is not as if Gould displaces the importance of phenotype completely. But rather than see Blackness solely or primarily as a constituent of experience, he is interested in how Black *writing* intervenes in a broader discursive field. The difference may boil down to Carretta's privileging of the writing subject and Gould's insistence on the intertextual subject matter. Gould indeed does note one of the dangers of the discursive field: "Sentimentalizing the horrors of slavery often led to the narrative erasure of Africans themselves, usually in violent death or even tragic suicide" (128). But he turns this around by pointing out that the writers were themselves aware of and sensitive to "the terms in which these debates were waged" (130). If rhetorical positioning can be said to jeopardize the vitality of Black experience, the rich rhetorical skills of Black writers are in part recuperative, restoring a type of subjective agency through "rhetorical management." If Carretta positions Black writers as

expressive of "overlapping, rather than conflicting, identities" (112), Gould imagines them as their own ideal audience, as skillful at *reading* as at writing the conditions of their participation in the public sphere.

John Saillant also stresses the broadly discursive literacy of Black writers but places the emphasis on a civic literacy that he sees absent in our own historical moment. Indeed, Saillant argues that reencountering African-Americans' aspirant citizenship would be a way to educate our students about the values of democratic participation and republican values. In our own cynical age—with our preferences for irony over sincerity—we may miss how Black writers were "expressing their sense of citizenship—not ironically but insistently and prospectively" (148). African-American writers, Saillant argues, "had a clearer understanding of the founding of the new nation than many in our time who have not only the opportunity but also the responsibility to know better" (142). Saillant urges us to take seriously the sincerity with which African-American writers pursued civic participation, evident in the appropriation of its public vocabulary, or grammar. African-American writers drew on their appreciation for and understanding of republican ideals when they pursued civic engagement through the normative device of the petition form, for example, using phrases, concepts, and cadences of widely read republican texts like Thomas Paine's *American Crisis, The Federalist,* and the U.S. Constitution.



The last two essays suggest ways to broaden what we teach when we represent African-American writing to our students. As alluded to previously, Xiomara Santamarina extends the discursive literacy of antebellum Black writing by pointing out the wider scope of interests manifest in midnineteenth-century African-American writing. Santamarina's chapter surveys a fascinating set of largely unexplored writings that continue to put pressure on any unified notion of an African-American literary canon. One outshoot is that Douglass's "exemplary" slave narrative appears the result of a finely tuned and highly crafted mode of life writing carefully fitted to the exigencies of white abolitionism. If less stylistically coherent, other Black slave autographs achieve greater autonomy outside the dictates of movement politics. And Black writers quickly learned to satisfy the supplementary use-value of slave narratives to

white audiences, that is, for entertainment. Black writers also explored the challenges of realizing the benefits of freedom in the nonslaveholding North, the assumption of privilege by aspirant middle-class free Blacks, and the formation of elite worldliness among those African-Americans who described their travels abroad. Especially noteworthy are the *Life and Travels* of Nancy Prince, who wrote of her travel to czarist Russia and her subsequent missions to Jamaica and work on behalf of emancipated Jamaican slaves. As Santamarina writes, Prince's writing testifies to the "challenges that regional or class-based *intraracial* difference posed (and still poses) to our assumptions of diasporic transnational racial solidarity, or "imagined communities" (172). "The point," she writes, "is to complicate students' understandings of what constitute raced texts and Black authors' audiences so that they can better appreciate the multiple or heterogeneous traditions African American writers inaugurated and revised (178).

If Santamarina compels us to see a broad diversity among disparate African-American writers, Robert S. Levine challenges us to recognize the changeable and even contradictory views held by those individual authors who have assumed canonical status through the celebration of exemplary and frequently singular works of genius. By asking us to privilege the study of the career over the study of the monument, Levine further contextualizes acts of political and aesthetic engagement. Would Douglass be baffled by our pedagogical obsession with his 1845 narrative, written at the very beginning of a career that would last another fifty years? What would William Wells Brown think of our fixation on *Clotel,* "though there is absolutely no indication in any of Brown's writing that he regarded the 1853 *Clotel* as having a special status in his career" (182)? Levine's insights result from his editing of the works of Brown and Delany, which has given him a wariness about narrowly univocal biographical or formalist readings. Nonplussed by the apparent contradictions a study of careers reveals, Levine prefers these to the static approach to monumental works because "such a perspective . . . allows for a greater interpretive freedom to engage texts as part of an ongoing cultural conversation" (197), one that ultimately extends to us and our students.

Notes

1. See James Olney, "Master Plan for Slave Narratives," (50–51) in James Olney, " 'I Was Born a Slave': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *Calla* 100 no. 20 (Winter, 1934): 46–73.

2. Brooks published *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Religions* in 2003 and had coedited, with John Saillant, the aforementioned anthology *"Face Zion Forward."* Gould published *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* in 2003 and coedited, with Vincent Carretta, *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* in 2001; Kazanjian published *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* in 2003 and coedited *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* with David Eng in 2002.

3. See 332–33 and 336; the citation is from an unpublished paper by Fred Moten.

4. Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity," *Slavery and Abolition* 20 (1999): 96–105.

5. The provenance of these labels is discussed in Carretta's essay in this volume. Referenced anthologies include Nina Baym, ed., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature,* 5th Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); David Damrosch and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, eds., *The Longman Anthology of British Literature,* 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006); Carla Mulford, ed., *Early American Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, eds., *The Literatures of Colonial America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner, eds., *The English Literatures of America* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Henry Louis Gates, ed., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature,* 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18th Century: Living the Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995). and Vincent Carretta, ed., *Unchained Voices: Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996).

6. Gesa Mackenthun, *Fictions of the Black Atlantic in American Foundational Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004) 38.

7. To their credit, the editors of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature,* the *Longman Anthology of British Literature,* and *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* explain to students that Equiano may have been born in South Carolina and thus not have experienced himself the events narrated in chapters 1 through 4. Neither Mulford nor the editors of *The Norton Anthology of British Literature* do so.

8. The Grimes, Ball, Clarke, Bibb, and Northup narratives are all available in Yuval Taylor's excellent two-volume anthology *I Was Born a Slave;* the Sojourner Truth narrative, first published in 1850 but revised and expanded in 1884, appears in an excellent Penguin edition edited by Nell Irvin Painter.

9. Of note is that Magdalene's owner, Charles Brockden, was the great uncle of the early American writer Charles Brockden Brown.