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Frederick Douglass, Southerner

by William M. Ramsey

There is nothing in the history of savages to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the colored people . . . by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South.
—Frederick Douglass, 1894

I am an Eastern Shoreman, with all that name implies . . . Eastern Shore corn and Eastern Shore pork gave me my muscle. I love Maryland and the Eastern Shore.
—Frederick Douglass, 1877

The greatest obstacle to understanding the life-long dynamics in Frederick Douglass' southern identity is Douglass himself. At age twenty, as the rugged young fugitive escaped bondage, he became forever a southern expatriate—someone who, dramatically and irreversibly, had shed his former condition. His remaking of self was emphatic: to be a free and autonomous self he could not remain a southern self. His *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) became a classic text reinforcing the myth of the reborn American self, the freely invented new man. Out of seething adolescent discontent and indignation, Douglass had asserted the manly independence of his spirit. The rage he directed at the South was so great that contemporaries used the word *leonine* to describe his fierce denunciations of the region as well as his full mane of hair and imposing physique. Because subsequent autobiographies, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881; 1892), also began with the same core tale of heroic escape, even the inclusion of subsequent northern years continued to key on the young man's repudiation of southern roots. This "before and after" pattern had the structure of a familiar regional binary, the South's portion being bondage (Hell)

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and the North's being freedom (the Promised Land). Indeed the mature years after slavery suggested a smooth, successful assimilation into the new free identity he had chosen. For thirty-four years Douglass lived in Massachusetts and New York, first as one of the abolitionist movement's, then as one of the freedmen's most effective orators and journalists. His 1872 move to Washington, DC at age fifty-four was less a resumption of southern living than evidence of his assimilated, national commitment to Republican policies in the South's reconstruction. In a word, Douglass' escape from the South at age twenty seemed to have been a complete emergence from the dead chrysalis of his southern identity.

In fact, his journey in southern consciousness was far from over. Long after the climax of his initial struggle for freedom, his psychic response to the South was to be a central, continuing test of character. With each phase of mature psychological development, in the classic shifts of personality arising throughout adulthood, he would continuously evolve. As with thousands of black Americans enduring the psychological duress of his era's racial realities, Douglass' successive reformulations of personality were grounded in a life-long response to oppression. Managing these transformations with cast-iron resourcefulness, he was a heroic, representative black American, and always a pilgrim on the never-ending road leading out of Dixie.

Peter Walker, in his book *Moral Choices* (1978), was the first critic to break through Frederick Douglass' heroic mask, arguing that no person is a fully formed hero from birth to death. Yet, reading the *Narrative*, one gains the impression that Douglass' entire childhood prefigured and centered on heroic resistance. Boyhood acts of manipulating white boys into teaching him the alphabet, secretly practicing handwriting in discarded copybooks of his master's son, and purchasing a copy of *The Columbian Orator* seem to depict a determined, discontented, resourceful youth always intent (as if from birth) on repudiating his slave condition. If one accepts Douglass' manly and defiant self-representation, then he was born an embryonic hero, this early, latent heroism already the touchstone of his entire life. Reviewing Walker's book, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., issued a call for scholars to look beneath Douglass' "always complete heroic self" (124). He observed, "Never does Douglass allow us to see his development as a person" (111). In Gates' view, the public Douglass is actually a "Rhetorical Man." He "exists as a rhetorical strategy primarily, as an open-ended system of rhetorical figures and tropes" (108).

In the astute phrase "Rhetorical Man," Gates suggests one approach

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to reconstructing Douglass' actual personal transformations—examining the rhetorical strategies of his texts. In their shifts and nuances are the changes of his self. However, it is so easy to fall under the sway of his leonine persona, applying a fixed, unitary reading of the self, that the ambivalent and fluid developments in personality are overlooked. Like Walt Whitman in repeated versions of "Song of Myself," Douglass heroically rejuvenated himself through rhetorical strategy even when shifting through successive psychological passages. The reader thereby engages, as with Whitman, not with an intimate individual but a rhetorical display of Individuality. Impressive individuals, however, are adroitly constructed, not born. As William L. Andrews keenly observes, "the human condition is perpetually liminal," and the task is to take Douglass' representations not as "a self-made man but a man still in the making" (*My Bondage* xxiv, xxvi).

Deep wrath lasts, and this is a central issue in Frederick Douglass' self-presentation. In the intersections between his deepest emotive sources and his rhetorical designs we can better grasp the complex force of his texts and the creative versatility of his pen. An extraordinary example of self-presentational strategy is the famous letter "To My Old Master, Thomas Auld," published on September 8, 1848, in *The Liberator* and later appended to *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). It was written at age thirty, three years after the hugely popular *Narrative* and right after his European tour, when the much-celebrated Douglass was feeling at the peak of confrontational power. Ostensibly this scathing attack on southern slavery directly addresses the slaveholder himself, in a unique departure from an abolitionist's speaking chiefly to northern sympathizers. A remarkable frontal assault, it provides a study in manipulated wrath.

As to the indelicacy of making public a "private" letter, he bluntly states that "a man guilty of theft, robbery, or murder, has forfeited the right to concealment and private life" (*Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* 412).[1] The indignation he feels is highly personalized because he attacks Auld for holding in bondage Douglass' siblings and for turning out his ailing grandmother "like an old horse to die in the woods."[2] Soon his thundering persona takes on the prophetic tone of a jeremiad: "It is an outrage upon the soul, a war upon the immortal spirit, and one for which you must give account at the bar of our common Father and Creator" (417). By this point the letter has revealed the spirit of a sublimated but aggressive man-to-man attack on a master by a former slave who is now anything but humble and compliant. Performatively, Douglass is shed-

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ding through a language act the submissive southern social role that was his bondage, in effect re-enacting his bold escape to freedom.

Conspicuously, the tone of the letter is wholly masculine, supportive of William L. Andrews' contention that "the fundamental theme of Douglass' greatest writing was his own evolving sense of manhood," and that in the need "to define himself" he was engaged with "issues of personal autonomy and social authority" (*Oxford* 4). In this vein Douglass expresses the will's agency and independent spirit: "I have selected this day on which to address you, because it is the anniversary of my emancipation." Manipulating gender as well as autonomy, he celebrates the liberation of his adolescent ego from control in an act that yielded "a free man, young, active, and strong" (413). Writing this letter at age thirty, only ten years removed from bondage, Douglass is still very much engaged in building his self-reliant male identity, here evinced in the separative ego's distinctness, independence, and implied right not to be owned:

> I am myself; you are yourself; we are two distinct persons, equal persons. What you are, I am. You are a man, and so am I. God created both, and made us separate beings. I am not by nature bond to you, or you to me. Nature does not make your existence depend upon me, or mine to depend upon yours. I cannot walk upon your legs, or you upon mine. I cannot breathe for you, or you for me; I must breathe for myself, and you for yourself. We are distinct persons, and are each equally provided with faculties necessary to our individual existence. (414)

The most audacious rhetorical reversal of his former social status vis-à-vis Auld is a very personalized use of Auld's daughter, this tactical turn taking on highly charged gender and racial values. Having accused Auld of placing Douglass' female relatives in terribly vulnerable circumstances, he asks Auld to picture Douglass' doing likewise. Douglass would break into his house to abduct "your own lovely daughter, Amanda, and carry her off," and then to "make her my slave—compel her to work, and I take her wages—place her name on my ledger as property." What follows is a hypothetical or virtual black rape of Amanda. He imagines that he will "clothe her scantily, and whip her on the naked back occasionally; more, and still more horrible, leave her unprotected—a degraded victim to the brutal lust of fiendish overseers, who would pollute, blight, and blast her fair soul—rob her of all dignity—destroy her virtue, and annihilate in her person all the graces that adorn the character of virtuous womanhood" (418). This long, lashing sentence (Douglass' own metaphori-

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cal bullwhip) may be, in its original emotive sources, an out-of-control fantasy of rage—a rage that thousands would have known in plantation bondage. If criminal rape is more about power and control than sexual gratification, then Douglass is shattering in a speech act the social constructions of race, class, and gender in the fair body of a southern plantation mistress, Amanda Auld. In effect, he wrests control of—and foully violates—the South that once emasculated him.

Yet he can feel spotless as a lamb, because the argument is a logical reversal of slaveholders' own behavior in conducting the sins of bondage and rape. Ingeniously, he has channeled an originally combative male rage into something acceptable to the sensibilities of bourgeois Christian abolitionists. A key element of constraint is his performing the rape by proxy through "the brutal lust of fiendish overseers," adroitly not transgressing the racial and sexual boundaries that even northern readers would have recognized. Moreover, throughout the rest of the letter Douglass has carefully deployed a mannered, formal tone of public epistle. Its dignified oratorical quality, its evangelical grounding of human rights in divine justice, as well as the generally measured diction and cadences, show a masterly sublimation of Douglass' passionate impulses into the persona of a Christian public self. "Sir," he formally addresses Auld earlier in the letter; "I will not therefore manifest ill temper, by calling you hard names," he says with a decorous restraint. "I know you to be a man of some intelligence, and can readily determine the precise estimate which I entertain of your character," he says with a tolerant nod toward Auld's intelligence (412). This rhetorical positioning of himself toward Thomas Auld (and in effect the socially respectable white world) comes, he says, from his dramatic "transition from degradation to respectability."[3]

Most curiously, the imagined rape of Amanda comes in the same text as Douglass' startling praise of the South in a letter meant to damn it. When in the heroic jeremiad mold, he normally suppresses positives for the biting negatives of reform critique. Here, however, in the rhetorical pose of respectable social deportment he praises Maryland for its physical abundance: "Its geography, climate, fertility, and products, are such as to make it a very desirable abode for any man." In temperate regret he notes the lovely region is marred by the practice of slavery: "and but for the existence of slavery there, it is not impossible that I might again take up my abode in that state." The same moderate voice claims, "It is not that I love Maryland less, but freedom more" (414). The style is vintage Douglass. The measured antithesis of that sentence—its final three words balancing freedom against a beloved but flawed South, while per-

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fectly juxtaposing positives and negatives—regulates the very anger that Douglass delivers.

Beneath the surface of this strongly individuated confrontational male, one senses some strong psychic needs, particularly a filial yearning-in-exile for family and a related need for connection to his supporting heritage. These impulses are the other side of his ambivalent southern identity. As with so many others who had escaped to freedom, what once was "home" is now "down home," the land from which he exiled himself but which holds enduring appeal:

> You will be surprised to learn that people at the north labor under the strange delusion that if the slaves were emancipated at the south, they would flock to the north. So far from this being the case, in that event, you would see many old and familiar faces back again to the south. The fact is, there are few here who would not return to the south in the event of emancipation. We want to live in the land of our birth, and to lay our bones by the side of our fathers; and nothing short of an intense love of personal freedom keeps us from the south. (414–415)

In his praise of Maryland we see that, at age thirty, Douglass is capable of expressing, ambivalently, feelings of both rage and attraction toward the South as well as surprising detachment.[4] This same attitude is perfectly distilled in the closing sentence of Douglass' letter to Auld, where warm brotherhood is again conjoined with assertive ego in mannerly, yet manly antithesis: "I am your fellow-man, but not your slave" (418).

The sources of Douglass' wrath lie in shocks of childhood, but juvenile traumas have not entrapped him in unproductive fixations. His life has evolved through the resourceful shifts of personality. The Auld letter was written at the peak of Douglass' warrior phase—a term I borrow from Carol S. Pearson's *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*. Her study explains in archetypal terms the insights of developmental psychologists such as Erik Erikson, the relevance to Douglass being the placement of his heroic mask in a series of distinctly different phases of ego orientation—not as a whole life's unchanging touchstone.[5] In Pearson's paradigm, Douglass' phases would be the Innocent, Orphan, Wanderer, Warrior, Martyr, and Magician, constituting collectively his continuum of life-long personality development. From this perspective, Douglass' audacious yet complex anger at Auld is situated within adaptive, evolving dynamics. Confrontational heroism was neither born in him, nor was it his only strand of personality, nor was it the "climax" of his development.

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Employing some of Pearson's key insights, while avoiding a labored analysis of all of developmental psychology's stages, I will examine three strands of Douglass' personality that the heroic persona most obscures: Autonomy, Nurture, and Detachment. Not wholly chronological, these highlighted elements of personality came out of specific phases and intertwined thereafter, suggesting how fully multivalent Douglass was. The triumphs of his character—even his manly self-reliance—were never unitary, fixed, or finally finished. Thus, Douglass' paradigm of heroic resistance alone cannot explain his love of the Eastern Shore, his brotherly gestures toward Auld, or the intellective detachment he deployed in reading the South.

Consider the complexity of the following rhetorical performance with its striking and resilient humor. It is his routine "The Southern Style of Preaching to Slaves," delivered early in his career in Boston, on January 28, 1842, as recovered by John Blassingame from a contemporaneous news report. Douglass had developed this humor on the plantations, first by mimicking animal sounds and then, subversively, the slaveholders. Here the warrior slays the southern dragon in laughter and ridicule, in a multidimensional presentation of self:

> "They would take a text—say this:—"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." And this is the way they would apply it. They would explain it to mean, "slaveholders, do unto *slaveholders* what you would have them do unto you:"—and then looking impudently up to the slaves' gallery . . . looking high up to the poor colored drivers and the rest, and spreading his hands gracefully abroad, he says, (mimicking) "And you too, my friends, have souls of infinite value—souls that will live through endless happiness or misery in eternity. Oh, *labor diligently* to make your calling and election sure. Oh, receive into your souls these words of the holy apostle—'Servants, be obedient unto your masters.' (Shouts of laughter and applause.) Oh, consider the wonderful goodness of God! Look at your hard, horny hands, your strong muscular frames, and see how mercifully he has adapted you to the duties you are to fulfil! (continued laughter and applause) while to your masters, who have slender frames and long delicate fingers, he has given brilliant intellects, that they may do the *thinking*, while you do the *working*." (Shouts of applause.) (16–17)

Too bad this came before audio-visual recordings, but one can fairly surmise some social dynamics Douglass here manipulates. Humor, an

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aggressive yet socialized management of anger and attack, channels the vulnerable orphan's primal fear and rage into acceptable form, and Douglass plays it well. Doubtless there were whites who entered the hall expecting, condescendingly, to see a humble slave stammer with formal English and fumble for coherent thoughts. If so, such assumptions would leave intact the social power of paternalistic listeners in relation to the alienated former slave. Inimitably, his mimicking speech act destroys such assumptions while advancing Douglass' autonomy. In an articulate reversal of his subordinate status, he joins his audience in a belittling ridicule of slaveholders, in self-reliance claiming that, so to speak, "I, not my former masters, can do the *thinking*." A necessary precondition for such performance was to detach himself sufficiently from the oppression he so indignantly abhorred. I presume two cultural resources enabled this. He drew first on the subversive style of black verbal display that was a vital survival tool in slave culture. Further, his religious faith provided a clarifying, transcendent perspective on the sins of slavery. In the southern preacher routine, subversive verbal parody and implied divine judgment coalesce to detach Douglass from the personal traumas of bondage, while inspiring his free and creative rhetorical play.

The fact is that Douglass' self-reliant autonomy is polyvalent, growing out of yet also still containing the vulnerabilities of boyhood and adolescence. In attributing autonomy as a key dimension of his personality, I include both valences of his maturation—the uncertain struggle toward it and a repeated desire to display it. Thus in boyhood, or the orphan phase as Pearson describes it, the narcissistic innocent becomes aware that total safety, satisfaction of needs, and loving affirmation are not possible. In this fall from Eden the ego must respond to withdrawal of protection, experiencing powerlessness, fear, abandonment, and helplessness while gradually developing responding competencies. Douglass was of course a literal orphan by age eight, by which time his slave mother (whom he had rarely seen) and his presumable biological father (Capt. Aaron Anthony) both had died. Subsequent dislocations from his grandmother to various plantations, locales, and overseers were a recipe for lasting fear and resentment. During this phase, orphans' anger can be turned on "anything or anyone that can be identified as not properly taking care of them" (29). Douglass, as an adult abolitionist, would draw on the orphan's memory of vulnerable and aggrieved self-focus, but transferring that sense outward, socially, to all black Americans. Realizing that for blacks marginalized by slavery and prejudice America was not "properly taking care of them," he manipulated the orphan's anger, replaying

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but transmuting it into his nurturing social compassion, lending to his oratory remarkable originative power.

Douglass' adolescence, or what Pearson would call his wanderer phase, is also a record of severe challenge. When, as Pearson puts it, the wanderer becomes "the explorer who set off alone to see the world" (51), this departure is the outcome of feeling alienated from a cage of social regulation (52). If the wandering is essentially the long-simmering alienation, the hero's physical departure is, then, not the beginning of his wandering phase but its climax. For Douglass the "cage" was the South's harshly restrictive slave order, which at first the young boy did not understand. His gradual growth into painful social awareness, later narrated as an inspiring example of liberating self-comprehension, was the turmoil of painful adolescent confusion.

Thus, Douglass' escape does not emanate from early heroic design but evolves into it through difficult passages. Initially the young boy's self-concern is only existential, lacking any conceptual awareness. For example, he wonders why white children know their birthdays and he doesn't, and why an overseer so horrifically whips his Aunt Hester. These things he feels inchoately, without understanding them and with no reference to escaping bondage. In time, however, his strongly intellective temperament—he is the kind of person who must ask questions—leads him into framing an explanatory rationale. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass dramatizes this characteristic with italic lettering: "*Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves, and others masters? Was there ever a time when this was not so? How did the relation commence?*" (178). His sufferings, originally narcissistic and I-focused, eventually led him into developing literacy and then, in an outward turn, to an ideological deciphering of the southern social order. His famous quest for literacy therefore is a slowly unfolding individuation, culminating in a teenager's understanding of his environment as a cage of social injustice, from which he feels compelled to separate.

The most famed line of the story suggests that his maturation comes suddenly in the hand-to-hand fight with the slave-breaker Edward Covey: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (60). What really has driven him into adulthood is a persistent cognitive journey through and out of vulnerability and confusion. Notice how his desire to learn the meaning of the word *abolition* turns on the matter of self-definition: "From this time I understood the words *abolition* and *abolitionist*, and always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself

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and fellow-slaves. The light broke in upon me by degrees" (43). Likewise, *The Columbian Orator*, the schoolbook anthology of great speeches with a dialogue between master and slave, gives him for the first time an ideational framework to understand slavery. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* he explains how previously inchoate feelings now find articulation: "The reading of these speeches added much to my limited stock of language, and enabled me to give tongue to many interesting thoughts, which had frequently flashed through my soul, and died away for want of utterance." He adds, "I had now penetrated *the secret of all slavery and oppression*" (226; emphasis added). Seeing one "secret" that can explain "all" really signifies the birth of conceptual ability, the learning how to learn through a unifying framework of ideational perception. So finally his intellectual journey as an adolescent wanderer brings him to comprehend incidents like Aunt Hester's whipping. *They are acts of oppression in a system of oppression.* For *that* reason he must flee.

These orphan and wandering themes are replayed in some of his most resourceful mature rhetoric. One such passage is the famed apostrophe by the teenage Douglass, standing by the Chesapeake Bay, in which he addresses the white-sailed boats to say that they are free—unlike him—to go north. Today one wonders why this obviously "staged" speech, so lacking in authentic voice and historical verisimilitude, appealed to his audience. "I would pour out my soul's complaint, *in my rude way*," he says (emphasis added), but there is nothing "rude" in the high style he deploys: "You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free!" (59). On he continues in an oratorical mode learned much later than his teens—after his mastering of dramatic irony, alliteration, metaphor, sentence balance, antithesis, and the high style of diction. Houston Baker is right to claim that this discourse appropriation removes the black autobiographer from any authentic voice of the slave quarters. However, Douglass' self-presentation springs a rhetorical assault. For his lecture audiences, this moment was comparable to a chimney sweep's breaking into German heroic opera, which is to say it carried a subtle shock appeal. Aggressively, Douglass has appropriated a literate voice that America socially either denied or did not expect of him, going beyond the simple rendition of facts that even his abolitionist mentors asked. Moreover, this is an aggressive tactic of inscribing onto complacent white consciousness an existential sense of black marginality. In effect, deploying such sentiment

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Douglass places *readers* into the affective state of the black youth. Writing of the most confused, self-doubting period of his life—an adolescent identity crisis—he recasts its emotive negatives into mature competencies. His competitive adult phase, in recapitulating old psychic stresses, manages and directs them now toward changing public policy through a persona that commands an audience to his will.

To change his world through rhetoric, it was necessary to revisit the world from which he had separated for the sake of formulating his current identity. Thus, many times in the years after he left the South, Douglass replayed its formative shaping of his self. Pearson explains, "Warriors change their worlds by asserting their will and their image of a better world upon them" (76). Fortuitously, the abolitionist movement gave Douglass his battleground, on which he was required to project strength and capability while repressing juvenile emotions that would weaken effective agency (20). Eric J. Sundquist has referred to this maturity as Douglass' "self-fathering" (124). No longer the vulnerable child, Douglass had to take a father's place and do as a protective father would. Whether flexing muscular force against Covey or dramatizing in speech his youthful anguish, reasserting manly autonomy would continue to be a rhetorical necessity.

In one of Douglass' greatest speeches, the Fourth of July speech delivered in Rochester on July 5, 1852, his early phases of development coalesce into masterly rhetorical manipulations. Here he attacks, warrior style, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. The offensive begins, notes David W. Blight, with his repetitions of one innocuous word, *your* (75). "This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the Fourth of July. It is the birthday of *your* National Independence, and of *your* political freedom" (Foner 182; emphasis added). The word is meant to alienate his audience as America has alienated him. Perfectly encapsulating his orphan status, or as Blight argues "the depth of his yearning to belong in America," the word soon raises a nearly palpable wall of exclusion and abandonment (74). It also captures the wanderer's dilemma because the law, now requiring all states to be complicit with slavery, extends southern captivity, coercively and totally, into a national threat. For escaped slaves this threatens a large-scale, enduring alienation with the captivity they once put behind them.

Douglass' rhetorical tactic, to be aggressive rather than just expressively pleading, transfers his personal sense of orphan-ness to the audience by severing their connection with the founding fathers. Thus he observes that America is yet a young nation, "still lingering in the period of childhood" (182). Raising the child's primal fear of separation and abandon-

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ment, amid references to the founding "fathers," he suggests emotively: "Just here, the idea of a total separation of the colonies from the crown was born! It was a startling idea. . . . The timid and the prudent . . . were, of course, shocked and alarmed by it" (184). Even though America was a child, the colonies found courage enough to exit the orphan stage and become autonomous wanderers, signaled by their resolute Declaration of Independence: "Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success" (185). The ensuing argument states that with the Fugitive Slave Act Americans lost their connection with the principles of the founding fathers. This—a severance from fathers—is the critical turn at which Douglass' listeners, not himself, are deprived of their parentage and become orphans.

Here where they are leveled to his status as equal fellow citizens, he draws the warrior's sword of rhetoric: "Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence. Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?" (188–180). From this point, as Douglass plays on racial disparity with the words *you* and *your,* their import has changed to include his audience, which now, having been placed in orphan shoes, can apprehend his rhetorical ironies. "I say it with a sad state of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary!" Soon he thunders, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?" (189).

This is quite literally a speech about a speech, and a stunning breach of the public holiday's ritual proprieties. At its core it is about status and power. Performatively it is a slave youth's revenge fantasy sublimated into a rhetorical seizure of protective power—the power of free citizenship that should include black Americans. It is an adolescent's declaration of alienation—with the covert counter-tactic of alienating *whites* from their former perspective. It is a competitive male's self-fathering act, as Sundquist would call it, by which Douglass takes on the father's mantle of social authority—after distancing his listeners from the more principled and courageous founding fathers. It contains the seed of something else as well. It prefigures a dissolving of the North/South binarism that previously grounded Douglass' heroic self-presentation. With passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, the black hero can no longer flee the South to a

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harboring North. As Douglass thunders "*New York has become as Virginia*," increasingly it is clear that the southern dragon is also the national dragon. For slavery, he exclaims, "remains no longer a mere state institution, but is now an institution of the whole United States" (195; emphasis added).

Given such mighty speeches as this, where he audaciously assaults the nation, no wonder that the whole of Douglass' adulthood seems best illuminated through his prism of self-reliant heroism. But that emphasis suppresses recognition of his equally profound will to nurture, a strand central in his personality since youth and given full expression only in his middle years. The fact is that if Douglass was a warrior he was a loving warrior, his social crusading fueled by deep compassion for others. More than other commentators, Allison Davis has emphasized that the anger and identity issues of Douglass' boyhood easily could have led to unresolved conflicts: "Resentment is a smouldering fire—a chronic, repetitive anger. It may last years and be very general, as in resentment of one's fate, or in long-harbored resentment against a parent who, one believes, did not love one enough. . . . The most universal conflict of this type exists between the wish to be loved and an angry desire to avenge a lack of love" (4). From his standpoint in psychology, Davis argues that constructive sublimation of his anger was one of Douglass' most vital, necessary personal achievements as a leader. If that is so, then the myth of re-invented self obscures the full social man.

If love is learned from the experience of love, to understand Douglass' intense loyalty to the hundreds of thousands left behind in slavery one must look to his familial and communal affections. In these positive emotional sources are the seeds of what Pearson calls the martyr stage, in which one evinces an ability "to learn to give and care" because the self is felt to be rooted in a shared communal dimension. This contrasts with "the narcissistic egocentricity of the Orphan" in which one recoils from suffering. The socially committed adult takes on suffering as part of meaningful struggle (99). Such suffering is transformative when "given freely as an expression of genuine love and care," as evidenced "in parents who see little hope of improving their own lives but who then sacrifice to make a better life for their children." The martyr's impulse thus is not contrary to self but a fulfillment of self, a choice "for life and against despair" (103).

The first source of Douglass' nurturing sensibility—in his choice of life over despair—undoubtedly was his grandmother Betsy Bailey and her husband Isaac. Also, as biographers such as Dickson J. Preston have

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discovered, among the white slaveholders were important givers of personal support (though compromised by the imposition of slavery). In Douglass' teens, the way was already being prepared for the social vision that burgeoned later. Within the black community religious mentors directed his sense of aggrieved alienation into positive directions, and at age thirteen came a spiritual conversion: "After this, I saw the world in a new light. I seemed to live in a new world, surrounded by new objects, and to be animated by new hopes and desires. I loved all mankind—slaveholders not excepted; though I abhorred slavery more than ever." His inclusion of whites at such a time is astonishing, and predictive of a later ability to channel grievance into fraternal reform. Here, typically, he sublimates anger into religious compassion: "My great concern was, now, to have the world converted" (*My Bondage* 231).

When Douglass reached the North, he did not drop from view in search of material self-advancement, but gravitated to acts of public commitment. His bonding with the fervid band of northern abolitionists was an electric response to their zealously fraternal and nurturing values. They offered him succor, and in the *Narrative* his response to Garrison's *Liberator* is as follows: "The paper became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. *Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds*—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of the institution—*sent a thrill of joy through my soul*, such as I had never felt before!" (96; emphasis added). *The Liberator* touched a deeply responsive chord. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass recollects its inspiring fusion of fraternal compassion with crusading attack: "It detested slavery—exposed hypocrisy and wickedness in high places—made no truce with the traffickers in the bodies and souls of men; *it preached human brotherhood*, denounced oppression, and . . . demanded the complete emancipation of my race" (emphasis added). He adds, "I not only liked—I *loved* this paper, and its editor" (362).

Aligning himself with reformer types in a great Christian cause, he would convert his youthful nurturing impulses into highly productive maturation. Thus, if the abolitionist crusade threw him into constant ideological combat, requiring him repeatedly to slay his dragons, it did not mire him in compulsive fixation on tyranny. In his mid-to-late thirties, he gave fuller expression of a personal passage from youthful anger to a sublimated sense of mutuality. In an important discussion, William L. Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story* examines the major shift of autobiographical tone in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, where a stronger "communal attachment" alters his rhetorical tactics (220). This sense of mutuality, a

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theme Andrews stresses, could find expression only in mid-life, when his personality was reintegrating around new needs, redirecting itself from a focus on heroic autonomy to the self's satisfaction in nurture. When Douglass was in his forties the Civil War erupted and, as David Blight notes, he was "thrilled at the opportunity to make his people warriors" (157) against "the hated enemy" (80). But that was not his only ego orientation. A millennial expectation of a morally rejuvenated social order gave him hope in "a new age of peace and justice," notes Blight (87). The nurturing vision, so organically a part of him, clearly appears in a wartime speech of December 1863, when Douglass stated his dream for "no North, no South . . . no black, no white, but a solidarity of nation" (116).

Here, in the depths of war, there is also a vital detachment, which was less developed in the early manly persona yet soon blossoms in Douglass' final phase. Of course, his late phase has seemed a "decline" into pragmatic party politics, federal appointments, ritual holiday orations, and bourgeois assimilation—all a falling off from the high-water mark of principled individualism. It was evolving growth, however, not decline that led to shifts of autobiographical tone in later writings. A surprising instance of expanding outlook appears in "Self-made Men," a paean to self-sufficiency composed in its first version in 1859 (at age forty-one), and so popular that Douglass would deliver it over fifty times in his career. Near the beginning he emphasizes, "*Properly speaking, there are in the world no such men as self-made men.* That term implies an individual independence of the past and present which can never exist." Pointing to our indebtedness to those preceding us he claims, "no possible native force of character, and no depth or wealth of originality, can lift a man into absolute independence of his fellow-men, and no generation of men can be independent of the preceding generation." Mutuality and the absence of confrontation are now an emergent theme. He explains "brotherhood and inter-dependence of mankind" thusly: "I believe in individuality, but individuals are, to the mass, like waves to the ocean. . . . *We differ as the waves, but are one as the sea*" (Blassingame 5:549; emphases added).

This is not an adolescent's individuation, but it *is* individuation—within an expanded perspective of what a self is. A similar water image appears in a remarkable scene in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, describing his return, at age 59, to the Eastern Shore on June 17, 1877, to visit an infirm Thomas Auld. His explanation of motive is: "He was to me no longer a slaveholder either in fact or spirit, and I regarded him as I did myself, a victim of the circumstances of birth, education, law, and custom" (875). Observing this surprising detachment, biographer Dick-

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son Preston states, "he realized that Captain Auld had not been an evil man but merely a weak and bewildered one . . . a victim of the slave system as Frederick had been himself" (182). If their reconciliation, formal but genuine, is a contradiction of the younger, more heroic self-presentation, it is born of remarkable psychological shifts: "We had both been flung, by powers that did not ask our consent, upon *a mighty current of life, which we could neither resist nor control.* By this current he was a master, and I a slave; but now our lives were verging towards a point where differences disappear, where even the constancy of hate breaks down and where *the clouds of pride, passion and selfishness vanish before the brightness of infinite light*" (876; emphases added). Like the metaphor of waves in the same ocean, the "mighty current of life" is an image of fluidity and process, not tormented competitive mastery of one's world.

In this orientation, Douglass clearly is sustained by interdependence and faith as much as autonomous manliness. Thus for one day, in a postwar and regenerated nation, he can be amicable with the dragon. Importantly, we can regard such detachment as strength, not decline or weakness. Erikson places this trait in the Integrity phase. Pearson's term for it is the magician stage: "Magicians move beyond dualistic, static notions of good and bad to seeing life as process" (120). Developmental theorists studying this transition in men note that the ego is beginning to participate in death and, no longer part of the generation rising in power, changes its task from mastery to acceptance of process and integrity of self. Integrity—here meaning coherence rather than virtue of character—is the ego's essential task in the final phase (Levinson 33–39). At this point, one struggles less against "the mighty current of life." This is not to suggest a decline of growth, for there is challenging change to be effected. Now, says Pearson, the self is "giving up the illusion that we can force life to fit our own scripts, that we can shape up other people to match our idea of the perfect mate or friend or employee, or even that we can make ourselves fit our own images of what we should be" (118). Whereas the child once desired external rescue from suffering, that dilemma now is resolved as persons learn "to trust in and submit to a power greater than themselves" (119)—to trust in, as Douglass says, "the brightness of infinite light."

Such a multiply stranded and evolving personality cannot finally be reduced by the singular touchstone of leonine manliness. A battler's sword is the wrong tool for detachment. To be sure, in *The Life and Times* Douglass tends to monumentalize himself in the mold of famous men, suggesting a unitary view of completed self. When interviewed by

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the Washington *Evening Star* in September 1891, Douglass confided that he had been writing his reminiscences "as a duty I owe to my children and my grandchildren, so that they may see what their father and grandfather has done, and that I may leave it as a monumental record of my life" (Blassingame 5:478). The monumental probably was in mind as he opened Chapter 15 with this architectural metaphor: "As I review the last decade up to the present writing, I am impressed with a sense of completeness; a sort of rounding up of the arch to the point where the keystone may be inserted, the scaffolding removed, and the work, with all its perfections or faults, left to speak for itself" (844). What I see in this metaphor is actually the psychic challenge of shaping a still unfinished personality.

By his life's end Douglass does display a sage-like sense of singular coherence. In 1892, he was interviewed at home in Anacostia by Thomas Fortune of the New York *Age*. Fortune's description reveals a remarkably centered, robust man of seventy-four enjoying his magician phase. "I am an old man now," says Douglass, but he rises at 5 a.m., then walks, answers correspondence for much of the day, writes an occasional article, and in the afternoon goes for a drive. He stills reads, plays violin, and is fond of family. Those past tests of youthful alienation, abolitionist crusading, and political battling seem to have been absorbed into a singular sense of wholeness: "The fact is, I look upon my life, as a whole, while it has some rough places in it, as having been singularly happy" (Blassingame 5:499). Observing Douglass' calm equilibrium and intellectual vigor, Fortune termed him, in the myth-making vein, "the sage of Anacostia" (498).

Yet, in apparent contradiction, Douglass was from the late 1880s to his death delivering ferocious jeremiads against the rise of lynching and white supremacy in the South. Those speeches reached pamphlet form in 1894, a year before his death, in "Why is the Negro Lynched? The Lesson of the Hour." In vintage excoriation, his attack on former slaveholders is a return to blunt decapitation of the dragon's ideology. The tone is set early in this wrathful denunciation of the South: "I fearlessly affirm that there is nothing in the history of savages to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the coloured people of this country, by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South." As Richard Wright would later do in fiction, beneath the veneer of southern civilization Douglass relentlessly exposes very primitive motives of a blood-kill. "It is commonly thought that only the lowest and most disgusting birds and beasts, such as buzzard, vultures and hyenas,

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will gloat over and prey upon dead bodies; but the Southern mob, in its rage, feeds its vengeance by shooting, stabbing and burning their victims, when they are dead" (Foner 4:492–493). In a plethora of hammering phrases, all in direct assault, Douglass repeatedly initiates sentences in his distinctive, leonine "I" manner (passim): "I contend," "I therefore affirm," "I challenge," "But I go further," "But I come to a stronger position," "Again I utterly deny," and, in a paragraph of seven long, blistering "I have showns" he delivers a lawyer-like summation beginning thusly: "To sum up my argument on this lynching business, it remains to be said that I have shown that the Negro's accusers in this case have violated their oaths, and have cheated the Negro out of his vote; that they have robbed and defrauded the Negro systematically and persistently, and have boasted of it. I have shown that—" One struggles to picture the graying sage of Anacostia, between this text's molten composing sessions, serenely playing the violin.

To the end, Douglass' psychic response to the South was intense, creatively metamorphosing with the never-ceasing demands of growth. Although his escape once seemed a rebirth into a new, manly identity, he birthed himself repeatedly according to the needs of autonomy, nurture, and detachment. In 1878, at age sixty, he returned a second time to the Eastern Shore to speak in two black churches on hard work and saving. His deeper motive was to locate his childhood home, Betsy Bailey's cabin in the woods. When he arrived at the site, neither the cabin nor the well remained. Only a nearby cedar indicated the spot. He bent down, scooped up a handful of soil, and brought it back with him to Washington (Preston 189–190). In this scoop of soil were the physical South and black community that he loved. But Douglass had known two Souths—the physical, geographical one, which he could praise, and the ideological South that repeatedly questioned his birthright in his own land. Thus each of his multiple strands of self was a response to bondage and memory, each a critical response to a region that was less humane than it should have been. For those who study southern literature, the issue is no longer how Douglass "belongs" in the canon. It is how essential he is for our understanding the southern legacy. In short, he belongs with that cast of authors including Clemens, Chopin, Glasgow, Faulkner, Wolfe, Caldwell, Wright, Hurston, Walker, and others, many of whom also left the South, who have given us not a monolithic myth of moonlight and magnolias but an essential critical tradition.

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NOTES

1. Douglass, Frederick. *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: The Library of America, 1994. Subsequent references to all versions of Douglass's autobiographies refer to this edition.

2. Douglass learned later that Auld, after reading the *Narrative*, would take "Aunt Betty," now infirm and losing her eyesight, into his own care. In the 1855 autobiography Douglass corrected some errors in his characterization of Auld and observed that after an abortive escape attempt, when he fully expected to be sold south, Auld instead sent him back to Baltimore and a milder fate.

3. My argument accepts Houston A. Baker's important observation, in *The Journey Back* (1980), that Douglass illustrates how the black autobiographer, needing to "define his selfhood" (31), was in "a semantic competition" (33) with white discourse conventions that he adopted with literacy. (In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* [1984], Baker shifts focus from how such conventions tended to control Douglass to his aggressive assumption of economic will, this yielding the impression of a more self-determinative person.)

4. I sense psychological sincerity in the praise of Maryland, not just the pressures of discourse and ideology on Douglass's self-presentation. Very early in his abolitionist career, on October 20, 1841, speaking in Lynn, Massachusetts, Douglass said: "The northern people think that if slavery were abolished, we would all come north. They may be more afraid of the free colored people and the runaway slaves going South. We would all seek our home and our friends, but, more than all, to escape from northern prejudice, would we go to the south. Prejudice against color is stronger north than south; it hangs around my neck like a heavy weight" (Blassingame 1:5). Here the yearning southward rhetorically underscores a criticism of the North. In the letter to Auld it is used differently, to criticize southern slavery. In both cases, a yearning to overcome familial separation is the core psychological source behind the rhetoric. Yet, even if his original "orphan sense" remained fundamental, Douglass manipulated it variously, according to developmental phase and rhetorical context.

5. Erik Erikson's eight famous developmental stages are trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Pearson finds equivalents for these in tropes widely found in literary and mythic narratives, hence the utility of her model to my analyses.

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