
THE NARRATIVE OF ARCHIBALD MONTEITH, A JAMAICAN SLAVE

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The long-neglected and unappreciated autobiography of Archibald Monteith, a nineteenth-century Jamaican slave, has had a strange and interesting publishing history. First printed in 1864 in a German Moravian religious periodical, it was translated into English the following year for publication in Great Britain. In subsequent years, the latter version appeared on a few occasions in histories of the Moravian missions in the Caribbean. But in 1966, a manuscript containing another version of Monteith's life story was discovered in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It was the labor of an American missionary who had served in Jamaica during the early 1850s. This narrative text further reveals Monteith's work to be an honest, moving account related by an intelligent, skillful storyteller who perceptively understood the tragic effects of slavery upon all men and women. Moreover, the new manuscript helps us to see the ingenious methods Monteith used in communicating his graphic picture of slavery, notwithstanding the primary spiritual aim Monteith and his Moravian missionary recorder were ostensibly pursuing. Now that we have this important text, we can give Monteith's autobiography the critical attention it deserves in order to illustrate its remarkable qualities of design and motivation that place it among the finest works of the slave narrative genre.

I

The world of the slave narrative/autobiography covers many areas, crosses continents and oceans, and spans the decades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Several nations claim various narratives as their own. The works can belong to American, British, French, Spanish, African, or West Indian histories and literatures depending on several considerations, such as the slave writer's geographical location or locations, the original language in which the slave wrote or dictated his or her story, and the place of major publication of the narrative work. In addition, one must take into account the fact that several slave memoirs written in Arabic or Spanish were translated into English by abolitionists for primary impact on American and British readers.¹ Another consideration is that narratives written in former colonial areas, the United States included, are claimed by both the ex-colonial powers and the now-independent countries. As a result, thorough studies of slave narrative literature cannot

be confined by the arbitrary limits of nationalistic and linguistic frameworks devised by political societies.

As is well known, the period of greatest activity for the publication of slave literature, mainly the years from the 1830s to the 1850s, occurred because of antislavery crusades in the United States and Europe. The numerous narratives by ex-slaves used in the fight against slavery are well-documented and continue to be analyzed. Until recently, the case was different concerning the treatment of the English Caribbean narratives. Serious studies of these works were rare in the past, probably because of the relatively fewer autobiographical accounts produced by slaves in the British West Indies.

Historians have long lamented the scarcity of direct accounts of British West Indian slavery: "Perhaps the most unfortunate of all deficiencies is the lack of firsthand evidence from the illiterate slaves themselves" (Craton, Walvin, Wright xiii). Recently, Gordon K. Lewis stated in his study, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*, that a situation prevails "in which the literary record of Caribbean slavery from the slave viewpoint is practically nonexistent" (173). Several historical factors might explain the reasons as to why relatively few written records were produced by the Caribbean slaves. The location of slaves on remote islands made escape extremely difficult. North American slaves could escape by land routes to the free territory of the North; island slaves seeking their freedom had to hide in the mountain and jungle areas and live divorced from the rest of society, or they had to flee to the coastal cities and remain forever fearful of discovery. Those who did manage to secure their legal freedom also migrated to the cities, where they entered the Creole societies, which allowed them a certain amount of participation in skilled trades, commerce, education, and the arts. These men and women would not want to jeopardize their new positions by documenting painful memories of slavery, which would brand them as political and social agitators.

In the American North, former slaves found abolitionists eager to collect their testimony, while in the British Caribbean, most slaves seeking help encountered only the almost powerless missionaries. Although many of these religious workers sympathized with the slaves and aided their freedom efforts, most of the missionaries preferred not to cause discord while performing their spiritual tasks. At times the distant British abolitionists, who occasionally journeyed to the West Indies to gather evidence for use in the antislavery struggle, made contact with a few enslaved men and women.²

Despite the apparent paucity of West Indian slave accounts, firsthand records do exist which reveal characteristics of the history of slavery in the British Caribbean. Moreover, several of the narratives when carefully studied can be noted for their achievements in literary composition. In this latter category are five autobiographical narratives related by West Indians who experienced slavery in the Caribbean during the nineteenth century. The works are by Mary Prince, James Williams, Ashton Warner, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, and Archibald John Monteith. Mary Prince's personal history was recently reprinted in editions of slave narratives published by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and by William L. Andrews, and thus her life story probably is the only one that is somehow known to modern readers of slave literature. The Williams, Warner, and al-Siddiq accounts are familiar to historians of the abolitionist period, but Mon-

teith's autobiography is practically unknown outside of a small group of men and women interested in the religious work of the Moravian missions.

The Muslim slave al-Siddiq wrote his account in Arabic, but all the other West Indian narrators dictated their life stories to whites who most certainly drew out from the black speakers particular incidents for use in designing the special kind of narrative required for maximum religious and social effects on a white audience. With the exception of Monteith's account, the autobiographies were used as testimony to combat the slave institution; in the Warner and Prince works, they also were used as evidence to secure the legal freedoms of their narrators. All the personal histories, especially the one by al-Siddiq, served to give proof of the advanced mental and emotional attributes possessed by black men and women.

At this point, if one considers the conditions under which the West Indian narrators told their stories, the question might arise as to the veracity and textual nature of these personal accounts. In the study of slave narrative literature, much has been written about the real motivations of the black autobiographers and the accuracy of their stories. John Sekora recently has questioned the autobiographical nature of the slave works. He argues that "the stated purpose of the slave narrative is far different from the creation of a self, and the overarching shape of that story is mandated by persons other than the subject. Not black recollection, but white interrogation brings order to the narration" (509).

With that in mind, we then may ask to what degree were the accounts distorted by self-censorship because of the narrators' unwillingness to displease their white benefactors by revealing full and innermost thoughts? And there were probably many other self-imposed restraints caused by the blacks' religious and moral sensibilities and their feelings about the various scruples held by the white amanuenses and the targeted reading public. Add to this state of affairs the white recorders' endeavors to elicit from the black storytellers certain events to support the themes and purposes of the narrative accounts, then the actual writing, editing, correcting, and arranging of the work, and it is no wonder that enormous difficulties are encountered whenever scholars attempt to analyze and evaluate slave autobiographies.

William L. Andrews writes in *To Tell a Free Story* that in the development of slave autobiography "the black narrator was, despite all prejudice and propaganda, a truth-teller, a reliable transcriber of the experience and character of black folk" (1). Andrews is examining Afro-American narrative, but his ideas are applicable to slave works produced in other parts of the world. He also states that by the middle of the nineteenth century "the genre had become the scene of a complex discursive encounter presided over by a self-determining narrator who makes free with text and reader in the name of truth to self, a standard that left both identity and veracity problematically intermeshed in their own mutual relativity" (2).

Despite what Sekora says about "white interrogation" determining the form of black narrative, many scholars agree with Andrews that the creation of self is certainly a chief accomplishment of most slave autobiographical accounts. It is true, as Sekora and many others contend, that the "self of autobiography comes into being in the act of writing, not before" (509). However, this does not mean that the black narrator as he wrote or told his life story was not able to forge his identity and practice being true

to himself within the encirclement of white design that confined him. One of the most fascinating features of most slave works is the character depiction of the autobiographical figure: a figure whose personal story rings true in spite of various hindrances that occurred during his or her life and at the moment of storytelling. From the narratives, we remember the striking character images of such autobiographers as Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs.

When we think about how slave stories came to be written, we recall that it must have been a heady experience for a slave or ex-slave to be asked to tell his or her story for general use and possible publication in the service of noble causes, such as the abolition of slavery, the furtherance of religious conduct, or the humanitarian claims that black men and women are the moral and mental equals of white persons. Because of this exhilarating once-in-a-lifetime experience, the black autobiographers would want to impart an honest and accurate message about the understanding they had of significant and, many times, shocking events. Thus, within the limitations of inner and outer censorship brought about by pressing social and legal aims, the narrators attempted through various implicit or hidden maneuvers to give the true meaning of their lives. As a result, frequently we can observe in a particular narrative the cross-purposes at work in the black slave's desire to reveal the unthinkable truth as opposed to his or her and the amanuensis's efforts to illustrate the allowable realities for the proper reader response.

Therefore, it is not mere supposition, wishful thinking, or flimsy thesis-building that induces serious readers of the slave narratives to find heretofore unnoticed signals that the black narrators placed in their stories despite all the restraints of their own and the white society's making. A careful reading of the narrative lives can bring to light various hidden signs, such as character disguises, masks, and subtle devices used in relating personal incidents; these can reveal the true story that the slave attempted to communicate to the world.

II

Examinations of the Jamaican slave works by James Williams, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, and Archibald Monteith uncover various concealed ideas and cross-purposes operating within their texts. Williams related his terrifying story of slavery to abolitionists who wanted to illustrate the evils of bondage and also prove that the probationary apprentice system in the West Indies was not working. The British government had set up this transitional four-year period in 1834, which would eventually lead to the slaves' full emancipation. Williams was only 18 years of age when he told of his slave apprentice experiences on the north coast of Jamaica. His *Narrative of Events* (1837) is an agonizing account of the tortures, whippings, and imprisonments endured by men and women in the hellish workhouse where the slaves are made to "dance" on the treadmill while being flogged. The young slave effectively depicts in his own words the unmerciful and insane world of colonial plantation owners who vent their cruel

anger against the soon-to-be-free slaves and who to try maintain their authority and control over them by means of fear. He delineates a surrealistic scene of pain in the workhouse:

It was miserable to see when the mill going, the people bawling and crying most dreadful—so they can't dance, so the driver keep on flogging; them holla' out, 'massa me no able! my 'to-mach, oh! me da dead, oh!'—but no use, the driver never stop—the bawling make it rather worse, them make the mill go faster—the more you holla the more the mill go, and the driver keep on flogging away at all them not able to keep up; them flog the people as if them was flogging cow. (17)

Williams is finally saved from further punishments when Abolitionist Joseph Sturge purchases his freedom and takes him to England to testify against the continuing cruel treatment of the slaves by the plantation masters.

In his narrative, Williams describes the slave conditions that his English friends wanted to read about; but in studying his work, we observe that the young man constantly dwells upon the bizarre practices of the white masters and upon their ready willingness to commit flagrant violations of the British law. He also condemns the magistrates who, instead of dispensing justice, are aiding the slavemasters. Williams says: "Some of them magistrate don't care what them do to apprentice, as long as them can get good eating and drinking with the massa and busha, and sometimes them set the massa in to do worse than them want" (24). Most significant in Williams' account of slavery are his repeated references to the workhouse horrors. The stark image of the workhouse, with its mechanism of punishment, the treadmill, becomes an overpowering metaphor for madness: a madness that occurs because the white rulers have created unjust and misconceived laws. Thus, it is interesting to see how Williams enlarges his attack against slavery to include the corrupt practitioners of the law and also, by implication, those lawmakers who have enacted the well-meaning but unrealistic legal measures for ending slavery. Williams paints a shocking portrait of the cruel insanity brought about by the apprenticeship law, a law that is intended as a means of gradually preparing the slaves for freedom but results instead in the creation of a terroristic state of angry and frustrated planters inflicting their revenge upon helpless black men and women.

During the apprentice period in Jamaica there appeared the brief account of another ex-slave whose manumission had been secured by a British opponent of bondage, in this case, Richard Madden. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq wrote his story in Arabic and then translated it orally into English for publication by Madden in his 1835 book on slavery in the West Indies. The following year, al-Siddiq dictated another English translation for George Renouard, which was printed in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. The African Muslim's name was spelled various ways by his English friends, who also knew him as Edward Donlan. The autobiography by al-Siddiq is a description of the noble origins of a young man in Africa who receives an advanced education with special training in the Koran. Captured as a prisoner of war, al-Siddiq is sold to the Christians, who take him to Jamaica as a slave. At the end of his account, al-Siddiq

explains the Muslim religion and its similarity to Christianity, and he bewails the fact that slavery denies him the advantages of practicing his religion.

In publishing al-Siddiq's work, his English supporters were chiefly interested in demonstrating to their white audience that a black person possessed mental faculties that could be developed through education. However, it is evident that al-Siddiq had more in mind when he wrote his narrative. He stresses the heroic quality of his African countrymen, who fight courageously in time of warfare, and he carefully delineates the scholarly and religious training given to the young Africans. In addition, al-Siddiq emphasizes the Muslim's religious practices and shows them to be as good as or in some cases superior to Christian worship. Overall, the narrative is a portrait of Africa as a culturally advanced society whose people are capable of extraordinary achievements.

The Jamaican accounts by Williams and al-Siddiq are significant pieces of slave narrative literature. Williams made a direct attack upon slavery and the misguided British lawmakers, while al-Siddiq presented a description of a civilized African land inhabited by noble, heroic people. A third view of Jamaican slavery exists in the autobiography of Archibald John Monteith, a Moravian Helper and Assistant in the Jamaica Mission at New Carmel, who related his slave and religious experiences from the vantage point of freedom. Of all the British West Indian narratives, Monteith's work stands out as the only complete spiritual autobiography. Its primary purpose was intended by both Monteith and his recorders to serve as a forceful example of a black person's capability for high spiritual achievement and good character formation. However, in the way the other narrators did, the former slave was able to reveal many significantly subtle feelings and thoughts about slavery as he told his life story.

Monteith's personal account was well known among the Moravian missionaries in the British West Indies, the United States, and Europe. His teaching and religious activities were mentioned with praise in the many reports sent back from Jamaica by missionaries, and published in the Moravian journal *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren*, which was issued monthly in London and was circulated worldwide. Just prior to his death in 1864, Monteith's autobiography appeared in German in the periodical *Missions-Blatt*, whose editor once served at New Carmel, where he knew and greatly admired the former slave. The editor claimed that the native Helper had dictated his memoir to Sister Geissler, the wife of a Moravian missionary at New Carmel. She had written down the ex-slave's words and translated them for the German publication. The editor also stated that the autobiographer's name was not being revealed because he was still alive. Presumably, Monteith would be embarrassed to have so many people learn that his life story was in print. A year later, the German piece was freely translated into English and printed in the *Periodical Accounts*; this version of Monteith's narrative is the one that appeared in its entirety or in paraphrased form in widely-distributed books published during the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.³

Until recent times, all accounts of Monteith's life depended on the "Memoir" printed in *Periodical Accounts*; the personal story was seen as a typical spiritual autobiography that contained an ex-slave's gratitude and dedication to the Moravian missionaries, who Monteith felt had saved his soul when they trained him to do God's work. In

turn, the missionaries considered Monteith's religious achievements to be a prime example of their beneficent mission efforts in Jamaica.

In 1966, an original manuscript copy of Monteith's autobiography was found in the Archives of the Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and printed in the *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society*. The booklet is in the handwriting of the Reverend Joseph Horsfield Kummer, who was a Moravian missionary in the New Carmel Mission during the years 1850–54, and who then returned to serve in churches in New York and Pennsylvania. Kummer titled the work *Archibald John Monteith: Native Helper and Assistant in the Jamaica Mission at New Carmel*. The manuscript is 39 pages long and is dated 1853.⁴ It seems to be the final form of a dictation and composition process copied after 1853 and based, as stated in the preface to the booklet, on "interesting and edifying conversations" Kummer and Monteith had during 1853 and part of 1854. These talks may have had their origin in the common practice the Moravian missionaries had at that time of conducting personal "speaking" with their converts. The Moravian author John H. Buchner, in his 1854 book, *The Moravians in Jamaica*, described the work of the missionaries: "They made it a rule to meet with each individual . . . for spiritual conversation. . . . These periodical conversations with each individual are generally denominated 'The Speakings'; and we can, from experience, testify to the beneficial effects which this personal intercourse of the missionary with the members has upon the whole congregation" (78). Kummer wrote that Monteith "gave me at various times *this account, or fragments of account of his life*" (1). These "fragments" must have been written down several times before Kummer made the finished copy that eventually was stored in the Moravian Archives.

The Kummer manuscript is practically identical to the record and chronology of events presented in the *Missions-Blatt* and *Periodical Accounts* printings of Monteith's story. All three accounts present almost the same factual information and paragraph order, in addition to a writing style marked by many similar language phrases. It is understandable that the memoir in the *Periodical Accounts* resembles the *Missions-Blatt* work from which it was translated. But how could the Kummer and Geissler versions be so close in text arrangement if both writers' claims are true, that Monteith related his life experiences to each one?

All indications are that one writer took down and composed Monteith's autobiography. The probability is that copies of Kummer's earlier account containing the "fragments" of Monteith's personal history were circulated among the Moravians stationed at New Carmel when Geissler translated the narrative for the German periodical. Perhaps Archibald Monteith himself gave or read copies of his autobiography to Geissler, and this would have justified her claim that the Moravian Assistant delivered his life story to her.

It is commonly known that slave works many times involved the collaboration of several people—the black subject, the white amanuensis, and the editor or printer. In an essay about the collaborative composition of American Indian and other "ethnic" autobiographies, David Murray points out that the texts of these works "are inevitably multi-voiced, hybrid products in which we can hear in varying degrees the 'speaking' subject but only through the ramifications and conventions of the written text" (178). When examining productions of this nature, critics, instead of dealing with questions

of accuracy and authenticity, should “look at the whole range of such works as a distinct type of text” (178).

Murray’s approach is useful for analyzing slave autobiography. In Monteith’s narrative story we have three texts to deal with—all of which display the fashioning influences of various named and unnamed recorders and translators. His autobiography is indeed “a distinct type of text,” in which the many voices heard there are never able to silence the ex-slave’s own strong speaking voice. Moreover, despite the factual and organizational similarities of the three versions of Monteith’s autobiography, there are important differences concerning intent and style, which when all considered reveal the kind of life experience Monteith had.

When we look at Kummer’s text, we see that it provides a somewhat different reading of Monteith’s life from the Geissler and *Periodical Accounts* versions, because Kummer supplied less spiritual apparatus and served less as an editorial writer for Moravian proselytizing and public relations aims. For example, Kummer’s booklet ends simply with a short religious verse; the Geissler work and its translation in the *PA* journal both end with a clarion call for the conversion of “dark heathenish Africa” (484).

A striking illustration of the differences between the Kummer and the Geissler/*PA* renderings of Monteith’s sentiments appears in the passages which describe the day Monteith receives his freedom from slavery. The Kummer text reads:

He gave me my free paper, and herewith my slavery had an end. Oh how full was my heart of thanks and praise that at length I had attained unto the blessing of *Liberty*. This day always remained to me a holy day. It was the *1st day of June 1837*. Soon after I had come from my masters presence, I dressed myself in my Sunday clothes, and rode to Carmel, where Br. Collis as our minister lived and labored. All at Carmel were surprised to see me thus on a week day; all the people present looked at me with astonishment, as I stepped near the house; I took off my hat and waved it about my head, and cried out with a loud voice. *THANK GOD! I AM FREE!*—All rejoiced with me but especially my dear minister Brother Collis! (46)

In the Geissler/*PA* memoir, the event is presented in this manner:

At once I paid down all my savings, and was soon afterwards able to complete the required sum, and my certificate of freedom was signed. Oh how full my heart was! how overflowing with thanks and praise to God! This day has always been to me a day of special rejoicing and thanksgiving. It was the 1st of June, 1837.

The first thing I did on obtaining my freedom, was to put on my Sunday clothes and ride to Carmel, where Br. Collis was now stationed. Every one was surprised to see me appearing in this manner on a week-day, but I cried aloud from a distance: “Rejoice with me! Thank God, I am free!” Br. Collis and all the Brethren and Sisters at Carmel congratulated me in a very hearty manner, and united with me in praising the Lord for His goodness. (483)

The two passages record the same information, but in ways that convey different meanings. Kummer's version is simple and direct with its emphasis on the former slave's receiving his "free paper" and then going to town dressed in his best clothes. Monteith is shouting his freedom and waving his hat to all his friends, who are happy as they rejoice with him in his freedom. The passage in the *PA* describes the day Monteith obtains his "certificate of freedom" in a more ornate and highly charged religious language that emphasizes the spiritual mission of the Moravian community. The focus here is on the Moravians and their special blessings from God; it is not on what Monteith stresses in the Kummer text: "herewith my slavery had an end."

Kummer's recording of Monteith's autobiography would not have turned out the way it did if one conjectures that Kummer copied his account from a written work produced by Geissler. Kummer's text does not contain the fancy high-flown rhetoric and constant doctrinaire religious phraseology that we see cluttering up the Geissler record of Monteith's narrative.

Geissler's primary aim in recording Monteith's autobiography was to display the excellent work of the Moravians in Jamaica. The *Missions-Blatt* account does not mention Monteith by name, and its objectively descriptive title states a third-person reference to the former slave's experiences. What Geissler was chiefly interested in showing was how an ignorant slave was made into a devout Christian teacher through the arduous and sacrificial work of the Moravian missionaries.

The *PA* memoir is a free translation of the Geissler text, and thus it is one more step removed from Monteith's speaking voice. The language of the *PA* piece is marked by ornate phrases, abstract diction and religious sermonizing that litter Monteith's story and rob it of much of the immediacy and direct simplicity of language that we see in the Kummer text. In addition, certain factual inaccuracies occur. In one case, probably for reasons that were considered indelicate, the *PA* account records Monteith as saying that after his freedom he lived with his "dear wife and the only daughter whom the Lord has been pleased to give us" (483). However, both the Kummer and the Geissler German texts state different information. Monteith mentions in the Kummer version that he has two daughters, one born to his wife and one born "in the time of ignorance" (47).

An example of the loss of simple graphic imagery between the Kummer and *PA* texts can be observed in a comparison of the sections that relate Monteith's description of the slave ships on the African coast. In the Kummer account, Monteith says, "Here I saw a great many things I had never seen before, and which greatly astonished me; but most of all was I pleased with the great water, the ocean. . . . When I awoke I saw a large ship before me. I was not a little astonished to see such a beautiful house floating on the water . . ." (31–32). In the *PA* version the language is rendered: "What most of all attracted my attention and filled me with intense awe and admiration was the wide expanse of the ocean . . . ; its smooth surface was dotted here and there with numerous boats. . . . Overwhelmed with the impression caused by this magnificent sight, I . . . gazed on the scene with indescribable delight" (434). We can notice that Monteith's expression in the Kummer text is concrete and unadorned. It recreates the direct impressions the young slave received at the time when he saw those strange

things. In contrast, the *PA* passage reflects the overwritten style of a translator bent on parading a knowledge of erudite language.

Whether or not Kummer's text is the primary account of Monteith's life may be a debatable issue; however, it is clear that Kummer's version presents the former slave's story in a more direct and touching manner. When all is considered, it becomes apparent that the discovery of the Kummer booklet is a major find in slave narrative scholarship. Now we have another text of Monteith's autobiography which can help us appreciate the record of a remarkable life story.

III

The narrative by Monteith, of course, was intended as a spiritual autobiography, and the three recorded texts clearly portray the former slave's religious life. Archibald Monteith's spiritual narrative is a classic example of that genre. The prominent Helper's conversion story is phrased in religious language and serves primarily to illustrate the devout and beneficial life of a man born in "ignorance" in Africa, but who later is converted to Christianity in Jamaica. Monteith's narrative follows the three-part structure of spiritual autobiography—the life of sin, conversion experience, and spiritual rebirth. The work also contains the usual elements associated with spiritual life stories. There are the contrasts of the sinful acts committed before conversion with the virtuous deeds practiced afterwards; and there are other marks of the spiritual narrative, such as the occurrences of significant events stemming from the emotional power of Scriptural readings (34), illnesses as signs of spiritual malaise (40), and mystical experiences related to the Lord (38).

As such, the narrative is an effective spiritual autobiography, but it is also a memorable slave narrative, despite the outward efforts of Monteith and his Moravian recorders to emphasize the work's spiritual aim. What places it in the genre of slave narrative literature is Monteith's inability to repress completely the slave experiences which were central to his existence and tied to his public spiritual practices. Private thoughts about his slave situation in the white world spilled into the allowable spiritual account. Thus, while relating his conversion story, Monteith accomplished his subtle purpose by the way he remembered and commented on his life in Africa, his kidnapping there, and his slave experiences in Jamaica. In Monteith's autobiography we can detect many of the essential elements and patterns of the slave narrative genre, such as the slave's dual search for freedom and identity, the determination to escape from slavery despite all difficulties, and the formation of the free person's new life after slavery.

Most of these characteristics of slave narrative literature can be found in Monteith's story, especially when Monteith through his character depiction of himself expresses a strong belief in the idea that physical freedom is a necessary concomitant to spiritual liberation and that it is also a prerequisite for personal, economic, and character advancement. For example, Monteith shows how all kinds of material and religious op-

portunities arise after he acquires his freedom. He purchases a house where he can live with his wife and daughter, and he considers several offers made to him for employment as a plantation overseer. The newly freed Monteith decides to refuse the offers because he no longer wants to be in a position that aids slavery. Instead, he accepts the Moravian Brother Collis's proposal that he become a Native Helper.

Monteith begins his narrative life story by painting a picture of Africa devoid of false images conjured up by the misconceived views of Western men and women. He claims he was born in 1799 and that his African name is Aneaso.⁵ The former slave makes it clear that he is descended from royalty on his mother's side, and he takes time to give a full and uncondescending explanation of African religious, cultural, and tribal life. The Africans are industrious, moral individuals with close family ties, bound by traditions and customs. One important custom is the painful and dangerous "festival of Tattooing" reserved for the children of "distinguished parents" (30). However, before Monteith can undergo this initiation rite, he is kidnapped at the age of 10 and sold into slavery. He recalls the astonishment and shock of being sold and the terror of seeing his first white men when he is placed aboard the slave ship.

The former slave's remembrance of his initial slave experience reveals a mixture of emotions. He exhibits a sense of awe and naive wonder about the strange world he is forced to enter, while at the same time he expresses a feeling of deep horror about the hellish slavery he undergoes in that world. Here we are reminded of the life of Olaudah Equiano, who wrote in his 1789 *Narrative* of similar experiences on the African coast when he was placed aboard a slave ship bound for the West Indies (1: 70–71). Equiano recalled how his fears of the white faces and the slave ship mingled with his feelings of wonder about the strange objects of Western society.⁶ Monteith remembers his early events in the same manner. Earlier, we noted his vivid description of the coastal scene in which Monteith says that he "was filled with astonishment to see the boats floating on the water, and most of all to see the great water itself" (32). Upon being taken to the slave ship, Monteith relates his sense of amazement: "I was not a little astonished to see such a beautiful house floating on the water; and when I was put on board nothing surprised me more, than to see the Captain with white face and hands, and with shining black feet without toes; (he wore boots)" (32).

After a terrifying Middle Passage voyage, during which time he hears the "heart-rending cries of anguish" of "fathers & mothers longing for their homes and children" (32), the young slave arrives in Jamaica and is told by the captain that he wishes to retain him as his personal servant. However, Monteith wants nothing more to do with the slave ship and threatens to jump overboard, whereupon he is sold to the master of an estate near New Carmel in the southwestern part of the island. Here it is interesting to speculate that Monteith's fate might have been similar to the shipboard life of Equiano if he had remained with the captain.

Monteith serves as a house servant for eight years until his master finally sends him to school. However, because most whites do not instill in the slaves the value of a Christian education, he fails to take learning seriously. Fortunately, Monteith is taught how to read by a pious white woman, even though he suffers the ridicule of the other slaves for desiring to read "the white peoples book" (35).

As he narrates his spiritual conversion experience, Monteith adds other meaningful

remarks against slavery and the white men and women who uphold or tolerate it in the Western world. Monteith never fails to miss an opportunity to point out the hypocritical behavior of the white Christian slavemasters. When he first undergoes his Christian instruction, the whites take him to task for his living with four women and his fondness for dancing. A white woman on a nearby estate where he receives his training tells the young slave that his behavior is sinful, and afterwards Monteith worriedly meditates upon this shocking revelation:

This also struck my conscience, for I was living with 4 women, without thinking it was sin to do so. In Africa this was done, and here in Jamaica we saw many white men, who were called gentlemen, and seemed to be respected, do the same. Although I had heard God's commandments and my heart went out after Jesus Christ, the blessed Saviour, and I wished to follow him, yet you must remember, minister we were in great darkness and ignorance. There was much that I did not properly understand, and I had no clearness to distinguish between what was right and wrong. The difference or contrast between Master and slave, between white and black, was so great, that I did not venture to ask. I was timid and backward to do so. I was so much the more thankful, when soon after this conversation with the nurse, Mr. Coke called upon me to come to him, and ask him, if there was any thing I did not understand. Many such opportunities I afterwards made use of, and gained much blessing for my heart, and especially by this means, by the blessing of the Lord, I gained much selfknowledge. (36)

The whole passage is couched in religious terms, and on the surface it makes the point that the young slave abandons his sinful ways when he is taught to understand the right way to live a Christian life. However, within the account we hear the sharp criticism of the respected white gentlemen who live with many women, and we are told of the great disparity "between Master and slave, between white and black," which prevents the association that would allow for proper human communication.

As Monteith continues to relate the spiritual progress of his life, he clearly remembers that the events were tainted by instances of negative treatment received at the hands of the whites. For example, he cites his master's opposition to his interest in religion (36); and later when the converted slave decides to give up living with women and marry the pious Rebecca Hart, his master's wife discourages him from doing so (39). Eventually, he is granted permission to marry in a legal church ceremony, but the service is marred by a crowd of "people, the most of whom laughed at us, and mocked us that we, black people would thus be married" (39).

Monteith even makes an interesting attack upon white medical knowledge and expertise when he recalls an episode of spiritual and physical illness. His body is "quite contracted and crippled" as he suffers from this "severe trial and affliction" from "the faithful Saviour" (40). The white men and women around him cannot help him, but luckily a black man rescues the sick slave: "All seemed unavailing, until at last a coloured man gave me something to drink; a tea prepared from a bush that grows here" (40). And it is this herbal potion that restores him to good health.

Toward the end of his narrative, Monteith dwells more on the horrors of slavery and its white perpetrators; but he is ever careful to slip in his views only when he discusses a particular spiritual matter. For example, when he describes the great slave rebellion of 1832, he makes a point of emphasizing the fact that the slaves in the New Carmel area do not join the revolt and that he is shocked about the events in the northern part of the island. He mentions that although the British soldiers are posted nearby to keep an eye on the slaves and frighten them, most of the blacks continue to attend church meetings because "so great was their hunger to hear the word of God, that the fear of man, and the red coated soldiers could not keep them away from Church" (42). On the surface Monteith is pointing out the loyalty of the slaves and their religious devotion. However, we notice also the idea he expresses in the passage that the slaves act courageously in refusing to be intimidated by the vigilant whites and their military force.

The depth of Monteith's desire for freedom is revealed in the account he gives of his manumission. Although universal emancipation is only a few years off, Monteith wants immediate liberty. After much opposition from his master, the Christian slave finally is allowed to purchase his "free paper" a year before freedom is proclaimed throughout the British West Indies; as observed earlier, Monteith treasures this special "holy day" of freedom.⁷

When all the slaves receive their emancipation on August 1, 1838, Monteith renders his harshest indictment of the slavery system: "Oh! the yoke of slavery! how it oppresses the poor negro in many ways . . ." (47). It is interesting to note here how this part of Monteith's narrative is presented in the *PA* version: "Thanks be to God for our freedom! The yoke of slavery was in many respects a serious hindrance to the work of conversion, and also to the continued growth in grace on the part of the converted" (483). The Moravian writer covers up the ex-slave's strong feelings with learned overblown language that emphasizes the benefits of emancipation for the Moravian missionary work rather than for the lives of the slaves.

Even though freedom has arrived, Monteith does not stop railing against the evil effects of enslavement which linger after emancipation. And he continues being careful for purposes of concealment to link his attack with spiritual concerns. Past servitude has made the blacks ill-equipped to manage their new lives, and it especially has weakened their spiritual condition. The oppression of the former slaves has made it "difficult in that degraded state to avoid the bad, and to follow only Jesus" (47). However, in Monteith's own case, his belief in his own worth and dignity as a person liberates him from all kinds of enslavement. He says he now recognizes only God as his master, and he ends his autobiography with the desire "that I may be and remain his property, until he calls me from this earth" (48).

While concluding his story, the Moravian Helper urges his "black brethren and sisters" to follow God's teachings "so that in the great day when we must render an account how we have made use of the precious word of God, our fathers in Africa who are still living in darkness and the shadow of death may not rise up in judgment against us" (47). It is surprising that Monteith's vision of the next world on judgment day includes his African forebears, who, although "living in darkness and the shadow of death," will be present at the day of reckoning. Significantly, this passage reveals

the survival of Monteith's African belief despite all his Christian training. Obviously, Monteith is not claiming that the actual fathers of the former slaves in Jamaica are all still alive in Africa. At this point in his life, almost half a century has elapsed since he and most of his kidnapped countrymen arrived in the West Indies. In the African religion the dead spirits are always in existence at the place of their earthly lives, and it was the strongly-held opinion of many slaves that upon death they would return in freedom to Africa.⁸ Monteith evidently still retains beliefs from his former religion that he still respects. This is why he is able to envision the African fathers as still living, and why he expects them in the afterlife, in spite of their condition of "darkness," to serve as active judges of the former slaves' earthly lives.

The reference to his African heritage is another illustration of Monteith's method of inserting his deepest sentiments beneath a surface expression of spiritual preoccupation. This masking device enables him to reveal painful and accusatory memories of past treatment by white persons in the Western world. Of the three known Jamaican accounts, Monteith's work is the most developed slave narrative we have. Through his clever manner of juncturing his views of slavery with spiritual matters, the dedicated Native Helper left for our benefit a more profound and meaningful record of the human experience than could ever have been imagined by his missionary friends.

Thus, we see that an examination of the Monteith autobiography based especially upon the Kummer manuscript reveals that it is more than an interesting spiritual memoir of concern only to religious historians. It is also a classic slave narrative with its dual themes of physical and spiritual freedoms and the presence of the strong speaking voice of the black individual giving testimony in support of a claim to human worth for himself and the other persons from his African homeland. In his act of recall, Monteith depicts himself as a dedicated person who possesses a fine African heritage and a talent of mind and body for great achievement. From the beginning to the end of his account, he envisions himself as an heroic figure chosen by God to do His work, a labor that involves pointing out the spiritual and moral blemishes of those who enslaved him. Monteith's strains of accusation toward white behavior could not be submerged despite the inner and outer restraints under which his narrative was recorded. The reader of Monteith's life story must be alert to find the deeper veins of meaning existing throughout the spiritual autobiography that Monteith skillfully placed within his "interesting and edifying" story.

Notes

1. Recent listings of slave narratives can be found in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), and in William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986); Davis and Gates provide a record of works by African Muslims in antebellum America, compiled by Allan Austin. An interesting example of a narrative that produced its major effect by being translated is the work of the Cuban slave Juan Francisco Manzano. His autobiography was translated from the Spanish and published in England in 1840. See Edward J. Mullen, ed., *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1981).
2. Besides the works of Craton et al. and Lewis, historical information about the British West Indies during the period of slavery can be found in the following works: Edward Brathwaite, *The Devel-*

- opment of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820 (London: Oxford UP, 1971); Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982); Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965); and Richard Hart's *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery*, 2 vol. (Kingston: U of West Indies, 1980–85).
3. Just a few years after his death in 1864, Monteith's life was praised and the *Periodical Accounts* autobiography reprinted in Thomas Harvey and William Brewin's *Jamaica in 1866: A Narrative of a Tour Through the Island* (London: Bennett, 1867). A prominent work that included a paraphrased version of Monteith's life was a Moravian historical account by Walter Hark and Augustus Westphal, entitled *The Breaking of the Dawn, or, Moravian Work in Jamaica, 1754–1904* (Belfast, Ireland: Strain, 1904). A thesis dealing with Monteith was written at the Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and as late as 1977 an article based on the *Periodical Accounts* version appeared in *The Jamaican Historical Society Bulletin*. However, a follow-up piece the next year announced the discovery of the Kummer manuscript.
 4. Unless otherwise indicated, my references to Monteith's autobiography are from the *Transactions* printing. I am indebted to Vernon H. Nelson, the Moravian Archivist in Bethlehem, who has assisted me in my research of Monteith's narrative and has allowed me to inspect the original manuscript booklet in the Moravian Archives. Also, all information concerning the German publication of Monteith's work in *Missions-Blatt* is derived from Nelson's own study of the German version. See the explanatory notes accompanying the *Transactions* printing of Kummer's text.
 5. Monteith's gravestone in the New Carmel burial ground lists his date of birth as 1800. In their 1867 book on Jamaica, Harvey and Brewin claimed that Monteith was in error about the year of his birth. They believed he was born in 1789, 10 years earlier than he stated.
 6. Equiano's mixed attitudes about his first encounters with the West are treated in my recent study of early black autobiography; see Angelo Costanzo, *Surprizing Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography* (Westport: Greenwood, 1987), 57–59.
 7. The extent of the regard for Monteith's impressive character is revealed in an 1837 letter printed in the *Periodical Accounts*. The plea was made for funds to help the newly-freed Monteith become financially secure so he could devote all of his time to religious service. The request was for 12 pounds sterling, but an editorial note stated that "a liberal subscription, by friends in Bristol and its neighborhood," brought in 36 pounds, 10 shillings (299–300).
 8. A recent article by Elizabeth Pigou, "A Note on Afro-Jamaican Beliefs and Rituals," *Jamaica Journal* 20.2 (1987): 23–26, presents a study of the survival of African religious beliefs in Jamaican slave society. She writes: "Very distinctive in African and Afro-American culture is the intense belief in the world of spirits and duppies and their interaction with the living" (24). Concerning a person's death, the slaves held "the belief that the spirit returned to Africa," and they had a custom of "sending greetings, via the spirit, to relatives in Africa" (24). See also Brathwaite, 218.

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