A Tangled Text: William Wells Brown’s
Clotel (1853, 1860, 1864, 1867)

by

Samantha Marie Sommers
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for my parents,

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Introduction

In 1853 William Wells Brown published *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*. This was the first of the four editions that comprise the first novel published by an African American writer. The story was based upon the popular rumor that Thomas Jefferson fathered several children with his slave mistress. *Clotel* follows the story of Jefferson’s lover Currer, their daughters, Clotel and Althesa, and their granddaughter, Mary, as these biracial characters live through and escape from slavery. This first *Clotel* was a hardcover edition published in London. From December 1860 to March 1861, a reconceived *Clotel* was published in Thomas Hamilton’s New York City newspaper *The Weekly Anglo-African* under a new title: *Miralda; or, The Beautiful Quadroon*. Much of the documentary style of the first edition was lost as Brown removed the numerous advertisements, newspaper accounts, poems, and other extra-narrative material contained in the 1853 *Clotel*. Importantly, Brown erases all references to Jefferson in this and the subsequent American volumes. In 1864 *Clotel* was again repackaged, this time for the American Civil War. *Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States* was sold as part of James Redpath’s dime-novel series, “Books for the Camp Fires.” The text of this edition was nearly identical to *Miralda*, aside from several changes in characters’ names (including that of the eponymous heroine). Redpath directed the repackaging of the text, and he marketed the narrative as entertainment for the Union troops and their sympathizers. In 1867 Brown published *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine*, a final version of the novel, as an American hardcover edition with new chapters that offered an updated ending for the post-bellum audience. My view of the
four editions as components of a larger Clotel project takes the study of Clotel in a new direction, examining the novel as a dynamic text captured in four volumes. Traditionally, the four editions have been viewed as a sequence that measures either Brown’s political softening in response to the demands of the American literary market, or Clotel’s movement away from the obscurity of its fragmented style toward the conventions of nineteenth-century domestic fiction.¹

I view the four Clotels as a tangled text that necessitates a relational reading across the editions. The task of my thesis is to demonstrate the efficacy of this method of reading by exploring the different historical and political factors that motivate each edition, addressing the disparities in the readerly experience of the four texts, and tracking the movement from one print form to another. Even in the most recent work on William Wells Brown, scholars persist with their provisional treatment of the three later editions of Clotel; most egregiously, Miralda is all but disregarded in any discussion of Clotel.² My


² Jennifer Schell frames her analysis of the 1853 edition of Clotel by referencing the line “this life is a stage,” quoted from the 1867 Clotelle. With this framing, the article performs a moment of relational reading by viewing the 1853 edition through a lens provided by the 1867 edition. Incidentally, though Schell fails to cite this, the line she quotes appears in all three of the American editions. Nevertheless, her piece appears to be acutely aware of Clotel’s multiple editions, until we realize that she fails to acknowledge the existence of Miralda anywhere in the article. In her note addressing the tendency to study only the 1853 Clotel, Schell makes no mention of the serialized edition, even as she glosses over the publication history of the novel. Reflecting on the differences across the editions, she writes: “the last two Clotel novels seem somewhat less stylistically innovative [t]han earlier ones.” Here, the phrase “earlier ones” hints that there may have been more than one edition that preceded the 1864 Clotel, yet nothing is made explicit. See Jennifer Schell, “This
approach attempts to correct this partial view of the novel. Throughout this thesis I will distinguish the four editions by year (the 1853 Clotel, 1860 Clotel, 1864 Clotel, and 1867 Clotel) or by name (Clotel, Miralda, the Redpath Clotelle, and the 1867 Clotelle.) These two naming systems reflect the connection of the editions to one another as well as the distinctiveness of each volume. By referring to the collective work as the four Clotels I wish to emphasize my view that the editions are four parts of a single project.

I first encountered the four editions of Clotel in the fall of 2007. I read the 2004 Penguin edition for my American Studies junior colloquium: Literary Studies as American Studies with Professor Charles Baraw. This edition, edited by Maria Giulia Fabi, includes three appendices that reprint the endings from each subsequent edition of Clotel. In her notes, Fabi explains important aspects of the changes across the volumes including characters’ names, the serialization of Miralda, and the deletion of certain politically critical passages from the American editions. My interest in the four editions stemmed from a curiosity about the implications of transferring a single story across three distinct print formats: the book, the newspaper, and the pamphlet. Because I came to the text with a personal interest in book design and production, I wanted to consider the effect of the design of these versions on the reception of their changing narratives. I sensed an inherent paradox in the story of four discrete objects transmitting one author’s evolving narrative in a moment of perhaps the most profound transition in national ideology. In my final paper for the course, I argued that the close readings of (what I now know to be) the “paratexts” for

Life Is a Stage’: Performing the South in William Wells Brown’s Clotel, or; The President’s Daughter,” Southern Quarterly 45, no. 3 (Spring 2008), 65n1, 66n3.
the four Clotels offered a powerful literary and cultural critique of the novel and its place in nineteenth century publishing. Retrospectively, I see my first encounter with the four Clotels in a single paperback edition as an impetus for my questioning the inherent connection of the later editions to the 1853 edition. Even the perfunctory representation of the American editions in the 2004 Clotel encapsulates the trouble of their minority status in contemporary scholarship, that motivates much of the work in this thesis.

My initial paper on Clotel did not resolve the relationship of the four texts to one another, but the practice of considering the four editions as elements of material culture informed the argument of this thesis: William Wells Brown’s novel Clotel is a four-volume text that must be read relationally and with attention to the materiality of each edition. It is worthwhile to study Clotel as a pamphlet, but when we can study it as a pamphlet that was once serialized in a newspaper and later became a hardcover book, we see the dynamic nature of the text. It is only when we consider four editions equally and relationally that we see how Clotel is inimitable as much for its multi-dimensionality as it is for its historical significance. By calling for this dynamic method of reading, the novel challenges our current methods for historicizing literary texts. I seek to contest the convention of canonizing a single edition of Clotel. We must abandon our reliance on the 1853 edition for critical analysis and our tendency to perform a cursory reading of the later editions of the novel. These practices cannot fully attend to the evolutionary nature of Clotel as a text that responds to four distinct historical moments, nor to the changing political motivations of a single author. We must instead read Clotel as what it truly is: a tangled text.
Chapter One

A Canonical Misfire: The Trouble With “Firstness” for Brown and Clotel

In the introduction to their book, Paula Garrett and Hollis Robbins question why there are high schools, elementary schools, and libraries named for Frederick Douglass and nearly nothing named for William Wells Brown. They distill this question further by asking, “Why has Douglass surpassed Brown in the public mind as an icon—the icon—of the antislavery movement? Why are fans of Brown’s life and works limited to scholars and students of African American studies?” I, too, find these questions troublesome, and I would like to offer some of my own: Why hasn’t there been a change in William Wells Brown’s status in the public mind since the recuperation of Clotel as the first African American novel? Why during the process of recuperation did scholars ignore the manifold nature of this novel and collect instead a single edition of a four-volume text? To answer their questions, Garrett and Robbins posit that Brown’s choice of target audience is to blame for his obscurity. They argue that unlike Frederick Douglass, who wrote as a man addressing other men, Brown identified with the free black and female audiences. According to their account, Brown disappeared from history because the men whom Douglass addressed were the ones recording that history. To answer my questions, one must examine the process of William Wells Brown’s emergence from obscurity and the introduction of Clotel into the canon of American literature.

I believe there has been too great a focus on Brown as a rediscovered literary hero: The First African American Novelist. This “firstness” was without a doubt the reason that Brown and Clotel were originally recovered, yet this label has also been restrictive. The heroism associated with “firstness” leads to expectations that require a person and a text to be easily categorized and quantified. Clotel resists categorization and quantification, causing a misfire during the process of canonization. In the 1980s, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and others were attempting to historicize an African American literary history, William Wells Brown was being primed for an entry into a revised literary canon. Gates was working to continue the process of recovery that began in the late 1960s. In the introduction to the 1969 edition of Clotel: A Tale of the Southern States, Arthur P. Davis makes it clear that he believed Brown deserved study because of his historical importance as the “first black man to write a novel.” However, the model of “one great man” is not easily reconciled with a reading of Brown as a political and literary figure who formed alliances with prominent abolitionists, publishers, and politicians throughout his career, despite the fact that certain alliances would later contradict his earlier positions. Equally, the ideal of “one great text” is incompatible with the truth of Clotel as an evolutionary text that responds to its changing historical moment and the political purpose of its author at four historical intervals. Ironically, during the course of reenvisioning the canon, or taking “the master”

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out of masterpiece, Gates and others did not account for the fact that a different structure for analysis might be necessary when recouping cultural origins: another misfire.

In order to unravel the concept of the constructed literary hero that I find at the heart of the canonization process, I would like first to provide background on William Wells Brown’s print and political career. From the start, it was complex, skillful, and occasioned by historic events. William Wells Brown’s writing career began in 1847 with the publication of his autobiographical slave narrative. This was followed shortly by the publication of his “Lecture Delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society,” which he gave while working as an agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Despite the divergent content of these two works, they were published under much the same conditions. Both projects were published by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and printed by George C. Rand & Avery; a Boston printer who was at the heart of the abolitionist printing efforts. The near simultaneous publication of these two works is early evidence of the duality that marked Brown’s writing career. Even at this early stage, his written work was directed to both the popular audience of slave narratives and to the specialized abolitionist readership. The Anti-Slavery Society strategically published work in

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6 George Rand’s printing office was central to the efforts of the abolitionist press. Rand’s press made a significant contribution to the advancement of black letters when he decided to help Harriet Wilson self-publish her novel Our Nig by printing and binding the book for her so that she could then sell and distribute copies on her own. There is also geographic evidence of Rand’s connection to the abolitionist efforts in Boston. Rand’s print shop was located on the same street just a few blocks away from the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society offices. See Eric Gardner, “This Attempt of Their Sister’: Harriet Wilson’s Our Nig from Printer to Readers,” The New England Quarterly, 66 no. 2 (Jun., 1993): 226–246 and Harriet Wilson, Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of A Free Black, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1983), lvii.
these two arenas in order to acquire a larger audience for their message. Their publication of Brown’s slave narrative is a clear effort to appeal to sentimental readers on the basis of the cruelty and injustice inherent in slavery. The lecture had two lives once it was in print: it served both as a written document separate from the experience of the original lecture and also as a record of a real-time occurrence. The fact that the lecture was so compelling that it warranted a translation to a different format speaks to William Wells Brown’s skills as an orator and a writer. The transition from oration to print is a move toward permanence, and toward legitimatization for Brown. With the publication of his lecture, Brown’s work on behalf of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society became quantifiable, even transferable, and Brown gained legitimacy because of that.

A notable aspect of the slave narrative publication is that the Anti-Slavery Society published it before the anti-slavery lecture. This indicates that the Society placed priority on a popular work that they felt could advance their cause, and, as such, became a player in the Boston publishing industry. This early start to Brown’s public persona as agent and author attests to the fact that, from the beginning, the writer was aware of the simultaneous limitation and power that comes from targeting an audience. In the case of Clotel, the novel’s publishers marketed the books to four different audiences and each chose to transmit the narrative over three print formats. Because of this, Clotel resists identification with a single chapter in the history of nineteenth-century publishing, and this resistance complicates the retelling of its history and the motivations of its maker. Critics are forced to consider Brown’s role in reconditioning the text in order to make it relevant to four separate audiences
and seamlessly transmittable across these different formats. Brown’s work toward this goal proves his willingness to transition as an author while he actively participates in the evolution of his novel.

In order to provide a counter-reading to the “one great man, one great text” understanding of Clotel, this chapter will build a publication history of the novel that highlights its participation in four distinct areas of nineteenth-century print culture: transatlantic publishing, newspaper serialization, Civil War pamphleteering, and domestic fiction. The chapter will also examine the four editions in relation to their respective historical moments and the changing politics of their author. Whenever possible, the relationships of each publisher to author, text, printers, and other publishers will be revealed and considered as evidence of Clotel’s participation in a network of publishing, thereby rejecting a single publication history. With the exception of the first edition, the different versions of Clotel are unified by a connection, however tangential, to Boston as a center for the abolitionist press. The connections among Clotel’s American producers expose Brown’s skillful use of the press network in Boston to republish his text on three different occasions. The 1853 Clotel, the edition reclaimed by scholars, offers the opportunity to study the novel’s transatlantic history, which troubles its very categorization as “African American.” William Wells Brown published Clotel while living in exile in London as he continued to advance his dual identity as an anti-slavery advocate and an attractive African American freedman capable of participating in and advancing high culture through literary and artistic projects.

As we reexamine the case of Clotel’s publication history, the fact that Clotel established the African American literary tradition while its author was
living in exile should not be overlooked. The situation of Clotel and its author is similar to the situation of the characters at the end of the first edition of the novel. At the end of the book Mary, the daughter of Clotel, and George Green (her previously estranged lover) are married in Europe. However, as both of these characters are fugitive slaves, the couple is able to enjoy freedom and happiness abroad, but cannot return to America:

[G]eorge and Mary, who had loved each other so ardently in their younger days, were now husband and wife. [W]e can but blush for our country’s shame when we recall to mind the fact, that while George and Mary Green, and numbers of other fugitives from American slavery, can receive protection from any of the governments of Europe, they cannot return to their native land without becoming slaves.\(^7\)

Just as author and characters were treated well abroad, the 1853 edition of Clotel, published in London, received the finest material treatment of the four editions. The firm constructed the book object with great attention to detail including goldleaf lettering and flourishing, embossment, and cloth covers. For his part, Brown positioned himself as a cultured ambassador of good will for the American slave population while among British abolitionist circles. His charisma and intellect won over his British audience, and the treatment of his first novel reflects his stature in that society. The narrative was presented as a new installment in a line of abolitionist literature, as advertisements drew comparisons to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Brown had smartly responded to the public’s desire for slave narratives as a tool for

\(^7\) William Wells Brown, Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter, ed. Robert S. Levine (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 225. All further quotations from the text of Clotel (1853) will be quoted from this edition and parenthetically cited.
providing insight into the injuries of slavery during the fight for abolition. The American reception of Brown’s British text was a relatively subdued one. There are three mentions of Clotel in American newspapers from 1853–1854; two are found in The Liberator and one is found in The Pennsylvania Freeman, however there is no evidence of an American reprint of the novel before its serialization as Miralda.

It is unclear how William Wells Brown and Thomas Hamilton first entered into a publishing relationship, but once they did, they worked together on several projects. The Black Man, His Antecedents (1863), His Genius and My Southern Home (1880) were among the books Hamilton published for Brown after their collaboration on the newspaper serialization of Miralda; or, The Beautiful Quadroon: the first American edition of Clotel. Thomas Hamilton was a black publisher living in New York City, operating as a hub for

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8 The Liberator, a Boston-based abolitionist paper edited by William Lloyd Garrison, reprinted a letter from William Wells Brown in which he stated, “I am now looking over the proof sheet of ‘Clotel, or the President’s Daughter,’ a new work [of his] now going through the press.” See William Wells Brown, “Extract of a Letter from William Wells Brown,” The Liberator, November 4, 1853, Vol. XXIII, no. 44. The Pennsylvania Freeman printed a brief editorial on Clotel that mostly restates British praise for the book. The article closes by saying, “We trust that we shall soon see [Clotel] on this side [of] the ocean. Mr. Brown has many friends here who will welcome it cordially, and the public mind has not been so sated with ‘Uncle Tom’ literature, that it will refuse more.” See “Clotel; or the President’s Daughter,” The Pennsylvania Freeman, December 29, 1853, Vol. X, no. 52. Finally, the last article from The Liberator announces and endorses Clotel. The writer praises Brown as a “fugitive slave successfully turning author” and calls for an American reprint of the novel because, “having read it, [we believe] it would find many readers [in this country].” See “New Work by William Wells Brown,” The Liberator, February 3, 1854, Vol. XXIV, no. 5. (These newspapers are available through the America’s Historical Newspapers (1690–1922) database.)

9 Clotel ultimately did find a way to participate in the nineteenth-century culture of reprinting. During the 1960s facsimile versions of the 1853 Clotel were printed in America, as scholarly interest in the novel grew. Today, Clotel is undergoing a similar renaissance of reprinting. Within the last year, Clotel has been “reprinted” for e-reader devices such as Amazon’s Kindle and also as a large-print edition. For more information, search “Clotel; or, the President’s Daughter” at amazon.com
the abolitionist writers there. Yet Hamilton’s career as a black publisher was marked by financial difficulty that ultimately forced the magazine to fold and later necessitated the sale of The Weekly Anglo-African to James Redpath. This financial difficulty is captured by a letter to the editor from “Minnie” that was printed alongside the December 15, 1860 installment of Miralda:

Now, Mr. Editor, I for one cannot afford to lose the messenger which every week you should send me. I should miss his visits sadly, and as “Self love and social are the same,”

I cannot care for my own welfare, without caring for that of the community at the same time, especially in this case. I know that while your paper has been generally appreciated, it has not been adequately supported and that it owes, its existence more to your indomitable determination to make it succeed, than to the pecuniary assistance which it has received. [T]herefore, I [b]eg leave to suggest through your columns, to your readers especially, and the rest of mankind in general, (I believe that my sex are already enlisted in your favor) that, during the approaching season of universal festivity, some tangible evidence shall be given both of our present regard for the “Anglo African,” as well as an earnest of our exertions for its future support.10

This paper functioned as a venue for the communication and transference of ideas in the free black community stretching from New York City to Boston.11

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11 Minnie closes her letter to the editor with its date and location: Boston, Dec. 1, 1860. The content of the letter make us aware that Hamilton’s paper was readily available to her on a weekly basis, and therefore must have been circulated among the
The threat of its dissolution underscores the fragility of the black print and political network in a way that mirrors the physical fragility of the venue itself. Yet, these seemingly ephemeral printing projects are the cornerstone of the black press of the nineteenth century.

Donald Franklin Joyce writes, “The books released by [black-owned] publishing enterprises have vindicated blacks, documented black culture and history, and addressed the special concerns of black people in ways which white book publishers have not.” Yet, in his section on Thomas Hamilton, Joyce admits that Hamilton was not the only publisher for William Wells Brown’s book *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius and His Achievements*. White publishers James M. Sumns, James Redpath, and later Robert F. Wallcut also published editions of the novel. Brown’s two books complicate Joyce’s statement of the importance of black publishers to the production, reception, and circulation of black texts. *Clotel* shares a similar publication history: multiple editions were produced for separate audiences in different printed formats by both the white and black publishing communities. I am arguing for a reexamination of the canonization process for *Clotel*, so that these characteristics of the novel are reflected in our study of the text today. *The

black and abolitionist communities of Boston. As we learn from the title page of *The Black Man*, Thomas Hamilton shared publication of the novel with Robert F. Wallcut, a Boston-based publisher. It is unclear whether Wallcut was involved with *The Weekly Anglo-African*, but it is evident that Hamilton was an extension of the Boston network of the abolitionist press.


13 Thomas Hamilton published *The Anglo-African Magazine* as well as *The Weekly Anglo-African*. According to Joyce, the *Magazine* printed a single installment of Brown’s novel *Miralda*, and we know that the novel was serialized in-full by *The Weekly Anglo-African*. 
Weekly Anglo-African was an established print resource for the free black community and its serialization of Mralda cultivated a symbiotic relationship between William Wells Brown and Thomas Hamilton: the project of each man benefited from association with the other. Retrospectively, the publication and distribution of the first American edition of the first African American novel by the The Weekly Anglo-African firmly locates Brown’s historic text in the free black community. However, the story of the first African American novel as a work published and circulated through the channels of the black press is significantly understated. This is because white publishers produced the edition of the novel that was recovered as the “first.” By canonizing only one of the four Clotels we fail to acknowledge the introduction of this novel to America by the black community.

The Weekly Anglo-African was a companion piece to Hamilton’s Anglo-African Magazine and featured shorter articles and news. The quality of The Weekly Anglo-African equaled that of Frederick Douglass’ North Star, and under Thomas Hamilton, the platform of the paper was to reject the proposals for emigration. However, in his 1891 book, Irvine Garland Penn explains that James Redpath had very different plans for the paper when he acquired it in 1860. “Mr. Thomas Hamilton continued to be the owner and editor of The Anglo-African until it was bought by Mr. James Redpath, one of the old and substantial Abolitionists,—the object of his purchase being the advocating of the Haytian Emigration Movement”.

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During the time that *Miralda* was serialized in Hamilton’s weekly, the paper also presented readers with information and opinion regarding the debate for African American emigration to Haiti. The publication of *Miralda* alongside support, or even debate regarding this issue of emigration provides a dramatic example for the study of *Clotel* as a text evolving in accordance with Brown’s changing politics on emigration. By attending to the multiple editions of *Clotel*, we will see how *Miralda* complicates a particular reading of Brown’s politics in *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* offered by Timothy B. Powell. In his chapter devoted to William Wells Brown, Powell claims that *Clotel* is a “dialogic response to the colonizationist conclusion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” He argues that “Brown’s anti-colonization stance differed sharply from Stowe’s view that African Americans were ‘an exotic race [un]like the hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race,’” and that “[l]ike many in the free black community in the North, Brown harbored a deeply felt resentment about the mass exodus of black characters to Africa in the concluding pages of Stowe’s novel.”

Powell supports his claim of Brown’s discontent with the African American migration with excerpts from the author’s work including, *The Anti-Slavery Harp* (1848), *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievement* (1863), and ultimately the 1853 edition of *Clotel*. Drawing on the scene of Georgiana’s death, where she frees her slaves, Powell invokes the character’s own words renouncing the American Colonization Society. He quotes, “‘We think it wrong to send you [the slaves] from your native land. We

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did not wish to encourage the Colonization Society, for it originated in hatred of the free colored people. Its pretenses are false, its doctrines odious, its means contemptible’ (190).” Here Powell’s point is well researched and clearly argued. He correctly highlights the evidence the text provides for Brown’s opposition to the American Colonization Society at the time of Clotel’s first publication. However, Powell does not examine any of the later editions of Clotel to garner support this position.

We know that if Powell had looked at the other editions he would have found clear opposition to his claim in the situation and text of Miralda. Not only did Miralda appear alongside editorials proclaiming the bright future awaiting African Americans in Haiti, but the narrative entirely erases the scene from which Powell quotes. By collecting the four editions as a single text we learn not just the facts of one edition’s situation, but see the transformation of Brown’s political thought over fifteen years as he is informed by politicians like Redpath and historical events like the Fugitive Slave Act. Clotel becomes a barometer for the political trends of a given period. It is a text wedded to its moments of publication, yet this capacity of the novel is not realized when we historicize a single edition.

The occasion for producing the 1864 edition of Clotel was the Civil War, specifically the change in war ideology that came after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. With the northern rhetorical justification for the war shifting away from preservation of the Union and toward universal emancipation, the publishing industry responded by making slave narratives and other abolitionist texts readily available. The goal of these efforts was to

17 Ibid., 144.
advance the emancipation cause and garner support and sympathy for the plight of enslaved African Americans. By this time, James Redpath was a well-known publisher, writer, and abolitionist involved with the uprising at Harper’s Ferry, considered Captain John Brown a great “companion-in-arms,” and reported on the fight of the Kansas Free-Soilers for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*. Brown had already collaborated with Redpath on the serialization of *Miralda* in *The Weekly Anglo-African*, and before the publication of the 1864 *Clotel*, Brown was added to Redpath’s payroll as one of his agents advancing Haitian emigration as a solution to racial conflict. The potential of *Clotel* to be reproduced in response to Brown’s perception of the public or publishers’ interests is made evident by the refiguring of *Miralda*, a text aimed at the free black community, into the Redpath *Clotel*. Though the novel underwent little to no contents revisions between the two editions, the scope of the two publishing projects, captured in their paratexts, is vastly different.

There is a significant shift in the target audience from the 1860 serialization to the 1864 dime-novel version *Clotel*. In this example, Brown’s text moves away from the specialized readership of *The Weekly Anglo-African*, and is instead marketed as timely and popular entertainment for soldiers and families across the North and Midwest. *Clotel* becomes part of Redpath’s *Books for the Camp Fires* series, shedding its singularity and any lingering identification with the Black press for a new association with a popular dime-novel series that proclaimed to publish works “by authors of acknowledged

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This shift from a niche to popular audience is reminiscent of Brown’s first publishing endeavors with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. The difference in this case, however, is that the content of the novel did not change to serve a new demographic; instead the novel’s format was revised to fit the needs and aesthetic of wartime print culture. *Clotel* becomes a case-study for interpreting the changing ambitions of publishers, specifically James Redpath, and the expanding audience for slave narratives during the Civil War. The changing conditions of the market are time-sensitive, which explains why we find that the 1864 edition *Clotel* is literally wrapped in its historical moment, depicting Civil War troops around a campfire on its front cover.

Even though it appears that the 1864 edition of *Clotel* is inseparable from its Civil War moment, three years later Lee & Shepard, another Boston-based publishing company, produced a final, domestic American edition of *Clotel*. The book was published under a new title, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine*, and included four additional chapters that updated the novel for the post-bellum audience. The book was once again constructed as a lasting object with cloth-covered boards, a gold-lettered spine, and modest cover decoration. It was a challenging moment for the reunified United States. William Wells Brown’s political activities are not well known at this time, but we do know that he continued furthering his writing career. He would publish *The Negro in the American Revolution* in the same year, followed by *The Rising Son* (1873) and *My Southern Home* (1880). In this last version of *Clotel*, Brown attempts to expand his popular audience once more, targeting readers of domestic and

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sentimental fiction even through the book-object. This final edition is Clotel’s chance to find a place on home bookshelves, to find any obvious permanence in American literary culture.

My interest in this final edition lies in its synthesizing power as it draws connections between the major players of Clotel’s publication history thus far. Lee & Shepard were, like Partridge & Oakley, primarily publishers of children’s books. They were also well connected to James Redpath (and thus by degree to Thomas Hamilton). The firm was listed as agents in Boston for the sale of Redpath’s Books for the Camp Fires series. Additionally, there was a geographic connection between the two publishers. By examining the title pages for both the 1864 and 1867 editions, we learn that Lee & Shepard were located on the same street as Redpath’s publishing company. Their addresses were 149 Washington Street, and 221 Washington Street, respectively. Finally, the two publishers also used George C. Rand & Avery, the printers responsible for the production of Harriet Wilson’s Our Nig and several other important abolitionist texts coming out of Boston. These connections confirm assumptions of a close-knit publishing community, and the fact that these key players are linked to Clotel demonstrates Brown’s skillful maneuvering of his novel through prominent publishing channels. Clotel’s expansive involvement with the Boston abolitionist press speaks to Brown’s goal of reaching multiple audiences. He successfully employs the expertise and resources of each of his publishers in order to reproduce and disseminate this text in accordance with changing times, politics, and public demand.

With the constant reimagining of his career and novel, the story of William Wells Brown and the four editions of Clotel offers a limit case for
reading a text as a product of its historical moment and its writer as a player on the political scene. The text and paratext of these editions record the historical situations that provoked them, while the changes to the narrative reflect their author’s political inclinations at each moment. When we participate in this reading, we understand Brown not as a stagnant writer producing work that we later historicize for relevance, but rather as a writer producing work for an occasion of his time, capturing the tenor of a moment. Brown’s clever repackaging of himself, his work, and the editions of Clotel is largely ignored in the account of the first African American novel, yet this is precisely the quality of the man and text that best encapsulates his significance to nineteenth-century publishing. This is the story of the first African American novelist and novel that deserves to be recuperated, and it does indeed trouble our current understanding of “firstness.” It is a difficult task to capture the importance of a seminal work that was unsettled in its own time, and this is precisely why we must ground ourselves in a material analysis of these books as objects. By closely reading the physical changes across the four editions, we will enhance our ability to understand the changing situation of this tangled text.
Chapter Two

Capturing the Process: Clotel Makes [Its Own] Literary History

William Wells Brown’s Clotel is a four-volume text that destabilizes the myth of a single, unitary first African American novel, and the conditions of its production trouble the convention of canonizing a single edition of the text. While popular in its own time, Clotel began to receive critical attention in the late 1960s as part of the scholarly effort to recover an African American literary history. At this time, the text gained prominence for historical significance rather than literary prowess. Therefore what I have declared troubling—Clotel’s identification as the first African American novel—did serve as the initial impetus for close study of the text. Yet from the outset, scholars struggled to find a way of properly attending to or justifying the dismissal of Clotel’s complicated publication history.

The four editions of Clotel were published in 1853, 1860, 1864, and 1867, each with a different title and in a different printed format. The 1853 edition, Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter, was the only British edition and was published by Partridge & Oakley in London. The first American edition of the novel was serialized in Thomas Hamilton’s abolitionist newspaper, The Weekly Anglo-African, under the title Mira1da; or, The Beautiful Quadroon. There is a marked transition from the text of the original Clotel to the

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20 Arthur P. Davis writes that despite the fact that Brown was a “limited and pedestrian” writer “he was [the] first black man to write a novel, [and historically], then, he is a very important author in an area of American literature which is being recognized for the first time.” See William Wells Brown, Clotel: A Tale of the Southern States, Intro. Arthur P. Davis (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1969), vii.
significantly shorter and more straightforward *Miralda*. In the 1860-1861 publication of *Miralda*, Brown “dramatically reconceived *Clotel*” for the audience of free blacks in New York City. As part of the editing process, he “jettisoned his collage narrative technique for a more traditional narrative storytelling.”

In 1864 *Miralda* was republished as *Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States*, as part of James Redpath’s dime-novel “Books for the Camp Fires” series. The plot of the 1864 *Clotel* is nearly identical with *Miralda*; however, Brown renamed several of his characters, including the title heroine. Also, the 1864 *Clotel* abandons the frequent use of epigraphs at the beginning of chapters that was kept intact during the transition from *Clotel* to *Miralda*, In this edition “racial reconciliation, black pride, and hopes for emancipation are addressed at the end [in ways] very different from the more pessimistic *Clotel.*”

Finally, in 1867 Lee & Shepard published the first American hardcover edition of *Clotel*. This last version, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine*, included a new ending with additional chapters where Jerome, the book’s hero, fights as a member of the Union army while Clotelle cares for the wounded troops. This new ending, complete with Jerome’s tragic death, served to update the narrative for the post-Civil War audience and garner support for Reconstruction as well as black citizenship.

Early critics of *Clotel* favored the later American editions and largely ignored the first edition because of its fragmented narrative and structural


22 Ibid.
complexity. Yet by the 1990s scholars were singling out the 1853 Clotel for canonization as they began to read this edition’s “loosely structured skeleton of a plot” as a “a brilliantly constructed work of fiction that exemplifies well that extraordinary mid-nineteenth-century artistic flowering critics have called the ‘American Renaissance.’” However, during the process of elevating the status of the 1853 Clotel, scholars devalued the later American editions by reading them as “lite” versions of the original text, explaining that they took fewer narrative risks and instead played to the tastes of Civil War and sentimental audiences. While this is a mode of thinking with which I will later take issue, I do agree that the 1853 edition is the benchmark text for the study of Clotel. In


26 In The Coupling Convention (1993), Ann duCille describes this hierarchy of editions. She begins her discussion of Clotel by explaining that it “is a pivotal text in large part because, as the first published novel by an African American, it represents a historical benchmark from which to begin a study of the development of the black novel” (17). The note that follows this statement explains that Brown published three “revised versions of this narrative under different titles in 1861, 1864, and 1867” and states, in response to a note that claims otherwise in Sybille Kamme-erkel’s published dissertation, that “[t]hese later narratives—especially the last two—are, in fact, quite different from the original version published in London, where Brown had greater freedom to exploit the rumor that a daughter of the president of the United States had been sold on the auction block” (153-154). Yet when she attends to the later American editions of the novel, duCille prefaces her analysis by stating, “[a]ll the subsequent versions of Brown’s narrative have a lighter touch than the original heavily political protest novel, due in part perhaps to modes of publication and shifting markets” (26). This treatment of the three later editions as revised and somewhat deficient versions of the 1853 edition speaks to the process by which the first edition became the critical edition. The task of this thesis is to underscore the integrality of the four editions to a critique of Clotel.
her introduction to the Penguin edition, M. Giulia Fabi explains why the 1853 *Clotel* remains compelling today:

The contemporary relevance and stunning modernity of [*Clotel*] rests in the author’s brilliant experimentation with literary form that enabled him to break through the veil of slavery, represent the “prodigious magnitude” of its oppressiveness, and unmask its deep-seated and long-lasting ideological ramifications in ways that change radically our understanding of American history, literature, and culture.27

Fabi’s point about the importance of experimentation with form in the 1853 *Clotel* is well taken, yet she misses what I offer as the project of this experimentation: to demonstrate to readers a new method of reading the four editions as a tangled text. By referring to the four editions as a tangled text, I wish to present an image of the four *Clotels* as a multidimensional novel project where the changing anti-slavery discourse of the mid-nineteenth century informs the narrative development of the novel.

This thesis is not especially concerned with issues of intentionality. For my purposes, it is not important to determine whether or not the four editions are the realization of a unifying artistic vision. The task of this project is simply to insist that you are not reading *Clotel* if you are only reading a single edition. One must traverse the four editions of *Clotel* as a single text in order to understand how the novel challenges the critical trend of examining a text as a discreet object separate from its literary history. Instead, the four editions of *Clotel* articulate the very process of the production and revision of a nineteenth-century text: we see literary history happening. The work of this chapter is

therefore twofold: to demonstrate the way in which the 1853 edition functions as a guide for reading relationally, and then to explore an alternative interpretation of an iconic scene by reading across the four editions.

While Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter has been called anything from unfinished to “a stunning example of literary pastiche,” the first edition offers the most complex version of the novel and challenges nineteenth-century American assumptions of linear narrative and generic consistency. As I will show, the narrative construction of this text, the leaps it makes between character spheres and plotlines, encourages scholars to enact a kind of relational reading. To begin, I will examine Brown’s resistance to narrative and temporal consistency by analyzing the opening to Chapter XXI, “The Christian’s Death.” Building on my analysis of that chapter, I will show how Clotel promotes this method of dynamic reading by resisting a linear progression of its chapters and breaking even the most provisional attempts at consistency. In Clotel, Brown often announces the beginning of a chapter by locating the reader in the narrative sphere of a particular character. But Chapter XXI starts with the line: “On the last day of November, 1620, on the confines of the grand Bank of Newfoundland, lo! we behold one little solitary tempest-tost and weather-beaten ship” (180). The effect of this opening is to dissociate the reader from any strains of familiar narrative or setting that have appeared in the book thus far. Because Clotel is such a densely populated novel, it is difficult to maintain a working catalogue of who’s who, where they live, and what they were doing at our last meeting. However, Brown creates a narrative

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routine by repeatedly beginning chapters with references to particular characters: “James Crawford, the purchaser of Althea” (124); “On Carlton’s return the next day” (126); “Mr. Peck kept around him four servants besides Currer” (135); “Althea found in Henry Morton a kind and affectionate husband” (146). Twenty of twenty-nine chapters in Clotel begin by mentioning one or more characters in their opening lines. This repetition provides a substitute for the consistency of following one, or even a few, characters through their stories in a linear fashion. From the repetition of these lines, the reader feels a sense of comfort and familiarity with the text despite the complexity of plots. Yet Chapter XXI’s opening line disrupts even this small concession to narrative order.

The first line of Chapter XXI differs from the more common constructions by thrusting the reader backward in history to a time and place previously unencountered in the novel. To begin a chapter that recounts the death of Georgiana Carlton, Brown chooses to narrate the story of the landing of the Mayflower in 1620. Georgiana Carlton is the daughter of Reverend Peck, a parson and slave owner in the South. Georgiana describes herself as a southerner with northern sympathies; she received her education in Connecticut and is a strong advocate of abolition. She marries Carlton, a school friend of her father’s, shortly after his unexpected death. During their courtship, Carlton’s admiration for Georgiana grew as she worked to convert him to Christianity. After their marriage, Georgiana and Carlton set about freeing the slaves who work on the family farm. Through a process of gradual emancipation, the slaves are made ready for their journey north, and in Chapter XXI, say goodbye to Georgiana (now in poor health) as they board a steamship
headed for Ohio. However, the opening two pages of this chapter explain the origins of Plymouth and Jamestown and read almost like a chapter from an entirely different book:

Behold the May-flower anchored at Plymouth Rock, the slave-ship in James River. Each a parent, one of the prosperous, labour-honouring, law-sustaining institutions of the North; the other the mother of slavery, idleness, lynch-law, ignorance, unpaid labour, poverty, and dueling despotism, the ceaseless swing of the whip, and the peculiar institutions of the South. These ships are the representations of good and evil in the New World, even to our day (181).

Here, we must consider the strategy behind Brown’s extreme use of metaphor in a chapter that stands apart from so many others. By depicting the two ships as the respective visual symbols of North and South, Brown forces the reader to consider how these ships can be emblematic of cultural entities and practices. They hold the entire potential of these two different societies—one based on wage labor, the other on slave labor. The ships become signifiers of the networks and forces (the market, the flow of materials and people, and the legacy of the slave trade itself) that defined the North and South in the nineteenth century. The implication here is that an object, like a ship, can both emblematize and participate in the social networks of a society. This is precisely the role of Clotel as a book-object in the nineteenth century: it portrays the social and political networks of its time and simultaneously plays within those networks as a market commodity.

As Brown digresses from his narrative to construct the story of slavery’s origins and the dueling factions of the North and South, he furthers the novel’s
temporal inconsistency. Though this is the most extreme example, there are several other instances in Clotel when the reader is confused as to how much time has passed, or whether or not there is a clear order of events. For example, Chapter XXII begins, “We shall now return to Cincinnati, where we left Clotel preparing to go to Richmond in search of her daughter” (186). Since the narrator left Clotel, Georgiana died in less than a week, but it is unclear how much time, if any, has passed in Cincinnati. In the opening of this chapter, time is manipulated such that the action can begin more than 200 years before the era of the novel, and then, in one paragraph, space and time can be collapsed such that we are instantly back in the life of Georgiana Carleton. These transitions in the novel: from past to present, and between multiple character spheres, are accomplished by the authority of a strong narrative voice, which guides the reader through the complexity of the text. It is not that the narrative voice smoothes the transitions; instead, its role is to clearly define the current time and place to which the text has transported the reader. This movement across plotlines, sanctions the Clotel scholar’s practice of reading relationally across the four editions and their fifteen-year publication history. Rather than reading the novel from start to finish, or even reading the four editions sequentially from beginning to end, the Clotel scholar is encouraged to move freely among the four Clotels in the way that the narrator moves the nineteenth-century reader through the 1853 edition.

Today’s scholars cannot reenact the nineteenth-century reader’s experience of this text. However, they are able to access the four editions concurrently, while Clotel’s contemporary audiences could not. Because of this, we can create our own edition of Clotel, occasioned by our current historical
moment. This edition would be a condition of relational reading, such that the editions are read as a single text, and we acknowledge that the first African American novel exists across four distinct book-objects. In *Clotel*, Brown explores the novel as a dynamic form through his reproduction of other genres within the text. By analyzing instances of reprinted materials, we will see how Brown’s experimentation in the novel pushes us to engage with the physical form of a written work. Following the cues the author provides in the text, we find the justification for attending to the materiality of the four editions, and exploring the boundaries of the novel genre.

Chapter XI provides a rich example of the numerous print genres incorporated into *Clotel*. At the start of the chapter, Carlton becomes troubled by an advertisement he encountered in a newspaper during his visit with Rev. Peck and Georgiana. Carlton explains:

“I saw an advertisement in the *Free Trader* to-day that rather puzzled me. Ah, here it is now; and,” drawing the paper from his pocket, “I will read it and then you can tell me what it means:

‘TO PLANTERS AND OTHERS. — *Wanted fifty negroes*. Any person having *sick negroes*, considered *incurable* by their respective physicians (their owners of course,) and wishing to dispose of them, Dr. Stillman will pay cash for negroes affected with scrofula or king’s evil, confirmed hypochondriacism, apoplexy, or diseases of the brain, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, &c. *The highest cash price will be paid as above*’” (132).

Here, not only is the language of an advertisement repeated in the dialogue of the characters, but Brown goes on to reproduce the ad as it would have appeared in the original newspaper. The use of typographic details including italics and small-caps highlights the printed origin of this advertisement. What is communicated in these details is more than just the information the text is
presenting; they reproduce the form that transfers that information. Additionally, the fact that Brown includes the name of the newspaper shows the novel’s power to contain other genres, rather than allude to them, because the printed title of a newspaper is its most identifiable characteristic. Clotel becomes the occasion for the reproduction of these printed forms, and in doing so acknowledges the physicality of a printed work and makes transparent the intertextuality of the novel. The chapter goes on as Mr. Carlton, Mr. Peck, and Georgiana discuss the meaning of the advertisement. A second reprinted section from the newspaper reveals that the sick slaves will be used for medical experimentation and even dissection after they are killed. The decision to reveal this information through reprinted materials speaks to Brown’s desire to affirm the truth of the situation he is describing. Similar to the moment where he writes, “This, reader, is no fiction”(148) Brown uses these sourced materials to present the injustices of slavery as “real” even as they are depicted in his fictional narrative. He uses texts that have life outside the novel to foreground the fact that the injustice they describe is imported from reality into the fictional narrative. Brown’s efforts to reveal the origins of these sourced materials present a juxtaposition of printed formats within the text of Clotel. In this case, the reader is made aware that he is encountering a newspaper within the text of a novel. By reprinting of these secondary sources, Brown creates a dialogue between print formats that prefigures and the act of reading the materiality of the four Clotel editions against one another.

Though a pattern of including the name of characters or important locations in the opening lines of many chapters exists, I would like to admit that the comfort this pattern provides is merely a substitute for smooth narrative
progression. In *Clotel*, Brown offers a version of the multi-plot novel (popular during the nineteenth century) whereby beginnings, peaks, and resolutions to several plotlines are interspersed throughout the work. For example, the reader follows the action from three character spheres during Chapters VI to XXI: Reverend Peck, his daughter Georgiana, their visitor Carleton, and the family slaves, including Sam; Clotel, her lover Horatio Green, their daughter Mary, and his wife Mrs. Green; and Althesa (Clotel’s sister), her purchaser and husband Henry Morton, and their daughters. The simplest way to show the intertwining of these subplots is to return again to the opening lines of chapters.

Brown first introduces the reader to the Reverend John Peck in Chapter VI “The Religious Teacher.” Chapters VI–VII, X–XIII, XVI, XVIII, and XXI tell the story of the Reverend Peck, who dies during the course of the events, his daughter Georgiana, who marries Carleton after converting him to Christianity and later dies, and their family’s slaves, including Sam. Chapters VIII, XV, XVII, XIX follow the subplot of Horatio Green’s affair with Clotel, the birth of their daughter Mary, the girl’s poor treatment as slave by Green’s wife, and Clotel’s attempt at escaping slavery. Finally, the story of the sale of Althesa to Henry Morton, their love affair, marriage, and family life is also told across Chapters IX, XIV, and XX. Chapter XV, “To-day a Mistress, To-morrow a Slave,” begins: “Let us return for a moment to the home of Clotel. While she was passing lonely and dreary hours with none but her darling child, Horatio Green was trying to find relief in that insidious enemy of man, the intoxicating cup.” The reader next hears that Mr. Green’s wife learned about Clotel and the daughter she had with Horatio and insisted that the two were sold. Instead, Clotel is sold to “the slave-trader Walker, who, a few years previous, had taken
her mother and sister to the far South,” and Mary is forced to work as Mrs. Green’s servant (149). The language of this scene, beginning with the opening line, foregrounds the movement between settings and character spheres that frequently occurs in this text. The phrase “let us return for a moment” indicates the kind of travel (leaving and returning) the reader must participate in to read this novel. Additionally, the phrase also attends to the passing of narrative time: the idea that the story will only remain in one place for a short while.\(^{29}\)

While the story centers primarily on the lives of Currer and her daughters Clotel and Althesa, there are numerous other characters who appear only once, or like Walker, reemerge unexpectedly. Clotel challenges a reader’s ability to perceive which characters should be paid attention to. Second, the detail is used to indicate the passage of time in the novel. It is rare for Brown to include information that makes clear how long certain characters have been in a given place. He prefers to jump between several scenes without indicating the pace of the action. Instead, the reader must ascertain how much time has passed by making note of details like the fact that Walker had sold Currer and Althesa “a few years previous” and also the fact that Clotel and Horatio’s daughter Mary is described as ten years old (149). The unclear passage of time is another way that this text requires the reader to surrender expectations of linear progression and experience instead a narrative circularity that more closely resembles the practice of relational reading.

\(^{29}\) Other phrases that highlight this kind of travel at the start of chapters include: “We shall now return to Cincinnati” (Ch. XXII), “We left Mary, the daughter of Clotel, in the capacity of a servant” (Ch. XXVI), and “We shall now return to Natchez.” (Ch. III)
The opening of the Chapter XVI, “Death of the Parson” takes us into the character sphere that includes Carlton, Georgiana, Sam, and Reverend Peck. The first line announces this transition, “Carlton was about thirty years of age, standing on the last legs of a young man, and entering on the first of a bachelor” (152). At this point, the novel is returning to the story of Carlton, Georgiana, and Mr. Peck after a two-chapter interruption that gave an update on the lives of Althesa with Henry Morton and Clotel, Mary, and Horatio Green. Previous to this interruption, the Parson’s family had been the subject of four consecutive chapters. The shift to reading six unrelated pages about the lives of the two slave women is a jarring one, and in Chapter XVII there is another break from the Parson subplot as the reader is brought back to Horatio Green’s home. It begins, “With the deepest humiliation Horatio Green saw the daughter of Clotel, his own child, brought into his dwelling as a servant” (156). While the first page is an account of Mrs. Green’s attempts to punish Mary for her husband’s indiscretions, including “seasoning” the girl by forcing her to work outside so that her skin will darken, the chapter quickly dissipates into an occasion for reproducing Thomas Jefferson’s treatises against slavery. In this way, a chapter that interrupts the ongoing plot line contains within itself an interruption of reprinted historical material that segues back into the Parson subplot only through the inclusion of an epigraph from the Declaration of Independence at the start of the next chapter. Here we find narrative movement from the main text of a chapter into the epigraph of the next chapter: a new category of movement within the novel emerges. By forcing a segue between these two chapters and the character spheres contained within them, Brown reaffirms the unsettled nature of this text. The fact that this segue
comes through reprinted material and an epigraph reveals the interplay of paratext and narrative in *Clotel*. The movement between editions reflects the movement of the narrative among several planes of plot and spheres of character, while the examination of paratext, we will see, responds to Brown’s own emphasis on print identity of his reproduced materials.

The first edition of *Clotel*, through its resistance to linear narrative, inclusion of sourced material from several print genres, and numerous interruptions, insists that the reader practice tangled reading. This tangled reading abandons the practice of reading the editions in isolation, or even sequentially, and instead requires that the reader move freely among the editions. Scenes should be read against their alternate versions wherever possible. Scholars must strive to overlay the texts of the four editions in order to see the additions and excisions to the narrative that help shape Brown’s tangled text. In the next section, I will enact this practice of reading the four editions *Clotel* as a single tangled text. Through this example it will be clear how this treatment of the text leads to a more complete understanding of the characters, motivations, and history at work in the novel.

**A Close Reading of a Tangled Text**

In “A Night in the Parson’s Kitchen” (Chapter XII in the 1853 edition and Chapter VIII in the later editions), we encounter a crucial scene in the development of Sam’s character. The story of Sam as the “Black Doctor” is often cited as evidence of Brown’s response to the tradition of blackface minstrelsy, yet on closer reading he appears more sincere than affected. Blackface minstrelsy was a popular form of theatrical entertainment in the
nineteenth century. During these shows, white male performers donned blackface and caricatured blacks primarily for white, working class audiences. Critics, like Paul Gilmore, have argued that, in this scene, Brown presents Sam as a caricature similar to the representations of blacks in minstrel shows. However, there is room for a more sincere reading of Sam’s character.

At the start of the chapter, Sam is clearly established as a high-ranking slave: “Mr. Peck kept around him four servants besides Currer [o]f these, Sam was considered the first” (135). This third-party introduction to Sam’s character shows that the narrator is reporting back on the master’s evaluation of Sam’s personal worth. It is not Sam himself proclaiming his superiority over the other slaves. Brown goes on to highlight the degree of trust Sam’s master has in his opinion when he writes that in matters such as dinner-parties, “Sam felt that he had been slighted if his opinion had not been asked” (135). This is not evidence of an air of self-importance on the part of the slave; instead, it speaks to the fact that his involvement in household affairs was routine, and expected. The text is also clear that Sam’s master was choosing to seek his opinion, not that he was arrogantly inserting himself into the planning. Similarly, the idea that Sam’s dress should be used as evidence of his insecurity or foolishness must be questioned because the text states that Mr. Peck was a master who “kept his house-servants well dressed.” It is uncertain who should

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31 Eric Lott, Love and Theft, 3.
be held responsible for Sam’s ever-present ruffled shirt; however, it seems likely that his master imposes this dress. As for Sam’s power among the slaves, the narrator explains: “A single look from [Sam] was enough to silence any conversation or noise in the kitchen, or any other part of the premises” (136). This moment refutes the claim that his fellow slaves see Sam as a joke; he is clearly respected.

Gilmore argues that Brown “foregrounds this possibility of using the minstrel show to enunciate slave resistance in his characterization of Sam.”32 To support this argument Gilmore chooses to read Brown’s descriptions of Sam as an effort to present him as a parody:

Sam seems to be nothing more than comic relief in the form of a minstrel burlesque: he wishes he were lighter (“He was one of the blackest of his race” [131]), fawns over his master and mistress, treats his position in the household with an overabundance of pride and dignity, and is overly concerned with his dress (“he was seldom seen except in a ruffled shirt” [131])33

Gilmore characterizes Sam in this way to argue that Brown is trying to show readers an evolving character, who begins as a minstrel and becomes an anti-slavery figure. He writes: “At this point, Brown has shown his black male characters as buffoons and toadies who buy into the master’s ideology. Yet as he develops Sam more fully, ‘we’ realize that we have only seen the stereotyped laughing black face, not the critical, freedom-yearning face that coexists

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33 Ibid., 53.
The description of Sam pulling teeth, which is accompanied by an illustration of this scene titled “Negro Dentistry,” is the only convincing evidence for Gilmore’s reading of Sam as a minstrel figure. In the illustration, Sam is certainly depicted as dark and animalistic. The dentist and his patient are pictured brawling together on the floor. Their facial expressions are particularly savage. Sam’s jaw is clenched, his patient’s mouth seems to be unnaturally wide open, and the forms of their bodies evoke racial stereotypes. The two men have heavily protruding brow bones as well as rounded mouths and jaws; they are represented as ape-like and foolish. Additionally, the illustration’s title, “Negro Dentistry,” implies that this illustration of brute physical force is a representative example of an entire race’s medical practices. Despite the fact that the text may resist this characterization, the imagery deployed in the illustration does invoke a scene of minstrelsy. However, we do not know how much control Brown had in commissioning or even approving this illustration; all we know is that he did not draft it himself.

The text of the novel conflicts with the illustration, providing a larger social critique of the codes that govern white and black performance in the novel. Because Sam’s foolish actions are learned from and approved by his master, the white doctor, it seems that white medicine and its complacency are the actual objects of satire in this scene. While there are examples from the text that highlight elements of performance in Sam’s version of medicine, one must remember that he learned this performance. Brown writes, “In bleeding, [Sam] must have more bandages and rub and smack the arm more than the doctor.”

34 Ibid.
“Negro Dentistry” illustration: Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter (1853)
would have thought of” (130). While the most obvious reading of this excerpt is to highlight that Sam is looking foolish, a key phrase here is “more than the doctor would have thought of.” This explains not that Sam is inventing his own performance of a fool doctor, but rather that he is exaggerating the actions he has already learned from a real doctor. Here we should not read this exaggeration as a minstrel performance, but rather as a critical mimicry of the white doctor. Brown uses Sam to demonstrate the bankruptcy of the presumption that knowledge can be manifest in gesture, or the social codes that choreograph such gesture.

The doctor’s approval of Sam’s performance as a stand-in is also made clear, while troubling the figure of the white doctor, “The master told Sam to examine [the slave] and see what he wanted. This delighted him beyond measure, for although he had been acting in his part in the way of giving out medicine as the master ordered it, he had never been called upon by the latter, to examine a patient, and this seemed to convince him after all that he was no sham doctor” (130). At first this passage, particularly the phrase “acting in his part,” seems to affirm the performative nature of Sam’s role as the “Black Doctor.” However, the text hints at more complicated origins of this performance. The convolution of the second sentence makes the antecedent of the pronouns “him” and “he” ambiguous. Therefore there are a few ways to read this moment: Sam has learned that his master is no sham doctor; the master has been convinced that Sam is no sham doctor; or, Sam thinks that he himself is no sham doctor. These divergent readings, all equally plausible, underscore the role of the author as a “maker” of synthetic characters and scenes. In this example Brown did not make his meaning clear, and so the
reader cannot know which man is not a sham doctor. The coincidence of using ambiguous language in this scene about sham doctors invites curiosity as to whether or not Brown is commenting on the artifice inherent in any character. This critique relates to the lingering question: if the minstrelsy categorization does not seem sufficient to explain the motivation of this scene, why use it at all? Minstrelsy presents the artifice of race by showing how race can be “put on” and “performed.” Yet, in the nineteenth century, the minstrel shows also naturalized race to white audiences. In this scene, Brown translates what is evident about race in the minstrelsy performance onto a writer’s invention of a character. In both cases, critics can see how the “thing” an audience experiences, that is, the minstrelsy show or the invention of character, deconstructs itself. Speaking about the minstrel performance as a popular form in the nineteenth century, Eric Lott writes:

Minstrelsy brought to public form racialized elements of thought and feeling, tone and impulse, residing at the very edge of semantic availability, which Americans only dimly realized they felt, let alone understood. The minstrel show was less the incarnation of an age-old racism than an emergent social semantic figure highly responsive to the emotional demands and troubled fantasies of its audiences.\textsuperscript{35}

Lott’s view that the minstrel show plays out internalized conceptions of race relates to my theory of this scene (of minstrelsy) as playing out our internalized conceptions of character when a flaw is inserted to reveal the artifice. Brown shows us how the reader cannot resolve any ambiguity created by the author, because the characters and narrative exist at the author’s discretion. Again,

\textsuperscript{35} Eric Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}, 6.
these readings are only available to the critic, who exists in a space separate from the audience, and is able to read the performance, and the experience of that performance, simultaneously. As critics of Clotel, we are also able to consider the four versions of the novel simultaneously: exposing the author’s process of revision. As we turn to the later editions, we will see how relational reading offers new insights into Sam as a character and places this scene in dialogue with Brown’s political interests in amalgamation.

In the 1860, 1864, and 1867 editions, this chapter contains an added scene of Sam as the Black Doctor, which raises the possibility that a political argument for amalgamation is motivating the entire episode. “Amalgamation” is William Wells Brown’s term of choice for racial mixing. In his travel narrative, *Three years in Europe; or Places I have seen and people I have met*, Brown uses the term in reference to the lightening of the African American slave population and to describe the system whereby white slave owners sexually exploit their black female slaves. He writes:

> Although the first slaves, introduced into the American Colonies from the coast of Africa, were negroes of a very dark complexion [the] present slave population of America is far from being black. This change in colour, is attributable, solely to the unlimited power which the slave owner exercises over his victim. There being no lawful marriage amongst slaves, and no encouragement to slave women to be virtuous and chaste, there seems to be no limits to the system of amalgamation carried on
between master and slave. This accounts for the fact, that most persons [are] struck with the different shades of colour amongst the slaves.\textsuperscript{36}

In this passage, amalgamation is used specifically to describe the sexual relationships between master and slave, yet earlier in the travel narrative Brown used the term toward a very different purpose. While describing how codes of class and race are transgressed at the World’s Fair exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, Brown remarks:

There is a great deal of freedom in the Exhibition. The servant who walks behind his mistress through the Park feels that he can crowd against her in the Exhibition. [All] meet here upon terms of perfect equality. This amalgamation of rank, this kindly blending of interests, and forgetfulness of the cold formalities of ranks and grades, cannot but be attended with the very best results.\textsuperscript{37}

Brown’s observations on the blending of rank, race, and social codes in his earlier works provide a new context for considering his revisions to “A Night in the Parson’s Kitchen,” which contains its own scene of mixing in the three American editions of \textit{Clotek}:

On one occasion, when making pills and ointment, Sam made a great mistake. He got the preparations for both mixed together so that he could not legitimately make either [h]e resolved to make the whole batch of pill and ointment stuff with pills. He well knew that the powder over the pills would hide the inside, and the fact that most persons shut their

\textsuperscript{36} William Wells Brown, \textit{Three years in Europe; or, Places I have seen and people I have met}, (London: Charles Gilpin, 1852), 274.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 211.
eyes when taking such medicine led the young doctor to feel that all would be right in the end.\textsuperscript{38}

This scene begins by establishing Sam’s regular participation the social codes that govern race and slavery. The movements he makes while mixing the pills and ointment, on all other occasions, are symbolic gestures that demonstrate his participation in a prescribed role defined by codes. On the occasion of the “great mistake,” Sam punctures the equilibrium of his world, and for the first time, the cultural codes that he operates within are broken down. The breakdown of the codes prohibits Sam from “legitimately” making either pills or ointment—his mistake has forced a separation between what could be made in the old world, and what can be made in this moment. What we later realize is that, in his mistake, Sam has now made room for an amalgamation of these codes.

The concept of an amalgamation of social codes, unclear boundaries between black and white gesture and knowledge, is manifest in the physicality of the pills Sam makes. First, they are of mixed substances, neither pills nor ointment, neither black nor white. Second, the detail about how he chose to put powder over the pills to hide the inside suggest that Sam is conscious of the different moment he is in, and the different medicine he has made. The powder can also be read in terms of the racial passing. Just as Clotel’s light skin allows her to hide her “inside” or slave identity, the pills that are also of mixed origin can be similarly disguised. The mention of the bizarre fact that Sam knows that people shut their eyes when they are taking pills is a way of expressing the view

of man’s blindness to race. What little comfort people draw from the idea that they are able to “see” race is, in the end, futile.

M. Guilia Fabi has argued that Brown’s mulatta characters “[constitute] a challenge to rigid racial definitions, and their ability to pass for white represents a genteel form of covert resistance to racial oppression.” In one of the central escape plots of the novel, Clotel’s light complexion plays a pivotal role in her ability to travel North with the much darker slave, William. Encouraging her to plan her escape, William tells Clotel, “You are much fairer than many of the white women of the South, and can easily pass for a free white lady” (167). In the end, the pair decides to use Clotel’s ability to pass in a plan that would allow both of them to escape. Clotel cross-dresses as a young gentleman and William assumes the role of her servant as they embark on their journey to freedom.

The practice of cross-dressing and, more generally, clothes stealing, is an important part of several escape plots mentioned in Brown’s novel. Depending on the episode, clothes can become an extension of the racial passing of the mulatto figure, assuming another’s identity, or in Clotel’s case the added element of gender-bending in the performance required to secure freedom. By highlighting the practice of donning other people’s clothing, and especially cross-dressing, Brown simultaneously brings attention to the way appearance indicates identity in this world and how easily that assumption can be undermined. Appearance part of an individual’s participation in the codes of race, gender, and class. In the performance of whiteness and masculinity, certain of Clotel’s characters show themselves to be of highest value both to the

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narrative (they are the ones who drive the story forward) and to the struggle against slavery (their performance allows them to escape). Returning to the metaphor of the mixed pills as racial mixing, we find that they offer their own version of resistance to racial oppression by being the first effective medical treatment mentioned in this scene: “It was several days before Sam could learn the result of his new medicine ‘[I] am entirely recovered,’ replied the patient. ‘Those pills of yours put me on my feet the next day.’ ‘I knew they would,’ rejoined the doctor” (26-27). The success of these pills, which grew out of a moment where cultural codes were broken down and amalgamated, suggests that the products of these mixed codes are more effective. This is similar to what we in the passage from My Southern Home, where the person who is neither legitimately black nor white is of highest value to society. This is the platform of amalgamation that Brown puts forth in his other writings and advances here.

By considering the later versions of this scene, a new lens for reading that emphasizes Brown’s argument for amalgamation becomes apparent. When we turn back to the first incarnation of this story, the term “Black Doctor” can be read as an amalgamation in itself. The term is more than a way of describing a dark-skinned doctor. Instead it is a new kind of doctor, one that operates in accordance with fractured cultural codes. The term presupposes Sam’s black identity and his ability to impart that identity on his line of work. The idea that Sam is empowered to create his own brand of medical professional and that his fellow slaves affirm that identity makes Sam an important representation of black masculinity in Clotel. He becomes a figure of authority for his peers and alongside his master. Yet the question remains: what qualities does the Black
Doctor possess that set him apart from his white master? What, if anything, makes his brand of medicine uniquely black?

For one thing, Sam’s medicine works. His “illegitimate” pills are the first effective treatment mentioned in the scene. The implication here is that Sam has been able to subvert the codes that inhibited effective treatment, while the white doctor can only “perform” medicine without true success. In this moment, Sam’s “mistake” is actually his most authentic gesture; it enables him to “strike through the mask.”40 In deviating from his master’s procedure, Sam escapes the codes and prescribed movements that had previously prevented him from practicing his own medicine. This reading contradicts Paul Gilmore’s criticism of Sam, which contends that he is only able to mimic the white doctor as a minstrel performance. Instead, we find that the master’s medicine is insufficient and that Sam’s blackness has illegitimately troubled the white order of racism. However, in the first edition, the scene finishes without Sam mixing the pills. This missing moment has led scholars to read Sam as a caricature of a doctor based only on the teeth-pulling scene and the accompanying illustration. Gilmore and others argue that later when Sam leads his fellow slaves in songs celebrating their master’s death, he becomes a fully developed anti-slavery character. Yet by practicing a new method of reading—one that reads alternate versions of the same scene against one another—I hope to have recast Sam as a complexly powerful character from this early scene. Furthermore, because Clotel allows the reader to enter into the process of textual revision we can understand Sam as a single character endowed with all the same qualities across

the four editions. In each publication of *Clotel*, Brown provides his readers a different degree of access to Sam’s character.

This close reading of Sam and the term Black Doctor as seen through the lens of amalgamation is a representative example of the insight a reader can gain by examining a scene across the four editions *Clotel*. In addition to this scene with Sam, there are other opportunities for relational analysis of characters across the four editions. For instance, scholars often cite the darkening of George/Jerome as indicative of Brown’s efforts to recast black heroes in the novel. Yet there has not been much analysis that could provide insight into the evolution of the character throughout the novel project. By not considering the four editions as a single text, critics eschew their privileged access to the narrative interplay of the editions and the view of the *Clotel* project as a documentation of the production and revision process for a nineteenth-century text. In the next chapter, the question of production will be addressed in specific terms that reveal *Clotel* as a text that participates in four distinct arenas of print culture.
Chapter Three

Considering the Object: Reading Four Paratexts

William Wells Brown’s novel *Clotel* requires critics to “read” the situation of a text beyond its plot.\(^{41}\) In other words, the text must be considered in terms of the fictional world contained by its narrative, and also as an element of material culture as it exists in the world. A book is both an object and a text; therefore we need to study it as both. The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the distinct situations of the four *Clotel* texts through material analysis of their paratexts bolstered by close readings of the narratives.\(^{42}\) Examples of paratext include, but are not limited to, the title, preface, illustrations, dedication, and epigraphs. These elements of paratext tell the story of the publishing and reception history of a text. They are also potential sites for cultural critique.

Gérard Genette has elaborated a theory of paratext and offered a guide for reading the ephemera of a book as a text itself, ripe with cultural meaning and commentary on the content it is presenting. His theory of the paratext will provide much of the scaffolding for my analysis of the cultural significance that is imbedded in the text of *Clotel* and the materiality of the books-as-objects.

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\(^{41}\) By the “situation” of a text I mean the sum of the social, political, and economic motivations and conditions that inform the publication of that text. Books exist both as containers for narratives and as the products of a publication industry that, like any other industry, responds to the changing cultural landscape in order to stay relevant. Reading the situation of a text forces the reader to attend to the dual nature of a book.

\(^{42}\) Paratext is a key term for this chapter, and is best defined by Gérard Genette. Genette writes that elements of paratext are “verbal or other productions” that “ensure the text’s presence in the world.” Furthermore, paratext “[enables] a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public.” See Gérard Genette, *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 1.
The study of paratexts offers an opportunity to draw meaning from a form that is coded with information explaining who read the text, where it was circulated, how it was read, and what happened to it after a person finished reading it. Genette writes that the paratext is “a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text).” The paratext is then the liminal space between a text and its audience. By critically engaging with the materiality of these four editions, I aim to produce a new reading of Clotel as a text and an object that responds to the pressures and expectations of changing markets and historical moments.

I will begin by investigating the intended audience of each edition, which included those interested in abolitionist literature, the Union military cause, and domestic fiction. Retrospectively, today’s scholars can understand that the pursuit of new spheres of readership guided Clotel’s evolving discourse on slavery, race, and freedom, keeping it relevant in a changing cultural landscape. With each publication, Clotel was recontextualized for audiences living through the United States’ transition from slavery, into war, and ultimately to universal emancipation. Finally, the varying degree of perishability for these objects is important to defining the situation of each text. The projected longevity of each object helps us understand today the anticipated impact of each edition in its

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43 Genette, Paratext, 2.

44 It is important to note that the material analysis in this section was performed using the photographs provided as part of the Electronic Scholarly Edition of Clotel. My observations of the hardcover editions (1853, 1867) are specific to the photographs provided here. Through my research in special collections libraries, I have learned that not all copies of these editions are the same as these examples. I consulted with rare books librarians to learn that some copies of Clotel that exist in libraries today may well have been re-bound to match the binding of a reader’s personal library.
Front cover: Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States (1864)
own time. I have identified these three areas: projected audience, publishing context, and degree of perishability as contexts to help shape my reading of the situation of each edition. However, they do not encompass the situation of any edition in its totality. Finally, I will begin my study of the four Clotels with the 1864 edition because it is the clearest case of the way in which a paratext reveals the situation of a text.

**Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States**

The paratext of the 1864 Clotel, published as part of James Redpath’s “Books for the Camp Fires” series, captures the situation of the novel rather than its narrative, and in doing so, effectively defamiliarizes the book-as-object. We can read the publisher’s goal, see a projected audience, feel the perishability of the edition, and even know what people paid for the book just by looking closely. Because the locations for material analysis are most apparent on this edition, the “Campfire” Clotel becomes the model object for reading these editions as material culture. In this way, a comparative reading of the four Clotels will lead to a strategy for analyzing the individual editions.

The visual presentation and construction of James Redpath’s Clotel demonstrates his intention to place the book in the hands of Union troops. The situation of the novel is inscribed directly on the object, and the front wrapper illustration is a prime example of this. In the illustration, Union soldiers are shown communing with each other around a campfire; a book is the only thing that is missing from this scene of reading. In this example, Redpath literally covers William Wells Brown’s text with its most apparent intended audience. However, the illustration on the cover of Redpath’s edition
BOOKS FOR THE CAMP FIRES.

No. I. ON PICKET DUTY, and Other Tales. By L. M. Alcott. Ten cents. (Second edition.)


No. III. THE VENDETTA. From the French of Balzac. An original translation. To which is added, The Blacksmith of Tennessee. Two Stories of Civil Wars! Ten cents. (Nearly ready.)


No. V. THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO. By Victor Hugo. Unabridged. A New York edition of this wonderful picture of the great Battle which decided the fate of Napoleon, omitted the three graphic introductory chapters. Ten cents.

Other Books are in active preparation; all by authors of acknowledged genius.

AGENTS.

Philadelphia. — A. Winch.
Chicago. — J. R. Walsh.

Any Book of this Series sent by mail on receipt of price, by

JAMES REDPATH,

BOSTON.
Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States

By W. W. Brown

Boston:
James Redpath, Publisher.
221 Washington Street.
New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton & Co.
does not insist that the Union troops are the sole audience for this *Clotel*. Instead, this illustration reaches out to civilian supporters of the Union and encourages them to share in the experience of northern soldiers by reading what they—the soldiers—are reading. Thus the audience of this book is first, soldiers and those consumers who could send books to the troops, and also civilians interested in reading this book to gain access to one aspect of the Union soldiers’ experience.⁴⁵ James Redpath’s note to readers at the end of the text helps to confirm the presence of this second intended audience.

In his note, Redpath explains that the “object” of the text is to “relieve the monotony of camp-life to the soldiers of the Union [a]nd at the same time kindl[e] their zeal in the cause of universal emancipation.”⁴⁶ The language Redpath uses in this note implies that his audience is not the Union army. There are no moments of direct address to indicate that the person reading the note is a soldier. Rather, the note provides civilian readers with an explanation of the “Campfire” series and becomes an invitation to participate in Redpath’s project of getting novels into the hands of the Union troops. This act of participation, and even the *suggestion* of such interaction between Union supporters and Union soldiers, demonstrates the role of this edition in the formation and maintenance of a community of reading that doubles as a

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⁴⁵ The front inside cover of the edition includes a note from the publisher that states, “Any Book of this Series sent by mail on receipt of price, by JAMES REDPATH, BOSTON.” The mention that these books will be mailed to readers indicates that these books could be sent to soldiers in the Union army on behalf of the purchaser.

⁴⁶ William Wells Brown, *Clotelle; or, A Tale of the Southern States* (Boston: James Redpath, 1867), 104.
in the Church, lived and ruled for years; here, Voltaire, the mighty genius, who laid the foundation of the French Revolution, and who boasted, "When I shake my wig, I powder the whole republic," governed in the higher walks of life.

Fame is generally the recompense, not of the living, but of the dead, — not always do they reap and gather in the harvest who sow the seed; the flame of its altar is too often kindled from the ashes of the great. A distinguished critic has beautifully said, "The sound which the stream of high thought, carried down to future ages, makes, as it flows — deep, distant, murmuring ever more, like the waters of the mighty ocean." No reputation can be called great that will not endure this test. The distinguished men who had lived in Geneva transfused their spirit, by their writings, into the spirit of other lovers of literature and everything that treated of great authors. Jerome and Clotelle lingered long in and about the haunts of Geneva and Lake Leman.

An autumn sun sent down her bright rays, and bathed every object in her glorious light, as Clotelle, accompanied by her husband and father set out one fine morning on her return home to France. Throughout the whole route, Mr. Linwood saw by the deference paid to Jerome, whose black complexion excited astonishment in those who met him, that there was no hatred to the man in Europe, on account of his color; that what is called prejudice against color is the offspring of the institution of slavery; and he felt ashamed of his own countrymen, when he thought of the complexion as distinctions, made in the United States, and resolved to dedicate the remainder of his life to the eradication of this unrepulsive and unchristian feeling from the land of his birth; on his return home.

After a stay of four weeks at Dunkirk, the home of the Fletchers, Mr. Linwood set out for America, with the full determination of freeing his slaves, and settling them in one of the Northern States, and then to return to France to end his days in the society of his beloved daughter.

THE END.

NOTE.—The author of the foregoing tale was formerly a Kentucky slave. If it serves to relieve the monotony of camp-life to the soldiers of the Union, and therefore of Liberty, and at the same time kindles their zeal in the cause of universal emancipation, the object both of its author and publisher will be gained.

J. H.
RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

BREAKFAST IN BED; or, PHILOSOPHY BETWEEN THE SHEETS. A Series of Indigestible Discourses. By Geo. AUGUSTUS SALA. $1.


"Miss Alcott is a woman of genius, and whether she writes of Hospital Life or Fairy Life, everything becomes gold beneath her pen."—Boston Traveller.


LARGE LITHOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS OF CAPT. JOHN BROWN. $1 each.

$5 sent by mail on receipt of price, by

JAMES REDPATH,
Publisher, Boston.
community of support for the Union and emancipation. Even the method for circulating this edition as part of Redpath’s “Campfire” series helped maintain a network of Union supporters in the North. In the front inside cover of Clotelle, Redpath lists the agents who sell his “Books for the Camp Fires” series. Based on this list, it appears that these books were not distributed anywhere south of Philadelphia. Such regional distribution would have reinforced the tight geographic boundaries that contained this community. This segregation of Northern and Southern literature mirrored the political situation of the polarized regions and simultaneously re-inscribed the division. The distribution of regional literature was not just a symptom of this division, but rather helped to define it.

While the “Campfire” edition of Clotel self-consciously projects its own audience, it seems to deliberately erase William Wells Brown from his position as author of the novel. The focus is instead on Boston publisher James Redpath and his project of rallying Union troops through the distribution of dime-novels. Brown is not named as the author of the narrative anywhere on the outside covers. In place of the author, the front cover displays the publisher’s name in two positions. Redpath’s name appears above the title “Books for the Camp Fires,” indicating that he created the series, and then again below the Clotelle title illustration. Because Redpath’s name is printed just below the title, he is visually indicated as the author, or at least owner, of


48 For an excellent resource on the motivations and mechanics for regional distribution of literature during the Civil War see Alice Fahs, The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861–1865 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
the text. This omission of Brown’s name endangers his authorship of the novel. If we return to the publisher’s note that appears at the end of the narrative, we find another example of Redpath’s erasure of Brown from his text. Referring to the author Redpath writes, “Note. —The author of the foregoing tale was formerly a Kentucky slave. If it serves to relieve the monotony of camp-life to the soldiers of the Union [t]he object both of its author and publisher will be gained.” The stated project of the “Campfire” series is to reach Union troops; the implicit project of the series is to create a community connected to the experience of Union soldiers through reading. The success of both projects hinges on the publisher’s ability to create a product that fits its projected image as reading material for Union soldiers. In his note, Redpath defines the separate entities of publisher and author, yet resists personalizing the role of the author by not including Brown’s name. Instead Brown is relegated to the anonymous identity of “former slave” while Redpath’s identity becomes inextricably linked to the text. The erasure of Brown as the author of Clotel is part of Redpath’s effort to create a “Campfire” series brand. Clotel is transformed from a novel by William Wells Brown to one installment in Redpath’s series. To what end is this important for Clotel?

The series is tied specifically to the turn in the war initiated by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The Redpath edition responds to the shift in the rhetoric of Civil War ideology that came after the Emancipation

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10 Brown, Clotel, 88.

50 Alice Fahs’ book The Imagined Civil War tells the complete story of the distribution of cheap Civil War novels to Union and Confederate troops through well-documented accounts of soldiers’ reading habits and book acquisitions. Her research confirms that civilians were purchasing these books for soldiers, and also reading the dime-novels themselves. She explains that many of these series were marketed to young adults, who continued to read them, for a time, even after the war was over.
Proclamation; it is also a material record of that shift. Without the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation on the presentation of the Civil War to Union supporters, there would be no “Campfire” edition. The book’s existence is justified by its purpose: to inculcate the Union soldiers to the cause of universal emancipation. In its repackaging, the novel was recast as a Civil War document rather than a book by William Wells Brown. This explains why the illustration on the front wrapper does not relate to the story, and why the edition largely erases Brown. It also speaks to the perishability of the edition. The edition was designed for soldiers during the Civil War, and imagines itself as a text embedded with the troops. Outside of that context aspects of its construction, like its slim binding and lightweight covers, seem cheap rather than purposeful.

In a similar way, the Emancipation Proclamation aimed to repurpose the Civil War for Union troops, particularly for the free blacks fighting among them. The fight was now, at least rhetorically speaking, for universal emancipation. Each new territory secured by the Union troops could now be a new space for freedom. The reality of the Civil War may not have been this heroic, but the tenor of the war did change and its purpose was repackaged. The move to recontextualize the war created a space for Redpath’s “Campfire” edition. This book was physically, visually, and textually ready for the new war, with its purpose inscribed on the text itself. This is the Clotel Redpath brought to a new audience of Civil War readers. Brown’s discourse on slavery, freedom, and race was presented through an object conceived in a historical moment of war and emancipation. In this way, the edition’s audience of soldiers and Union supporters experienced the novel’s discourse while they participated in a real-world discourse on the same issues. The intended
Books for the Times.


HOSPITAL SKETCHES: BY MISS L. M. ALCOTT. 50c. No work recently published has received more and more uniformly flattering notices from the press and distinguished writers than this “wonderful little book.”

TOUSSAINT L’OUVERTURE: A BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Camp Fire edition, $1; in cloth, $1 25. The Biography is that of Dr. Beard, revised by the editor of the Guide to Hayti; the Autobiography is now first translated into English, and is a rare and interesting historical document, only recently permitted to be copied from the original manuscript in the Archives of the French Government. Among the Notes and Testimonies are a proclamation by the negro King Christophe, essays by Harriet Martineau and John Bigelow, (U. S. Consul at Paris,) including descriptions of visits to the Chateau de Joux, poems by Wordsworth, and Whittier, and a portion of the eloquent oration of Wendell Phillips. Illustrated with a portrait and autograph of Toussaint, and a map of colonial St. Domingo.

TOUSSAINT L’OUVERTURE: THE GREAT ORATION OF WENDELL PHILLIPS. 10c. It is claimed by some students of history that Toussaint was not only the First of the Blacks—the most wonderful genius that the Negro Race ever produced within the boundaries of authentic history—but the greatest Soldier, Diplomatist and Statesman that the New World has given birth to up to the present date—January 1, 1864. In this Oration Toussaint’s claims are eloquently presented by the greatest of American orators, who contrasts him with Napoleon, Cromwell, Washington.

THE BLACK MAN: BIOGRAPHIES OF 58 CELEBRATED NEGROES AND MULATTOES: BY WM. WELLS BROWN. $1.00. Illustrated with a steel portrait of President Geffrard, of Hayti.

THE PUBLIC LIFE OF CAPTAIN JOHN BROWN, with an Autobiography of his Boyhood and Youth. Thirty-eighth thousand. $1 00. Illustrated with a fine steel portrait of the hero of Harper’s Ferry.


Any of these publications mailed, postage paid, on receipt of price, by JAMES REDPATH, Publisher, 221 Washington St., Boston.
audience for each edition of *Clotel* encounters a reconceived version of the narrative and book-object tailored to the historical moment and reflective of its author’s changing politics. The work of the rest of this chapter will be to move through the three remaining editions, considering them as material culture, and treating each as a record of *Clotel’s* change over time.

*Clotel; or The President’s Daughter*

The first edition of *Clotel*, published by Partridge & Oakley in London, presents William Wells Brown as an author, a fugitive slave, and a figure in transition between these identities. Beginning with the title page, the 1853 edition visually represents the duality of Brown’s persona, beginning with the title page. Here his full name is printed as the author of *Clotel*, but also with the captions “A Fugitive Slave” and “Author of Three Years in Europe” underneath. In a way, these modifiers encapsulate the transition in identity that results from the publication of Brown’s first novel. On this single page, he is a fugitive slave, a travelogue writer, and author. In the text of this edition, he is represented first as the subject of the “Sketch of the Author’s Life.” This lengthy autobiographical text is unique to the 1853 edition and emphasizes Brown’s identity as a fugitive slave to better show the arc of his transformation by sending readers back to his beginnings. The “Sketch” goes to great lengths to explain the variety of experiences Brown had while he was a slave and continues the story into his career as an anti-slavery lecturer, and finally his escape to England. Recounting his situation after making his escape to the North, Brown writes, “In proportion as his mind expanded under the more favorable circumstances in which Brown was placed, he became anxious, not
merely for the redemption of his race from personal slavery, but for the moral and religious elevation of those who were free” (69). This is one of several examples indicating the degree to which Brown was engaged in the fight for universal emancipation, but also for the betterment of his race. This excerpt also highlights Brown’s personal betterment as a precursor to his evolution from slave to writer, and his last shift from writer to author, which is made evident through his use of the third person when referring to himself and his earlier work. As the narrator of the “Sketch,” Brown-as-author, is unable to identify himself as the fugitive slave or autobiographer after he has written Clotel. Instead, he uses a linguistic barrier to separate his past identity and works from his present situation. As we analyze other elements of the book’s paratext, Brown’s move into authorship will remain a prominent feature of this first edition.

As part of the paratext, the binding for the Partridge & Oakley Clotel shows that this book received greater attention as a marketable object than any of the other editions. Through analysis of that binding, I will demonstrate how the construction of the object also attests to Brown’s transition into his identity as author. With its cloth-covered boards, decorative impressions, and goldleaf lettering, this edition fits comfortably into a personal library of fine books. The front and back covers are identical in design; most likely the same plate was used to make the flower impression, borders, and publisher logo for both sides of the book. These die-stamped covers first became common during

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51 In my analysis of Brown’s transition in identity, I do not consider him in the role of “author” until after the completion of his first edition of Clotel. By making this distinction, I aim to use this term to mark his contributions to and innovations of the novel genre.
the nineteenth century and are found on the majority of trade books from the period. In “Manufacturing and Book Production” Michael Winship comments on the impact of publishers’ use of these new cloth-cased bindings and gold stamping:

The implications of this development are hard to overstate: for the first time, the publisher was responsible for the design and production of the binding in which they [the printed sheets] were sold to the public. Publisher and reader were connected in a new way, not just through the text of the work that the former published but also through the package in which that text appeared.  

This was the beginning of the transition from publisher as bookmaker to publisher as marketer. As Winship notes, “[p]ublishers and booksellers quickly discovered that a publisher’s binding could not only reflect a book’s content or genre but in itself influence a customer’s decision whether or not to purchase it.” As publishers paid greater attention to the design of their “product,” the purchase of the book-object became as important as the text itself. 

By looking at the binding of the 1853 edition, it is evident that the viewer’s gaze is directed to the spine. On the spine, there are gold leaf flourishes

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53 Ibid., 60.

Spine: Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter (1853)
around the book’s title, Brown’s last name, and the publication year, all of which are printed in gold and in capital letters. Additionally, the spine is the only part of the binding that provides any information about the work. While the front and back covers reference the publisher, they contain no information relevant to the narrative. If this edition were stored in any position other than one that privileged a view of the spine, it would be unidentifiable. However, the fact that the spine allows the book to be easily recognized both by title and author is significant. This is the only instance in the publication of Clotel in which Brown’s name appears on the outside of the book with the title of his novel. This attention to the physical presenting the first edition as a novel helps to affirm the status of Clotel’s narrative as such. The physicality of the 1853 edition then doubly justifies Brown’s status as author first, because of the attention given to his text, and second, because he is included on the novel’s form.

The first edition’s paratexual affirmation of Brown’s physical and intellectual escape from slavery leads into a discussion of his more nuanced transition from writer and lecturer to novelist. The epigraph of this edition, as an element of paratext, attests to this specific change in Brown’s identity. Genette writes that epigraphs have four functions, “none of which is explicit:” 1) to comment on, elucidate, or justify the title; 2) to comment on the text; 3) to create an association of the author of the epigraph with the text and its author; 4) or to mark, by its presence or absence, the period, the genre, or the tenor of a piece of writing. With Clotel, we can analyze the changing title page epigraphs in relation to these four functions. The title pages of the 1853 and 1867

55 Genette, Paratext, 156-160.
editions, and the title header for Miralda, all include opening epigraphs, while the 1864 edition includes a coat-of-arms illustration instead. By interpreting the 1853 epigraph, we learn that it helped to familiarize the reader with Brown’s early writing style as he moved into the role of author.

The epigraph included on the title page of the Partridge and Oakley 1853 edition of Clotel is from the Declaration of Independence. The epigraph appears at the bottom of the page, sectioned off from the other text by two short lines, one above and one below the epigraph. The passage reads:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are LIFE, LIBERTY, and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.” — Declaration of American Independence

By including this epigraph on the title page of Clotel; or the President’s Daughter, Brown destabilizes the ideal of American liberty for his readers and affects their experience of the text. For example, the inclusion of the Declaration of Independence on a title page for a book with the subtitles The President’s Daughter and A Narrative of Slave Life implies Thomas Jefferson is the father of Clotel, even before this rumor is explored in the text. James Thomson Callendar was the first to publicize the rumor that Thomas Jefferson fathered several children with his slave mistress, Sally Hemings, who was also the half-sister of his deceased wife, Martha Wayles Skelton. Callendar published the rumor in a newspaper, the Richmond Recorder, during the second year of Jefferson’s presidency. In particular, the novel responds to the part of the rumor that asserted one of Jefferson’s daughters had been sold on

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56 William Wells Brown, Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter (London: Partridge & Oakley, 1853), n.p.
Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States. By William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Author of "Three Years in Europe." With a Sketch of the Author's Life.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." — Declaration of American Independence.

London: Partridge & Oakey, Paternoster Row; and 70, Edgware Road. 1853.
the auction block for $1000.57 With this information in mind, this opening epigraph clearly directs the reader to the particular president Brown is referring to in his subtitle, and will soon implicate in his narrative.

This epigraph proclaims that men are equal and entitled to basic human rights while it is juxtaposed with Clotel’s subtitle: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States. This gesture highlights Brown’s frankness in the novel when confronting the injustice of slavery. In England, many people were familiar with Brown’s personal slave narrative, travel literature, panoramic-views project, and work as an anti-slavery advocate, but they were not yet familiar with Brown as an author. J. Noel Heermance makes the case that the 1853 edition of Clotel was the next logical project in Brown’s well-established print career.58 He argues that in this first edition of Clotel, Brown began to depart from his tradition style of polemic and documentation and move toward the genre of story as critique. However, there are still traces Brown’s familiar polemic and documenting tendencies in the 1853 edition of Clotel.

In Chapter Three, “The Negro Chase,” almost half the text is reprinted material that includes advertisements for slave catchers as well as newspaper accounts of a lynching. After printing and citing two advertisements, Brown discusses the slave catchers’ practice of using dogs to recover runaways. He details the cruelty and inhumanity of such methods to highlight the violence erupting in response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, “These dogs will attack a


Third installment: *Miralda; or, The Beautiful Quadroon* (1860)
negro at their master’s bidding and cling to him as a bull-dog will cling to a beast. Many are the speculations as to whether the negro will be secured alive or dead, when these dogs once get on his track” (96). By using documentation as an opportunity for polemic, Brown imports the reality of the outside world into his narrative, thus troubling the separation between the two.

Despite the interruptions of evidence, Brown continues with the plot of this chapter. He writes that the slave was captured and that a lynch court decided that he should be burned at the stake. The narrative then breaks for a newspaper article’s account of the slave’s death. The name and location of the paper are cited in the text, situating the fictional scene in a documented reality by inserting written material taken from “real life.” Finally, the chapter ends by turning back to Brown’s fictional characters. “Currer was one of those who witnessed the execution of the slave at the stake, and it gave her no very exalted opinion of the people of the cotton growing district” (99). By reprinting documents that advance the anti-slavery cause, Brown’s style remains consistent from his old work into this new novel. Brown’s transition in identity invites curiosity about his personal shift from anti-slavery lecturer and fugitive slave to author. In this edition, the writer again asserts himself through print, but for the first time as author of the novel. As it transitions to the newspaper format, the next edition Clotel explores the power of narrative as a political tool.

**Miralda; or, The Beautiful Quadroon**

Miralda is the first example of Clotel’s transformation in narrative and format across the four editions. This serialized edition of the novel undergoes an act of transposition that allows the authority of a newspaper to legitimate the
argument of its fictional narrative. Precisely because it exists in this newspaper format, the issue of perishability is of greatest importance to this edition of the four Clotels. Serialized from December 1, 1860 to March 16, 1861, in Thomas Hamilton’s The Weekly Anglo-African, Miralda; or, the Beautiful Quadroon was so perishable that no copies of the first six chapters exist in newspaper archives. This fact remains a paradox in the study of the material history of the book: a fragile text so widely and thoroughly read that it no longer survives. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. offers these comments on the transience of these print venues:

One black writer in the middle of the nineteenth century worried about this, calling these periodicals “ephemeral caskets” in which so much that was rich and vital in the thinking of African Americans would be buried, lost, and forgotten, tossed into the dustbin of history. [C]an you imagine a more fragile, or perilous, repository for the first vital writings of the first generation of black intellectuals[?] Fortunately, many of these periodicals survive today, against the greatest odds, because of efforts during the 1930s and beyond to microfilm and preserve them.59 This study too, is indebted to prior efforts in the preservation of these periodicals.60 As the first publication of Clotel in America, Miralda is largely glossed over by literary historians and critics.61 Several older sources indicate

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60 Microfilm copies of the front page for The Weekly Anglo-African (Miralda was only printed on the front page of the paper) are available as part of the Electronic Scholarly Edition of Clotel.
confusion as to where and when *Miralda* was published, but today we are able to study all but the first six chapters of the novel as they originally appeared.

The role of *The Weekly Anglo-African* was to win support for the abolitionist cause and to bolster an emerging Northern community of African Americans by enabling their self-assertion through print culture. During *Miralda*’s serialization, the focus of the newspaper shifted toward advocating African American emigration to Haiti. By considering the place of *Miralda* as a serialized text participating in the printed discourse on a divisive political issue like Haitian Emigration, this section will explore the political power of *Clotel* as a narrative. The prescribed purpose of the newspaper format is to facilitate the distribution of information and argument, rather than entertainment. Therefore, the appearance of a novel in this format invites the reader to consider equally its literary merit and political value. It is particularly important that *Miralda* is presented in the newspaper format, one that is directly linked to the temporality of the “real world.” A reader can use the issues of *The Weekly Anglo-African* to measure the chronology of historic events. *Miralda*, more than any other edition of *Clotel*, is happening in “real time.” In this way, *Clotel* seeks to collapse the fictional world of the narrative onto the real world of the serialized text. Because it is the liminal space between these two worlds, *Miralda*’s paratext provides a natural access point to begin examining the interplay between the edition’s narrative and historical realities.

Unique among the four editions of *Clotel*, *Miralda* shares a paratext with other work in *The Weekly Anglo-African*. However, that same material,

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61 See my earlier note (Introduction n.2) on the absence any discussion of *Miralda* in Jennifer Schell’s article “This Life Is a Stage”: Performing the South in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* or, *The President’s Daughter.*
printed alongside the narrative, is also a part of *Miralda*’s paratext. We must understand that *Miralda*’s paratext is more than the signifiers of the newspaper (title header, page numbers, publisher information, etc.,) because the works that surround the narrative also inform the reader’s experience of *Miralda*. In this way *Miralda*’s text, like the narrative of the 1853 edition, is interrupted by these other works as well as the breaks in narrative that are a convention of serial publication. In place of the reprinted newspaper articles and advertisements within the narrative, the text is juxtaposed against articles, letters to the editor, and even poetry.

Irving Garland Penn writes that James Redpath (who owned the paper at the time of *Miralda* serialization) “used *The Weekly Anglo-African* as the surest medium through which the Afro-American could be reached.” 62 For seven weeks, *Miralda* shared the front page with a featured section “The Emigration Question: Letters From The People.” However, nearly all of the content during the weeks of *Miralda*’s serialization referenced Haiti or the possibility of emigration. In these letters, individuals present arguments from all sides of the controversy, yet the pro-emigration side seems always to have the last word, reflecting the publisher’s bias. The presentation of *Miralda* alongside these letters activates the text as a political tool. The audience of the narrative becomes the audience for this emigration debate, and in turn, the emigration debate affects the audience’s experience of the narrative. One example of this is the ways the letters on Haitian emigration inform a reader’s perspective on *Miralda*’s resolution. As the heroine, Miralda, and her long-lost lover, Jerome,

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meet again after escaping to Europe and are finally married, we see the reverse effect of the juxtaposition of narrative and politics. Here, the political argument for African American emigration to Haiti is given power within the narrative because Miralda and Jerome emigrate to Europe and live happily there. Originally we saw that the narrative lent support to the political cause by expanding its audience, yet, with this reading, we find the political cause sanctioning the resolution of the narrative. This reversal of influence demonstrates the power of narrative as a political tool, and conversely, proves the power of a political environment to inform a reading of a text.

*Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine*

The project of the 1867 Lee & Shepard edition is to enter William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* into this canon of American sentimental literature. As the only edition published after the Civil War and the ratification of the 13th Amendment, *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine* is informed by its historical context, its status as the permanent American *Clotel*, and its appeals to the audience of sentimental fiction. These three factors are largely related to the text’s concern for the genre of American sentimentalism. Jane Tompkins writes that the sentimental novel is chiefly characterized by the fact that it targets female readership and is often produced by female writers. In *Sensational Designs*, she argues for a reexamination of sentimental literature stating, “[T]he work of the sentimental writers is complex and significant in ways other than those that characterize the established masterpieces. [The sentimental novel] is a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both
codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time.” This edition appears at a time when the legislative resolutions to conflicts of slavery, freedom and race left many African Americans living in a repackaged version of their prior situation as impoverished sharecroppers, or displaced freedmen fighting discrimination and disenfranchisement. By 1867, African Americans had not yet received the right to vote, nor was their economic situation promising in the South. Given the bleakness of this situation, the literature of sentimentalism became a key tool for affecting change in behavior and ideology in order to improve race relations in post-bellum America by presenting characters sympathetic to abolition alongside those suffering in slavery.

By closely reading this book as material culture, we find markers of the edition’s appeal to sentimentalism inscribed on and within the text. These markers allow us to read the book as an object that makes a lasting appeal to a new post-war, post-emancipation audience struggling with racial injustice. The book asks that readers allow the power of the narrative to affect them. Therefore the project of the 1867 Lee & Shepard edition, as understood through its paratext and text, is to move the discourse on slavery, freedom, and race in Clotel into the register of sentimentalism as part of the fight for racial equality. The opening epigraph for this edition is a quotation from Alexander Pope that also preceded each installment of Miralda. As a first example of a paratextual appeal to sentimental readers, the quotation reads:

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CLOTELLE;

OR,

THE COLORED HEROINE.

A Tale of the Southern States.

BY

WILLIAM WELLS BROWN,


"What is the news, my friends?" (Harp. 3d. 4.)

"The slave and liberty still go on well.

When shall we see an outlaw end?”

"The W. B. and my friend, and should be yours."

LIBRARY

BOSTON:

LEE & SHEPARD, 169 WASHINGTON STREET.

1867.

Title page: Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine (1867)
Ask you what provocation I have had?
The strong antipathy of good to bad.
When truth or virtue an affront endures,
The affront is mine, my friend, and should be yours.  

When viewed through the lens of sentimentalism, the strength of this same epigraph is its call for a relationship between reader and text. To an audience trained to look for gestures inviting sympathy or other emotional reactions, the line “The affront is mine, my friend, and should be yours” reads as though Pope is calling out to readers to feel the affects of the affront rather than to understand the implications of an affront on truth or virtue. This is just one example of the 1867 Clotel’s attempt to speak on familiar terms with sentimental readers. The book continues to make these appeals to sentimentalism in an attempt to use the power of the genre to inspire change in the dominant cultural ideology. However, the consolidation of a sentimental reading community is a precondition to the novel’s ability to affect change.

In addition to being another appeal to sentimental readers, the dedication page of the 1867 Clotel also works to reveal Clotel’s community of female readers. The dedication reads as follows:

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64 William Wells Brown, Clotel; or, The Colored Heroine, (Boston, Lee & Shepard, 1867), n.p.
TO
MRS. ANNIE G. BROWN
MY WIFE,
WHO, ON READING THE MANUSCRIPT, SO MUCH ADMIRE THE
CHARACTER OF CLOTELLE AS TO NAME OUR DAUGHTER
AFTER THE HEROINE,
This Unpretending Volume
IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR. 65

The dedication uses three different typefaces, and four different sizes of
the dominant typeface. This page also uses a typeface not found anywhere else
in the book. The words “my wife” are set off differently from all other text in a
distinctive and bold outline face, perhaps to emphasize the affection in the
relationship between the writer and his spouse. With this dedication page,
Brown situates his text in both the domestic and romantic spheres using the
words “Mrs.,” “my wife,” and “daughter.” Brown also implies a situation of
family reading by acknowledging his wife as a reader and indicating that they
will continue to share this book within their family since their daughter is
named after the title character. Similarly, the words “admired” and
“affectionately” carry a romantic register with them as a husband reveals the
feelings he has for his wife, the dedicatee. In this way, Brown provides the
sentimental reader with a love story between author and wife at the very start of
the book.

Given the situation of this text, it is important to consider the way this
dedication page makes use of sentimental tropes. If the goal of sentimental
literature was for readers to emotionally connect to the characters and their
situations, what better way to encourage that engagement than to begin with a

TO

MRS. ANNIE G. BROWN,

MY WIFE,

WHO, ON READING THE MANUSCRIPT, SO MUCH ADMIRER THE CHARACTER OF CLOTELLE AS TO NAME OUR DAUGHTER AFTER THE HEROINE,

THIS UNPRINTED VOLUME

IS MOST AFFECTINGLY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.

Dedication page: Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine (1867)
personal testimony to the novel’s ability to affect the reader. Before the narrative begins, the reader finds a document guaranteeing the novel’s ability to stir the emotions of its reader. Genette writes that the dedication, as a part of paratext, “proclaims a relationship [a]nd this proclamation is always at the service of the work, as a reason for elevating the work’s standing or as a theme for commentary.” Through his wife’s endorsement of the book as sentimental literature, Brown uses his dedication to elevate the standing of his novel, and introduce his first female reader. From this, we can then interpret William Wells Brown’s wife as a character inserted, before the narrative begins, as the archetype of a sentimental reader. In the way that Robert S. Levine argues that Georgiana Carleton, the daughter of the parson and the novel’s preeminent advocate for abolition, is made available to white readers as the “best” version of Southern white women, Mrs. Annie G. Brown is made available as the ideal reader for this text. With Mrs. Brown as a model, readers understand that they should strive for her experience of reading, in which the power of the novel was so overwhelming that she brought the character Clotelle to life in her own family.

The story of Mrs. Brown’s decision to name the couple’s daughter Clotelle in honor of the book’s protagonist, highlights her involvement in the preparation of the book for publication. The dedication explains that she read “the manuscript,” implying that the story was unpublished at the time. Brown uses the sincerity of his wife’s positive reaction to the novel to condition his readers for a positive experience with the book. This story, as told in the

66 Genette, Paratext, 135.
dedication, creates a version of the communities of reading that were a central part of Redpath’s project. While engaging with the dedication page, a female reader learns that she is a part of Clotel’s community of female readers, which began with the author’s wife. In this way, the paratext of the 1867 Clotel works to strengthen the bonds of its female readership with the goals of reaching these women on an emotional level and inspiring them to address issues of racial injustice in their community.

The physicality of the Lee & Shepard edition makes another appeal to sentimental readers as an American edition ready for a personal library. The publisher’s attention to the design and construction of this book, which has cloth-covered boards and goldleaf lettering on the spine, is an effort to bring Clotel inside the American home. Again, the spine is the only place that displays any identifying characteristics of this book, and even here the information is sparse. The subtitle, The Colored Heroine, printed in gold, is the only information a potential reader receives about the text within. This choice of title is also an appeal to sentimental readers. In the era of the “tragic mulatta” as a literary figure, the intended audience would understand from the spine, that this novel would present a narrative aimed at capturing the emotions of the reader through powerful depictions of the institution of slavery. Readers of sentimental literature would be able to recognize this text even before they read it. In addition to the title, the physical form of the book also targeted a domestic readership. Lee & Shepard’s choice to publish Clotel as a higher quality object transformed the text from a perishable dime-novel into a lasting book-object. By working to gain a permanent place in the domestic sphere, and in American literature, the 1867 Clotel is empowered to influence generations of
readers and inspire them to consider the situation of race in their own historical moment.

By engaging in material analysis of these four books-as-objects, the Clotel scholar is able to understand, more fully, the unique situation of the first African American novel. This thesis is motivated by the desire to advance a new method for reading the four editions of Clotel relationally. This chapter has been an investigation of a central conflict that comes out of this relational reading: how are we meant to understand a text printed across four formats? The answer I put forward is to read the printed format of the editions as a text and a record of the historical moment for each part of the Clotel project.
Conclusion

In the final section of their anthology, Paula Garrett and Hollis Robbins reprint the four versions of Sam’s dentistry scene as told in *Clotel, The Escape*, the 1865 *Clotelle*, and *My Southern Home*. The title of this section is: “Teaching William Wells Brown: Four Versions of an Anecdote.”* In this presentation of the four versions of the anecdote alongside one another is one move in a slow trend toward practicing the new method of relational reading for which my thesis argues. Equally, the editorial decision to include this as the final section in the anthology and to use the word “teaching” in the title, suggests that the editors are aware that we must learn a new way of studying William Wells Brown by examining multiple versions of texts. However, the editors offer no commentary on the four versions, instead they offer them freely for readers to observe Brown’s practice of revising and reprinting his own work. The Bedford/St. Martin’s Cultural Edition and Penguin editions of *Clotel* also contain excerpts from the later editions, though the Cultural Edition does not reprint any part of *Miralda*. Again, the move to reprint excerpts from other editions shows that the editors of these editions are aware of an innate relationship among the four *Clotels*, while they resist explicating a strategy for reading these included texts.

The most pointed example of this resistance comes from Christopher Mulvey, an editor of the Electronic Scholarly Edition (ESE) of *Clotel*. Mulvey is

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the critic who best articulates the “Clothel problem.” In a statement that addresses the purpose of the ESE, he explains, “The Clothel problem is easily stated. Clothel’s author, William Wells Brown, published the novel Clothel in four different versions between 1853 and 1867. [T]hese versions are sufficiently different to raise issues of textual identity and of publishing practicality.” By his participation in the project of the ESE and his statement here, it is clear that Mulvey is aware that the four editions of Clothel require a new kind of scholarly treatment. Yet again, he offers no suggestions for what to do with these four editions even though he was part of the group that enabled readers to explore the four Clothels as a single text. These examples of reprinting, excerpting, and electronically publishing the four editions indicate to me that the field of Clothel scholarship is primed for an overhaul of the conventional methods for reading and understanding the first African American novel. The project of my thesis has been to begin this work by interpreting the available resources and using them to practice a new method of relationally reading the four versions of Clothel.

I owe a great debt to the work of the ESE of Clothel. The edition allows a reader to approach the four editions of the novel as parallel texts by visually collating the four narratives on-screen, and tracking the changes across the editions. This Clothel hypertext demonstrates the power of electronic publishing to provide a platform for the presentation of the complete work including paratext, narrative, and revisions. The electronic edition of Clothel effectively

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destabilizes the traditional hierarchies in literary studies by simultaneously presenting the book as an object and as an evolving text. The ESE resists prioritizing literary analysis before material analysis and troubles the divide between the four editions of Clotel. In this way, it provides the most holistic view of the novel. Yet, for all of its worthy contributions to the study of Clotel, the electronic edition is not enough.

When we consider the implications of this new method of reading, it is clear that our print editions of the first African American novel are inadequate. Our Clotel books must be reimagined to reflect the work of the novel project. To capture the true Clotel print editions and their editors must provide readers with the complete text of the four editions, and encourage engagement with this dynamic text. They must also highlight the novel’s participation in different arenas of nineteenth-century print culture and attend to the four editions as a record of Brown’s changing politics. For too long Clotel has been constructed in response to the myth of a single, unitary, founding African American novel. We must revise our process of production in order to respond to Clotel on its own terms, attending to its intricacies and acknowledging its innovation to the act of reading and our conception of the novel.

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70 The images of the four editions provided in my thesis are made available as part of the ESE of Clotel website.
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