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Intertextual abolitionists: Frederick Douglass, Lord Byron, and the print, politics, and language of slavery

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Intertextual Abolitionists:
Frederick Douglass, Lord Byron, and the Print, Politics, and Language of Slavery

A Thesis
Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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This project is lovingly dedicated to the memory of

Jim Cowan

Father, Friend, Teacher

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Introduction

In 1853, Frederick Douglass published *The Heroic Slave*, reintroducing the world to the narrative of Madison Washington, the rebellious captive, who, alongside eighteen of his fellow bondsmen, stormed the deck of the slave ship *Creole* in 1841, leading to the freeing of one hundred sixteen slaves. *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass' sole piece of fiction, functioned as both a political tool to comment on the state of the American South's "Peculiar Institution" and as a personal statement on the part of its author. Douglass here channeled the rhetoric of self-imposed emancipation for all those in captivity, using both the communicative ability of print to spread his message, and the freedom from restraint for the author offered by fiction to suggest an alternative approach to abolition for those in bondage. Douglass called upon a literary tradition that found its roots ranging throughout the various centuries all the way back to antiquity.¹

Among those voices is that of Lord Byron, the British Romantic poet who had dedicated a vast portion of his time, and had ultimately given his life, to the fight against oppression. While it may seem at first a stretch to connect the works of a poet separated from Douglass by both an ocean and more than thirty years, in the design of his novella, Douglass called on the language of freedom throughout history. Douglass embedded in his story small vignettes from some of slavery's biggest opponents who existed outside the scope of American identity, most notably the works of Byron, calling upon the abolitionist rhetoric of Great Britain at the turn of the 19th Century. Byron's words suggest a similar desire to Douglass' own and are echoed throughout *The Heroic Slave*. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Byron developed themes of emancipation, exploring and advocating for Greek independence. Through his channeling of Byron, Douglass is

¹ Frederick Douglass and Robert S. Levine, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), xi-xxxvi.

then able to build upon an already expansive series of conversations on the nature of slavery and the desire for self-emancipation.

It is the design of this project to suggest that Douglass' text both pulled on and was a catalyst in the field of emancipatory discourse and debate, most notably through the links between Douglass' and Byron's work. These links offered Douglass a means of harnessing past conversations on slavery.² Douglass' ability to access these communicative environments is made possible due to the intertextual nature of literature. Intertextuality can be defined as the connections that one makes between multiple texts while reading; that the reader is "moving"³ between texts, connecting ideas and forming patterns. The meaning derived from reading "becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving from the independent text into a network of textual relations."⁴ Through the use of adaptation and word play, Douglass was able to access and use a separate narrative voice from that which he had demonstrated in all his other works. Through the integration of this new voice, Douglass channeled a series of communicative environments that had far reaching effects within the United States and helped shape the language of abolition in the 19th Century.⁵

² Douglass pulled from four sources for his epigraphs. The first from the hymn "God is Love," found in the *Oberlin Social and Sabbath School Hymn Book*, 1846 -- the second from William Shakespeare's *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, 4.1.1-7, and the third from Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies Volume 6*, (see section three of this project for a closer analysis of Moore). My focus on Douglass' use of Byron, the fourth and only source used more than once, is founded in Douglass' purposeful altering of only Byron's words. While it is true that each of the first three epigraph sources can be read as allusions to *The Heroic Slave* and their particular selections, I argue though that Douglass' altering of Byron's poetry for the third and fourth sections of the text constitute part of a much more personal conversation from Douglass to the reader.

³ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2011). 1.

⁴ Allen, 1.

⁵ This communicative environment on slavery had been one of an ever-evolving nature. It has been cemented in the foundation of civilization and repeated, echoed throughout history in a vast variety of forms. Ultimately, for the purposes of this project, these conversations culminated in the political spectrum of 19th Century America. Of course, history reveals that the issue of slavery has been firmly entrenched in the ideological makeup of the United States since its inception, with the founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, grappling with notions of the morality of slavery whilst forming a society through which this method of labor played a key role in the development of American commerce and agricultural trade. Indeed, chattel slavery served as the backbone for the economic stability of a large contingency of the country's population, leading to the formation of trade routes and the exchange of goods.

The notion of an environment of discourse is an important one for this project, especially when we note that there have always existed modes and methods of communication within the fabric of ecological societies. Ecological societies here represent the communities of life that exist within any given moment. These communities gather and build around one another and often exchange communications. Communities, in their very nature, are a series of inter and overlapping relationships formed through discourse of a variety of ever-evolving mediums. Those mediums through which we choose to communicate become a key part of our identities and our social environments. The notion of how these communicative movements shape and are in turn shaped by their environments is known as media ecology.⁶

Media Ecology is the study of “‘complex communication systems as environments’ and [is] concerned with ‘the interactions of communications media.’”⁷ These environments exist within almost all facets of life and help shape the ways in which their respective societies function. For the purposes of this project, media ecology theory serves as a means of expanding a conversation on intertextuality in literature. Whereas an intertextual close reading allows for the observation of transmission of ideas between texts, media ecology opens that intertextual examination to the exterior of the text, allowing the critic to view both the relationship between

⁶ The ideology of slavery was embedded in the language of America before the country’s inception through the integration of slavery in the commerce and culture of colonial politics and trade, such as the emergence of the rice crop in South Carolina and Georgia as a major economic movement in the earlier part of the eighteenth century and the eventual shift to cotton production less than a century later. These economic shifts find as their catalyst the introduction of various innovative technologies through periods of great change, such as the industrial revolution, which saw the emergence of such devices as the cotton gin, fueling the desire for slavery as an institution for economic independence and the growth of America as an equal nation to the likes of Great Britain and Europe. These technological innovations spurred communities of conversation embedded in the ideology of slavery. It became a prime example of an evil deployed through the lens of necessity, with those in favor defending the practice through the procurement of economic status and independence from world superpowers, while the opposition focused on the morally based nature of such a system that saw the commodification of human life as in direct opposition to the systems of both religious belief and the very language of the country, suggesting that a society predicated on the individual rights of man could not exist within a system that saw its growth through the proliferation of forced servitude.

⁷ Lance Strate, *Echoes and Reflections: On Media Ecology as a Field of Study*. (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2006). 18.

texts, but also historical movements and conversations that echo through literature and time. Media ecology is not predicated on mediums of modern technologies, such as the Internet or other advancements of the digital age, although its focus has primarily existed in this lens of study. Due to the lack of restrictions, I have fashioned a media ecology analysis on the discourse of slavery exemplified in the works of Byron and Douglass, allowing for an examination of a similar vein of conversation that is transatlantic in nature.

Media ecology seeks to analyze the ways in which these communication systems “affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value.”⁸ This focus on value holds a double meaning for the purposes of this project, as value at once seeks the empowerment of a culture through the perpetuation of knowledge in discourse, the spread and appreciation of cultural aesthetics, yet it is also expressed in the capitalist nature of the valuation of goods, in which slavery as a system thrived through the objectification of human life. It is indeed true that print, as a form of media, was key in the proliferation of pro-slavery rhetoric, pulling on the language of religious scripture. Yet, print, as a form of communication, was critical in the presentation of abolitionism and the emergence of otherwise constricted voices, such as the words of those in bondage. *The Heroic Slave* serves, in this capacity, as Douglass’ greatest literary triumph and is a prime candidate for a media ecology study. It is a fictional tale interwoven with historical fact. It pulls on the intertextual relationship of both reality and literature with the incorporation of Douglass’ rendition of the infamous *Creole* revolt allowing Douglass’ novella to exist, not in isolation as an antislavery tract, but rather as a part of a much bigger network of related texts, connecting all the way back to Byron and his own campaign of abolition.

Relatively unmentioned throughout much of the 20th Century, *The Heroic Slave* has become the subject of increasing interest. Scholars in both literary and historical fields engaged

⁸ Strate, 17.

in a series of conversations on both the social implications of the text, as well as a deeper analysis of its design, within which exist movements situated in the media ecology tradition. Douglass crafted his novella as a purposeful response to the raging debate on abolition and its implementation, firmly entrenched in the American political sphere of the 19th Century. As Douglass' sole piece of fiction, I suggest that the author's choice of genre was deliberate, thus implying that Douglass was very much aware of the ways in which print culture functioned as a medium for his purpose.

In fiction, Douglass, who primarily preached a code of nonviolence and worked with white abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, was able to present a much more personal statement on the means by which a slave could seize their freedom. Suggesting emancipation through violent insurrection, *The Heroic Slave* uses its status as a fictional text to shield Douglass from the potential political ramifications that would be apparent if such rhetoric were to be presented in the lens of speeches or a nonfiction accounting of his life, such as was the case with his multiple autobiographies and practically all other aspects of his work. Fiction, by its very nature, serves as a means of communication existing both within and without the discourse of the time in which it is written. Douglass only had to fall back on the text's fictional nature to separate himself from the text, and through this methodology he crafts a personal message in which he champions the seizure of freedom at the hands of the slave themselves by any means, even if that course be one of violence. Douglass' work thus becomes a means of rebellion against the image of the oppressed slave, rather suggesting that the key to emancipation lay in the hands of the oppressed, and not in the good nature of the human race to see the error of their ways. This interpretation is supported within this project through the close analysis of a series of intertextual

readings from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Douglass took and then modified these elements of the text to fit the form of *The Heroic Slave*'s various transitional epigraphs.

To accurately structure this argument, this project will begin with a section on Lord Byron's *Don Juan* and its role in the conversation of abolition in early 19th Century Britain. This section will evaluate Byron's own interactions with slavery and his desire for the emancipation of Greece from the Ottoman Empire. This will occur through the lens of close readings of a select section of *Don Juan, Canto III*, the "Isles of Greece," an embedded subtext that openly speaks on the ills of slavery and the championing of self-emancipation as well as the responses generated from these works in the circles of British society. This section will suggest that the new narrative voice in "The Isles of Greece," is, in fact, that of Byron himself. This interpretation will further cement Douglass' later actions in *The Heroic Slave*, building on the argument that these texts allowed for a radicalized championing of abolition. It is my hope that this first section will serve as a model for my reading of *The Heroic Slave*, and means by which, in the last section of this project, I will connect these two authors and their works.

The second section of this work will serve as a means of examining *The Heroic Slave* itself, in the same vein as the first section. Through a close reading, I will take in the text's print history and the means by which print as a medium played a key role in the vocalization of Douglass' personal feelings on his work. In this section, I will evaluate several print responses around the *Creole* rebellion in its close reading of Douglass's novella. I will also draw on the works of noted biographies, such as David W. Blight's *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, as well as on recent criticism of *The Heroic Slave* and its relation to political history. This section will then analyze the novella, looking closely at the means in which the plot is

designed, the role of the white ally in the text, and in the empowerment of the slave through Madison Washington's struggle to both free himself and his family from bondage.

In the final section, through a carefully constructed implementation of intertextual theory, I aim to show how Frederick Douglass builds off of previous abolitionary discourses through the integration of his purposeful epigraphs in the novella. I will examine each of Douglass' epigraphs concerning the works of Lord Byron and pair this examination with a close reading of Byron's poetry, suggesting that Douglass' own awareness of those communicative structures codified through the print medium allowed the author to shape the conversation on slavery in a direction more in tune with his own desires. Within this section I will also argue that *The Heroic Slave* seeks to respond to both slavery as an institution, but also as a response to Douglass' contemporary abolitionists, notably Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, although providing a powerful aid to the anti-slavery cause, also led to the perpetuation of racial stereotyping of African Americans that is still felt to this day. Douglass' response in the form of the slave who frees himself and his people without the direct and over empowering usage of the white ally aids in my analysis that Douglass was advocating for self-emancipation, as it contradicts the assertions made in Stowe's novel that the white ally was instrumental and needed for the realization of liberation. This analysis also serves as a microcosmic observation of print's effect on the advancement of culture in the context of media ecology through the highlighting of an intertextual conversation generated between Stowe and Douglass as a result of the novella.

In concluding this project, it is my hope here to expose the power of technological advancement and its relation to the way in which society evolves, as well as to formally submit my theory that Douglass' use of fiction was indeed purposeful and well executed in his desire to

spark a series of new conversations on the matter of slavery in a way that both championed and empowered the slave, with the text's very title advancing this very purpose.

I. "I Could Not Deem Myself a Slave"

Nine years before Frederick Douglass' birth and half way around the world, the British poet George Gordon, Lord Byron began his great Grand Tour of continental Europe. This expedition would ultimately prove to be the beginning of a long and often-conflicted relationship between Byron and Greece from his arrival in 1810. Through his sojourn, Byron came to sympathize with the Greek cause. These leanings would prove inspirational for the poet's later writings, as Byron increasingly grappled with the notion of slavery and the importance of liberty.

Despite such a gap in time and place, Douglass and Byron were champions of the oppressed, each an abolitionist in their own right. Douglass fought for the end of chattel slavery while Byron championed a liberation of the Greek state from the Ottoman Empire. These circumstances transfix these authors within a historical movement spanning time; that of the constant question of slavery, in all its forms, and of the rights of man. This conversation, existing within a community of abolitionists and connected through the intertextual connections of centuries of writing, links Byron to Douglass and establishes an environment of discourse transferable and disseminated through print medium. Yet, as I will argue, Byron differed from Douglass in his ultimate view on the status of those in bondage in that Byron saw the Greeks as a society in need of liberating, but one that should still exist under the watchful eye of a protector. Byron mirrors a later Douglass, though, in his poetry, championing self-effected emancipation through a call for ultimately violent revolution.¹

The Grand Tour would also spark Byron's authorial fame at only 24 years of age. Yet, despite the ups and downs of his famed literary career, Byron's personal interest in Greece carried on. The culmination of the Grand Tour, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the poem that made

¹ The first publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812 spurred Byron into the foray of slavery and the abolitionist conversation. The majority of my analysis of this early poem by Byron will be centered later in this project, although several selections offer insight into Byron's early abolitionist leanings.

Byron famous practically overnight, offers several insights into Byron's attitude toward forced servitude. As Stephen Minta notes, we begin to "find that other note, of resistance, and recognition of the possibility of change, which will prove so potent in Byron's life."² Indeed, Byron questions the nature of 19th century Greece late in Canto II.

"Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!
Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,
And long accustomed bondage uncreate?"³

Here Byron, steeped in the classics, recognized the past glory of Greece and pained for a return to such status. He questions the future of the nation, asking, "who" shall "lead thy scattered children forth?" suggesting both that the nation of Greece had become lost, childlike, and that this nation was in need of saving. Modern Greece, "a product of Byron's raw experience," could not be "reconciled with Ancient Greece, a product of his English public school learning." He saw the persecution of the Greeks at the hands of the Turks as an affront to the glory of antiquity. Unlike Douglass, whose hunger for abolition was stoked through his own personal past in conjunction with a desire for equality among and independence for African Americans from whites, Byron was not convinced that the modern Greeks were capable of complete independence.⁴

"Not such thy sons who whilome did await,
The hopeless warriors of a willing doom,
In bleak Thermopylae's sepulchral strait—
Oh, who that gallant spirit shall resume,
Leap from Eurotas' banks, and call thee from the tomb?"⁵

² Stephen Minta, "The Image of Greece in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*," in *Byron's Poetry*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 187.

³ George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). 2:68

⁴ Peter Cochran, "Songs and Stanzas, Stanzas and Songs: Greece in *Childe Harold* and Greece in *Don Juan*. In *Byron's Poetry*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). 173.

⁵ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 2:68.

Byron's citing of Thermopylae in this section calls on the memory of Greek sacrifice, a time in which King Leonidas and 300 of his Spartan soldiers held off the Persian King Xerxes in Greece's defense. This ultimate sacrifice is emphasized here as a means of calling on the Greeks to emulate their past ancestors, furthering the legendary status of ancient Greece through his addition of "Eurotas' bank," referring back to the birth of Sparta and the reign of Greek kings.

Byron's vision of "hopeless warriors" is later cemented in the same Canto, as Byron writes "Greece! change thy lords, thy state is still the same; / Thy glorious day is o'er, but not thine years of shame."⁶ Minta remarks that in the notes to *Childe Harold*, "Byron is a little airily confident of what the future holds," signaling further the poet's early doubt of a successful Greek emancipation. "He says that 'the interposition of foreigners alone can emancipate the Greeks, who, otherwise, appear to have as small a chance of redemption from the Turks, as Jews have from mankind in general.'" I take Byron's early notions of Greek emancipation to be genuine, if not fully developed at this early point. Roderick Beaton notes in his book, *Byron's War*, that the poet's writing reflects, "the possibility that Greece might ever, one day, be 'restored.'" The sight of so much destruction in terms of Greek architecture and the disconnect from the old world led Byron to feel "the presence only of death."⁷

Byron goes on to state, "the Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should! but they may be subjects without being slaves."⁸ Despite his lack of belief in the possibility of Greek sovereignty, Byron was still pained by Greece's status as slave to the Turks. For Byron, this violated his sense of liberty. Byron instead "envisioned a 'free' Greece as a minor colony of Britain... 'a free state with a

⁶ Byron, 2:69.

⁷ Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 17.

⁸ George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Alice Levine (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010). 90.

proper guarantee.”⁹ Here Byron suggests liberty under the protective guidance of the Crown, not a complete liberation in the style proposed by the likes of Douglass, but one that still echoed of an abolitionist nature.¹⁰

Byron’s writing, much like Douglass, is foregrounded in an association within a communicative environment centered on slavery. This was further stimulated through the poet’s personal associations. Anne Isabella Noel Milbanke, the Lady Byron, was a major proponent of anti-slavery legislation in her lifetime, and as such, her union with Lord Byron may have stoked his views on the matter.¹¹ Byron’s passions were apparent following his return from the Grand Tour, as evidenced in his various defenses of the downtrodden, most specifically the Catholics and framebreakers, in the House of Commons in 1812.¹² In one particular instance, Byron reminisces on his past experiences in Greece, “I have traversed the seat of war in the peninsula, I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey.” He compares them to what he saw as atrocious conditions imposed by the British government upon its subjects -- “but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the very heart of a Christian country.”¹³ Byron’s experiences influenced his actions in the political sphere of Britain, and, in turn, echoed within the conversations of government and, ultimately, in the daily dialogue of the people through Byron’s writing. With regard to the first cantos of *Childe Harold*, Francis Jeffrey, a contemporary critic of Byron’s, wrote that the poem exhibited a tone of “self-willed independence,” a trait that seems to have

⁹ Byron, 90.

¹⁰ Minta, “The Image of Greece,” 187.

¹¹ Anne Milbanke Byron would ultimately attend the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, and became a subject of extreme interest to the American abolitionist and contemporary of Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe shares her own circle of communication with Byron through extensive commentary on Lady Byron in her writings, and in assessments of Byron himself, albeit primarily negative in nature.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Lady Byron Vindicated* (Luton: AUK Classics, 2012).

¹² Drummond Bone, *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, (Cambridge University Press: 2004), pp. 44–47.

¹³ T.C. Hansard, ed. *Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, Vol. 22 (London: T. C. Hansard, Printer, 1812). 970.

reverberated through Byron following his return from the Mediterranean, expressing his attitude toward Greek independence. As it was, the effects of Byron's journey through Greece as a young man did not cease with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Byron came back to Greece partly at the behest of his dear friend, John Cam Hobhouse, who was involved in the British interactions with Greece and her independence. During this time, Byron had been working on his epic satire, *Don Juan*. Byron also appears to have been drawn back to that Mediterranean landscape out of his long desire to see a return to the Greece of old.¹⁴ Minta writes that Byron "was already interested in the effects of slavery on the Greek character" and through the construction of Haidee's father, Lambro, Byron sees "something of the spirit of old Greece," noting in the third canto of *Don Juan*, "His country's wrongs and his despair to save her/ Had stung him from a slave to an enslaver."¹⁵ This intertwining interest in the narrative of slavery permeated Byron's values and his writing, ultimately culminating in the poet's most famous lines written on Greece, the "Isles of Greece" section of Canto III of *Don Juan*, presenting to the reader the struggle and plight of the Greek subject and the desire to strike off the chains of slavery.

Embedded in the latter portion of Canto III of *Don Juan*, a new narrative voice emerges through a breakage in the text. This break in the narrative constitutes the short poem-within-a-poem, "The Isles of Greece," situated between the 86th and 87th stanzas of Canto III. The stanzas here are renumbered, ranging one to sixteen. This poem deviates from the standard of iambic pentameter of *Don Juan*, following a shortened iambic tetrameter poetic meter and

¹⁴ During his absence from Greece, Byron's lack of focus on that country's plight, according to Roderick Beaton, was due primarily to his rise in fame that began with the publication of *Childe Harold*, and yet we are still given clear evidence of Greece's effect on Byron's writing as his work *The Giaour*, in which he ponders on the state of Greece, suggesting that it is "living Greece no more! / So coldly sweet, so deadly fair, / We start – for soul is wanting there." Byron's regret on not seeing the classical Greece of old was one that he would reflect on for the remainder of his life.

Beaton, *Byron's War*. 36.

¹⁵ Minta, "The Image of Greece," 191.

shifting from eight line stanzas to that of six, a ballad stanza inserted into ottava rima. The separate narrative voice is that of a poet, whom editor Alice Levine notes most clearly resembles Robert Southey, the poet laureate of England, “but ironically also on Byron himself,” for “he had travell’d ‘mongst the Arabs, Turks, and Franks.”¹⁶

As I look now to the means by which *Don Juan* in fact aided in the message that Byron strives to strike across in “The Isles of Greece,” I begin with the origin of this inner-poem itself, yet another example of the intertextual relationships apparently at work in the makeup of the poem. It is rather interesting that the text was inspired by Richard Polwhele’s *Grecian Prospects*, a short poem published in 1799. Stephen Minta writes that this poem too, “is a vision of the Greek islands, a vision both geographical and political,” very much in the keeping of “Isles of Greece,” and one that “promises that a renewal of the glories of ancient Greece is at hand.” The importance here then lies on the political nature of the work. Here Byron capitalizes on his previous encounters with abolitionist rhetoric on behalf of Greece to craft his own petition to the cause. This is inherently intertextual in nature, as Byron’s work, though not a copy in any capacity, was influenced by the preceding work of *Grecian Prospects*. This is evident in the lines “Yet, in these isles, I nursed the martial fires, / Fires, that ere-long shall far illuminate Greece.”¹⁷ The ability of the former text to influence the later, rather the inevitability of it highlights the influential nature of conversation through media representation. In this context, the reading and transmitting of print media produced on Byron an effect that influenced his writing.

The narrator of the “Isles of Greece” is a poet, who “was of great fame, and liked to show it: / His verses rarely wanted their due feet; / And for his theme—he seldom sung below it, / He being paid to satirize or flatter, / As the psalm says, 'inditing a good matter.'” Byron builds the

¹⁶ Byron, *Byron’s Poetry*, 492.

¹⁷ Minta, “The Image of Greece,” 192.

poet up for several stanzas before the initiation of his sub-section of poetic verses, noting that “he praised the present, and abused the past, / Reversing the good custom of old days, / An Eastern anti-jacobin at last / He turn'd, preferring pudding to no praise.” Here Byron laments on past glories for Greece and further hints at his own lengthy relationship with the Greeks, “for some few years his lot had been o'ercast / By his seeming independent in his lays... He was a man who had seen many changes, / And always changed as true as any needle; / His polar star being one which rather ranges.” Byron implies that the poet is of the sort who would strike up a tune in favor of any nation as long as it held a profit, which, along with the poet’s Greek nationality, calls on Byron’s earlier sentiments on the Greek people and their inability to hold a proper and free country on their own.

He had travell'd 'mongst the Arabs, Turks, and Franks,
And knew the self-loves of the different nations;
And having lived with people of all ranks,
Had something ready upon most occasions—
Which got him a few presents and some thanks.
He varied with some skill his adulations;
To 'do at Rome as Romans do,' a piece
Of conduct was which he observed in Greece.

Byron can easily be read in these selections of the text, as, despite his stopping to recenter the narrative of the poem, Byron’s narrator dives back into a lengthy and intricate description of the poet-character:

But now being lifted into high society,
And having pick'd up several odds and ends
Of free thoughts in his travels for variety,
He deem'd, being in a lone isle, among friends,
That, without any danger of a riot, he
Might for long lying make himself amends;
And, singing as he sung in his warm youth,
Agree to a short armistice with truth.¹⁸

¹⁸ George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 1st ed., vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). 5:186.

The insistence upon the collection of “free thoughts,” can be read as more than a passing remark on the nature of slavery and its ever-embedded struggle with liberty. Here also, Byron notes on the “lone isle,” a space both physical in that it represents a location within the context of *Don Juan*, but also in that the poet himself is stranded on a lone isle in his mind. Byron was forever changed by his experiences of the Grand Tour and had since been unable to separate himself from the notion of Greece’s tarnished state. Thus, he chooses to accept a “short armistice with truth,” choosing to embed in the text a message that falls in line with Frederick Douglass’ much later desire to call upon the self-effected emancipation of his people. For Byron, this meant the casting off of the Turks at the hands of the Greeks, an event that had not yet been set in motion at the time of Canto III’s writing.

Through a close reading of “The Isles of Greece,” focusing on the distinct difference in structure and voice between this poem and that of the rest of *Don Juan*, I propose that Byron here is capitalizing on the use of print medium and the publication and readership of his mock satire to spread his own personal message on the ills of Greek slavery. It seems that readership was one of Byron’s goals, especially when one considers that Byron first published the early cantos anonymously, thus forfeiting his recognition as the author. This could have been partly due to Byron’s infamy at the time in England, perhaps suggesting that Byron was interested in the general thoughts of an anonymous author on the readership.

Byron’s understanding of readership played a factor in the dissemination of Canto III and the structuring and placement of “The Isles of Greece.” In his review of the piece, Francis Jeffrey refers to “The Isles of Greece” as “the glorious Ode on the aspirations of Greece after liberty,” clearly captivated by the power of Byron’s words. However, Jeffrey calls into light the confusion emanating from the piece and its placement in *Don Juan* as a whole, noting that the piece is

“instantly followed up by a strain of dull and cold-blooded ribaldry.” Jeffrey’s strong feelings on “The Isles of Greece,” evident through his use of the word “glorious,” is even more telling when we consider Byron’s reputation in England had all but been tarnished by critics and gossip in 1822. This further suggests that the piece had a profound impact on the reader, fostering a sense of sympathy for the revolutionary cause and generating conversation on the subject of Greek liberty.¹⁹

The isles of Greece – the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace –
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!
Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all, except their sun, is set.

The opening lines of the inner poem call at once upon classical Greek figures, drawing on the lore of Ancient Greece, but they also saturate the stanza in a profound sense of loss with the addition of the final couplet. “Eternal Summer” here is a place both of mythic status to be remembered for generations, but also as a representation of what Greece could forever be. However, this glorious vision “except [its] sun” has set, the poet here reminding us that gone are the heroes of old, and the country that they had so adored.

The Scian and the Teian Muse,
The hero’s harp, the lover’s lute,
Have found the fame your shores refuse;
Their place of birth alone is mute
To sounds which echo further west
Than your sires’ “Islands of the Blest.”²⁰

The emphasis on “shores refuse” sets an accusatory tone in the second stanza. The poet here questions the nation from which he hails, a nation that “alone is mute / To sounds which echo

¹⁹ Francis Jeffrey, “On *Don Juan*,” in *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Alice Levine (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010). 797.

²⁰ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 5:188-9.

further west,” these being the sounds of a nation in slavery. The poet refuses to stay silent, as he cannot envision himself in bondage, or his country of such former glory be seen as a mere thrall.

The Mountains look on Marathon—
And Marathon looks on the Sea;
And musing there an hour Alone,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free
For standing on the Persian’s Grave,
I could not deem myself a slave. —²¹

Here the poet embraces his Greek heritage, reminiscing on the once great battle of Marathon and the eventual defeat of Xerxes and the Persians, reminding his audience that a fight against the enslavement of the nation was successful once before. This Greece, despite the poet’s lamenting, is, however, gone, to which he acknowledges the role in which his country played a part. “A King sate on the rocky brow... And ships by thousands lay below, / And men in nations – All were his... And when the sun set – where were they?” The poet questions the nature of his country directly, “and where are they? – and where art thou, / My country? On thy voiceless shore,” decrying the silence and laying the blame for the fall of Greek heroes on her own feet. “The heroic lay is tuneless now – / The heroic bosom beats no more!” The poet ultimately grieves that he alone is now a voice of rebellion and the only remaining remnant of a proud history, one that he himself is not fit to wield. “And must thy lyre, so long divine, / Degenerate into hands like mine?” This lament, though personal to the Greeks in nature, also reveals Byron’s conflicted nature. At once he seems to be brimming with the desire to aid Greece’s people, but his foreignness and doubt toward the potential of a free Greece seep through the poem.

Must *we* but weep o’er days more blest? –
Must *we* but blush? – Our fathers bled.
Earth! render back from out thy breast
A remnant of our Spartan dead!
Of the three hundred grant but three.
To make a new Thermopylæ!

²¹ Byron, 5:189.

What silent still? and silent all?
Ah! no – the voices of the dead
Sound like a distant torrent's fall,
And answer – “Let one living head,
“But one, arise – we come, we come!”
'Tis but the living who are dumb.²²

The poet-singer, and Byron through him, directly addresses the Greek people in the next stanzas. By italicizing “we” in the context of the poem, the poet is highlighting his lineage and appealing to the patriotism of his people. Here, I argue, Byron is acting in a similar fashion. Having thus lamented on the tragic nature of a once-proud nation, Byron riles up the Greeks by appealing to their sense of duty to those who have fallen in the name of their nation, noting “our fathers bled” and thus reminding the people that their ancestors died for a free Greece and to suggest that to do anything else is but a disservice to their memory. Still, there is no answer from the citizenry, who, if but even one would stand up and fight, would have the might of history and the heroes of the past on their side. This is a call to arms to the Greeks on the part of Byron.

Heroism thus becomes important to Byron. The forging of this environment of calling upon the Greeks to remember their ancestry is essential to his argument in that it changes the psyche that has been damaged by slavery, empowering the Greeks to revolt. The poet-character warns his people that they must not rely on the help of others, and “trust not for freedom to the Franks - / They have a king who buys and sells,” the poet instead insisting on self-enacted emancipation. “In native swords, and native ranks, / The only hope of courage dwells.” Still, the disenchantment of his people's plight has disheartened the poet, who remarks “but Turkish force and Latin fraud, / Would break your shield, however broad,” thus his next lines inviting his people to drink comes as a form of concession to the reader. I see this as acquiescence as rather the poet switching tactics, seemingly reconciled to the belief that his people will not fight, he

²² Byron, 5:190.

suggests they “in vain – in vain – strike other chords – / Fill high the cup with Samian wine! / Leave battles to the Turkish hordes, /And shed the blood of Scio’s vine!” For the reader of *Don Juan*, this “sad trimmer’s” sudden championing of drink can be taken in the context of the occasion in which he sings.²³ The poet is in attendance at a party, and thus his cries for Samian wine could be in accordance with the norm of such an event. I see this more as a jest at the Greek people, as the poet has already called out their “silence” on the part of resistance.²⁴

The poet continues his act of shaming the people by reminding them that they “have the letters Cadmus gave,” the gift of letters and learning, asking them “Think Ye he meant them for a Slave?” The lament here is made equally more tragic with this accusation, as the poet reminds his people that they have faced many tyrants before, and that the Turks are no different. “And there perhaps some Seed is sown / The Heracleidan blood might own.” Again the poet seems hopeful that there is a trace of resistance in his people as he calls on their blood-connection to the past. His lament is further assisted in the fifteenth stanza, as he notes, in regard to those “virgins” who “dance beneath the shade,” shade here also, perhaps, pertaining to the occupation of the nation at the hands of the Turks, “my own the burning tear-drop laves, / To think such breasts must suckle Slaves.” The poet ends his song on a note that firmly places his song in the rankings of abolitionist rhetoric:

Place me on Sunium’s marbled steep,
Where nothing save the waves and I
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die –
A land of slaves shall ne’er be mine –
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine! -²⁵

²³ Byron, 5:190.

²⁴ In 1822, the people of Chios (Scio) were butchered by the Turks in one of the many atrocities committed during the Greek War of Independence. For those readers who read *Don Juan* following the massacre, “Scio’s vine” takes on a double meaning in the poem through intertextuality, as it stands for wine, thus a call for the Greeks to continue their drunken ribaldry, but also a reminder of the slaughter of the Greeks of Scio.

²⁵ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 5:192.

At once this passage challenges the poet's previous verses, as he commands his people to "dash down" their wine after imploring them to fill the bowl high. This can be read as the poet now enacting a form of open rebellion in the spilling of wine, alluding to the bloodshed of inevitable revolt, as he enacts a death by suicide rather than dishonor himself and his country by being taken captive. He labels his people and their country as "a Land of slaves" and refuses to accept, "shall ne'er be mine," thus positioning himself as a beacon of change for his people. Here then, Byron challenges the Greeks to fight their oppression, his open talk of taking one's own life in the place of enslavement a clear sign that blood must be shed in the name of freedom.

I look to the following three stanzas of *Don Juan* following "The Isles of Greece" for further evidence of Byron's intentionality in the call for abolition, as here Byron, through the lens of the poem's narrator, calls into question the legacies that we leave behind after our deaths:

Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung,
The modern Greek, in tolerable verse;²⁶

The emphasis on "thus sung, or world, or could, or should have sung" here is a direct statement on the part of the narrator about who the Greeks are and should model themselves after. As their country is enslaved, Byron here insists that the Greeks must rebel in all facets of their lives.

But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think;
'Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses
Instead of speech, may form a lasting link
Of ages; to what straits old time reduces
Frail man, when paper – even a rag like this,
Survives himself, his tomb, and all that's his. –

And when his bones are dust, his grave a blank,
His station, generation, even his nation,
Become a thing, or nothing, save to rank

²⁶ Byron, 5:192.

In chronological commemoration,
Some dull MS. oblivion long has sank,
Or graven stone found in a barrack's station
In digging the foundations of a closet,
May turn his name up, as a rare deposit.²⁷

Byron, through *Don Juan*, here directly references the power of print media in the defense of Greek abolition, as “a small drop of ink,” capitalized here to indicate importance, “makes thousands, perhaps millions, think,” emphasizing the importance of the written word in the combating of slavery. Byron notes that long after we are dead, our words will still have meaning and that they alone will continue our legacies. Based on the state of his embedded words, Byron is here speaking of himself as well as the Greeks, calling into question his own actions and perhaps setting the stage for his own eventual rallying to the Greek cause several years later, an action that would ultimately spell out his death.

Eric Strand notes that the “contradictory political stance of Byron's epic poem can be linked to his troubled relationship to this world-system, the love of wealth and pleasure, of unbridled consumption that the system offers,” and that it can be “countered by the awareness that this consumption decenters any conception of struggle versus power, of a movement for liberation.” This provides further support of my reading of the inner-poem, as it adds to the notion that Byron, through the voice of the poet, is decrying the drunken revelry and instead insinuating a need to fight. “Thus to understand this is to understand why Byron stopped writing *Don Juan*, and why he poured his savings into the Greek nationalist movement,” argues Strand, noting that *Don Juan* was itself a “commodity, an element in global trade, and for Byron joining the Greek struggle represented a more authentic way of rocking the markets of tyrants to their foundation.” Yet even Strand suggests that Byron may have failed here, noting that “the pathos

²⁷ Byron, 5:192.

(or bathos) of his political activism is that it prefigured simply one more role for the global consumer” and that “because he could never coherently articulate an opposition to the economic world-system, Byron's attempt at political heroism ended with him dying a tourist.”²⁸

Despite his apparent belief that Greece would be better under the watchful eye of a benevolent protector, that of England, rather than on her own, I argue that Byron did champion a form of resistance and urge Greek citizens to defend their lands and seize their freedom. The additional emphasis that the poet within the poem is singing in the house of Lambro, who embodied the remnants of old Greece and who watched in secret as the poet sung, further suggests my reading has merit.

“The Isles of Greece” carries “its own conviction, independent of the unreliability of the singer... the song remains one of the most powerful acts of propaganda in the cause of the Greek freedom.”²⁹ Indeed Byron’s poem in a note to Thomas Moore in November of 1820 shares this same sentiment:

“When a man hath no freedom to fight for at home,
Let him combat for that of his neighbours;
Let him think of the glories of Greece and of Rome,
And get knock'd on the head for his labours.

To do good to mankind is the chivalrous plan,
And, is always as nobly requited;
Then battle for freedom wherever you can,
And, if not shot or hang'd, you'll get knighted.”³⁰

Byron suggests that the slave stand up, not for himself if need be, but for this fellow slaves, to stand together in a fight for their liberty. He should remember the glory of ancient Greece and Rome and in that remembrance fight, even if that fight be in vain, for it is good to be chivalrous, and one must be willing to champion the “battle for freedom” wherever he can, furthering such a

²⁸ Eric Strand, "Byron's "Don Juan" as a Global Allegory," *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 4 (2004): 506.

²⁹ Minta, “The Image of Greece,” 193.

³⁰ Byron, *Byron's Poetry*, 759.

cause with the hinting of a incentive, that of knighthood, and the consequence of loss being a hanging.

Byron's poem thus represents a means of championing self-effected emancipation through a call for ultimately violent revolution. This championing was further empowered through the use of the print medium in the publication of Canto III and the responses thus generated by its reviewers and readers alike. Indeed, in this regard Byron effectively produces an effect that would later be studied by and at first duplicated, then expanded upon by Frederick Douglass, who, I will later suggest, saw the freedom of African Americans as achievable through self-enacted liberation, and thus imbues this notion in *The Heroic Slave*. Douglass' text, unlike Byron's, suggests that the slave can only have true freedom when he is left to his own devices and not placed in the hands of a watchful American government. These two authors, because of their similar methods of thinking, are forever bound together through the support of Douglass' intertextual epigraphs.

Byron's ultimate death in Greece in April of 1824 further propelled the conversation on slavery in the context of Greek independence, stimulating that communicative environment in which Byron had been a part of since 1810. In his writing from the December 1870 edition of *Fortnightly Review*, John Morley wrote in response to the souring of Byron's reputation in England, remarking that from Byron "dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for this land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented amongst the oppressed." Morley sees Byron as the epitome of what it means to be British. "He led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe."³¹ Matthew Arnold's 1881 preface to *Poetry of Byron* further acknowledges the spirit of Byron, particularly his support for the oppressed citing

³¹ John Morley, "From Fortnightly Review," in *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Alice Levine (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010). 800.

Byron's writing "I have simplified my politics' he writes, 'into an utter detestation of all existing governments.' And again: 'Give me a republic. The king-times are fast finishing; there will be blood shed like water and tears like mist, but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it.'" Arnold makes a prediction of his own here. Taken with Byron's sentiment, he notes that "when the year 1900 is turned, and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has then just ended, the first names with her will be these," referring chiefly to Byron and firmly entrenching the Lord in the context of liberation.³²

Greece ultimately would receive her freedom from Turkish rule, but not until after years of bloodshed and atrocities committed on the part of both sides. The cry for freedom on the part of Byron was felt in his writing, which in turn was distributed and consumed among the masses and over the years to follow, eventually influenced a new breed of abolitionists half a world away and in the context of chattel slavery. Byron would become a cog in the machine of Frederick Douglass and his own message of emancipation and would continue an environment of anti-slavery discourse across transatlantic borders.

³² Matthew Arnold, "From Preface to *Poetry of Byron*," in *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Alice Levine (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010). 802.

II. *The Heroic Slave*

In the previous section of this project, I examined Lord Byron's "The Isles of Greece" in the context that the poet used the inner-poem of his mock-epic *Don Juan* Canto III as a means of expressing his own personal sentiment on slavery and oppression for the people of Greece. I argued that Byron, seizing on the communicative nature of print media, used his ability as a writer to champion liberation on the part of the Greeks through a form of self-emancipation through violent resurrection. In the context of this second section, I argue that, in accordance with the idea of intertextuality, highlighted in Byron's influencing through the reading of *Grecian Prospects* a similar scenario unfolded around Frederick Douglass' *The Heroic Slave*. It is my aim to examine the contents of Douglass' novella, highlighting key literary texts and events occurring within a similar gap in time that constitute part of a conversation on slavery in which we have already heard Byron's voice, and argue that Douglass here expands on that conversation through the suggestion of liberation without further protection.¹

The Heroic Slave first appeared in 1853 in the pages of *Autographs for Freedom*, a "fund-raising volume" edited by Julia Griffiths, a "British friend and the managing editor" of Frederick Douglass' newspaper.² The collection was a response to the ever-growing abolition movement published by John P. Jewett and Company, who had only recently published Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Griffiths included a series of other short narratives, letters, and poetry pertaining to abolition in her collection, with Douglass' sole piece of fiction, *The Heroic Slave*, placed near the end, shortly after another text entitled "The Heroic Slave-Woman."

¹ Section one of this project evaluated Byron's claim that Greece, despite a need for liberation from the Ottomans, could never truly manage complete freedom if they were granted it, as Byron was sure the Greeks would fall prey to yet another empirical power. Douglass argues against this tactic in *The Heroic Slave*, suggesting complete autonomy for the African American following bondage by means of self-liberation.

² Frederick Douglass and Robert S. Levine, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), xii.

This coupling likely produced on account of the similarity in name, the novella does not draw attention to itself from an initial reading of the collection, and rather it seems to blend with the rest of the collection. Yet, much like its protagonist and namesake, the novella did not stay hidden for long. *The Heroic Slave* was soon serialized and printed between March 4th and 25th of that same year in Douglass' own *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.³

For Douglass, the publishing of *The Heroic Slave* was a response to an already raging debate over the nature of slavery. This conversation, as I have argued, was one that had been built up and disseminated amongst the public for centuries through the deployment of varying types of media, to which an ecological environment of discourse was produced and from then after fueled by the consumption of and responses to that media, creating an intertextual network of art that bridges time and genre. Douglass had been a part of this conversation in various capacities since his birth as a slave. However, *The Heroic Slave* was written first as a response to the events of The *Creole* rebellion. Robert Levine writes “the *Creole* rebellion not only was important in American history and politics, but also had an impact on Douglass's career, moving him toward a more radical position on the uses of violence to achieve black freedom.” This concept of violence was one already depicted in the works of Byron, a notion that had gradually grown for the poet over the course of his life, like Douglass.⁴

In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass “addressed the abolitionist movement, the trans-Atlantic history of slavery, interracial friendship, black leadership, and the relationship between journalism, fiction, and history.” The ability of the author to transfuse multiple genres and themes together within his novella, as well as “his skillful use of setting, point of view, and

³ See Julia Griffiths et al., *Autographs for Freedom*, (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853).

⁴ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, xii. Robert Levine, et al., whose work highlighted the community-like structure of the media conversations that appeared in the 19th century American slave trade, made an extent of the work of the next section possible through their collecting of primary sources.

stylized theatrical dialogue,” left some, as Levine notes, to “almost lament that this was his only work of fiction.” This curiosity is an important one. As I have noted in the introduction to this project, I see Douglass deployment of fiction as both a shield to protect him from the contrarian views in which he establishes over the course of the novella, and as a means of ensuring a vast spread of his position on slavery to readers through the guise of a fictional narrative.⁵ That the novella was based on a historical event concurrent with its publication allowed for that rapid consumption as readers would have been deeply vested in events upon which they had context. Historian David Blight writes “the turn to fiction to expose the full danger of the fugitive-slave crisis was also a logical progression in Douglass’ evolution as a man of words.” This notion taken in the context that Douglass had already mastered “oratory, achieved fame with autobiography, and now independently engaged in the world of journalism.” Citing critics Shelley Fisher and Carla Peterson, Blight argues that Douglass “gave a profound voice to the slave rebel, in the person of Madison Washington, for an audience that could see such figures only as a dangerous lot.” This notion of providing a different rendition holds to an ideology that Douglass’ *The Heroic Slave* was more than a piece of fiction. It was a call for self-effected emancipation and a means not only of destabilizing black stereotypes, but also of expressing the agency of the African American outside the context of the white race.⁶

The intentionality of *The Heroic Slave* is also felt in Douglass use of prose over poetry for his work. For Byron, whose medium was poetry, the emphasis in “Isles of Greece” and *Childe Harold* is on the build-up of feeling in the text, the expression of terrible loss juxtaposed with the invocation of the beautiful and ancient enamor the reader and incite them to action. Douglass’ deferment to fiction then calls upon a different capacity. When concerning the

⁵ Douglass, xii.

⁶ David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019). 249.

distinction between poetry and prose, I consider Bakhtin's work on the subject, as it also pertains to the theory of intertextuality, key here for Douglass' literary purpose. Bakhtin, though writing after Douglass, called into question the nature of poetry, as "poetic forms like the epic and kinds of lyric are essentially monologic" this being a key factor as "they enforce a singular, authoritative voice upon the world." This authority was troublesome to Bakhtin, who believed in a society opposed to a singular voice, suggested "only the novel, and indeed only certain kinds of novel, are truly dialogic." Dialogism is the idea of a series of different voices or viewpoints in a text as opposed to one unitary voice in monologism. To this end, Douglass' choice of prose over poetry can be read as a means of drawing attention not to his own story, but rather to the lives and torments of all slaves. With its rather universal title, although *The Heroic Slave* features the narrative of Madison Washington, the character could stand for any African American slave.⁷ Perhaps Douglass also was aware, as Bakhtin would be, that the importance of otherness in terms of literary voices was due to a "recognition that language is never our own, that there is no single human subject who could possibly be the object of psychological investigation, that no interpretation is ever complete because every word is a response to previous words and elicits further responses." This is the very nature of intertextual theory.⁸

The intertextual environment in which I argue Frederick Douglass' *The Heroic Slave* existed was based, in part, on the rebellion on *The Creole* in 1841.⁹ The events of the rebellion,

⁷ Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2011). 25.

⁸ Allen, 27.

⁹ Levine writes of *The Creole* and the events of the rebellion at the beginning of his introduction to *The Heroic Slave*, noting:

"On 25 October 1841, the slave ship *Creole* left Richmond, Virginia, for New Orleans, the largest slave-trading market in North America. The brig carried 13 sailors and crew, 6 white passengers, numerous boxes of tobacco, and 135 slaves, worth about \$100,000. Eight days later, as the *Creole* sailed through the northern Bahamas, 19 slaves rose up in revolt. Within a few hours they had taken control of the ship and forced a crewman to sail the brig to the Bahamas. They put into port on New Providence at Nassau, the largest settlement in the Bahamas, populated chiefly by blacks who had been freed by Great Britain's 1833 Emancipation Act. The *Creole* reached Nassau on 9 November. The mutineers appealed to the British

as I have noted, were explosive in the political sphere of 19th Century America, much like the way in which Greek independence played a role in the politics of Byron's era. As Robert Levine writes, "the *Creole* mutiny electrified the nation and helped escalate sectional tensions over slavery. Southerners (and some northerners) were outraged that British authorities chose to free U.S. slaves, especially those who had taken violent action against their masters." This idea of violence on the part of slaves terrified southern slave owners, as it came to represent a complete destabilization of the master-slave power dynamic and a fully realized representation of black agency. They "viewed the British as endorsing slave insurrections—their worst nightmare—while also denying Americans their legal right to the domestic slave trade. In response, many southerners demanded war with England and threatened to start it themselves." The *Creole* had suddenly channeled a transatlantic debate on slavery.¹⁰

The *Creole* came on the heels of the *Amistad* uprising of 1839, and, as Levine notes, only months after the Supreme Court "ruled in favor of freeing the *Amistad's* leader, Joseph Cinqué, and his fellow rebels, who had been imprisoned in Connecticut jailhouses" since the events. Due to this quick succession of events in the context of slave rebellion, the results of the *Creole* rippled throughout Congress and fueled the flames of pro and anti-slavery discourse. One of the first examples of print media being used in a fashion of direct communication revolving around the *Creole* comes from the "8 December 1841 issue of the *New Orleans Advertiser*, which published the lengthy deposition—known as the 'Protest'—that white officers and seamen gave to a New Orleans notary shortly after the *Creole* arrived in New Orleans on 2 December 1841."

Following its publication, the "Protest" was interpreted and various newspapers on either side of

authorities, who within a week had freed the 116 slaves not participating in the rebellion, but detained the mutineers; in March 1842, they, too, were freed. The rebellion was comparatively civil: 1 crewman and 2 slaves were killed. Taking into account the numbers liberated versus those killed, it was one of the most successful slave revolts in North America." Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, xi.

¹⁰ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, xii-xiii.

the debate lines released various responses and editions of the document. Drawing on the “Protest,” on “23 December 1845 the National Anti-Slavery Standard published an article, ‘An American Cinquez,’ that directly linked the Creole rebellion to the Amistad slave rebellion of 1839, led by Joseph Cinqué.” Only two days later, the *Colored American*, “based in New York City and the leading African American newspaper of the time, published ‘Another Amistad Case,’ which also drew on the ‘Protest.’”¹¹

The *Colored American*’s response to the “Protest,” directly fires at the heart of the issue for the mutineers on board the *Creole*, “as on *English soil slaves cannot breathe.*” The article goes on to write, in response to England’s choice of pardoning the mutineers:

“Our Supreme Court has just given them a precedent in the Africans of the Amistad, she may follow so illustrious an example. But this country has adopted other precedents, in refusing to deliver up her mail robbers, and her murderers, who had taken refuge under our government from Canada. England will never do for us, what we have in like circumstance refused to do for them, especially in the case of men fighting to deliver themselves from chattel slavery. The Southern papers are already in a great rage about this case; we advise then to keep cool, not to be too wrathful, they may be glad yet to back out. John Bull won’t be frightened. We advise old Virginia to be careful how she ships her slaves to the South. These Virginia slaves are hard cases.”¹²

The reader is openly aware here of the direct dialogue between the writer and the people of Virginia, yet their note on injustices of an indifferent America do not fail to go unnoticed. These tones at once fill the reader with a sense of inherited guilt for those who would stand idle or support the bondage system. For those who were already under the abolitionist sway, these words were a rekindling of dedication to the cause and yet another victory on the road to the dispelling of oppression. “Another Amistad Case” was a direct response to another response, forming a link in a communicative chain. Following this article, papers such as the *Colored American* would inspire others, notably the *Liberator*.

¹¹ Douglass, 59.

¹² Douglass, 61. See later in this section for more on this notion of Virginian slaves as “hard cases.”

William Lloyd Garrison took the “Protest” and republished it in his *Liberator* in December 1841. Although it was originally meant as a means by which to vilify blacks and ignite anger amongst southern whites, “for antislavery leaders like Garrison and Douglass, what came across most forcefully in the whites’ account of the rebellion was the blacks’ heroic quest for freedom.” In particular are lines such as the recorded words of the slave rebel Madison Washington, who exclaimed, “I am going up, I cannot stay here,” the attention to his use of “I” denoting his individual agency. “Madison said he wanted to go to Liberia. Ben Blacksmith, D. Ruffin and several of the slaves then said that they wanted to go to the British Islands.” Their interest in freedom from slavery over butchering the crew demonstrated to Garrison and Douglass that Washington and his cohort were seeking freedom.¹³

The issue of *Creole* inevitably ended up on the floor of Congress with the depositions of the crew and debate on the reaction of Great Britain. The excesses of printed responses on behalf of the rebellion spurred such events on. These depositions furthered the conversation. “From the point of view of . . . U.S officials, the blacks were murderous rebels who should be returned to their white owners, but antislavery people who read the same depositions tended to regard the blacks as resourceful, freedom loving, and compassionate.”¹⁴ Such views threatened to spur on clashes both verbal and physical and elicited responses from politicians and ultimately led to the calling for a black revolution.¹⁵

¹³ Douglass, 69, 73.

¹⁴ Douglass, 81. Levine goes on to write “the depositions became part of the U.S. record of the rebellion, and were presented by President Tyler and Secretary of State Webster to the U.S. Senate on 19 January 1842, and were printed as Senate Document 51, 27th Congress, 2nd session, 1842.” The signification of recording here denotes the importance of preserving the conversation on slavery on the part of U.S. politicians. Such a conversation was paramount to the idea of freedom in American society.

¹⁵ One such letter from Webster to Edward Everett, the U.S. minister to Great Britain, generated commotion so intense that it led to the resignation of Ohioan congressman Joshua R. Giddings, who had been censured by the southern politicians on account of his desire to pass resolutions on behalf of the slaves of the *Creole*. See Douglass, 104.

Throughout the responses that generated as a result of the *Creole* rebellion, there were also created a variety of reports on the status, history, and character of Madison Washington. In “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America,” Washington is cited as “that bright star of freedom,” which “took his station in the constellation of freedom. He was a slave on board the brig *Creole*, of Richmond, bound to New Orleans, that great slave mart, with a hundred and four others. Nineteen struck for liberty or death.” Again we are given an emphasis on the notion of freedom and the bounds by which freedom should be secured for all men. “Noble men! Those who have fallen in freedom’s conflict, their memories will be cherished by the true hearted, and the God-fearing, in all future generations; those who are living, their names are surrounded by a halo of glory.” Here there is almost a spiritualistic quality associated with the slave’s quest for freedom, suggesting that divine prominence was on the side of the oppressed rather than the oppressor.¹⁶

“An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America” went on to state, in the case of the slave, that they should “rather DIE FREEMEN, THAN LIVE TO BE SLAVES. Remember that you are THREE MILLIONS... Let your motto be RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE!” Through the capitalization of key words in the text, the editor adds emphasis to the notion of securing freedom through resistance to oppression. “No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency.” This sentiment calls directly on the language of *The Heroic Slave* and the story of Madison Washington. Douglass would have been aware of such language and responses

¹⁶ Douglass, 109.

to the *Creole*, though it has been noted that he, himself, did not take part in the conversation until much later.¹⁷

In commenting on the state of conversation existent during and after the time of the *Creole* rebellion, it has been my intention to highlight the communicative discourse that existed between various sides in the political debate over slavery, as well as express the different influencing factors that played a role in Frederick Douglass' ultimate drive to write about Madison Washington. To be sure, Douglass had mentioned Washington several times before ever beginning his novella, as early as 1845, when he noted, "a short time ago we had a glorious illustration of affection in the heart of a black man—Maddison Washington." Douglass made a point to remark on the case of Washington, asking his audience "Why did Maddison Washington leave Canada where he might be free, and run the risk of going to Virginia," though he already had an answer in mind, "I know that the most intellectual and moral colored man that is now in our country is a man in whose veins no European blood courses." Here Douglass first seems to become captured by the notion of self-liberation, asking his audience to question not the results of the *Creole*, or the events that happened during the rebellion, but rather those steps that led to Washington's actions in the first place.¹⁸ Douglass was, even if only subconsciously at the time, preparing himself for a response, not only to the *Creole* rebellion, but ultimately to the notion of bondage, and the will of the African American to seize their freedom through the overthrowing of such oppression.¹⁹

¹⁷ Douglass, 109.

¹⁸ Douglass, 113. Note that the spelling of Madison here includes the addition of an extra "d" and reflects the spelling from the source material.

¹⁹ For an intimate list of all of Frederick Douglass' responses to the *Creole*, and on Madison Washington in particular, see the third part of *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, which focuses on Douglass and the *Creole*. 111-143.

For the purposes of my argument, having set down an analysis of the means by which intertextuality and media representation were at play with one another during the slavery debates of the 19th century, as evidenced through the *Creole* rebellion, I now turn to *The Heroic Slave*. As I have shown, Douglass wrote *The Heroic Slave* partly as a response to the *Creole* rebellion and the raging debate on slavery.²⁰ The novella's opening reveals Frederick Douglass' power as a writer, as he openly challenges the founding notions of liberty upon which the United States was founded:

“THE State of Virginia is famous in American annals for the multitudinous array of her statesmen and heroes. She has been dignified by some the mother of statesmen. History has not been sparing in recording their names, or in blazoning their deeds. Her high position in this respect, has given her an enviable distinction among her sister States. With Virginia for his birth-place, even a man of ordinary parts, on account of the general partiality for her sons, easily rises to eminent stations. Men, not great enough to attract special attention in their native States, have, like a certain distinguished citizen in the State of New York, sighed and repined that they were not born in Virginia. Yet not all the great ones of the Old Dominion have, by the fact of their birth-place, escaped undeserved obscurity. By some strange neglect, one of the truest, manliest, and bravest of her children, —one who, in after years, will, I think, command the pen of genius to set his merits forth, holds now no higher place in the records of that grand old Commonwealth than is held by a horse or an ox. Let those account for it who can, but there stands the fact, that a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry, —who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson, —and who fought for it with a valor as high, an arm as strong, and against odds as great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence, lives now only in the chattel records of his native State.”²¹

In the context of this passage, Douglass highlights the notions of nationalism and patriotism associated with the state of Virginia. By calling on notions of honor and nobility in association with the state, specifically in how her “high position”, had “given her an enviable distinction among her sister States,” Douglass sets up a dichotomy within Virginia between the plight of slavery, a base and dishonorable service, and the very honorable history of the state.

²⁰ For information regarding Douglass' use of the text, see section three for a closer-analysis of the purposes for Douglass' novella, as this current section is an overview of the communicative environment in which it was introduced and an accounting of Douglass' intentionality for aspects of the plot.

²¹ Douglass, 3-4.

“With Virginia for his birth-place, even a man of ordinary parts, on account of the general partiality for her sons, easily rises to eminent stations.” Here Douglass asserts that, in the case of Madison Washington, his birth in Virginia, with that proud history already established, it was inevitable that he should seek his freedom. As Robert Stepto writes, “Douglass knows the slave narrative convention... he seems to have an understanding of how to exploit its rhetorical usefulness in terms of proclaiming the existence and identity of an individual without merely employing it verbatim.”²²

Douglass seems to be hinting, in conjunction with Stepto’s point, that the fact of being born in a slave state then denied Washington of his ability to claim that honorable past as his own, for he lacked the freedom necessary to own such an identity. Of course, this will undoubtedly be the challenge to which Douglass argues throughout his text, noting that such traits that were prevalent in all of Virginia’s children were instilled in the identity of his rebel-protagonist.

Within the context of his opening passage, Douglass also pulls on the founding language of America, upon which he would also recall at later points throughout the text. Stepto writes on what he calls “ the small yet delightfully artful riddle which permits a certain ingenious closure of the paragraph.” He claims that “after declaring that his hero loved liberty as much as did Patrick Henry, and deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson, Douglass refuses to name the third famous son of Virginia with whom his hero is to be compared.” Stepto here directs our attention to this third son, noting, “of course, as any school boy or girl knows, the mystery man is Washington,” that being George Washington, the first president of the United States. This passage then directly calls on the founding of

²² Robert B. Stepto, “Storytelling in Early Afro-American Fiction,” In *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S. Levine, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 193.

the country, and the language of its original documents, engaging in intertextual conversation through print media representation.²³

Through the specific citing of Virginian citizen Thomas Jefferson, Douglass' intention does not go unnoticed. Of particular interest then to Douglass' opening, is its direct connection to the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson, a son of Virginia, wrote the artifact, again of the print media variety, and thus its deep message of independence holds an additional value to Washington's story in that it comes from a Virginian.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.”²⁴

That all men “are created equal” calls into question the notion of slavery and disrupts the ideal of Virginian honor, as one must ask how a state that has prided itself on its inhabitants and their achievements has been able to idly sit by and endure such a system of dishonor. The constitution calls on the “Right of the People” insisting importance here through the usage of capitalization, “to alter or to abolish” any government that is “destructive” to the people. In this regard, abolition is inherently justified in the identity of America.

Jefferson, himself a slave owner, wrote on the trouble of slavery. “The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies where it was, unhappily,

²³ Stepto, 193.

²⁴ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration, 2018), <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa.”²⁵ Here Jefferson laments on the obvious injustice done upon America, and he seems to be aware of the nature of events and their inevitable course if slavery should proceed. “We have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is on one scale, and self-preservation is on the other.”²⁶ Slavery became such a momentous issue, that for Jefferson, it had become an institution that had taken on generational values. “Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal.”²⁷ Jefferson’s comment here a direct reference to the notion of the African as animalistic and thus not equating the same social status as whites, with Jefferson equating all mankind to the animal. Thus, the slave and the master are on equal ground.

“The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities.”²⁸ The struggle for Freedom then became a struggle against ideologies built up in American culture, ideologies that, as Douglass seems to put it in the very beginning of his novella, were directly at odds with the language of the founding fathers, for “the whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other.”²⁹ Through his inclusion of this insight into Virginia at the beginning of his novella, Douglass channels the intertextual nature of American ideology and establishes the basis for his argument for the

²⁵ Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson's Thoughts on the Negro: Part I," *The Journal of Negro History* 3, no. 1 (1918), 55.

²⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, “To John Holmes Monticello, April 22, 1820” (Charlottesville, Virginia: Monticello, April 22, 1820), <http://www2.monticello.org>.

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 174.

²⁸ Jefferson, *Notes*, 174.

²⁹ Jefferson, *Notes*, 174.

necessity of resistance toward slavery and a call for emancipation. Into this world steps Douglass' secondary character, Mr. Listwell, and so began Madison's story.

The actual narrative of Washington begins several paragraphs into the text, set in the spring of 1835, and opens with an Ohioan traveller, the white Mr. Listwell, who has simply stopped to allow his horse to drink. He hears the sound of human conversation, and following it, stumbles upon a black man in the midst of a soliloquy.

“What, then, is life to me? it is aimless and worthless, and worse than worthless. Those birds, perched on yon swinging boughs, in friendly conclave, sounding forth their merry notes in seeming worship of the rising sun, though liable to the sportsman's fowling-piece, are still my superiors. They *live free*, though they may die slaves. They fly where they list by day, and retire in freedom at night. But what is freedom to me, or I to it? I am a slave, —born a slave, an abject slave, —even before I made part of this breathing world, the scourge was platted for my back; the fetters were forged for my limbs. How mean a thing am I. That accursed and crawling snake, that miserable reptile, that has just glided into its slimy home, is freer and better off than I. He escaped my blow, and is safe. But here am I, a man, —*yes, a man!* —with thoughts and wishes, with powers and faculties as far as angel's flight above that hated reptile,—yet he is my superior, and scorns to own me as his master, or to stop to take my blows.”³⁰

The establishment of Madison Washington's character through dialogue before we are even given a description of the character foreshadows Douglass purposefulness in choosing his topic. Washington, Douglass here insists, is more than a man; he is representative of an ideal. The text's italicization of “*live free*” highlights Douglass' chief concern for the abolitionist cause, that is the freedom of the slave to live as he chooses, as a man rather than as property. Madison here insists that he is a “*man*,” again drawing italic emphasis to the meaning of the word and directly forging a link between “*man*” and living “*free*.”

“When he saw my uplifted arm, he darted beyond my reach, and turned to give me battle. I dare not do as much as that. I neither run nor fight, but do meanly stand, answering each heavy blow of a cruel master with doleful wails and piteous cries. I am galled with irons; but even these are more tolerable than the consciousness, the *galling* consciousness of cowardice and indecision. Can it be that I *dare* not run away? *Perish the thought*, I

³⁰ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 5-6.

dare do any thing which may be done by another. When that young man struggled with the waves for *life*, and others stood back appalled in helpless horror, did I not plunge in, forgetful of life, to save his? The raging bull from whom all others fled, pale with fright, did I not keep at bay with a single pitchfork? Could a coward do that? *No,—no,—*I wrong myself,—I am no coward. *Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it. This working that others may live in idleness! This cringing submission to insolence and curses! This living under the constant dread and apprehension of being sold and transferred, like a mere brute, is too much for me. I will stand it no longer. What others have done, I will do. These trusty legs, or these sinewy arms shall place me among the free. Tom escaped; so can I. The North Star will not be less kind to me than to him. I will follow it. I will at least make the trial. I have nothing to lose. If I am caught, I shall only be a slave. If I am shot, I shall only lose a life which is a burden and a curse. If I get clear, (as something tells me I shall,) liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man, precious and priceless, will be mine. My resolution is fixed. *I shall be free.*”³¹

Again Douglass places emphasis on key wording in and phrases in the soliloquy, thereby enforcing his central message in the speech and highlighting intentionality in the design of his character. The repetition of “*dare*” casts the image of rebel in the mind of the reader before they even meet the man, at once forcing us to stereotype Washington and yet this moment also denies the reader the ability to cast those same stereotypes on Washington because of his race. This action thus forces a reflective moment on the reader when Washington is soon described afterward, and I see it as Douglass asserting that a man can never be truly or fairly defined solely due to his race.

Washington calls on the North Star, as so many slaves before him on the road to freedom, yet this scene calls on notions of preordination, and suggests a divine right to emancipation. Indeed, Madison’s final words in his initial speech compel us toward his frame of thought, “*I shall be free*” here registering not as a wish, but as a statement of fact. Douglass supports this

³¹ Douglass, 5-6. I have chosen to cite this opening soliloquy in its completed, albeit broken, form above as the effect of Washington’s words are lost if not read in their entirety. I have broken the passage in two for the purpose of highlighting key details early that influence the later half of the speech, but I recommend reading it in its entirety for full effect.

claim through the inclusion, in the next paragraph of Madison's expression of "satisfaction" as in "that moment he was free, at least in spirit."³²

As the narrative drives forward, the reader is painted a picture of Washington from the narrator's point of view.

Madison was of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong. In his movements he seemed to combine, with the strength of the lion, the lion's elasticity. His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron. His face was "black, but comely." His eye, lit with emotion, kept guard under a brow as dark and as glossy as the raven's wing. His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect. A child might play in his arms, or dance on his shoulders. A giant's strength, but not a giant's heart was in him. His broad mouth and nose spoke only of good nature and kindness. But his voice, that unfailing index of the soul, though full and melodious, had that in it which could terrify as well as charm. He was just the man you would choose when hardships were to be endured, or danger to be encountered, —intelligent and brave. He had the head to conceive, and the hand to execute. In a word, he was one to be sought as a friend, but to be dreaded as an enemy.³³

Here Douglass contrasts the "strength of the lion" with the image of a child who "might play in his arms, or dance on his shoulders," suggesting that despite a foreboding exterior, Madison was of a gentle heart. This line also serves as a direct reference to Douglass' contemporary Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which her protagonist Tom is described as "a large, broadchested, powerfully-made man... united with much kindness and benevolence," only Douglass here omits any reference to "benevolence."³⁴ Indeed, Douglass here seems to be issuing a warning, perhaps the first real sign of his leanings on abolition. By noting that Washington was "to be dreaded as an enemy," Douglass implies the danger of the shackled slave when he is refused his rightful salvation.

In "Arms like Polished Iron," Celeste-Marie Bernier argues "Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* challenged characteristic abolitionist tendencies towards using the slave's body as the sole

³² Douglass, 6.

³³ Douglass, 7.

³⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life Among the Lowly*. Ed. Christopher G. Diller (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2009). 67.

marker of authenticity.” She notes that “overall, he resists its straightforward appropriation as an object for consumption by a white audience by reclaiming the importance of the black male body as symbolic, rhetorical figure.” In this sense, Douglass “juxtaposes the physical spectacle of the slave with a superlative performance of black male intellectual prowess in Madison Washington’s exemplary command of language.” Washington’s speech and his skin color contrast one another in the context of the 19th Century American mindset and thus set about breaking stereotype barriers that have been put into play throughout the overarching conversation on slavery.³⁵

Of particular interest to this project is Bernier’s mention that Douglass’ descriptions of Washington throughout *The Heroic Slave* “are in direct contrast to those provided in his speeches, including for example his earlier address, ‘Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano’ (1849).” As I have earlier proposed, Douglass used fiction as a means of shielding himself while revealing his true feelings on abolition. For Douglass, the rebellious slave was truly the best slave, for the rebellious slave would stop at nothing to attain freedom. Douglass’ description of Madison then “ultimately subverts white racist stereotypes as they are used positively in order to situate the black male body within an explicitly separatist framework,” thus allowing Madison’s voice to take on new meaning in the minds of Douglass’ readers.³⁶

As the story continues to unfold, the first section ends on an interesting note. Hiding in the bushes, the mysterious white man listens as Washington resumes his soliloquy, lamenting on the loss of his wife, still in bondage. Douglass, referring to his white character, writes “he had long desired to sound the mysterious depths of the thoughts and feelings of a slave,” suggesting an attitude toward the slave that went beyond the simple master-servant dynamic. Yet, as

³⁵ Celeste-Marie Bernier, “Arms like Polished Iron,” In *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S. Levine, et al, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 226-227.

³⁶ Bernier, 228.

Madison Washington cries, “what, then, could I do for her? I should be in more hopeless slavery, and she no nearer to liberty, —whereas if I were free, —my arms my own, —I might devise the means to rescue her,” the mysterious stranger does not intervene, instead waiting until Washington is gone to enter the clearing.³⁷

It is here revealed to the reader that the character in question is called Mr. Listwell, and that the effect of Madison’s soliloquy has been quite powerful on the man. “The speech of Madison rung through the chambers of his soul, and vibrated through his entire frame. “Here is indeed a man,” thought he, “of rare endowments, —a child of God, —guilty of no crime but the color of his skin.” Listwell swears then in the moment “from this hour I am an abolitionist. I have seen enough and heard enough, and I shall go to my home in Ohio resolved to atone for my past indifference to this ill-starred race, by making such exertions as I shall be able to do, for the speedy emancipation of every slave in the land.” This scene, ending the first part of the novella, has a two-fold effect. For Mr. Listwell, this initial encounter with Washington serves as both the setup to a larger argument on abolition, and also firmly affixes Douglass’ view on the role of the white ally in the text. Listwell’s very name implying *listen well*, Robert Stepto noting, “he *enlists* as an abolitionist and does *well* by the cause,” implying that the role of the white ally is in his ability to aid the African American, but, as Listwell’s exclusion from the conversation suggests, that role is one that can and should be conducted in a manner that does not interfere with black agency. This notion here sets *The Heroic Slave* apart in its message from that of Byron’s “Isles of Greece,” as Byron was openly advocating for liberation under the protective guidance of

³⁷ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 8.

Great Britain, whereas Douglass seeks no guidance, just the freedom of complete independence.³⁸

Douglass crafts Mr. Listwell and uses him subsequently throughout the majority of the novella as a means to share his tale of Madison Washington with a white readership, as well as to suggest their role in the abolition of the slave. David Blight takes time to mention Mr. Listwell in his biography of Douglass, writing that in Mr. Listwell, Douglass had “created a striking character, a stand-in for all the Yankee white abolitionists he had known who had, in their best instincts, helped slaves such as himself.”³⁹

Mr. Listwell returns center stage as the second part of the novella opens. It has been five years since the encounter in the forest and in the middle of the night, a visitor stumbles upon the home of Mr. and Mrs. Listwell. When Mr. Listwell answers the door, he notes Madison Washington and exclaims, “Oh, sir, I know not your name, but I have seen your face, and heard your voice before. I am glad to see you. I know all. You are flying for your liberty, —be seated, —be seated, —banish all fear. You are safe under my roof.” This moment here seals Mr. Listwell and Madison Washington together, as the former offers service to the later as an equal, not as a potential master. Mr. Listwell reiterates this point in his response to Madison’s thanks, “A resting-place, indeed, sir, you shall have; not, however, in my barn, but in the best room of my house. Consider yourself, if you please, under the roof of a friend; for such I am to you, and to all your deeply injured race.” The offer of sharing the same roof denotes the equality between the two men, as this alone was a serious offense to many, and would ultimately have warranted legal action if it were discovered.⁴⁰

³⁸ Stepto, “Storytelling,” 197.

³⁹ Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 250.

⁴⁰ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 12.

Douglass first notes the absurd cruelty that ultimately led Washington to initially flee for his freedom. “My crime was that I had stayed longer at the mill, the day previous, than it was thought I ought to have done, which, I assured my master and the overseer, was no fault of mine; but no excuses were allowed.” Washington goes on to remark, “slave-holders are so imperious when their passions are excited, as to construe every word of the slave into insolence. I could do nothing but submit to the agonizing infliction.” This base treatment incites Washington to ultimately escape, but he cannot go far for fear of losing his wife. “The thought of leaving my poor wife and two little children caused me indescribable anguish; but consoling myself with the reflection that once free, I could, possibly, devise ways and means to gain their freedom also, I nerved myself up to make the attempt.” Douglass here expresses the humanity of the slave, denying again the animalistic stereotype through the reminder of the reader of Washington’s love for his wife Susan. There is nothing more human than love, and here Douglass emphasizes this point by having Washington remark that instead of leaving for freedom, he stayed for four years to be near her.⁴¹

“In the dismal swamps I lived, sir, five long years, —a cave for my home during the day. I wandered about at night with the wolf and the bear, —sustained by the promise that my good Susan would meet me in the pine woods at least once a week.”

In the passage that I have cited above, the reader may be aware of Douglass’ alliteration to another prominent literary figure of his time. I am referring of course to Thomas Moore, whom Douglass quotes in the epigraph to the fourth section. Moore was a contemporary of both Douglass and Lord Byron and wrote “A Ballad: The Lake of the Dismal Swamp,” to which Douglass here alludes.⁴²

“They made her a grave, too cold and damp

⁴¹ Douglass, 14-15.

⁴² Douglass, 16-17.

For a soul so warm and true;
And she's gone to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp,
Where, all night long, by a fire-fly lamp,
She paddles her white canoe."

The ballad calls on the tale of love lost and the departure of a young man's love to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp, which could stand as a metaphor for that which exists beyond death, or, in the case of Madison, that place that is out of reach, the plantation.

"Away to the Dismal Swamp he speeds—
His path was rugged and sore,
Through tangled juniper, beds of reeds,
Through many a fen where the serpent feeds,
And man never trod before.

And when on the earth he sunk to sleep,
If slumber his eyelids knew,
He lay where the deadly vine doth weep
Its venomous tear and nightly steep
The flesh with blistering dew!"⁴³

Madison has journeyed far and wide since his last encounter with Mr. Listwell, and this section of Moore's poem represents that journey, while also speaking to the life in which Washington has subjected himself to for love. However, such times were not meant to last, and Washington tells the reader that his habitation was set ablaze and thus he was set upon his course to which he ultimately finds Mr. Listwell.

On the way, Madison encounters another slave, an elderly man, whom Douglass uses as a means to reinforce the barbarity of slavery, as well as remind the audience that not all whites are alike. Having given the old man the last of his money and sent him into town to fetch new clothes and supplies, the elderly man returned "In a very few minutes," and "closely on the heels of the old man, I distinctly saw fourteen men, with something like guns in their hands." When

⁴³ Thomas Moore, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, vol. 2, 10 vols. (London: Longman, 1840). 223-225.

the men cannot find Washington, they punish the old man instead. Douglass here goes into excruciating detail.

“After searching about the woods silently for a time, the whole company gathered around the old man; one charged him with lying, and called him an old villain; said he was a thief; charged him with stealing money; said if he did not instantly tell where he got it, they would take the shirt from his old back, and give him thirty-nine lashes... They laid thirty-nine lashes on his bare back, and were going to repeat that number, when one of the company besought his comrades to desist. ‘You’ll kill the d——d old scoundrel! You’ve already whipt a dollar’s worth out of him, even if he stole it!’ ‘O yes,’ said another, ‘let him down. He’ll never tell us another lie, I’ll warrant ye!’ With this, one of the company untied the old man, and bid him go about his business.”⁴⁴

The effect is one of terror and anger. The desire of the men to “whipt a dollar’s worth out of him,” highlights the barbarity of slavery and the necessity of emancipation. The barbarity of the action also calls into question the nature of abolition and the means by which most abolitionists sought an end to slavery. If nonviolence was the right path, how then could such acts of base violence take place, and where was the retribution for the slave? I argue that here Douglass paints such a powerfully painful scene that it insinuates that ending slavery is a necessity, even if it be one that should also call on violent action as the tone and mood provoked from the passage ushers the reader to these conclusions. It also calls into question, yet again, the role of the white in that liberation. This is more clearly noted in the response from Mr. Listwell, who then agrees to take Madison to the Canadian border, whereupon he sees Washington off. Mr. Listwell then “went to his home that day with a joy and gratification which knew no bounds. He had done something ‘to deliver the spoiled out of the hands of the spoiler.’” By disengaging himself then from Washington and not following him on his journey, Douglass reinforces the need of the white ally to be separate in the pursuit of freedom for the black slave.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 22-23.

⁴⁵ Douglass, 26.

In concluding this section of the thesis, I would like to take a moment to reiterate my primary drive so far and highlight how that argument is established in the final two parts of *The Heroic Slave*. In this section, I have argued that Douglass' text, much like Byron's poetry, enters into a communicative environment that spans centuries and connects transatlantic cultures through its emergence as a print media response to the debate on slavery. Both of these authors have argued for self-emancipation through rebellion, even if that is through violence. This was highlighted in Byron's "Isles of Greece" embedded with the third canto of *Don Juan*, and now within the plot of *The Heroic Slave*. At the same time, I have argued here that Douglass' text takes a step beyond Byron's call for a freedom from oppression but under the protection of a superpower through the introduction of Mr. Listwell and the structuring of the narrative to avoid the personal journeys of the protagonist.

We are only granted flashbacks in the case of Madison's time abroad, and as the third part of *The Heroic Slave* is fashioned, much like the fourth and final part, the reader is granted a continuation in this story telling style through the use of dialogues and flashback sequencing. Part Three again centers on the figure of Mr. Listwell, and pertains to his conversations with a series of Virginian natives as they discuss an upcoming slave auction. The conversation haunts the dreams of Mr. Listwell, a further indicator of Douglass' commitment to presenting his reader with the inhumane horror of the Peculiar Institution. Upon waking from a terrible sleep, Mr. Listwell comes face-to-face with the slave auction:

"On reaching the alley Mr. Listwell saw, for the first time in his life, a slave-gang on their way to market. A sad sight truly. Here were one hundred and thirty human beings, — children of a common Creator—guilty of no crime—men and women, with hearts, minds, and deathless spirits, chained and fettered, and bound for the market, in a christian country, —in a country boasting of its liberty, independence, and high civilization! Humanity converted into merchandise, and linked in iron bands, with no regard to decency or humanity! All sizes, ages, and sexes, mothers, fathers, daughters, brothers, sisters, —all huddled together, on their way to market to be sold and separated from

home, and from each other forever. And all to fill the pockets of men too lazy to work for an honest living, and who gain their fortune by plundering the helpless, and trafficking in the souls and sinews of men. As he gazed upon this revolting and heart-rending scene, our informant said he almost doubted the existence of a God of justice! And he stood wondering that the earth did not open and swallow up such wickedness.”⁴⁶

The picture painted before the reader is one of utter detestation. Douglass here calls on the higher authority of spirituality, noting the “common Creator” of both slave and slaver, and emphasizing Mr. Listwell’s sudden crisis of faith as further indicator of the inhumanity of chattel slavery. This situation is doubly intensified with Mr. Listwell’s discovery of Madison Washington among the slaves to be sold. “It was MADISON WASHINGTON! Here was a scene for the pencil! Had Mr. Listwell been confronted by one risen from the dead, he could not have been more appalled. He was completely stunned. A thunderbolt could not have struck him more dumb.” Douglass’ references the print nature of *The Heroic Slave* in this moment to hammer home that although this is indeed a story, its premise is based in and pertains to events in reality.⁴⁷

Shortly here afterward, Madison is asked about Mr. Listwell by one of his fellow bondsman. He replies by noting, ““He is a friend of mine. I cannot tell you now. Suffice it to say he is a friend.” This notion of friendship again a means by which Douglass denotes equality as a natural right among both blacks and whites alike. “At these words, all mysterious as they were, the unhappy company gave signs of satisfaction and hope.” Douglass uses this point in the story to foreshadow the events that concurrent readers would only have been too well aware of. “It seems that Madison, by that mesmeric power which is the invariable accompaniment of genius, had already won the confidence of the gang, and was a sort of general-in-chief among them.”

⁴⁶ Douglass, 34.

⁴⁷ Douglass, 35.

Yet, through the entirety of the scene, Mr. Listwell is not privy to this conversation, as he has had to hide, again demonstrating Douglass' call for white support without interference.⁴⁸

The reader learns that Madison returned to the south out of a desperate desire to free Susan. "I could not bear the thought of leaving her in the cruel jaws of slavery, without making an effort to rescue her." Madison explains that he went for her, but in his haste to see her, Washington alerted the master's dogs. "We made the best of our way to the woods, but it was now too late, —the dogs were after us as though they would have torn us to pieces... Nevertheless we ran on. Seeing that we gave no heed to their calls, they fired, and my poor wife fell by my side dead, while I received but a slight flesh wound." The death of Susan again highlights the atrocities and inhumanity of slavery and reinforces the drive for abolition. The reaction of Washington to Susan's death reiterates this, and suggests open rebellion. "I now became desperate, and stood my ground, and awaited their attack over her dead body. They rushed upon me, with their rifles in hand. I parried their blows, and fought them 'till I was knocked down and overpowered.'" Washington's ability to fight back is the ultimate terror to the southern slaver, as I have previously mentioned, as it is representative of full black agency. The resulting sell of Madison at auction is a firm response to such agency and again stresses the need for immediate action on the part of slaves. There is no means of achieving agency if one can simply be sold off to revisit the same fate all over again.⁴⁹

"In the final moments of Part Three, Mr. Listwell faces a choice. He must choose either to leave Madison to his fate in New Orleans, which would surely have resulted in death for the rebel, or choose to help him, which could ultimately have disastrous effects for the both of them.

⁴⁸ Douglass, 36.

⁴⁹ Douglass, 38. This scene also calls into mind the article "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," addressed earlier in this section, as that document directly called for the resistance of slaves toward their oppression. Here Douglass seems to channel that rhetoric, indicating its effect on him and the role of intertextuality on his later writing.

“The thought struck him that, while mixing with the multitude, he might do his friend Madison one last service, and he stepped into a hardware store and purchased three strong *files*. These he took with him, and standing near the small boat, which lay in waiting to bear the company by parcels to the side of the brig that lay in the stream, he managed, as Madison passed him, to slip the files into his pocket, and at once darted back among the crowd.”⁵⁰

Although Mr. Listwell chooses to assist Madison in his hour of need, Douglass’ structuring of the scene has symbolic importance to his overall aim. Despite the aid of the white ally in this instance, Mr. Listwell does not directly free Madison, but rather gives him the tools necessary for his liberation, leaving the actual act of rebellion through self-affected liberation up to Washington himself. This moment represents Douglass’ final drive of his view on the usage of whites in abolition, and it represents the absolute empowerment of Washington, as his future is now firmly in his hands. This thought is further confirmed in Mr. Listwell’s final scene in the novella, in the last paragraphs of Part Three. “Mr. Listwell stood on the shore, and watched the slaver till the last speck of her upper sails faded from sight, and announced the limit of human vision. “Farewell! farewell! brave and true man!” Mr. Listwell here is not granted a vision of Madison’s fate, nor is he allowed access to the final part of the novella, but rather because he is no longer needed than no longer wanted. Mr. Listwell fulfills his purpose, the role of the white ally in the text, and leaves the remaining pages to Madison.

Part Four of *The Heroic Slave* is the retelling of the *Creole* rebellion from the viewpoint of several sailors and patrons of a coffeehouse. The majority of this part of the text pulls directly from the transcripts and accounts of the rebellion, and as such, my focus is strictly on one specific moment of the event. Much like the previous parts of the text, Douglass here relies on dialogue to guide the reader to the novella’s conclusion. We learn that Madison, using the files from Mr. Listwell, is able to free himself and lead his fellow captives to freedom, Douglass here

⁵⁰ Douglass, 40.

channeling the historical accounts of the *Creole*, only this time Madison's escape is no longer seen as mutiny or rebellion, but rather as emancipation. In the dialogue that followed, the crew of the *Creole* "forgot his blackness in the dignity of his manner, and the eloquence of his speech. It seemed as if the souls of both the great dead (whose names he bore) had entered him." In his final fight, Madison finally transcends all stereotypes and unshackles the label of slave that has oppressed him for so long.⁵¹

Douglass uses this moment as a final message to his reader on the necessity of self-emancipation for the slave, suggesting that only through such independent action can a true sense of freedom exist within the African American, thus leading to the realization of his agency. That this rebellion was based in violence and Douglass' choice to highlight the fruition of Madison's autonomy was at the heart of that violence is not a coincidence. I argue that Douglass chooses this violent moment to make it clear that violence may, in fact, be a necessity for the freedom of the African American. I would argue though, that Douglass was not intending to incite random acts of debase violence, such action was the opposite of what he had in mind, demonstrated in the graphic depiction of the beating of the elderly man. Frederick Douglass, much like Byron, was calling on full-out insurrection for the pursuit of liberty, and that in such a cause, as was the case with the founding of America, violence against oppression could be justified. In this capacity, Douglass' *The Heroic Slave* entered the intertextual debate on slavery, and, as I will suggest in section three of this project, he uses other voices in that community, most notably Byron, to use *The Heroic Slave* as a means of dismantling stereotypes and channeling rebellion.

⁵¹ Douglass, 49.

III. The “Files” of Frederick Douglass

Toward the end of Frederick Douglass’ 1853 novella, *The Heroic Slave*, Mr. Listwell makes a final attempt to assist Madison Washington, the namesake of the novella, in the securing of his freedom from the clutches of a slave ship by slipping three files into Washington’s pocket. These files are used by Madison to free both himself and eighteen of his fellow captives, eventually leading to their commandeering of the ship and their self-effected emancipation from the bonds of slavery. In a similar manner as Washington, Douglass implements a series of figurative files of his own in the writing of his novella. Douglass’ files are a series of carefully selected and arranged epigraphs incorporated into the text, that, when coupled with the fictionalized narrative of Washington that Douglass drew from the factual *Creole* revolt¹, can be read as a critical response to abolition.

Of the quotes used by Douglass, two come from the pages of Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. As the first two sections have endeavored to exhibit, Frederick Douglass’ *The Heroic Slave* cites Byron’s “Isles of Greece,” the poem-within-a-poem in the third canto of *Don Juan*, in that his poet-laureate balladeer calls upon those in bondage to seek their freedom through their own resistance, even if that means using violence as a means to an end. Section two emphasized how Douglass, although seemingly echoing Byron, differs in his approach to the situation in that he seeks complete liberation, even from the aid of the white ally. It is now the goal of this third section to propose a new reading of Frederick Douglass’ *The Heroic Slave* through the context of two of the key quotations borrowed from the fourth and second cantos of Byron’s poem, respectively. I argue that Douglass, although differing from Byron’s emphasis on the protection of an other, caretakership for Byron and the white race for Douglass and through

¹ Frederick Douglass and Robert S. Levine, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), xi.

an intertextual manipulation of these select quotes, adapts the meaning of Byron's words to suit his own ends. Douglass thereby shifts textual authority, adapting Byron's "bloody Circus" from a world of the Coliseum to that of 19th century America to support his vision of agency and independence for his fellow African Americans, as well as a response to the vision of the slave as produced in 19th century fiction.²

Throughout this project, I have deployed several close readings of texts through the lens of intertextual theory. The theory of intertextuality supposes that when one reads, they bring to a text their own interpretations of a concept based on previous readings and their extrapolations derived therein. This same principle applies to the writer as well. If one applies this theory to a literary work, it can be suggested that a text has no independent meaning.

For Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* is then a fictional tale interwoven with historical fact, one that pulls on the intertextual relationship of both history and fiction. The communicative environment of slavery existed both within and outside of the confines of the print medium. As section two highlighted, *The Heroic Slave* existed as a print response not only to the pro and antislavery tracts of the 1850s, but also as a response to the conversation initiated by the real-world events of the *Creole* rebellion. The intertextual nature of these events, each significant on their own, was essential in the structuring and spreading of a discourse on human bondage. Without one, the others may not have occurred. This, of course, being true for the entirety of this project, as intertextuality puts forth that each new author is inspired by someone who came before and will undoubtedly inspire someone who will come after.³

² George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 171.

³ I here refer to the work of Julia Kristeva, who worked on *semianaylis*, the "vision of texts as always in a state of *production*, rather than being products to be quickly consumed." This idea fashioned the theory of intertextuality and helps demonstrate my argument that Douglass' usage of Byron is based on the intertextuality inherent in works of art. The text becomes the "sight of the struggle," a conversation taking place as a result of intertextuality, in

In commenting on the variety of publications connected to the text, it is important to set aside a portion of this section for the purposes of defining my central argument in the language hereafter used, pertaining to the figurative *files*, as I'm conceiving of Douglass' borrowed and adapted quotations. In both iterations of *The Heroic Slave*, when introducing the actual, albeit fictional, files that will inevitably assist in Washington's freedom from bondage, Douglass intentionally italicized the word *files*. This italicization, I believe, indicates the importance of the word on the central narrative, the means of Washington's final liberation; their importance is made evident in their italicization. An examination of both *Autographs for Freedom*, published in Boston through Jewitt and printed in Cambridge by Allan and Farnham, and the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, published and printed by Douglass in Rochester, reveal the same textual emphasis of the word, despite multiple printings and publishers. This is proof of the intentionality and it highlights Douglass' purpose for *The Heroic Slave* as a whole.

It is equally important to make mention of Douglass' status as an editor. The responsibility of maintaining the authenticity of the text, of corrections and intentionality, choosing the sequence of stories on the page -- these are paramount to the editor. Douglass would have been keenly aware of the impact that such modifications in his work would bring to the trained reader's eye because of the intimate nature of his work with texts. Thus, it is not a stretch to say that Douglass' italicizations and alterations of the text were purposeful. Douglass intentionally chooses to italicize the word *files*, not only to suggest their importance to the narrative, but also as a means of drawing attention to the use of the work in its entirety as textual equivalent of these files. In this regard, the *files* of which Douglass writes take on new meaning. Not only do they represent a literal tool in the context of breaking chains, but their usage in the

which the text grapples with those works that have inspired it whilst it attempts to fashion itself as a new production. This ultimately creates a conversation that has cultural ramifications, thus the emphasis on the ecological nature of the media. See Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2011), 32-35.

novella to grant freedom at Washington's own hands, through his strength alone, empower those files as a means of self-emancipation and Douglass' choice to italicize *files* demonstrates his awareness of that meaning, and his use of the word as a rhetorical strategy to make his argument; making the usage of his epigraphs significant.

Douglass believed that only through a self-imposed agency could the African American not only escape the bonds of slavery, but also become a fully-fledged individual entitled to the same agency, civil rights, and access to education allotted to all whites. Douglass himself drew his reader into a necessary intertextual reading of his work, and supported his political goals through the inclusion of the epigraphic quotes, adding a visible connection not only to other texts, but also to a powerful argument against slavery, one, in the context of Byron's poetry, that is centuries in the making. This intertextual bonding with Byron, hinged on the intentional basis of Douglass' *files*, demonstrates the intertextual nature of media despite its many forms. *Files* here no longer stands as merely an allusion to a physical tool, but rather as a means of highlighting a more important conversation on the self-advocacy of the oppressed, and the italicization of such a charged symbol expresses to its reader the importance of it upon Douglass' mind. Douglass uses *files* as a means of branching together two media forms, with the intention of providing a singular message. Both poetry and prose employ the use of the written word, and as such, they command the power to influence the minds of their readers. This influence is the basis of all communication environments.

The addition of poetry to prose, as is the case with the epigraphs in *The Heroic Slave* is the addition of pure emotion to a text that already reads as a realistic narrative. Poetry inherently calls on the senses and appeals to the emotions, harnessing, through the careful presentation of preselected language, an effect that saturates the senses, invoking a sense of the sublime. Prose

mimics the thoughts and actions of everyday experience through the careful logging and narrating of an event in its entirety, focusing on description rather than sensation. Through the combination of the two, the effect is strong enough to leave a lasting impression on the reader, for the verses of the poetic are felt throughout the work of prose. The technology, the medium upon which discourse revolves, in this case literacy, serves to influence and structure society based on the conversations that occur as a result of the reading of these genres of writing. Through the joining of the poetical form with the power of prose, Douglass strung together the the emotional power of poetry with the communicative capacity of prose, a genre with the ability to capture the thoughts and emotions of many in one unified voice, presenting his reader with a powerful, both emotionally as well as intellectually, representation of the right and necessity of freedom for all mankind.

The epigraphs aforementioned are found at the beginning of the third and fourth sections of *The Heroic Slave*. Much like the emphasis of the *files* that is consistent through the transition of the story from collection to serialization, these quotes are identical in each printing of the text, expressing their intentionality. Both are taken from the pages of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, the first being "His head was with his heart, / And that was far away!"⁴ and the second "Who would be free, *themselves* must strike the blow."⁵ Yet it is rather curious that Douglass first cites the source as simply *Childe Harold*, without the context of their specific canto and stanza location. This, being strange to me, prompted a close investigation of the source text which led to unexpected results. Upon first inspection, the lines credited to the poem were, in fact, not written there. Several editions of Byron's poetry revealed that alterations had been made to the Douglass

⁴ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 27.

⁵ Douglass, 41.

text. When viewed from the lens of the novella, these alterations not only seemed intentional, they actively play a role in the reading of the story.

It is on these grounds that I propose each quote serves a triple purpose: first, each epigraph functions to foreshadow the coming events in the novella. Second, these adapted quotes represent both Washington's inner strife and Douglass' personal feelings regarding chattel slavery. Third, through a close reading of his own, Douglass adapts and transfers Byron's world into the nineteenth century, adapting another rebel-author's consciousness via a process of intertextual reading and saturating it with a sense of American identity, thus reading *Childe Harold* through the lens of *The Heroic Slave*, of seeing parts of the latter in the former and vice-versa. By incorporating Byron's words in his own narrative, Douglass reinforces the importance of *The Heroic Slave*, a text that I have already shown to have similar themes and emphasis on liberty as Byron's "Isles of Greece," through the lens of the poet, whom Douglass himself had a great fondness for, and whose notoriety for defending independence in all forms would have been quite known by Douglass' contemporaries.⁶

Douglass' first purposeful textual alteration comes from *Childe Harold* Canto IV, written as "He heard it, but he heeded it not - his eyes / Were with his heart, and that was far away." The alterations made to this quote reveal its three-part purpose in Douglass' narrative. I read Douglass' rendition of the quotation exchanging "eyes" with "head" to signify that Madison Washington, although having achieved freedom in Canada, still thinks of his wife, who is still in thrall of the Peculiar Institution, foreshadowing Madison's objective of freeing her. At this same

⁶ Douglass' admiration for Byron is evident in his usage of the poet's work. Both David Blight and L. Diana Barnes note that Douglass repeatedly used the same quote from epigraph 4, "his favorite piece of poetry," though with Byron's original wording, in separate speeches, specifically noting its usage in 1855, and then in 1856 when Douglass would speak at anti-slavery rallies or address those free blacks that joined the fight for abolition. See L. Diane Barnes, "Insurrection As Righteous Rebellion in *The Heroic Slave* and Beyond," *The Journal of African American History* 102, no. 1 (Winter 2017), 21. See David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), 273, 287.

time, “head” also signifies Douglass’ own personal ire at slavery, and his desire for abolition. Douglass, once a slave himself, feels for his people still in captivity and in his “head.” These thoughts are never far away, as his mind and spirit were not broken during captivity which is a goal of slavery. To this end, it is not hard to imagine that he has read Byron’s poem through this lens of thinking, imprinting his own creative consciousness into Byron’s world of the Gladiator even while bringing the Gladiator into the fold of the nineteenth century.

In *Childe Harold*, Byron envisions himself, through the viewing of *The Dying Gaul*, a Roman statue, in the midst of the vast Coliseum, questioning the nature of the law and commenting on the depravity evident in achieving pleasure for the masses. This reading of the statue is an ekphrastic one, again calling on the notion of media and intertextuality. Through his initial imagining of a narrative past for the work, Byron translates art from a physical form of stone to that of ink on paper, each a representation that must be worked over for perfection, one with the hands and the other with the mind. This is intertextual in nature in that Byron has been influenced by the statue and his work thus becomes a result of its initial creation, spurring along a conversation that ultimately both led to the statue’s construction and, later, Douglass’ appropriation of Byron’s words. Just as poetry and prose can be formatted to work together in the text, so to can intertextuality in art be used to graft both the craft of sculpting and writing if their message is received in a fashion that stimulates a similar conversation.

And here the buzz of eager nations ran,
In murmured pity, or loud-roared applause,
As man was slaughtered by his fellow-man.
And wherefore slaughtered? wherefore, but because
Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws,
And the imperial pleasure.—Wherefore not?
What matters where we fall to fill the maws
Of worms—on battle-plains or listed spot?

Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.⁷

Douglass could very easily have read these lines to reflect nineteenth century America, reflecting a transatlantic, transhistorical, and intertextual vision of a failing political system. “And here the buzz of eager nations ran, / In murmur’d pity, or loud-roar’d applause / As man was slaughter’d by his fellow man.” The Compromise of 1850 approved the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, sparking fierce debate between pro and anti-slavery factions of Congress, foreshadowing the 1856 caning of Charles Sumner by Preston Brooks and the coming of the American Civil War, events echoed in Byron’s lines. “And wherefore slaughter’d? wherefore, but because / Such were the bloody Circus’ genial laws, / And the imperial pleasure. - Wherefore not?” Byron’s emphasis on the use of “wherefore,” defined most closely as “for what reason,” asks the reader to consider for what reason were these slaves, in both Byron and Douglass’ narratives, persecuted. For Byron, the Gladiator is a slave in the sense that he is forced here to fight. He is, in fact, a Christian hero persecuted by Pagans, one who is tortured and used as a means of entertaining the masses. At the behest of this “bloody Circus,” the Roman Coliseum and subsequent gladiatorial matches and games of bloodsport, these men are slaughtered in Byron’s literary world, whilst such lines conjure the image of that institution of chattel slavery as the “bloody Circus” of Douglass’ lifetime, and that his people were subjected and slaughtered out of the principle toward the most base-form of capitalism -- the exchange of money for human labor and servitude.

Douglass’ altered epigraph comes from Byron’s depiction of the Gladiator; Douglass’ heroic slave.

I see before me the Gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow

⁷ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 2:171.

Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his drooped head sinks gradually low—
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him - he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.⁸

Byron calls upon the natural authority of the gladiator-slave through the capitalization of his title, expressing his agency and status as an individual of importance, despite his base-social rank, such as assigned to Madison Washington or any other soul in bondage. The Gladiator's brow is "manly," a further indicator of his natural human stature despite his social rank and he "consents" rather than succumbs to death, which emphasizes his will and power until the end. Death cannot simply take the Gladiator, suggesting their equality, and the Gladiator "conquers" agony. This "heroic" slave feels no pain as he chooses to die, the emphasis of choice here indicates Washington's desire for agency and his determination to be free or die in the process of that achievement.

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away;
He recked not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butchered to make a Roman holiday—
All this rushed with his blood—Shall he expire,
And unavenged? —Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!⁹

Death is not merely an ending for the Gladiator, but rather a release from mental bondage imposed on him. "The arena swims around him - he is gone, / Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won. / He heard it, but he heeded not - his eyes / Were with his heart, and that was far away." The effectiveness of these lines is in the ability of the poet to

⁸ Byron, 2:171.

⁹ Byron, 2:171.

capture the deep sentiment existing within the Gladiator's final moments. He has become detached from the world, his mind on matters no longer existing in the present space. He has wandered to a better place mentally because he is not allowed to do so physically. Here we are given the verse from which Douglass pulls his adapted epigraph. Again, the exchange of "eyes" with "head" allows Douglass, through the intertext created between poem and novella, to express his own, specific deep-level of connection to the plight of abolition, for it is in his mind and in his heart, at the core of his being; the source of his own agency is in his own self-effected abolition.

For Byron's Gladiator, the mockery of the law for the approval of the crowd no longer bears meaning, for he has slipped away into his own thoughts. Here Byron draws out a memory, another series of "texts" that are drawn upon to paint the final form of the Gladiator. "He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize, / But where his rude hut by the Danube lay, / *There* were his young barbarians all at play / *There* was their Dacian mother - he, their sire, / Butcher'd to make a Roman Holiday." Byron uses his own italization of the text for emphasis on *there*, not merely this Gladiator's home, but a mythical place beyond life and death, a release from involuntary servitude. Byron himself emphasizes this latter point in his footnote to the text, wherein he notes that despite all manner of becoming a gladiator, the result was the same. "Besides the torrents of blood which flowed at the funerals, in the amphitheaters, the circus, the forums, and other public places" these gladiators, at feasts "tore each other to pieces amidst the supper tables, to the great delight and applause of the guests." Yet, despite this barbarism, "Lipsius permits himself to suppose... the evident degeneracy of mankind, to be nearly connected with the abolition of these bloody spectacles."¹⁰ This same argument is forefront in Douglass' mind; the constant worry on

¹⁰ George Gordon Byron, *Lord Byron: Selected Poems*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 556.

the part of Southern slave owners about a violent future in which freed slaves turned on their former owners, or that world in which their profits would cease with the equality of both blacks and whites, drove a deep wedge between North and South and sparked the fires of rebellion and anti-abolitionism. Yet, this line also denotes Byron's own reservations against complete independence for Greece, a notion strongly emphasized throughout section one of this project. Byron calls for the avenging of the Gladiator. "-Shall he expire / And unavenged? - Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!" For Douglass, this translates as a fight for the freedom of the slave.

Douglass' epigraph to the fourth section of *The Heroic Slave* is similar in its adaption of *Childe Harold*, and the only one of the two epigraphs that I found to have been previously addressed in scholarship. L. Diane Barnes writes that this was "Frederick Douglass' favorite line of poetry,"¹¹ and it was the one that he quoted most often. Byron's original line reads:

"Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not / Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?"¹²

Barnes comments on the nature of agency expressed in Byron's writing, noting "the agency" of the line "asserts the right of enslaved men and women to throw off their bonds through their own volition." Douglass saw the appeal of such a line, but omits the "hereditary." Barnes sees this as "all bondsmen, not just those in hereditary slavery, had the right to use whatever means necessary to escape enslavement."¹³

The most striking difference between Douglass' and Byron's lines of text is the emphasis, again made visible through the italics, that Douglass supplies to the line. "Know ye not / Who would be free, *themselves* must strike the blow." First, Douglass completely omits the "bondsmen" from the context of the passage. This has two purposes. Through omission, Douglass situates Byron's words within an "American" world, pulling on the language of the

¹¹ Barnes, "Insurrection," 21.

¹² Byron, *Lord Byron*, 2:69.

¹³ Barnes, "Insurrection," 21.

country's founding fathers that all citizens are entitled to freedom, regardless of religion or race, the very call of the Declaration of Independence. Second, Douglass is drawing the authority of the text from Byron, who searches for the answer to a question, saturating the reader in Douglass' own reading of the text -- making known his feelings on abolition. To this end, the question mark at the end is exchanged for a period, suggesting a statement, or, perhaps, a command. This is highlighted further by the addition of a comma following the word free, signifying a break in the line, shifting emphasis to "themselves," supported by yet another intentional italization. One reads this as "You don't know, or have the right to decide who would be free, they themselves who seek freedom must claim it for their own." This shift of focus to *themselves* specifies that it must be the slave who sets oneself free, and not those who hold them in bondage; for after all, as Douglass suggests, how can we decide who is free and who is not? - a question that calls on a higher authority.

Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not
Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?
By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?
Will Gaul or Muscovite redress ye? No!
True, they may lay your proud despoilers low,
But not for you will Freedom's altars flame.
Shades of the Helots! triumph o'er your foe:
Greece! change thy lords, thy state is still the same;
Thy glorious day is o'er, but not thy years of shame.¹⁴

The second epigraph is pulled directly from a conversation on the impact and ills of slavery, viewed from the lens of Byron, with both authors seeking to "tear their name defiled from Slavery's mournful page,"¹⁵ implying that the fight is not simply with a man-made institution, but with the persona of suffering itself, Slavery, a proper name and figure with dark implications spanning centuries.

¹⁴ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 2:69.

¹⁵ Byron, 2:69.

In the context of this close reading, in which I theorize Douglass' own interpretation of Byron's poetry, I am, in my own right, rendering my own consciousness upon the text. I am conducting another intertextual reading, moving between and through both the written word and the various authoritative voices pre-imposed upon it before me; calling on Barthes' reminder that a text is a "tissue, a woven fabric," woven from the "already written" and the "already read."¹⁶ I have suggested that Douglass close read Byron through the lens of combating slavery through self-emancipation. This process of close reading that I have employed is one that is familiar to the reader for it is traditional. Yet, from this traditional reading, fused with the integration of multiple forms of media and art representation, Douglass blends the genre of history with that of literature to produce an argument that comes, not from the mouth of Frederick Douglass the abolitionist, but from the fictional accounting of Madison Washington's non-fictional narrative. For Douglass, this is apparent in the historical basis from which he draws his narrative. Douglass' tale is, as I have expressed in this project, based directly on the real revolt of 19 slaves aboard the *Creole* on October 25, 1841.

William L. Andrews writes that for Douglass "the task of the narrative of *The Heroic Slave* became primarily to make Washington narratable to empower in and through an authenticating story, in a history, that which Washington truly represented - the revolutionary, not blindly rampaging, slave." Douglass calls upon factual details in support of his vision for agency that he is able to realize fictionally. By rooting his narrative in contemporary history, Douglass ensures that his intentionality will not go unnoticed. The contemporary reader would be aware of Madison Washington's revolt and seizure of the *Creole*, allowing the author to focus on the narrative he builds around it and the justifications Douglass offers for Washington's revolt in the story. This is denotive of the hypermediacy of Douglass' work. The blending of multiple

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text: Roland Barthes*, ed. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 159.

genres into one purposeful narrative. Washington's independence and burning desire for liberty are his alone, not Douglass', and through Madison's voice, and the injustice done upon him despite his ultimate desire simply for freedom and recognition as a human being foster a resistance in the minds of the reader toward the slavery movement. This purpose of Douglass' is further solidified through the conversational tone of the text.¹⁷

The purposeful nature of *The Heroic Slave* is revealed through the novella's structure, through Douglass' use of historical fact coupled with long stints of dialogue between characters of all viewpoints — pro and anti-slavery alike — all of whom reflect on the experiences of Washington. Andrews writes that “by structuring the story around speeches that he seems merely to report verbatim to the reader, the narrator gives the narration an appearance of objectivity.” This dialogue narration, coupled with the intertextual reading of *Childe Harold*, allows Douglass to propose intentionality, not only in the words and actions of Madison Washington, but throughout the entirety of the text, due to the fact that “the authority of the narrator is insisted on from the start... Indeed, his right to tell his story in his own way, free from the obligation to limit himself only to the few facts available to him, is insisted upon before any narration takes place.”¹⁸

Through his use of textual *files*, two epigraphs adapted from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* appearing at the beginning of parts III and IV of *The Heroic Slave*, Frederick Douglass expresses the need for more powerful African American agency that goes beyond whites' instrumentality to realize blacks' full freedom for themselves. If freedom is to have meaning then it must be taken, not given to the slave, for giving implies that it was somehow

¹⁷ William L. Andrews, “The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative,” in *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015), 203.

¹⁸ Andrews, 206.

earned and not theirs by right. The freedom to pursue one's course, be it violent or otherwise, is the chief motif of the novella, and one that is echoed in the actions of Frederick Douglass.

Douglass' confrontation with Covey the Slave-Breaker in his youth is evidence enough of Douglass own feelings toward freedom. Though Douglass claimed to have only fought on the defensive, historian David Blight notes that this "does not ring true," suggesting that Douglass embraced violence as a way of finding his freedom. Douglass would later tell the public that his victory over Covey was the "demonstration of physical force necessary for male dignity and power. He had bested the tyrant; he now possessed an inner freedom and outward pride." This notion of an inner-freedom is key to Douglass' vision of freedom for the African American. "It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery,' Douglass said, 'to the heaven of comparative freedom.'" Douglass adapts Byron's voice to suit his own purpose, not only to suggest self-affected emancipation through violent insurrection, but also as a means of expressing the self-advocacy of the slave through the countering of stereotyping in the narratives of pro and antislavery tracts alike.¹⁹ Thus, the intertextual relationship of multiple media genres produces the desire for a new sense of agency, of a call for progression as a result of a cohesion of representation. The visual, the emotional, and the intellectual all championing a sense of liberty and a need for equality.

Most notably, *The Heroic Slave* is, then, a counter to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* both as a means to combat negative black stereotypes fostered within the novel, as well as a means of further cementing the need of self-literation for blacks, rather than at the hands of whites, allied or not. Frederick Douglass had developed a personalized relationship with Stowe throughout his lifetime. According to Blight, Douglass visited the home of Stowe in

¹⁹ Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 65-66.

February 1853, most likely during the time of, or a short time either before or after, the writing of *The Heroic Slave*. Douglass wrote of his visit in his newspaper, harnessing the power of the print medium, praising Stowe for her work and seemingly comparing her to Burns and Shakespeare.²⁰ Yet, despite his public praises both in his writing and in his oratory addresses, Frederick Douglass must have taken issue with certain aspects of Stowe's fictional creation. In part, Stowe's depictions and commentary on the actions of the slaves within her novel would have caused Douglass concern.

Throughout her text, Stowe's narrative of Tom is directly intertwined with that of the white master, as Tom is subjected to the world of men such as Mr. Shelby, St. Claire, and Simon Legree. These characters' interactions with Tom evoke various levels and forms of slavery in a Dantesque²¹ fashion in which Tom maneuvers from one extreme form of white oppression to another, from the seemingly passive Mr. Shelby to the kind and genuine St. Clare, before being uprooted and cast into the clutches of Legree.

I would note that Stowe's narrator openly talks on the properties of African Americans throughout the text, as at an early point, on commenting on the arrival of Tom at St. Clare's plantation, the narrator remarks:

Tom got down from the carriage, and looked about with an air of calm, still enjoyment. The negro, it must be remembered, is an exotic of the most gorgeous and superb countries of the world, and he has, deep in his heart, a passion for all that is splendid, rich, and fanciful; a passion which, rudely indulged by an untrained taste, draws on them the ridicule of the colder and more correct white race.²²

²⁰ Blight, 247-48.

²¹ I refer to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, more specifically his three stages/levels through which Dante must navigate: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. One might then read Tom's journey as mimicry or adaption of Dante, in which Mr. Shelby is *Purgatorio*, St. Clare is *Paradiso*, and Legree represents *Inferno*. Stowe's abnormal placement could suggest a desire to pair one extreme to another, Heaven and Hell, thus relegating Purgatory to the forefront.

²² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life Among the Lowly*. Ed. Christopher G. Diller (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2009), 206.

This passage speaks to the many biases of the narrator. The blanket statement of the “negro” suggests the collectiveness and thus inferiority of the African America and is followed by the comment of the landscapes of Africa, a foreign land that speaks to the reader of savagery and a place beyond the laws of civilization. The African American is here characterized as being in a perpetual state of awe at the majestic workings of the white race as their more-primitive nature, according to the narrator, making Tom powerless to resist ogling at the lavish estate of St. Clare. This passage could alternatively be read as a remark on the sophistications of the senses of the black slave, but the narrator’s further noting of an “untrained taste” that is “rudely indulged,” implies that the slave is not as sophisticated as the “more correct white race,” and is at a racially inferior status.²³

It seems unlikely that Douglass would have missed these remarks, with them more likely playing a role in Douglass’ crafting of *The Heroic Slave*. Indeed, both David Blight and Robert Levine hold the view that the novella served, in part, as a response to Stowe. Blight remarks that the novella, with “its depictions of a noble, stunningly intelligent, yet violent slave rebel, was Douglass’ critique of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” Throughout the novella, Blight notes that “Washington prays effusively in the novella for his liberation, yet in the end does not rely only on God for freedom. He is beaten savagely like Uncle Tom, but is no Jesus figure. He is the militant, praying rebel” who is not afraid to use violence to achieve his, and his people’s freedom.²⁴ Thus *The Heroic Slave* works to dispel the stereotypes put in place by Douglass’

²³ A further point here for emphasis on the importance of this passage, and as a further means of examining the discourse on slavery and its various forms, is on the passage cited above. These remarks on the part of the narrator toward the “negro” race were, interestingly enough, removed in at least one addition of the text, the 1900 printing by the Henry Altemus Company, who simply cut the text off with the line “Tom got down from the carriage, and looked about with an air of calm, still enjoyment.” This mostly likely due its publication as part of the “Altemus’ Young People’s Library,” but it also seems to reflect a transition in sentiment toward African Americans. See Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 110.

²⁴ Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 249.

abolitionist contemporary while also promoting a form of potentially-violent emancipation that Douglass had come to see as more and more of a necessity.²⁵

The pitting of *The Heroic Slave* against *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is actually the revisiting of this project's overall conversation on the nature of media and the ways in which communicative environments, fostered through the consumption of that literature, flourish. Frederick Douglass takes on the task, with the writing of his novella, of engaging in a series of dialogues with Stowe, and in turn, their readers, on the nature of liberty and the argument over slavery. Levine writes that Douglass "was one of the first newspaper editors to recognize the degree to which Stowe's novel was converting millions of northerners into antislavery advocates who would resist the Fugitive Slave Law and heed the 'higher law' of God." Yet, Douglass saw that the necessity for physical absolution for the slave was just as much a necessity as spiritual liberation. Levine further writes that in "*The Heroic Slave*, Douglass departs from Stowe's idealization of the nonviolent, Christlike Uncle Tom by depicting a black-skinned hero who is more than willing to use violence to gain his freedom from slavery." As a result, Stowe responded by creating her own "black-skinned revolutionary hero" in *Dred* (1856). This provides evidence of an intertextual conversation on the debate over the equality of the African American in conjunction with the white American. This dialogue, in turn, provided readers with a score of written material to influence conversation and debate on a larger scale. Again this demonstrates the importance of intertextuality on human discourse and how the joining of varying medias directly affects generational thinking.²⁶

Douglass' open rejection of Stowe's system of beliefs comes at a time when, as Levine writes, "Douglass broke openly with Garrison, as he came to believe, contra Garrison, that the

²⁵ See Blight, Chapter 15: "John Brown Could Die for the Slave," 280-309.

²⁶ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, xxviii.

most effective way to combat the Fugitive Slave Law and slavery generally was to champion political activism over moral suasion.” This was, effectively, “an antislavery reading of the Constitution over a proslavery reading, and Unionism over dissolution.” Douglass did praise Stowe in his paper, hoping “that the novel could mobilize enough people, North and South, to influence Americans to abolish slavery.”²⁷ Douglass wanted more from Stowe, however, than the novel. He urged her to help educate freed blacks and to help fund the building of a school. Stowe never committed, evident of an attitude of prejudice that was commonplace amongst even some abolitionists in the antebellum years. Douglass would have noted this reservation in Stowe, and perhaps seeing it early, it was yet another propelling agent for *The Heroic Slave*.

It is during Tom’s time on the Legree Plantation that Stowe’s philosophy, or at least what I believe Douglass saw as Stowe’s idea of African Americans, and their capacity for resistance, emerges. In the last chapters of her novel, Stowe paints a painful portrait of Tom’s death, suggesting that he was heroic in his refusal to both bend from his Christian faith and to reveal the location of Cassie and Emmaline. However, this assertion is compromised by the arrival of George Shelby, who has conveniently arrived just in the nick of time, and also just too late, to buy back Tom. Stowe here expresses a desire and need for a white inclusion in even that most sacred of moments, the very personal transition between life and death, through the interruption of George’s arrival.

Tom’s death, a powerful form of self-sacrifice, calls on the image of the Gladiator. “What matters where we fall to fill the maws / Of Worms - on battle-plains or listed spot? / Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.”²⁸ George Shelby’s appearance, through an intertextual lens, echoes the final moments of the Gladiator, as he is granted a vision of his family, which is a

²⁷ Robert S. Levine, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in Frederick Douglass' Paper" *American Literature* 64, no. 1, (March 1992), 72, 76.

²⁸ Byron, *Lord Byron*, 2:171.

reward for his resistance. Shelby stands as a symbolic representation of “home” for Tom, not just as a physical place, but also encapsulating his wife Chloe and their children. Yet, George also offers Tom earthly redemption in a way that also allowed Stowe to appease her white audience, as he becomes partial white savior to Tom, though even George Shelby cannot save him. This becomes clear when one examines Stowe’s language in those final moments. “O, dear Uncle Tom! do wake, - do speak once more! Look up! Here’s Mas’r George, - your own littel Mas’r George. Don’t you know me?” George shakes Tom from his thoughts as he attempts to die, shifting the attention to himself with his constant queries.

George’s need to add his title when addressing even his dying friend expresses his inability to set aside the position of power that he has over Tom, even for the sake of granting his friend peace in his final moments. Tom expresses that seeing Shelby is “all I wanted! They Haven’t forgot me... Now I shall die content!” However, even this vocal acceptance of death on the part of Tom is denied by Shelby. “You shan’t die! you *must n’t* die, nor think of it!” Tom denies George this position of power, dying on his own terms much like Byron’s Gladiator, leaving George and the world of white masters forever. Tom’s rebuttal against George and his belief that he had “got the victory” given to him by “Lord Jesus,” stands as spiritual victory over the oppressive nature of slavery, even despite this brilliant portrait of open defiance between master and slave seemingly losing its authenticity due to its lengthy and unrealistic finality.²⁹

Through this spiritualistic win, Douglass seizes an opportunity to promote the physical resistance toward slavery, as *The Heroic Slave*, in the context of Douglass’ files, draws the reader to the epigraphs and Byron’s death of the Gladiator, linked through intertext and is then read as a direct response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. By incorporating the Gladiator within the foray of the text, Douglass channels the warrior-slave’s defiance and equality with death, and

²⁹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. 455.

emphasizes this resistance, which in turn is then highlighted when the reader reviews Stowe's own work. Douglass here redirects a conversation focused on the morale and spiritual good of Tom in life and death, and the notability of his character even in the face of adversity, and turns it to one that champions rebellion. Madison Washington too is subjected to immense pain and loss and has his character tested, but he too is "heroic" like Tom in his resistance of death, for the sell of slavery into the deep South would have implied such an end, and thus his rebellion is just. Like Tom, Madison, though called a slave, is a man, and his spirit may never be caged.

For Stowe, spiritual freedom was enough to redeem Tom and made his suffering worth while in the end. Yet Douglass would have been much more aware, considering his emphasis on physical freedom in *The Heroic Slave*, of those other African Americans still held in bondage. The plight of these souls, who also were in need of immediate emancipation, help justify Douglass' use of physical liberation. Physical freedom must be guaranteed, not just spiritual freedom. Douglass uses *The Heroic Slave* to counter "the belief that whites have the power 'to do us good'"³⁰ This is "a power, as Douglass understands it, very much dependent on the ability of blacks to put that 'good' to use," therefore, he purposefully excuses Washington's white ally, Mr. Listwell, long before Madison's revolt at sea. "Farewell! farewell! brave and true man!"... Saying this to himself, our friend lost no time in completing his business, and in making his way homewards, gladly shaking off from his feet the dust of Old Virginia."³¹ As Robert Stepto expresses the importance of Mr. Listwell, as his "creation is possibly the polemical and literary achievement of the novella."³² David Blight makes a similar assertion, writing that in Mr.

³⁰ Levine, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," 83.

³¹ Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, 41.

³² Robert B. Stepto, "Storytelling in Early Afro-American Fiction: Frederick Douglass' 'The Heroic Slave'" *The Georgia Review* 36, no. 2 (1982): 365. This evaluation of the white ally is evidenced in section two of this project, in which Listwell's dialogue choices and relationship with Washington call into question Douglass' motives in the novella.

Listwell, Douglass “was trying to tell the Garrisonians something about the role he preferred for them, instead of the one that he had come to expect from them.” Listwell’s ability to listen well rather than speak, to step back and leave Washington to his own narrative, demonstrates Douglass’ personalized response to George Shelby’s intrusion in Tom’s death. *The Heroic Slave*, through the representation of Mr. Listwell’s assistance and Madison’s self-executed revolt, emphasizes Douglass’ belief that freedom is ultimately dependent on the agency of the African American, and not ultimately of the white race, who may only assist, but not finally take responsibility for black liberation. To this end, the importance of Douglass’ novella as a means of communication with Stowe and those contemporaries who held similar feelings, was for both the purpose of fighting the negative stereotyping that such works as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* left on the reader, but also as a means of emphasizing the call for liberty that Douglass had highlighted through the inclusion of Byron’s poetry.

The Heroic Slave, along with its epigraphs, represents a figurative file for Douglass to counter the image of a slave dependent on the agency of his white master. It is a story of the achievement of freedom at one’s own hand, and a somber reflection on the state of the nation in the mid 19th century. *The Heroic Slave* serves as a conduit through which a conversation on the nature of slavery and liberty flourished, bridging two nations and multiple generations of writers across the Atlantic in a debate on basic human rights. Douglass had taken Byron’s notions of self-effected emancipation through violence and had adapted them to his own ends, insisting beyond Byron, who advocated for a liberation with guardianship, for a freedom from both shackle and helping hand; a true liberation in the realization of true equality for the African American. To be free meant both spiritual salvation as well as physical emancipation. For Douglass, this was a necessity that, as his novella strived to denote, was built upon the role of the

black slave to make it so in accordance with his own desire, and not at the hands of the oppressor.

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