

**Music as a Literary Device in Solomon
Northup's Slave Narrative *Twelve Years a Slave*.**



SOLOMON IN HIS PLANTATION SUIT.

Solomon Northup

Image 1

Nathalie Nordnes



ENG350

Master's Thesis

Department of Foreign Languages

University of Bergen

May 2020

Abstract

Oppgaven undersøker musikk som litterært virkemiddel i Solomon Northups *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853). Jeg argumenterer for at beretningene om musikk i slavefortellingen er essensielle for å oppnå en dypere og mer nyansert forståelse av Northups personlige opplevelser, slaveriet som institusjon og slavekulturen i sørstatene i antebellum-epoken. Først introduserer oppgaven begrepet musikalsk ekfrase og knytter det til musikken i *Twelve Years a Slave*. Videre, ved å studere musikken som gjennomgående litterært motiv viser jeg hvordan den fungerer som en sonisk inngang til Northups indre sjelsliv, og hvordan den har vært ytterst effektiv til å påvirke leseren emosjonelt for å fremme avskaffelsen av slaveriet. Deretter, ved å analysere musikken som symbol demonstrerer jeg hvordan fiolinen symboliserer skjulte aspekter ved Northups identitet, og hvordan instrumentets symbolske karakter endres avhengig av dens kontekst. Denne diskusjonen viser også hvordan deler av Northups karakter er å anse som ugjennomtrengelig for leser, så vel som for andre karakterer i slavefortellingen. Her argumenterer jeg også for at musikken fungerer som symbol for aspekter ved slavekulturen og dens tilhørende musikk som ikke bare forblir utenfor leserens rekkevidde, men muligens også for Northup selv. Ved å diskutere eksempler på personifikasjon demonstrerer jeg hvordan fiolinens menneskelige egenskaper gjør leseren i stand til å knytte seg til instrumentet på et følelsesmessig plan og derav forstå omfanget av Northups ensomhet i slaveriet. Avslutningsvis studerer oppgaven gjennom det litterære virkemidlet synekdoke og dets effekt, hvordan fiolinen representerer en større helhet som også innlemmer Northup. Som teorigrunnlag benytter oppgaven blant annet Lydia Goehr og Siglind Bruhns definisjoner av musikalsk ekfrase, William Freedmans teori om det litterære motiv, Édouard Glissants teori om opasitet og Jerrold Levinsons teori vedrørende musikalsk lesevitenskap.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Twelve Years a Slave: Background	
1.0 Audience and Reception	10
1.1 The Slave Narrative as a Genre	13
1.2 The Music that Sprang out from Slavery	18
1.3 Conclusion	22
Chapter 2: Music as a Literary Device	
2.0 Musical Ekphrasis	25
2.1 Music as a Literary Motif	28
2.2 Symbolism and Spaces of Opacity	40
2.3 Personification and Synecdoche	54
2.4 Conclusion	57
3.0 Works Cited	61

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:

- My advisor Lene M. Johannesen. Thank you for guiding me throughout the process of writing. I have really appreciated your inputs, interest and enthusiasm. It has been nice to come by your office for inspirational conversations about the thesis subject, the various theoretic approaches and chats about music and life in general. Although covid-19 put an end to our regular meetings in March, the supervision has progressed online. I am thankful for your quick replies to the many questions I have had during the writing of my thesis, and the solid and uplifting feedback you have given me on the many drafts I have sent you.
- To Roger, Helena, my mother, father and the rest of my dear family, to friends and colleagues for generously supporting me throughout this year of writing when life has been a little rough. Although in doubt at first, I am so happy I did not postpone the writing of my thesis. Special thanks to my colleague Joakim Stegen Tischendorf for tuning into the topic of my thesis and contributing with interesting viewpoints.

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to my daughter Helena, I hope that you one day will read this. I love you.

Music as a Literary Device in Solomon Northup's Slave Narrative *Twelve Years a Slave*.

Introduction

Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) is regarded one of the "initial chronicles" of the African American literary canon (Cataliotti, xi). Once a free black man in Saratoga Springs, Northup is lured into slavery by the prospect of a generous work opportunity. The slave narrative serves raw and truthful accounts of Northup's hardships as a slave on plantations in Louisiana in the 1840s and 50s, until he is eventually rescued and freed after twelve years of bondage. In addition to the remarkable story, another striking aspect regarding the slave narrative is how music plays a prominent role in the life of the narrator Northup, as well as in the lives of the other slaves. Northup's testimony thus reveals how various forms of music became both an individual and communal tool of survival to resist racial oppression and to cope with the traumatic experiences that accompany a life in chains.

Being able to express himself through the tunes of the violin is not just a creative skill that provides Northup with superficial joy and pleasure, it also becomes a necessary means of comfort in order to survive the physical and emotional abuse experienced in slavery, or as he puts it: "It has also been the source of consolation since, affording pleasure to the simple beings with whom my lot was cast, and beguiling my own thoughts, for many hours, from the painful contemplation of my fate" (Northup, 7). In addition to experiencing an emotional escape through music, Northup's violin and musical skills also offer a physical outbreak from the hardships of slavery, as well as necessary provisions: "It introduced me to great houses – relieved me of many days' labor in the field- supplied me with conveniences for my cabin- with pipes and tobacco, and extra pairs of shoes, and oftentime led me away from the presence of a hard master, to witness scenes of jollity and mirth" (Ibid, 143). As Northup explains in the excerpt, fiddling grants him mobility and occasional freedom within a strict and inhumane regime.

In this thesis I will argue that Northup's accounts of music is essential to gain a deeper understanding of his slave narrative, and that an attentive reading and listening approach to music as a literary device in and of itself is needed to interpret the imaginary that is being presented to us through the text. The music is trying to tell us something, either to supplement and enhance the impact of occurring events in the texts, or it functions as its own narrative within the narrative, or it might in some cases do both. As literary device the music in *Twelve Years a Slave* is

also doing the opposite; as a symbol of opacity it occasionally signifies something hidden, which is either beyond our reach to be understood or too gruesome to be told. Either way, the music in Northup's slave narrative provides for an aural and sonic way of reading the text. By paying close attention to the imprints of music I argue that the reader is opened up to more nuanced and complex understandings of Northup's personal slavery experience, the institution of slavery and lastly, the slave culture in the American South in the antebellum era.

In my analysis I therefore aim to explore music as a literary device in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* by focusing on musical ekphrasis, music as a recurrent literary motif, its symbolic aspects, and functions as personification and synecdoche. Viewing music as a literary device in *Twelve Years a Slave* (or in other slave narratives for that matter), has to my knowledge never been done in any detail before and will thus cover new research grounds. The same regards treating musical ekphrasis within the scope of music in slave narratives. For the first part I will employ the relatively new theory of musical ekphrasis as it is defined by Lydia Goehr in her journal article "How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis" (2010) and Siglind Bruhn's "A Concert of Paintings: 'Musical Ekphrasis' in the 'Twentieth Century'" (2001), and connect it to Northup's slave narrative. When I secondly evaluate music as a leading, recurrent motif throughout *Twelve Years a Slave* I will demonstrate how music can be seen as a sonic gateway to Northup's innermost feelings, and how it is most valuable in creating an emotional reader-response in favor of promoting the anti-slavery cause. For this part, William Freedman's theorizing of the literary motif (1971) will be central to my analysis and explorations. Thirdly, by analyzing the symbolic aspects of music I will make evident how Northup's violin conveys hidden aspects of his identity and furthermore, how the character of the wooden instrument dynamically changes depending on the contexts in which this symbol occurs. This discussion will also reveal internal spaces within Northup's character that remain inaccessible to the reader, as well as to the other characters in the slave narrative. For this part, I look to recent trauma studies especially when evaluating a passage where Northup's first person voice is suddenly replaced by a self-distanced third person point of view. Similarly, I will also discuss aspects of slave culture and the music that emerges from it that are not only out of reach to the reader, but possibly even to Northup himself. In these cases I argue that music functions as a symbol for spaces of opacity and I will therefore refer to Édouard Glissant's theory of opacity from his philosophical work, *Poetics of Relation* (1997) in my examination. Additionally I will make use of Jerrold Levinson's theory of musical literacy (1990) throughout the discussion. By discussing examples of personification in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* I will demonstrate how adding human attributes to the violin helps readers to emotionally connect with the inanimate object and thus understand

the scope of Northup's solitude when in slavery. Lastly, by viewing Northup's references to the violin as examples of synecdoche, the instrument represents a larger whole that includes Northup himself, yet the emphasis on the instrument in these contexts makes Northup appear more modest when expressing his musical talents. The careful examination and analysis of music through these literary devices will along the way provide me with answers to the core concern of my thesis work; As a whole, what is the paramount function of music in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*?

There is a substantial body of scholarships and journal articles that explore the role of music in African American literature. Some of these works relate more specifically to the music in slave narratives, but there are but a few texts of direct relevance to my approach in this thesis, and there seems to be a definite gap in the field regarding analyses that discuss music as a literary device in and of itself in slave narratives, let alone *Twelve Years a Slave*. In the following paragraphs I consider a few of the sources that touch upon relevant aspects of my project.

Nicole Brittingham Furlonge's *Race Sounds- The Art of Listening in African American Literature* (2018) reflects on the importance of listening in African American literature. She relates music to literature in the black tradition, arguing that reading also involves paying attention to sound. Her work "aims to understand how listening functions to perceive and interpret bodies, ideas, and aesthetics of race, gender and class differences" (Furlonge, 2). She gives advice on how to read, interpret and listen to the words of African American canonical texts, literature and art, mostly from the twentieth and twenty-first century. Yet, in her study she also comments specifically on listening in slave narratives and the sonic language of Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*: "For him" she says, "the songs, sung and heard, are the ultimate vehicles for communicating the horrors of slavery. He imbues sound with the affective strength of moving one to fight to abolish slavery" (Ibid, 84). Furlonge claims that the approach of listening should be somewhat similar to that of listening to jazz music; that one should listen with "big ears" in order to be able to interpret the works. She argues that African American literary and cultural texts in particular are to be thought of as sonically charged. By paying attention to sound it is possible to discover "the lower frequencies of representation, considering the ways in which aural perception can tell alternative stories and amplify sound and difference in new ways" (Ibid, 2). Although *Race Sounds* focuses on paying aural attentiveness to other elements in addition to music in African American literature, and her discussion mostly concerns African American literature from another time period, her approach is applicable to my analysis of music as a literary device. This is because by paying close attention to the sound of music in Northup's slave narrative, I too will be exploring "the lower

frequencies of representation, considering the ways in which aural perception can tell alternative stories and amplify sound and difference in new ways”(Ibid, 2).

Of more direct relevance to my thesis, Lara Langer Cohen deals with the function of music in Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* in her journal article “Solomon Northup’s Singing Book” (2017). By paying particular attention to the descriptive sounds in Northup’s accounts, Cohen claims that “once we attune ourselves to the voices as well as the words of slave narratives, it is surprising how much music they make” (Cohen, 259). Somewhat similar to Furlonge’ approach, she argues that listening will offer “an alternative to the visual imperatives of slave narratives... and become compounded by genre conventions of eye-witnessing and descriptions of spectacular violence” (Cohen, 260). Central to Cohen’s discussion and also a topic in my analysis, is the musical score “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation”, a song which is to be found on the last page of Northup’s slave narrative. I will turn to Cohen’s arguments in more detail when I discuss music as a symbol and spaces of opacity.

Furthermore Aaron D. McClendon views the musical input in fugitive slave William W. Brown’s works as sounds of sympathy for the antislavery cause. In "Sounds of Sympathy: William Wells Brown's "Anti-Slavery Harp", Abolition, and the Culture of Early and Antebellum American Song" (2014) McClendon argues that Brown used music as a tool of sentiment in the antislavery movement in the 1840s, and that he often included singing in his repertoire when lecturing for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society about the horrors of slavery. In these lectures Brown discussed how abolition could be achieved by appealing to people’s feelings, although he believed that those who had never been held in bondage could not fully grasp the sufferings in the lives of the American slaves. Similarly to Cohen, McClendon explains how music became increasingly important in the 1840s and 50s for the antislavery movement and how many antebellum Americans saw music as a moral organ in the way that it could persuade people to act right (McClendon, 88). Brown was no exception as he compiled and edited a collection of abolitionist songs containing forty-eight lyrics which he named *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, a songbook he dedicated to his once fellow bondsmen. McClendon argues that “it was the antislavery hymn and slave songs that most heavily influenced how music worked in Brown’s writings, for it was these two genres that first convinced him that sound could be one of his greatest allies in the abolitionist efforts” (McClendon, 85). McClendon concludes that

The Anti-Slavery Harp was Brown’s effort...to get free Americans to...“feel right”...by making audible and then amplifying the pain and sufferings of slaves as well as the sentiments of those who opposed slavery. Doing so could generate sympathy for slaves,

mobilize antislavery sentiment, and help usher in what would be, and thus what would sound like, a free nation. If Brown could change the way America heard itself, then he could potentially transform how it thought of itself, how it was organized, and how it would move forward as a nation (Brown, 97).

McClendon's arguments of Brown's use of music are relevant to my discussion of the paramount functions of music in Northup's slave narrative. This is because I believe that Brown's purpose of implementing music into his lectures are somewhat similar to that of Northup's idea of adding scenes of music to *Twelve Years a Slave*, as I will demonstrate later.

I have now mentioned a few of the sources that include relevant aspects of my thesis. Furthermore, to be able to say something about the role, purpose and literary functions that music serves in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, I will in the following paragraphs give a theoretic embedding that will function as a basis for my analysis. First, I find it important to explain the features of the slave narrative, thereafter I will outline some general characteristics of the African American musical genres during the time of slavery and publication of *Twelve Years a Slave*, and lastly explore the connections and differences between them. By doing so, it will become evident what the imprints of music adds to the equation that the slave narrative as a genre does not. This part of my thesis will thus make it apparent why a close reading of the passages of music is necessary in order to achieve a deeper understanding of Northup's slave narrative. Before I do so however, I wish to touch briefly upon the aspects of why the slave narratives were written. Who was the intended target group? And furthermore, how were they received by its audience? In the extension of these answers lies also the paramount function of the music written into them.

Chapter 1: Twelve Years a Slave: Background

1.0 Audience and Reception

In “Who Read the Slave Narratives?”, Charles Nichols remarks on the importance of slave narratives in the pre-Civil War period. He states that the slave narratives marked the beginning of a protest tradition in African American writing which affected the attitudes of the larger community toward the slaves. The authors of these narratives, often fugitive or manumitted ex-slaves, presented the institution of slavery in a fairly objective manner although they in the early beginnings were edited, promoted and distributed by abolitionists for the anti-slavery cause. Soon however, the interest grew among the general public and other publishing houses also began to issue them for commercial purposes (Nichols, 149).

Slave narratives became immensely popular with the public during the antebellum period, and the idea of releasing Northup’s accounts as a narrative of its own quickly came about after he regained his freedom in January 1853. The book was published already in July the same year and sold well (Fiske et al, 138). Already by mid- August it had reached an amount of 11.000 items sold (Ibid, 141). By January 1955 publisher Miller, Orton & Mulligan announced that sales had reached an impressive 27,000 copies during the two first years (Nichols, 150-152). In comparison, William Wells Brown's *The Narrative of William W. Brown- A Fugitive Slave* sold 8000 copies and had multiple editions within 1849. Frederick Douglass' *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* sold 30,000 from its first year of publication in 1845 until 1860. Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* received positive reviews by numerous newspapers across the nation. William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper *The Liberator* referred to it as a “deeply interesting and thrilling Narrative”, whereas other reviewers seemed to be impressed by the mild tone, honesty and lack of exaggeration (Fiske et al, 140).¹

There are several factors contributing to the immense acclaim of the slave narratives. One of them would be their sensationalism; the slave narratives provided truthful accounts of the inhumane conditions of slavery, some “far excelling fiction in their touching pathos” (Nelson, 60-61). The heroic acts perpetrated by the sympathetic characters in their pursuit of freedom, captivated and fascinated sentimental readers. Comparisons were for example made between Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as they were released only a year apart and covered similar grounds (Fiske et al, 140). However, Stowe’s book

¹ The popularity of the slave narrative genre declined after the Civil War and subsequently at the end of slavery, however, until interest was regathered by literary critics and historians in the beginning of the twentieth century. Today the slave narratives are considered an essential part of the African American literary canon.

is a work of fiction and Northup's narrative is autobiographical and would thus be considered more startling. According to the authors of *Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave*, Northup's remarkable story of kidnapping, enslavement and later rescue, caused wide sensation in the national press (Ibid, 136). Within a month after regaining his freedom, Northup had become a recognized national figure, a position he withheld for years to come (Ibid, 136). In addition to the sensationalism of the slave narratives, another factor of more importance might also explain their enormous popularity, namely the timeliness of their theme. In the decades before the outbreak of the Civil War, slavery had become a heavily discussed problem in the American public and private sphere where the North and the South represented the opposites (Nichols, 152).

As a tool of sympathy, the intention of the slave narratives was to promote the anti-slavery cause, and they were met by an enthusiastic crowd. As I mentioned initially, abolitionists were the first to publish slave narratives as they understood the power of these eyewitness accounts of slavery, and used it to their advantage. Similar to other former slaves like William Wells Brown and Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup used his slave narrative as a platform to battle against the perception of slaves' inferiority and to fight for their rights. The American Anti-Slavery Society argued that only through the testimony of blacks, especially former slaves, would Northerners "hear the victims' side of slavery": "The public have itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave. Multitudes will flock to hear one of his class speak.... It would be a good policy to employ a number of colored agents, if suitable ones can be found" (John A. Collins to Garrison, quoted in the *Liberator*, 21 January 1842). Due to the great interest, Northup travelled across New York and New England after the release of *Twelve Years a Slave* to promote his work in a series of lectures before antislavery meetings, abolitionist conventions and the general public at lecture halls (Fiske et al, 143). A correspondent from Frederick Douglass's newspaper reported with great enthusiasm from one of these lectures where Northup spoke about his slavery experiences:

Last night I had the pleasure of hearing Solomon Northup... His story is full of romantic interest and painful adventures, and gives as clear an insight to the practical workings and beauties of American slavery...Northup tells his story in a plain and candid language, and intermingles it with flashes of genuine wit. It is a sure treat to hear him give some hazardous adventure, with so much sang froid that the audience is completely enraptured and the 'house brought down (*Frederick Douglass Paper*, January 27, 1854).

Although slave narratives became so popular that they were translated into French, German, Dutch and Russian and thus became available to a European audience, they were originally intended for Northerners in an attempt to make them understand the true conditions of slavery and thereby take a stand against it. These readers had begun to come to terms with the realities of slavery and their views often derived from what they read in the slave narratives. The depictions were heavily contradicting the idealized image presented by the many slaveholders on Southern plantations as they thoroughly described the horrible reality of family separation, sexual abuse, heavy workloads and brutal punishment. Northerners would see an enslaved people not much different from themselves, represented with the love and respect friends and family would show for one another, as well as the deep bonds that existed between them. Furthermore, the narratives gave valuable insight into the African American culture with its religion, folktales and last but not least, music. In a geographically and politically divided country, the narrators of the slave narratives gained a unique status and authority as important eye-witnesses for their Northern readers (Heglar, 9).

According to Nichols regarding the purpose of the slave narratives, “The appeal to their readers’ sympathy was no doubt a powerful one” (Nichols, 152). Similarly, the intention and function of music in these slave narratives can be juxtaposed with the purpose of the slave narrative itself, something which corresponds with McClendon’s arguments of Brown’s use of music as a tool of sentiment to appeal to his audiences while lecturing. African American music was becoming increasingly popular at the time, and musical troupes such as the Hutchinson Family Singers and the Luca Family Singers toured widely across America singing antislavery songs. In addition there was an emergence of songbooks promoting the abolishment of slavery, such as William W. Brown’s *The Anti-Slavery Harp*. Cohen points out that “white audiences were eager for various forms of what Nina Sun Eidsheim calls ‘sonic blackness’, especially the ‘sounds of slavery’ as it would provide authentic evidence of the slavery experience” (Cohen, 260). Adding elements of music into the slave narratives created valuable pockets of space that would evoke pity and sadness for the enslaved people, as the reader believed they could “hear” their voices and learn their true feelings. An example is where Frederick Douglass writes about the songs he heard being sung by the slaves: “To those songs I trace my first glimmering of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds” (Douglass, 263). Douglass saw the music as a persuasive vehicle in gaining support for the anti-slavery cause. As he explains in his narrative: “I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than

the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do” (Ibid, 263). Similarly, Garrison wrote in 1832 that the purpose of antislavery societies were “to scatter tracts, like rain-drops, over the land, on the subject of slavery” (Sekora, 494). A similar emotional response may have been traced within the reader as the music provided valuable insight into what one believed would be the very souls of the slaves. This again would create sympathy for the abolitionist cause, which was likely the overall purpose of adding music into the slave narratives.

Discussing the aspects of why the slave narratives were written, who their intended target group was, and how they were received has also allowed me to briefly touch upon the paramount function of the music written into them. In this connection I also find it necessary to establish an historic overview of some of the conventions and perimeters of the slave narrative genre, which marks the very beginning of black literary voices and has shaped later African American literature. They are often divided into three subgroups according to the historical period in which they are written; the first narratives are referred to as the proto slave narratives of the colonial and early national periods, the second group is called the antebellum slave narratives, and the last group is named the postbellum narratives published after the Civil War (Heglar, 7-8). In this thesis I will focus on the second category: the antebellum slave narrative written between 1830 and 1861, as this is the category where Northup’s narrative belongs.

1. 1 The Slave Narrative as a Genre

Kerry Sinanan claims that “the slave narratives were dynamic, responsive hybrid writings that evolved within a range of diverse dialogues, debates and arguments” (Sinanan, 61). It had a responsive nature and in order to understand its features, tropes and purposes, Sinanan points out the importance of seeing the genre within the historical, cultural and philosophical context in which it was written, as well as being aware of the literature and ongoing debates it was a part of or reacted against (Ibid, 61). Abolitionism grew more radical and organized in the antebellum era, and according to Philip Gould “the central abolitionist project of exposing the evils of the Southern plantation (and the false paternalistic myths supporting it), became the absolute priority of the antebellum slave narrative” (Gould, 19). Slave narratives were to function as empirical evidence to support the anti-slavery cause, and the primary focus was to provide detailed accounts of “the actual, daily conditions of slave life” (Ibid, 19).

In contrast to the proto slave narratives of the colonial and early national periods, a common trait for the antebellum slave narrative (1830-1861) is that they were to a larger degree authored by literate ex-slaves, and not just dictated to a white writer who interpreted and re-arranged the oral report. In the case of *Twelve Years a Slave*, although there was potential

interference of an editor, it is assumed that much of the wording and modes of expression is the voice of Solomon Northup himself. Author and lawyer David Wilson was appointed the editorial role of Northup's narrative soon after he regained his freedom in 1853. In the book's "Editor's Preface" Wilson does not refer to himself as a co-writer, but as the editor whose object "has been to give a faithful history of Solomon Northup's life, as he received it from his lips" (Northup, 1). Yet discussion was raised in the press "whether Northup or Wilson did the actual writing" (Fiske et al, 137). The *New York Times* commented on their beliefs of how the writing came about: "Some curious but no doubt competent person, has...been at the pains to elicit from the rescued negro a full story of his life and sufferings...and they fill a stout volume" (*New York Daily Times*, April 22, 1853). *The Syracuse Evening Journal* claimed that Northup should not be considered the actual author, but that he had dictated his story to another who had "acted as his amanuensis" (*Syracuse Evening Journal*, January 30, 1854). Wilson writes however in the "Editor's Preface" that Northup has "invariably repeated the same story without deviating in the slightest particular, and has also carefully perused the manuscript, dictating an alternation wherever the most trivial inaccuracy has appeared" (Northup, 1). Fiske et al write in *Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave* that even though he might not have been the "actual person who put pen to paper, Northup was very involved in its content" (Fiske et al, 138). Furthermore they claim that there are elements in the book which are clearly Northup's, such as:

The story line itself; the descriptions of his physical surroundings (e.g. the Great Cocodrie Swamp); the descriptions of his social surroundings; the descriptions of the agricultural and manufacturing processes in which he participated (Northup does not attempt to describe those in which he did not participate, such as the ginning of cotton; the descriptions of daily living on the plantation; and the descriptions and assessments of the individual people. Northup was in the position to experience all of these; Wilson was not (Ibid, 138).

In addition, Fiske et al claim that there exists a poetic voice within the slave narrative that undoubtedly belongs to Northup. These romantic descriptions concern "Patsey and Mary McCoy; Northup's brief but intense descriptions of the dancing at the Christmas balls; and his description of Mrs. Ford's garden, where he sought emotional release following his flight through the swamp..." (Ibid, 139). I will however argue that Northup's poetic voice is present also in the passages that include music, especially in the scenes where he describes the emotional relationship to his most beloved possession; the violin.

I have pointed out in the above paragraphs that the ex-slaves to a larger degree authored their own narratives. Yet the antebellum slave narratives in many ways also restricted the narrator from freely expressing himself/herself. As mentioned earlier; the intention of the narrative was to promote the anti-slavery cause and to represent a voice on behalf of the black people in bondage. James Olney comments on this “irresolvably tight bind as a result of the very intention and premise of his narrative”, which, is to present “slavery as it is” (Olney, p. 48). In order to do so, the narrator “must maintain that he exercises a clear-glass, neutral memory that is neither creative nor faulty”(Ibid, p. 48). Although the narrators were given a voice through their stories, they were sponsored by abolitionists and writing with a white audience in mind, taking precautions so as not to offend anyone. As a consequence they often portrayed themselves as less subjective eyewitnesses of slavery than they in truth were. Although their life stories were told in the first person and their accounts depict men and women undergoing great change, expressing individuality by revealing fragments of interior life was kept at a minimum. When they were doing so, it mostly circulated around the thoughts of slavery. One of the few exceptions, however, seems to be when Northup centers around the topic of music, where he, by the use of literary devices becomes more personal in his accounts. In my analysis I will discuss the implication of this in more detail.

Thematically speaking the antebellum slave narrative emphasizes the journey from slavery to individual freedom. According to Charles J. Heglar in his *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft*, there seems to be a common literary theme running through and thus organizing the antebellum narrative: “The narrators awaken to their physical and mental enslavement in the South, resolve to be free, and use various individual means to escape to the North, where they end their physical and psychological quests in freedom” (Heglar, 8-9). The narrative furthermore emphasizes movement as it “moves from south to north, from rural to urban, and from slavery to freedom” and ends with the arrival at the final destination for the fugitive slave (*Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature* Vol 3, 107). Yet the narratives reveal few details of the escaping route in order to protect those who assisted the runaway slave in gaining freedom, or to not ruin the chances for others who intended to commit a similar escape (Scott, *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*). The beginnings of the slave narratives often specify where the slaves were born and furthermore elaborate on blood relations. The endings typically emphasize “reconciliation with a different kind of social family/institution, not religious but political” (Sekora, 493). What distinguishes Northup’s story from most other slave narratives in the antebellum era, is his early youth and adult life as a free man. According to Fiske et al, kidnappings of free black citizens for the purpose of slavery were not uncommon

(Fiske et al, 63). What was rare however, was the “remarkable occurrence for anyone to be rescued, as Northup was” and thus being able to tell their life story (Ibid, 12).

The titles of the slave narratives often referred to the authors themselves. Solomon Northup’s title *Twelve Years a Slave* was considered a clever one and was in the subsequent years mimicked by other ex-slaves. Examples are *Twenty-two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman*, by Austin Steward, released in 1857, and *New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man: Recollections of H. C. Bruce*, in 1859 (Ibid, 142). The slave narratives would also include elements that would verify the authenticity of the author as a fugitive slave, such as letters, prefaces, guarantees, tales or other documents by reputable abolitionists (Heglar, 9). Robert Stepto claims that these documents “are at least partially responsible for the narrative’s acceptance as historical evidence” and that in literary terms, they “collectively create something close to a dialogue- of forms as well as voices- which suggests that...the slave narrative is an eclectic narrative form” (Stepto, 3). As I have mentioned before, Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* includes a short editor’s preface by David Wilson where he vouches for the truth in Northup’s accounts, in addition to other verifying documents in the appendix. Similarly, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* also begins with an eight page- long preface by the founder of the American Anti- Slavery Society, William Lloyd Garrison, and a letter from Wendell Phillips, the president of the Anti- Slavery Society. This also applies to *The Narrative of William W. Brown- A Fugitive Slave*, which opens with a letter from Edmund Quincy and a preface by J.C. Hathaway, both abolitionists and participating in the editing of Brown’s accounts. Quincy notes in his letter to Brown that “At last, a man must be differently constituted from me, who can rise from the perusal of your Narrative without feeling that he understands slavery better, and hates it worse, than he ever did before”(Brown, xxiv). Such introductions would often claim that the narrator did not exaggerate their accounts, on the contrary, they understated the horrific experiences of slavery.

Sekora comments that “The slave narrative is unique; it resembles other forms, but other forms do not resemble it” (Sekora, 510). Due to the purpose of the narrative and the interference of white abolitionist editors, the form of the slave narrative is regarded as Anglo-American (Ibid, 510). The narrator’s accounts of slavery were often written down after having repeatedly been performed orally at abolitionist’s lectures, which gave them the opportunity to “polish an oral version of their tale” (Stepto, 9). By listening to lectures by other black agents, narrators often inspired each other in terms of structural conventions (created by white abolitionists) at these meetings. This regards for example Douglass and Brown, who first began as speakers against slavery and thereafter published their slave narratives (Sekora, 497). In contrast, Northup did not

begin to give lectures about his first hand experiences until after the release of his book in the second half of 1853 (Fiske et al, 143). Northup's lecture appearances would be announced in newspapers in advance, such as in the *Syracuse Evening Chronicle* who wrote that Northup would "recount in his simple and unvarnished way, the particulars of his kidnapping and twelve years' subsequent servitude in the South" (*Syracuse Evening Chronicle*, February 2, 1854).

I have so far mentioned many of the perimeters of the slave narrative such as the structure of the actual narrative, the title, as well as prefaces or introductions written by a white abolitionist or a friend that would verify the truth of the narrator's accounts. James Olney points out a list of 17 formal components that characterizes the typical outline of the slave narrative, some of them are the ones I have described in the above paragraphs (Olney, 50-51). One might therefore assume that these criteria were outlined by white abolitionists as an attempt of creating a white wrapping that would make the slave narrative accessible to its targeted audience, or, to quote Sekora: "The black message will be sealed within a white envelope" (Sekora, 502). Yet none of Olney's bullet points outlines a demand for musical elements in the slave narrative like the ones we see in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. I therefore argue that inclusions of music might be regarded as deliberate choices made by Northup himself, creating spaces that are worth exploring. As we shall see in more detail later in the thesis, these sonic spaces are of relevance as to express Northup's personal slavery experience, the institution of slavery and the slave culture in the American South in the antebellum era.

While Sekora claims that the slave narrative genre is considered Anglo American due to its form, I argue that there are other literary features that make it African- American. African American literature and culture are rooted in an oral tradition that include storytelling, old sayings, proverbs and songs (Hamlet, 5). The orality of the slave narrative is consequently evident in the way it creates a dialogue with the audience by directly approaching and engaging the reader in its storytelling. The narrator declamatorily converses with his readers in between the events of the narrative and furthermore persuades and argues with them in order to take a stand against the institution of slavery. Another feature I suggest can be traced to the African American oral tradition is its simple, direct narrating style that always stays close to the core of the story, leaving less important details out of the plot². For instance, in Quincy's letter to Brown in the beginning of the narrative he points out "the simplicity and calmness with which you describe scenes and actions which might well "move the very stones to rise and mutiny" against the National Institution which makes them possible"(Brown, xxiii). Northup received similar praise after an

² Throughout my readings of various slave narratives this is a feature I have noticed, yet I have not been able to confirm my assumption with theoretic evidence.

appearance at the courthouse in St. Albans, Vermont where he was commented on “his unaffected simplicity, directness and gentlemanly bearing” (*Vermont Tribune*, March 3, 1854). Similarly, Douglass addressed the issue of slavery with “admirable brevity” (Sekora, 500). His mission was simply to expose slavery because, as he put it “to expose it is to kill it” (Ibid, 500). This again emphasizes the authenticity of the narrator as they in the midst of the most dramatic incidents keep a rational, concise tone in the way he/she approaches the material, which corresponded well with the purpose of the narrative.

Sekora further claims that meeting the ex-slaves face-to-face and listening to their spoken words was considered a more powerful and flexible tool than the written slave narrative (Sekora, 501). This corresponds with Douglass’ experiences on the matter as he recalls audience who revisited the antislavery meetings several times to see him lecture about slavery. The initial time they showed up they came to be informed, the second time they came in order to be moved. Similar to what Brown experienced by using antislavery hymns and slave songs to appeal to people’s feelings, incorporating music at such meetings would have a powerful effect on its listeners. I argue that by adding these oral elements of music also into the written slave narratives would help them come alive and have similarly persuasive effects on its readers. This, I believe, is also the paramount function of music in Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave*. Having considered in some detail the role of music, we now come to the main concern in this thesis, namely the topic of music in slave narratives, and more specifically the music in Northup’s slave narrative.

1. 2 The Music that Sprang out from Slavery

Robert H. Cataliotti points out that “music has always occupied a central position in Black American life” and that “it has been the music that has preserved many elements of both African and African American culture throughout the black experience in America” (Cataliotti, ix). Since most slaves were considered illiterate in the sense that they could not read nor write, the African American cultural expression is said to be deeply rooted in an oral tradition rather than a written one (Hamlet, 5). In African American slave culture, singing was used as a form of communication. Applying scenes of music would therefore appear as familiar elements in the slave narrations, as music constituted a natural part in the daily lives of the narrators as well as in the lives of the other black characters.

To understand the musical genres that sprang out from slavery, we must also pay attention to their origins. The people who entered the shores of North America during the years of the Atlantic slave trade (1619-1808) brought along with them customs, rituals and religious beliefs from their African home countries. A combination of these African cultural elements

alongside a gradual influence by European practices were eventually passed on to later generations (Floyd Jr, 38). Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture* (1987), which is regarded a seminal study on African cultural influences in slavery, argues that the Ring Shout should be considered an inevitable cornerstone in the development of African- American culture in North America (Stuckey, 10). The Ring Shout was an African ritual dance performed by the slaves that included rhythmic, call-and-response singing and counterclockwise dancing. Most activities would be performed within the Ring Shout, they danced, prayed and sang and used drums to accompany them. In fear of inciting rebellions, the ritual of the Ring Shout was prohibited by various states in 1740, along with the playing of loud instruments and meetings for religious and educational purposes (Floyd Jr, 38).

Another early African American dance is the practice of Patting Juba. The dance includes movements of stepping, clamping and stomping and probably derives from an African dance called guiouba. Patting Juba became popular among the slaves after many slave owners prohibited the use of drums because they feared that they could communicate rebellions on the plantations through the instruments. Where they had no instruments available to accompany them when they sang and danced, they "patted juba". Northup describes the practice in *Twelve Years a Slave* as "striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, then left with the other- all while keeping time with the feet, and singing" (Northup, 144). As his description of patting juba is the only one of its kind, there might very well have existed numerous versions of the practice (Floyd Jr, 53). As I will demonstrate in the analysis later, Northup does not only give an important witness account of slavery, he also provides valuable insight into the musical traditions of the African- American slaves.

The African ritual of the Ring Shout alongside a new Christian God gave life to a new musical genre, namely the African- American spiritual (Ibid, 39). The spirituals were a joint product of the performers' past as Africans and their present state as slaves in America. A typical build-up of the spiritual could be both long- phrase and short-phrase melodies that were repeated and thus turned into larger melodic structures (Ibid, 43-44). Furthermore they included African elements such as call-and-response, call-and-refrain and textual improvisation. The literary features in the lyrics of the spirituals are similar to those in African song, for example simile, metaphors and personifications (Harding, 199). Yet the main focus was the ongoing struggles they faced as slaves. Spirituals and secular songs accompanied slaves in their everyday chores as "rowing songs, field songs, work songs and social songs, rather than exclusively within the church" (Barker, 372).

The spirituals can be divided in two categories; the sorrow songs and the jubilees. Whereas the sorrow songs described the present struggles African Americans faced in slavery, the latter category expressed hope of a better future (Floyd Jr, 41). The importance of the spirituals as a way to express sentiments is noted in W.E.B Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* "chapter XIV: Of the Sorrow Songs: "They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways". He refers furthermore to the melody of the spirituals as the "articulate message of the slave to the world" (du Bois, 253). Similarly, Douglass expresses that the spirituals "told a tale of woe...they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterish anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains" (Douglass, 263).

Thematically the spirituals expressed the hope and possibility of freedom and were born out of necessity to express "the black experience in America" (Floyd Jr, 40). In "Spatial Dialects: Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song", Thomas P. Barker states that there are different beliefs of what kind of freedom the slave songs were communicating. Whereas some believe they are "teaching freedom in the afterlife", others see them as "a material call to arms" (Barker, 364). Through the use of double-meanings, it is difficult to distinguish whether these spirituals express material or spiritual freedom, and this was likely the intention. Some slave owners understood that these songs could signal an alternative meaning, and thus forbade their slaves to perform songs unless they were in the presence of white overseers (Edet, 1976). Most of them however, preferred not to see, or did not understand the purpose of these songs, and allowed the slaves to sing them as they wished. Furthermore, Barker points out that these freedom-expressing spirituals can be seen as forms of resistance towards the institution of slavery (Barker, 364). Although black bodies were being dominated through torturing attempts of gaining control and breaking their wills, they would never be able to truly control their minds and spirits. Letting out their deepest frustrations, sorrows and future dreams through coded songs would have a healing effect as well as enabling communication with other slaves.

Work songs constituted an important part of the working process as it created rhythm for repetitive manual work. The sound of the axe chopping wood like a drum, and the voice of the singers would produce a call-and-response effect that would increase the pace of their work. Therefore, these songs were often demanded to be sung by their overseers to increase productivity. The verses would often be improvised and required a skilled lead singer with a strong voice, and slaves inhabiting these qualities were costly at auctions (Floyd Jr, 50). Double-meanings enabled slaves to criticize their social superiors without fearing disapproval. Slaves used

for example work songs to comment on their over rulers: “These African- Americans were constantly poking fun at themselves, their overseers, their masters, and visiting observers. Their humor was their armament in a culture in which they had little control” (Floyd Jr, 52).

Much similar to African customs, African-American slaves used calls, hollers and cries in the field, during hunt, at night or in the streets and the character of each was made to serve a purpose. Floyd Jr states that “sometimes these fragments and phrases were verbally articulate and communicative; at other times, they were wordless. But *meaning* was always present and was always communicated” (Floyd Jr, 46). The timbral nuances performed in a vocal line would signal these different meanings. Hollers can be described as “portions of yodelized song” and derived originally from Pygmy singing by Congolese peoples. Similar to their forefathers, slaves used hollers to communicate across larger distances, e.g. valleys and hollows and fields. In contrast, calls and cries were used in a more intimate setting to express personal communication (Floyd Jr, 46-47). Kebede describes them in his *Roots of Black Music* (1982) as follows:

Unlike calls, which are primarily used to communicate messages, cries express a deeply felt emotional experience, such as hunger, loneliness, or lovesickness. They are half-sung and half- yelled. Vocables are often intermixed in the text. The melodies are performed in a free and spontaneous style; they are often ornamented and employ many African vocal devices, such as yodels, echolike falsetto, tonal glides, embellished melismas, and microtonal inflections that are often impossible to indicate in European staff notation (Kebede, 130).

Instruments that were used by the slaves included banjo, musical saw, flute, quills, drums, triangle, sticks or bones and rattles of various kinds, and the violin (Floyd Jr, 52). The latter is devoted much attention in *Twelve Years a Slave* as this instrument is Northup’s ruling passion since youth and his most beloved possession. The violin, or the fiddle was a common part of African-American culture. Jaqueline Djedje, writes in “The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle” that the fiddle had “several cultural meanings both in Africa and the Americas” and that the instrument reflected “both resilience and acculturation” among the enslaved African Americans (Djedje³). It reflected acculturation in the sense that fiddling was a popular instrument among white Americans, and slave owners would therefore often encourage or force their slaves to pick up the instrument. This regards an enslaved Northup when Master Epps purchases him a violin in New Orleans “through the importunities of Mistress Epps”, as she is described as being “passionately fond of music” (Northup, 118). However, the

³ Page numbers were not available for this source

instrument's popularity among white Americans would thus allow "some Africans the opportunity to maintain and signify a tradition that was an important part of their culture prior to contact with Europeans" (Ibid). The resilience however could be heard in the playing technique and musical sound made by black fiddlers, which was much different to that of white musicians as it had its own distinctive style. Words such as "rough", "scraping", "sawing" and "jerky" would be descriptive of the black fiddling style, whereas the white fiddling style would be characterized by words such as "smooth", "clear" and "notey" (Ibid). Although the instrument was associated with the profane and many white Americans viewed it as an uncivilized, evil instrument, it never became prohibited like the drums. This is most likely due to the cultural importance of the instrument to European Americans and the use of music to increase work productivity among the slaves (Ibid). Being a talented black fiddler granted a male slave mobility as well as financial income. These factors are probably the reason for why quite a few of the slaves who managed to run away from slavery were in fact, fiddlers who had seized the opportunity to make an escape (Longold, Soundstudiesblog⁴). Although Northup was, through his fiddling talents, granted mobility and relieved of many days of hard work in the field, he did not attempt to make an escape when in slavery. His eventual freedom was granted after twelve years a slave when he secretly managed to send a letter home where he informed about his unfortunate circumstances and whereabouts.

1. 3 Conclusion

According to Robert H. Cataliotti, "African Americans have held on to and developed their music as a way of remembering, a way of enduring, a way of celebrating, a way of protesting and subverting, and, ultimately, a way of triumphing". Similarly, "African American literature tells the same story with the technical mastery, powerful spirit and sense of heritage found in music" (Cataliotti, ix). In this chapter I have outlined the features of the slave narrative as well as considering some of the music that sprang out from slavery, including Northup's musical passion, fiddling. To conclude this chapter on the background for *Twelve Years a Slave*, I will comment on the common features of the slave narrative and the music, as well as the differences between them. The latter will reveal what the imprints of music add to the equation that the slave narrative as a genre does not, and thus make it apparent why a close reading of Northup's passages of music is necessary to achieve a deeper understanding of the slave narrative. First, both the slave narrative and the slave music are equally viewed as expressions of protest against the institution of slavery. The slave narrative presents the empirical facts about the slavery

⁴ I could not detect page numbers for this source

brutalities and furthermore informs about the socio-political exigencies in America's antebellum era. Similarly, the music signals resistance as it communicates "the black experience in America" (Floyd Jr, 40). The songs express hope of future freedom and were often coded and thus signalled alternative meanings to distract their white overseers. Furthermore, both the slave narrative and the slave music can be viewed as communal art forms, as they represent more than just the person performing it. The slave narrative's aim was to represent a voice on behalf of the black people, in addition to telling an individual tale of a former slave. Similarly the music signals both collective and individual emotional aspects of slavery. Lastly, both the music and the slave narrative have a nature of call-and-response and thus demand an audience. The slave narrative calls out to the reader and furthermore converses, persuades and argues with them. By revealing the horrors of slavery it consequently asks the audience to take a stand against it. Similarly, African American music often includes call-and-response elements where a musician takes the lead and serves a phrase of music that functions as a call, whereas others form phrases that respond to the call. In addition, when music is performed, a relationship between the musician(s) and their audience is established. The performer calls out to the listener with his/her music, moving the audience in one way or another to demand a response.

There are however also considerable differences between the two cultural expressions. The main target group of the slave narrative was, as we saw previously, white Northerners, and the aim was to make them take a stand against slavery. The former slaves therefore had to write through a neutral, clear-glass perspective and follow a strict structure to meet the demands of abolitionist editors and their white readers. The form of the slave narrative is consequently considered Anglo-American, and as I have demonstrated it is debatable how much of the wording that belongs to the slave narrators themselves and what is considered the voice of someone else. The expression of slave music, on the other hand, would appear far more spontaneous and evolved under extreme conditions where literacy was not allowed. The music became an immediate and effective vehicle to remember, communicate and express themselves emotionally and provided black people with a voice. It became a place where they could signal feelings of sorrow, joy, anger, protest, frustration, desire and triumph (Cataliotti, x). This corresponds well with what for example Peter J. Capuano notes about the use of songs in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: "Song offers slaves the opportunity to express their personal testimonies while remaining within the framework of their larger cultural experiences- all without actually speaking of their shame and trauma" (Capuano, 96). Different from the slave narrative then, the music is composed by the slaves for the slaves and for no one else. What I will refer to as spaces of music within the slave narrative can therefore be considered far more personal and subjective

than other narrative spaces. As a reader, it is therefore necessary to investigate these passages of music to grasp Northup's personal experiences, the slave culture and to engage more deeply into the horrifying aspects of slavery.

Chapter 2: Music as a Literary Device

2. 0 Musical Ekphrasis

As a parent concept for the analysis of music as a literary device in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* I want to employ the term musical ekphrasis, a more recent variant⁵ of ekphrasis (Bruhn, 553). The word "ekphrasis" means "expression" in Greek, and the term refers to the verbal description of a visual work of art, in another work of art. Such vivid and often dramatic descriptions of visual arts might either be imagined or real. An example of the latter might be Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen who in his play *The Lady from the Sea* from 1888 describes a painting with a dying mermaid and in addition, gives detailed accounts of a sculpture of a woman having a nightmare of a former lover returning to her. These ekphrastic descriptions of other art forms are commonly said to be linked to the overall meaning of the play, as female protagonist and daughter of the lighthouse keeper Ellida Wangel longs for the lost days of her youth. In addition, a sailor whom she once was engaged to and thought had died, reappears after ten years and claims her hand in marriage. Furthermore, Ibsen's ekphrastic description of the dying mermaid shares similarities to a real painting named *Lady from the Sea*, created by Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (*Wikipedia*, Ekphrasis). In sum, any visual work of art may be verbally scrutinized and interpreted as a subject of ekphrasis within another medium of art, or viewed the other way around, any verbal work of art might include ekphrastic descriptions of another visual piece of art. Examples could be a poem describing a painting, such as John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", or a novel including a description of a sculpture. Acknowledging *music* as an art form within other forms of art; also known as musical ekphrasis, is however far less common. A plausible explanation to its rarity may be found in Lydia Goehr's journal article "How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis" (2010) where she discusses the possibility of musical ekphrasis. She claims that some theorists of ekphrasis "overly devote their attention to questions of medium and workhood" and others "persist in treating music as standing apart from the other arts" (Goehr, 390). Since music and ekphrasis do not naturally join hands, "one must either discard their common conceptions or, much better, revise and expand them"(Ibid, 389).

Siglinde Bruhn defines musical ekphrasis in "A Concert of Paintings: 'Musical Ekphrasis' in the Twentieth Century" as something that "narrates or paints stories or scenes created by an artist *other* than the composer of the music and in another artistic medium" (Bruhn, 554). She furthermore states what needs to be present for it to be defined as "musical ekphrasis":

⁵ Critics began to talk about musical ekphrasis in the last years of the 19th century

1. a real or fictitious 'text' functioning as a source for artistic representation:
2. a primary representation of that 'text' in visual or verbal form: and
3. a re- presentation in musical language of that first (visual or verbal) representation.

In addition to Bruhn's definitions, Goehr distinguishes between two ways of musical ekphrasis, the first one she describes as "an ancient, description-based view", whereas the second one includes "a modern work-to-work view" (Goehr, 389). The first view is "when a piece of descriptive speech or writing brings an image or scene of music before the imagination (the "mind's eye"). Here, attention is paid to the musical subject matter or point of the text or to the rhythm and tunefulness of its delivery" (Ibid, 389). Its preliminary task "as a listening and temporal art" is "to render present through words what was absent to the eye" (Ibid, 393). This view is considered the less familiar of the two, yet it is the one we often see in *Twelve Years a Slave*. On several occasions in the slave narrative Northup brings music to aesthetic presence through what Goehr calls "the sheer power of description" (Ibid, 407). These are crucial scenes of music I also will return to later in the analysis when discussing music as a literary motif and music as a symbol. An initial example is Northup's encounter with a Native American tribe who performs a ring formed dance to the tune of an Indian fiddle:

When they had formed in a ring, men and squaws alternately, a sort of Indian fiddle set up an indescribable tune. It was a continuous, melancholy kind of wavy sound, with the slightest possible variation. At the first note, if indeed there was more than one note in the whole tune, they circled around, trotting after each other, and giving utterance to a guttural, sing-song noise, equally as nondescript as the music on the fiddle. At the end of the third circuit, they would stop suddenly, whoop as if their lungs would crack, then break from the ring, forming in couples, man and squaw, each jumping backwards as far as possible from the other, then forwards- which graceful feet having been twice or thrice accomplished, they would form in a ring, and go trotting round again...at intervals, one or more would leave the dancing circle, and going to the fire, cut from the roasting carcass a slice of venison... and such is a description, as I saw it, of an Indian ball in the Pine Woods of Avoyelles (Northup, 64-65).

When Northup describes the music in words in the slave narrative, its sonic expression is brought before our imagination. In addition we are given valuable information about Native

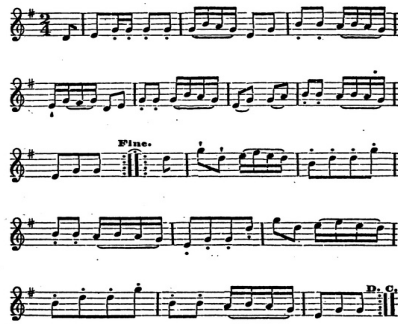
American ceremonial traditions. Whereas the music performs a more drone-like sound without an apparent rhythm, the circling dance fulfills this purpose with its regular repeated pattern of trotting, jumps and stops. Through this example of musical ekphrasis a white reader would imagine a people with a somewhat different approach to music, dance, instruments and customs compared to that of themselves. Yet, in a larger perspective they would also become aware of the many similarities one share as humans, such as the appreciation of communal belonging through meals, music and dance. In addition they would see a people that, at the same rate as whites, hold customs and traditions originating out of practical considerations, religious beliefs or other important life events, that they value dearly.

In Northup's musical descriptions he does not only, as Goehr comments in her discussion of musical ekphrasis "exemplify a premise but actually describes it to reveal a truth that lies beyond what is directly seen, sung, or said" (Goehr, 410). As with Ibsen's elements of ekphrasis, I will argue that examples of musical ekphrasis in *Twelve Years a Slave* can be linked to the overall meaning of the slave narrative. Through the descriptions of music Northup forces the reader to sympathize and identify with the humanity of the slaves in the slave narrative, including himself. The music becomes Northup's personal testimony against the trauma and horror he faces in captivity, and furthermore provides him with strength and hope to endure the difficult conditions.

As I have now explained the more "ancient, description-based view" of musical ekphrasis and given examples from Northup's slave narrative, I will turn my attention towards the second and far more familiar and modern way in which music and ekphrasis join hands. This way can be described as what Goehr calls "a work-to-work relation, when, say, a musical work represents a poem, painting, or sculpture" (Goehr, 389). Here the focus has often been "what one work of art achieves in re-presenting another work of art" or as Goehr with reference to Bruhn puts it: "for a work to be ekphrastic, it must not only represent or express but also explicitly re-present or re-express another work" (Ibid, 393 and 404). Within this category Goehr asks us to consider something called notational ekphrasis, which is a musical work being "brought to imaginative but not fully to aesthetic presence", either "by means of signs or score alone" (Ibid, 408). This is something that one sees in Northup's slave narrative at the very end with "Roaring River- a Refrain of the Red River Plantation". Reading the score of "Roaring River" without hearing the performance of it makes it imaginatively present, a point which makes it ekphrastic in the ancient sense. Yet Goehr argues that notational ekphrasis might correspond with the more modern view of musical ekphrasis "if the score became or was produced as a work of visual or graphic art in its own right" (Ibid, 408).

ROARING RIVER.

A REFRAIN OF THE RED RIVER PLANTATION.



"Harper's creek and roarin' ribber,
Thar, my dear, we'll live forebber;
Den we'll go to de Ingin nation,
All I want in dis creation,
Is pretty little wife and big plantation.

CHORUS.

Up dat oak and down dat ribber,
Two overseers and one little nigger."

Image 2

In sum, musical ekphrasis in *Twelve Years a Slave* gives back life to various musical arts that have now been silenced, furthermore it provides the performers with a voice through the depiction of their musical expression. As Goehr puts it: "Even if "mere words" cannot bring actual life back, they can place what has been silenced into imagination and memory and, by this means, give it meaning and value for the future" (Ibid, 392). In addition to the scene I have discussed above, Goehr's quote also relates to the passage in *Twelve Years a Slave* where Solomon Northup describes the practice of "patting juba", in which I will discuss later in connection to music as a literary motif (Northup, 144). As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, since Northup's descriptive scene of music is the only one of its kind, musical ekphrasis near rescues a musical artform from being forgotten.

2. 1 Music as a Literary Motif

As I mentioned in the background chapter, none of Olney's bullet points outlines a demand for musical elements in the slave narrative. In order not to offend a white audience, as well as appearing trustworthy in their accounts, narrators strived to express themselves through a balanced, neutral language. Whereas the slave narrative presents the empirical facts and informs about the socio-political exigencies in the antebellum period, music might indicate the emotional aspect of the slave experience. The inclusion of music could therefore be considered deliberate choices made by Northup himself so as to create sonic spaces that would express the emotional experience of the trauma of slavery. In addition, we are also through the descriptions of the music at times let into the interior life of the narrator, and as a result, the music appeals to the readers and their sentiments by awakening them to take a stand against slavery. Consequently, I

therefore argue that the descriptions of music play a central role in Northup's accounts, and work as part of the register of literary devices that the slave narrative employs, and specifically as a literary motif.

The term "literary motif" might be described as "a recurrent theme, character, or verbal pattern, but it may also be a family or associational cluster or figurative references to a given class of concepts or objects..."(Freedman, 2006). A literary motif may "act symbolically", yet "unlike a symbol, it may recur in a work without using the same object, image or word each time"(Ibid, 200). It might furthermore appear as "an object of description and, more often, as part of the narrator's imaginary and descriptive vocabulary" (Ibid, 2006). In view of this definition, I will suggest that the repeated references to music in Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* accounts for its vindication as a literary motif. The musical descriptions follow the narration as an emotive red line like a literary motif, and add qualities of "subtlety, richness, and complexity" to the text (Ibid, 2009). To evaluate the effectiveness of the motif as a literary device, William Freedman lists five factors that should be considered: "frequency, avoidability and unlikelihood, significance of context, the degree of relevance and coherence of the motif as a whole, and- for those motifs that function symbolically- its appropriateness to what it symbolizes" (Ibid, 2000). In view of these categories I will show how music can be regarded a literary motif in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* by discussing examples from the text and see what it accomplishes with its various functions and effects.

The first of Freedman's factors is frequency. According to Freedman, the more often a literary motif recurs, "the deeper the impression it is likely to make on the reader" (Ibid, 2005). Furthermore, the effect on the reader will be increased through extensive individual metaphors or episodes, rather than passing references involving the motif subject (Ibid, 2005). Music appears as a rather frequent motif throughout *Twelve Years a Slave*, both as passing references, as well as being at the center of description. An example of the former is when Northup uses a musical metaphor to describe their three children Elizabeth, Margaret and Alonzo: "They filled our house with gladness. Their young voices were music in our ears" (Northup, 11). Being qualified as a passing reference the comment might appear insignificant at first, yet it unconsciously makes the reader aware of how Northup, until this point in the narrative, associates music with only good and beautiful parts of life. In addition the example illustrates how music permeates his way of thinking, expressing himself and perceiving the world. An example where music is situated at the center of attention in the narrative is when Northup who is present at a dance in a village nearby the slave plantation, encounters a Native American tribe from Texas ⁶. They perform a ritual that

⁶ I have referred to this scene earlier in my discussion of musical ekphrasis.

includes music and a circle-trotting movement which Northup describes in great detail. The instrument that creates the music is referred to as “a sort of Indian fiddle” that creates “an indescribable tune” (Northup, 64). Furthermore he describes the melody as “a continuous, melancholy kind of wavy sound, with the slightest possible variation”, whilst the tribe accompany the sound of the fiddle with “a guttural, sing-song noise, equally as nondescript as the music on the fiddle” (Northup, 64). Although Northup is regarded a skilled musician within his field of music, he is probably not very familiar with the Native American musical genre. Yet, by being what we call “musically literate”, he is able to observe accurate details of the incident that give valuable insight into the sound and structure of the performance. By Jerrold Levinson’s definition, Northup’s musical literacy can be seen as a component of broad cultural literacy. In being “broadly culturally literate” lies the notion that one is not only a competent reader and writer of one’s language, but also that one is able “to comprehend adequately various other modes of communication, formulation or expression central in one’s culture- for example, mathematical, artistic, social, or behavioral ones (Levinson, 18). Being broadly culturally literate, then, is being competent in a number of going modes of discourse- verbal and nonverbal” (Ibid, 18). According to Levinson, the activity of listening to music comprehendingly would mean that one has a fundamental understanding of “a background, a framework, a domain of reference, a set of givens” in order to presuppose and understand a piece of music (Ibid, 19). Furthermore, such musical comprehension involves “connections to things not explicitly presented in the particular text, passage, event, pattern, or phenomenon to be understood”, and can only be acquired through experience (Levinson, 19). Northup’s musical literacy benefits the reader in the passage I have described above as one can sonically imagine the music based on his given descriptions. A similar example where Northup’s musical skills benefit the reader, is a scene at Christmas where he describes a nightly jam session among the slaves that includes a polyrhythmic, call and response performance:

One “set” off, another one takes its place, he or she remaining longest on the floor receiving the most uproarious commendation, and so the dancing continues until broad daylight. It does not cease with the sound of the fiddle, but in that case they set up a music peculiar to themselves. This is called “patting”, accompanied with one of the most unmeaning songs, composed rather for its adaptation to a certain tune or measure, than for the purpose of expressing any distinct idea. The patting is performed by striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with

one hand, the left with the other- all the while keeping time with the feet, and singing, perhaps, this song:...(Northup, 144).

Levinson notes that musical literacy is different from reading literacy as “the relevant knowledge (of musical literacy)...may be largely tacit, not explicit, and he may often come to a lot of it in a largely intuitive, experimental, non-verbally-mediated way” (Levinson, 24). While there is “no ‘dictionary’ of musical literacy”, reading literacy on the other hand, “requires its vast skein of background knowledge in verbally encoded form” (Ibid, 24). According to Levinson, to understand a piece of music “is fundamentally hearing it in an appropriate way...whereas understanding a written text remains grasping an articulate meaning”(Ibid, 24). Therefore, although a slave could not read nor write, there is no doubt he would be considered musically literate in the sense that he had what Levinson refers to as “an implicit grasp of these things- in his bones and ears, so to speak” (Ibid, 24). Such dimensions of musical comprehension simply depend on the inborn capacities of human beings then. As I have previously mentioned, ever since the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade music has been an important part of African American life and culture. Slaves who were born into slavery would know the musical expression that emerged from their own slave culture and would thus be considered musically literate within this genre in a way outsiders were not. Northup comments on the musical capacities and literacy of his fellow bondsmen by stating that “the African race is a music-loving one” and that there were many of them “whose organs of tune were strikingly developed, and who could thumb the banjo with dexterity” (Northup, 142).

I will return to the topic of musical literacy or rather, what I argue is the occasional lack of Northup’s musical literacy when discussing symbolism and spaces of opacity in *Twelve Years a Slave*. For now I will move onwards with and sum up my discussion of the literary motif and its first factor frequency. As I mentioned in a previous paragraph, music appears as a rather frequent motif throughout *Twelve Years a Slave*. Already in the first chapter Northup establishes the valuable role and influence of music in his life. In the second chapter music is presented as the very reason to why he is tricked into slavery, and throughout the years of bondage it also appears as a recurrent motif. Here it works as a force of consolidation, an emotional escape or it might symbolize the hope of freedom and returning to what has been for Northup: “The sun shone out warmly; the birds were singing in the trees. The happy birds- I envied them. I wished for wings like them, that I might cleave the air to where my birdlings waited vainly for their father’s coming, in the cooler region of the North” (Ibid, 32). Music is also described through vested interest by a keen and musical literate observer (Northup) of various musical performances.

Unfortunately music also recurs as an act of force by his over rulers. Lastly, the slave narrative is summed up at the end by the sheet music and lyrics of “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation”, which I will discuss more in detail later. So, to sum up the discussion of the first factor; the frequency and various forms in which the literary motif recurs in *Twelve Years a Slave* might say to illustrate the importance of music to Northup.

Freedman’s second factor that determines the efficiency of a literary motif, is avoidability and unlikelyhood: “The more uncommon a reference is in a given context, the more likely it is to strike the reader, consciously or subconsciously, and the greater will be its effect” (Freedman, 205). First of all, Northup’s slave narrative might very well be the only one that actually includes sheet music in its text; the “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation”. Lara Langer Cohen refers to this song as the book’s “soundtrack” as Northup at one point recounts that the enslaved people sang it on the Red River plantation while patting juba at a Christmas celebration, as well as it being featured as sheet music at the end of the narrative. (Cohen, 259). Adding the musical notation of the song invited “the largely white readers of Northup’s narrative not only to ‘hear’ the enslaved voices but themselves to sing *in* them” (Ibid, 261). Although the inclusion of the song into a slave narrative is to be regarded as highly unusual and thus striking to the reader, there was an increasing tendency in the antebellum era to perform and publish “sentimental songs that claimed to represent the true feelings of the slaves” (Ibid, 261). Given the musical context in the time of the slave narrative’s publication, “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation” was therefore most likely considered a very successful literary device that, together with the other musical passages, would engage the reader and thus promote the abolitionist cause. Northup’s musical skills were sought after before slavery, as well as within it, and when he was freed again after twelve years, he continued to use his music to engage and persuade a white audience. In addition, for the readers of today, the sheet music along with Northup’s descriptions in the slave narrative make it possible to hear and imagine historically significant musical traditions.

A more striking aspect of the part music plays in the narrative is Northup’s extraordinary artistic skills. As previously mentioned, fiddling was by no means uncommon in the antebellum era, on the contrary it was regarded popular entertainment for people from all walks of life across America. Being lightweight and easy to carry, a single violin could easily entertain a large audience at any festive occasion, be it a barn dance or more formal gatherings. In addition, black fiddlers were not an unusual sight as slaves were often encouraged or forced to pick up the instrument by

their masters (Longold, Soundstudiesblog ⁷). Yet Northup, according to the way he portrays himself in the narrative, stands out as a uniquely talented musician among the other slaves:

My business on these gala days always was to play the violin. The African race is a music-loving one, proverbially; and many there were among my fellow-bondsmen whose organs of tune were strikingly developed, and who could thumb the banjo with dexterity; but at the expense of appearing egotistical, I must, nevertheless, declare, that I was considered the Ole Bull of Bayou Bœuf. My master often received letters, sometimes from a distance of ten miles, requesting him to send me to play at a ball or festival of the whites (Northup, 142).

The comparison to the world-famous Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bull, whom Robert Schumann once proclaimed was among “the greatest of all”, is a remarkable and bold one that is bound to strike the readers. Bull, who toured the United States widely in the middle of the 19th century, had a playing technique that amazed the audiences wherever he went. The virtuoso was a master at improvising, and he often improvised missing parts of his many works in progress at his concerts until the tunes eventually reached their final form. Henrik Wergeland’s biography from 1843 about Ole Bull (whom he knew first-hand) concludes with the poem “Norge til Amerika ved Ole Bulls Didreise” ⁸ where he imagines that Bull’s extraordinary violin play would contribute to releasing the African- American slaves from their chains (Wergeland ⁹). The readers at the time of publication must have read the comparison to the white Norwegian “popstar” Ole Bull with great astonishment, and if they knew Bull by his music and reputation, they could also vividly imagine Northup’s exceptional musical abilities. What might also have appeared truly remarkable to an audience, is the substantial musical repertoire Northup brought along with him into slavery. In addition he most likely learned new tunes when being captive in Bayou Bœuf, and by that he increased his repertoire even further. As he was born a free man, his background was completely different compared to the other slaves, with an upbringing that included proper education and musical schooling. An unaware audience must therefore have found his musical skills most exotic and appealing.

One final example in relation to Freedman’s second factor avoidability and unlikelyhood is Northup’s references to poetry. Although being a slave where most of his fellow bondsmen

⁷ I could not detect page numbers for this source

⁸ English translation: Norway to America on Ole Bull’s Departure

⁹ I could not detect a page number for this source, however you can read the full biography *Ole Bull Efter Opgivelser af Ham Selv Biografisk Skildret af Henrik Wergeland* by following the link in works cited. The biography includes the poem “Norge til Amerika ved Ole Bulls Didreise” at the end of the second page.

were illiterate in the sense that they could not read or write, Northup's stands out with his educated background and knowledge of highbrow culture. An example is when he describes Master Epps' capability of love towards his wife by lending the words from "A Destiny", a poem written by English social reformer and author Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton: "He loved as well as baser natures can, But a mean heart and soul were in that man" (Northup, 130). Much of Norton's work has parallels to her own life, as she was married to George Norton who abused her physically and verbally. When she left him, she lost custody of her three children as they were considered her husband's property. Similarly Northup refers to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "The May Queen" in relation to Mr. Bass, the white Canadian carpenter and outspoken abolitionist whom Northup finally confides in, in hope of freedom: "Oh, blessings on his kindly voice and on his silver hair, And blessings on his whole life long, until he meet me there." (Northup, 183) In addition to referring to the works of Norton and Tennyson, Solomon Northup demonstrates his own poetic skills in a poem where he describes the brutal life and destiny of Master Epps' slave Patsy and her longing for heavenly freedom:

I ask no paradise on high,
With cares on earth oppressed,
The only heaven for which I sigh,
Is rest, eternal rest (Northup, 173).

By including these rhyming lines to underline the events of narrative, the reader also becomes aware of Northup's many artistic qualities, his poetic skills as well as musical ones. Throughout the narrative Northern readers would learn to know a brave, highly educated, talented, intelligent and empathic man not much different to themselves. In short, despite the color of his skin Northup was a protagonist they would sympathize with and identify themselves with. In sum, as a spokesman for slaves still in chains, these extraordinary references to music and poetry would be beneficial to the abolitionist cause.

A third factor determining the efficiency of a literary motif is "the significance of the contexts in which it occurs" (Freedman, 205). Music appears at climactic points in Northup's slave narrative and also at times becomes the central cause of development, and thus "has greater effect than one that occurs only in less passages, particularly if these passages do not overtly concern the tenor of the motif" (Freedman, 205). An example of this is that music is the very reason why Solomon Northup is tricked into slavery by Brown and Hamilton when they offer him short-term employment as a violinist for a circus company in Washington DC:

They also remarked that they had found much difficulty in procuring music for their entertainments, and that if I would accompany them as far as New-York, they would give me one dollar for each day's services, and three dollars in addition for every night I played at their performances, besides sufficient to pay the expenses of my return from New-York to Saratoga. I at once accepted the tempting offer, both for the reward it promised, and from the desire to visit the metropolis (Northup, 13).

Another example of music appearing at climatic points in the narrative is when brokenhearted Eliza, fearing an upcoming separation from her children Randall and Emily, sings songs of comfort at Williams' slave pen. She is deeply desolated of her change in fortune as she has shared house and bed with her master Elisha Berry for nine years, a man she describes as kind and who is also Emily's father. Initially being promised her freedom she dresses herself and her daughter in their finest clothes and follow Berry's son in law into town, only to be delivered to slave trader Burch instead. The contrast between the hopeless situation they find themselves in and the soothing sounds of Eliza's hymns is a brutal one that emphasizes the emotive quality of music as a literary motif:

While we were thus learning the history of each other's wretchedness, Eliza was seated in a corner by herself, singing hymns and praying for her children. Wearied from the loss of so much sleep, I could no longer bear up against the advances of 'that sweet restorer', and laying down by the side of Robert, on the floor, soon forgot my troubles, and slept until the dawn of day" (Northup, 35-36).

In the midst of deep despair and hopelessness Eliza turns to music as an attempt to comfort herself and her children. The soothing sounds of their mother's singing become a temporary moment of tranquility and normality in an utmost extreme and inhumane situation, and for the children these songs possibly become something to remember their mother by. Although only a passing reference, the inclusion of music at this climactic point in the narrative has a strong emotional effect on the reader.

A fourth factor determining the efficiency of a literary motif is "the degree to which all instances of the motif are relevant to the principal end of the motif as a whole and to which they fit together into a recognizable and coherent unit" (Freedman, 205). Although the passages including music serve various purposes and at first glance might appear unrelated, I argue that

this is not the case. On the contrary, the literary motif in *Twelve Years a Slave* can be regarded effective by the fact that most components of music point to the unifying companionable attributes and effects of music which accompany the characters, as well as the narrative itself. An example where the music accompanies the narrative in a harmonious manner is when Northup only hours before being captured, witnesses the funeral of president William Harrison in 1841:

The next day there was a great pageant in Washington. The roar of cannon and the tolling of bells filled the air. While many houses were shrouded with crape, and the streets were black with people. As the day advanced, the procession made its appearance, coming slowly through the Avenue, carriage after carriage, in long succession, while thousands upon thousands followed on foot- all moving to the sound of melancholy music. They were bearing the dead body of Harrison to the grave (Northup, 16).

The tone of the music is described as melancholic and thus converges with funeral etiquette. The funeral itself functions as empiric evidence as it verifies the truth in Northup's accounts, whereas the accompanying music calls to the sentiments of Harrison's death. A somewhat similar example is when Northup is invited to play at the annual Christmas dance at the old Norwood plantation. The owner, Miss Mary McCoy is described as "a lovely girl, some twenty years of age" is arranging a large feast with dancing and food in abundance for the several hundred working hands at her estate (Northup, 190). She is described as beautiful and gentle master whom is beloved by all her slaves:

Nowhere on the bayou are there such feasts, such merrymaking, as at young Madam McCoy's... When the dinner was over the tables were removed to make room for the dancers. I tuned my violin and struck up a lively air; while some joined in a nimble reel, others patted and sang their simple but melodious songs, filling the great room with music mingled with the sound of human voices and the clatter of many feet (Northup, 190-191).

Similar to Harrison's funeral where the melancholy music converges with the event it is purposed for, Northup's lively tunes on the violin accompany the cheerful event and thus put emphasis on the joy and merrymaking that slaves could experience during Christmas holidays. The music in Northup's slave narrative is nearly always present in one form or another, accompanying the narrative and thus creating additional dimensions of pathos to the truthful accounts. Yet the tone

of the music might not always harmonize with the scenes in which it is featured, like in the two examples I have described above. An example of dissonance and contrast can be found in the passage where the narrator describes how Master Epps often forces his slaves to make music, dance and laugh all night long, and thereafter demands that they perform their ordinary tasks in the field at day:

All of us would be assembled in the large room of the great house, whenever Epps came home in one of his dancing moods. No matter how worn out and tired we were, there must be a general dance. When properly stationed on the floor, I would strike up a tune. “Dance you d-d niggers, dance” Epps would shout. Then there must be no halting or delay, no slow or languid movements; all must be brisk, and lively, and alert. “Up and down, heel and toe, and away we go”, was the order of the hour (Northup, 118).

The contrast between the sound of “a marvelous quick-stepping tune” extracting from Northup’s violin, and the forced merry-making dance to avoid the lash of Master Epps’ whip, creates a most unpleasant, near unbearable tension that greatly provokes the readers who is able to picture the scene (Northup, 119). As a literary device, the divergent music emphasizes what might be one of the worst horrors of slavery; the mental torture of the never-ending proprietary use and control of bodies. Bruhn in her discussion on musical ekphrasis claims with reference to Anthony Newcomb that non-vocal music also narrates (Bruhn, 564). Furthermore she states that “double-dotted attacks” in music “characteristically stand for allusions to ‘fate’, while syncopations and other rhythmic irregularities often capture ambivalence” (Bruhn, 580) Although these are fitting descriptions to Northup’s unfortunate circumstances, we cannot know for sure if Northup’s tune includes any of the above. What we do know however, is that a “a marvelous quick- stepping tune” is a melody of rhythmic flexibility. According to Bruhn, rhythmic flexibility in music “frequently is employed to epitomize the concept of freedom...” (Bruhn, 580). The contrast between the narration of the tune and the passage in which it appears could therefore not be any greater.

A somewhat similar example of contrasting music is to be found when the slaves are prepared for auction, before the admission of customers. They are ordered to shave and wash themselves and are furnished with new, clean clothes. Afterwards they are paraded and made to dance while appearing smart and lively:

Bob, a colored boy, who had some time belonged to Freeman, played on the violin. Standing near him, I made bold to inquire if he could play the “Virginia Reel”. He answered he could not, and asked if I could play. Replying in the affirmative, he handed me the violin. I struck up a tune, and finished it. Freeman ordered me to continue playing, and seem well pleased, telling Bob that I far excelled him- a remark that seemed to grieve my musical companion very much (Northup, 48).

Bruhn claims with reference to aesthetician Kendall Walton’s discussion of music and its representational qualities that “mere titles often suffice to provide this essential factual skeleton and make music patently representational- and even narrative” (Bruhn, 565). Although Northup does not make an effort in explaining the various musical elements of the tune “Virginia Reel” in the excerpt above, he manages to set the tone and atmosphere by simply referring to its title as many of the readers probably are familiar with the tune already. Yet this presupposes of course that “the beholder be acquainted with the stimulus”, meaning that the reader actually knows the song referred to, to be able to understand what it brings to the context in which it appears (Bruhn, 578). According to Bruhn in her discussion of musical ekphrasis, “the significance of the listener’s familiarity with the primary work of art increases in proportion to the degree to which a composer establishes original links between musical means and the extramusical content of that primary work (Bruhn, 578).

To those unfamiliar with the song however, the “Virginia Reel” was a popular dance in America from 1830-90 with origins as an English country dance dating back to the 17th century. Although there might have been slight geographical differences from one area to another, there are also certain similarities, such as the two lines of couples facing each other and in turn dance in a series of figures (also known as a reel figure). I argue that the continuous reel in the song shares similarities to a life in slavery; hard repetitive work in the cotton fields with brutal lashes of the whip to make sure that the pace is upheld where the only way to terminate the endless working loads is through heavenly or material freedom. Yet the tone and pace of the tune can be described as cheerful and lively, and in that way it contrasts with what is soon about to happen in the narrative, when family members will be screaming and crying as they are separated and sold to different owners. The dissonance between the cheerful sound of the violin and the brutal happenings in the narrative is a powerful literary device that clearly adds an uncomfortable tension to the reading experience. The imagined tone of the music is likely to have a disturbing effect on the reader, and in addition it enhances the impact of the occurring event. As a result,

the divergent music becomes most valuable in creating an emotional reader- response in favor of promoting the anti-slavery cause.

To sum up Freedman's fourth factor- the degree of relevance and coherence of the literary motif as a whole; we see that the examples above are somewhat different as the literary motif might accompany the narrative in a harmonious manner, or the music might create a disturbing tension when contrasting the narrative tone, pace and lyrics. Yet I argue that all the instances of the literary motif throughout the narrative fit together into a recognizable and coherent unit due to the companionable attributes and effects of music, which accompany either the characters or the narrative itself. The qualities of music all contribute to the same effect towards the reader, as the music makes us feel, subconsciously and consciously, the horrible conditions of slavery. The literary motif simply leads to a deeper understanding on the issue of slavery and consequently what the lack of freedom means to Northup and his fellow bondsmen.

Freedman's fifth and final factor is the appropriateness of the motif to what it symbolizes. I argue that the constant references to music in its various forms throughout *Twelve Years a Slave* are patently appropriate as various symbolic representations of freedom. The music reminds Northup of who he once was as a free man with a family and a home in Saratoga, New York. Although he is stripped for his basic rights and privileges and is even denied his own name after being sold into slavery, no one can take his music-making abilities away from him. These qualities become a symbol of the life he used to live in freedom and a soothing hope and consolidation of once returning to his loved ones. When yearning for freedom, the violin becomes a tool of expression that accordingly soothes his soul. Through aesthetic imagination, the hope of freedom is manifested in the tunes of the violin which makes him endure the hardships of slavery. Throughout the narrative the literary motif of freedom is also realized through material practice, as Northup's work as a musician provides him with occasional breaks from bondage. Music saves him from many hours of hard field work as he is invited to play at dances and feasts nearby. These live performances also provide him with money, food and other necessary supplies. To Northup, the music becomes significant, if not crucial in his struggle for survival. Simply put, the recurrent literary motif of music symbolizes various representations of freedom and becomes a defining part of his slavery experience.

To sum up Freedman's five factors that evaluate the effectiveness of the motif as a literary device, music adequately fulfills all the given criteria. As a result, the literary motif of music might "enhance our appreciation and alter judgment as well as increase understanding" regarding the issue of slavery and Northup's personal experiences on the matter (Freedman, 208). Additionally, the emotional aspect of music contributes to "add scope and depth to the reading

experience” (Ibid, 210). Freedman also shares an interesting idea on the motif’s value that is most transferable to Solomon Northup and his slave narrative:

Perhaps one might sum up the value of the motif in the combination of its intellectual and affective appeals. Intellectually, since the motif usually points to a skillful author capable of subtlety and complexity, it first of all enhances the reader’s respect for that author. This increased respect, I think, becomes inextricable from his impression of the work (Freedman, 210).

Through Northup’s many references to music in his slave narrative, and in describing how music consolidated and helped him, he manages to express his knowledge and deep appreciation of music as an art form. Through his complex depiction of music he comes across just as skillful, intelligent and human as any white person, and as an effect of the literary motif it thus makes himself relatable to a Northern white audience ¹⁰. Also by revealing how music became a torturous tool performed by his over rulers, Northup gains sympathy from his readers, and thus promotes the condemnation of slavery. A final comment on music as a literary motif in Northup’s slave narrative would be Siglind Bruhn who, with reference to Carolyn Abbate argues that music should be “seen not merely as ‘acting out’ or ‘representing’ events as if it were a sort of unscrolling and noisy tapestry that mimes actions not visually, but sonically, but also as occasionally respiking an object in a morally distancing act of narration” (Bruhn, 564-565). I argue that the literary motif in Northup’s slave narrative succeeds in doing so in the way it frequents as, in the words of McClendon, “a moral organ” throughout the story (McClendon, 88). Yet the music never appears insisting, it rather persuades in favor of the abolishment of slavery in a gentle manner and narrates its own reflections of slavery. The recurrent literary motif of music reinforces the central theme of Northup’s slave narrative, namely his struggle for freedom and his longing to return to his family and home as a free man in New York, Saratoga.

2. 2 Symbolism and Spaces of Opacity

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the aim of this analysis is to clarify the crucial role of music in *Twelve Years a Slave* in order to gain a deeper understanding of Northup’s personal experiences, the institution of slavery and its slave culture in the American South in the antebellum era. So far I have discussed music in the slave narrative in connection with

¹⁰ This appears of course as condescending attitudes today, yet at the time of *Twelve Years a Slave*’s publication in 1841 this would be the effect of the literary motif to a white Northern reader.

Freedman's theorizing of the literary motif, however the role of music is far more complex than the recurrent motif. The violin is considered Northup's most valuable belonging, both as a free man and within slavery. Furthermore this wooden instrument is the most prominent element of music in *Twelve Years a Slave*. In this chapter I will point out how the violin holds symbolic functions that differ from its literal meaning. In addition, I will demonstrate how the symbolic meaning of the violin is of a dynamic character, as its meaning and purpose gradually change as the plot progresses. I will also argue that as a symbol, music conveys hidden aspects of Northup's identity and as a symbol lets the reader into his internal feelings, longing, struggles and conflicts. Yet I argue that although we are given glimpses into Northup's inner self, there are internal spaces of his character that remain opaque. As a symbol of music, the violin thus becomes a symbol of opacity, an interior space in Northup's character that becomes inaccessible to the reader. Similarly there are spaces within slave culture and the music that emerges from it that remain out of reach to the reader, and possibly even to Northup himself.

According to Abrams, the term "symbol" in literature is a literary device applied to "a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself" (Abrams, 320). Freedman exemplifies symbols as "Melville's white whale or the mode of Ahab's death; it may be the New Testament's cross or the crucifixion of Christ upon it; or it may be the scarlet letter or little Pearl's peculiar reaction to it" (Freedman, 203). Furthermore, Abrams notes that the symbol's broad area of significance makes it a "higher mode of expression" compared to for example an allegory, which is considered more specific in its reference (Abrams, 322). Symbols share similar effects with the literary motif in the way that they add "scope and depth to the reading experience" (Freedman, 210). By the use of literary devices such as symbols, the slave narrative appears more nuanced and complex to the reader. Whereas many authors use symbols that are considered "conventional" or "public" within a certain culture, Northup's use of symbols within his narrative is of a more "private" and "personal" character (Ibid, 320). Abrams notes that in these private matters the symbolic function might "pose a more difficult problem in interpretation" as the "significance they largely generate themselves" (Ibid, 320). Northup's use of symbols might therefore be "richly- even boundlessly-suggestive in its significance" (Ibid, 322). Since personal symbols offer a vast range of possible interpretations, they also demand attentive and skillful reading on behalf of the reader. He/she must look for what Abrams calls "implicit suggestions" within the literary work (Ibid, 321). In the case of *Twelve Years a Slave*, I will argue that such suggestions appear in the depiction of Northup's many experiences in slavery as the narrative progresses.

Within *Twelve Years a Slave* there are altogether fourteen passages that mention the word violin or fiddle. Most often when a musical setting is described, either in a passing reference or a more in-depth description, the wooden string instrument plays a part in it. As I have referred to earlier, even when Northup gives a detailed account of the Indian ball in the Pine Woods of Avoyelles, it is a fiddle that creates the representation of the meditative sound that the Native Americans use as a basis when performing their dance ritual: “When they had formed a ring, men and squaws alternately, a sort of Indian fiddle set up an indescribable tune. It was a continuous, melancholy kind of wavy sound, with the slightest possible variation (Northup, 64)”. Furthermore, as an accomplished fiddler, the violin plays an important part of Solomon Northup’s life. The music it creates unceasingly accompanies him in his life narration, from the blissful moments of his youth to the difficult years of bondage. Before being kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana, he describes a content life in Saratoga, New York where the instrument is synonymous with joy and happiness: “The leisure hours allowed me were generally either employed over my books, or playing on the violin- an amusement which was the ruling passion of my youth” (Northup, 7). As seen in this first reference, the violin, in addition to his books, is an object that symbolizes Northup’s identity as an intelligent, creative and educated young man. He is well-read as well as being considered musically literate, and the violin is an important tool for him to express his sentiments. Up till this point in the narrative, the musical expression has been of a joyous character as it reflects a happy life as a free man together with his wife and children. This can also be seen in the excerpt below where Northup explains that the violin and his musical skills are praised in the public sphere and provide for an additional income:

In the winter season I had numerous calls to play on the violin. Wherever the young people assembled to dance, I was almost invariably there. Throughout the surrounding villages my fiddle was notorious...We always returned home from the performance of these services with money in our pockets; so that, with fiddling, cooking and farming, we soon found ourselves in the possession of abundance, and, in fact, leading a happy and prosperous life (9-10).

As we can see, in addition to symbolizing Northup’s identity and sentiments of joy and happiness, the violin also symbolizes a state of wealth and abundance. Thereafter the violin reappears in a new scene where he accepts the offer from Merrill Brown and Abram Hamilton of accompanying them to Washington for what he is led to believe is work for a circus company. Here the violin continues to represent potential wealth and abundance, and Northup seems to be

flattered by the work proposal as it appears to be well rewarded. That the instrument also can be seen as a symbol of his identity is apparent when he in a hurry decides to bring along nothing more but the violin and a change of clothes. In this scene the violin is interchangeably connected to Northup, and seems to be as much a part of him as his limbs:

I have the impression that they were introduced to me by some one of my acquaintances, but who, I have in vain endeavored to recall, with the remark that I was an expert player on the violin...I at once accepted the tempting offer, both for the reward it promised, and from the desire to visit the metropolis... So taking a change of linen and my violin, I was ready to depart...I drove away from Saratoga on the road to Albany, elated with my new position, and happy as I had ever been, on any day in all my life (12-13).

When he describes the given circumstances of the work proposal, Northup remarks on his high spirits, the prosperous reward and the opportunity of travelling. These positive promises stand in stark contrast to the truth of the upcoming years of his life which will be spent in slavery. In retrospect, knowing that his most beloved possession plays a crucial part in his own kidnapping, the violin stands out as a sign of warning, shrouded in the otherwise joyous description. In addition, the instrument foreshadows the continuous corruptive forces of the instrument, as it will soon be used against him.

The violin is once more referred to at the slave pen in New Orleans where Northup questions Bob, a colored boy, if he can play the "Virginia Reel" (Northup, 48). In advance he does not know how slave dealer Theophilus Freeman will react to his bold request towards Bob where he next is handed the violin and demonstrates the tune himself. A few days earlier Northup has been near beaten to death with countless blows by slave dealer James H. Burch at Williams' Slave Pen for refusing to give up his own name and freedom. Therefore he runs a risk when making the inquiry that something similar might happen again. In this example, the violin represents Northup's feeling of integrity and the great pride he takes in his musical abilities. Even though he is soon to be sold at the slave action, the violin also offers a momentary respite from the horrific situation and reminds him of a former life where fiddling was his ruling passion and synonymous with joy and happiness.

As this is the first time Northup plays the violin after being kidnapped, the instrument begins to serve an additional symbolic function in relation to his identity. Since he has been stripped of his name and rights and from now on is forced to go by the slave name Platt Epps (from Georgia), the violin represents what he is no longer allowed to express about himself. It is

the only possession he has left from his soon to be past, and, as an identity marker, the violin secretly reminds him of who he is. In addition it functions as a reminder of his home and family. In the next twelve years Northup no longer utters any words about his true identity, the kidnapping or his entitlement to freedom. The violin thus becomes a symbol of opacity for is slave owners and fellow bondsmen as these elements are kept from view. The wooden instrument becomes Northup's substitute, an object that secretly carries his identity and sentiments when he himself is not able to reveal them to those around him.

When Northup makes the inquiry of playing the "Virginia Reel", he also ends up demonstrating his talents in the presence of slave dealer Freeman. By revealing his musical skills they become a commodity ready to be taken advantage of by dealers and slave owners. Already the next day an old gentleman who aims to buy Northup is denied to do so by Freeman because he, due to Northup's extraordinary musical skills, cannot afford his asking price of 1500 dollars. This grieves Northup much, as the old gentleman's residence in the city of New Orleans would make his plans of a future escape more feasible. Again, the incident above foreshadows the gradually more complex symbolic meaning of the violin, where both good and evil forces reside in tumultuous turns. The complicated character and symbolic function of the instrument is further evoked when Master Epps buys Northup his own violin:

Tibeats, at the time of my sale, had informed him I could play the violin. He had received his information from Ford. Through the importunities of Mistress Epps, her husband had been induced to purchase me one during a visit to New-Orleans. Frequently I was called into the house to play before the family, mistress being passionately fond of music (Northup, 118).

In addition to performing for Mistress Epps, the purchase of the violin soon escalates into the more brutal musical events I have referred to earlier when discussing music as a literary motif, where a drunk Master Epps forces his slaves to dance, make music and appear joyous until early morning, in order to avoid the lashes of the whip (Northup, 118). When Northup is ordered to play on the violin, the symbolic meaning of the instrument dramatically changes from representing feelings of joy and happiness to embodying the horrors of slavery. The violin becomes perverted by his slave masters and thus symbolizes threat and torture as it is weaponized towards Northup and the other slaves. Northup's reluctance to perform music in such contexts makes the reader aware of the gradually more complicated role that the violin and possibly also music in general, come to play in his life.

Viewing the violin as a harrowing instrument of torture reaches a climax in a passage where Northup's narrative first person voice is suddenly replaced by a self-distanced third person point of view. This perspective describes how Northup, known as Platt Epps when in slavery, is seen by white men and women as he walks through town with his fiddle:

The young men and maidens of Holmesville always knew there was to be a jollification somewhere, whenever Platt Epps was seen passing through the town with his fiddle in his hand. "Where are you going now, Platt?" and "What is coming off tonight, Platt?" would be interrogatories issuing from every door and window, and many a time when there was no special hurry, yielding to pressing importunities, Platt would draw his bow, and sitting astride his mule, perhaps, discourse musically to the crowd of delighted children, gathered around him in the street (Northup, 143).

Lara Langer Cohen suggests, in relation to this scene, that "his coerced performance estranges him so profoundly that he can only see himself as his white interrogators do- from the outside and as Platt Epps, an identity that exists at the whim of those who enslave him" (Cohen, 267). Although I do not disagree with Cohen's argument, I argue that there is a lot more to this dramatic shift than what she brings to light. As I explained at the very beginning of my thesis, the music in slave narratives might signify something hidden that is either beyond our reach to be understood, or it could be too gruesome to be told. I argue that this scene where Northup is only approachable as Platt Epps to his white interrogators in town as well as the reader, presents us with an example of the latter. The passage can be viewed as a culmination of slavery's horrors to Northup, a point in which he can no longer bear to be the main subject of his own narrative. He is so traumatized by the experiences of slavery that he takes on a self-distanced perspective in order to protect himself from the emotional and physiological torment evoked by reentering this space of memory.

The benefits of objectifying oneself as a method to cope with traumatic experiences are well documented. Self-distancing, which can be defined as "adopting a third-person visual perspective, or viewing oneself from the perspective of an outside observer" is said to "reduce subjective emotional reactivity to anger-eliciting and sad memories" (Kross, Ayduk, & Mischel, 2005). In psychology it is therefore regarded as "an adaptive way of processing negative memories for individuals with emotional problems" (Wisco, Blair E et al, 2). The cause of Northup's self-distancing may thus be a matter of protection. When he is reluctant to share his narrative from a first person point of view at this point in the slave narrative, certain aspects such

as his true emotions, remain opaque to the reader. The only persisting object that reminds the reader of Northup's identity and inner life is however again the fiddle in his hand as he wanders through town. The music thus symbolizes opacity of what is kept out of reach to the reader. In addition, as this scene can be viewed as a culmination of slavery's horrors to Northup, the wooden instrument takes on a somewhat disturbing character as a symbol and turns into a tool of coercion and torture.

As a prolongation of the discussion above where Northup's feelings are kept from view to the reader due to a self-distanced perspective, I want to make an additional comment that concerns Northup's expression of his own sentiments within the slave narrative as a whole. When Northup in his testimonies describes the contemplations of his fate, he mostly uses words that lean towards the state of sadness and sorrow. An example is when he is forced to run away to avoid his outraged slave master Mr. Tibbeats who tries to kill him: "I was desolate, but thankful. Thankful that my life was spared,- desolate and discouraged with the prospect before me (Northup, 88)". Although Northup is treated in the most unjust ways one can imagine, the reader is seldomly subjected to sentiments of anger, bitterness, hatred, fury and outrage. Considering the circumstances, feelings of these sorts would be natural reactions and most likely also part of Northup's register of emotions during his time in slavery. I therefore suggest that such sentiments might equally have been occupying Northup's mind and soul, but are largely hidden from the reader's view. I believe that the absence of such emotions are deliberate choices either made by Northup himself or his abolitionist editors to fit the function and purpose of the slave narrative. First, as I have explained in the introduction, the intention of the slave narratives was to promote the anti-slavery cause and to represent a voice on behalf of the black people in bondage. In order to do so, the narrator is to "maintain that he exercises a clear-glass, neutral memory that is neither creative nor faulty" (Olney, p. 48). Northup should therefore avoid expressing sentiments of anger, bitterness and outrage as these feelings would appear more subjective and thus not beneficial for the cause. Second, if these sentiments were to be expressed by Northup, they would be directed towards slave owners and dealers. These people were white, as were most of the slave narratives' Northern readers. Rage towards Northup's white over-rulers could therefore be misinterpreted as anger towards the whites in the U.S. as a whole and would thus not work in favor of promoting abolition of slavery. As a result, Northup's most subjective sentiments are never revealed and forever remain opaque to the reader.

The scene that solely involves Northup as a self-distanced Platt Epps strongly contrasts with other passages where musical performances appear to be voluntary and a natural part of work or leisure time. In my discussion of music as a literary motif I have already referred to

music as a force of consolidation and emotional escape for Northup and his fellow bondsmen. Additionally I have explained how music as a recurrent motif symbolizes the hope of freedom to Northup and the return to his loved ones. In these settings the violin becomes a tool of expression that accordingly soothes his soul when he yearns for freedom. As a result, the instrument is considered a blessing to him and those around him. In reference to the violin as a symbol, the fiddle symbolizes therapy, comfort and healing in settings where playing appears to be voluntary. In addition it becomes a necessary means to survive the difficult hardships faced in captivity and the trauma that results from it.

As I have explained earlier by the help of Abrams' definition, the violin in *Twelve Years a Slave* is an object that functions as a symbol "which in turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself" (Abrams, 320). Among other things, I have previously argued that the violin is a symbol of opacity where Northup has to hide the details of his identity and the emotions in the wake of his kidnapping and the many challenges faced in captivity. These issues remain opaque to the other characters in the slave narrative, yet, as I have demonstrated above, details about his identity and feelings are present to the reader through the violin as symbol. I have also pointed out how Northup, through self-distancing as a way of coping with trauma, can only be viewed from the outside as Platt Epps. As a result, parts of Northup's character, such as his inner sentiments, remain opaque to the reader in this scene. In addition, I have argued that Northup deliberately holds back anger, fury, bitterness and outrage from the reader as these sentiments would not be beneficial to the anti-slavery cause the slave narrative is promoting. In sum, although we are largely given a good view of Northup's experience of slavery through his accounts, there are some aspects that are left untold and thus will remain opaque forever, even 200 years after the slave narrative's publication. Viewing these examples collectively, we see that spaces of opacity operate on several levels in *Twelve Years a Slave*. These musically charged spaces remain impenetrable to the reader, to the other characters in the slave narrative, and as I will argue in the following, possibly even to Northup himself.

In the article "Solomon Northup's Singing Book" (2017), Lara Langer Cohen addresses the gradual tension in the role of music and the symbolism of the song "Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation". She claims that the song "exposes the excruciating contradictions of music under slavery, and it demands what music, so fundamental a part of Northup's life both before and during his own enslavement, could mean to Northup after it" (Cohen, 264). Similar to the case of the tune "Virginia Reel," where I argue that the continuous reel in the song shares similarities to a life in slavery, Cohen claims that continuation is a motif in "Roaring River" (Cohen, 266). She asks us to "consider the title's image of running water, its chorus's chase "up"

and “down”, its fantasy of living forever, its repeated signs (Ibid, 266). The score of “Roaring River” thus raises harrowing questions about the meaning of Northup’s ultimate “freedom”(Ibid, 266):

Harper’s creek and roarin’ ribber,
Thar, my dear, we’ll live forebber;
Den we’ll go to Ingin nation,
All I want in dis creation,
Is pretty little wife and big plantation.

Chorus. Up dat oak and down dat ribber,
Two overseers and one little nigger (Northup, 218)

Cohen states that while the narrative seems to focus on Northup and his individual road to freedom, the song represents those who are still enslaved, and left behind. Having studied the song “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation” in detail she notices that the lyrics and the tablature of the melody do not add up on the printed sheet music. She argues that it is not a mistake, but rather a “zone of opacity”... “a space inaccessible to the reader, perhaps to the slave narrative as a genre, perhaps even to Northup the survivor” (Cohen, 268). As a conclusion, she claims that the tension between music and lyrics in the sheet music symbolizes the conflicted relationship to music for Northup when he is in bondage and perhaps also in his life after he is freed.

Cohen’s theory of opacity is certainly an interesting and plausible interpretation of the ill-fitting notation and lyrics. Yet I will argue that music as a symbol brings out the opaque in far more profound ways in other spaces that Cohen does not go into detail about. I consider these spaces crucial in the way they tell us about Northup’s own relation to slave culture. The lyrics for “Roaring River- A Refrain of the Red River Plantation” that figures at the end of *Twelve Years a Slave* also appears within the slave narrative in connection with a description of patting juba. As mentioned earlier, this is a dance that features handclapping and striking one’s thighs while keeping time with the feet and by singing songs. Surprisingly, despite Northup’s supposed musical knowledge and literacy he refers to the lyrics as “one of those unmeaning songs, composed rather for its adaption to a certain tune or measure, than for the purpose of expressing any distinct idea” (Northup, 144). After describing the ritual of patting juba and the “Roaring

River” lyrics, he additionally includes lyrics for a song named “Old Hog Eye” as it might be more appropriate to the rhythm of the juba:

Who’s been here since I’ve been gone?
Pretty little gal wid a josey on.
Hog eye!
Old Hog Eye,
And Hosey too!

Never see de like since I was born,
Here come a little gal wid a josey on.
Hog Eye!
Old Hog Eye!
And Hosey too! (Ibid, 145)

If these words are not suited rhythmically to the juba patting, Northup suggests another lyric, claiming that this one is “equally nonsensical, but full of melody, nevertheless, as it flows from the negro’s mouth” (Ibid, 145):

Ebo Dick and Jurdan’s Jo,
Them two niggers stole my yo’.
Chorus. Hop Jim along,
Walk Jim along,
Talk Jim along, &c.

Old black Dan, as black tar,
He dam glad he was not dar.
Hop Jim along, &c. (Ibid, 145)

As I have referred to in the introductory chapter, slaves used songs to comment on their over rulers, to signal danger or routes to freedom, or, to quote Floyd Jr: “*meaning* was always present and was always communicated” (Floyd Jr, 46). The lyrics above possibly serve a purpose on their own, in addition to performing an important function in connection to patting juba. Although Northup seems unable to grasp important aspects of slave culture by claiming that

these lyrics appear nonsensical, this might not be the case to other enslaved listeners who might see them as meaningful. He also remarks that these songs are “not, however, to be appreciated unless heard at the South”, a comment which in a way contradicts his former notice of them as “nonsensical” (Northup, 145). By this Northup reveals himself as a dissociated observer who is unable to make sense of the lyrical content of these slave songs, and that he is possibly aware of it himself. In stark contrast to what appears to be Northup’s view of certain slave songs, Frederick Douglass in his slave narrative hints at what Cataliotti refers to as “the existence of a nonliteral meaning in the songs, an aural subtext...And this subtext is exclusionary; the emotions, feelings and meanings are communicated in a kind of communal insider code” (Cataliotti, 5):

The thought that came up, came out- if not in the word, in the sound; and as frequently in the one as in the other...They would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves (Douglass, 262-263).

Northup’s dissociation and in some ways insensitive interpretation of an important aspect of African American slave culture which he himself was part of for twelve years, might be due to several causes. Cohen suggests with reference to Robert Stepto that Northup’s “objective posture” might be a result of “the demands of audience and authentication”, or as alienation (Cohen, 267). This limited view might therefore be due to the function and purpose of the slave narrative mentioned above. The required conventions of the genre in order to promote the anti-slavery cause, might have restricted the narrator from freely expressing himself. According to Cohen then, a possible explanation could therefore be that Northup grasps more of the songs and their words than he indicates, yet he frames it differently to suit the slave narrative’s purpose and requests from a white audience. An additional comment to this justification is however that Northup might have been fully aware of slave songs being used as a tool of communication amongst the slaves, and that he intended not to reveal these implementations and functions of music to a Northern audience in case it would prevent slaves from gaining their freedom in the future. I will however suggest a third reason, which Cohen does not comment upon, namely that Northup, being born free, perhaps never actually understood these songs, despite being enslaved for twelve years. Or to pose another claim by modifying the latter explanation; perhaps the songs appeared fully transparent to Northup when in slavery, but when he regained his freedom he lost the ability to understand and discourse musically within the genre of slave music and thus

remains solely an observer to the slave culture he was once a part of. Either way, in any of these cases, the music becomes impenetrable to the reader, and possibly even to Northup himself.

If I am right, Levinson's theory of musical literacy becomes relevant also in this respect. I have previously referred to Northup as musically literate in the sense that he is able "to understand the majority of musical utterances in a given tradition" and "hearing it (the musical piece that is) in an appropriate way" (Levinson, 19 and 24). In connection to grasping the meaning of juba songs however, I argue that there are weaknesses to Northup's musical literacy which I will here consider more closely. Levinson argues that listening is contextual, "for the music to be heard or experienced those ways is for it to be related to- brought in some fashion into juxtaposition with- patterns, norms, phenomena, facts, lying outside the specific music itself" (Ibid, 22). Furthermore he exemplifies his theory with a situation where a comprehensive listener is confronted with the first movement of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony (E-flat) for the first time. A musically literate listener of the tradition that Bruckner's musical piece belongs to should be able to hear the music as "tonal"¹¹, "symphonic"¹², "romantic"¹³ and "Brucknerian in character". Furthermore he should be able to experience "the connectedness" of "its individual motion/flow/progression" (Ibid, 19-20). Moreover he should react to and register "the order of tension and release, or expectation and fulfillment, or implication and realization during the course of music" and also hear "the music's progression with some awareness of the performance means...involved in generating the songs being heard", in addition to apprehend "in large measure the gestural and emotional content of the music" (Ibid, 20). Lastly the comprehensive listener has "a sense of the wider resonances- in this case, mythic, religious, and nature-loving ones- attaching to the movement, rightly construed" (Ibid, 20). In sum, if the listener fails the task of hearing and experiencing any of these factors, he lacks the basic musical comprehension that is needed to grasp Bruckner's Fourth Symphony (E-flat). The reasons why he cannot hear the musical piece in an appropriate way, might however vary. An example is that the listener might be from Japan, India, or Indonesia in which case he might not be able to hear the music as tonal as he belongs to a different musical tradition¹⁴ (Ibid, 20). Or, another reason might be that he is not able to hear that Bruckner's Fourth Symphony (E-flat) is Romantic in style due

¹¹ "Tonal, i.e., as constructed on the basis of a familiar set of eight-note scales, major and minor, and as having certain implied standards of consonance and dissonance- or stability and instability- both melodically and harmonically" (Levinson, 19).

¹² "Symphonic, i.e., as a large scale utterance, with regard to both span of time and number of voices or parts involved" (Levinson, 20).

¹³ "Romantic (or nineteenth-century) in style, i.e., as having certain distinctive features and ways of developing which that term denotes" (Levinson, 20).

¹⁴ "Stripped of its tonal character in the hearing of such a listener, Bruckner's movement retains only the sense it has as a pattern of changing dynamics and timbres" (Levinson 20).

to “unfamiliarity with the difference between Romantic music, its Classical predecessors, and its twentieth-century successors” (Ibid, 20). Or, as a final example, maybe the listener “does not grasp the movement as governed by the sonata idea¹⁵” (Ibid, 20-21).

Similar to the scenarios above, Northup, although a skilled black musician and thus having a past of valuable musical input and experience, his musical schooling belongs to a different tradition than that of slave music. As I have explained in the introduction, slave music developed through centuries as a necessary means of communication and as a way to express sentiments concerning the ongoing trauma of slavery. Northup, who was not born into slavery, but kidnapped at the age of 32 might not have been able to fully grasp the slave music at the same level as another slave would. As Levinson puts it: “Comprehending listening is a process of constant, largely unconscious correlation, and a listener without a ‘past’ will be incapable of having it go on him in the right way” (Levinson, 27). Therefore Northup might not have been able to hear the timbral nuances performed in a vocal line of the calls, hollers and cries in the field that would signal different meanings (Floyd Jr, 46-47). He might furthermore not have been able to identify the various messages of the cries which could “express a deeply felt emotional experience, such as hunger, loneliness or lovesickness” (Kebede, 130). Additionally Northup himself might not have been able to perform the many African vocal devices used among the slaves “such as yodels, echolike falsetto, tonal glides, embellished melismas, and microtonal inflections that are often impossible to indicate in European staff notation” (Ibid, 130). And finally, and this is the most important point, there might have been meanings to the “nonsensical” juba songs that Northup was unable to detect that would have made them meaningful if he knew them (Northup, 145).

Another common denominator for why I suggest Northup fails to grasp the juba songs and how he chooses to refer to them as “meaningless” and “nonsensical”, relates to the theory of opacity, a concept which Édouard Glissant addresses in his philosophical work *Poetics of Relation*. He claims that the process of understanding people and their ideas is done from Western perspectives and thought, and that “its basis is this requirement for transparency” (Glissant, 190). When we aim to understand and accept each other, one’s solidity is measured “with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps judgments” (Ibid, 190). Glissant argues that we have to go beyond accepting each other’s differences and also let go of “this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures” (Ibid, 190). We must understand that it is “impossible to reduce anyone, no matter who, to a truth he would not have

¹⁵ “Such a person will be inert to many of the experiences that Bruckner has, so to speak, designed into his music” (Levinson, 21)

generated on his own” (Ibid, 194). He therefore demands the right to opacity as there will always be elements that are being kept from us and merely exist within the time and space to whom it concerns. Glissant gives examples of such spaces of opacity by declaring that “Plato’s city is for Plato, Hegel’s vision is for Hegel, the griot’s town is for the griot” (Ibid, 194). If I take Glissant’s view into consideration, I will argue that there are spaces within their time and place as represented in Northup’s narrative that are only understandable to the slaves, and possibly remain opaque even to him. As I have already pointed out in my above discussion, these opaque spaces are to be found in slave culture and the music that emerges from it. Similarly there are spaces of opacity within the slave narrative which are only accessible to Northup, such as Northup’s interior life in the scene that presents him in 3rd person as Platt Epps, the fiddle playing slave.

Glissant’s demand of the right to opacity corresponds well with Goehr’s arguments relating to musical ekphrasis. According to Goehr, applying ekphrastic techniques is “to illuminate another artwork but sometimes to produce virtual and dynamic dramatic spaces in which all the tensions between saying and showing, concealing and revealing, are put into play” (Goehr, 410). As previously mentioned, she furthermore claims that the function of mentioning an artwork within another artwork is more than exemplifying a premise: it “describes it to reveal a truth that lies beyond what is directly seen, sung, or said” (Ibid, 410). I argue that although we never get to the bottom of the opaque spaces¹⁶ in Northup’s narrative as they are simply not for the reader, recognizing their existence adds depth to the representation of slave culture, the slave narrative itself and lastly, the reading experience.

To sum up my discussion, I have so far in my thesis discussed music in *Twelve Years a Slave* as a literary motif and as a symbol. Both literary devices share similar effects in the way that they add “scope and depth to the reading experience” (Freedman, 210). As a result, the slave narrative appears more nuanced and complex to the reader. Both music as a literary motif and music as symbol recur frequently throughout the slave narrative and they often figure in the same passages of the work. Yet, what has given me ground to explore them both each on their own premises, is their likeness. The symbol takes the shape of a violin and is “an object of description and, more often, as part of the narrator’s imaginary and descriptive vocabulary” (Ibid, 206). More importantly, the violin “suggests a range of reference, beyond itself” (Abrams, 320). Similarly, a literary motif may also “act symbolically”, yet “unlike a symbol, it may recur in a work without using the same object, image or word each time” (Freedman, 200).

¹⁶ The opaque spaces refer to for example the meaning of slave music and Northup’s interior life when viewing himself from the outside as Platt Epps

As a symbol then, the violin can be seen as a physical object that correlates with and represents Northup's inner self and through this use of imagery, the violin allows him to convey his identity more indirectly as a secret reminder of who he is and where he came from. Northup's use of personal symbols within his narrative is consequently of a more "private" and "personal" character (Ibid, 320). The meaning of the violin as symbol moreover dynamically and dramatically evolves throughout the slave narrative. Northup's interaction with the violin shifts, from coercion to performance out of free will, and the reader learns how the role of music gradually changes for him and becomes more complex and difficult. In several passages the violin can be interpreted as a substitute for Northup's veiled identity, and through these interpretations of the symbol we are permitted access to his inner sentiments and reactions towards the experiences faced in slavery. Yet, due to various reasons, I argue that this view is also limited as there are spaces of opacity that remain obscure to the other characters, the reader, and lastly, perhaps even Northup himself. These latter spaces of music I consider crucial in the way they tell us about Northup's own relation to slave culture. Overall, viewing the violin as a symbol with its multiple functions demonstrates the important role of music which contributes to increased understanding of Northup and the experiences he faces in slavery, as well as the slave narrative as a whole.

2. 3 Personification and Synecdoche

In the last part of my analysis I will argue that Northup does not stick to the use of symbols in its most usual sense, but instead the violin, by the use of personification, can be interpreted as having a voice of its own. In addition, I argue that Northup, by using another literary device, synecdoche, in some cases only refers to the violin when it in fact signifies a larger whole, namely himself. In the following part I will identify some examples from *Twelve Years a Slave* to illustrate my arguments, and explain the possible reasons for Northup's use of these literary devices in the scenes they appear. I will then point out how the use of personification and synecdoche affects the slave narrative as a whole.

According to Abrams, personification is when "an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings" (Abrams, 103). These human traits might include emotions, sensations, desires, speech and gestures. As example of personification Abrams uses Elizabeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, I. 251-2 where frosty cliffs apparently are equipped with eyes to observe the subject of the poem:

Then, land!- then, England! Oh, the frosty cliffs

Looked cold upon me. (Abrams, 104)

The above definition regarding personification suits Northup's violin well, which in many passages seems to function as a character on its own. In his descriptions, Northup ascribes the wooden instrument's qualities similar to those of a true friend who loyally stands by him during the difficult times of slavery. An example is when he refers to the violin as a "source of consolidation since, affording pleasure to the simple beings with whom my lot was cast, and beguiling my own thoughts, for many hours, from the painful contemplation of my fate" (Northup, 7). A similar illustration is when Northup describes the additional income the violin provides for: "I met with other good fortune, for which I was indebted to my violin, my constant companion, the source of profit, and soother of my sorrows during years of servitude" (Northup, 128). Personification of the violin is also highly present in the passage below where it, in addition to offering companionship, holds numerous other human traits:

Alas! Had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage...*It was my companion- the friend of my bosom- triumphing loudly* when I was joyful, and *uttering its soft, melodious consolations* when I was sad. Often, at midnight, when sleep had fled affrighted from the cabin, and my soul was disturbed and troubled with the contemplation of my fate, it would *sing me a song of peace*. On holy Sabbath Days, when an hour or two of leisure was allowed, it would only *accompany* me to some quiet place on the bayou bank, and *lifting up its voice, discourse kindly and pleasantly* indeed (Northup, 143).

Adding such characteristics to an inanimate object reinforces the impression of the great solitude Northup experiences in slavery. He desperately longs for his loved ones and the life he once had at home. He has no one to confide in about his fate, nor can he rely on anyone for comfort or help most of the times other than the violin. By personifying his musical instrument he is given a companion to share his burdens with, and the description of the years spent in slavery appear less solemn.

In addition to holding traits similar to those of a dear friend, Northup describes the violin as a character with immense popularity among others. When he attends festivities where young people want to amuse themselves with music and dance, he writes: "Throughout the surrounding villages my fiddle was notorious" (Northup, 9). As the reader comes to understand, the performer and his musical instrument are co-dependent. This means that the violin is nothing

without Northup extracting the tunes out of the instrument and vice versa. By using personification and attributing the violin with qualities that Northup himself holds, he appears quite modest in the way he undermines his own performing role. A similar example of the violin's approval is when Master Epps answers Bass' inquiry about where his slaves will be holding Christmas: "Platt is going to Tanners' to-day. His fiddle is in great demand" (Northup, 189). Master Epps' answer can be read as an attempt to discredit Northup's musical abilities as he links the great demand to the violin, and not to Northup himself.

However, I argue that the above examples of the violin can also, if interpreted somewhat differently, be viewed as illustrations of synecdoche. The word derives from the Greek *synekdoche* which can be defined as "simultaneous understanding". According to Abrams, synecdoche is "when a part of something is used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part" (Abrams, 103). To exemplify this literary device Abrams writes that "we use the term "ten hands" for ten workers, or "a hundred sails" for ships and, in current slang, "wheels" to stand for an automobile" (Ibid, 103). Furthermore, synecdoche can be used as a type of personification in the way that it attaches a human aspect to a nonhuman thing (Ibid, 103). The latter fact would be the case with Northup and his violin, and if we view the violin as interchangeably connected to and as much a part of him as his limbs, it would mean that the instrument in fact signifies Northup as a larger whole. By the use of synecdoche in this case however, the violin becomes the emphasized part of the larger whole rather than Northup himself. Similar to the effect of personification, this might be an intentional rhetoric device Northup employs to express modesty by occasionally undermining his musical talents. If that is the case, he only partly succeeds by doing so as he also reveals in his slave narrative that he was "considered the Ole Bull of Bayou Bœuf" (Northup, 142). When drawing the attention towards the instrument as the subject of the actions, power of associative and referential thinking is required from the reader in order to detect that the instrument in fact represents a larger whole when Northup declares that: "Throughout the surrounding villages my fiddle was notorious" (Northup, 9). Northup's use of synecdoche when speaking of his violin might therefore not immediately be perceived by the reader, yet when it is discovered it adds additional depth and complexity to Northup's character and the slave narrative as a whole.

The use of personification and synecdoche as literary devices within *Twelve Years a Slave* thus share similar effects. First, the human attributes of personification connect the readers with Northup's violin and help them to relate, sympathize, understand and act emotionally towards it. Through the personification of the violin the reader also learns about Northup's solitude, which again might have a strong emotional effect on the reader. As a result, the emotional aspect might

persuade the reader in favor of the anti-slavery cause. If the reader interprets Northup's references to the violin as synecdoche, the instrument represents a larger whole, yet the emphasis is on the instrument in these contexts and Northup becomes a minor character in the background. As an effect, Northup appears more modest when expressing his musical talents. In sum, the use of both literary devices creates a more vivid imagery and elevates Northup's language and narrative as it appears more complex and nuanced.

2. 4 Conclusion

I have throughout my thesis demonstrated how Northup's testimony in *Twelve Years a Slave* uses music as an individual and communal tool of survival to resist racial oppression and to cope with the traumatic experiences that accompany a life in chains. By outlining the features of the slave narrative as well as the African American music that sprang out from slavery it becomes clear what the imprints of music adds to the understanding that the literary slave narrative as a genre does not. For those in bonds, music was necessary in order to communicate, to express themselves and to remember. Similar to the purpose the violin had to Northup, the slave music allowed the slaves to indicate sentiments not to possible show elsewhere, such as feelings of sorrow, joy, anger, protest, frustration, desire and triumph (Cataliotti, x). Another relevant factor that distinguishes the slave narrative and the music, is that the latter was created by the slaves, for the slaves. I have therefore argued that spaces of music thus appear and can be read as more personal and subjective than other parts of the slave narrative, and that it is necessary to explore them thoroughly to achieve a more nuanced and complex understanding of Northup's slavery experience, the institution of slavery and the slavery culture in the American South in the antebellum era. In sum, as I have demonstrated throughout my analyses, the music makes it possible for the reader to discover "the lower frequencies of representation, considering the ways in which aural perception can tell alternative stories and amplify sound and difference in new ways" (Furlonge, 2).

What separates Northup's testimony from many other antebellum slave narratives is the recurrent topic of music, and as these musical elements are not included in Olney's list of formal components that typically outline a slave narrative, I have therefore argued that such inclusions are deliberate choices made by Northup himself. His narrating voice seems very much present in the passages that include music, especially in the scenes where he describes the emotional relationship to his most beloved possession when in slavery, the violin. Furthermore, through the exploration of music as a literary motif and as a symbol, it becomes even clearer that these sonic spaces express the emotional experience and the trauma of slavery to Northup.

Through William Freedman's theorizing of the literary motif we learn how music is a core element of Northup's life, it permeates his way of thinking, how he expresses himself and perceives the world. It is a frequent motif throughout the slave narrative and also appears in unlikely ways, such as the sheet music of "Roaring River -A Refrain of the Red River Plantation" and Northup's own comparisons to world-famous Norwegian violinist and composer Ole Bull. Additionally the literary motif often appears at climactic points in the narrative which again has a strong emotional effect on the reader, such as Northup's kidnapping and Eliza's songs of comfort to soothe her broken heart and her sleeping children who will soon be separated from her. When discussing the degree of relevance and coherence of the literary motif as a whole and how they fit together into a recognizable and coherent unit, I have pointed at the unifying companionable attributes and effects of music which accompany the characters, as well as the narrative itself. In many of the scenes the music harmonizes with the scenes it is featured, whereas in others it creates dissonance and contrast. The effect of the latter is often an unpleasant, unbearable tension that greatly provokes the reader, while the harmonizing music often has the effect of emphasizing the narrating events it accompanies. When discussing Freedman's fifth factor; the appropriateness of the motif to what it symbolizes, I have argued that the recurrent motif of music symbolizes freedom as the music becomes significant, if not crucial, in his struggle for survival. In sum, the literary motif in *Twelve Years a Slave* makes us feel, subconsciously and consciously, the horrible conditions of slavery, and the emotional aspect of music contributes to "add scope and depth to the reading experience" (Freedman, 210). As a result, Northup gains sympathy from his readers, and thus promotes the condemnation of slavery.

By arguing that Northup's violin holds symbolic functions that differ from its literal meaning, I have demonstrated how the music conveys hidden aspects of his identity and furthermore lets the reader into Northup's internal feelings, longings, struggles and conflicts. As a dynamic symbol, the violin all in one symbolizes Northup's identity, integrity, wealth and abundance, and finally happiness as well as threat and torture. Furthermore, as a symbol of opacity the wooden instrument secretly reminds Northup of who he is and thus becomes a symbol of opacity vis a vis his slave owners and fellow bondsmen. Overall, viewing the violin as a symbol with its multiple functions demonstrates the important role of music, as it further adds a deeper understanding of Northup and his experiences in slavery, as well as the slave narrative as a whole.

Lastly, I have argued that Northup's violin, by being personified, can be interpreted as having a voice of its own. When he ascribes the instrument's qualities to those of a dear friend,

the impression of Northup's solitude when in slavery, is reinforced. By personifying the violin he is given a companion to share his burdens with, and the years spent in slavery appear less solemn. Additionally, the personification of the violin connects the reader with the instrument as it becomes easier to relate, sympathize, understand and act emotionally towards it. Through the use of another literary device, synecdoche, the violin occasionally refers to a larger whole, namely Northup himself. As an effect, this vivid imagery makes him appear more modest when expressing his musical talents. Both literary devices add additional depth to the slave narrative as it appears more complex and nuanced.

Northup's musical literacy benefits the reader as one can sonically imagine the music based on his descriptions. However, I have suggested in my thesis that Northup, who is not born a slave, might not have been fully able to grasp the purpose and meaning of the slave music at the same level as some of his fellow bondsmen. Consequently, and in relation to Glissant's theory of opacity I have argued that Northup reduces the juba songs to being "meaningless" and "nonsensical", rather than simply accepting that there are elements of slave culture that he does not understand, as it is simply not for him.

By discussing *Twelve Years a Slave* in light of musical ekphrasis as defined by Lydia Goehr and Siglind Bruhn, I have shown that Northup brings music to aesthetic presence "through the sheer power of description" (Goehr, 407). I have furthermore argued that the examples of musical ekphrasis in his accounts can be linked to the overall meaning of the slave narrative as Northup, through his descriptions of music, forces the reader to sympathize and identify with the humanity of the slaves, including himself. In addition, reading through the lens of musical ekphrasis gives back life to various musical arts that have been silenced and furthermore provides the performers with a voice through the depiction of their musical expression. In sum, musical ekphrasis strengthens the reason why Northup's slave narrative should be read in light of the music it on multiple levels represents. As musical ekphrasis is an understudied field generally and in relation to slave narratives specifically, I suggest that there is a lot more to explore for future criticism than I have been able to do in this one thesis.

The Narrative of William W. Brown (1847) as well as the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) would be good starting points for further scrutiny within the scope of musical ekphrasis, as they both include passages of music that fulfill the criteria of either "an ancient, description-based view" or "a modern work-to-work view" (Goehr, 389). An example of the latter is to be found in one of Brown's many passages where he has implemented music as part of his narrative. In this particular scene family members are separated as the slave owner Mr. Walker gives away a child simply because he cannot bear the noise of its crying. The

mother begs him to give it back to her and promises to keep him quiet, but has to return to her ranks without her child only to be chained to the rest of the gang, so that she will not run away (Brown, 20). To accompany this horrific scene in the slave narrative, Brown has inserted the lyrics of a song which he says he has “often heard the slaves sing, when about to be carried to the far south”, and furthermore comments on the origins of the song that “it is said to have been composed by a slave” (Brown 20). Similar to the examples of musical ekphrasis in Northup’s accounts, the inclusion of music in Brown’s narrative gives back life to music that has now been silenced and furthermore provides the slaves with a voice through the lyrics of the song. By imagining the music in the slave narratives through the given descriptions the reader/listener might pick up sounds of struggle, torture and violence, resistance, fear, hope, longing, love and sorrow that is not to be found elsewhere in the texts.

If I were to speculate on what might be brought out of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) by reading it through the lens of musical ekphrasis, I would call attention to a scene where Douglass describes enthusiastic slaves who are selected to go to the Great House Farm “for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves” (Douglass, 22). This scene fulfills the criteria of “an ancient, description-based view” where “a piece of descriptive speech or writing brings an image or scene of music before the imagination (the ‘mind’s eye’). Here, attention is paid to the musical subject matter or point of the text or to the rhythm and tunefulness of its delivery” (Goehr, 389):

While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune (Douglass, 22).

Similar to Northup and Brown, Douglass does not only “exemplify a premise but actually describes it to reveal a truth that lies beyond what is directly seen, sung, or said” and furthermore forces the reader to sympathize and identify with the humanity of the slaves in the slave narrative (Goehr, 410):

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. ...Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my

spirit and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them (Douglass, 22).

It would consequently seem that analyzing the role of music in slave narratives has the potential to bring out nuances that are otherwise lost. As my analysis shows it is clear that music begins where words end. To Northup, music becomes a necessary means of communication to express emotions that go beyond words. Furthermore music helps the reader to relate to the incidents in the narrative, the characters within it, and of course the slavery cause. In sum, music is a powerful tool that affects the reader emotionally, physically and psychologically. Similar to what my analysis of *Twelve Years a Slave* has done, I argue that focusing on the literary function of music can help broaden the field of slave narrative studies. I believe that an attentive reading and listening approach to music as a literary device in and of itself helps to interpret the imaginary that is being presented to us through the slave narratives, and that the music might try to tell us something that is yet to be discovered.

3.0 Works Cited

- Image 1 (front page): Sketch of Solomon Northup by Frederick M. Coffin (engraved by Nathaniel Orr) - Solomon Northup (1855) *Twelve Years a Slave*
- Image 2: "Roaring River. A Refrain of the Red River Plantation". Page 218. Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. 1853. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 2016.
- Abrams, H. M. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Eighth Edition. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.
- Barker, Thomas P. "Spatial Dialectics: Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song." *Journal of Black Studies* 46, no. 4 (2015): 363-83.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24572907>.
- Brown, W. William. *The Narrative of William W. Brown*. 1848. Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 2015.
- Bruhn Siglind; A Concert of Paintings: "Musical Ekphrasis" in the Twentieth Century. *Poetics Today* 1 September 2001; 22 (3): 551-605. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-22-3-551>
- Capuano, Peter J., "Truth in Timbre: Morrison's Extension of Slave Narrative Song in *Beloved*" (2003). Faculty Publications -- Department of English. 87.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/87>
- Cataliotti, Robert H. *The Music in African American Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Cohen, Langer Lara. "Solomon Northup's Singing Book." *African American Review* 50, no.3 (2017): 259-272. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed May 23, 2019)
- Djedje, Cogdell Jacqueline. The (Mis)Representation of African American Music: The Role of the Fiddle. *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 10(1), (2016).1-32.
doi:10.1017/S1752196315000528

- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. 1845. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Mentor, 1987. 241-331.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. "XIV: Of the Sorrow Songs". 1903. Reprint, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018.
- Fiske, David, Clifford W. Brown, and Rachel Seligman. 2013. *Solomon Northup: the complete story of the author of Twelve years a slave*.
- Floyd, Samuel A. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Freedman, William. "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation." (1971) in Hoffman J. Michael, Murphy D. Patrick. *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Second Edition. London: Leicester University Press, 1996: 200-211. 123-31. Accessed January 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/1345147.
- Furlonge, Brittingham Nicole. *Race Sounds. The Art of Listening in African American Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018.
- Floyd, Samuel A. "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry." *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 49-70. doi:10.2307/1519943.
- Goehr, Lydia. (2010). How to Do More with Words. Two Views of (Musical) Ekphrasis. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. 50. 389-410. 10.1093/aesthj/ayq036.
- Gould, Philip. "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative." Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, 11–27. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521850193.002.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. "For Opacity". 1997. University of Michigan Press.
- Hamlet, Janice D. "Word! The African American Oral Tradition and Its Rhetorical Impact on American Popular Culture." *Black History Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (2011): 27-31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24759732>.
- Harding, Vincent. *There is a river: The black struggle for freedom in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Heglar, Charles J. *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001.
- Kebede, Ashenafi. 1982. *Roots of black music*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice- Hall.
- Kross, E., Ayduk, O., & Mischel, W. (2005). When Asking "Why" Does Not Hurt Distinguishing Rumination From Reflective Processing of Negative Emotions. *Psychological Science*, 16(9), 709–715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01600.x>
- Levinson, Jerrold. "Musical Literacy." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 24, no. 1 (1990): 17-30. doi:10.2307/3332852.
- Lingold, Mary Caton. "Fiddling With Freedom: Solomon Northup's Musical Trade in 12 Years a Slave" <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2013/12/16/11444/> Accessed: 29.04.20
- McClendon, Aaron D. "Sounds of Sympathy: William Wells Brown's "Anti-Slavery Harp", Abolition, and the Culture of Early and Antebellum American Song." *African American Review* 47, no. 1 (2014): 83-100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24589797>.
- Nelson, John H, "The Negro Character in American Literature" (Lawrence, Kansas, 1926).
- Nichols, Charles H. "Who Read the Slave Narratives?" *The Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1959): 149-62. doi:10.2307/273218.
- Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. 1853. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 2016.
- Olney, James. "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo*, no. 20 (1984): 46-73. doi:10.2307/2930678.
- Parini J, Leininger PW, eds. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*. 1 ed. ed. Oxford University Press; 2004.
- Radano, Ronald. "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals." *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 506-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344020>.

- Sekora, John. "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative." *Callaloo*, no. 32 (1987): 482-515. doi:10.2307/2930465.
- Sinanan, Kerry. "The Slave Narrative and the Literature of Abolition." Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, 61–80. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521850193.005.
- Scott, Lynn Orilla. "Autobiography: Slave Narratives" *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*. Publication date: July 2017. Retrieved 17.10.19 from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-658>
- Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. Chicago, 1979.
- Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture. Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. 1987. Reprint: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wergeland, Henrik. *Ole Bull: Efter Opgivelser av Ham Selv Biografisk Skildret af Henrik Wergeland*. 1843. Retrieved 07.03.20 from <https://www.dokpro.uio.no/wergeland/WIV5/WIV5008.html>
- Wisco, Blair E et al. "Self-distancing from trauma memories reduces physiological but not subjective emotional reactivity among Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder." *Clinical psychological science : a journal of the Association for Psychological Science* vol. 3,6 (2015): 956-963. doi:10.1177/2167702614560745
- Wikipedia. Ekphrasis. Retrieved 07.03 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekphrasis>