Frederick Douglass and Rhetoric

A study of antislavery policies, genre conventions and rhetorical devices in Frederick Douglass’s major slave narratives
Acknowledgements

The story of the realization of this dissertation actually goes back a few years ago when I decided to spend a semester abroad in Norway. In the fall of 2014, during my stay in Bergen, I followed a class called “American Culture and Literature”. This happened to be one of the best choices in my scholarly career. There and then, I discovered my fascination for (African-)American literature and in particular the genre of the slave narrative. I was touched by the pureness and grief of the former slaves and their life stories. Being deeply affected by Frederick Douglass’s narrative, I wrote my term paper on his first autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. And even though I wrote my BA paper in the field of Dutch Linguistics, I decided to write my dissertation in English, a switch that was not at all evident. Nevertheless, I could not have been happier with the choice I made.

During my writing process, I have often experienced a feeling of being lost, as if I was totally on the wrong track. I can never thank my family and friends enough for encouraging me to keep on reading and writing, and to push me to my limits. I am very grateful for their help and their comfort, for it was always there in times I needed it the most. In that matter, I especially want to thank my dad, Hugo Van Mieghem, who reread my work several times and offered me the advice I needed to continue. Also a special thank you is in order to my supervisor, Dr. Jasper Schelstraete. He guided me through the enormous pile of research topics and was prepared to offer help whenever I was in need for it.

I hope that, with this dissertation, I can spread some new information, pass on a few clever ideas and now and then surprise my readers. Foremost, I hope they will enjoy reading through what I have been working on for the last ten months. And lastly, I sincerely wish that my rhetorical skills are sufficient enough to persuade the reader to appreciate my work (for it would be quite ironical to write a dissertation on rhetoric if I were not able to persuade my reader…). Frederick Douglass once said: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”. I can only fully agree with him on that.
Table of Contents

0 Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 3

1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 7

2 Abolitionism ...................................................................................................................... 10
  2.1 The Abolitionist Movement: its source, its bloom and its importance after the Civil War ................................................................. 11
    2.1.1 The British Anti-Slavery Movement ...................................................................................... 11
    2.1.2 The Women Movement .................................................................................................. 12
    2.1.3 The Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation ......................................................... 14
    2.1.4 Abolitionist Movements after the Civil War ................................................................ 15

  2.2 The Abolitionist Movement and Frederick Douglass ....................................................... 16

  2.3 Abolitionist influence on Douglass’s narratives ............................................................... 17
    2.3.1 The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself .......................................................................................... 17
    2.3.2. My Bondage, My Freedom .............................................................................................. 18
    2.3.3 The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass .................................................................... 19

3 The genre of the Slave Narrative ......................................................................................... 21
  3.1 Slave narrative or autobiography? A brief introduction ............................................... 22
    3.1.1 Adaptation ...................................................................................................................... 22
    3.1.2 Veracity and Irony ......................................................................................................... 23
    3.1.3 Religion ......................................................................................................................... 24

  3.2 Different stages of the slave narrative ............................................................................. 25
    3.2.1 First stage: focus on the narrative ............................................................................... 25
    3.2.2 Second stage: focus on antislavery ideology ................................................................. 26
    3.2.3 Third stage: focus on political surroundings and further “black” achievements ....... 28

  3.3 Douglass and the slave narrative .................................................................................... 29
    3.3.1 Integration ..................................................................................................................... 29
    3.3.2 Separation ..................................................................................................................... 29

4 Influences of Aristotle’s theory of the Rhetorical Triangle on Douglass’s writing .......... 33
  4.1 Aristotle: background information ................................................................................. 33
4.2 Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle: logos, ethos, pathos ........................................35
   4.2.1 Logos ........................................................................................................35
   4.2.2 Ethos and self-fashioning ........................................................................36
   4.2.3 Pathos ........................................................................................................37

4.3 Influence on politics ........................................................................................39

4.4 Rhetoric and Douglass ....................................................................................41
   4.4.1 Importance throughout his life ....................................................................42
   4.4.2 The voice of the author .............................................................................44
   4.4.3 Approach of the audience .........................................................................46

5 Characteristics of the slave narrative and their impact on Douglass’s narratives ..................................................50

5.1 Adaptory and advisory rhetoric ......................................................................50
   5.1.1 Adaptory Rhetoric ...................................................................................51
   5.1.2 Advisory Rhetoric ....................................................................................51
   5.1.3 Rhetoric of moral absolutism ....................................................................53

5.2 Veracity: intertextuality and (self-)censorship ..............................................55
   5.2.1 Intertextuality ..........................................................................................55
   5.2.2 (Self-)censorship .....................................................................................56

5.3 Irony ..................................................................................................................58

5.4 Religious imagery ............................................................................................62

6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................65

7 Works Cited ..........................................................................................................67
1 Introduction

In the nineteenth century, the dark shadow of slavery loomed over the southern part of the United States of America. And although a thin layer of gold and wealth acquired by the plantation owners tried to conceal its darkest secret, the “land of the free and the home of the brave” was not able to prevent this well kept information from climbing to the surface to reveal itself. Hence, in an attempt to resist and abolish slavery, several antislavery parties were founded. To support their cause, they required the help of former slaves and their stories, the so-called slave narratives. Due to the growing recognition of the antislavery movements and the enthusiasm with which the narratives were often received, the slave narrative grew out to be one of the most successful genres of the mid 19th century. Furthermore, political institutions started to question the system and the consequences proved to be enormous. Nineteenth-century America was exposed to fundamental and challenging changes which divided the country into two major parties: the northern states were against slavery, while the South was in favor of it. America was a breeding ground for a war, a war in which abolishing slavery was the (seemingly) premised goal. However, it has to be mentioned that, although especially the southern states of the country were led by proslavery ideologies, discrimination of the African population was, to a less extent, also a fact in the northern free states.

Driven by the desire to gain his personal freedom, Frederick Douglass, a (former) slave, understood the importance of literacy in a country in which slaves were kept intentionally ignorant of the outside world. He managed to teach himself how to read and write, and little by little, his literacy helped him to attain his freedom. By the age of twenty, Douglass managed to flee from Maryland to New York City. Shortly after his arrival in the North, he became aware of the antislavery ideas of the Abolitionist Movement and inspired by its political ideology, he chose to openly declare his opinion on slavery. In order to convince Northerners of its inhumanity, he himself began to attend and even to give speeches on the act of slavery, using his personal experiences as a convincing argument. In 1845 he published his first autobiography The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself, which was then followed by two extended versions of the former in 1855 and in 1881, respectively My Bondage, My Freedom and The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass.
Nineteenth-century America was characterized by rapid and fundamental change on many fronts - political, economic, social, geographic - all of which combined to draw the battle lines for the American Civil War. Since the slave narrative, supported by the Abolitionist Movement, was a political genre, the inconstancy of this turbulent society inevitably influenced its genre conventions. Hence, Douglass’s manner of thinking, speaking and writing also changed throughout the years. In Witnessing Slavery: the Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives, Frances Smith Foster, Professor Emerita at the San Diego State University, classifies the slave narrative into three different stages. Additionally, she provides a general overview of the typical written features of each stage. Smith Foster also acknowledges the importance of recognizing the differences between multiple slave narratives of the same author. She stresses that later narratives are not just simply revisions of the first slave narratives. “They [slave narratives] might have dealt with the same subject, but the content and style were revised in so many ways that they should be considered as completely new works” (147-148).

Douglass inevitably underwent some mental changes throughout the fifty years between his first and last narrative. This is reflected by his writing style and the arguments he makes considering for instance his personal view on religion and politics. To confirm these changes, I will take a closer look at Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle in which pathos, ethos and logos are related to respectively the self-knowledge of the author, the approach of the audience and the content of a speech or written source. Although logos, to Aristotle, was a less important device of rhetoric, it seemed to be indispensable to the slave narrative, since often, the focus of the narrative is put on the content of the story. Smith Foster’s approach of the four major characteristics of the slave narrative - I refer to these as adaptation, veracity, irony and religion – could serve as a functional equivalent of logos. I will therefore combine Aristotle’s theory on pathos and ethos with Smith Foster’s insights on the characteristics of the slave narrative to prove while Douglass’s narratives are all significant illustrations of the slave narrative.

Though a considerable amount of research has been performed on the rhetoric in slave narratives, up until now, no or very little attempt has been made to measure how Aristotle’s rhetoric is translated into Douglass’s narratives. In this thesis, I will primarily consider the importance of Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle to Douglass’s work in view of
the Abolitionist Movement and the antislavery cause. I will prove that the slave narrative is characterized by features of political rhetoric - ethos and pathos - in combination with logos, which is realized through adaptation, veracity, irony and religion. Subsequently, I will classify Douglass’s narratives into Smith Foster’s framework of the slave narrative genre, providing examples from *The Narrative of the Life, My Bondage, My Freedom* and *The Life and Times* to strengthen my arguments. In chapter 2, I will present a general overview of the Abolitionist Movement considering the political American landscape and its British connections. The transatlantic nature of Abolitionism was of great encouragement to Douglass’s further interaction in the antislavery battle. Next, in chapter 3, I will discuss the genre of the slave narrative and what makes it so unique and necessary in the abolitionist ventures. Finally, in the two last chapters, I will analyze Douglass’s slave narratives including *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), *My Bondage, My Freedom* (1855) and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881) from a more rhetorical point of view. In chapter 4, I primarily focus on Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle and its two major pillars, ethos and pathos. I will also consider the influence of rhetoric on politics, more specifically, how rhetoric interfered with the campaign of the abolitionists. Furthermore, I will provide examples from the narratives to relate Aristotle’s Rhetoric to Douglass’s personal life and writing. In chapter 5, I will return to the theory of Frances Smith Foster considering the major characteristics of the slave narrative and their relation to logos. Hereby I rely on four major topics that are most applicable to Douglass’s narratives, namely adaptation, veracity, irony, and religion.
2 Abolitionism

Even though the primary focus in this study is not situated in the field of American history, I will have to supply the reader with some background information considering the Abolitionist Movement. The American Anti-Slavery Society was founded in the 1830s. One of its founders and leaders was William Lloyd Garrison, an American journalist and publisher. Its main objective was to abolish slavery in the southern part of America and to then provide former slaves with equal rights concerning inter alia the permission to vote, humane working conditions, access to public transport... Hence, the first chapter provides an explanation for the importance and impact of the Abolitionist Movement to Frederick Douglass as a slave, a writer, an orator, and eventually an American citizen. I am even inclined to say that without the assurance of the existence of this antislavery institution, Douglass would not have attempted to escape from slavery for however little knowledge he had on the ideology of Abolitionism¹, he knew it was undoubtedly an ideology acting against the southern slavery policy: “I found, however, that whatever they [the abolitionists] might be, they were most cordially hated and soundly abused by slave holders, of any grade” (Douglass 229). In the following chapter on the 19th century political landscape of the United States, I will especially concentrate on the abolitionist’s role model, Great Britain, and on the movement’s achievements around the mid nineteenth century. Secondly I will also discuss the importance of publishing slave narratives and performing antislavery speeches, for the Abolitionist Movement depended - to quite a large extent - on the enthusiasm with which these were received. Lastly I investigate the movement’s influence on Douglass. This study considers his personal achievements and career as a writer and orator. A further discussion, including examples from Douglass’s autobiographies, on how Abolitionism and antislavery policies have influenced him in making certain personal and rhetorical choices, is provided in chapter 4.

¹ Due to their extreme isolation on plantations, slaves were completely ignorant of any global knowledge. As far as a slave was concerned, the plantation he worked on and
2.1 The Abolitionist Movement: its source, its bloom and its importance after the Civil War

2.1.1 The British Antislavery Movement

The British antislavery organizations were an inspiration to the Abolitionist Movement. This is quite ironic for it was Britain in the first place which at the start of the 18th century decided upon the deportation of millions of slaves from Africa to the United States. By the end of the century, it is estimated that three million Africans had been transported from their home to “the land of the free” to work in extremely hard conditions, turning America in the great nation it is today. Nevertheless, already in 1783, British antislavery ideas arose into the English Quaker society. It was however only in 1787 that a larger public could be reached through the foundation of The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. This community was centered in London and its surrounding area. The support of Scotland and Wales in 1792 contributed to the rapid expansion of the antislavery movement and by 1806, through the submission of many petitions against the system, a bill was passed in which the entire British Atlantic slave trade was to be prohibited (Oldfield, “British Anti-slavery”). Douglass, during his first visit to Britain, was struck by the humane treatment that was offered to a black man in this country. In My Bondage, My Freedom and Life and Times he provided several favorable cases in which he elaborated on the equal status of the black and the white race. In these examples he did not restrain himself from pointing out that Britain was clearly outdoing America in terms of anti-discriminating policies. In the following excerpt, Douglass is crossing the Atlantic for the first time, in search for shelter after the publication of The Narrative of the Life. When he is about to enter the American ship that would bring him and some of his (white) companions to the British Isles he encounters much opposition: “This was a first-cabin fare; but on going on board, I found that the Liverpool agent had ordered my berth to be given to another, and forbidden my entering the saloon. It was rather hard, after having enjoyed for so long a time equal social privileges (...), now to be cooped up in the stern of the Cambria and denied the right to enter, lest my presence should disturb some democratic fellow-passenger” (Douglass 702).
2.1.2 The Women Movement

To gain more spiritual and financial support, the Abolitionist Movement got involved in the women’s cause to achieve equal rights, such as the right to vote. By 1856 most adult white males had the legal right to cast a ballot. Considering earlier rules that solely granted white property owners the privilege to vote, this change was already quite innovative. Since both parties, Afro-Americans and women, pursued the same main goal, obtaining equal rights, they decided to form an alliance. It was a foregone conclusion that middle class women in that period in theory were to stay at home, for working was associated with the lower classes of society. Under no circumstances were they to interfere in politics or economical life. However, in practice it was often the case that women supplied their husbands with their advice (Boyer 13). On top, most of the well-off women enjoyed a good education and since they had the time, they were able to read a lot or to dedicate their lives to charity. Being (upper) middle class, they also had the means to support the movement which was, according to Douglass, necessary particularly to help escape slaves from the South to the North - a most expensive journey - and to subsidize education for black people. Also, according to Dr. Fionnghuala Sweeney, “the support and interest of women provided Douglass with access to the upper echelons of power and privilege, strata for which a certain strata and persona were necessary” (53). Supporting the women’s cause and being associated with this, could thus upgrade one’s status in society. Especially for Douglass, with his considerable political ambitions, this could be of great help. Nevertheless, even though feminine ideas on equality seemed parallel and women proved to enrich the party’s prestige, the decision to allow their interference led to a lot of discussion within the association. A few members were opposed to the admission of women for reasons stated above. Women were not fit to interfere in politics. The quarrel within the movement eventually resulted in the birth of two new factions: Garrison’s Abolitionist Party, in which women were allowed to participate, and the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. A few months after the separation, there was a second break, this time within Garrison’s party. Several members, including Douglass, stepped up against their leader who had decided that abolitionist members should not be interfering in politics. He argued that, in view of the Constitution as a proslavery document, all political activities were acting in accordance with the southern defense mechanism that abused the Constitution. The
Liberty Party, as the descendants called their new faction, was presided by James G. Birney.

Two of the most important women who took a seat within the Liberty Party, though not extensively spoken of in *The Life and Times*, are “The Grimké Sisters”, Sarah and Angelina, mostly referred to in combination with each other. A remarkable fact though was that these women were the daughters of a southern slaveholder and yet devoted their lives to the abolition of slavery (Boyer 50). Another important female voice, of the National Woman Suffrage Association, was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She portrayed the double discrimination, concerning both race and gender, African-American women had to face (Boyer 70): “They had the double battle to fight against the tyranny of sex and color at the same time, (...). Their opponents were found not only in the ranks of the New England clergy, but among the most bigoted abolitionists in Great Britain and the United States” (Cady Stanton 53). Stanton was also the prominent writer of the Declaration of Sentiments of 1848. The progressive document was signed by 68 women and 32 men - including Douglass - at the first convention organized by women. About his support to the Women’s Suffrage Movement, Douglass commented the following:

“There are few facts in my humble history to which I look back with more satisfaction than to the fact... that I was sufficiently enlightened at that early day, and when only a few years from slavery, to support your resolution for woman suffrage.... When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of women, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act’ (Foner & Taylor 709).

Eventually black people gained the right to vote in 1871 with the legislation of the Fifteenth amendment. In practice however, it took almost another century before the act was enforced in 1965. The Voting Rights Act prohibited all racial discrimination in voting. Forty-five years earlier, in 1920, the 19th amendment, including voting rights for women in every state of the United States, was passed².

---
² This amendment was already introduced in Congress in 1878 by Senator A. Sargent but it needed 41 years to be passed (Schlup & Ryan 436).
2.1.3 The Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation

When the Constitution was written, slavery in the southern part of America remained tolerated to make sure all states would sign the document. The majority of inhabitants of the northern states, however, were still determined to abolish slavery in the whole country. Up till the 1860s, for every free state that entered the Union, a slave state had to be admitted as a compensatory matter. When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, he decided that from that point on, new states could only be submitted to the Union if their leaders were willing to sign a document that forbade any form of enslavement. Of course the seven southern states felt discriminated by this new measure. Their answer to Lincoln’s treatment was not to be misunderstood: if Lincoln did not recall the new law, they would withdraw themselves from the Union. Lincoln, however, did not concede and the South realized their earlier threat, leading to a break between the North and the South. Mississippi, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Georgiana, Louisiana and Texas formed an alliance and decided to call their territory “Confederate States of America”. They appointed Thomas Jefferson as their new president. Douglass, being a well-known antislavery supporter at that point in his life, saw in this drastic separation the opportunity for the enslaved blacks in the South to flee to the North. He somewhat hoped that the Civil War would bring justice to its oppressed people. He supported Lincoln in his battle to overcome slavery\(^3\) and urged enslaved men to flee from the plantations to participate in the war. To encourage them to enlist, Douglass promised them emancipation. If only they were willing to show their American spirits, Lincoln would grant them their freedom. The battle was won by the northern front and through the Emancipation Proclamation enslaved people in the southern states were declared free. Above this, all southern states that wished to re-enter the Union were forced to sign a contract in which they proved to have eliminated all forms of slavery from their land.

\(^3\) The Civil War was more of a power struggle between two men trying to display their status. Lincoln in this matter profitted from the idea of a battle fought to abolish slavery. He gladly welcomed all new (black) working forces although it is known that he did not call himself an abolitionist and that he did not particularly demand an immediate ending of all slavery practiced (Boyer 57).
2.1.4 Antislavery Movements after the Civil War

After the Civil War and the approval of the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass at first considered the battle to be won in favor of his cause. He however acknowledged the frailty of the recently changed and disordered society and accepted the offer to continue lecturing the antislavery ideology throughout the country. The American Anti-Slavery Society supported Douglass’s foresight and under the leadership of Wendell Philips, the members of the organization kept on striving for equal rights. This proved to be necessary as slavery, in theory, might have been forbidden by law, in practice, the discrimination of black people was still continuing. The inferior status, with which the black race was associated, did not vanish from one day to the next and this, in turn, was reflected in society. In the former Confederate States, a group of dissatisfied citizens who called themselves “Confederate veterans” created the Jim Crow Laws, a form of racial segregation in all public facilities. Racism however did not stop at this point and the use of violence was often the answer to any sort of discussion. Certain organizations started to radicalize. They supported slavery and all kinds of racial segregation. Their most notorious organization, the Ku Klux Klan, justified its crimes through Christian considerations. The members created a constant threat to all people of a different color or belief (Boyer 59). Yet, the South was not the only source of discrimination and danger. Although the situation in the North might have looked more livable on the surface, there was also a latent corruptness. Douglass recounts of various events in which he, his family or any black person for that matter was certainly not free from racist collisions. In short, the abolitionist network had won one battle, but they had received several new challenges in return. They had to fight against discrimination to provide the black man with a better future starting with the providence of proper educational facilities and equal access to public places and transport. Today, the US still faces modern forms of slavery. National as well as international anti-discrimination campaigns are still battling against any form of segregation.
2.2 The Abolitionist Movement and Frederick Douglass

Douglass’s relationship to the Abolitionist Movement was one of mutual necessity. Both parties acknowledged the fact that a collaboration would pay off for the individual as well as for the common cause. Douglass would have the opportunity to fight for his (people’s) freedom whilst the abolitionists would attract a larger public through the narration of his remarkable slave stories. Douglass joined the movement following an invitation from Garrison, who immediately saw in which way his oratory qualities would contribute to the abolitionist cause: the public needed stories, real evidence, proof of the inhumane treatment blacks received in the North. Douglass on the other hand felt that this opportunity would lead to a future career as a freedom fighter, an honorable ‘title’ that would make him a worthy representative of the black race. Attending abolitionist’s meetings above all gave him the chance to befriend several antislavery icons such as William C. Coffin who inspired him and revitalized his passion for the rhetoric (Douglass 96). Encouraged by Coffin and Garrison, he began addressing the crowds with great enthusiasm. This attracted a wide network of supporters. Douglass was loved and became the figurehead, even the showpiece of the Abolitionist Movement. Hence, when the public became suspicious of the veracity of Douglass’s stories, the movement was the first to temper him. The accusation was based on the fact that Douglass proved to be too intellectual to have been an actual slave. He was after all a black man and as such belonged to the inferior race. Therefore he was not expected to be so well-educated. The charges pushed Douglass into another, more independent direction. He began to distance himself from the Abolitionist Movement and started his search for an own identity. In the same period he undertook his first voyage to Great Britain. This journey left a great impression on him. Britain’s hospitality confronted him all the more with the disastrous situation in his home country. As a result, his interest and interference in politics grew even bigger. According to Sweeney, Douglass was one of the most notable visitors of the Irish shores during the nineteenth century. She states that his travels throughout the United Kingdom in 1845 and in 1847 had a lasting effect on his social and intellectual status. Also, “his personal and political transformation found correspondence in the shifting form of his literary work, which became enmeshed in those same strategies and ideologies” (13). Moreover, the acquaintances he made during his first trip to Britain were of great importance. His newly made friends helped him
financially to enable him to buy his freedom. They also supported his further writings, encouraging him for example in publishing his own newspaper. A lack of support from the American side however, eventually led to a break with the abolitionist party. Nevertheless, Douglass never showed a hostile attitude towards his former abolitionist companions, especially regarding his mentor, William Lloyd Garrison. In his letters – some of which were published in his last autobiography, *The Life and Times* – he addresses Garrison as his friend, although the latter might have put his own cause before the personal goals of Douglass. Whatever the case, both figures kept on sharing the same, basic antislavery ideology and equally respected one another.

### 2.3 Abolitionist influence on Douglass’s narratives

When superficially comparing *The Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). It is remarkable that each new version is lengthier than the previous one. The striking difference between the length of the first volume, – 87 pages, and the second one – 313 pages⁴, is due to Douglass’s interest into the increasing political changes that took place during the 1850s. As a consequence of his trip to Britain, he elaborates on the different attitudes towards colored people there and in the US. *The Life and Times*, with its 570 pages, is the most extensive narrative Douglass has written. It was published in 1881, which is already 26 years after the publication of *My Bondage, My Freedom*. The large time gap between the second and the third narrative is probably the most obvious reason for the length of the third book.

#### 2.3.1 The Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself

When *The Narrative of The Life* was published, in 1845, Douglass had only just begun his career as a writer and orator. He joined the Abolitionist Movement around 1841 and encouraged by its leaders, he started speaking in front of antislavery supporters. After

---

⁴ These numbers are based on the edition I used, a compilation of the three narratives published by The Library of America (New York) in 1994. They are only included to give the reader an idea of the difference in length.
his first publication, he fled to the British Isles for a period of two years, securing his safety, not having the supports to bail himself out of slavery yet. In that period he published a second edition of The Narrative of The Life already showing his sincere interest and devotion to the Irish uprising for independence. Feeling highly connected with this people - being in search of an own identity and equality himself - Douglass wrote an extra introduction to The Narrative changing both the form and geopolitical orientation (Sweeney 14-15). Although the core narrative of his life in slavery did not undergo any notable adjustments he proved not only to be interested in politics, but also to have a striking insight in the resemblance of both his own and the Irish cause. And of course he understood how emphasizing this resemblance, could win the voice and even the support of the Irish in fighting a similar battle.

2.3.2. My Bondage, My Freedom

In 1855 Douglass published his second volume, My Bondage, My Freedom. By then, not only had he had the opportunity of meeting a great deal of antislavery figureheads in Great Britain, he also succeeded – although not highly encouraged by his former abolitionist friends - in publishing his own newspaper, The North Star5. His advanced engagement in political and cultural life is reflected in the second part of My Bondage, My Freedom. Expressing a more combative attitude, the tone of this extended autobiography is harsher and more influenced by the bitterness carried against proslavery institutions. By this time, Douglass started preaching in proslavery states as well as in free states. The abolitionist ideology became widely known and as an unavoidable result, it also became widely opposed. Douglass's antislavery companions from the Liberty Party6 as well as himself were frequently attacked, verbally and physically. Radicalized southern politicians and slavery supporters in general organized meetings that more than once resulted into mobs.

---

5 In 1851 Douglass decided to change the name of his paper to The Frederick Douglass Papers due to the existence of many other periodicals and journals carrying the word “star(s)” in their title (Douglass 7).
2.3.3 The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass

His last autobiography, *The Life and Times*, is – probably due to a large time gap between the second and the last volume – more extensive than the other two. It particularly deals with the political changes that both the American society and Douglass himself had to go through. *The Life and Times* proves to be more difficult to classify as a slave narrative. It is divided into three major parts of which the first is again an overview of his life as a slave and his life shortly after. Again, a few adjustments have been made considering word and topic choice, formation and style. A new part on his traveling to the British Isles is also included. As the title announces, the next two chapters are entirely ascribed to the “Times”, or the transformation society had gone through between approximately 1850 and 1880. In other words, how the North and the South eventually ended up fighting a Civil War and what the outcome meant for Douglass and his fellow slaves. In these two chapters, Douglass mainly points his attention towards the continuation of pursuing equality and of course the moment on which (former) slaves finally get emancipated during the Civil War. After this event Douglass’s political career reaches unheard levels. This eventually led to his appointment as Marshal of the District of Columbia, one of the greatest achievements of his life as a black man and former slave.

Finally, the last chapter of *The Life and Times* comes somewhat unexpected; right after the appendix, Douglass looks back upon his travels to Great Britain, France and Italy. It almost feels as if he was obliged to fill another 100 pages, since this chapter does not fit in the general feeling the book evokes as a whole, that of radical changes in a progressive society. On the contrary, it shows the steadfastness of the European culture. In this chapter Douglass’s tone changes, one might discover a spark of melancholia. Douglass appears to be slightly jealous of the cultural richness that this continent preserved. I therefore consider the part after the appendix written primarily in the view of the American Cultural Declaration of Independence, as Emerson labeled the in the 1850s growing interest in creating an own, American artistic/literary identity. Frederick Douglass also wanted to display his knowledge in the cultural field. A reference to (ancient) Europe as “the cultural mother country” was thus not that unexpected. Additionally, it was around the mid 19th century that popular and sensational topics found their way into magazines such as ‘The Penny Newspaper’. It is remarkable that with the emergence of these unreliable narratives, Douglass’s efforts to completely distance himself from popular literature grew. He, for example, included several letters
and speeches of his own hand as well as of other important and influential leaders of the time in *The Life and Times*, in other words, he included unprocessed, pure documents. Considering the gossipping character of popular literature at the time, he might have felt the pressure to assure that the opinions expressed were funded on proof and that they were entirely objective.
3 The genre of the Slave Narrative

The genre of the slave narrative, together with its writers, was incredibly important for the Abolitionist Movement to successfully spread antislavery ideas in the northern as well as in the southern states of America. In her book *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*, Frances Smith Foster defines the slave narrative as follows:

“In slave narratives, as in other autobiographical literature, the authors are keenly interested in the clues provided by the narrated experiences about their identities and about the ultimate significance of their lives. They investigate the process of their spiritual and emotional development and try to assess the effects of social and familial relationships upon the ways in which they see themselves. Statements and arguments about philosophical, political and religious beliefs are interspersed throughout their stories of physical bondage and escape” (4).

In the following chapter, I will initially provide a small introduction with background information on the slave narrative. The introduction is then followed by an overview of the four major characteristics of the slave narrative, as discussed by Frances Smith Foster in *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*. I identified these characteristics as adaptation and irony, veracity and religion. The ideas stated in 3.1 and 3.2 are generally based on Smith Foster’s research.

Finally, in chapter 3.3, I will situate Douglass’s narratives in the first, the second or the third phase of the slave narrative by taking a closer look their general intonation. This research is necessary to investigate to what extent Douglass’s later narratives can still be classified in the genre. *The Life and Times*, for instance, was published in 1881 and thus long after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Douglass seems to be more preoccupied with political concerns such as the progress of the war and its aftermath.
3.1 Slave narrative or autobiography? A brief introduction

The slave narrative found its origin in the autobiography. As stated in Smith Foster’s earlier quote, the slave narrative and the autobiography primarily focus on a life story of either the writer itself, or of a person the writer for example admires. What then distinguishes the slave narrative from the autobiography is that the slave narrative is interlaced with contemporary social concerns. Smith Foster points out that the inclusion of social insecurities such as politics and religion distinguishes the slave narrative from the autobiography (44-45). The inclusion of contemporary issues resulted in the slave narrative being classified as an independent genre quite soon after the first publications around 1770. During the first half of the 19th century the slave narrative quickly became one of the dominating genres. Due to its immense popularity, slave narrators, such as Olaudah Equiano, Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, were able to force their opinions regarding political and social matters onto the public. In many cases they cited abolitionist and antislavery ideals, which in turn contributed to the success of the antislavery societies. Although there were no official rules in the writing process of the slave narrative, there were certain features typical of the genre. In this chapter, I will not discuss all of these characteristics individually, however, I will focus on those that apply most to Douglass’s narratives. I refer to the work of Professor Smith Foster for further details on this matter.

3.1.1 Adaptation

A first characteristic of the slave narrative is adaptation. It concerns the ability of the writer to adapt one of his own experiences to a comparable but slightly different experience that might sound more familiar to a wider audience. In this respect, it is fair to see a connection between the genre of the slave narrative and the genre of the autobiography, since the writer can rely on the stories of other slaves to get the audience’s attention. The slave narrative and the autobiography thus show a similar tendency to replace individual incidents by incidents that can serve as examples for the whole race (Smith Foster 5). By referring to the stories of others, the writer can call upon the listener’s earlier collisions with slavery, which then results in a quicker and stronger apprehension of the severity of the cause. Frederick Douglass certainly applied to this technique in his narratives. He addressed the miseries of those of whom the fate
was much worse than his. Since Douglass's considered himself lucky to have ended up with Mr. Auld in the city, he understood that he might not be able to make the public understand the horror of southern suppression if he only referred to his own experiences in slavery. He recognized that it would be more effective to draw the audience’s attention by recalling certain stories which people were already familiar with. I will return and elaborate on this technique of repetition in chapter 5, when discussing Douglass’s view on adaptation in his major narratives. So far it is fair to say the writer was obliged to show a profound insight in the whole of the slavery system. On top, he was supposed to display the capability of relocating himself in someone else’s misery, in order to evoke the same empathy/sympathy with his public.

### 3.1.2 Veracity and Irony

Veracity is the second feature I will consider. Since black people were dogmatically classified as “the inferior race”, even in the North, they were not considered to be trustworthy. Providing their stories with accurate and detailed information, now and then referring to the work of previous, respectable writers, the slave narrator increased his chances of obtaining a notable and intellectual status. Blacks were considered to be human, but there was no confusion possible about their adherent status. This caused a white public to be truly shocked when hearing a black man speaking about politics in a very eloquent way. In addition to this, the people of the northern states – to some extent – were left in the dark when it came to slavery practices in the South. Many of them truly believed that black people were predestined for fieldwork, because of their physical features. They believed that plantation slaves were paid for their work and that they were able to live independent lives. Hearing a former slave's story completely disproved these beliefs and was therefore shockingly received (Smith Foster 9). Additionally, veracity refers to “censorship” and the power of the slave narrative to deliberately leave certain details out of the story. This might sound quite contradictory to the previous statement in which veracity is related to accuracy and intertextuality. However, the slave narrator was free to hold back information for his own or for other's safety, or simply to win the trust of his audience: “If he [the black orator] was to obtain their sympathy and aid, he had to do this in a manner which did not threaten or embarrass his readers” (Smith Foster 9). As it probably was already embarrassing to the readers to
have to admit the accuracy of a black man’s ideas and statements, the writer of the slave narrative had to be careful not to insult his (often) rather ignorant public. To deal with this issue the slave narrator applies to several rhetorical strategies, “irony” being one of them. Irony is therefore a third aspect that distinguishes the slave narrative from the autobiography. It proves to be inseparable from the slave narrative as a genre, but it is most frequently significant for the second stage of the slave narrative. *My Bondage, My Freedom* was written and published in this second stage. Its tone is harsher and fiercer, as will be clear after reading chapter 3.2 on the “different stages of the slave narrative”. The exact use then of irony in Douglass’s narratives will be widely discussed in chapter 5.

### 3.1.3 Religion

A fourth characteristic feature of the slave narrative is the inclusion of religious symbols and fixed Christian expressions. It is notable that the reference to religion seems to be more frequent in the writings of Afro-Americans, people who were born into slavery in the United States, such as Frederick Douglass was. There were two types of black writers, the one who was born in Africa and the one who was born in America. The African slave had the advantage of having an own identity and thus having the African nationality. This “identity” is what an Afro-American slave lacks the most. He is not an American nor an African, for he has never seen or experienced any feelings evoked by the thought of the “mother country”. The slave’s religion is the only certainty he can rely on. Therefore, the Bible is evoked as the slave’s authority. For instance, in the slave narrative, the “bondage” of the slave is regularly compared to the fate of the Children of Israel? (Smith Foster 11). Furthermore, “to bear a slave’s heavy cross” is a common expression used to relate the burden of the slave to the burden of Jesus (Smith Foster 83). Religion for the slave is the only source of security, the only element he and his slaveholder have in common. This does not mean, however, that they experience their belief in a parallel way. References to stories in which southern slaveholders abused religion in order to justify a cruel deed, were, in that matter, commonly used to

---

7 “The Children of Israel” is a very common term in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It refers to the Israelites (Jews) as the descendants of a common ancestor, Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel. The Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years.
demonstrate the immorality of the slaveholder to the audience. Douglass, in his narratives, frequently refers to the “times that he lost his faith” and justifies this statement by showing the hypocrisy of the master. In this respect, as will become clear in chapter 5, the slave narrator uses irony to refer to a master’s immense greed, beastly sexual desires and cruel sadism. For Douglass’s narratives in particular, a reference to infernal imagery is regularly used to talk about the deeds of certain overseers or to talk about an enslaved life in general.

3.2 Different stages of the slave narrative

The slave narrative made its appearance in literary life in the late 18th century as a subgenre of the autobiography. Its development is identifiable through three major stages, roughly situated at the end of the 18th century, the period before the Civil War and the period after the Civil War. The development of the slave narrative is highly compatible with the progress made by societies (Smith Foster 17). Especially politics and social concerns were thus of great relevance to the writer in approaching his own life story and in approaching the public. Although many Northerners did not fully approve of the quite radical ideas of Abolitionism, they were highly interested in the true to life stories of the former slaves. As such the popularity of the narrative made further extensions of the antislavery societies possible.

3.2.1 First stage: focus on the narrative

The first stage of the slave narrative, according to Smith Foster, is situated at the end of the 18th century. Its focus lies on the experiences of the writer as a slave. It is therefore most identifiable with the autobiography, which also primarily aims at narrating a life story. A life after slavery is hardly mentioned, for in most cases, the life of a former slave stayed extremely hard, even after a successful escape. In the first stage, the slave narrative is described as a distinct literary genre in which slavery is presented as a loss – or lack - of physical freedom. There is no reference to dehumanizing practices, a topic widely criticized in the second stage (Smith Foster 47). Remarkable is that not the owners or the institution, but the concept of slave trade in itself is attacked. In their narratives, former slaves do not question their status of being the “inferior race”. They for example acknowledge the fact that a disobedient slave needs to be punished. The
injustice, however, is related to the way in which certain masters use their power to (severely) punish an innocent slave (Smith Foster 105). Douglass, in his narratives, points out that the plantation of Col. Lloyd is “a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs. The laws and institutions of the state, apparently touch it nowhere. The troubles arising here [there], are not settled by the civil power of the state. The overseer is generally accuser, judge, jury, advocate and executioner. The criminal is always dumb” (Douglass 160). Douglass, for instance, recalls the story of a slave girl who is beaten to death by her mistress for being inattentive. The mistress is found guilty of the crime and yet she does not even have to appear before court: “(...) the girl had come to her death from severe beating. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Mrs. Hicks, but incredible to tell, for some reason or other, that warrant was never served, and she not only escaped condign punishment, but the pain and mortification as well, of being arraigned before a court of justice” (Douglass 516).

3.2.2 Second stage: focus on antislavery ideology

From the 1820s on, the slave narrator acknowledged his role as “a tour guide for free whites into the world of enslaved blacks” (Smith Foster 53). The focus in the second stage has shifted from the narrative itself to the struggle for freedom and the inhuman treatment of “the inferior race”. Above this, an increasing interest in politics is strengthened through political changes and economic wealth (Smith Foster 54). The rise of antislavery movements and their message spread to abolish slavery, gave a boost to the Negro’s confidence. Former slaves became the abolitionist’s mascots in winning over the public, presenting them authentic horror stories of southern exploitation. It was evident that a certain degree of eloquence was necessary to perform antislavery speeches and in several cases to also write pamphlets or even books. There was – from the former slave’s point of view – an increasing interest in rhetoric. This eloquence with which several of them, including Douglass, presented themselves, made the label of “inferior” somewhat doubtful. With regard to Frederick Douglass, this remarkable degree of intellectuality and fluency led to several inconveniences concerning the veracity of his story. Douglass recounts of an experience in which his suggestion to write a book and start a periodical paper of his own was highly opposed by his
companions. William Lloyd Garrison, head of the Abolitionist Movement, advised Douglass to withdraw his plans and to — in order to contradict the rumors — speak in a less learned manner. Douglass countered these allegations with the publication of *The Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* and the birth of ‘The North Star’. The slave narrator in the second stage became thus more independent and rather than telling someone else’s story, he wanted to search for an identity of his own. By the mid 19th century this led to a separation between white abolitionists and their most important source of publicity, the black eyewitness. To demonstrate the differences in tone in the first stage and the second stage of the narrative, I refer to the following example. In *My Bondage, My Freedom*, Douglass includes the story of one of his most courageous battles in which he defeats his master, Mr. Covey. This story is also included in the first narrative. The approach and word choice in *My Bondage, My freedom* is significantly different from the approach and word choice in *The Narrative of the Life* (Sundstrom, Ronald, "Frederick Douglass").

*The Narrative of the Life*  “My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain as slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact” (Douglass 65).

*My Bondage, My Freedom*  “It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot honor a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise” (Douglass 286).

Douglass talks about his determination to become a freeman eventually. However, in the second abstract, words such as “self-respect”, “self-confidence”, “force”, “honor”, “power” and “arise”, display his self-consciousness and combative spirit.
3.2.3 Third stage: focus on political surroundings and further “black” achievements

The slave narrative arose to its climax in the period between 1831 and 1865 (Smith Foster 61). Especially the 1850s the genre became extremely successful. Its success was primarily a consequence of the popularity another genre, romanticism. The hero of the romantic novel, often an exotic man or woman, was tortured by the cruelty of a system or was locked away from the outside world. A dangerous escape, followed by a hazardous journey, always proved to be the only way out of the system. To be kept from searching one’s own identity was - in that time - one of the most gruesome abstentions a man would have to endure. This explains why the stories of former slaves had such an impact on the public. Moreover, since the slave narratives were based on real life experiences, they were even more exciting than the general romantic novel.

The end of the Civil War did not necessarily equal the end of the interest in the slave narrative. The tone merely shifted from a combative political one to a more positive one. The focus was put on the accomplishments of black people in the field of politics, social life and education. In theory, slavery was abolished in the United States, but in reality former slaves and their children were far from accepted in society. The Emancipation Proclamation had the biggest impact in the South. Southerners were used to the system of slavery and the sudden changes led to rioting and radicalization. Whilst in the North, many (multicultural) laborers saw their jobs taken from them by the – usually – cheaper black manpower. The slave narrative became a more literary genre after 1865. From the 1920s on, researchers started to show an interest in the peculiarities of the genre. It was however not until the mid 20th century, that slave narratives began to serve as valuable sources of historical information “and most importantly, as guides to the slaves’ perspective on their own felt experience” (Blight, “The Slave Narratives: A Genre and a Source”).
3.3 Douglass and the slave narrative

3.3.1 Integration

In the introduction to this third chapter, I questioned to what extent the genre of the slave narrative applied to Douglass’s narratives and more specifically to *The Life and Times*. Considering the division of the different stages in chapter 3.2, Douglass’s volumes – contrary to what I had expected - seem to fit in perfectly in the tradition and evolution of the genre. *The Narrative of The Life* is more likely to fit in the first stage of the narrative, even though it was written and published in 1845, which is theoretically speaking long past the first stage. I nevertheless suppose that every slave narrator – in the early steps of his career – had to go through the same stages the slave narrative itself had to go through. Therefore I do not think it rare or even improper to allocate *The Narrative of the Life* in this first period in which the focus is on the narrative itself. Note that the notion of “narrative”, after the publication of his first work, is not repeated in any other following title. Douglass already indicates the character of his first autobiography in the title, thus pushing it in a certain direction. *My Bondage, My Freedom* on the contrary, can be classified as an example of the second stage of the slave narrative. Its tone is much grimmer and combative than the tone adopted in *The Narrative of The Life*. Another argument that justifies the classification of *My Bondage, My Freedom* in the second stage of the narrative, is that Douglass displays a clearer interest in politics. The second part of the autobiography, “Life as A Freeman”, for instance, is devoted to his travels to the British Isles. Especially the British antislavery policy is appealing to Douglass, since its ideology is more developed and successfully spread than its American counterpart. Lastly *The Life and Times* is, according to its major focus on politics and further general accomplishments and struggles, a third stage example.

3.3.2 Separation

Despite the previous arguments that Douglass’s narratives seem to be integrated in the system of the slave narrative, there are several crucial points in which they exhibit features that deviate from the general characteristics of the different stages. In what follows, I will look into Douglass’s personal style as a writer, the general ending of the
slave narrative, the anti-American content that is often presented in the narratives and, the avoidance of the topic of “the source of slavery”.

To begin with, Douglass did not wish to be solely associated with the genre of the slave narrative. By the time he published his first narrative in 1845, the genre was not yet classified as “literature” and since Douglass attached considerable value to his intellectual appearance, it was most likely that he aimed at a higher level of appreciation. In this respect I refer to the earlier cited situation in which Douglass denies Garrison’s request to act less sophisticated in his writing and speaking.

The second guideline Douglass may have ignored, considers the ending of the slave narrative. The accomplishment of the journey to a free state commonly equals the end of the slave narrative. Most of the individuals who did manage to escape from slavery, might have considered themselves “free men”, however, not much improvement was notable from their newly won freedom. Escaped slaves felt a constant threat of being found and captured by insiders of a former master’s plantation. Even other blacks, although likely sharing the same fate, were not trustworthy. They were – probably due to their own lamentable conditions - not afraid of turning a companion over if it involved winning a sum of money. Additionally, even if a black man succeeded in keeping away from crooks, if he was lucky enough to find a job, the working conditions were very harsh. There was a great competition with the lower class of recently immigrated laborers since black people were usually satisfied with less money, never having been allowed to learn a real trade, and were therefore considered cheaper working forces. Douglass on the other hand was lost for very little time and was lucky to have met with the right people in the right places. He almost instantly moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he was able to find a job as a ship caulker, a trade he had learnt when living in Baltimore with his Mr. Hugh Auld. Not long after he settled in his new home, he attended an abolitionist meeting where he met with journalist and publisher William Lloyd Garrison, who was an important contributor to the Anti-Slavery Society and eventually became one of the most prominent figures in Douglass’s early after-slavery life. Douglass, having quite succeeded in life so far, felt the urge to distinguish himself from the black mass in pointing out his accomplishments. Nevertheless this is not the only reason he spent more than half of The Life and Times talking about his life
after slavery. He at most desired to prove the humane status and capability of the black race in stating his successful undertakings as an example.

A third aspect typical of the slave narrative is related to the content of the story. According to Frances Smith Foster, “it became almost axiomatic that for every two or three bad experiences related, one good experience [had to] be recounted” (14). The slave narrator created this order to avoid a dispute with the American audience. Another subject that had to be shunned was the focus upon Britain’s exemplary status when it came to antislavery policies and their realization. Britain - to many slave narrators - was far more enlightened and hospitable than the United States. Mentioning Britain’s rapid progression was not uncommonly interpreted as anti-Americanism or “an attempt of black people to change the American society” (Smith Foster 15). Nevertheless, Douglass openly displayed his love for Great Britain and he repeatedly suggested following its innovative approach of antislavery matters. Also, he did not refrain from ridiculing his native country with a touch of irony towards the Star-Spangled Banner: “Whatever may be said of the aristocracies here, there is none based on the color of a man’s skin. This species of aristocracy belongs preëminently to ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’. I have never found it abroad in any but Americans. It sticks to them wherever they go. They find it almost as hard to get rid of as to get rid of their skins” (Douglass 690).

Lastly the slave narrator is almost obliged to avoid talking about the sources of the slavery system, such as racism, discrimination and economics. Douglass, however, ignores any pressure regarding the concealment of any crucial fact. In The Life and Times for example, he does not recoil from touching upon subjects such as the economic problems with which the US are struggling. In a letter to the Social Science Congress at Saratoga, he advises the Negro to keep on working in the South, even though the government supports traveling to the North, due to southern opposition (Douglass 865-868). Douglass emphasizes the necessity to give, and the right to obtain protection, and thus urges the black man to live where he desires to live, ignoring this so called governmental exodus. “If the people of this country cannot be protected in every State of the Union, the government of the United States is shorn of its rightful dignity and power, the late rebellion has triumphed, the sovereignty of the nation is an empty name, and the
power and authority in individual States is greater than the power and authority of the United States” (Douglass 870). Also, the immigration issue is highly broached. Douglass includes a situation in which he is still a slave but works on a ship where he is little more than the gofer of all the other laborers. Racism and discrimination are two other subjects of which he does not withdraw. On the contrary, in *The Life and Times* he refers to many stories in which he – being a black man – was constantly discriminated. Trying to enjoy a good seat when traveling by train or sitting in the front row in church were most frequently answered with “We don’t allow niggers in here” (Douglass 689).
4 Influences of Aristotle’s theory of the Rhetorical Triangle on Douglass’s writing

I have discussed the importance of the Abolitionist Movement on Douglass – and vice versa – in chapter 2, and submitted the genre of the slave narrative to a closer look in chapter 3. In this fourth chapter, I will approach the influence of Aristotle’s theory of the Rhetorical Triangle on Douglass writing. I will start with a general framework on Aristotle’s view of the basis of rhetorical strategy. In this framework I will focus on the Rhetorical Triangle and its three major pillars, logos, ethos and pathos. Subsequently I will also consider Aristotle’s further developments on the subject of rhetoric. This is then followed by a more concrete overview of how rhetoric is related to political matters – the abolitionist cause – and the way in which Douglass incorporates ethos and pathos into his work.

4.1 Aristotle: background information

Aristotle (c. 384 BC – c. 322 BC) was a Greek philosopher who is, in the literary domain, most known for his pioneering work into the art of rhetoric. Starting from the basic ideas of earlier philosophers, among whom his teacher Plato, Aristotle added his typical logical approach of thinking. More precisely, he showed an interest in the role and importance of the orator in the whole process of persuasion, the art convincing another of one’s own ideas. His major work into the field of rhetoric is called Rhetoric, the Art of Rhetoric, or a Treatise on Rhetoric. The book is divided into three major parts of which the first offers a general overview on rhetoric, the second presents a more defined theory of the three most important means of oratory and the third introduces elements of style and arrangement.

In this paper, I will not provide the reader with a complete overview of Rhetoric for it would lead us away from the actual topic, the rhetoric as interpreted by Frederick Douglass in his major slave narratives. Also, Aristotle’s work already enjoyed quite an amount of scholarly research and to consider all of the previous writings properly, would be an immeasurable task. I have based my research on the work of William W. Fortenbaugh, who devoted a great part of his studies to interpreting Aristotle’s Rhetoric.
in his book *Aristotle's Practical Side: On Psychology, Ethics, Politics and Rhetoric*. I therefore refer to his work, and this book in particular, for a more detailed document on the topics discussed in the following chapter.

Aristotle’s reference to earlier research in combination with new insights in the field of psychology, ethics and politics presented the public with a broader perspective on the (growing) impact of rhetoric. He was the first to consider the role of the orator in the process of persuasion, and therefore, his insights proved to be more interesting than previous ones. Nevertheless, in view of this dissertation in particular, the choice of Aristotle’s work as a theoretic framework can also strike the reader as slightly inconceivable, since Aristotle’s view on slavery was not very different from that of other intellectuals in ancient Greece, nor did it significantly differ from the American slaveholder’s perspective in the 19th century. Fortenbaugh addresses Aristotle’s prospects on slavery in chapters 14 and 15 of *Aristotle’s Practical Side*. He stresses that Aristotle does make a distinction between a man fit for slavery and a man fit for mastery and how the former is not given equal mental capacities. However, Aristotle also acknowledges the fact that slaves are human people and are not to be put on an equal level with animals, for slaves, contrary to animals, have the ability of feeling. Also, slaves are supposed to be capable of understanding their master’s reasons for imposing a certain task. Therefore a slave is considered to be a more developed human than for example a child, who still has to learn this kind of reasonable approach. Aristotle clearly stresses the importance of reason for a slave. Since he has the capacity to feel and comprehend, the slave will need a clear and useful explanation for every given task in order to make it valuable. Although Aristotle might have been a supporter of slavery, he also distinguishes himself from various other philosophers such as his teacher, Plato, who were not convinced of the human status of the slave. His ideas are notably different from the basic American slavery ideology that prescribed a master to withhold any source of information or any opportunity for knowledge of his slave, in order to keep him satisfied with his work.
4.2 Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle: logos, ethos, pathos

The Rhetorical Triangle is a visual understanding of the process of persuasion. It consists out of three major pillars. Each of these is related to one of the three main concepts, namely ethos, pathos and logos. At the top of the triangle one can find either ethos, a concept that stands in relation to the speaker, or logos, which applies to “what is being said”. At the sides then one can find pathos, in relation to the audience, and dependent on what concept was stated at the top, ethos or logos. Aristotle refers to the whole of the triangle as being essential in the process of persuasion (Rhetoric I, 2).

ETHOS
the credibility of the speaker

PATHOS
when speech stirs the emotions of the audience

LOGOS
persuasive arguments

4.2.1 Logos

To Aristotle, the least important element in his research is logos as this is related to the speech itself. The orator\(^8\) may prove a truth or may feign an apparent truth. It is then for the hearer to judge the orator’s sincerity (Rhetoric I,2). The first definition of rhetoric in the Merriam Webster Dictionary is the following: “language that is intended to influence people and that may not be honest or reasonable” (Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, 8).

---

\(^8\) In Rhetoric, the kind of language that is kept in mind is an oral language. This dissertation focusses on written rather than oral speech. I will therefore refer to the speaker as “the speaker”, “the orator” as well as “the writer”.

35
“rhetoric”). Following this description, rhetoric is not bound to “veracity”. Subsequently, the orator has every right to adjust his words in favor of his own cause. It is thus perfectly reasonable that the audience is being told a great lie. Inevitably, this leads to marking the truth as less significant, which then leads to labeling “what is actually said”, as less significant. Consequently, since what is said is less important, the “way in which something is said” becomes more interesting, for how will the orator be able to convince his hearer otherwise? In this matter, nonetheless, one should not completely ignore the role of logos as an indispensible player in the persuasion process. Since, without words, there would not be any communication in the first place. The other pillars, ethos and pathos, however, are the main actors.

4.2.2 Ethos and self-fashioning

Ethos is intertwined with the role of the speaker. In this respect, Aristotle states that a man’s personal character, or how he appears to the public, is of great importance. Hence, it is necessary that an audience is convinced of the goodness of the orator for if this is not the case, the orator will not stand a chance of winning its confidence (Aristotle I,2). As I have mentioned in the previous paragraph, not “what is being said”, but the “way in which something is said” will be crucial in the persuasion process. Ethos adds another aspect to this definition of rhetoric, taking the importance of “the person who is speaking” into account. Moreover, Aristotle claims that “putting up the right character to the right audience” is the key to success in political rhetoric (II,1). We generally believe good men more fully and therefore persuasion is much more likely to be achieved when we consider the speaker to be good and just. However, Aristotle adds that “this kind of persuasion should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character, before he begins to speak” (I,2). The latter may seem contradictory to the earlier saying that Aristotle claimed logos to be less important. Therefore one should interpret “what the speaker says” as the way or the manner in which the orator says something and not as a reference to the actual words he is speaking.

There is nonetheless a more recent view on the importance of ethos in the Rhetorical Triangle. Originally used to express a renaissance author’s appearance, “self-fashioning”, as a concept, was introduced by Stephan Greenblatt, an American historian and
professor at the University of Harvard. The meaning of self-fashioning seems to (partly) contradict earlier addressed statements of Aristotle, who claimed that an orator’s appearance depended upon his eloquence, the manner in which he was telling something. When talking about self-fashioning, however, the focus is put upon the speaker’s status, rather than on his eloquence. Self-fashioning, or the art of creating oneself, thus refers to the fact that every human is always – to a certain degree - influenced by a person’s appearance. The opinion we create of someone can be formed even before hearing an orator speak or before reading a writer’s words. It is for instance probable to judge a person without even hearing him speak, solely by looking at his way of clothing for instance. This first impression then can guide the public towards a certain kind of sympathy for the speaker, even before he has shared his ideas. This feeling of sympathy – or antipathy - renders the speaker a better – or worse - position. Especially for pragmatic purposes, this kind of audience guiding can prove to have conclusive effects in pulling an audience towards the statement defended by the speaker. However, one must keep in mind that this opinion is mostly superficial, based on ways of dressing or gossip, and therefore it can be dangerous and misleading. The possession of a critical insight and the awareness of the impact of such a subconscious guidance are necessary to separate one’s actual words from one’s appearance (Keohane, “Self-Fashioning in Society and Solitude”).

4.2.3 Pathos

Subsequently, persuasion can come through the hearers, through the emotions they perceive in listening to or reading a narrator’s words. The perception of the audience is linked with pathos, or translated, “emotion”. Emotions receive a lot of attention in Rhetoric, for “it [they] instruct[s] the orator in persuasion through the hearers” (Fortenbaugh 29). It is important to consider the emotive state of the perceiver while absorbing emotions carried out by the sender (Aristotle I,2). Following Aristotle’s “logical approach”, every emotion that is not received through physical discomfort, is provoked by an offensive factor. To clarify this statement, Fortenbaugh puts up a case in which he takes the feeling of experiencing anger as an example, for it is one of the most significant emotions humans can experience. Anger, is namely derived from injustice. When a person feels that he is treated unreasonably, he will experience a feeling of
anger. Nevertheless, this negative feeling is always accompanied by a joyful counterpart, the feeling of a possible revenge. However, consider the following quote of Fortenbaugh: “When an orator demonstrates that a particular man has acted in an outrageous and insulting manner, he excites anger in the audience” (30). After a reasonable explanation of the orator, it is probable that the audience experiences a feeling of understanding. The response that follows out of this understanding will then be intelligent and reasonable. The same is true for fear: “When an orator demonstrates that danger is imminent, he is arousing fear in his audience. (...) The hearers think their lives threatened, become frightened, and begin to think about their own safety. Fear makes them deliberate” (Fortenbaugh 30). Aristotle considers this reaction perfectly human and reasonable. He does not dismiss the hearer as a victim of an irrational force but on the contrary acknowledges the action as intelligent. A probable reaction to the fear, after it is clear that there is (yet) no need to be afraid, is to abandon it and to replace it with confidence (Fortenbaugh 30). What is most exceptional for Aristotle’s analysis is that he stresses that emotions are not invariably blind impulses. Emotions are only to be defined as such when received through physical pain. However, if a physical discomfort is not the provoking factor of a certain emotive reaction, the emotion followed by it is considered a consequence of a man’s judgment. Even in the case of anger being defined as unreasonable to others, because it is clear that there was no injustice done, the anger will be reasonable to the person perceiving the feeling. In this case, the anger is still classified as reasonable “for it is not based upon some momentary phantasy” (Fortenbaugh 29).

In sum, Aristotle contributed to the field of rhetoric and thereby elaborated on the basic insights of his predecessors. The most important extension regards the study of emotions and how these are reasonable ravings of the human mind. They cannot solely be ascribed to blind impulses. The fact that the capability of feeling is considered a man’s blessing rather than a man’s burden, contributes to the importance of evoking certain emotions during speaking or writing. To know how an audience will react to a certain situation, gives the narrator a great advantage. He is able to – to some extent – take over control and guide the audience into a certain direction of which he will benefit.
4.3 Influence on politics

According to Aristotle, rhetoric falls into three separate fields of study. These are established through the kind of audience: the hearer can act as a judge or he can act as an observer. From within this knowledge, we can thus distinguish three fields: ceremonial, forensic and political oratory. The first branch, ceremonial rhetoric, is submitted to an observing audience, the two others, forensic and political rhetoric, to a judiciary audience. In political rhetoric, the orator or writer urges the public to do or to resist something, by for example anticipating the audience’s expected emotions. Political rhetoric involves both private counselors - for example a judge - as well as public audiences (Aristotle I,3). Douglass’s field of rhetoric, both in his oral work as in his narratives, was that of political rhetoric.

In order to convince his audience, the narrator operates three conditions, or as Aristotle appoints them, three sorts of rhetorical syllogisms (= enthymemes). A syllogism is a logical argument (a major premise) which, through deductive reasoning (a minor premise), arrives at a conclusion. A well-known example is Descartes’ "I think and therefore I am". The reasoning is the following: humans think, I think, so therefore I am human. There are three kinds of enthymemes: complete proofs, probabilities, and signs (Aristotle I,4). If the narrator is able to refer to "what has happened", "what most likely will happen" and to "what might (have) happen(ed)", he will more likely succeed in persuading his audience of his capacities. Not only does he show to be informed about the past, he is also capable of looking at the future, trying to foresee certain obstacles. He will even try to present a possible solution for these potential difficulties (Aristotle II,20). The use of these enthymemes is an important device for the orator because it allows him to require some thinking of the audience. The major premise is deliberately left out so that the audience, which is given the conclusion, has to figure out how the orator got to a particular conclusion in the first place. This kind of procedure renders the audience a certain confidence and it allows a listener to actively participate in the thinking process. This being part of the thinking process also gives the hearer a (false) feeling of sharing the orator’s opinion.

If we now apply the status of sincerity into political rhetoric, it is interesting to investigate how truth can take various forms. In 19th century America there were two
leading parties considering the issue of slavery: the democrats who, were against it and the republicans, who were pro. In her article “Do you understand your own language?” Jacqueline Bacon questions various statements and their bipolarity, or how a so-called “topoi” can possess a totally contradictory meaning if only seen through a different pair of eyes. A topoi is a rhetorical trope in which a commonly known statement is used to evoke a familiar feeling in the audience. Bacon stresses the inconsistency of the meaning of such clichés and examines the procedure slave narrators follow in controlling the meaning of a certain topoi. Proslavery orators operated the Constitution as a document in favor of slavery, stating that the so-called freedom and equality, two concepts on which the Constitution was built, intentionally did not include African-Americans. Antislavery orators who wanted to adopt the same content in favor of the antislavery cause, needed to redefine the topoi in function of Abolitionism (Bacon 55). For instance, in the following passage from a speech given in 1860, in Glasgow, Douglass is literally citing the words of an orator who is claiming the Constitution to be a proslavery document. However, the orator here does not quote the exact lines of the original text. In stead, he refers to the number of the Article to then summarize its content.

“I quote his own words: — "Article 1, section 9, provides for the continuance of the African slave trade for the 20 years, after the adoption of the Constitution. Art. 4, section 9, provides for the recovery from the other States of fugitive slaves. Art. 1, section 2, gives the slave States a representation of the three-fifths of all the slave population; and Art. 1, section 8, requires the President to use the military, naval, ordnance, and militia resources of the entire country for the suppression of slave insurrection, in the same manner as he would employ them to repel invasion." (Douglass, “the Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?”)

Douglass explains how these different interpretations of one certain topoi can be created out of the words of the orator. The following lines, also taken from the Glasgow speech, present Douglass’s insight in rhetoric and its persuasive, however often deceptive character. He comments on the deceiving speech stated above:
“These are the words of that orator, and not the words of the Constitution of the United States. Now you shall see a slight difference between my manner of treating this subject and what which my opponent has seen fit, for reasons satisfactory to himself, to pursue. What he withheld, that I will spread before you: what he suppressed, I will bring to light: and what he passed over in silence, I will proclaim: that you may have the whole case before you, and not be left to depend upon either his, or upon my inferences or testimony. Here then are several provisions of the Constitution to which reference has been made. I read them word for word just as they stand in the paper, called the United States Constitution” (Douglass, “The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery”).

Douglass explains to his audience that what the orator claimed to be the exact Constitution’s words, was the interpretation of an individual and that therefore the orator was trying to mislead his them. Douglass however, then cites the real document and permits the audience to “decide for themselves” whether the Constitution is the proslavery document his opponent claimed it to be. Additionally, after Douglass’s speech, the public will feel as being treated unjust by the first orator, and the most likely reaction will be anger, one of the strongest emotions. They will feel grateful towards Douglass, for showing them the deception of the first orator and they will sympathize with him in his cause.

4.4 Rhetoric and Douglass

In this subchapter I will investigate the meaning of rhetoric throughout Douglass’s personal and professional life. I will therefore provide a compact explanation to his personal interest in rhetoric and how it grew bigger over the years. Subsequently, I consider the impact of the two most important pillars of Aristotle’s Triangle, ethos and pathos, on his professional life. Examples from The Narrative of the Life, My Bondage, My Freedom and The Life and Times allow a closer look into the author’s search for an own identity and his approach of the audience.
4.4.1 Importance throughout his life

As I have mentioned in chapter 2 of this dissertation as well as in the previous paragraph on political rhetoric, slave narratives performed a necessary role in supporting the abolitionist program. One of the most important signboards of the Abolitionist Movement was Frederick Douglass, who, after his escape from slavery, started his career in view of this organization and continued to support minority groups several years after he had broken off the alliance with its leaders.

However, even before becoming a free man, the eloquence of speech was not entirely unfamiliar to Douglass. Several times in his life as a slave, he proved himself to be aware of the impact of word choice or the importance of formulation. When he first moved to the Auld family in Baltimore, the mistress of the house taught him the alphabet. And although she ceased to tutor him any further after a warning and prohibition by her husband, Douglass persisted in the continuance of his teachings without the help of his mistress. It was by overhearing the conversation between Mr. Auld and his wife that he understood the true meaning of slavery. He learnt that slaveholders had certain devices to keep their slaves ignorant of common knowledge in order to keep them satisfied with the lot that had been given to them. In this respect, it is quite striking that the only book the young Douglass possessed was *The Columbian Orator*. It was a scholarly work meant to teach children of slaveholders how to behave towards their slaves. Next to speeches and oratories, *The Columbian Orator* provided several artificial dialogues between a master and his slave. In one of these conversations a runaway slave succeeds in convincing his master, who is touched by the slave's words, of setting him free. Consider the following excerpt of *The Columbian Orator* as cited in *My Bondage, My Freedom*:

"The slave is represented as having been recaptured, in a second attempt turn away; and the master opens the dialogue with an upbraiding speech, charging the slave with ingratitude, and demanding to know what he has to say in his own defense. Thus upbraided, and thus called upon to reply, the slave rejoins, that he knows how little any thing that he can say will avail, seeing that he is completely in the hands of his owner; and with noble resolution, calmly says, 'I submit to my fate.' Touched by the slave's answer, the master insists upon his further speaking, and recapitulates the many acts of kindness which he has performed..."
toward the slave, and tells him he is permitted to speak for himself. Thus invited to the debate, the quondam slave made a spirited defense of himself, and thereafter the whole argument, for and against slavery, was brought out. The master was vanquished at every turn in the arrangement; and seeing himself to be thus vanquished, he generously and meekly emancipates the slave, with his best wishes for his prosperity” (Douglass 532-533).

Douglass’s interest in rhetoric was evoked by reading this book and it definitely made him understand the importance of eloquence. Seeing the slave talking his way into freedom gave him a certain kind of hope for his own future for by that time, the more he read on slavery, the more discouraged he became (Douglass 532). After escaping slavery, his passion for rhetoric strengthened, as he attended his first abolitionist meeting. He was amazed by his future protégée, William Lloyd Garrison, who was speaking that night. After attending this event, Douglass managed to grasp the whole idea of rhetoric in just one sentence: “… the orator swaying a thousand heads and hearts at once and, by the simple majesty of his all-controlling thought, converting his hearers into the express image of his own soul” (Douglass 661). Garrison is able to grasp the attention of the hearer but more importantly, through the persuasiveness of the orator, the audience is able to transfer itself into his soul, as if it is part of the experience he was recounting. In this way, he allows his audience to fully empathize with the speaker. Douglass stresses the fact that not only heads have to turn, but also hearts, hereby acknowledging the importance of pathos, emotion. That same night Douglass himself was asked to speak in front of the public for the first time after his escape from slavery. Looking back at this experience, he found himself to be inexperienced: “It was with the utmost difficulty that I could stand erect, or that I could command and articulate two words without hesitation or stammering. I trembled in every limb. I am not sure if my embarrassment was not the most effective part of my speech” (Douglass 660). This however, was the first of many speeches yet to come in the future.
4.4.2 The voice of the author

Douglass was well aware of the importance of “knowing oneself”. But his process of achieving self-assessment definitely implied an extra difficulty: the search for an own identity. Douglass’s life and personality had to undergo some serious re-reflection after his escape from slavery. That is, he went from having no identity, being almost non-existent to the state, to an actual American citizen. In theory, the acquisition of his freedom was settled in one day. However, in practice, this change required a serious re-reflection of his past. This for instance becomes clear from what Douglass writes in a letter to Garrison, when going back to America after a visit to Ireland: “I have no end to serve, no creed to uphold, no government to defend; and as to a nation, I belong to none. I have no protection at home, or resting-place abroad. The land of my birth welcomes me to her shores only as a slave, and spurns with contempt the idea of treating me differently; so that I am an outcast of society of my childhood, and an outlaw in the land of my birth” (Douglass 687). Another example of the awareness of an own identity is situated shortly after Douglass’s arrival in North America. He was forced to give up his name, or at least a part of it, out of safety reasons. For a slave, a name is one of the scarce things that connects him with a family. Losing it therefore equals the loss of a big part of one’s identity. I will return to this matter in the next subchapter on “approaching the audience”.

In his autobiographies, Douglass more than once stresses that he himself was aware of the changes he underwent. These changes especially concerned his view on slavery and his view on religion. He often refers to himself as the “I then” and the “I now”, when addressing subjects in which he has developed a bigger insight through the years. His awareness of the true meaning of the slave songs is an example of such insight: “I did not, when a slave, fully understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. (...) It was a great mistake to suppose them happy because they sometimes made those joyful noises. The songs of the slaves represented their sorrows, rather than their joys” (Douglass 503). He was also conscious of his development as an orator. Additionally, he fully understands that adapting this awareness into his writings and speeches is crucial to win over an audience to the abolitionist side of the table. There is for example a passage in The Life and Times in which Garrison advises Douglass to use a less intellectual tone in his speeches, to satisfy the expectations – “he is black so
he is definitely dumb” - of the audience. The way of approaching an audience proves to be crucial to obtain the premised result. When the hearer for instance doubts the sincerity of the speaker, he will not believe his story in the first place, and he will definitely not be able to empathize with the speaker’s experiences in slavery, which, for all he is concerned, are fake.

When considering the search for an own identity, it is useful to return to the notion of self-fashioning. As I already pointed out in the previous chapter when discussing ethos, self-fashioning is all about the status of a narrator. “The importance of the outside look” is a theme that is also addressed by Lynn A. Casmier-Paz in her article “Slave Narratives and the Rhetoric of Author Portraiture”. She notices that the portrait of the author on the cover of the slave narrative tends to display a grieved, unsmiling man. In her study, Casmier-Paz examines whether the portraiture of the author carries a strategic and political function or if it is mainly used to guide the reader’s understanding of the text (91). She discovered that the frontispiece author portrait of the slave narrative needed to be very straightforward to fully use the opportunity of already introducing the subject. A more ironical frontispiece, as was common in the 18th and 19th century, was avoided in order to prevent any possible misreading. The most important task of the slave narrative was to spread political abolitionist content and portraying the former slave as the narrator of his own story, was the most effective way to fulfill that task. However, in Douglass’s narratives, the cover shows a portrait of a well-dressed, serious author. He bears absolutely no resemblance to an ordinary slave. Douglass’s clothes and appearance are deliberately and carefully picked out to reflect the credibility and truthful character of the story that is being told in the book. Also, in the beginning of the 19th century, American scientist started showing a great interest in phrenology, which claimed that certain parts of the brain were significantly bigger differing from person to person. Parts that were better developed were significant for one’s character. Douglass, in his portraits, is typified with a high forehead, which reflects his intellectual status (Casmier-Paz 102).
4.4.3 Approach of the audience

In this third and last part of this subchapter, I touch upon the techniques used by Douglass to maneuver the reader into a certain position. However, not only the reader, but also the author, is pushed into a fixed persona\(^9\). In what follows, I will firstly look into the act of adding/leaving out information in order to acquire a certain reaction from the reader. Subsequently I will discuss the use of apostrophe in approaching the reader in a friendlier and more familiar manner. And finally I will point out the importance of formative details such as the use of an exclamation mark or the capitalization of certain words.

A first technique is used to evoke emotions through the addition or the concealment of certain details when recounting an experience. As I was discussing the issue of identity in the previous subchapter on the voice of the author, I mentioned the importance of Douglass’s name change. I will outline a remarkable difference between the three narratives with regard to this story. In *The Narrative of the Life*, the narrator explicitly mentions that he did not want Mr. Johnson to “take from him the name of Frederick. I must hold on to that, to preserve a sense of my identity” (Douglass 92). However, in *My Bondage, My Freedom* and *The Life and Times*, there is absolutely no reference to this strongly expressed desire in the first narrative. In stead, Douglass chose to elaborate on the origin of the new name, its Scottish background and the nobleness of the man who gave it to him, Nathan Johnson: “I have often thought that, considering the noble hospitality and manly character of Nathan Johnson, (...), he far more than I, illustrated the virtues of the Douglas of Scotland. Sure am I that if any slave-catcher had entered his domicile with a view to my recapture, Johnson would have been like him of the ‘Stalwart hand’ ” (Douglass 651). In the first narrative he thus puts up a more romantic view, while in the second example, the reasoning is more mature. Two different emotions are thus provoked. With the romantic view, he is trying to let the audience relocate itself in his own position, provoking pity. With the second approach, he is aiming at the audience’s admiration. The result being, for *The Narrative of the Life*, the audience’s understanding, and for *My Bondage, My Freedom* and *Life and Times*, the audience’s respect for his humbleness.

\(^9\) The author is pushed into a fixed character since he has to adjust himself towards the expectations of his audience. I refer to the example on p. 38.
Another example of reader guidance is the literal approach of the reader through apostrophe, an example of a rhetorical trope in which a person or a concept is directly addressed. In especially his second narrative, *My Bondage, My Freedom*, Douglass addresses his reader directly, approaching him as if they are on very familiar terms with each other. As it is already peculiar that the reader should be involved in the story Douglass is telling, it is even more unusual that he is almost invariably addressed as “dear”- or “dearest reader”. This approach automatically renders him with a feeling of amicableness, which then reduces the step towards empathy. In *My Bondage, My Freedom*, as well as in *The Life and Times*, we read the following: “You have, dear reader, seen me humbled, degraded, broken down, enslaved, and brutalized, and you understand how it was done; now let us see the converse of this, and how it was brought about” (Douglass 270/575). This is an excerpt taken from the part in his life where Douglass is sent to Mr. Covey, the “Niggerbreaker”. He puts the reader in a position in which he is almost experiencing Douglass’s life directly from the sidelines. This again renders the reader with a certain feeling of familiarity towards the narrator. He will be overcome with a feeling of empathy and maybe even sympathy. Also, in some cases, the reader is not directly addressed but nevertheless he is assumed. Consider: “The reader will pardon so much about the place of my birth, on the score that it is always a fact of some importance to know where a man is born, if indeed, it be important to know anything about him” (Douglass 140). In this passage, Douglass does not ask his reader for understanding, he just assumes it. By replacing an interrogative sentence with a declarative sentence, Douglass already places the reader in a position in which it is not in his right to decide whether he will agree to what the narrator is about to say. Douglass does not allow or assume any questioning and therefore, the reader will have to comply. However, in other situations, the narrator bids the reader for approval: “If the reader will now be kind enough to allow me time to grow bigger, and afford me the opportunity for my experience to become greater (...)” (Douglass 151). In this excerpt, it is almost as if Douglass is apologizing for contributing a bigger part of his autobiography to his family history. Precisely because it is a written story, it will be impossible for the reader to decline this request and it will not stop Douglass from writing his personal history.

Lastly I would like to include this passage from *The Fourth of July Speech* in which apostrophe is used in an accusative in stead of a friendly way:
“The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?!”

Also, considering the contrasting personal pronouns used in this abstract, it is notable that Douglass repeatedly stresses the differences between himself (me) and the audience (you) to point out that he does not feel as if he is part of their American community. In “Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?” he is reminding the audience of the hardships the black people still have to endure. His people, in contrast to the American people, are not free. Because of this direct approach, Douglass catches the audience’s attention, confronting it with his reality. As a result, they will probably experience empathy.

As a third and final point, I would like to elaborate on the use of capitalization, italics and exclamatory marks to stress certain words or phrases. Again, these formative details are especially characteristic for the second novel, My Bondage, My Freedom. This is not entirely unexpected for this novel is categorized in the second stage of the slave narrative. Typical for this stage is that not the narrative but the struggle of the slave itself is centralized. The tone is thus more assertive and firm, darker, in a way. A word receives and holds a stronger connotation when it is stressed or when it is followed by an exclamation mark. This kind of formative detail is used to accompany the combative undertone of a narration. Consider the following example where Douglass and his companions are imprisoned for conspiring an escape and they can only think of one person to have revealed their secret to Mr. Thomas, Sandy. The following excerpt shows how the background idea, in this case the discovering of Sandy’s betrayal, is reflected in the form of the language: “Master Thomas would not tell us who this informant was; but we suspected, and suspected one person only. Several circumstances seemed to point SANDY out, as our betrayer” (Douglass 321). Another example in which italics are used
to prove a point is the following: “Many came, no doubt, out of curiosity to hear what a negro could say in his own cause. I was generally introduced as a ‘chattel’ – a ‘thing’ – a piece of southern ‘property’ – the chairman assuring the audience that it could speak” (Douglass 366). In this excerpt the words that should be understood from an ironic point of view, are put in italics. Douglass is providing the reader with some “reading help” and at the same time, he is making sure that the reader will understand his aversion of this literally dehumanizing announcement.

Having applied the two most important concepts of the Triangle, ethos and pathos, to Douglass’s vision, I draw the following conclusions: Douglass, as an orator, creates a certain persona, with which he attempts to allure an audience. He acknowledges that this persona, to some extent, has to fulfill the expectations of the reader. In order to persuade the latter, Douglass also relies on his own methods and techniques. Through the concealment or addition of certain information, the use of apostrophe and the stress of important words, he manages to guide the attention of the reader in his direction.
5 Characteristics of the slave narrative and their impact on Douglass’s narratives

Besides the creation of a persona and the approach of the audience, there are other rhetorical devices that an orator has to bear in mind when preparing a speech or a written text. In the following chapter I will discuss the four major characteristics of the slave narrative as stated in Smith Foster's *Witnessing Slavery*. I have already touched upon these concepts - adaptation, irony, veracity and religion - very briefly in chapter 3, when examining the genre of the slave narrative. However, the four also seem to have emerged throughout this whole dissertation, which acknowledges their importance, not only in the genre of the slave narrative but also on a higher level, in being part of the rhetorical process. I will rely upon numeral examples from Douglass’s major slave narratives, *The Narrative of the Life, My Bondage, My Freedom*, and *The Life and Times* to explain why I agree with the theory of Smith Foster. I have selected these three volumes for they can be classified at several crucial points in the development of the slave narrative, namely the first stage in which the narrative itself is centralized, the second stage, which is typified by the political battle towards equality and the third stage, with a focus on further accomplishments of the black community.

5.1 Adaptory and advisory rhetoric

In chapter 3, I approached adaptation as a feature in which the writer expresses the ability to adapt one of his own experiences to a comparable but slightly different experience that might sound more familiar to a wider audience. Douglass, for instance, included the stories of fellow slaves who were worse off then he was. And although these stories were generally based upon real experiences, it is probable that not every person he addressed, played a part in Douglass's life as a slave. This would mean that he included their stories solely to meet with the audience’s already acquired knowledge. Robert B. Stepto writes the following on the use of “other voices” in his book *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*: “Slave narratives are full of other voices which are frequently just as responsible for articulating a narrative’s tale and strategy. These other voices may belong to various characters in the story (...). Their primary function is of course to authenticate the former slave’s account (...); they are at
least partially responsible for the narrative’s acceptance as historical evidence” (3). Douglass’s narrative is written in an eclectic narrative form, which basically means that the writer combines various elements (voices, mediums, forms…) in one narrative. In Douglass’s case this is reflected in the various Bible citations, the inclusion of texts of slave songs, the preface of for example W.L. Garrison to *The Narrative of the Life* and the several letters included in *The Life and Times*. Stepto has a lot more to say on this subject but including his full reasoning here, would lead us too far from the actual topic. The inclusion of the stories of other slaves is nevertheless very important to the slave narrative. As mentioned above, these stories are adjusted to create a more recognizable experience, one which the audience is already considered to be familiar with. It is a kind of unwritten rule that, as a slave narrator, you also refer to the experiences of other slaves in order to create a common memory.

5.1.1 Adapitory Rhetoric

After discussing the approach of the audience in chapter 4, it became clear that not only relying on someone else’s experiences but also relying on certain topoi is a commonly used technique to reach an audience. A third technique then, is to solely adjust one’s own experiences to the expectations of the audience. Consider the following citation of Jacqueline Bacon: “In adapitory rhetoric, the expectations of others form the basis of a persuasive situation, and the rhetor attempts to adapt the message to avoid a clash with the audience’s beliefs and attitudes. Shared values of rhetor and speaker, rather than conflict between them, are emphasized” (55-56). Political rhetoric, in this respect, turns into a tool of manipulation instead of persuasion. In order to win its support, the orator will deceive his audience by making false promises.

5.1.2 Advisory Rhetoric

Not only adaptation is used as a rhetorical device to take hold of an audience, Bacon argues that African-Americans also frequently rely upon an “advisory rhetoric” to guide their audience. In advisory rhetoric, the speaker challenges conventional attitudes (56). It is this kind of rhetorical adaptation that is typical for Frederick Douglass’s narratives. The speaker does not refrain from emphasizing the differences between the vision of the
audience and himself, judging the public on their narrow-minded view. In chapter 4.3, I have already cited a passage from one of Douglass’s speeches in which he addresses the seemingly ambiguous meaning of the Constitution. Douglass in his speech clearly stresses the gap between him and his audience by emphasizing the contrast between the “I”, the slave, in contrast to the “you”, the white audience.

Since the tone of The Narrative of the Life is less provoking and less politically influenced than the tone of its two successors, sufficient examples of advisory rhetoric are fairly hard to find. There are nevertheless a few situations in which it is notable that Douglass is guiding his reader through the narration of shocking experiences. Previous to the following abstract, Douglass is telling the story of the killing of an innocent black man by an overseer on the plantation. And although the crime was committed in front of dozens of slaves, none of their testimonies was valuable, since it would have been their word against the word of the white overseer. No trial is held and the man stays unpunished. This particular story returns in the two successive narratives as well, but, as will become clear, the tone in the second and third narrative is different from the tone used in the first. It is quite striking that Douglass himself refers to the role of the slave narrator as being an advisor: “Mr. Gore lived in St. Michael's Talbot county (...) he very probably lives there now; and if so, he is now, as he was then, as highly esteemed and as much respected as though his guilty soul had not been stained with his brother's blood. I speak advisedly when I say this, - that killing a slave, or any colored person in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community” (Douglass 31).

My Bondage, My Freedom, in contrast to Douglass’s The Narrative of the Life, has a more combative undertone and intention. The following abstract deals with the same story as the one described above, but the tone is different: “Mr. Gore lived in St. Michael's Talbot county (...) he probably yet resides there; and I have no reason to doubt that he is now as highly esteemed, and as greatly respected, as though his guilty soul had never been stained with innocent blood” (Douglass 202). Some of the words have been substituted by more specific alternatives: “Not” is replaced by “never”, and “his brother’s blood” in the first narrative is replaced by “innocent blood” in the second. “Never” contains a more resolute and stronger meaning than “not”, and referring to an overseer and a slave as if
they were “brothers”, depicts quite a romantic idea. A reasonable explanation for the word choice is that both narratives belong to a different stage of the slave narrative, and that both stages carry their own characteristics. The Narrative of the Life can be classified in the first stage, of which the view is often romanticized. My Bondage, My Freedom, on the contrary, is classified in the second stage, of which the tone is grimmer and more determined.

Yet, the passage continues: “I am well aware that what I have now written will by some be branded as false and malicious. It will be denied, not only that such a thing ever did transpire, as I have now narrated, but that such a thing could happen in Maryland. (…)” (Douglass 202). Douglass added a few sentences in which he already counters the reaction of his reader, namely, disbelief. He thus stresses the differences between his opinion and the opinion of his reader, which is also typical for advisory rhetoric. Finally, the last part of the passage matches the original narration: “I speak advisedly when I say this, - that killing a slave, or any colored person in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community” (Douglass 203).

If we now look at the experience as told in the third narrative, The Life and Times, we find more or less the same description as in The Narrative of the Life: “Mr. Gore lived in St. Michaels, Talbot Co., Maryland, and I have no reason to doubt, from what I know to have been the moral sentiment of the place, that he was a highly esteemed and as much respected as though his guilty soul had not been stained with innocent blood. I speak advisedly when I say that (…)” (Douglass 515).

5.1.3 Rhetoric of moral absolutism

Lastly, it is also typical for African-American writers to refer to American hypocrisy, mostly by shocking the audience, and then guiding them in the right direction. This kind of approach, where provoking shock is more effective than logic argumentation, is called “rhetoric of moral absolutism” (Bacon 56). Especially in The Life and Times, Douglass turns his attention to several hypocrite policies in America, such as racial segregation in public transportation. In the following example, Douglass is travelling to Great Britain as an American refuge, but when he and his friend Mr. Buffum enter the ship, it is made
clear that Douglass cannot be received as a cabin passenger. He writes down the following about this experience: “American prejudice against color had triumphed over British liberality and civilization, and had erected a color test as a condition for crossing the sea in the cabin of a British vessel” (Douglass 677-678). With these exclamations towards American prejudice, Douglass verbally attacks his own audience. He is subtly guiding the reader to share his opinion. Firstly he sketches the problem, American hypocrisy, which is then followed with the proposal of a solution, British tolerance. Furthermore, the reaction of Douglass towards the unjust treatment sounds as follows: “The insult was keenly felt by my white friends, but to me such insults were so frequent and expected that it was of no great consequence whether I went in the cabin or in the steerage” (Douglass 678). When analyzing this quote and its purpose, we have to keep in mind that Douglass’s audience mainly consisted out of (northern) white middle class people. The choice of “white” as an adjective characterizing the noun “its friends” is not entirely random. Douglass already presumed a certain feeling of connection between his audience and his friends. He thus puts his reader on the same level as Mr. Buffum, whose shocking reaction functions as an example for the audience’s response. To justify my choice in putting this example within the discussion of the third narrative – for the identical story was told in My Bondage, My Freedom as well - I refer to other, similar passages that were included in The Life and Times. For instance, when Douglass is in a restaurant and a white gentleman prevents him from being sent away because he is disturbing the other customers: “Let the gentleman alone! I am not ashamed to take my tea with Frederick Douglass” (Douglass 889). Another similar experience took place right after the Emancipation Proclamation. Although slavery was – in theory – abolished by then, there were still several cases in which segregation was omnipresent. When Douglass is sitting in a “white coupé” (in stead of in the Jim Crow car, a dirty wagon for the colored people) and refuses to give up his seat, the brakemen have to remove him by force, leaving the seat – and the surrounding area - completely wrecked: “They however found me much attached to my seat, and in removing me I tore away two or three of the surrounding ones” (Douglass 670).
5.2 Veracity: intertextuality and (self-)censorship

When discussing veracity as a characteristic of the slave narrative, it is necessary to point out two major subcategories, intertextuality and censorship. The first subtopic is related to the discussion of adaptation. Intertextuality is connected with the need to narrate the stories of other slaves in order to evoke stronger emotions within the audience. Furthermore, intertextuality also applies to the references made in an author’s work towards earlier writings and sayings. Secondly, censorship oversees the use of vulgar language used by the author and is in control of the topics that the author wishes to address. In Douglass’s case, some adjustments are in order since there was no actual institution to forbid him a certain choice of word or topic usage. Douglass however stuck to a technique called self-censorship, which will be discussed below.

5.2.1 Intertextuality

A first subcategory of veracity is intertextuality. Douglass’s narratives are full of references to other writers and their work. The allusion to well-known citations and their authors renders the speaker a certain kind of status and credibility. However, the “credibility status” of the speaker is not only determined by citing previous, authoritative works. Offering accuracy, or geographically/historically correct references, seems to be just as important to persuade the audience of one’s honesty and sincerity. In this matter, logos plays an essential role, for although “what was being said” was a less important factor to Aristotle in the composition of his Rhetorical Triangle, to the slave narrator, it seems to be a sufficiently influential factor. Since the latter was colored, he was in most cases certified as less sophisticated and trustworthy than any white person. In order to disprove this prejudice, it was important that the slave narrator left an impression of credibility and intellectuality. Displaying his global knowledge to a white audience meant risking a reaction of disbelief, however, it would probably also catch its attention. It was thus of the highest importance that the slave narrator demonstrated his expertise, not only through his appearance, but also through his words. In this matter, it is remarkable that Douglass, whenever he is in doubt of the accuracy of his stories, adds certain phrases such as “as well as I can remember”. It is a kind of hedging strategy, so that, when a reader has attended the same event for instance, and he is not entirely correct in his recounting this event, Douglass is sort of protected from any possible
critique on the accuracy of the story. Consider the following lines taken from The Narrative of the Life: “His reply was, (as well as I can remember,) that Demby had become unmanageable” (Douglass 30). In this example, Douglass was still a little boy and it was thus inevitable that he had forgotten the exact words that were spoken that day. However, by adding the information between parentheses, the reader is made clear that Douglass acknowledges his potential mistakes.

5.2.2 (Self-)censorship

A second subtopic of veracity considers the obstructive character of censorship. In his narratives, Douglass approaches this “obstruction” rather as an advantage. There is no specific institution that actively forbids the use of offensive themes or information in the narratives. On the contrary, Douglass seems to coordinate his own censuring institution, deliberately keeping certain details from the reader. In her book Witnessing Slavery, Frances Smith Foster summarizes self-censorship, a term that refers to the technique used by Douglass, as follows: “The content, structure and communicative context of the slave narratives made them create a particular kind of literature, to shape and reveal their realities in ways most beneficial to their needs. That this is so can be seen as much from what was said and how as from what was not said and why” (140).

There are three main reasons that withheld Douglass from passing on certain information to his reader. To begin with, the concealment of certain information can be more of a safety precaution, to prevent endangering people who took part in his escape out of slavery. This is for instance the case in the first narrative: there are no details whatsoever on Douglass’s escape because there was too short a time between his actual escape and the writing of the narrative. He explains this inconvenience to his reader: “I deem it proper not to make known my intention not to state all the facts connected with the transaction. (...) it is not only possible, but quite probable, that others would thereby be involved in the most embarrassing difficulties. (...). I deeply regret the necessity that impels me to suppress any thing of importance connected with my experience in slavery” (Douglass 84). Sometimes Douglass explicitly informs his reader of the danger that is related to the narration of certain details, as is the case in the previous abstract; other times he claims not to know the exact details of an enterprise, as the example of
the childhood memory above indicated. The second reason then for withholding information from the reader, concerns the nature of extremely cruel deeds that are too intense and shocking – even for Douglass himself – to retell. For example, after recounting a series of situations of the dehumanizing treatment of the slaves on the plantations, he ends the “chapter of horrors” with the following remark: “But here I leave this phase of the society of my early childhood, and will relieve the kind reader of these heart-sickening details” (Douglass 205). Thirdly, self-censorship can be a form of adaptation as well. Certain information can be left out, to the advantage of the writer, or added, in order to please the reader. This for instance could be the case when Douglass claims to have forgotten the details of an enterprise, or of a specific period in his life. On the other hand, Douglass also chooses to mention the names of people to whom he owes a lot of gratitude, or on the contrary, of people whom he considers to be vicious. Consider the following example on “the preacher’s home in St. Michaels” and pay attention to the well-considered use of capitalization: “Not often did we get a smile of recognition from these holy men. They seemed almost as unconcerned about our getting to heaven, as they were about our getting out of slavery. To this general charge there was one exception – the Rev. GEORGE COOKMAN. Unlike Rev. Messrs. Storks, Ewry, Hickey, Humphrey and Cooper (all of whom were on St. Michael’s circuit) he kindly took an interest in our temporal and spiritual welfare” (Douglass 253). Douglass clearly wants to put Reverend Storks, Ewry, Hickey, Humphrey and Cooper in a bad daylight, contrasting their hypocrisy with the goodness of the Reverend George Cookman.

To reify this third reason for self-censorship, I refer to Douglass’s attempt to conceal the true identity of his father. Douglass’s family history, or at least what he does know about his relatives, is discussed in each of the three narratives. Whilst his mother and grandmother receive a considerable amount of attention, his father is hardly mentioned in the second and third narrative. Frances Smith Foster proposes a reasonable explanation for this remarkable case. She assigns the inconvenience to “the tragic mulatto theme” (128): “The mulatto was a manifestation of the most evil results of slavery. He embodied the defilement of womanhood and the violation of marital sacraments” (128). Also, the fact that a lot of the slave narrators were mulattos, could be assigned to them having a white father. Their ability to read and write was a consequence of having this white relative. In The Narrative of the Life we read the
following: “My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing, the means of knowing was withheld from me” (Douglass 15). However, this is what we find in My Bondage, My Freedom: “I say nothing of father, for he is shrouded in a mystery I have never been able to penetrate. Slavery does away with fathers, as it does away with families (...). My father was a white man, or nearly white. It was sometimes whispered that my master was my father” (Douglass 151). And lastly, in The Life and Times, Douglass states the following about his father: “Of my father, I know nothing. Slavery had no recognition of fathers, as none of families” (Douglass 477).

Censorship, however, can also refer to the issue of inappropriate language usage. In The Narrative of the Life, for instance, offensive words are crossed out. I can only assume this form of censorship being administered by the editor, either directly before the first publication of a work, or when publishing a later edition. Publishers of the 20th century for example10, might have considered the language too offensive and as a result they might have made one or two adjustments in order to secure the profits of the sale, for if the book had been classified as scandalous, there was a considerable chance that it would not have been appreciated by the public. An example of this type of censorship is found in The Narrative of the Life, where presumably “damned” and “bitch”, are partly left out: “He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d-----d b---h” (Douglass 19).

5.3 Irony

Irony is an omnipresent feature in Douglass’s narratives. With this rhetorical device, the author or speaker indicates the opposite of what is actually meant. To an audience that is intellectually capable of understanding the often very harsh underlying idea, irony is the most effective way to make people fully aware of the gravity of a situation. In his article “Irony and Rhetorical Strategy”, David Kaufer, an English professor at the Carnegie Mellon University, investigates the relationship between irony and rhetorical

10 After its peek around 1850, the slave narrative fell into oblivion. The interest in the African-American culture, however, was renewed around the early 1920s.
strategy. In his research he focuses on two major topics: the relationship between the author and his audience, and the fact that some situations seem to be more suitable for the use of ironic strategies than others (94). Concerning the first question, it is important that from the audience's point of view, there is no misunderstanding whatsoever on the opinion and background of the author. Only then, and if the audience is sharp and witty, it will be able to decode the message hidden within the irony (94). This however, does not necessarily mean that the audience has to share the opinion or viewpoint of the ironist. Since an audience does not always sympathize with the writer or speaker, the latter must be able to rely on different strategies in which he shows to take account of the kind of audience he is approaching. Kaufer proposes that “those with whom he [the author/the orator] shares his irony are his confederates, those with whom he does not share it are his victims” (95). He adds that the audience that is victimized through the narration, does not necessarily identify with the literal meaning. If the audience is known with the ironist’s background, it will surely understand the true meaning that is hidden beneath the surface of what he is saying, even if it does not share the opinion of the author (96).

In the second topic of his research, Kaufer investigates the nature of the situation in which irony is used and how the author is meant to deal with it. To detect and classify the situation, irony is divided into five subcategories of which two seem to be actively used in Frederick Douglass’s slave narratives: “Irony as epideictic in pursuit of group cohesion” and “Victimizing an audience while addressing it”. The first implies a confederate audience that is able, through common knowledge with the author, to detect the smallest hint of irony. This for instance would be the case if Douglass were speaking at an abolitionist gathering. The second one implies an audience of which the ideology does not comply with the ideology of the author, for example if Douglass was speaking in front of a proslavery public (100).

Although this dissertation is focusing on Douglass's narratives, I do feel obliged to cite at least one more written abstract of his oral work, for it - in my opinion - is one of the best examples of irony one can find in any speech given in history. Since the audience is directly addressed, it is also an accurate illustration of the second subcategory of irony discussed above. The abstract is derived from the Fourth of July Speech (1852) in which
Douglass addresses the question “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?”. Part of the speech is also included in Jacqueline Bacon’s article “revolutionary topoi”. Consider the following lines of the speech:

“Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to... express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! (...) Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?” (“Revolutionary Topoi” 61-62)

At first glance, it seems as if Douglass is victimizing himself by calling upon his restrictions for being black. When taking a closer look, it is clear that Douglass is being ironic and actually pities his audience for not seeing their mistake in inviting him. He judges them for not understanding the true meaning of Independence Day and for ignoring the fact that many Americans cannot enjoy the independence they refer to.

The ironist normally does not address his audience directly, notwithstanding, in some situations – and this is clearly the case in Douglass’s second narrative – there is a reason for doing the opposite. According to Kaufer, “there are some situations in which the ironist must keep his victim unaware of the fact that he is not part of his real audience. And he can carry out his strategy by addressing his victim as if the latter were part of it” (102). This is the kind of irony that is called satiric. If the audience were mocked, it would be (politically) dangerous to do this directly. Therefore irony is used to put the audience on the wrong track. Again, an audience that is familiar with the background and ideology of the ironist will be capable of detecting the irony. Nevertheless, the ironist cannot be judged, since what he is literally saying, does not contradict the standards of society.
Not only in his sermons did Douglass use irony as a device to persuade his audience. There are a lot of examples in each of his narratives in which he includes the rhetorical device. What seems most prominent though, is that irony is (almost) always used when addressing any issue with the slaveholder. Of course, from the background information we receive from Douglass and from the knowledge the reader already has, it is clear that these comments are to be understood in an ironic, even satirical way. However, in the following example, Douglass addresses the hypocrisy of the slaveholder directly instead of saying the opposite of what is actually meant. Therefore, Douglass is using an even stronger device than irony, namely, sarcasm. If the author is being sarcastic, he is presenting his victim with an even harsher criticism than if he is being ironic. There are for instance multiple situations in all three of the narratives in which the author refers to the slaveholder family’s extreme devotion and charity. Sarcasm is then used in order to victimize the southern slaveholders who believe themselves to be true servants of God. There are, as said, multiple examples of this kind of irony/sarcasm in Douglass’s narratives but I will only include a few in this thesis. For instance, in the following abstract, Douglass refers to the sins of his master, Thomas Auld, and how he absolved himself for the crimes he committed: “I have said my master found religious sanction for his cruelty. I have seen him tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cowskin upon her naked shoulders, (...) and, in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote these passage of Scripture – ‘He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes’ ” (Douglass 53). Subsequently, when talking about the slaveholders, often small religious imagery is drawn into the picture, just because the masters see themselves as messengers of God, for example: “the sacred precincts of the great house, the home of the Lloyds” (Douglass 190), “that mistress, with saintly hair” (247), “that angelic face made place to that of a demon” (37). The house of the slaveholder is anything but sacred, and the mistress’s hair is the opposite of saintly. However, there are other ways in which the ironist is not using religious imagery to refer to the inhuman treatment of the slaves by their masters. In the following example, the value of the slave is measured with the value of an animal. The slave is not considered a human and is, in hierarchical matters, classified lower than the cattle: “his [Col. Lloyd] horses and dogs fared better than his men. Their beds must be softer and cleaner than those of his human cattle” (Douglass 193). This excerpt is again more likely
to be classified in the category of sarcasm since it again criticizes and accuses the institution's cruelty.

Based on the examples just given, it is fair to say that although there are multiple examples in which irony is used in its basic form, sarcasm can also be seen as a dominant feature in Douglass's narratives. Sarcasm is more criticizing than irony as a rhetorical device.

5.4 Religious imagery

Slaveholders generally portrayed themselves to the outside world as very religious and devout men. If they at all found the need to justify their cruelty, they would argue that God himself justified slavery. It was a generally accepted idea that He had punished the Negro by giving him a black skin color. Slavery supporters went as far as to announce that they rescued the African from an unholy, pagan land and brought him to “a land of light and humanity” (Gabrial Introduction). In the introduction to his book The Press and Slavery in America, Brian Gabrial, Professor of Mass Communication at Concordia University, claims that “words describing Africans - Negro, (Spanish), noir (French) and black (English) - always contained a negative connotation such as evil, wretchedness or misfortune” (introduction). Although skin color was never regarded as an inferior or superior mark before the 18th century, it became connected to race due to white globalization and colonial power, and so eventually did slavery. The white slaveholders, were thus “generous and kindhearted” to give the inferior black man a goal in life, to let him work on the field and to make him understand the word of God and the Holy Bible. Douglass used irony/sarcasm as a rhetorical device to express his thoughts upon the seemingly goodwill and purity of the southern slaveholder. Next to this, there are numerous other references to religion and its impact on a slave's life. To the slave, religion was the only factor that was, and would stay, stable. References to Bible content are for instance found in slave songs and in slave stories. Religion even became a part of the slave's identity, for it was the only consistent factor that could provide him with a past.
A first example is related to the story of the “Children of Israel”, who were forced to leave their native land and work in slavery. It is clear that the African(-American) slave interpreted this Bible story as a metaphor for his own life. For instance, when Douglass attends his first abolitionist meeting, he is stunned by Garrison's exceptional devotion. His first impression of the abolitionist leader is the following: “You are the man – the Moses, raised up by God, to deliver his modern Israel from bondage” (Douglass 658-659). The similarity between Garrison and Moses is not far-fetched: first of all, African(-American) slaves undergo the same fate as the Children of Israel. Garrison then, as the leader of the Abolitionist Party, is supposed to lead the African(-American)s to freedom, literally and figuratively. Moses in his turn did the same for his people, by guiding them out of Egypt into a free land.

Next to this, Douglass includes a few lines of slave songs in his narratives. Most of these songs are filled with sorrow or contain a request to be granted freedom in this or in the afterlife. In the following example, Canaan, is a metaphor for the northern free states. Canaan is another name for the land of Israel and thus, there is a direct reference to homesickness. The lion that is mentioned in the lyrics probably represents the southern slaveholder who is in the way of the slave escaping his fate:

“O Canaan, sweet Canaan,
I am bound for the land of Canaan,
I thought I heard them say,
There were lions in the way,
I don’t expect to Star
Much longer here.
Run to Jesus – shun the danger-
I don’t expect to stay
Much longer here” (Douglass 308)

There is, however, another passage in Douglass’s life story in which the reference to the lion reappears. Douglass addresses the transformation of his Mistress Sophia, the wife of Master Hugh Auld, whose character took a complete turn after being initiated in the world of slavery: “Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly
qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness” (Douglass 40). This comparison between the tiger and the lamb is most likely also derived from a passage from the Bible in which Jesus represents both a lamb and a tiger (The Holy Bible, Rev. 5:5-6).

Subsequently, characterizing Douglass’s narratives in particular, are the numerous allusions to hell imagery. Slavery as an Institution is always compared to hell and the slaveholder to the devil or a lion guarding its gates. For example: “Slaves know enough of the rudiments of theology to believe that those go to hell who die slaveholders” (Douglass 163). It even seemed that the slave himself – never being rendered the opportunity of knowing any better – submitted to his fate and accepted the fact that God made white men slaveholders and black men their slaves: “I was told, too, that God was good, and that He knew what was best for me, and best for everybody. (…). Besides, how did people know that God made black people to be slaves? Did they go up to the sky and learn it? (…). It was some relief to my hard notions of the goodness of God, that, although he made white men to be slaveholders, he did not make them to be bad slaveholders, and that, in due time, he would punish the bad slaveholders, that he would, when they died, send them to the bad place, where they burnt up” (Douglass 178-179).
6 Conclusion

In this dissertation I have attempted to approach Frederick Douglass’s major slave narratives from a more rhetorical point of view. My original goal was to prove why rhetoric and politics are related and why it is so important to the genre of the slave narrative and the cause it served, abolishing slavery in the United States.

I began my research in chapter 2, by looking at America’s political changes in the 19th century, and by questioning its most influential institutions. It is remarkable how the 19th century brought a considerable change to the United States of America. In only a couple of decades, the country went from being an agricultural society to being an industrial superpower. The rise of several Abolitionist Movements and the increasing popularity of its major force, the slave narrative, definitely played an unmistakable role in the battle against slavery. In this battle, Frederick Douglass was one of the most important protagonists. Proving to be extremely talented as a writer and an orator, he managed to work his way out of slavery, to become an active member of the Abolitionist Party and eventually even an accomplice of President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

Subsequently, in chapter 3, I firstly distinguished the genre of the slave narrative from the genre of the autobiography. Although both focusing on someone’s life story, the slave narrative gave special attention to the inclusion of political and social concerns. Next, I categorized Douglass’s narratives into the three major stages in the development of the slave narrative, put up by Frances Smith Foster in her book Witnessing Slavery. For its focusing on the unjust character of slavery, The Narrative of the Life could be taken as an example of the first stage. My Bondage, My Freedom, then, could – given its more political and combative spirit - rather be classified in the second stage. Lastly, The Life and Times, proved to be more of a third stage example, for it zoomed in on further accomplishments of the black man after the Emancipation Proclamation had come through.

In the following chapter, I looked into Aristotle’s view on rhetoric and his understanding of the Rhetorical Triangle, a visual representation of the three major pillars of persuasion, ethos, pathos and logos. Aristotle considered the first two, related to
respectively the representation of the author and the perception of the audience, to be the most important for political rhetoric. Logos, however, to the slave narrative, proved to be a necessary factor as well. In chapter 5, I considered the use of certain characteristics of the slave narrative, adaptation, veracity, irony and religion as an equivalent of logos, or, “what is being said”. I approached these characteristics by applying them to Douglass’s major slave narratives, *The Narrative of the Life, An American Slave, Written by Himself, My Bondage and My Freedom* and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

Douglass’s narratives are clearly guided by the principles of rhetoric as stated by Aristotle in his Rhetorical Triangle. Pathos, linked to the audience, and ethos, linked to the author, seem to be equally given attention to. However, logos, although of less importance to Aristotle, is necessary to the slave narrator in putting up his credibility and getting a respectable reputation, a matter which was of no consequence to white speaker. The slave narrative is thus considered to be a form of political rhetoric, which is completed by several realizations of logos. When retuning to Douglass’s narratives in particular, it is then made clear that these presumptions were correct. Douglass proves himself to be a true political orator: he creates a certain persona, to influence his audience's first impression. Also, he shows to be aware of the way his audience thinks and reasons. By touching their emotions, leaving specific information out of his story and stressing the importance of particular words and sentences, he is able to guide his audience in the direction he choses it to go. However, his three narratives also prove to be interlaced with continuous examples of the slave narrative's specific characteristics, representing logos. As is clear from the last chapter on rhetorical devices, several factors such as adaptation and advisory rhetoric, veracity - containing intertextuality and censorship -, irony and religion, together with the earlier discussed pillars of the Rhetorical Triangle, ethos and pathos, form the basis of a successful slave narrative. To the Abolitionist Movement, Douglass's talent to persuade led to the victory of many interracial conflicts in the North, and occasionally even in the South.
7 Works Cited

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


