IN THE FIRST chapter of Clotel, the first known novel by an African American, the eponymous sixteen-year-old daughter of Thomas Jefferson stands on the block as the auctioneer drives up her price by calling out her virtues. The first bid is $500, prompting the auctioneer to belittle the crowd’s ignorance of the going rate for such “fancy girls” and to vouch for her “good moral character.” Bids rise to $700. He notes her intelligence. Bids rise to $800. He promises that she is a “devoted Christian, and perfectly trustworthy.” Bids rise to $1200. Finally, he affirms that she is “pure” and chaste, a “virtuous creature.” Her virginity pushes the price to $1500. Sold. In itemizing a woman’s virtues like so many articles in a bill of lading, Brown dramatized how slavery commodified people, body and soul.¹

But then the ground shifts under our feet. In summing up the auction scene, the narrator reports that Clotel’s “Christianity [sold] for three hundred; and her chastity and virtue for four hundred dollars more.” The math is off. It was her Christianity (and trustworthiness) that ratcheted up the price four hundred dollars; her chastity, three. The discrepancy suggests Brown’s ambivalence about how to represent the market value of a slave girl’s virginity relative to her piety. His earlier and later versions of this scene reveal that he was continually revising these two values and their relationship to one another.² Regardless of which virtue cashed in higher, the perpetual juxtaposition of virginity and piety implied that they were linked, while also paradoxically hinting at future sexual compliance. This tension is especially
evident in Clotel: A Tale of the Southern States (1864), a redacted version geared to Union soldiers, in which the girl’s religiosity is mentioned both before and after her sexual purity, a redundancy that makes the second reference to religion—the slave’s ability to “make an excellent prayer”—sound strangely suggestive, as if the image of the slave girl on her knees promised sexual favors. “The piety of the Slave is to be a good servant,” Brown had told the women of Salem, and for slave women, serving the master could include a great deal.3

If the shifting values and freighted rhetoric surrounding piety in Clotel’s inaugural scene suggests that Brown regarded slave religion with a certain cynicism, it also announces the novel’s investment in invoking Christianity in hopes of rousing the sympathies of white readers and converting them to abolitionism. Though typically treated as a secular novel, Clotel is infused with religious characters and language.4 This show of piety seems to be not the result of Brown’s own religious fervor, but a canny rhetorical strategy inspired by the unprecedented success of Uncle Tom’s Cabin.5

During 1852 and 1853, Stowe’s novel dominated the antislavery conversation in Britain, where Brown had been living since attending the International Peace Congress in Paris in 1849. Nowhere was this more evident than in the pages of the London-based Anti-Slavery Advocate, the monthly, eight-page newspaper of the Anglo-American Anti-Slavery Society, an organization Brown had helped found with the British Unitarian reformer and ophthalmic surgeon John Bishop Estlin and a handful of others dedicated to immediate emancipation.6 One of the paper’s primary goals was to stoke the antislavery flames sparked by Stowe’s bombshell. References to the novel and its author filled the first issue in October 1852. One article begged readers not to “allow the feelings which the thrilling scenes and fearful developments of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ have excited in their minds, to pass away without some desire, some effort” to assist the American antislavery cause; another took the London Times reviewer to task for caviling at Stowe’s representations of slavery; and the last page featured an advertisement promoting antislavery bazaars as a means for readers whose hearts had been touched by the novel to advance the slave’s deliverance.7 From the second issue forward, the paper ran a quotation from the novel in the masthead: “Nothing of tragedy can be spoken, can be conceived, that equals the frightful reality of scenes daily and hourly acting in the United States, beneath the shadow of American law and the shadow of the Cross of Christ.” Stowe loomed large in the paper throughout 1852 and 1853, as the paper defended the novel against the criticism of the London Times reviewer; tallied the number of copies sold in various editions; described how one publisher employed “400
men, women, and children, constantly occupied in binding the work”; corre-
roborated Stowe’s horrific representations of slavery, including relating the
story of a “real life” Uncle Tom whipped to death for refusing to renounce
his Christian faith; noted the success of the novel in Paris, Italy, Spain, and
Germany; reviewed the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; reported on Stowe’s visit
to England in 1853; and printed passages from one of Stowe’s speeches.  

That Brown himself found a valuable ally in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is suggested
in the paper’s report that he lectured on it to four hundred people at the
Athenaeum in Newport, on the Isle of Wight, in February 1853, and in his
sending William Lloyd Garrison a letter that May, reprinted in the *Liberator*,
in which he declared that the novel had “come down upon the dark abodes
of slavery like a morning’s sunlight, unfolding to view its enormities in a
manner which has fastened all eyes upon the ‘peculiar institution,’ and awaken-
ing sympathy in hearts that never before felt for the slave.” The plaudit, an
unattributed borrowing from an antislavery festival advertisement, reflects
Brown’s recognition that Stowe’s novel was a game-changer for the antislav-
ery movement.

What Brown learned from Stowe’s success that had not been at all clear
before the spring of 1852 was that a *novel* could be more effective in creating
antislavery feeling than straight-up facts or speeches and, more pointedly,
that the novel should be sentimental and preachy. Brown took this lesson
to heart. *Clotel* abounds in abolitionist sermonic rhetoric, voiced by Peck,
Georgiana, Snyder, and the narrator. With antislavery sermonizing, Brown
presented readers with the religious arguments against the institution, and
with proslavery sermonizing, the role that organized Christianity played in
giving it moral sanction. He stressed the latter point in the novel’s preface,
arguing that if high-status individuals, “especially professed Christians,” did
not own slaves, slavery would have been abolished long ago and that the
mission of the friend of the slave should be to convince “the wise, the pru-
dent, and the pious to withdraw their support” from it. In treating Chris-
tians’ support of slavery as a prime reason for its continuance, Brown both
picked up on a theme Stowe had stressed in her *Concluding Remarks*, where
she had castigated the “Church of Christ,” and reiterated the critique of pro-
slavery Christians he had first presented in lecturing for the Western New
York Anti-Slavery Society and Garrison’s Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Soci-
ety in the 1840s. Speaking to the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, for
instance, he had declared that a slave-trader’s joining the church was “only
an evidence that when Wickedness, with a purse of gold, knocks at the door
of the Church, she seldom, if ever, is refused admission.” Shaming churches
that supported slavery and celebrating those that opposed it was also a cen-
central strategy of the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, which ran as its first major section, typically on the front page, a “Religious” department that detailed in turn where each of nearly two dozen American denominations and religious organizations, including Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, Roman Catholics, and the American Tract Society, stood on the slavery question. In short, Brown and his circle saw winning the support of Christians, individually and collectively, as a moral linchpin in the abolitionist campaign.

Although Brown found it necessary to preach in *Clotel*, he did not feel compelled to write his own sermons. The novel’s sermonic rhetoric is a complex tapestry of verbatim excerpts from dozens of nineteenth-century sermons, lectures, pamphlets, periodical essays, and other previously published writing. These silent borrowings, long unrecognized, are mappable today only because of the archives of digitized texts now at our fingertips. The Conclusion acknowledges the novel’s debt to the stories of slaves Brown had met as a boatman on Lake Erie, to characters mentioned in abolitionist journals, and to part of a short story by Lydia Maria Child’s (“The Quadroons”), but his subsequent “Having thus acknowledged my resources [. . . .]” hurries the reader rather too quickly past the issue of his textual borrowing, in particular the fact that the novel includes vast tracts of dialogue and commentary lifted from published writing. If Brown’s lack of candor about the extent of his borrowing reinforces the image of him as a “trickster,” it also shows his political seriousness in that it allowed him to build on the antislavery sentiment that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had ignited by ventriloquizing a range of theological and biblical arguments foreign to the abolitionist discourse of his lectures and autobiographies.¹³

Some students of *Clotel* may be dismayed to find that its borrowings go so deep, but the mosaic of sermonic passages in the novel can be read as evidence of Brown’s resourcefulness and artistic ingenuity, as well as of his peculiar moment in literary history. Ezra Greenspan explains that Brown worked much like a newspaper editor, drawing from “a common pool of uncopylefted, unrestricted print information” and recombining these texts into new configurations.¹⁴ The extent of these recombinations and reconfigurations in *Clotel* should prompt us to a fuller awareness of the novel’s liminality in the history of African American narrative. The 1850s were, as William L. Andrews writes, a transitional time for black narrative, when, leaving straight autobiographical narratives behind, it “broke most profoundly with discursive conventions and white expectations in an attempt to find new ways of authorizing itself.”¹⁵ To borrow in *Clotel* as extensively and silently as Brown did, and to borrow sermons, which were supposed to express one’s sincerity and conviction, was indeed a break with convention, though one designed
less as a gesture of self-authorization than as a pragmatic, efficient strategy for writing an inspiring antislavery novel.

In incorporating proslavery sermonic rhetoric, Brown was, as Robert Levine writes of his relation to sources in general, “highly aggressive [ . . . ] wresting them from their place in white supremacist culture.” The term pastiche is especially apt for these borrowed proslavery passages, given how the novel mocks and otherwise subverts them. However, in using antislavery religious discourse, Brown’s approach was much more appreciative and inclusive, reflecting the fact that he opposed white supremacist culture alongside a host of white and black, male and female abolitionists dedicated to ending slavery and promoting racial justice. His sermonic novel orchestrates a vast chorus of fellow laborers that included such eloquent speakers as Garrison, Theodore Dwight Weld, Sarah Grimké, and Robert Purvis. *Clotel* is thus not merely, in Henry Louis Gates’s words, “an abolitionist’s sermon,” but many abolitionists’ sermons. In this respect, Brown’s novel is continuous with other African Atlantic texts, which, as Heather Russell explains, are often polyvocal, a “communal, participatory narrative enactment,” with many voices “shar[ing] the stage.” As stage manager, Brown assigned his borrowed sermons with care, typically giving Georgiana more theologically conservative rhetoric than that of the narrator. This tendency may suggest his own liberal religious sympathies, but personal expression was not the point. The purpose of *Clotel*’s religious rhetoric was to win Christians for abolitionism by addressing them in their own moral and religious idiom.

**Exposing the proslavery preacher**

The only ordained minister dramatized in *Clotel* is the Connecticut native John Peck, a “popular preacher” who enjoys “a large congregation with a snug salary” in Natchez, Mississippi. That Peck is a minister is almost gratuitous, as he never preaches a sermon or leads a church service, but his vocation allows him to serve as the novel’s representative Southern Christian gentleman—and consummate moral hypocrite. The initial characterizations of Peck are favorable: he makes sure his slaves are “well fed and not overworked”; keeps his overseer in line; and is an amiable host, loving father, and upstanding citizen who gives generously to charity. Only after granting these stereotypical virtues of Southern gentlemen does the novel reveal that he is “nevertheless, a most cruel master.” Besides refusing to sell Currer to her daughter Althesa, he drives his field hands until late at night (a statement difficult to reconcile with the earlier claim that he doesn’t overwork them),
hunts his escaped slaves with vicious dogs, and has shot to death a slave who fought off the dogs with a club. Like Lippard peeling back the layers on Jervis, or Hawthorne on Dimmesdale, Brown demythologized and deautho-
rized the figure of the pious, respectable clergyman. Going beyond them, he showed how supposed gentlemanliness could go hand-in-hand with a com-
mitment to an unjust, death-dealing social institution.

The tension between Peck’s refined persona and objectionable proslavery ideology is most fully articulated in two lengthy speeches drawn verbatim from articles in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* from the late 1840s. Such extensive excerpting of proslavery writers reflected Brown’s practice of let-
ting slavery’s apologists stand self-condemned through their own words. As he had explained in quoting advertisements from Southern newspapers in his lectures, “I do not present to you the assertion of the North [ . . . ] or my own assertion; but I bring before you the testimony of the Slaveholders them-
-selves,—and by their own testimony must they stand or fall.”21 Using lines that first appeared in a *Southern Presbyterian Review* book review denounc-
ing the French Revolution, Peck maintains that Adam and Eve had forfeited whatever “natural rights” they had at their creation by disobeying God in the Garden of Eden, which means that “Rights and wrongs are necessarily the creatures of society”—both “artificial and voluntary.”22 By incorporating this politico-theological reasoning into *Clotel*, Brown laid bare the reaction-
ary political philosophy underpinning slavery—a philosophy that rejected the foundational American principle of, in Peck’s (and the review’s) term, “inalienable rights.”23 Although Peck’s tone here is so reasonable as to risk backfiring on *Clotel’s* antislavery project, especially for an audience in Brit-
ain, where the French Revolution was viewed with more skepticism than in the United States, Brown apparently wagered that readers would see through the seeming eloquence and rationality and resist the anti-democratic logic.

In a second long, religiously infused proslavery speech, Peck dismisses Carlton’s defense of natural rights and declares that he stands with the Bible because it is older than the Declaration of Independence. Yet instead of then arguing for slavery from the Bible, he argues for the necessity of providing slaves with religious instruction—a risky choice on Brown’s part, as even antislavery advocates might contend that as long as slavery remained in force, slaves should be taught Christianity. Brown presented this proslavery argument in top form; Peck’s speech comes from the notable James Thorn-
well, one of the South’s leading evangelical apologists, a firm believer in social order who advocated a proslavery position stressing the moral and religious obligations of masters to their slaves.24 Using Thornwell’s words, Peck argues that the Bible establishes rights only in connection with duties
and that along with the right of slavery comes the duty of giving slaves religious instruction. But the core argument is less biblical than sociological: “our domestic institutions can be maintained against the world, if we but allow Christianity to throw its broad shield over them.” That is, if Christianity does not protect slavery, the world will abandon it, a point very similar to the one Brown stressed in his preface to *Clotel*, when he blamed the persistence of slavery on Christians’ support for it. By incorporating this revelatory passage from Thornwell, Brown stressed that politics and strategy, not ethics, underlay Southern concern for slaves’ religious instruction.

Perhaps to reduce the risk of Peck being read sympathetically, Brown concluded the speech from Thornwell with two lines of his own, both charged with irony for antislavery sympathizers: “Why, is it not better that Christian men should hold slaves than unbelievers? We know how to value the bread of life, and will not keep it from our slaves.” To anyone familiar with Brown’s *Narrative* or other slave autobiographies, the answer to the first question would have been a resounding “no.” As Frederick Douglass had blasted the myth of God-fearing slaveowners, “[O]f all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest, basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others.” Brown’s own narrative, prefatory to *Clotel*, also highlighted the hypocrisy of proslavery Christians, describing, for instance, how the slave catcher who arrested him and his mother held family prayers with the slaves in custody under his roof. Brown also seems to have counted on readers hearing the irony beneath Peck’s assertion that Christian slaveowners would not keep the “bread of life” from their slaves—on their knowing the realities of a grimly enforced religion of servility and, more literally, insufficient food.

Brown satirized proslavery preaching most directly with the missionary preacher Snyder, though here, too, extensive excerpting from a proslavery writer risked undermining the book’s antislavery message. The first four-fifths of Snyder’s lengthy sermon to the slaves comes from two sermons in Thomas Bacon’s *Sermons Addressed to Masters and Servants* (1813), from which Brown lifted and pieced together passages focusing on servitude. The resultant motley sermon exposed how white self-interest dictated the parameters of religious instruction for slaves: Snyder tells the slaves to serve their masters as they themselves would want to be served, to serve diligently and not as “eye-servants,” to accept their condition as ordained by God, and to bear “correction” patiently, whether deserved or not. Yet even considering that Brown selected some of the most damning passages from Bacon, including a proslavery sermon was risky, especially given that Snyder takes as his text not an obscure verse from Numbers or Leviticus, but the Golden Rule:
“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.”

For abolitionists, using this precept to direct slave behavior was an outrage and the most blatant hypocrisy. But for those uncertain whether Christianity supported slavery, connecting forced servitude to this foundational Christian ethic might have sounded seductively reasonable. It was a gamble to bank on nineteenth-century Protestants seeing the fallacy of Snyder’s applying to slaves such familiar ideas as providentially decreed social positions, the spiritual hazards of “riches and power,” and God’s compensating for unjust punishment on earth with justice in heaven.

To prevent readers from interpreting Snyder’s borrowed sermon too generously, Brown undercut it on every side. Most cruelly, Snyder lacks the height associated with authority; he is described as “exceedingly low in stature” and called the “low squatty preacher.” He also has little respect for his listeners or concern for their spiritual well-being. He rattles up in his one-horse wagon at the last minute and begins preaching without hymn or prayer or affectionate address; Bacon, in contrast, at least opens, “My well-beloved Black Brethren and Sisters.” As for the sermon itself, while the bulk comes from Bacon verbatim, Brown added a final section of his own to underscore the absurdity of proslavery Christian teaching (from “Lastly, you should serve your masters faithfully” to “Now let me exhort you once more to be faithful”). There he laid it on thick, as Snyder tells his audience how lucky they are to be slaves, unlike their fathers in Africa, who were “poor ignorant and barbarous creatures,” or their owners, who went to great trouble and expense to outfit slave ships and who must endure such vicissitudes of capitalism as bank busts and crop failures: “Oh, my dear black brothers and sisters, you are indeed a fortunate and blessed people.”

Brown undermined Snyder’s sermon most aggressively in the listeners’ response to it. Though Snyder’s pulpit style is just the sort slaves were believed to like—he speaks with “gesticulations, sonorous voice, and occasionally [brings] his fist down upon the table with the force of a sledge hammer”—the slaves are listless and bored. They lounge under the apple trees sleeping and eating hazelnuts. Afterward they critique the sermon as a performance to impress Carlton and reject its racist message. Aunt Dafney says it best: “I got no notion of dees white fokes, no how [. . .] Dey all de time tellin’
dat de Lord made us for to work for dem, and I don’t believe a word of it.”

When another adds that the people who wrote the Bible were “great fools” for putting in it nothing but “servants obey yer masters,” Uncle Simon corrects him, telling him that he heard it read in Maryland and knows there is more in there than that. The slaves are ignorant, but they are not stupid. Whoever reviewed *Clotel* for the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*—perhaps Brown himself—presented this post-sermon parley as a highlight of the book, excerpting it in its entirety.

After this exercise in missionary preaching, Snyder continues to sermonize at a dinner with Carlton and Huckelby, Peck’s overseer, but now to a different tune. Among whites, he drops the proslavery rhetoric that pays his bills to advocate for labor solidarity and education. Following anecdotes that center on the ignorance of poor Southern whites, he indicts the South for not respecting education and industry: “No community can be prosperous, where honest labour is not hounoured. No society can be rightly constituted, where the intellect is not fed. Whatever institution reflects discredit on industry, whatever institution forbids the general culture of the understanding, is palpably hostile to individual rights, and to social well-being.” These moralistic declarations come straight from a paper by John Gorham Palfrey, one of Massachusetts’s leading antislavery voices of the late 1840s. Ordained a Unitarian minister, Palfrey was a Boston luminary who had served as pastor of the Brattle Street Church, editor of the *Christian Examiner* and of the *North American Review*, Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard, member of the Massachusetts General Court, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and U.S. Congressman. In assigning Palfrey’s words to Snyder, Brown recast the rebuke of a distant Northern magistrate and littérateur as the common-sense observations of a middle-class Northerner (Snyder hails from the Mohawk Valley of New York) who has witnessed daily life in the South. Brown may have believed in the self-incriminating power of proslavery discourse, but he hedged his bets by creating a proslavery preacher who, off the clock, undermines his own sermons by wielding Northern antislavery arguments.

**Antislavery preaching**

Where in *Clotel* is the black preacher who talks back to Snyder and Peck? It’s a natural question given the importance of preachers to antebellum African American culture and to later African American fiction. “The Preacher,” as W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1903, “is the most unique personality developed
by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist—all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number.” Brown, it seems, had little respect for this powerful personality or, indeed, for black folk religion. The only black preacher in sight is Uncle Simon, a dubious figure who wins the admiration of his peers—“Uncle Simon can beat dat sermon all to pieces”—but whom the novel accords scant authority. His vocation is barely acknowledged (“Now Uncle Simon was himself a preacher, or at least he thought so”), and he is notably lacking in Christian humility, being “rather pleased than otherwise, when he heard others spoken of in a disparaging manner.” Worse, Simon’s preaching has taught his fellow Poplar Farm slaves nothing. Ned thinks the Bible contains only “slaves obey yer masters,” and the rest dismiss Snyder’s sermon only because they know it works to extend Peck’s mastery, not because they have any better understanding of Christian faith. On the neighboring plantation of Jones, the slaves supposedly do their own preaching and hold religious meetings whenever they wish, yet here, too, the slaves are ignorant of Christian texts and doctrines. Asked “who made you,” a slave replies, “De overseer told us last night who made us, but indeed I forgot the gentmum’s name.” Another, asked, “Do you serve the Lord?,” answers no, he has served only Mr. Jones. A third thinks she knew John the Baptist in Old Kentuck. After letting readers have their laugh with Carlton, the novel uses Georgiana’s sorrow to model a more sensitive response: “She did not even smile [. . .] but seemed sore at heart that such ignorance should prevail in their midst.” Although these dismissals of slave preaching make Brown seem unappreciative of the creativity and community-building power of black spiritual leadership, they served his abolitionist goals. Whereas Stowe’s Tom fed arguments that saints like him proved that slavery must be good for the soul, the evidence of Simon and the unnamed slave preachers on the Jones plantation grant slavery no such redemptive power. Lacking literacy and freedom, the novel says, African Americans will be lamentably ignorant of even the most basic Christian teachings.

The main antislavery preacher in this novel is a white woman: not-so-little Georgiana, Peck’s attractive 18-year-old daughter. That Brown made Georgiana an adult, if barely, rather than a child not only opened up obvious marriage-plot possibilities, but also affirmed the right of a woman to preach to men and to play a role of moral leadership in the antislavery moment. Each of Georgiana’s three long speeches against slavery (in chapters 6, 10, and 21) is a compilation of texts from contemporary sources, a compositional strategy that allowed Brown to mount detailed arguments from Christian premises he did not typically grant. His lack of concern for theological
fine points is evident in the inconsistencies in Georgiana’s theology, which, while often theologically conservative, cannot be identified with a particular denomination or religious perspective. Brown’s theory seems to have been that if one theological argument failed to persuade a reader to oppose slavery, another might stick.

Georgiana’s antislavery teaching in Chapter 6 is arguably the moral center of the novel. In response to her father’s pontificating about the unbiblicalism of natural rights and the necessity of religious instruction for slaves, she launches into a speech equating the will of God with whatever “produces, secures, or extends human welfare” and holding that everyone has a duty to act accordingly. Since slavery does not further this end, God does not will it, and humanity should not, either. The moral reasoning is thorough, even belabored, less the voice of a young woman fresh from boarding school than that of a clergyman—as indeed it was. Georgiana’s speech comes straight from Congregational minister George Allen’s *Resistance to Slavery Every Man’s Duty*. Allen was the theologically liberal, though not Unitarian, pastor of a church in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, from 1824 to 1840, who organized his fellow ministers in central Massachusetts to oppose slavery and helped found the Free Soil party in 1848. Brown cut off the original speech just as Allen was getting warmed up—before Georgiana might begin to sound too declamatory. After the passage Brown excerpted (ending with the question, “Can that then be right, be well doing—can that obey God’s behest, which makes man a slave? which dooms him and all his posterity, in limitless generations, to bondage, to unrequited toil through life?”), the original continues with fifteen more rhetorical questions, pressing ministers to ask themselves whether God could support an institution in which a person was, to paraphrase just a few of the outrages Allen listed, subject to the “will of a despot,” unable to hold property, deprived of a country that offered protection, denied a voluntary home, cut off from parents, forced to submit the body, regardless of sex, to the unquestioned will of a master or overseer, and starved physically, mentally, and spiritually. The fiery litany of slavery’s injustices is overwhelming as oratory, let alone polite conversation.

Brown affirmed Georgiana’s propriety and femininity and bolstered her persuasive power by concluding her first antislavery speech with a borrowed Christian principle whose ethics, strangely enough, would seem to run counter to his own. After citing and glossing a favorite Bible verse of antislavery advocates (“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. This single passage of Scripture should cause us to have respect to the rights of the slave”), Georgiana declares, “True Christian love is of an enlarged, disinterested nature.
It loves all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, without regard to colour or condition.” These lines come from Thomas Reade’s Christian Retirement: Or Spiritual Exercises of the Heart (1810), a devotional volume reprinted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Brown’s one, crucial change was to add the phrase “without regard to colour or condition,” thereby politicizing the pietism, a point underscored when Peck rebukes his daughter, “Georgiana, my dear, you are an abolitionist; your talk is fanaticism.” But as in so many passages in Clotel, Brown has played a risky game in incorporating others’ words. The implication that white Christians have a special obligation to love their black brothers and sisters in Christ—that “True Christian love [. . .] loves all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity”—resonates with Brown’s criticism elsewhere of churchgoers who abuse the slaves they worship alongside, but it also suggests that those who do not “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” a category that would exclude, for instance, the plantation slaves kept ignorant of Christian teaching, fall outside the obligations of Christian love. What good does a Christians-first ethic do for those who cannot answer “who made you”? Though one assumes that Brown intended simply to affirm color-blind love as a core Christian principle, Reade’s wording reflects a parochialism not otherwise endorsed in the novel.

In Chapter 10, Georgiana resumes preaching to convince Carlton, now a Christian, that Christianity does not support slavery. This sermon strikes a more theologically conservative note than the one in Chapter 6. After beginning with a text, Acts 17:26 (“God has created of one blood all the nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth”), she moves to the doctrine: “To claim, hold, and treat a human being as property is a felony against God and man.” It is the first line of Chapter 9, “Scripture Argument Against Slavery,” in Methodist abolitionist minister La Roy Sunderland’s Anti-Slavery Manual (1837). The next few lines of the sermon veer back and forth between unmarked quotation and lines original to Brown. Brown continues to develop Georgiana’s antislavery doctrine with “The Christian religion is opposed to slaveholding in its spirit and its principles; it classes men-stealers among murderers,” the words of the late-eighteenth-century abolitionist and Anglican bishop Beilby Porteous, spoken during a debate on slavery in the House of Lords in 1806 and widely quoted by American abolitionists. Perhaps eager to preserve Georgiana’s ethos as feminine and even-tempered, Brown truncated Porteous’s speech, leaving off the declaration that Christianity classed “men-stealers among murderers of fathers and of mothers, and the most profane criminals upon earth.” Instead, he had Georgiana move on to the application, with phrasing that seems to be his own: “and it
is the duty of all who wish to meet God in peace, to discharge that duty in spreading these [antislavery] principles. Let us not deceive ourselves into the idea that slavery is right because it is profitable to us.” Georgiana then circles back to doctrine, now borrowed from Theodore Dwight Weld’s *The Bible Against Slavery* (1838): “Slaveholding is the highest possible violation of the eighth commandment. To take from a man his earnings, is theft; but to take the earner is a compound, lifelong theft.”  

Again, Brown cuts off his source before it grows too vehement for Georgiana—before, that is, Weld’s melodramatic description of that lifelong theft as “supreme robbery, that vaults up the climax at a leap—the dread, terrific, giant robbery, that towers among other robberies a solitary horror, monarch of the realm.” Georgiana presses instead a renewal of the application, this time with a reference to Christ as Redeemer, a theological move targeting Christian readers: “and we who profess to follow in the footsteps of our Redeemer, should do our utmost to extirpate slavery from the land. For my own part, I shall do all I can.”  

These decisive lines, which appear to be Brown’s own, would seem to conclude Georgiana’s sermon. Amen, and cue the hymn. 

But Brown had more antislavery sermons on tap. Georgiana continues preaching to Carlton for another several hundred words in language that draws largely on *An Address to Free Colored Americans* (1837), an essay prepared by a committee of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in New York City in May 1837 and often attributed to Sarah Grimké, one of the committee’s leading members. Grimké might well have come to mind as Brown created a young Southern woman opposed to slavery. Raised in an affluent, slaveowning Charleston home and troubled from childhood by the injustice of slavery, Grimké had as a young woman taken the radical step of becoming a Quaker and relocating to Philadelphia. Her younger sister Angelina moved North as well, and in 1836 they would become the nation’s first female abolitionist agents, lecturing for the American Anti-Slavery Society. As an address to free blacks, Grimké’s speech is not obviously apropos for Georgiana’s attempt to convert Carlton to antislavery, and one suspects that Brown placed it here after first considering it for Georgiana’s speechmaking in Chapter 21, when she addresses her newly freed slaves. The language taken from Grimké’s address is both plainly sermonic and among the most biblicist and Christocentric in the novel. Georgiana (parroting Grimké) begins by referencing several scriptural passages, most notably Acts 1:8 and Acts 1:14, in which Jesus promises his disciples that the Holy Ghost will come upon them, and they respond by fervently praying “with the women”—a gender inclusiveness that helps justify the preachiness of Grimké’s, and Georgiana’s, subsequent speech. After the biblical text
comes the doctrine to “consider the poor,” along with the promise from Ephesians 3:8 that those who do so will be “blessed upon the earth.” Georgiana then invokes Matthew 25:40 to narrow in on the antislavery doctrine: “Does not the language, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me,’ belong to all who are rightly engaged in endeavouring to unloose the bondman’s fetters?” Finally, there are the anaphoric exhortations of Georgiana’s application-heavy peroration, still borrowed from Grimké, through which Brown addressed Christian readers in their own terms:

Shall we not then do as the apostles did? Shall we not, in view of the two millions of heathen in our very midst, in view of the souls that are going down in an almost unbroken phalanx to utter perdition, continue in prayer and supplication, that God will grant us the supplies of his Spirit to prepare us for that work which he has given us to do? Shall not the wail of the mother as she surrenders her only child to the grasp of the ruthless kidnapper, or the trader in human blood, animate our devotions? Shall not the manifold crimes and horrors of slavery excite more ardent outpourings at the throne of grace to grant repentance to our guilty country, and permit us to aid in preparing the way for the glorious second advent of the Messiah, by preaching deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to those who are bound?

This speech allowed Brown to invoke a range of religious arguments for abolition that he did not make elsewhere and that he may not have believed: that the religiously uninstructed slaves were “heathens” on their way to perdition, that prayer should be a central antislavery activity, that God’s spirit animated human antislavery effort, and that one should “preach deliverance to the captives” to prepare for Christ’s second coming. Even after Carlton leaves, with a tear testifying to the sermon’s efficacy rolling down his cheek, the preaching continues as Georgiana explains to her father the incompatibility of Christianity and slavery. Her long, theologically dense monologue pieces together passages from Hartford Congregationalist minister William Weston Patton’s sermon *Slavery, the Bible, Infidelity: Pro-slavery Interpretations of the Bible: Productive of Infidelity* (1846) and Grimké’s *Address to Free Colored Americans*, with the excerpts from Patton developing the argument that convincing skeptics of Christianity requires Christians to reject slavery as unbiblical and those from Grimké warning that the nation has failed to heed God’s demand to proclaim liberty to all. Through these borrowed texts Brown presented sustained theological arguments outside his usual discursive range, which
he then reinforced through other characters’ responses and the narrator’s commentary. After Georgiana speaks, Peck insists on his right to exercise his own judgment but also agrees to say nothing around Carlton about the Bible sanctioning slavery, while the narrator goes a step further and asserts that in speaking Georgiana has “accomplished a noble work” and is her father’s “superior and [. . . ] teacher.”

Georgiana’s final sermon appears in Chapter 21, “The Christian’s Death,” as her slaves gather around her deathbed. Nearly all of this speech comes from William Lloyd Garrison’s *An Address, Delivered Before the Free People of Color* (1831), which Garrison wrote based on speeches he had delivered to African American political groups in Northeastern cities in 1831. This speech uses sermonic techniques characteristic of Garrison, including biblical quotation, oratorical sentence patterns, and a tone of moral certainty. Georgiana’s speech is a strategic précis of it, one that hits the major points while passing over counsel less urgent for the antislavery cause, such as Garrison’s admonition to form societies for moral improvement, or less suited to a young woman, such as the call to join forces politically. In adapting his mentor’s address, Brown also sought to minimize the moral burden of newly freed slaves. While he gave Georgiana Garrison’s “I dare not predict how far your example may affect the welfare of [. . . ] your brethren yet in bondage,” he withheld key phrases in the latter half of Garrison’s sentence: “but undoubtedly it is in your power, by this example, to break many fetters, or to keep many of your brethren in bondage.” The omission drops the implication that free blacks might be to blame for the perpetuation of slavery. Similarly, whereas Garrison warned, “If you are temperate, industrious, peaceable and pious; if you return good for evil, and blessing for cursing; you will show to the world, that the slaves can be emancipated without danger: but if you are turbulent, idle and vicious, you will put arguments in the mouths of tyrants, and cover your friends with confusion and shame,” Georgiana says only, “If you are temperate, industrious, peaceable, and pious, you will show to the world that slaves can be emancipated without danger.” Gone is the implicit call to turn the other cheek and the warnings that improper behavior will bring shame. Nearly all of the remainder of Georgiana’s speech excerpts or paraphrases passages in Garrison’s *Address* exhorting the free people of color to live pious lives, educate themselves and their children, and reject the American Colonization Society. Indeed, Garrison’s lengthy denunciation of the ACS may have prompted Brown to turn to this address rather than a more recent one, given that George Harris’s move to Liberia at the end of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* made critiquing the ACS newly urgent. Brown closed Georgiana’s speech on his own words: a direction to heed the aboli-
tionists’ workhorse verse, “Remember those in bonds as bound with them,” and the pragmatic counsel to hasten North. One can imagine his pleasure in rewriting Little Eva’s deathbed scene with Garrison’s speech at hand. Not only are the slaves freed, but the dying girl’s sermon is as practical as it is high-minded.

The sermonic narrator

The other major antislavery preacher in *Clotel* is the narrator, whose sermons appeal not, like some of Georgiana’s, to Jesus Christ, the eschaton, the need to convert the heathen, or even (at least until the Conclusion) the Bible, but rather to moral principles, a benevolent God, and the sacredness of human life. Much of this liberal sermonic rhetoric comes from other sources and cannot, as the words of a fictive narrator, be read as Brown’s avowed belief. Yet it may reflect something of his own religious thought in the early 1850s, insofar as it resonates with the Unitarianism of Estlin and the other abolitionists among whom he wrote *Clotel*, as well as with his autobiographies and lectures.

The narrator’s liberal preaching begins in Chapter 1, “The Negro Sale.” After pointing to mixed-race individuals as the visible evidence of white Southern society’s contempt for marriage (black or white) and to the laws and church statutes refusing to legitimate black couplings, the narrator affirms that “it would be doing that degraded class an injustice, not to acknowledge that many of them do regard it as a sacred obligation, and show a willingness to obey the commands of God on this subject.” This religious rhetoric, apparently Brown’s own, lays the groundwork for the subsequent pious speech, which begins, “Marriage is, indeed, the first and most important institution of human existence—the foundation of all civilisation and culture—the root of church and state.” What follows (through “whether by means of instruction, precept, or exhortation”) is an excerpt from Unitarian minister Samuel Osgood’s translation of German theologian Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette’s *Human Life; or Practical Ethics*, quoted by William Bowditch in his *Slavery and the Constitution* at the beginning of Chapter 6, “Indirect Instruction.—No Legal Marriage of Slaves.” The theological liberalism of this passage lies in its privileging of marriage, rather than the church or traditional religious practices, as the bearer of moral value and enabler of spiritual elevation. To say that marriage is the only realm in which some feel
the “true sentiments of humanity” downplays the Christian community as a cultivator of human virtue and, against notions of original sin, treats humanity as inherently good. Marriage here offers no less than a form of salvation, as husband and wife “become conscious of complete humanity, and every human feeling, and every human virtue.”69 Deprived of these boundless benefits, slaves are morally impaired: “what must be the moral degradation of that people to whom marriage is denied?” Brown drops, though, Bowditch’s hyperbolic answer to this question: “Must not the degradation be uncalculated and incalculable? And yet such is the condition of the slaves!”70 It was one thing to acknowledge the harm done to slaves, another to dehumanize them by calling their degradation incalculable.

Brown returns to this broadly Protestant rhetoric at the end of the first chapter in the prophetic sermonic outburst denouncing Christian hypocrisy. First, in words that appear to be Brown’s own, the narrator declares that the sale takes place “in a city thronged with churches, whose tall spires look like so many signals pointing to heaven, and whose ministers preach that slavery is a God-ordained institution!”71 To extend this critique, Brown inserted passages from Allen too heated for Georgiana yet too good to leave on the cutting room floor. Following Allen nearly verbatim, the narrator thunders:

What words can tell the inhumanity, the atrocity, and the immorality of that doctrine which, from exalted office, commends such a crime to the favour of enlightened and Christian people? What indignation from all the world is not due to the government and people who put forth all their strength and power to keep in existence such an institution? Nature abhors it; the age repels it; and Christianity needs all her meekness to forgive it.72

Though Allen was a Congregationalist, this passage has no identifiably orthodox content, and its call for “indignation from all the world” made it apt for a British audience. Brown also seems to have had British readers in mind when to Allen’s declaration that indignation was “due to the government,” he added, “and people.” The call for popular accountability reflects Clotel’s emphasis on convincing Britons to exercise their moral influence on Americans through such measures as severing relationships with slaveholding churches.

The narrator’s liberal theology also defines one of the novel’s most memorable sermonic moments, the beginning of Chapter 21, which describes the parallel, simultaneous voyages of the Mayflower to Plymouth Rock and the slave-ship to Jamestown, Virginia. This passage comes directly from a speech that Alvan Stewart delivered before the New Jersey State Supreme Court in
1845 as counsel for two African Americans still held as slaves after the Bill of Rights attached to the state's new Constitution, ratified in 1844, prohibited slavery. Engaging in courtroom theatrics, Stewart had just directed everyone to look to the northeast to see what they could behold “on the last day of November, 1620,” the phrase with which Brown begins the chapter. The religious rhetoric of these borrowed paragraphs is brief but heightened—for instance, “Hear the voice of prayer to God for his protection, and the glorious music of praise, as it breaks into the wild tempest of the mighty deep, upon the ear of God”—and, as with other preaching by Clotel’s narrator, religiously liberal. God is the key figure, not Christ, and the sublimity of music and nature matter more than the content of the hymn or prayer. The Pilgrims are loosely termed “servants of the living God,” not English Separatists, and their mission is “to establish religious and political liberty for all,” a secularized and wildly inaccurate description of their aims. But theological precision was irrelevant compared with Stewart’s, and Brown’s, moral point: “These ships are the representation of good and evil in the New World, even to our day.” What mattered to Brown was not metaphysics but convincing his readers of slavery’s immorality.

Brown’s bias toward theological liberalism is also evident in the narrator’s sermonic rhetoric concerning Georgiana, much of which reinforces her moral exemplarity and mutes her theological particularity, presumably to make her more broadly appealing. For instance, in a paragraph followed by, “This was [Georgiana’s] view of Christianity,” the narrator says:

We learn from Scripture, and it is a little remarkable that it is the only exact definition of religion found in the sacred volume, that “pure religion and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” “Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.” “Whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye so even unto them.”

This passage first appeared in an editor’s column of the abolitionist newspaper the New-York Evangelist in the spring of 1847 and was widely reprinted in the late 1840s, including in Parker Pillsbury’s The Church as It Is: or the Forlorn Hope of Slavery (1847), from which Brown probably copied it. Although Georgiana has arguably occupied the moral ground staked out in these verses—that true religion lies in caring for others and in resisting slavery—her speeches have also espoused far more divisive theologi-
cal arguments. By using this moralistic redaction of Christianity to reframe her religiosity, Brown softened the sharp edges that came with assigning her lengthy passages from Grimké. The narrator also liberalizes Georgiana in commenting that “though a devoted member of her father’s church, she was not a sectarian,” and in summarizing her “philosophy” as the belief that “all men are by nature equal; that they are wisely and justly endowed by the Creator with certain rights, which are irrefragable [. . .].” This last line, along with nearly all the remainder of the paragraph, comes from a eulogy for William Wilberforce delivered by the African American educator Benjamin F. Hughes, erstwhile pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, principal of Colored Free School No. 3 in New York City, and a founder of New York’s Phoenix Society, dedicated to black educational advancement. Brown returned to this eulogy for the chapter’s penultimate paragraph, which follows Hughes closely from “Peace to her ashes!” through the first half of the first sentence of the final paragraph, “In what light would she consider that hypocritical priesthood.” In applying these inclusive phrases to Georgiana, Brown repositioned his heroine as a religious liberal while democratizing and degendering the rhetoric of moral heroism.

The eulogy for Georgiana concludes in a secular oratorical mode. Directly after the passage from Hughes, Brown patched in another eulogy, this one given by African American abolitionist Robert Purvis for the Quaker antislavery activist Thomas Shipley, a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the organization’s most prominent Philadelphia member. The narrator now praises Georgiana solely for the happiness she brought by restoring family relationships in granting her slaves freedom. The eulogy closes with a loosely religious invocation of Brown’s own: “Oh, that God may give more such persons to take the whip-scarred negro by the hand, and raise him to a level with our common humanity! May the professed lovers of freedom in the new world see that true liberty is freedom for all! and may every American continually hear it sounding in his ear.” This reference to God is more rhetorical flourish than theological premise; the emphasis is on an awakened consciousness of the Enlightenment values of “humanity,” “freedom,” and “liberty.”

Alongside the religiously liberal and secular oratory surrounding Georgiana’s death, Brown included several sentimental meditations on death that border on the sermonic yet offer little religious consolation. Significantly, the novel neither describes nor marks the precise moment of death, a scene that would have raised questions about Georgiana’s perceptions on the threshold of the hereafter. There is no scene in which she, like Little Eva, looks off and exclaims, “O! love,—joy,—peace!” Instead, Brown included a homily on
death’s inevitability and suddenness (beginning “Death is a leveller”) taken from James Montgomery’s *Gleanings from Pious Authors* (1846). This discourse on *vanitas* may have suggested to some readers that earthly transience should redirect one to spiritual ideals, but the absence of such a message or any hint of redemption strikes a pagan note. The passage concludes only, “This hour he [man] glows in the blush of health and vigour, but the next he may be counted with the number no more known on earth.” The gloomy tone is a far cry from the proclamation in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that Eva passes “from death unto life!” and that “the bright, eternal doors” close after her. The narrator’s lamentations resume in two paragraphs running from “In the midst of the buoyancy of youth, this cherished one had drooped and died” through “yet the thoughts will linger sadly and cheerlessly upon the grave,” a reflection on grief taken from a sketch first published in the *New England Offering* in 1848. Its sermonic overtones are audible in its oratorical exclamations (e.g., “Oh what chill creeps through the breaking heart”), anaphoric repetitions (“that the eye [ . . . ]—that the ear [ . . . ]—that the voice”), and, above all, affirmation that “faith [is] strong enough to penetrate the cloud of gloom which hovers near, and to behold the freed spirit safe, for ever, safe in its home of heaven.” That last line is all the solace of an afterlife this chapter offers. The excerpt from Hughes, which follows these paragraphs on grief, couches life after death only in the subjunctive: “But if it were that departed spirits are permitted to note the occurrences of this world [. . . ]” No further reassurances are offered, and no pious slave has a vision-like dream of the departed Georgiana, as Tom does of Eva in his darkest hour on the Legree plantation. Instead, the sermons that close the chapter—the eulogies written for Wilberforce and Shipley—suggest that the redemption Brown valued most was the secular one of political liberty.

While the narrator lingers over Georgiana’s demise and eulogizes her at length, he sermonizes only briefly upon the death of his title character. Before the taut final sequence of Clotel’s life—the men running toward Clotel from both ends of Long Bridge, her wild and anxious looks, the water rolling below, the clasped hands and heavenward glance, the fatal jump—the narrator explains the significance of her desperate act:

> But God by his Providence had otherwise determined. He had determined that an appalling tragedy should be enacted that night, within plain sight of the President’s house and the capital of the Union, which should be an evidence wherever it should be known, of the unconquerable love of liberty the heart may inherit; as well as fresh admonition to the slave dealer, of the cruelty and enormity of his crimes.
These two sentences are not quite sermonic as I have been using the term. Though the cadences are oratorical, especially in the second sentence, the theological and biblical diction is sparse. The slave dealer’s cruelties are crimes, not sins; the salient fact about Clotel is not her soul, but her “unconquerable love of liberty.” And yet the passage functions as a sermon insofar as it assigns her suicide a theological meaning: God ordained it so that it could serve as a symbol of humanity’s love of freedom and as a rebuke to slave dealers. We should not underestimate the strangeness of this theological justification. Nowhere else in the novel or in Brown’s surviving lectures or autobiographies is slave suffering or death credited to the providence of God. Despite being coupled here with an antislavery message, this theological position has the potential to rationalize any number of slavery-related horrors by casting God as the hidden agent. In spirit it anticipates the language of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, which would posit, in a hypothetical formulation more guarded than that in Clotel, that American slavery might be “one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove.”87 Whereas Lincoln would merely speculate that divine agency had guided the human cruelty of slavery, the narrator presents the idea without qualification: God causes Clotel to die so that she can serve as an example and admonition. This fatalistic theologizing makes sense only when one learns that the entire scene of Clotel’s flight and suicide comes wholesale from an 1842 article in the New-York Evangelist.88 As with several other borrowings in Clotel, Brown may have gotten more than he bargained for from his source material. Along with the suspense-filled climax and the line about a woman’s “unconquerable love of liberty” came the dubious theologizing. That Brown did not excise this assertion suggests his indifference to the theological ramifications of a single line. He may have reasoned that as long as this all-ordaining God hated slavery and loved liberty, what did it matter if his inscrutable system allowed for the death of a single slave? To have God pulling the strings at least dignified his heroine’s death.

In the final paragraph of the novel’s Conclusion, Brown threw off his borrowed robes and preached without mediation. In a series of anaphoric exhortations, he first called “British Christians” to sympathize with the slave and to refuse fellowship to slaveholding American Christians, then prevailed upon “the whole British nation” to let its voice be heard across the Atlantic begging the descendants of the Pilgrims to “proclaim the Year of Jubilee”—that is, to set their slaves free.89 The biblical allusions here, in the appeals to the British and in the concluding promise, are thicker than anywhere else in Brown’s original prose.90 Brown was almost certainly mimicking the
sermonizing of Stowe's Concluding Remarks, but his rhetoric is markedly more upbeat. Whereas Stowe had ended by threatening readers with the “wrath of Almighty God,” Brown gave them the sermon's conventional hope of redemption, declaring that once the Year of Jubilee was proclaimed, “Then shall the earth indeed yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” If the language of fearing God conjures a glimmer of the holy awe in Stowe's closing threat, Brown at least made explicit the promised blessings. The tonal difference between the two probably speaks both to their theological differences, his greater liberalism not inclining him to represent God as punitive, and to a racially inflected rhetorical strategy. As a black man, he may have worried that playing the role of the scowling prophet would seem to raise the shade of Nat Turner and so make his white audiences nervous.

Although Brown played it safe in his final sermon, one line stands out as an innovation: “let no Christian association be maintained with those who traffic in the blood and bones of those whom God has made of one flesh with yourselves.” The surprising phrase here is “made of one flesh with yourselves,” which melds two biblical verses: Acts 17:26, in which Paul tells the men of Athens that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men,” and Genesis 2:24, which says that a man and his wife will be “one flesh.” Whether intentionally or not, Brown called Christians to renounce slavery not merely because blacks and whites were all children of God but also because they were husbands and wives, united in marriages that were, in language Brown borrowed from Child, “sanctioned by heaven, although unrecognised on earth.” The final sermonic paragraph thus brings Clotel full circle, returning to the point that opened Chapter 1: the incontrovertible fact of mixed-race couplings and the need to bring order out of social and moral chaos by ending slavery.

Every other novelist discussed in this book spent childhood Sundays sitting in the pews of Northeastern churches. Brown endured the first day of the week standing outside a Missouri church with his master's horses, “in the hot, broiling sun, or in the rain, just as it happened.” It was not an experience to inculcate a love of the preached word. His later experiences with Christian churches were mixed at best, as ministers in New York and Philadelphia often forbade him to use their sanctuaries for his antislavery lectures. Having seen firsthand so many ministers’ hostility and indifference to the antislavery movement, he would write to Garrison in 1853 that he had “long since despaired of anything being done by a clergyman.”

But if Brown knew that the clergy could not be trusted to advance the antislavery cause, he also knew—because Stowe's novel had blazoned the fact
across two continents—that sermons wrapped in fiction could have phenomenal power. Armed with this realization, he crafted a novel that embedded preaching in sentimental plots. Georgiana is in this respect emblematic of Brown’s own ambitions in Clotel. Just as her “voice of great sweetness” and “most winning manner” make her preaching persuasive to Carlton, so, too, did Brown seek with his stereotyped characters and familiar plot devices to ease the way for the abolitionist sermons at the novel’s core.\textsuperscript{96}

That the many sermonic passages Brown pieced together have long been read as seamless wholes suggests how skillfully he joined his borrowed parts, as well as how much one sermon can sound like another, at least at the distance of a century or so. Read as a greatest hits album of abolitionist speeches and sermons, Clotel is an aesthetically innovative text that is also unusually representative of the racial, gender, and religious diversity of the abolitionist movement. It is thus a fascinating origin point for the African American novel and a consummate example of the creativity of nineteenth-century American novelists eager to capture the moral authority of preaching in the pages of fiction.