

Turner, Jr. (one of the ministers observed by Spencer) of the Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Turner explains homiletical musicality, or black preaching, as a product of culture, kratophany, oppugnancy, and glossa. He, too, employs terms which are not readily accessible to the “lay” ethnic studies scholar, but, in most cases, he endeavors to rephrase and to simplify concepts wherever possible. In addition to the sections already noted, the book includes a select bibliography, an index of first lines, and a general index.

Sacred Symphony, indeed, relates to the ethnic experience, or more specifically, the African American ethnic experience, in that it documents musical excerpts from a style of communication that grew out of the needs of African peoples in a New World. Black preaching, along with other African American products like jazz, rhythm-and-blues and hip-hop music, has been and probably will continue to be looked down upon by European Americans as well as many African Americans; but it neither needs nor wants any excuses or apologies for itself because it is and has been one of the unifying elements of African American communities all over the United States.

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Marion Wilson Starling. *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. Second Edition (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1988) xxx, 375 pp., \$12.95 paper.

This is another reprint of Marion Wilson Starling’s breakthrough study of the slave narrative, which she undertook for her Ph.D. dissertation at New York University in 1946 under the advisorship of Oscar Cargill. During the 1960s and 1970s when slave autobiography became a serious critical endeavor, many scholars referred to Starling’s thorough historical and literary research; however, her dissertation was not published until 1981. Then, Starling’s work became more readily available, and now the paperback edition allows this well-deserved book to reach a wider audience.

One reason the dissertation took so long to be published is explained by Starling herself in the prologue in the first edition. Surprisingly enough, it was her family that stood in the way. Belonging to the genteel tradition of African American cultural society, her family never forgave her for wanting to teach black students and for concentrating her scholarly pursuits on slave narrative studies.

The value of much of Starling’s work lies in the monumental research

she undertook to dig up the hundreds of forgotten pieces of slave testimonies scattered around in archival collections, nineteenth-century periodicals, confessional and abolitionist accounts, and on the thousands of pages documenting the slave narrative interviews collected by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s. To examine her findings is to appreciate the great task she assumed and the great service she gave to historical and literary scholarship of the slave narrative work. Her contribution was a great act of recovery for a largely unknown record of a people's past.

Although her treatment of the slave narratives has been superceded by the recent critical analyses conducted by poststructuralist and deconstructionist scholars who situate the slave works in the tradition and genre of autobiography, Starling's detailed summaries of the many accounts provide the reader with a good deal of information about the content of the narratives. She also deals with the problem of separating the spurious works from those that were truly produced by ex-slaves.

Starling's view is that all the slave accounts contain historical significance but possess very little literary quality. However, she does find "passages of literary merit" in "many of the narratives, and a number of them possess considerable literary worth." She gives Frederick Douglass's autobiography the highest claim to artistic expression. What is surprising about Starling's thesis concerning the slave narrative is revealed when she writes: "Social history apart, therefore, the significance of the narratives rests largely upon their germinating influence on American letters in the 1850s and 1860s and upon their revelation of the mind of the American Negro author as a slave." She sees Harriet Beecher Stowe's achievement in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the literary high point in the history of the slave narratives because it was their influence that made Stowe's work possible. Starling believes the slave narratives themselves were becoming increasingly fictionalized and that "the influence of these narratives upon Mrs. Stowe's masterpiece and its successors needs to be written."

Scholars today have made us more aware of the literary qualities of the slave narratives because they are able to use evaluative tools devised from critical philosophies and methods that were unknown to Starling back in 1946. We understand now that certain fictional techniques are essential in autobiographical writing, and thus what Starling mistook as the fictionalizing of the narratives was, in many cases, just a matter of technique. However, Starling was on the right track when she called for the study of the slave narrative's influence on future writing. It is widely perceived now that the slave autobiography did and continues to have a significant effect on numerous fictional and nonfictional works of American literature.

To read Starling's pioneering work is to come face to face with the raw material she unearthed for our benefit. She brought to our attention a misplaced part in American history and revealed the rich literary

treasures that are being proclaimed now by enlightened critics of American writing.

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H. Nigel Thomas. *From Folklore to Fiction: A Study of Folk Heroes and Rituals in the Black American Novel. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, Number 118.* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) xii, 200 pp. \$37.95.

The complex and important relationship between African American folklore and African American literature is the focus of this thoughtful, well-written book. Many African American writers have drawn from folklore, and Thomas sets out to demonstrate--by analyzing specific examples--some of the traditions that have developed in the use of folklore in African American writing.

Thomas provides a fine introduction to the principal forms of African American folklore. From tricksters to preachers, from verbal lore to musical lore, from religious lore to secular lore, Thomas covers a wide range of essential themes in a succinct and informative manner. This section would make a good general introduction for beginning students in African American folklore or culture.

Thomas then turns to an exploration of the ways in which literary characters invoke the qualities of folk characters. There is a chapter on such archetypal characters as the folk preacher and the "bad nigger," and another on the trickster. A long chapter is devoted to rituals, with special attention on blues and folk sermons. As Thomas puts it, "No other aspect of Afro-American reality is as potent as the ritual. It is inevitable, then, that in works where the characters embody very definite traits from black American legendary heroes, Afro-American rituals also abound, for the one complements the other." The development of the dramatic treatment of rituals in literature is discussed, and some important and interesting parallels (as well as contrasts) are drawn between such rituals as blues performances and sermons.

In each chapter Thomas takes the reader from early (in some cases nineteenth century) to modern approaches, documenting the shift from the rather direct and somewhat "clumsy" uses of folklore in early writings to the highly sophisticated, politically informed symbolism of current works. He argues that African American writers have always had to operate within a European American context. The trick was always to balance the (often conflicting) demands of publishers and audiences. Early writers, for example, were probably pushed by