

【연구논문】

## William Grimes' Salable Book and Redeemed Self: *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* and Uncanonical Slave Narrative

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Most of the famous slave narratives of the 1830s and 1840s were guided, edited, prefaced, puffed, and even outlined by white abolitionists. These abolitionists typified romantic and nationalistic ideals of American democracy by manufacturing former slaves' testimonials in print, as if these narratives were epitomized in the former slave as symbol of triumphant humanity over unjust institutions. Many critics including Robert Stepto point out that the slave narrative is not necessarily identical to autobiography because the autobiographical genre is free from the authenticating paraphernalia that reverberates in canonical slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (1845).<sup>1)</sup> Going further, John Sekora boldly proclaims that

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1) Robert Stepto, *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*, ed. Dexter Fisher and Robert Stepto (New York: MLA, 1979), 180.

the slave narrative is not an African American genre because of the white authentication, intervention, and approval in publishing slave narratives.<sup>2)</sup> However, a few slave narratives, not only written by but also published by their authors without the abolitionist aids, provide us with an important aspect of the slave narrative genre beyond its canons. This essay analyzes William Grimes's *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* (1825, 1855), which was designed explicitly to raise money for its author, who had become penniless as a result of a series of legal fights for his freedom and civil rights. Grimes's narrative exemplifies self-published slave narratives in the U.S. that do not subscribe the abolitionist framing of what the slave narrative should be, but establish African American authorship by redeeming the materialized blackness in the print market.

The self-published slave narratives, which appeared in both Europe and North America, diversify our understanding of the slave narrative. Self-published slave narratives reside outside of the traditional category of this genre mainly because unlike the majority of slave narratives they did not seek white abolitionists' authentication. The most well-known former slave narrative among these must be Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life* (1789). In North America, William Grimes was the first author who published his narrative by himself in 1825. Before 1850, including Grimes, only seven former slaves published their narratives without professional publishers' mediation. In addition to Grimes' second edition of the narrative in 1855, between 1745 and 1865 in both Europe and North

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2) John Sekora, "Black Message / White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 509.

America, only thirteen among 121 slave narratives in total were self-published. Although these thirteen narratives were seemingly independent from antislavery groups and publishers, the abolitionist authority still overshadows most of them in the way that a former slave author often closely worked with (most likely white) abolitionists to publish a narrative. Because of her illiteracy, Sojourner Truth needed her abolitionist amanuenses' helps to transcribe and compile her story. Even though Harriet Jacobs could read and write, she had not been able to place her narrative for publication until Lydia Maria Child corroborated the narrative's authenticity and introduced Jacobs to her antislavery circle. In contrast to these cases, William Grimes published his narrative without associating with abolitionist groups at all.

To gain Northern white readers' recognition instead of doubt, former slave writers created narratives backed up by white authentication because these writers' authority was not as self-evident as that of white writers. Sara Wood argues that, when a white-authored preface and letters are crucial to confirming a black writer's authenticity, the slave narrative is "guaranteed by an authority acceptable to white, patriarchal America."<sup>3</sup>) In the same sense, Sekora coins the term "Black message" and "White envelope" to investigate the crucial role that white abolitionists played in publishing the antebellum slave narrative. Sekora draws a parallel between slaveowners' attempt to control slave language and white abolitionists' effort to produce "not that of individualized Afro-American life, but rather the concrete detail of lives spent under slavery."<sup>4</sup>) Rather than accurately

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3) Sarah Wood, "Exorcising the Past: The Slave Narrative as Historical Fantasy," *Feminist Review* 85 (2007): 84.

presenting a former slave author's experiences, the slave narrative reflects "the institutional conditions under which many of the narratives were composed."<sup>5</sup>) In this way, the slave narrative wrapped with white authentication, which Sekora names "White envelope," testifies "to belief in an undifferentiated sameness of [black] existence."<sup>6</sup>) Given that these studies generalize the genre in the relation between white abolitionists and black writers, Grimes's exceptional example forces the reader to revisit the conventional understanding of the slave narrative, which has been characterized narrowly in the context of abolitionism in the antebellum U.S.

It is notable that William Grimes does not include any white acquaintance's written support in his narrative. He adds his own preface that describes the purpose of his publication—to sell the book for profit. In considering that white abolitionists launched more organized movements in the 1830s and most slave narratives were published after that period, it is not surprising that William Grimes's narrative is never covered with "White envelope," as its first edition came out in 1825. Nevertheless, we cannot help wondering about why he never worked with abolitionists to make his 1855 edition more marketable and recognizable. From the mid-1830s to the Civil War, many abolitionist groups actively sought former slaves.<sup>7</sup>)

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4) Sekora., 497.

5) *Ibid.*, 495.

6) *Ibid.*, 497.

7) Patrick Kennicott, "Black Persuaders in the Antislavery Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 1.1 (1970): 5-11. While recruiting articulate speakers for the antislavery fair was abolitionist groups' primary goal, they also looked for personal testimony to publish. Sekora adds that white abolitionists often treated former slaves and free blacks in similar fashion. See Sekora, 496.

William Lloyd Garrison highlights the importance of the black speaker, which is “that of an antislavery lecturer, for ‘eloquent’ Negro speakers were able to draw ‘in most places far larger’ audiences than their white counterparts.”<sup>8)</sup> A letter writer in the *Liberator* in 1842 also comments: “The public have itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave. Multitudes will flock to hear one of this class speak.”<sup>9)</sup> Grimes lived in New Haven and Litchfield in Connecticut, both of which served as hubs of abolitionism. Therefore, his 1825 narrative could have been rediscovered, or he could have worked as a black agent for white abolitionists. There is evidence that hints at Grimes’s possible encounter with abolitionists since he seemed to be well acknowledged to local people: “[A]fter a residence here [New Haven] of nearly thirty years, I have become, . . . , ‘a fixed institution,’ and have become pretty generally known.”<sup>10)</sup> As another example, on August 25, 1865, the *Liberator* reports on his death: “Wm. Grimes, better known as ‘Old Grimes’ a quaint old darkey, once a slave, *known to all our citizens*, . . . , died in this city yesterday. . . .”<sup>11)</sup> Nevertheless, the two editions of the narrative suggest that Grimes remained out of white abolitionists’ reach.

Grimes’s dissociation from white abolitionists does not indicate any

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8) Quoted in Kennicott, 5.

9) *Ibid.*, 11.

10) William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave*, ed. William L. Andrews and Regina E. Mason (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 104.

11) Quoted in Susanna Ashton, “Slavery, Imprinted: The Life and Narrative of William Grimes,” *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 2012), 132. Emphasis added.

“Black envelope” of his narrative. For his second autobiography Frederick Douglass needed the “Black envelope” to demonstrate his black humanity and individuality that the Garrisonian abolitionists disregarded. Differently from Douglass, Grimes rarely shows the communal sense of being a former slave and free black in the North. In the *Life*, he declares his African American identity by evidencing his marriage to a black woman who looked like “a fine Virginian like [himself]” and he felt “might be proud to embrace.”<sup>12)</sup> Despite his “three parts white,” which means that he could have passed for white, Grimes clarifies that he made a choice to be black.<sup>13)</sup> Regardless of his racial pride, however, he did not look for a black publisher for both his first and second editions. The first known African American publishing company, the African Methodist Episcopal Book Concern, was established in 1817, New York City, and continuously expanded to issue newspapers, literary journal, and literature in the 1840s.<sup>14)</sup> In considering that these periods are coupled with the time when Grimes published his first edition in the same city, Grimes seems to have intentionally avoided a black publisher as well as white one. Moreover, for most of his life in the North, Grimes lived and worked in New Haven, across Yale College, near which a group of black and white abolitionists planned to establish a college exclusively for African Americans in 1831.<sup>15)</sup>

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12) Grimes, 97.

13) *Ibid.*, 29.

14) Frances Smith Foster, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” *American Literature History* 17.4 (2005): 721-22.

15) James Brewer Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870,” *The New England Quarterly* 76.3 (2003):

Even though the project was abandoned because of local people's strong opposition, Grimes could hardly have ignored the controversy over the project happening in his neighborhood and presumably might have conversed with black abolitionists who visited the provisional college site. Silently keeping himself remote from abolitionism, William Grimes used no racial envelope to cover his "Black message."

I distinguish the act of writing from the act of publishing to examine the significance of Grimes' self-publication of the *Life*. Its full titles visualize the author who is both writing and publishing. The cover of his 1825 edition says *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself. New York*. It is remarkable that, for the second edition issued thirty years after the first one, he slightly changed the title: *Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave, Brought Down to the Present Time. Written by Himself. New Haven: Published by the Author*. Grimes stresses two points in the latter title. First, even after he paid off his freedom in the North, he introduces himself as a "runaway," which the phrase "the present time" perpetuates. The unstable and illegal status that the word "runaway" implies exposes his permanent anxiety about being not recognized as a fully legal citizen. Second, Grimes leads the reader's attention to the fact that he not only wrote the book, as the subtitle attests, but also published it by himself. For some reason, his self-publication was not considered important enough to mention in the 1825 edition. But, from the very first page of the 1855 edition,

Grimes entitles himself both as an author and as a publisher. This long title suggests that the act of publishing legitimizes the author, whose citizenship is not entirely accepted in the “free” North. In the title, the words “runaway,” “brought,” and “present” emphasize that the authority of the author-“Himself” is temporary, unlawful, and not settled. Yet, the phrase “New Haven: Published by the Author” confirms his solid identity as a member of the local community, New Haven, and the authority that enables him to publish the book under the title, “the Author.”

Through the act of writing, the writer recollects seemingly fragmented and unrelated selves and events. In spite of the loose structure of Grimes’ narrative, he draws the comprehensive portrayal of himself. His very act of writing may authorize one person named William Grimes from the various times and places in which he was identified differently as a slave, illegitimate child, runaway, alleged criminal, and working-class man. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. cite Francis Bacon in order to emphasize the philosophical and historical significance of slave narratives in that, “since the Renaissance in Europe, the act of writing has been considered the visible sign of Reason.” In this tradition, “[t]he slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to *write themselves into being*,” assert Davis and Gates.<sup>16)</sup> By mastering the oppressor’s language and demonstrating it in print, former slave writers declare how they are human with the capacity of rational thoughts. Moreover, the emphasis on “written by himself” or “herself” in many slave narratives also

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16) Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Introduction: The Language of Slavery,” *The Slave’s Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), xxiii.

insinuates its writer's desire that the writing generically breaks from the white abolitionist-mediated testimony. As in her analysis of Frederick Douglass Rachel A. Blumenthal puts, when a former slave writer claims his or her authorship, "[n]o longer does the fugitive slave only *represent* the sufferings of an entire slave population. No longer is his body a *text* available for the reading and editing pleasure of white abolition. The autobiography, finally, marks a break with the post-slavery bondage of black writing at the hands of white editors."<sup>17)</sup>

If William Grimes's narrative is not shaped by abolitionist agendas, and therefore if it illustrates his accounts of slavery and class stratification more personally and truthfully than other canonical narratives, it is possible to find self-published slave narratives more autobiographic than others. Nonetheless, even though the white authentication is absent from Grimes's narrative, his life story can hardly affirm the voice of the author "I" at the same level that white authors do.<sup>18)</sup> The *Life* reveals the "I" narrator's dubious identity with the unspeakable name of his father and a couple of different names. In the first place, the author does not directly offer his father's name, while proudly saying, "My father, \_\_\_\_\_, was one of the most wealthy planters in Virginia." He elaborates the characteristic of his white father and quotes the song "Old Grimes" in the next

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17) Rachel A. Blumenthal, "Canonicity, Genre, and the Politics of Editing: How We Read Frederick Douglass," *Callaloo* 36.1 (2013): 186-87.

18) Jeannine DeLombard, "'Eye-Witness to the Cruelty: Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*,'" *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 245-75. See her comparison between Ralph Waldo Emerson's "I" and Frederick Douglass's "eye-witness."

couple of pages, which give enough information for the reader to guess the father's real identity. However, the father's name does not empower William Grimes to assert his presentable identity because Grimes was "in law, a bastard and slave," who was born ironically in "Virginia in a land boasting its freedom, and under a government whose motto is Liberty and Equality."<sup>19</sup>) These marks of being an illegitimate son invalidate the authority that his last name carries. In addition, William Grimes does not introduce his current name (except the title page and preface) before mentioning two other names—Theo and John, which were randomly called by his owners. Grimes perceives the ineffectiveness of his names, as he excuses it: "I will here mention, that as it may appear strange for me to have so many names, . . . , that it is a practice among the slave holders, whenever one buys a slave of another, if the name does not suit him, or if he has one of the same name already, he gives him what name he pleases."<sup>20</sup>) While admitting the absurdity of naming a slave, Grimes also omits to mention how he got the current name, "William," which could empower him to create a new identity as a free man just like Booker T. Washington calls self-naming "privilege."<sup>21</sup>)

Since William Grimes cannot present his solid selfhood through one determinate name, his narrative breaks a rule of autobiography. By quoting autobiography genre theorist Philippe Lejeune, Lynn Casmier-Paz argues that slave narratives belie "autobiographical pact," for which Lejeune regards a proper name of an author as its

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19) Grimes, 30.

20) *Ibid.*, 86.

21) Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: W.W.Norton, 1996), 21.

contractual obligation to its reader. According to Casmier-Paz, a fugitive slave writer's name is rarely the same as the name of her or his text's "I." In this sense, Grimes violates the autobiographical pact.<sup>22)</sup> As a matter of fact, the absence of abolitionist intervention from a printed slave narrative does not necessarily mean its author's achievement of independent authorship like autobiography. Lara Langer Cohen asserts, "Even when abolitionist editors did not directly intervene in slaves' narratives, the movement's public relations imperatives and the conventions of white literary culture almost inevitably mediated their production."<sup>23)</sup> Unfortunately, the act of writing under the title "written by himself" is not enough to individualize the author, William Grimes, in the print market.

While breaking the convention of the slave narrative's "White envelope," William Grimes does not show enough effort to make the readers believe his life story. For example, at an antislavery fair, Douglass not only still needed his white sponsors' authentications but also was instructed to perform recognizable stereotypes of black men. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, his white abolitionists warned him to "give us the facts" instead of "philosophy." Otherwise, "[p]eople won't believe [Douglass] ever was a slave, . . . , if [he] keep[s] on this way."<sup>24)</sup> Because Northern whites often failed to see intellectual

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22) Lynn A. Casmier-Paz, "Footprints of the Fugitive: Slave Narrative Discourse and the Trace of Autobiography," *Biography* 24.1 (2001): 216. "For this reason," argues Casmier-Paz, "fugitive slave narrative can tactically manipulate a reader's interpretation through assertion of multiple names and multiple identities."

23) Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012), 103.

24) Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom. The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John W. Blessingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks,

province of a former slave, Douglass was required to prove his “authenticity” by faking himself. Whereas African descents were believed artless from the perspective of white readers’ romantic racial fantasy, African American writers faced white readers’ doubt about their writings’ facticity. This racial double, which George Frederickson describes as the “duality or instability of Negro character,” represents one of the most lasting legacies of slavery.<sup>25)</sup> Likewise, although the ability to write and read somewhat evinces that a black person has reason, Northern whites considered Douglass’s blackness incompatible with reason. It explains why in his narrative Douglass had to elaborate the process of getting literacy, which served him as “the path way from slavery to freedom.”<sup>26)</sup> By contrast to Douglass, Grimes is relatively silent about how he learned to read and write, as if he is uninterested in highlighting the credibility of the *Life* and his “reason.” The author simply states that “I have learned to read and write pretty well,” adding, “if I had an opportunity I could learn very fast.”<sup>27)</sup> In addition to the multiple names that weaken the trustworthiness of his autobiographical “I”-narrator, Grimes’s terse statement about how he gained literacy rouses the reader’s suspicion that the *Life* might be fictitious.

Grimes’s lackadaisical defense of his authenticity corresponds with his profit-oriented purpose in the publication of the *Life*. In other

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series 2, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 207.

25) George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 55.

26) Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, ed. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: W.W.Norton, 1997), 29.

27) Grimes, 103.

words, he does not apparently prioritize the black humanity that most slave narratives strive to verify. Rather, Grimes tries to intensify the readers' interest in his story by withdrawing his authorial control over them who may doubt, misunderstand, or consume the narrative only for pleasure. He to some extent willingly becomes subject to commodification by writing the narrative. In her study of the slave narrative in the antebellum print culture, Cohen specifies three risks of marketing ex-slave writers' testimonials in print: fungibility, alienability, and salability. First, when we measure literary achievement through the production of a former slave author's selfhood, we mistakenly reproduce the logic of slavery, which makes persons *fungible*, by "equating a story's 'freedom' with its author's." Second, this understanding of the slave narrative subsumes that black personhood is *alienable* because we already believe that the personhood "can be transferred to a book," a tangible and ironically impersonal material. At last, the author's humanity can be confirmed through a book sale, which makes that personhood *salable*. Through the book publication, "a former slave derives power from transforming his or her life into a commodity."<sup>28</sup>) Grimes undeniably recognizes that, by publishing his personal story, he must present himself as a fungible, alienable, salable commodity to the reader-buyers in the market instead of insisting on an invaluable human-subject.

The author unhesitatingly announces the pursuit of financial gain as the main reason for writing his narrative. He understands that the degree of freedom is dependent upon the ability to pay for a living.

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28) Lara Langer Cohen, "Notes from the State of Saint Domingue: The Practice of Citation in *Clothes*," in *Early African American Print Culture*, 162-3.

In the preface titled “To The Public” Grimes states that he “tasted the sweets of liberty” briefly but it was “embittered, indeed, with constant apprehension.” Through his “eight years labor and exertion,” he could accumulate a thousand dollars, but the money was stripped “to purchase freedom” and he turned to be “penniless upon the world with a family.”<sup>29)</sup> Therefore, in order to achieve a life with financial autonomy that renders him practically free, he must sell the narrative. However, his belief in the importance of being a proprietor does not mean that he is naïve enough to accept that he could enjoy freedom through financial stability and be accepted as a citizen equal to the white counterpart. Rather, Grimes penetrates the danger of commercializing himself by selling his story as a former slave and working-class black man. Grimes says, “Those who are acquainted with the subscriber, he presumes will readily purchase his history. [ . . . ] To those who still think the book promises no entertainment, he begs leave to suggest another motive why they should purchase it. To him who has feeling, the condition of a slave, under any possible circumstances, is painful and unfortunate, and will excite the sympathy of all who have any.”<sup>30)</sup> He shamelessly introduces the narrative as an entertainment for North American readers. The extraordinary agonies and sufferings he experienced under slavery become at best sensational stories to the readers. In addition, Grimes does not seem to mind the readers’ idle sympathy for himself and other slaves in the South, when he says that his book arouses his sensitive readers’ sympathy but does not ask any further action for

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29) Grimes, 29.

30) *Ibid.*, 29.

enslaved blacks. In other words, his pain could be others' pleasure if the reader finds his agonizing history exciting enough to purchase it. When he even claims, "My readers may put their own constructions and draw inferences, I can barely state that I tell the truth,"<sup>31)</sup> Grimes apparently gives up his authorial control over the readers.

Grimes's second edition suggests the author's effort to make it more marketable than the first one. About the reason for the additional edition, Grimes says, "A large number of my intimate friends have urgently requested me to print another edition of my *Life*," and he complied with the request for the purpose "of raising, if possible, a small amount of money." When Grimes added his self-image to the cover of the second edition, he obviously follows the fashion of slave narrative publication at his time "to gratify the laudable curiosity [about his enslaved life] which so many of my friends have exhibited to procure a true and perfect *Life of 'Old Grimes'*."<sup>32)</sup> Although he did not work with abolitionists, this helps us assume that Grimes intended to make his book more recognizable to the Northern readers who were sympathetic to abolitionism. According to Casmier-Paz, the slave frontispiece portraits, engravings, and daguerreotypes "contain graphic cues to assist the readers' identification of the image as the likeness of a slave," as these images "evidence multiple icons of realistic, biographical representation available to the period."<sup>33)</sup> Regardless of his apparent indifference in assuring

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31) *Ibid.*, 60.

32) *Ibid.*, 104.

33) Lynn A. Casmier-Paz, "Slave Narratives and the Rhetoric of Author Portraiture," *New Literary History* 34.1 (2003): 92. See the 1855 edition cover of *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* at the North American Slave Narrative

the reader of his reliability, Grimes offers a sense of reality about him through the engraving image on the cover. In the image, the seventy-one-year-old author is sitting with a basket of lottery tickets on his laps. As he defends his job, (“Some people used to say it wasn’t right to sell lottery tickets, but . . . . I didn’t think I was doing wrong”), Grimes proudly exhibits himself as a lottery broker in a decent suit.<sup>34</sup>) While demonstrating his civility in the formal attire, Grimes also visualizes his working-class identity with the basket. The plainness of the image also helps the readers believe his lived experience written in the narrative. Moreover, Grimes details how he had the engraving: “The book, as will be seen, is *illustrated* by a likeness of ‘Old Grimes,’ engraved by Sanford from a Photography by Wells, Daguerrierian [*sic*] Artist.” Not only does he offer the accurate information of the artist, but he also “recommend[s] all readers to visit [the artist’s] rooms, . . . , and then have their own taken.”<sup>35</sup>) This insinuates that Grimes treats his readers as consumers who buy his book and are willing to spend more money on newly produced commodities like photographs.

It must be too hasty if we conclude that Grimes mindlessly serves the readers’ taste in order to maximize profits from the book sale. While he maintains that he “hopes some will buy [his] books from charity” like antislavery sentiments, Grimes adds one more sentence: “[B]ut I am no beggar.”<sup>36</sup>) Grimes’ act of publishing signals his

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digital archive (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/grimes55/menu.html>).

34) Grimes, 110.

35) *Ibid.*, 112.

36) *Ibid.*, 103.

effort to keep the author himself from the inhumane commodification. He administrated the book's publication in the print market through four tactics: securing copyright, strategically marketing, targeting a specific group of audience, and inventing his working-class identity.

First of all, William Grimes obtained a copyright for the narrative to attest to his legal ownership of the narrative. This is the first U.S. copyright claimed for a full-length black-authored book. Susanna Ashton examines the significance of William Grimes' copyright: "[T]he fact that he went to the expense and effort to have his copyright asserted under the jurisdiction of the 1790 Copyright Act, the first federal copyright act in the United States, illustrates how his work marked a transitional moment of national conceptions about citizenry, civic rights, the public sphere, and property itself" because the law required "the U.S. citizenship on the part of the claimant."<sup>37)</sup> However, this assertion exaggerates the eligibility of the claimant. In fact, the Act of 1790 did not limit the claimant to the U.S. citizen. The law states that "the author and authors of any map, chart, book or books already printed within these United States, being a citizen or citizens thereof, or resident within the same, his or their executors, administrators or assigns, who halt or have not transferred to any other person the copyright of such man" can claim a copyright. The Act explicitly allows "resident" as well as "citizen" can have a copyright. Then, "[a] clerk shall be entitled to receive sixty cents from the said author or proprietor, and sixty cents for every copy under seal actually given to such author or proprietor as aforesaid."<sup>38)</sup>

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37) Ashton, 128.

38) United States Copyright Office, *Copyright Act of 1790*, Retrieved on 9 Nov.

According to this law, Grimes worked with a clerk of the District of Connecticut, named Charles A. Ingersoll, as his legal witness. And, he inserted this legal document into the beginning of his narrative.<sup>39)</sup> What Grimes intended to gain by confirming his copyright is rather his property right to the print than his legal citizenship itself. As the narrative describes, the endless legal fights occurred in the “free” state and deprived him of property. He was often sued, jailed and cheated by Northern people, which restricted him physically and financially: “I would sometimes win the case; but the lawyers would alone reap the benefit of it. At other times I lost my case, fiddle and all; besides paying my Attorney.”<sup>40)</sup> Grimes learned the reality in which an impecunious black man was still not accepted as a citizen as equal to whites because of racism and economic caste. He, therefore, presumably wanted to ascertain his ownership of the narrative for securing profits from the intellectual property and printed commodity, the *Life*.

Second, most likely because of his experience as a printer’s slave, William Grimes knew how carefully to plan marketing strategy. One of his owners, Oliver Sturges, hired Grimes out to Phillip David Whoolhopter, a printer and the founder and editor of the *Columbia*

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2014. (<http://copyright.gov/history/1790act.pdf>)

39) The page says, “Be it remembered, that on the twenty-eighth day of January, in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, WILLIAM GRIMES of the said District, hath deposited in this Office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as Author, in the words following, to wit: *The Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself*.” To see the entire page image of the copyright notes, click the link to the digital text of his 1825 narrative at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/grimes25/verso.html>.

40) Grimes, 91.

*Museum*, a Federalist newspaper in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>41)</sup> Even though Grimes worked for the printer during a short period time—roughly one year, he could not have missed the printing and marketing process that the well-known printer performed in Grimes's sight. Moreover, technological innovations and broad reading public's emergence in the early nineteenth century might encourage Grimes, an uneducated and unknown author, to publish his narrative. The flat-bed press appeared in the 1810s and 1820s, and subsequently steam power and the invention of the cylinder press in the following years enabled mechanized manufacturing prints.<sup>42)</sup> Following the example of Olaudah Equiano, Grimes published his book by subscription, a practice that as Vincent Carretta has observed had less popular in the late eighteenth-century book trade except among black authors.<sup>43)</sup> It is not surprising that commercial publishers as well as Grimes were often "more concerned with the genre's market potential than its political efficacy."<sup>44)</sup> He assumed the risk of financing print and tried to minimize financial loss without letting a publisher (usually a bookseller) take the risk of printing costs. At the same time, Grimes sold the book to unsubscribed readers, as it is suggested by the fact that he asked his reader to buy his book and to spread words about it several times in the printed pages. Likewise, even though it is unknown whether or not the sale of the *Life of*

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41) *Ibid.*, 57.

42) Cohen, *Fabrication*, 6.

43) Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2005), 275-95.

44) Philip Gould, "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 21, 23.

*William Grimes* was successful, Grimes was commercially acute enough to carefully design the narrative for sale in addition to obtaining the copyright to it.

Third, William Grimes targets a certain group of readers whom he met and worked with every day, instead of appealing to antislavery advocates and sympathizers. Grimes's supposed readers were urban, working-class men, and young college students who lived in large cities in the New England area. His clients could have stopped by his barbershop where Grimes would suggest a copy of his narrative to them. In doing so, Grimes might wish to have more subscribers for his forthcoming narratives, which he planned and did not come out to the market at last.<sup>45)</sup> As if he tells his life story to his client at the barbershop in unrefined language, the *Life* includes slang and many curses. For instance, he audaciously claims that "the generality of girls are sluttish" or transcribes blasphemous language from his owners such as "[Y]ou damned son of a bitch. God damn you."<sup>46)</sup> Whereas these expressions would discomfort gentle and/or women readers, in this way the narrative could be imbued with the sense of working-class reality and urban masculine culture.

For these reader groups, Grimes carefully created the narrative by infusing several popular genres and styles in the early nineteenth-century U.S. such as the city-mysterious novel, confessional crime narrative, picaresque novel, and gothic discourses. Jeannine M. DeLomabard argues that the confessional crime narrative or "black

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45) Grimes, 91. Grimes says, "Let it not be imagined that the poor and friendless are entirely free from oppression where slavery does not exist. . . This I may do in a future edition, and when I feel less delicacy about mentioning names."

46) *Ibid.*, 97, 77.

gallows literature,” as she calls, must be considered the earlier genre of African American literature because “crime ephemera was one of the primary print means by which the American public apprehended individual black experience from a putatively first-person perspective.”<sup>47)</sup> Certainly, Grimes’s first-person narrator like that of this genre confesses his culpable behaviors. To him, bodily desires often win over spiritual control. He disturbingly admits, “I have been so hungry for meat that I could have eat my mother.”<sup>48)</sup> Violating Christian virtues, he reveals that he enjoys binge drinking and smoking a cigar sometime till blackout occurs.<sup>49)</sup> These aspects of Grimes as a villain would entertain his targeted readers who were accustomed to the stereotyped image of African descent in the confessional crime narrative such as Cotton Mather’s scaffold orations, *The Ordinary of Newgate’s Account of the Behaviour, Confession and Dying Words of the Condemned Criminals* (1679-1772), and other more popular and secular gallows literature in Grimes’s time.<sup>50)</sup> However, while borrowing a black villain’s voice from the confessional crime narrative, Grimes does not show any regret or desire for guidance and redemptive power from God. Rather, he goes further to narrate his heretical behaviors. Grimes visited a fortuneteller to hear about his upcoming fate, confirming the fortuneteller’s credibility: “What she told me proved to be true.”<sup>51)</sup> In addition, a ghost in a haunted place

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47) Jeannine Marie DeLombard, “Apprehending Early African American Literary History,” in Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, 95.

48) Grimes, 41.

49) *Ibid.*, 72.

50) DeLombard, 95-96.

51) Grimes, 48.

bothered him, and he conflicted with one of his peer slaves, Frankee, whom he found to be a witch.<sup>52)</sup> Worse than these instances, Grimes was overjoyed when his cruel mistress died, saying, “She is dead, thank God, and if I ever meet her again, I hope I shall know her.”<sup>53)</sup> This series of his faithless misconducts sound interesting to working-class and male audiences rather than middle-class white women with tender ears.

In addition to his heretical villainies, Grimes amuses the readers by portraying himself as a picaresque hero. According to Carl Ostrowski who studies the intertextuality between the slave narrative and the city-mysteries novel, the two genres rely on similar linguistic and rhetorical features, “since both groups of writers saw themselves as defenders of the powerless and champions of reform against the interests of the wealthy and powerful.”<sup>54)</sup> Grimes’s *Life* well exemplifies this commonality through the characterization of the narrator. In the narrative, Southern slavery serves as a corrupt institution that Grimes as a lonely protagonist should fight for his own survival. He keeps the readers in tension by inviting them to unceasing conspiracy, plots, and revenges happening in the fights between him and other slaves.<sup>55)</sup> In particular, theatricality is crucial to being a picaresque hero. Grimes occasionally disguised himself as a white man in a decent suit to avoid white trooper’s surveillance in

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52) *Ibid.*, 59-60, 51-52.

53) *Ibid.*, 33.

54) Carl Ostrowski, “Slavery, Labor Reform, and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City-Mysteries Novel,” *African American Review* 40.3 (2006): 502.

55) Grimes, 34, 42.

the night.<sup>56)</sup> Furthermore, he tricked his masters to find a better master through pretending to be on hunger strikes and actively bargaining of himself to possible slave buyers. When his fifth master Mr. A. turned out to be cruel, Grimes performed his physical frailty that would force the master to sell him before his value as a slave decreased: "I was determined not to eat anything in his sight, or to his knowledge, in order to make him think he must either sell me or lose me."<sup>57)</sup> Grimes even boldly asked his master, Mr. Bullock, "Are you willing to sell me?"<sup>58)</sup> In comparison to other slave narratives, Grimes is also relatively specific in describing the process of his escape to the North.<sup>59)</sup> This dramatic escape may thrill the readers because the descriptions let them easily visualize Grimes's excitement, anxiety, and fear.

Finally, Grimes proclaims his black working-class identity through which he conflates the apparent differences between slavery in the South and economic caste in the North. His perception of this identity deserves our attention because African Americans in the antebellum North were represented narrowly by renowned black elites, even though the majority of African Americans like Grimes held menial jobs. In this period, black elites expressed apprehension over the life styles of working-class blacks. For example, Frederick Douglass regards urban black people as low-skilled labor forces that would degrade the whole black population in the North. He negatively

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56) *Ibid.*, 71.

57) *Ibid.*, 55.

58) *Ibid.*, 77.

59) *Ibid.*, 81-83.

portrays black Americans in the urban areas: “[Blacks in the Northern cities] engaged as waiters about hotels, barbers or boot-blacks, and the women washing white people’s dirty clothes.”<sup>60</sup>) More explicitly, in the national convention of 1848, one leader spoke that menial occupations “have been so long and universally filled by colored men, as to become a badge of degradation, in that it has established the conviction that colored men are only fit for such employments.”<sup>61</sup>) In these black leaders’ mind, Grimes’ jobs in the Connecticut cities—a barber and lottery broker—must have been considered not out of necessity for a living but as a conscious choice, which would devalue black leaders’ effort for racial uplift. Against this patronizing attitude of black leaders, Grimes candidly and proudly defends the value of his labors.

Grimes’s understanding of his working-class identity elucidates the commonality between slavery and capitalism. When he found a first job in the North, he outspokenly complains: “I found it much harder at this time to be a free man, than I had to be a slave.”<sup>62</sup>) In the end of his first edition, Grimes audaciously “advise[s] no slave to leave his master.”<sup>63</sup>) He also suggests that the readers not imagine “that the poor and friendless are entirely free from oppression where slavery does not exist.”<sup>64</sup>) We may not have to accept literally his opposition to slaves’ escape from the South. However, his comparison

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60) *North Star*, 23 Feb. 1849.

61) “An Address to the Colored People of the United States,” *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 Sept. 1848* (Rochester: John Dick, 1848), 55.

62) Grimes, 87.

63) *Ibid.*, 101.

64) *Ibid.*, 91.

between Southern slavery and Northern capitalism, so called “wage slavery,” could not but trouble abolitionists because he echoes proslavery apologists like George Fitzhugh. Grimes’s narrative debunks the myth of Northern free states as a haven for former slaves in the light of class oppression, as he says that “the disposition to tyrannize over those under us is universal.”<sup>65)</sup> The “us” here refers not only to enslaved blacks but also to Grimes’s readers who had similarly menial jobs in the Northern cities. Invalidating the assumption about black working-class’s choice of “degrading jobs,” he justifies the worth of his labor: “I have had to work hard; [but] I have been often cheated, insulted, abused and injured; yet a black man, if he will be industrious and honest, can get along here as well as anyone.”<sup>66)</sup> The *Life* itself functions as a written document of the black working-class whose voice was barely heard or recorded in the canonized slave narratives.

It is noteworthy that the *Life of William Grimes* functions as the author’s symbolic body, as the book declares that in the beginning the narrative records what the author “has seen, heard, and felt, not a little.”<sup>67)</sup> If the commodification of the author is inevitable in the market place, Grimes attempts to buy back the “fungible,” “alienable,” and “salable” self by strategically merchandizing the *Life of William Grimes* for his own benefits. In this manner, the narrative demonstrates the author’s strong desire to legalize his right to the narrative that stands for Grimes’s personhood. More importantly, it announces his

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65) *Ibid.*, 47.

66) *Ibid.*, 102.

67) *Ibid.*, 29.

legitimate citizenry as a former slave and working-class black man whose laboring body was exposed to dangers of both the dehumanizing institution of slavery and the exploitative capitalism in the North.

He concludes the second edition by exhibiting the narrator as a man of feeling: “[T]hose persons who have oppressed poor Grimes should recollect that although his skin is perhaps a little darker than theirs, he yet has the feelings of a man, and knows when he is abused.”<sup>68)</sup> His sentience never completely lets him be a commodity for sale because feeling is the most obvious evidence of his inalienable personhood. Grimes proclaims his feelings at the end of his narrative again:

If it were not for the stripes on my back which were made while I was a slave, I would in my will leave my skin as a legacy to the government, desiring that it might be taken off and made into parchment, and then bind the constitution of glorious, happy and *free* America. Let the skin of an American slave bind the charter of American liberty!<sup>69)</sup>

The “skin” serves as a tangible mark of the pains that Grimes has undergone. The book-making process including “taking off,” “parching,” and “binding” the skin preserves the physical evidence of Grimes’ pains. Therefore, even though the constitution of America is an insentient object/thing, the skin embodies the constitution through Grimes’ living experiences. At the same time, the skin powerfully reminds us of Grimes’ humanity that no system like slavery, racism,

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68) *Ibid.*, 112.

69) *Ibid.*, 103.

and caste can thingify.

Through the acts of writing and of publishing, William Grimes creates the rhetoric of corporeal envelope to cover his own life story. He believes that neither "White envelope" nor "Black envelope" could represent him. Instead, his figurative skin, as it is literally neither "white" nor "black," covers the *Life of William Grimes*. In the passage, Grimes wishes to offer his skin to "bind the charter of American liberty," but the visible sign of slavery on his scarred back belies the euphonious façade of the American constitution for freedom. His narrative per se reveals the contradictions of a national ideology that could wed liberty and slavery because his body as the tangible evidence of slavery would be "bound" for "the charter of American liberty." Moreover, while mocking the loophole of the United States' founding documents, the author rather enshrines his life story as a symbolic self. By writing and publishing the narrative by himself, Grimes re-collects the fragmented experiences with his identities that are various but homogeneously placed outside of legal power. His flogged yet not torn-away skin metaphorically binds the truthful account of the former slave and working-class black man. This passage demonstrates that his humanity inscribed in the narrative is as divine, legitimate, and priceless as the U.S. constitution.

Whereas William Grimes tries to sell out his life story, his administration for its publication shows that he never gives up his authorial control in the favor of his urban working-class readers' pleasure and idle sympathy. Rather, his strategic publication reinforces his authorship by visualizing the seemingly unreliable narrator as a fully feeling human who deserves the readers' recognition. Therefore,

the price of the book is equal to the price of Grimes's personhood. In the print market, the more the book was sold, the more Grimes could buy back his materialized blackness and claim his inalienable humanity to his contemporary readers. William Grimes was sold and, accordingly, redeemed.

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## Abstract

### **William Grimes' Salable Book and Redeemed Self: *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* and Uncanonical Slave Narrative**

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Famous slave narratives of the 1830s and 1840s, which were edited, outlined, and advertised by abolitionists, typify romantic and nationalistic ideals as if they were epitomized in the runaway slave as symbol of black humanity triumphant over corrupt institutions. However, a few slave narratives, not only written by but also published by their authors without the abolitionist aids, provide us with an important aspect of the slave narrative genre beyond its canons. This essay analyzes William Grimes's *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* (1825, 1855), which was designed explicitly to raise money for its author, who had become penniless as a result of a series of legal fights for his freedom and civil rights. Grimes's narrative exemplifies self-published slave narratives in the U.S. that do not subscribe the abolitionist framing of what the slave narrative should be, but establish African American authorship by redeeming the materialized blackness in the print market.

#### **Key Words**

Slave narratives, William Grimes, self-publication, authorship, and working-class blacks in the antebellum period