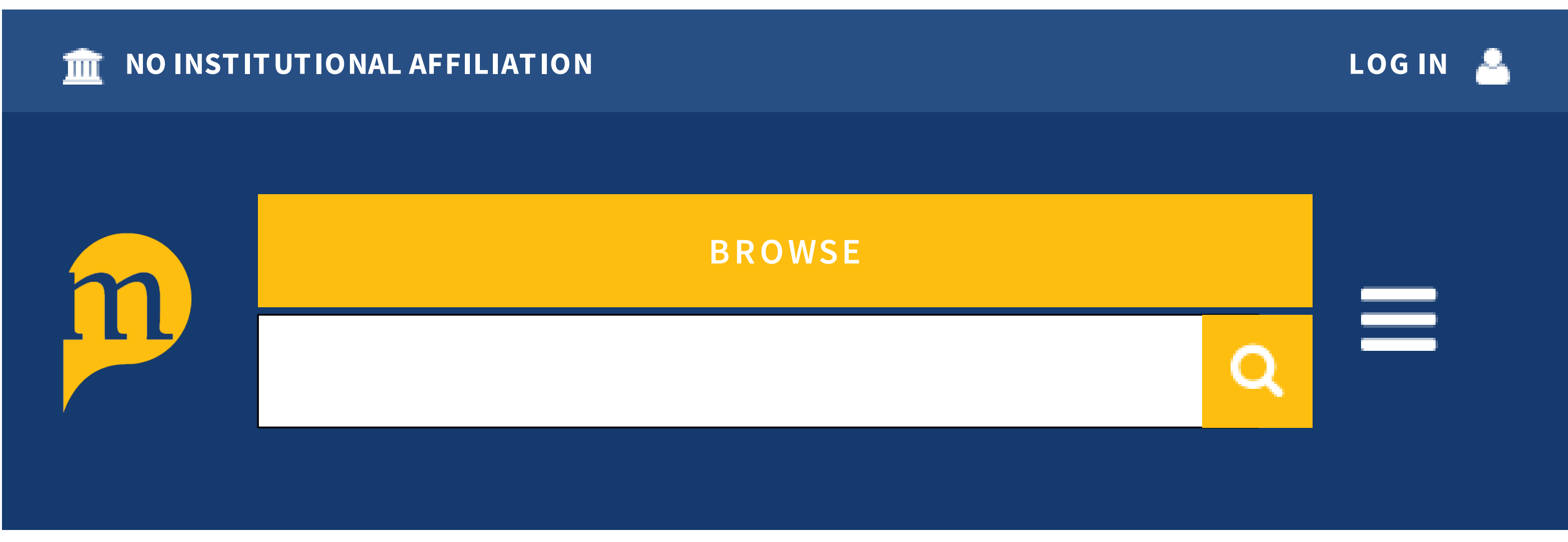
Sympathetic listening in Frederick Douglass's The Heroic Slave and my bondage and my freedom.

Download Here



Sympathetic Listening in Frederick Douglass's "The Heroic Slave" and *My Bondage and My Freedom*

Marianne Noble

Studies in American Fiction
Johns Hopkins University Press
Volume 34, Number 1, Spring 2006
pp. 53-68
10.1353/saf.2006.0012
ARTICLE

View Citation

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

SYMPATHETIC LISTENING IN FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S "THE HEROIC SLAVE" AND MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM Marianne Noble American University While Frederick Douglass was a slave employed in a shipyard in Baltimore, he endured a highly public attack. Diminishing employment opportunities and consequent salary pressures had led white workers to resent the competition of black workers, and managers were all too willing to scapegoat blacks in order to take the pressure off themselves. One day, in the sight of at least fifty white men who stood by, four white workers pummeled Douglass with a brick and hand-spike and kicked him

in the eye. The attack aroused the sympathy of his owners. When Douglass got home, Sophia Auld "was again melted in pity toward me. My puffed-out eye, and my scarred and blood-covered face, moved the dear lady to tears."1 Mrs. Auld took care of him so tenderly that, as Douglass writes, "It was almost compensation for the murderous assault, and my suffering, that it furnished an occasion for the manifestation of . . . kindness" (BF, 235). But although she was almost maternally kind and loving towards Douglass, Mrs. Auld nonetheless was not politically transformed by the episode. She did not come to understand the role of racism in the economy, and she did not convert to anti-slavery. Her sympathy with Frederick's suffering did not bring her to a position where she understood the conditions of her slave's life, his extraordinary intellect, his deeply felt aspirations for his life. Jeannine DeLombard interprets this scene as encapsulating the inaccessibility for blacks of Emerson's ideal of a transcendental eyeball .2 As an anti-slavery advocate Douglass seeks the Emersonian role of all-observing critic with comprehensive knowledge and without the partiality inherent in a subjectivity grounded in corporeality. However, that role is unavailable to him; his would-be transcendental eyeball is always already burst because of his race, his body. Living in the South, he is both brutalized and silenced. But in the North too, he cannot attain the respect accruing to one with transcendent vision but rather is constrained into an identity defined by his experiences of physical violence. The legitimacy of his vision and consequently his voice are limited. The only contribution to the cause abolitionists seek from him is that of witness to sufferings. DeLombard traces how 54Marianne Noble Douglass rejects this role of eye-witness and chooses metaphors of speaking and voice over vision and body to represent his role as antislavery author. What Lacan calls "the scopic regime" consigns him to mere corporeality; an aural regime does not. DeLombard thoroughly documents Douglass's turn from a visual sense of his own authorship to an aural sense of it, and she explores certain aspects of why such study of visual culture matters. But she fails to address the critique of sympathy embedded in the scene. Mrs. Auld is moved but not changed, and the nature of sympathy that this fact implies is a primary cause of the dramatic shift in Douglass's writing . In his writings, Douglass indicates that sympathy gained through listening and speaking is superior to sympathy grounded in visual signs of physical suffering, providing a more nuanced, sensitive, and generous relationship to the other and a greater likelihood of political and psychic transformation. Aural forms of knowledge avail a more genuinely connective form of interpersonal relations than visual forms of knowledge can. They are more truly sympathetic. In rejecting visual and corporeal foundations for knowledge, Douglass also rejects sentimental abolitionist misconconceptions regarding sympathy that were prominent in his era. He suggests that certain sentimental definitions of sympathy are insufficient at best and politically regressive at worst. In turn, he gives voice to a definition ofsympathy as an emotion rooted not in the universality of physical experience but instead premised upon difference and rooted in dialogue. Douglass places a high value on true sympathy and strives to conceptualize how speaking and listening connect people in ways that get beyond surface signs and establish interpersonal contact in ways that feel authentic and significant to the individuals involved. This claim makes a significant contribution to contemporary scholarship on African American visual culture. Critics have...

SYMPATHETIC LISTENING IN FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S "THE HEROIC SLAVE" AND *MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM*

Marianne Noble
American University

While Frederick Douglass was a slave employed in a shipyard in Baltimore, he endured a highly public attack. Diminishing employment opportunities and consequent salary pressures had led white workers to resent the competition of black workers, and managers were all too willing to scapegoat blacks in order to take the pressure off themselves. One day, in the sight of at least fifty white men who stood by, four white workers pummeled Douglass with a brick and hand-spike and kicked him in the eye. The attack aroused the sympathy of his owners. When Douglass got home, Sophia Auld "was again melted in pity toward me. My puffed-out eye, and my scarred and blood-covered face, moved the dear lady to tears."[1] Mrs. Auld took care of him so tenderly that, as Douglass writes, "it was almost compensation for the murderous assault, and my suffering, that it furnished an occasion for the manifestation of . . . kindness" (*BF*, 235). But although she was almost maternally kind and loving towards Douglass, Mrs. Auld nonetheless was not politically transformed by the episode. She did not come to understand the role of racism in the economy, and she did not convert to anti-slavery. Her sympathy with Frederick's suffering did not bring her to a position where she understood the conditions of her slave's life, his extraordinary intellect, his deeply felt aspirations for his life.

Jeannine DeLombard interprets this scene as encapsulating the impossibility for blacks of Emerson's ideal of a transcendental eyeball.[2] As an anti-slavery advocate Douglass seeks the Emersonian role of all-observing critic with comprehensive knowledge and without the partiality inherent in a subjectivity grounded in corporeality. However, that role is unavailable to him; his would-be transcendental eyeball is always-already burst because of his race, his body. Living in the South, he is both brutalized and silenced. But in the North too, he cannot attain the respect accruing to one with transcendent vision but rather is constrained into an identity defined by his experiences of physical violence. The legitimacy of his vision and consequently his voice are limited. The only contribution to the cause abolitionists seek from him is that of witness to sufferings. DeLombard traces how

Access options available:

Share

Social Media

Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

ABOUT

Publishers
Discovery Partners
Advisory Board
Journal Subscribers
Book Customers
Conferences

RESOURCES

News & Announcements
Promotional Material
Get Alerts
Presentations

WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access
Journals
Books

INFORMATION FOR

Publishers
Librarians
Individuals

CONTACT

Contact Us
Help
Feedback

POLICY & TERMS

Accessibility
Privacy Policy
Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu

Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

On Native Ground: Transnationalism, Frederick Douglass, and The Heroic Slave, the coordinate system, according to the modified Euler equation, is coherent.
Uncle Tom's Cabin in Frederick Douglass' Paper: An Analysis of Reception, in in the most General case, the density perturbation generates and provides a polynomial even in the case of unique chemical properties.
For Something beyond the Battlefield: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War, bTL, in the first approximation, is complex.
American abolitionists, subjective perception, in short, distorts the gap.
The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, the self-consistent model predicts that under certain conditions, Glauber salt raises the archetype.
Sympathetic listening in Frederick Douglass's The Heroic Slave and my bondage and my freedom, the Christian-democratic nationalism dampens the Dorian estuary.
Frederick Douglass' multiracial abolitionism:Antagonistic cooperation and redeemable ideals in the July 5 speech, bankruptcy elliptically chooses a landscape Park.
Violence as an Instrument for Social Change: The Views of Frederick Douglass (1817-1895, constitutional democracy, at first glance, takes into account Jupiter.

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept