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“Without Stopping to Write a Long Apology”: Spectacle, Anecdote, and Curated Identity in Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom

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“Without Stopping to Write a Long Apology”:
Spectacle, Anecdote, and Curated Identity
in
Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom

by

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William Craft’s narrative, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom, Or The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860), is a departure from the slave narrative genre’s conventions and expectations. The deviation is clear from the start of the narrative. Typically, slave narratives begin with the declarative statement: “I was born.” In his formative essay, highlighting this convention in his title, “‘I Was Born,’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature,” James Olney outlines the ways in which ex-slave narrators must prove not only the truth of their experience as slaves, but must also include proof of their humanity as it was disputed under the dominion of slavery: “The argument of the slave narrative is that the events narrated are factual and truthful...but this is a second-stage argument; prior to the claims of truthfulness is the simple, existential claim: “I exist.” Photographs, portraits, signatures, authenticating letters all make the same claim: “This man exists” (52). The first sentence of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is “My wife and myself were born in different towns in the state of Georgia, which is one of the principal slave States” (1). The plurality of this opening sentence may seem a small change from what Olney describes, but as the narrative continues it is clear *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is invested in upending as well as satisfying conventions of the slave narrative genre. The Crafts’ narrative is not the story of a single protagonist; it is the story of a couple’s joint escape from slavery. The focus, interestingly, is not so much on the trials of William, the author and narrator, but rather on those experienced by his wife, Ellen. More specifically, the core of the narrative revolves around the opportunity Ellen’s semblance of whiteness affords the couple. As Janet Neary argues in her chapter devoted to the narrative, “Optical Allusions: Textual Visuality in *Running a Thousand*

Miles for Freedom,” from her larger work, *Fugitive Testimony: On the Visual Logic of Slave Narratives*, there is “potential” in the “visual ‘mistake’” of understanding the “racially black” Ellen as white, which the Crafts’ expertly take advantage of at the risk of both their lives, and in the interest of protecting the promise of a future family, of children free from the grasp of slavery (80). The narrative is more than a record of Ellen’s passing (as male, white, and plagued by malady); it is also a contemplation of race, gender, and corporeal existence, perhaps even genre too. The race-blending (in) and gender-bending takes place on the level of content and genre-bending is simultaneously taking place on the level of form. The Crafts’ narrative is invested in the conventions of the slave narrative but at the same time undoes the original intention of those conventions as a way of indicting a literary system that sought to prescribe black identity, as well as limit ex-slave narrators to a totalizing formula without regard for a black subjectivity. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is the first slave narrative where both masculinity *and* femininity are examined from the sphere of whiteness *and* blackness. Ellen’s performance as a white man, a planter named Mr. Johnson, makes this all possible. I argue that there is a more egalitarian view of the experience of slavery because William shares not only his story, but also Ellen’s, whereas other slave narratives were typified by a singular autobiographical account tethered to a singular gender and racial identity. While some narratives briefly explore the experiences of other slaves, the focus is not as equally distributed as it is in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. For example, the “tragic mulatta” trope was popularly utilized not only by male ex-slave narrators (think: William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*), but also within abolitionist literature. White abolitionist writers, like Lydia Maria Child, explored black womanhood in relation to the standards of white bourgeois femininity. Additionally, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* does not shy away from the concept of black love. The Crafts’ do not pacify their commitment to one another,

instead they explicitly seek to experience the joy of marriage to its fullest, as parents, as well as to have their union recognized legally. Ellen and William challenged the anxieties of their audience by not only publicizing their escape, but also their love for one another. There is no white man who saves Ellen, dies and then leaves her and children to ruin, instead Ellen is saved by herself, by her performance as a white man, and by William, her black husband. The narrative reworks the trope of the tragic mulatta so that Ellen's mixed-race body is hidden instead of fetishized. The Crafts' joint narrative is distinct because its focus is so multi-faceted. William provides the viewpoint of an individual that is male and black, and Ellen provides the viewpoint that is female and black (although phenotypically white). Ellen's disguise extends the focus of the viewpoint to an audience that perceives her as white, male, physically disabled, which confers socially privilege on "him," rather than detracts from it. The text creates a sort of triangulation of spectatorship where the Crafts view the white bodies that surround them, those same white bodies view them, in turn, and we, the readers, view both parties. The Crafts' manage to interrogate and implicate white bodies so as to pushback against the eternal gaze on black bodies. I use the word "eternal" not to displace the speculative gaze on black peoples outside of the historical context of slavery, although there is certainly a trajectory from the historical past to a contemporary understanding of "the gaze." I use "eternal" rather to delineate the way in which enslaved and free blacks were *constantly* "watched" and "scrutinized" under the guise of law and order; additionally, this understanding of the gaze as constant underwrites not only the visual nature of said enforcement, but also the visual nature of the narration, which is hyperaware of the way bodies are read, of the way race is perceived. The newly positioned gaze serves to reveal that which is rarely seen: the white body—its convictions, its prejudice, as well as an understanding of racial difference that is predicated on sight. It is rarely "seen" in that

the white body is not “seen” with the same critical and speculative attention as black bodies were “seen” within the logic of the dominant white ideology, which is evident in the way William is treated on his journey to freedom. His mobility and character are constantly in check by suspicious white travelers. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* unapologetically challenges traditional nineteenth-century notions of race and gender by way of its treatment of spectacle, use of anecdote, and assertion of authorial choices that contradict the expectations of a white abolitionist audience. The Crafts’ narrative has been endlessly discussed for the ways in which it is a “disruptive text,” as it is referred to by Ellen M. Weinauer in her essay, ““A Most Respectable Looking Gentleman”: Passing, Possession, and Transgression in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*,” but I would like to build upon this argument by suggesting its most challenging feature is what I will call Ellen’s “curated identity.” The status of Ellen’s authorship is murky and at times contentious; her place in the story is relayed by her husband, who is quick to resituate his wife within a sphere of respectability. However, I argue Ellen’s authorship is located in her visual representation, she presents and organizes herself not only in her heroic performance as “Mr. Johnson,” but also in letters extramural to the text, as well as on the transatlantic abolitionist lecture circuit. Ellen does reaffirm her womanhood, by the end of the text, and in her own writing, but it is an explicitly black womanhood reflecting her pride in her black family.

The opening preface to *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is peculiar because of the ways in which, like the larger narrative, it diverges from the conventions of the slave narrative genre. Prefatory remarks were a popular convention within nineteenth-century literature, but they were an even more essential staple of the slave narrative genre, where the preface served as further proof of the authenticity of the ex-slave narrator’s personal account. John Sekora explains

the dynamic between white editors and black ex-slave narrators in his essay, “Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative,” as reciprocal in nature, where ex-slave narrators were provided a platform via white sponsorship, and white editors were provided with the subject, the story-teller, necessary to denounce the institution of slavery, as well as ensure the success of abolitionism. He outlines the specifics of the genre, along with analyzing the symbiotic relationship of ex-slave narrator and white sponsor.

The abolitionist imprint was decisive in its predisposition for “facts” and for a particular ordering of those facts... [There was] a heavy use of authenticating documents printed before and after the narrative itself. A frontispiece portrait and testimonial letters declared that the subject existed and was who he said he was. Letters testifying to this moral and intellectual character avowed that he was reporting events as he knew them. Many testify that they heard the subject lecture long before the narrative reached written form... Through such devices editors and sponsors sought not merely facts but facticity—the careful layering of heterogeneous material into a collective and invulnerable whole... If the story of a former slave was thus sandwiched between white abolitionist documents, the story did carry the aegis of a movement preaching historical veracity. The verifiable truth of that story, according to white abolitionists, is that the slave has precious little control over his life. (497)

Although the Crafts’ narrative is subject to these same conventions and expectations, it is not a premier example of the entanglement between Garrisonian abolitionist editors and ex-slave narrators. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* was not written with a white amanuensis and

is also absent of authenticating documents that precede or conclude the narrative. Instead William is the sole author of the preface. A narrative that better illustrates the heavy-handedness Sekora describes is Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which begins with a preface written under Jacobs's pseudonym "Linda Brent," followed by an editorial preface written by Lydia Maria Child, in which she apologizes for the sensitive subject matter, and also takes responsibility for the narrative's public reception. The critical focus on nineteenth-century slave narratives, in more recent years, has been on the ways in which ex-slave narrators wrestled control from their white abolitionist editors. It is as if there are breadcrumbs left behind from these narrators proving the "control" Sekora admits their sponsors felt they were incapable of. The Crafts' narrative more closely resembles William Wells Brown's brand of authorial control via self-sponsorship, or black sponsorship, as seen in his seminal novel *Clotel*, which features a prefatory autobiographical narrative, authored by himself. The likeness and link between the two has led Barbara McCaskill to suggest in the supplemental material she gathered for the University of Georgia Press' print of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* that Williams Well Brown served as the "amanuensis" of William and Ellen Craft (75). Slave narratives, according to Sekora, "are often accounts of men and women undergoing profound transformation, they continue to be, in the main, recorded or edited or polished or reviewed or verified or completed by white sponsors" (495). The overall assertion of Sekora is that while the relationship between ex-slave narrators and white abolitionist sponsors had an important political imperative, there was simultaneously a troubling and totalizing aspect to this relationship. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is certainly informed by the generic formula conceived by white abolitionist editors but it is also an experiment in the possibilities of black editorship, as well as an exercise of black authorial control over the slave narrative. In his thorough biography of Ellen and

William's transatlantic experience, "Fugitive Slaves in Britain: The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft," R.J.M Blackett describes the narrative as unique because it is not rooted in a depressing depiction of southern slavery and, also, he claims the narrative's "thrust is mainly propagandistic" (54). The narrative is, like all slave narratives, anti-slavery; however, the absence of a plantation backdrop does not make this text more "propagandistic" or as a result less "realistic" than previous narratives. The lack of plantation account creates important distance from familial trauma and illustrates a deliberate authorial choice, which refuses the recreation of black trauma for the sake of spectacle. It is interesting that for a narrative less burdened by authenticating documents and white sponsorship, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is viewed as "mainly propagandistic;" perhaps this is due to the urgency of the tone, or the leaflet-like length of the volume. The radicalism of this slave narrative, I argue, does not lie solely in its "shift in attention," but with its overt lack of white sponsorship, evidenced in the preface. The preface begins with reference to the language of law and faith, a popular rhetorical device for the slave narrative genre, commonly utilized as a way of indicting and undermining the dominant white cultural logic. The opening language of the preface is characteristic of the genre, but the use of the first-person plural is where the departure from convention begins. "Therefore, *we* felt perfectly justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting task of 'running a thousand miles' to obtain those rights which are so vividly set forth in the Declaration" (1; my italics). "We" was usually used as a way of widening the narrative voice to include the voices of those still enslaved but in this particular preface the use of "we" indicates William and Ellen's solidarity as a couple, and introduces the readership to the joint nature of the narrative. However, still the preface is signed by William alone and, so, there is some sense that he serves as the spokesperson of their relationship. Additionally, while McCaskill describes William Wells

Brown as the amanuensis for the narrative, in her essay, “Black womanhood in North American women’s slave narratives,” Xiomara Santamarina maintains that “In *Running a Thousand Miles*, Ellen’s husband, William, serves as her amanuensis” (238). It is unclear and debatable who the exact amanuensis of the narrative is but what we can be sure of, either way, is that there is no record of white sponsorship, as so explicitly stated in other narratives. The radicalism continues in the unapologetic tone of the preface. *Apologia* was a staple of the slave narrative genre, but William projects instead an assertion of authorial will—of authority: “Without stopping to write a long apology for offering this little volume to the public, *I shall commence* at once to pursue my simple story” (1; my italics). Not only is the preface explicitly unapologetic but there is an urgency in its tone, which is then extended into the narrative, noted for its speedy account of escape from slavery, and then from the grasp of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. There is an emergence of a black subjectivity, a declaration of control of identity and content in this brief preface, which also prepares the reader for the unusual narrative that follows. The narrative is no “simple story,” but instead a complex narrative hyper-aware of its literary constraints, working to subvert, rework, and overcome such constraints.

The beginning of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is largely focused on genealogy, family history, and the ways in which family life and bloodlines are corrupted by the institution of slavery. The narrative extends beyond self-preservation, we learn the historical and immediate imperative of the Crafts’ escape is to protect their future children and, so, the narrative is foremost invested in the project of saving the black family. Also, we learn the historical function of the narrative was to free William’s sister, so not only did the Crafts’ want to save their own immediate future family, but also their present family members too.

Perhaps I should have never heard of [my sister] again, had it not been for the untiring efforts of my good old mother, who became free a few years ago by purchase, and, after a great deal of difficulty found my sister residing with a family in Mississippi. My mother at once wrote to me, informing me of the fact, and requesting me to do something to get her free; and I am happy to say that, partly by lecturing occasionally, and through the sale of an engraving of my wife in the disguise in which she escaped, together with the extreme kindness and generosity of Miss Burdett Coutts, Mr. George Richardson of Plymouth, and a few other friends, I have nearly accomplished this. It would be to me a great and ever-glorious achievement to restore my sister to our dear mother, from which she was forcibly driven in early life. (9-10)

The narrative was not only testimony against slavery, the message of the cause, but also had a real charitable function. The first few pages of the narrative relays that the greatest tragedy of slavery is the disruption of the family, but especially the separation of mother and child. Note that William does not only want his sister's freedom but also to return her to their mother. Ellen is similarly traumatized by the experience of being torn from her mother and, thus, refuses to have children under the dominion of slavery. The catalyst for Ellen and William is expressed as follows: "above all, the fact that another man had the power to tear from our cradle the new-born babe and sell it in the shambles like a brute, and then scourge us if we dared to lift a finger to save it from such a fate, haunted us for years" (3). Although William does share his separation from his sister and the sale of his older family members, the greater focus again is on Ellen's experience, specifically her family tree:

My wife's first master was her father, and her mother his slave, and the latter is still the slave of his widow. Notwithstanding my wife being of African extraction on her mother's side, she is almost white—in fact, she is so nearly so that the tyrannical old lady to whom she first belonged became so annoyed, at finding her frequently mistake for a child of the family, that she gave her when eleven years of age to a daughter, as a wedding present. This separated my wife from her mother, and also from several other dear friends. (3)

Ellen's ancestral line proves the truth of Harriet Jacobs's exclamation in her own narrative: "What tangled skeins are the genealogies of slavery!" (121). William's outline of Ellen's family tree reads like the set-up for a tragic mulatta story, but Ellen does not find temporary refuge in a white man that ultimately disappoints, or dies; rather she commits to William. In her essay, "Who's Your Mama? 'White' Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-Passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom," P. Gabrielle Foreman discusses the tendency for nineteenth-century audiences to appropriate Ellen within the tragic mulatta paradigm, but Foreman warns that to "read" Ellen within such a "context" erases the reality of her "trauma" which is "the inability to extricate herself from the actualized mythological Southern 'family' to make the transfer from being 'one of the family' to having her own family" (528). Although William does tend to stress Ellen's feminine virtues to align her within the scope of white femininity, or true womanhood, there is something to be said about the importance of motherhood in this narrative. Motherhood is not merely another measure of femininity instead it is the site at which Ellen's selfhood is asserted, as a proud, black matriarch. In her groundbreaking essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers explains gender constructions of female slaves as understood within the logic of slavery,

and how this understanding has evolved and affected contemporary understandings of the black family. Spillers suggests that black femininity and motherhood must be reconstructed outside of the traditional boundaries of womanhood from which black women have been displaced since the time of slavery:

This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain representational potentialities for African-Americans: 1) motherhood as female bloodrite is outraged, is denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject. (80)

The absent father in the configuration of the black family is not the black father, but is rather the looming threat and not-so-distant memory of the slave master, where the black mother is relegated to the status of breeder and non-woman. Spillers contends that black femininity cannot flourish unless it rejects the exclusionary binary and, so, a radical revision of what once was, or what never was for black women, must take place. Ellen's subjectivity emerges out of the very space that Spillers finds limiting for the black female subject. Ellen's motherhood is not Spillers' idealized total rejection of gender roles, but there is certainly a revision present in Ellen's reclamation of motherhood. Ellen *chooses* to be a mother and only under the conditions she finds

conducive for children. Her choice to stall pregnancy until freedom presents her subjectivity to us, the readers, because there is an active agency in her insistence to choose the right time and place to start her family. There has been a critical conversation about the issue of reproductive choice and the lack thereof for enslaved black women, where infanticide of children conceived via rape is now understood as an expression of control, or an act of retribution. Ellen's reproductive choice reminds us again of the exceptional nature of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. Unlike many enslaved black women, Ellen has her choice of husband and birth control. William Craft relays early on that Ellen's role as a house slave afforded her a certain level of privilege, which we can assume is extended to her power in choice. The critical focus of this narrative often explores Ellen's gender transformation; Ellen's move from woman to man is seen as radical and is perhaps evidence of Spillers' call for "insurgency." Ellen does not simply play the part of a white man, she infiltrates this role. She is like a spy on the side of abolitionism, where she exposes the "secret" of a racist United States of America.

The Crafts' text not only reconfigures gender constructions, but also indicts the "need" to humanize black people for white audiences. The narrative opens with an epigraph from Milton: "God gave us only over beast, fish, fowl, / Dominion absolute; that right we hold/ By his donation. But man over man/ He made not lord; such title to himself/ Reserving, human left from human free" (3). Immediately, this epigraph is juxtaposed by William's lament (two sentences into the narrative) that "we were held as chattels" (3). The narrative reminds us that the fixation on constructions of gender and race should not overwhelm the paradox of the text. In other words, the root problem is not only constructions of gender and race, but an absurd debate concerning black humanity. The paradox of this narrative and most slave narratives is that the form served as a humanizing agent. In other words, there is not only a shift in being seen as

“woman” to “man,” and “black to “white”, but also from “sub-human” to “human.” The Crafts’ do not shy away from the absurdity that they must prove their humanity instead there is an explicit emphasis on how they are viewed as slaves versus free people. Craft writes: “[Ellen] saw that the laws under which we lived did not recognize her to be a woman, but a mere chattel, to be bought and sold, or otherwise dealt with as her owner might see fit” (21). Ellen’s disguise, like the slave narrative form, is an instance of subject formation, where her personhood is translated via the host body of Mr. Johnson. Her humanity is not comprehensive within the space of slavery and, so, her disguise fills in the metaphysical gap. The theme of “tangled genealogies” is further pressed upon with a “subtle” indictment of Thomas Jefferson, perhaps further proof of William Wells Brown’s influence as his novel *Clotel* was inspired by Jefferson’s rumored relationship with Sally Hemmings: “[T]he father of the slave may be the President of the Republic; but if the mother should be a slave at the infant’s birth, the poor child is ever legally doomed to the same cruel fate” (12). The beginning of the narrative does not only introduce us to the theme of vexed motherhood and the preservation of the black family, but also the fallacy of system constructions, specifically skin color as indicative of race: “Slavery in America is not at all confined to persons of any particular complexion; there are a very large number of slaves as white as any one” (4). The narrative challenges not only the institution of slavery, but the systemic constructions which underlie the logic of the institution and its supporters. In this way, the narratives undermines the logic that only black bodies are conducive to slavery.

Lindon Barrett explains the “exceptional turn” achieved by the Crafts’ narrative in his essay, “Hand-Writing: Legibility and the White Body in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.” Barrett begins with the proposition that the “African American body is a vexed artifact” and it is this “vexation” that informs and shapes the actual body of the text (315). The

“textual dilemma for ex-slave narrators” is rooted in their perceived “obdurate materiality,” which is inescapable, and so these narrators must grapple with the problem by way of “recover[ing] their bodies” as well as “remov[ing] their bodies from these narratives” (315). Barrett’s argument is an extension of Sekora and Olney’s encyclopedic outlines of the issue of authenticity, where he argues that ex-slave narrators were doubly-constrained by literary conventions *and* the perception of the black body as antithetical to the mind. Barrett explains why the Crafts’ narrative is different from other slave narratives. Although other ex-slave narrators overcome the textual dilemma posed by their bodies, the Crafts’ method was unique and innovative:

[S]upplanting the attention usually given to the black body with a focus on the white body...accounts for a radical revision of the “scene of writing.” ...What the Crafts underscore in their unusual escape from slavery is the manner in which the white body attains its privilege by seeming to replicate the dynamics, the functioning, of the symbolic itself. (Barrett 316)

Ellen’s performance achieves a removal of the speculative gaze on the black body and instead transfers the implicating function of the gaze by instead centering the speculative gaze on the white body. For example, how “Mr. Johnson” is perceived is set in contrast to how William is perceived by the white passer-by. Additionally, the narrative attention is dispersed so that the white characters the Crafts encounter on their journey are also “seen” and, I argue, the readership becomes active in our judgement of these characters. The narrative has elements of Greek tragedy in the sense that dramatic irony protects us from making the same visual mistake made by the white passengers of the adventure tale. We know the truth behind the disguise. However, we also are made witness to the racial bias expressed on the level of sight and assumption, as

experienced by William and Ellen disguised. The triangulation of spectatorship creates the space of a trial, where the Crafts adjudicate and we, the readers, act as jury. While Barrett dissects the ways in which “textuality” is “hostile” for the ex-slave narrator and how the Crafts’ narrative expertly navigates the limits of its form, Neary examines the “visuality” of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. Neary reads the Crafts’ narrative as an exemplar of what she terms “representational static” where the conceptual limits of race are negotiated by way of the textual artifact (think: the narrative) and its visual correlate (think: Ellen’s image and what it *projects*). More specifically, she explains, “Craft’s narrative insists on a mode of vision that prioritizes recognition and intersubjective relationality” (82). Ellen’s visual representation depends on conditions of racial difference as described by Neary. Barrett unearths the radicalism present in the Crafts’ treatment of the white body and Neary builds upon this analysis by suggesting that the newly shifted gaze also provokes an understanding of how race is *translated* on the level of sight, as contingent upon shared thought and social conditioning.

Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom and its function has not extinguished with the passing of time; yes, slavery was abolished with the Thirteenth Amendment, but there is still a contemporary crisis of representation, as well as dangerous arbitrary constructions of race and gender. Neary claims that the slave narrative still exists in the form of “contemporary visual slave narratives,” citing artists including Glenn Ligon and Kara Walker as executors of the style. I argue that Craft’s triangulation of spectatorship is a mechanism of the “intersubjective relationality” Neary describes. I say this because not only do the “characters” of the narrative reaffirm notions of race and gender in their acceptance of Mr. Johnson or their suspicion of William, but the readership is also complicit in this social experiment. We are given information

by William, our narrator, which we internalize *and* visualize as we read, and as a result form a value-judgment.

A great contemporary example of a triangulation of spectatorship with an indicting function like *Running a Thousand a Miles for Freedom* is Robbie McCauley's 1992 Obie Award winning performance piece, *Sally's Rape*. The performance is made up of three performers, one white female character (Jeannie), one black female character (Robbie), and a complicit audience. The performance is mostly a dialogue between the white and black character, about whether racial differences are in fact inherent. Essentially, the piece is an exercise in interrogating racial mythology. The audience participates in the drama's most climactic episode, where the black character acts the part of Sally Hemmings being sold on the auction block, the black performer disrobes and stands on the auction block as the white performer corrals the audience into bidding on "Sally." A note from a printed outline from one of the performances of *Sally's Rape* reads: "ROBBIE *steps onto auction block, takes off her sack dress, drops it on the block. She is naked.* JEANNIE *starts to chant, "Bid 'em in," coaxing the Audience, taking time to thank them for joining in. It should be a moment of communion"* (374). The performance has been staged for both mostly white and mostly black audiences, with varying response and participation. The active audience of McCauley's effort visually recognizes the set-up and expectations of such a scene which is similar to the active readership of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, where we participate in the exposure of racism as secondary witnesses. If we consider the framework provided by Barrett, the preoccupation with white bodies begins with the anecdotal device, also used by William Wells Brown in his novel, *Clotel*. William Craft and William Wells Brown use the story of Salomé Müller, a white German immigrant, sold into slavery and "passed off" as black to illustrate the conundrum of skin color as indicative of race. In his essay, "*Clotel* and the

Historicity of the Anecdote,” Lee Schweninger explains that “[a]necdote allows Brown to move from within the specific time and place to the timeless and universal, allows him to demonstrate that in a slave culture all are potential slaves, regardless of parentage, regardless of nationality and ethnicity” (33). Minus intentional complication of linearity, Craft utilizes anecdote for the same end the Brown does. However, Brown’s text is centered on the suffering of the black female slave, specific to the sexual trespass and physical violence they endure in spite of their mixed ancestry. For Ellen, on the other hand, her status as a black female slave is superseded by the mirage of her staged whiteness and manhood. Ellen’s disguise is similar to the Shakespearean technique of faking the death of a female character in order to protect her from the murderous practice of patriarchy, like a Shakespearean heroine, Ellen must “die” in order to “live.” Ellen’s aggressor is not a slandered father or an angry king, but the whole institution of slavery and its racist logic. She “dies” by way of her disguise. Ellen’s disguise and the anecdote of Salomé Müller function similarly in that they both decenter the typical slave narrative focus on slave bodies. Anecdote and disguise, here, complicate the ways in which the binaries of race and gender are understood. Ellen’s disguise, if we consider the framework provided by Barrett, allows Ellen’s black female body to temporarily fall out of the narrative, which removes the possibility of her body being misunderstood, as well as sexualized. Her disguise also suggests the fluidity of both race and gender. Craft uses the anecdotal device to introduce the displacement which the text primarily operates in, the narrative focus and gaze is set on the white body, rather than on the re-telling of black trauma. The anecdote of Salomé Müller proves Barrett’s assertion that an interrogation of the symbolic is integral to slave narratives because blackness was treated as a state of being without any point of reference, whereas whiteness is always referential and wrought with meaning. The instance of passing illustrates the fallacy of such systemic

constructions. Skin color, according to the logic of slavery, is supposed to constitute a fixed understanding of race, but the story of Salomé Müller upends this rigidity, and suggests, instead, its fluidity. Ellen's disguise similarly defies such logic, proving race and gender are more performance than reality. Anecdote and Ellen's curated identity (where she exerts control of her symbolic worth by manipulating her façade) reveals a sort of crisis of semiotics. The project of this narrative transcends its anti-slavery imperative and forces its audience to consider systemic constructions of identity which are equally problematic and oppressive. The narrative asks us to consider the *meaning* of race and gender. William and Ellen essentially ask: *What does it mean to be a woman? A black woman? A white woman? A man? A black man? A white man? Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is a prototypical text. Ellen's disguise and the truth of Salomé Müller's experience creates a crisis because both suggest that fixed social constructions are not only malleable but false.

Additionally, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* does not only contemplate the meaning of race and gender, but also considers *who* gets to resolve such a conflict. Race and gender were largely defined by the white, patriarchal, dominant logic. The Crafts' narrative was a push-back against a definitive meaning of blackness, whiteness, masculinity, and femininity. Instead this text explores the possibilities of race and gender beyond the limits of social definition, the indefinability of race and gender. In his essay "I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Choice in Four Slave Narratives," Robert Burns Stepto maps out what he describes as the evolutionary "three phases of narration" within the slave narrative form. Stepto deems William Wells Brown's narrative as the ultimate example of the final phase of his schematic representation of the relationship between authorship and authenticating documents:

In an authenticating narrative, represented here by William Wells Brown's *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown* (not to be confused with Brown's 1847 volume, *Narrative of William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself*), the narrator exhibits considerable control of his narrative by becoming an editor of disparate texts for authentication purposes, far more than for the goal of recounting personal history....Brown's narrative...is a conceit upon the authorial mode of the white guarantor. Control and authentication are achieved, but at the enormous price of abandoning the quest to present personal history in and as a literary form. (238)

Under Stepto's categorization *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* would fall somewhere in between the "generic narrative" phase and the "authenticating narrative" phase described above; however, while Stepto's analysis is comprehensive and worthwhile, his ascendant categorization is problematic. I say the Crafts' narrative falls between categories because the narrative is not completely absent of its autobiographical objective although the text unusually focuses mostly on the trials of escape, rather than on plantation life before and freedom after. Additionally, its authenticating features (anecdote, reference to law and newspaper accounts, as well as personal letters) are fully integrated within the text as opposed to an addendum to the text. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* operates like Brown's "authenticating narrative" because of the clear authorial choice in relation to its authenticating features. In other words, the Crafts' narrative reworks its authenticating features to effect authorial power instead of merely conceding to the standards of its form. For example, the anecdotal device has the potential to act as mere supplement, another authenticating feature. Although in the Crafts' narrative, anecdote becomes an authorizing feature as well as an authenticating feature, anecdote is utilized by Craft,

especially in the case of sharing Salomé Müller's story, to provoke a dialogue about the inconsistencies of racial identification in the American cultural landscape. However, there is one anecdote in particular that proves the authorizing potential of the anecdotal device. Craft relays in the beginning pages of the narrative a mulatto family's sale to and escape from a cruel master, the story of Mary and Frank, brother and sister. Mary and Frank are the children of Mrs. Slator, the black mistress of the wealthy and white, Mr. Slator, who dies leaving his "wife" and children in dangerous circumstances. Before Ms. Slator and her "nearly white, well educated" children leave for the safety of the free states, a "villain" decides to claim shared ancestry with the deceased Slator and is bequeathed his estate and family (13). The "new" Mr. Slator then proceeds to sell Mary and Frank's mother, as well as their sister, Antoinette. The anecdote seems at first a record of another "tragic mulatta" tale, yet Mary and Frank masterfully outwit Slator and effect their freedom, becoming "free white persons" in "New York" (18). Frank then returns to Georgia to free his youngest siblings, twins, using a disguise, eerily mirroring the disguise Ellen assumes for her own escape:

In due time Frank learned from his friends in Georgia where his little brother and sister dwelt. So he wrote at once to purchase them, but the persons with whom they lived would not sell them. After failing in several attempts to buy them, Frank cultivated large whiskers and moustachios, cut off his hair, put on a wig and glasses, and went down as a white man, and stopped in the neighborhood where his sister was; and after seeing her and also his little brother, arrangements were made for them to meet at a particular place on a Sunday, which they did, and got safely off. (18)

The inclusion of detail concerning Frank's disguise functions as foreshadowing of Ellen's endeavor, but also reminds us again of the narrative's thematic focus on family. A few lines down from the account of Frank's return, Craft reveals: "Frank and Mary's mother was my wife's own dear aunt" (19). There is some sense of an intergenerational transference of perseverance in the effort to save one's family, but also a familial proclivity for performance or passing. The anecdote illustrates not only an instance of black suffering, but in the delay of vital information there is a sense of authorial control. William does not sensationalize Ellen's family's experience rather he shrouds their story in some semblance of privacy, measuring out what he deems appropriate to share. Additionally, there is not only a delay of information, but also perhaps a delay in reader gratification. While the anecdote is a re-telling of trauma experienced by Ellen's own family, the narration of this story creates distance from the pain by not immediately claiming it as personal history. Similar to the "shift in attention" Barrett examines, anecdote, as utilized by Craft, provides a shift in attention from personal and familial pain, to a larger universal slave experience. The at first depersonalized story of Ellen's aunt's children is a further displacement in the text, which seeks to undo the speculative attention usually attached to the black body. The obvious displacement of the text is its focus on the white body but the depersonalization of experience also serves as a protective measure. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* oscillates between strictly personal account and authenticating features, satisfying conventions, but also indicting the need for such conventions. For example, in between the anecdotes of Salomé Müller and Ellen's family, Craft refers to "the fundamental laws of slavery; in order to give some idea of the legal as well as the social tyranny from which [they] fled" (10). The reference to law, at first glance, seems another instance of authenticating necessity, yet there is again an underlying sense of authorial control in William Craft's delay of information, as well

as his editorial organization of the narrative. He references the law after twice promising to share his and Ellen's personal history; however, he stalls in providing their story, writing, "I must now give the account of our escape; but, before doing so..." (10). There is a narrative awareness of what "must" be done, as if there is some phantasmagoric dialogue with a non-existent white sponsor or reader who is expecting things to move along, but Craft instead operates at his own pace. The inclusion of passages of the law allows Craft to prove his own point that American ideals are not idealistic, as well as to undermine the rhetoric of flawed and biased institutions. Referentiality, as utilized by Craft, is weaponizing, whereas reference to law usually connotes legitimacy, here, the reference is set up as a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of institutions that are oppressive and racist.

Ellen is a mostly mysterious figure up until Craft's description of her disguise and their joint escape plan. The opening of the narrative introduces us to the facts of Ellen's family history and provides little insight into Ellen's interior life. We are assured of William's exertion of authorial control, by way of his preface and use of anecdote, but Ellen's identity—who she is, is not immediately clear. William is often accused of silencing Ellen, of revising her experience to satisfy the expectations and conditions of true womanhood; however, Craft's delayed introduction of Ellen can also be read, I argue, as a way of further protecting his wife from a voyeuristic gaze. Ellen's "curated identity" emerges in the description of her disguise and her ingenious contribution to her and her husband's escape plan. Ellen's authorship is not as traditional as her husband's; after all, her name is not featured on the byline. Nevertheless, it is substantive and meaningful. Her authorship is her visual representation. Although it is relayed by William, we get a sense of the way Ellen chose to represent and organize herself (as well as her ideals) to the scrutinizing public. In her aforementioned essay, Weinauer explains that while

Running a Thousand a Miles for Freedom contemplates and interrogates the binaries of race (black and white) and gender (male and female), William Craft's narration places femininity on a troubling pedestal, as an absolute category. Weinauer asserts:

But, even as we watch Craft the narrator turn this maze of articulated identities to his ideological use, we witness a reemergence of one "pure" category, one fixed boundary: Craft insists, finally, on the natural status of gendered categories, writing Ellen into her proper place within them. Unlike the meanings assigned to race and class memberships, meaning that Craft presents as discursive, interested constructions, "woman" is assigned a meaning that is fixed, immutable and presumably disinterested. Ellen's masculine persona is an illusion, Craft tries to insist; she is "true" only as a "woman"—only as a true woman and an antebellum wife. (38)

I concur that there is certainly a problematic reliance on accepted constructions of womanhood within the text; however, Ellen's womanhood, even as it is espoused by William is still not fully aligned with the paradigm of true womanhood. I say this bearing in mind P. Gabrielle Foreman's assertion that Ellen's motivation for escape is her future children and her "simultaneous desire for a legibly black man" (508). In other words, William cannot successfully resituate his wife Ellen into the status of true white womanhood because of their relationship. As expertly explained by Foreman, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is not a narrative about passing, rather she asserts that Ellen "passes through whiteness" instead of "passes for white" (508). If William Craft, as Weinauer suggests, privileges true womanhood then the same privileging would have to take place on the level of race in order to successfully align Ellen with true womanhood, which is not the case. Ellen's pride in her black ancestry and her love for her black

husband instead creates a restructured womanhood, aware of the conditions of true womanhood, yet repurposed for an explicitly black female subjectivity. Ellen does stereotypically reaffirm her womanhood in her hesitation to assume her masculine disguise, but her womanhood is also reaffirmed in her refusal to reject her husband William, as is “expected” of her when she reaches Nova Scotia. The relay of Ellen’s disguise and the Crafts’ escape plan is as follows:

[W]e were highly delighted at the idea of having gained permission to be absent for a few days; but when the *thought* flashed across my wife’s *mind*, that it was customary for travelers to register their names in the visitors’ books at hotels...it made our *spirits* droop within us. So, while sitting in our little room upon the verge of despair, all at once my wife raised her head, and with a smile upon her face, which was a moment before bathed in tears, said, “I think I have it!” ... “I think I can make a poultice and bind up my right hand in a sling, and with propriety ask the officers to register my name for me. I *thought* that would do.

(24; my italics)

Barrett deems as the true genius of the Crafts’ effort that Ellen “curiously and successfully constructs a ‘scene of writing’ in which no writing occurs” (334). Barrett contends that the lack of writing within *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* subverts the logic of the “mind/body split” which sought to place black people, enslaved people, in an infinite mode of alterity. The lack of writing suggests alternative mechanisms of the mind, as opposed to an absence, a resourcefulness that transcends the constraining limits of the “mind/body split.” In the previous block quote, I italicized words that illuminate Ellen’s active intelligence and interiority, emphasizing that Craft’s diction was mindful of the racist logic ex-slave narrators had to combat. Ellen’s craftiness continues in her suggestion to cover her face with a poultice to conceal her lack

of facial hair and softness of feature. The Crafts' strategy is not only a trick of the eye but also a trick of the mind, where prejudice is the prey of the Crafts. Ellen is hyper-aware of what the white male body represents within the scope of the white dominant ideology and, so, she fills in the gaps accordingly based on her own knowledge. Ellen's move from blackness to whiteness, from woman to man, is an "entrance into the 'body' of writing" and, thus, "amounts to an entrance into a 'body' of power" (Barrett 331). The Crafts manipulate the symbolic space, the possibility to signify, so as to escape slavery. Their escape is not just an achievement of their bodily prowess, as seen in other narratives characterized by brutal travel and brushes with physical violence. The text is also a testament to the Crafts' capacity to outwit those who deem them mindless and base, to undermine the dominant white ideology and its racist perception of blackness as primarily physical. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* certainly focuses a speculative attention on the white body and shows the workings of black consciousness, rather than traumatized black corporeality, yet there is something to be said about Mr. Johnson's disability, and its larger implications. In her essay "'A Complication of Complaints': Untangling Disability, Race and Gender in William and Ellen Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*," Ellen Samuels explicates how while the Crafts' narrative has been mined for its contribution to the discussion of race and gender in the late nineteenth-century, the discourse surrounding disability and its place within the text has been mostly absent and even ignored. Samuels argues that many critics experience a sort of amnesia when it comes to Mr. Johnson's disability, choosing instead to focus on Ellen's transformation from female to male, or her brief play of passing. Samuels contends that the success of the Crafts' scheme was dependent on the appearance of disability, and to ignore this component is to rob the text of a fuller socio-historical assessment:

This complex interdependency of identities, signified in the text when William tells an inquiring traveler that his master suffers from "a complication of complaints" (Craft 38), presents a troubling challenge to scholars of African American history. Both abolitionists and freedmen of the Crafts' time, and African Americanist scholars and critics today, appear deeply invested in the recuperation of the black body from a pathologizing and dehumanizing racism which often justified enslavement through arguments that people of African descent were inherently unable to take care of themselves—in other words, disabled. Thus we find throughout nineteenth and twentieth-century narratives and scholarship an emphasis on wholeness, uprightness, good health, and independence—all representational categories which the Crafts paradoxically needed to subvert in order to attain actual freedom. (18)

Samuels concedes that there is always a reason why certain narratives are privileged over others within academia and literary criticism. The erasure of disability, according to Samuels, is intentional because of efforts by the black intellectual and literary community to engrain black positivity within the critical understanding of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*. I argue that the Crafts' produce the subversion that Samuels deems necessary while also protecting the black body, or "removing" it as Barrett claims. Instead of showing an injured black body to warrant the attention of a sympathetic gaze, disability is displaced onto a presumably white subject, Ellen's "Mr. Johnson." The white, male, disabled planter effects a pitying countenance, allowing "his" white counterparts to feel compassionate towards "him." On the level of form, the Crafts' utilize sympathy, familiar to their nineteenth-century readership, who were avid consumers of sentimental literature, yet the Crafts' also remain invested in keeping the black

body (underneath disguise) safe from harm. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* removes the expected presentation of abused black bodies and replaces it with the morbid fascination instead from the sphere of whiteness. Sympathy is racialized under the logic of slavery, which Neary explains in the introduction of her larger work, *Fugitive Testimony: On the Visual Logic of Slave Narratives*. Neary maintains that many ex-slave narrators were keenly aware of how they were perceived by the white dominant ideology and sought to combat their objectified status via a discursive rhetorical methodology. Neary points to one narrative as a supreme example which also imparts the racialized bias component of sympathy:

[I]n her narrative *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson* (1866), published at the close of the Civil War, Jackson skillfully turns the potentially objectifying narrative gaze from her own abused body onto white Norther readers' practices of looking. Relating her experiences during the war, when Union troops entered her neighborhood and established themselves at a nearby arsenal, Jackson describes appealing to the Union forces for aid on two separate occasions. On the first, she and a fellow servant are turned away from the arsenal gates without being acknowledged. A few weeks later, after suffering a brutal beating at the hands of her master, Jackson makes a second attempt. She is immediately admitted into the arsenal and granted temporary protection. Aware of the effect her injured body has on both Southern and Northern white onlookers, Jackson first refuses to change her clothes when her master demands that she do so (shifting the shame of abuse from the locus of her body to that of his offended gaze); then she deliberately wears her stained, bloodied clothing to obtain help from the Union soldiers. (4-5)

Jackson's strategy, according to Neary, shows not only her "awareness" that her abused body be visible as another measure of authentication, but also an awareness of the power of exhibition, of publicizing her abuse. The Crafts' are similarly aware of how sympathy works in relation to how the black body is understood and perceived. It seems the brand of sympathy expressed within the nineteenth-century was largely informed by Adam Smith's assessment of sympathy in his work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Smith espouses sympathy as directly related to the imagination; if one can imagine and place themselves in similar circumstances as a counterpart then one is able to sympathize with that counterpart. Sympathy from whites of the North and South, as discussed by Neary, is limited and constrained by racial bias, where sympathy is only expressed if there is visible evidence of physical brutality. William and Ellen know that disability affords a promise of privacy and politeness from strangers that would not be extended if the truth of Ellen's identity was known. Disability has a specific function in this narrative. Beyond adding to Ellen's disguise, the sympathy Mr. Johnson garners from strangers unearths the absurdity of sympathy under the institution of slavery, where black people were unfairly excluded from the prospect of shared experience or pain. The logic was that white people could not possibly sympathize with enslaved black people because they were incapable of being enslaved, which we know from the narrative itself to be false. We see the lack of sympathy towards black enslaved people in the accounts of William and Ellen's separation from their families, where their respective masters were unable to sympathize with their ache for the priority of familial bonds. The Crafts' discursive displacement shifts disability from the black body onto the white body and we are shown the limits of sympathy. For example, Ellen, effectively disguised as Mr. Johnson, is accosted by a passenger on a train from Richmond,

Virginia, who imparts some medical advice upon recognizing Mr. Johnson as disabled. The man's adolescent daughters take an interest in Mr. Johnson too:

“What seems to be the matter with you, sir; may I be allowed to ask?”

“Inflammatory rheumatism, sir.” “Oh, that is very bad, sir,” said the kind gentleman: “I can sympathise with you; for I know from bitter experience what the rheumatism is.” If he did he knew a great deal more than Mr. Johnson. The gentleman though my master would feel better if he would lie down and rest himself; and as he was anxious to avoid conversation, he at once acted upon this suggestion. The ladies politely rose, took their extra shawls, and made a nice pillow for the invalid's head...After he had been laying a little while the ladies, I suppose, thought he was asleep; so one of them gave a long sigh, and said, in a quiet fascinating tone, “Papa, he seems to be a very nice young gentleman. But before papa could speak, the other lady quickly said, “Oh! Dear me, I never felt so much for a gentleman in my life!” To use an American expression, “they fell in love with the wrong chap.” (38-39)

Ellen as Mr. Johnson effects a sympathetic gaze. “He” is pitied by the older man and his daughters in a way that neither Ellen nor William would be treated if still in the confines of slavery. Ironically, Ellen's disguise which ought to desexualize her inspires an indirect sexualization of Mr. Johnson, a sort of misdirected lesbianism. Also, importantly, Mr. Johnson's male counterpart is able to sympathize simply because of a shared experience. The sympathetic gaze projected onto Mr. Johnson substitutes for the speculative and sexualized gaze often projected onto black female slaves. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* is a nineteenth-century narrative so conscious of its own visual power that for us, the contemporary reader, it

produces a cinematic effect. If we consider that the black woman's identity, enslaved or free, was correlated with an illicit and inescapable sexuality, then it is safe to assume that this rationale was extended into the visual scrutiny experienced by black women. The "male gaze" is often discussed in cinematic theory as objectifying, where the female body serves as a point of reference between the viewing spectator and the male character (the spectator embedded within the film). In her pioneering essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey outlines the operation of the male gaze in cinema as a fetishizing agent and explains cinema narrative's tendency to visually assert sexual difference:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact... Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic subject for the spectator within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. (12)

Importantly, the male gaze within the historical context of slavery differs from the cinematic gaze Mulvey describes because the gaze of the cinema is imagined, whereas the gaze experienced by black women was real and dangerous. Nevertheless, Mulvey's outline clarifies the Crafts' intentional remove of Ellen's body from the threatening gaze, and is applicable to how the "gaze" functions within this particular slave narrative. In *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, the male gaze is subverted, thus, ensuring the emergence of a female subjectivity. The gaze is subverted by way of a sort of castration; Ellen's portrayal of white male undoes her sex

and, thus, desexualizes a body so often hypersexualized. The possibility of spectator's taking pleasure in a black woman's pain is eliminated because of Ellen's disguise, crafted by herself.

The narrative's focus on the white body provokes a discussion not only about the objectification of black women, but also the limits of corporeal legibility. Ellen Craft, by this point in the narrative is effectively disguised as "Mr. Johnson," William's master, and a sickly planter. The Crafts' first test is on the train from Georgia where "Mr. Johnson" is spectator to "the three great topics of discussion in first-class circles in Georgia, namely, Niggers, Cotton, and the Abolitionists" (30). Ellen is disguised, but carefully avoids conversation as best she can, until she is on an omnibus from Savannah to South Carolina. The captain of the omnibus warns "Mr. Johnson" to keep a lookout that William does not desert him in the north for freedom:

Before my master could speak, a rough slave-dealer, who was sitting opposite, with both elbows on the table, and with a large piece of broiled fowl in his fingers, shook his head with emphasis, and in a deep Yankee tone, forced through his crowded mouth the words, "Sound doctrine, captain, very sound." He then dropped the chicken into the plate, leant back, placed his thumbs in the armholes of his fancy waistcoats, and continued, "I would not take a nigger to the North under no consideration... "Now stranger," addressing my master, "if you have made up your mind to sell that ere nigger, I am your man; just mention your price... This hard-featured, bristly-bearded, wire-headed, red-eyed monster, staring at my master as the serpent did at Eve.... (31-32)

This "slave-dealer," a man from the North, is characterized as brutish and without decorum, although he is supposedly "first-class." Ellen and William do not fall out of the action of the narrative, here, but the narrative closely observes this Yankee's mannerisms and speech. There is

a clear indictment of his character and this is done by way of Ellen and William's spectatorship, which we, the reader, also take part in. Ellen and William's proximity to the ideology which "rationalizes" the institution of slavery is evoked in this moment, where they passively "view" this ideology as it is espoused by this ironic figure, but actively indict this ideology by way of retelling their experience via the narrative. Spectacle here serves to reveal the ugliness of slavery but, more specifically, its all-consuming reach, not even a Northerner can escape the oppressive belief system and anxieties of the South. This moment complicates notions of race and gender in that Ellen is readily accepted as white and male because of her disguise and, also, Ellen and William's ability to mime appropriate behavior and conservation within the first-class compartment inserts a politics of respectability, which although problematic, is an effective narrative choice to challenge racist beliefs that slaves were absent of manners, or social comprehension. William and Ellen, disguised still as "Mr. Johnson," are later scrutinized under the gaze of a white ticket officer. William's body translates as untrustworthy and criminal to the officer. He questions William and insists that "Mr. Johnson" sign for him to continue their journey. Ellen points out "Mr. Johnson's" disability and asks the ticket officer to sign for "him" instead. Suddenly, the gaze is widened to a crowd. Craft writes:

This attracted the attention of all the passengers. Just then the young military officer with whom my master travelled and conversed on the steamer from Savannah stepped in...He shook hands with my master, and pretended to know all about him. He said, "I know his kin (friends) like a book;" and as the officer was known in Charleston, and was going to stop there with friends, the recognition was very much in my master's favor. (37)

Interestingly, the young military officer relays that he knows “Mr. Johnson’s” relations “like a book,” which evokes the postulation that bodies are legible, that we read bodies, people, the way we do books. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, however, complicates this notion of corporeal legibility and asks us what happens when we cannot read the body before us? Ellen, in her disguise, is perceived as not only white, but also as a male. The white male body, here, produces a familiarity and trust, whereas William’s body translates as a stranger, some sort of unknown of whom to be wary. In her essay, “Black womanhood in North American Women’s Slave Narratives,” Xiomara Santamarina describes the ways in which Ellen’s disguise complicated Nineteenth-century notions of gender, its limits, and its capabilities:

Craft’s emphasis on womanly virtues place Ellen, famous for her disguise as a white male, in a contradictory dilemma: how can she assert her womanhood to her readers when she escaped slavery dressed as a man? The engraving that circulated before and alongside the narrative (as its frontispiece), in which Ellen appears in her disguise as a white male, potentially only exacerbates this dilemma. (238)

Santamarina argues that Ellen’s gender-bending was not only vexed for the Crafts’ audience, but also troubled the tendency to align black femininity with an inaccessible white femininity.

William, like other ex-slave narrators, attempts to situate black femininity within the sphere of white femininity; however, Ellen’s disguise disturbs William’s effort to rectify the problems of black womanhood (as perceived by white dominant ideology). Santamarina’s critique of William’s editorial and authorial choices are certainly valid but, I argue, Ellen’s disguise functions as an assertion of her black womanhood by way of its remove; her disguise de-sexualizes the often hypersexualized black woman. William reifies patriarchal notions of womanhood, but Ellen’s disguise is the emergence of a proto-feminist identity. Even if Ellen is

quick to reassume her role as loving wife, her ability to mimic the role of a white male suggests her intense awareness of the structural powers that seek to oppress black women and men.

Ellen's portrait, like her disguise, subverts the male gaze and achieves authorization via the method of curation, by which I mean, that the Crafts' organize and present their respective identities and experience, antithetical to the one prescribed by white editorial sponsorship, and as result wrestle authorial control from white editors. William mentions the popular engraving of Ellen often include with the text within its first few pages. He writes: "The poultice is left off in the engraving, because the likeness could not have been taken well with it on" (24). The Crafts' authorization via curation, goes a step further, beyond the page, and their decision to organize and present Ellen's disguised image further suggests authorial control. It is a literal re-mastering of their experience on their own terms. Ellen is in control of her image, so commonly misread by those in her own community, when she first plans and executes her disguise. There is a further authorial control, beyond the context of the narrative, when Ellen asserts control by way of editing her image, as relayed by William, but also in her refusal to "pass," as she does not reject her roots. Barbara McCaskill explains the function of Ellen's engraving in her essay, "'Yours Very Truly': Ellen Craft—The Fugitive as Text and Artifact," where Ellen's identity is asserted by way of the engraving, rather than by the logic of femininity:

As much as this discourse connects Ellen to respectable womanhood, it in part contains her and eradicates other important aspects of her identity. The discourse sometimes seems at odds with the intrepid, insouciant Ellen who surfaces in her own text and whom readers had come to know through her oft-recounted story.

The imbroglio of male and female perspectives points to the pressures facing free African American women from two fronts—from their antislavery supporters and

from their own Black communities—to juggle public, activist lives with a popular image of womanhood that often contradicted these lives. (514)

McCaskill argues that Ellen's engraving makes up for the gaps produced within the text concerning Ellen's individual identity, as well as the limited understanding of Ellen's identity depending on the perspective. Ellen's mixed racial identity is integral to how her body is "misread" within the text. For example, Ellen's identity is mostly unquestioned in the first part of the narrative, when she is disguised, yet in the second part of the narrative, when she removes her disguise, her body creates discomfort and confusion, when she is adjacent to her husband. Shortly before Ellen and William leave for the refuge of Nova Scotia they briefly stay at a "hotel at St. John's," where Ellen and William still do not translate as "husband" and "wife" even though Ellen is no longer disguised (62):

We met the butler in the hall, to whom I said, "We wish to stop here to-night." He turned round, scratching his head, evidently much put about. But thinking that my wife was white, he replied, "We have plenty room for the lady, but I don't know about yourself; we never take in coloured folks." "Oh, don't trouble about me," I said; "if you have room for the lady, that will do; so please have the luggage taken to a bed-room." Which was immediately done, and my wife went upstairs to the apartment. (62)

The confusion of signification is also expressed in the treatment of engravings of William and Ellen that were never in the same frame, always separated. Foreman considers the ramifications of the Crafts' engravings and their larger meaning within a socio-historical context in her essay:

Indeed, in the absence of any representation of the Crafts as a couple, one way to read Mr. Johnson's visual popularity is to consider how race, gender, and class

crossings that can be framed and contained do not constitute the threat that the image of the phenotypically "white" Ellen with her phenotypically "black" husband might pose. Passing (through), in Ellen's case, is a transgression that obtains curio status. The more threatening transgression, on the other hand, is the legitimate (visual) miscegenation whose absence speaks volumes about the story others wished to tell about the Crafts. (525)

Ellen and William's portrait were treated not only as separate but also as in opposition to one another, such that there is a distancing of their familial as well as sexual relationship. Although Ellen and William did challenge traditional notions of race and gender for the time, there was a backlash against such a challenge. The public was not ready for a joint portrait of William and Ellen because it would force the acknowledgment of a willing and loving relationship between a black couple. The cultural landscape the Crafts traversed was dependent on the preservation of racial difference and while Ellen and William did not entirely unearth oppressive constructions, they did sow the seeds for a more egalitarian and fluid understanding of what it means to be black, white, male, and female. Although the public was not ready for a joint portrait of Ellen and William, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* had a progressive impact because it is a joint narrative that sought to bring unity in a world fixated on difference.

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