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The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic,

1755-1791

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The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic, 1755-1791

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B.A., New York University, 2002
M.A., Memphis Theological Seminary, 2010

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

The Gospel According to John Marrant: Religious Consciousness in the Black Atlantic, 1755-1791

By

Alphonso F. Saville, IV

In the historical struggle for African American advancement, religious ideology has been central to visions of black freedom cast by a host of religious leaders. Scholars continue to grapple with establishing common vocabulary that makes intelligible the rhetorical strategies employed to catalyze black communities for social change. Notably, Thee Smith highlights the presence of West African conjuring traditions in the religious repertoire of African American social movements.[1] Religious practitioners, argues Smith, conjure biblical archetypes to make social action integral to religious devotion in Black communities of faith. While conjuring Biblical archetypes has functioned prominently in black religious communities, other typological referents for black religious imagination remain under-theorized and mostly unexamined. My dissertation explores John Marrant's use of typology in his literary corpus. Marrant, one of America's earliest black authors and preachers, employs the Talking Book trope to prescribe poly-religious identity as a strategy for navigating New World terrains. Henry Louis Gates describes the Talking Book as a rhetorical device that underscores hermeneutical indeterminacy as a rhetorical norm in black narrative traditions.[2]

[1] Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford, University Press, 1994).
[2]Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

According to Gates, the trope originates with Esu, the messenger of divine communication in Yoruba mythology. While Gates' theory has been a standard interpretive framework in African American literature, I contend that Marrant's use of the Talking Book locates African religious thought at the center of African American religious development. My reading also suggests that Marrant's *Narrative* uncovers a pluralist identity in early black American religious history informed by the hermeneutical indeterminacy standard in Black Atlantic narrative traditions. By highlighting the generative impact of African narrative traditions on North American religion, I aim to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that esteems African cultural perspectives central to the making of the New World.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Introduction

The brief, but adventurous, life of John Marrant provides a glimpse into the multitude of religious cultures formed and informed by persons of African descent in the eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic world. Marrant's journey begins in 1755 in New York and ends in 1791 in London. In his thirty-five year life span, Marrant is a member of an Afro-Catholic religious community in St. Augustine, Florida; a witness to the preaching of renowned Methodist minister George Whitefield and a participant in American revivalism in Charleston; a resident of a Cherokee settlement for two years in Georgia; an exhorter to enslaved persons in Charleston and surrounding plantations; an ordained minister in Bath, England in the Huntingdon Methodist Connection; an itinerant preacher to a community of Black Loyalists in Halifax, Nova Scotia; and the first chaplain to the African Lodge of Freemasons in Boston. Beyond his extraordinary travels and the diverse religious communities he encounters, Marrant has significance for scholars of African American religious history that stems from his literary accomplishments. The corpus of his written works includes an autobiographical narrative, a journal that recounts his ministerial activity in Canada, several sermons, and a handful of unpublished letters. Each document incorporates religious themes, symbols, and rhetoric that provide insight into the formation of Black Atlantic religious thought and practice in the eighteenth century. Both the variety and volume of Marrant's writings establish him as one of the most prolific writers of African descent in the eighteenth century.

Despite his widespread travels and fascinating career as an author and minister, John Marrant is not widely known in either popular or scholarly narratives of African

American religious history.[3] The scholarship that does engage Marrant focuses on his participation in evangelical Christian communities and his appropriation of Euro-American religious and philosophical discourse. The overemphasis of Marrant's location within Western culture obscures the constitutive impact of Africana religious cultures on his religious rhetoric and practice. The devaluation of broader Africana religious phenomena characterizes much of the scholarship in the historiography of Black Atlantic religious studies.[4] This dissertation aims to explore the variegated intellectual and cultural communities that contribute to the development of John Marrant's religious formation, and, by extension, Black religion in the eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic world. Through a phenomenological reading of Marrant's encounters with an array of cultural and discursive worlds, I propose that the multicultural, poly-religious foundations of his religious consciousness that are established and reinforced by his movement and

[3] To my knowledge, this dissertation is the first full-length study of his life.

[4] This observation is primarily in reference to the field of religious studies. African Atlantic scholars trained in history, anthropology, and archaeology have been more inclusive of broader Atlantic phenomena in their studies of Black Atlantic religion. See, for example, J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); James H. Sweet, *Domingos Alvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*, First Edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Christopher C. Fennell, *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World*, Reprint (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures* (Kingston, Jamaica: Universities of West Indies Press, 2004); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

exchange throughout the Atlantic world illuminate previously understudied phenomena in Black Atlantic religion. The intellectual and cultural exchange that occurs as a result of Marrant's continual movement around the Atlantic rim suggests a dialogical relationship between Black religious communities and institutions in North America and religious phenomena in the broader African diaspora. Additionally, the symbiotic relationship between Black religious communities in various locales of the African diaspora implies a shared sense of peoplehood among persons of African descent in the New World. Consequently, I utilize conjure as a theoretical lens to elucidate a Black Atlantic discourse that emphasizes Black moral essence, collective identity, and political autonomy as sacred dimensions of Africana culture in the eighteenth century. In analyzing the autobiographical narratives of John Marrant, the dissertation aims to redress the under-emphasized role of Africana spirituality in the development of Black religion in North America. The dissertation also intends to demonstrate how an emphasis on movement and cultural exchange generates novel interpretive categories for understanding African Atlantic religious experience.

Secondary constructions of John Marrant date back to Samuel Whitchurch's 1785 panegyric which celebrates Marrant's ordination and ministerial call. Whitchurch's *The Negro Convert*[5] poetically captures Marrant's life and adventures dramatically detailing his adoption of the Christian faith as a teenager in Charleston. Whitchurch considers neither the breadth of Marrant's travels nor the diversity of peoples he encounters critical to his religious formation. Rather, the unusual details of Marrant's life highlight the

[5] Samuel Whitchurch, *The Negro Convert, a Poem* (London: Printed and sold by S. Hazard; sold also by Hughes and Walsh,; Mills, and Bulgin, Bristol, 1785).

providential design of God. Accordingly, Whitchurch interprets Marrant's narrative within the theological norms of the eighteenth-century Protestantism. Similarly, most contemporary scholars under-value the significance of Marrant's poly-religious encounters preferring the one-dimensional construction established by Whitchurch. This depthless portrait understands Marrant's progression in religious consciousness as conversion and, thus, not only reveals an over-reliance on Christian interpretative categories of analysis, but also betrays a presumption that African-descended people of the eighteenth century engage in unilateral exchange abandoning indigenous and other pre-existing religious orientations for Christian identities in the New World.

Vincent Carretta posits that Black writers of the eighteenth-century Anglophone world vacillate between American and British identities. Carretta's argument assumes African institutions neither survive nor are modified in New World locales. As a result, analytical categories arising from traditional African religious cultures are not considered. According to Carretta, John Marrant adopts Afro-British identity despite his North American birth. His affinity for British culture and society is attributable to anti-slavery sentiments and a fledgling abolitionist movement in London during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Carretta implies that Marrant's political and religious ideology is mostly, if not thoroughly, shaped by Enlightenment philosophy and corresponding liberal political discourse. The role of traditional African culture and the broader Black Atlantic religious world are assumed to have minimal impact on Marrant's religious

development at best. Presumably for this reason, Carretta does not explore the rich conceptual paradigms offered by African-inspired philosophical and cultural traditions.[6]

Cedric May identifies Marrant as one of the progenitors of Black evangelical Christianity. May brings to the fore the political capital afforded Marrant and other Black Atlantic evangelists via their participation in Christian institutional religion. May also notes that Marrant revises theological orthodoxy to fit the particular needs of his Black communities in both South Carolina and Nova Scotia respectively. According to May, Marrant eschews the boundaries of Methodist doctrine and establishes himself as a religious innovator. Marrant's innovation is rooted in his desire to create an independent religious community—a Black Zion that preserves religious and political autonomy for his community. While May's depiction is compelling, it renders an incomplete portrait because it fails to address the role of Marrant's engagement with the myriad of non-Christian religious cultures he encounters in his life's journeys.[7]

Phillip Gould depicts Marrant as a progressive religious and political leader whose distinctiveness arises from his ability to use oral and literary technologies to position himself centrally within mainstream moral and political discourse. Gould's analysis, however, is confined by strict adherence to Enlightenment-inspired political and philosophical discourse. His interpretation implies that Marrant's ideology, and by extension African Atlantic religion, develops in dialogue with European and American,

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[6] Vincent Carretta, ed. *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Centur.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 1.

[7] Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

but not African, ideals and institutions. In this way, the contours of Black Atlantic religion are predetermined by American and European empirical and colonial processes.[8]

In their co-authored introduction to their volume of eighteenth-century Black authored texts, Joanna Brooks and John Saillant attend primarily to Marrant's itinerant preaching career among Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. They highlight the trans-Atlantic influence Marrant exerts on communities in British North America and England suggesting a bi-lateral, if inequitable, exchange between persons of African and European descent. Protestant evangelicalism, they argue, undergoes a substantial transformation as a result of contact and exchange between Europeans and Africans in the eighteenth century. Marrant's reappraisal of Protestantism, however, is attributed to the material and historical conditions that categorize Black life and not co-existing orientations derived from traditional African culture. Brooks and Saillant account for the ways Black religion shapes Anglo Protestantism, but they do not account for the ways African and other non-Christian cultures influence Black Christianity. Thus, Marrant's historical significance is contained within an intra-Protestant nexus of exchange.[9]

Similarly, Joanna Brooks, in her study of religion and African American literature, underscores the social context within which Marrant's ministry emerges to explain his radical political awareness. Brooks notes that Marrant's socially-conscious preaching not only demonstrates theological affinity with James Cone's Black liberation theology but also potentially revises conventional periodization regarding the emergence

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[8] Philip Gould, "Free Carpenter, Venture Capitalist: Reading the Lives of the Early Black Atlantic," *American Literary History* 12, no. 4 (2000): 659 –684.
[9] Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, eds., *"Face Zion Forward": First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), Introduction.

of Black Nationalist discourse. She maintains that Marrant along with his contemporaries are valuable, under-utilized sources for reflecting on the interstices of Black Nationalism and Black religion. While Brooks' valuation of Marrant's progressive preaching and writing advances scholarly understanding of eighteenth-century Black Atlantic religious and political discourse, her analysis reveals an over-dependency on Christian interpretive categories. Because she classifies Marrant within the Black theological tradition, the consequence of his cultural exchanges with non-Christian communities is unintelligible.[10]

The widespread assumption that John Marrant only exhibits an evangelical Protestant identity elucidates a larger concern within Black Atlantic religious studies. As James Sweet notes, an inability, or unwillingness, to recognize the contributions and constructive elements of African culture to the formation of trans-Atlantic religious phenomena ensures that "categories for analyzing the Atlantic remain preponderantly American and European."[11] European colonial and American plantation processes do not bear exclusive responsibility for the development of John Marrant's religious consciousness, or that of African-descended people in the New World more broadly. This dissertation aims to redress the notion of unilateral exchange between Europeans and Africans presumed to typify Black religious identity formation in the eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic world. By considering the ways John Marrant navigates and negotiates poly-religious cultures in various trans-Atlantic locales, I contend that European and American religious and cultural influences do not erase African ways of

[10] Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literature.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[11] Sweet, *Domingos Álvares*, Kindle edition.

knowing and being, but rather provide additional resources through and by which African descended people adapt, modify, and transform pre-existing cultural orientations.

Scholars in religious studies have employed a philosophy of inter-subjectivity that suggests the locus of religious experience may be found in episodes of inter-personal and cross cultural encounter.[12] The emphasis on encounter has a long intellectual trajectory in the field of religious studies; however, scholars have largely neglected this approach in studying Africana spirituality, opting instead for theologically-derived interrogations of beliefs. Charles Long, a notable exception, discusses cultural contact as a locus of religious phenomena in his study of the European conquest of the New World. According to Long, the intellectual legacy that fueled European exploration and domination of New World lands and cultures was rooted in an archaic notion of religious pilgrimage. For Long, pilgrimage is a significant, and under-utilized, interpretive category in the study of religion. This ancient practice, which predates citied traditions of human societies, constitutes a foundational aspect of religious consciousness.

> The world as cosmos, a home, and receptacle for the human mode of being, is based upon this perception of space and the human transversal through it. The sacred as orientation and those forms perceived from this orientation is defined in this movement. As a species we have maintained this mode of being for most of

[12] See for example Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, translated by John W. Harvey, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987); Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, First edition (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960); Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Aurora, Co: The Davies Group Publishers, 1999).

> our existence on this planet, and though it is not given the status and prestige in citied traditions that it retains in hunting and gathering societies, it remains a residual value even within the citied traditions of modernity.[13]

The generative factor is the experience of encounter occasioned by the movement of human beings across the earth. Long posits that religious consciousness is shaped by engagement with the "ever-present spaces of earth, sky, topographies, and flora and fauna over which the human passes."

Charles Long's notion of human interaction with the cosmos exemplifies how humanity's subjective relationships with the natural world contribute to religious consciousness. Fellow historian of religion Mircea Eliade helps to elucidate how human engagement with variegated geographical spaces establishes religious epistemology. In a study of rituals associated with territorial conquest, he emphasizes encounter as an indispensable site for understanding religious phenomena. Noting the differentiation of space into sacred and profane dimensions, Eliade asserts that crossing boundaries occasions religiously significant phenomena due to the exchanges that occur as a result of cross cultural contact and the ritual reenactment of cosmological myths that consecrate unsettled territories. The sanctification of new territory, through both ritual reenactment and cultural exchange, establishes a fixed point of orientation through which "real living" is made possible. Thus, the experience of contact and exchange with new people and territories that arises from boundary crossing emerges as a critical locus for understanding religion.

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[13] Long, *Significations*, 107.

While Eliade's use of boundary crossing and encounter as interpretive categories emphasizes geography, it should not be assumed that geographical boundary crossing is the only means by which religious phenomena are made observable. In her discussion of American religious history, Catherine Albanese notes that "[physical] territorial boundaries were only one kind of border with which people dealt."[14] Albanese also notes the inward boundaries of human consciousness and highlights this as an important site for observing religious phenomena.

> The internal landscape of identity provides a new territory in which boundaries become important. By searching for identity and finding it, individuals metaphorically establish inner boundaries, discover through testing who they are not, and begin to affirm who they are. In the process, each individual finds that these personal boundaries overlap with those of others, so that there can be a free process of exchange.[15]

Human encounter, particularly when facilitated by movement across boundaries, occasions the manifestation of religious phenomena. In any encounter, whether inter-personal or in the natural world, boundaries are crossed. Even questions regarding one's

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[14] Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2006), 3. Albanese also notes the physical reality of one's body constitutes a boundary that is crossed both unavoidably and continuously in the simple acts of daily living. As such, the body becomes the locus for a number of religious experiences. The everyday realities of eating and digestion, personal grooming, and sexual intercourse exhibit only a handful of examples around which religious consciousness takes shape. Rituals concerning food preparation and prayers offered before a meal typify just some of the ways in which religious consciousness is evident in the act of eating. The special care with which people in numerous religious cultures handle extra-bodily materials---excrement, hair, nail clippings, saliva, blood, etc.—provides adequate data for understanding religious consciousness with relation to the boundaries implied by the human body.

[15] Ibid., 4.

identity cross ideological boundaries as they pertain to one's own self-understanding. The inevitability of boundary crossing within human experience suggests that encounter is an ideal conceptual framework for analyzing religious phenomena.

Given the numerous metaphorical and physical territorial boundaries that John Marrant traverses during his lifetime, this dissertation will employ a methodological approach that emphasizes movement, contact, and exchange in an attempt to generate new interpretive categories for Africana religious experience. In fact, this methodological lens can be useful for African Atlantic religious studies more broadly due to processes of forced and voluntary movement by individuals and communities within the historical experiences of persons of African descent across both the African continent and the wider Atlantic world. The involuntary presence of African people in the New World, the forced separation of families and dispersions of Africans resulting from the domestic slave trade in the Americas, the escape of enslaved persons into free territories within North America, and the relocation of African Americans from rural to urban locales in the twentieth century all suggest pilgrimage, contact, and exchange to be viable categories for understanding African Atlantic religious history. Thee Smith exhibits the interpretive possibilities afforded by careful attention to historical encounter and subsequent cultural exchange. His study of African American conjuring traditions discloses how the Bible "comes to view as a magical formulary for African Americans; a book of ritual prescriptions for reenvisioning, and therein, transforming history and culture." Black Americans of African descent employ biblical figuralism, or typology, a hermeneutic methodology introduced in the Americas by European immigrants, and combine it with conjure, a religious tradition with antecedents in West and West-Central

African spirituality. Conjure, Smith posits, emerges "not only as a specific phenomenon in the field of African American religious studies, but more broadly as a new conceptual paradigm for understanding Western religious and cultural phenomena generally." Smith's theory of conjure is derived from the everyday practices of African American historical experience, and it allows scholars to theorize black religious experience from new and illuminating perspectives. The conjure paradigm uncovers a somatic, praxis-oriented epistemology embedded in historical African American communities. [16]

In addition to movement, contact, and exchange, James Noel provides a useful theoretical framework that illuminates the impact of inter-cultural exchange on African American religious consciousness. Noel's phenomenological reading of African Atlantic history analyzes the simultaneous appearance of Black consciousness and Black religion in the New World. Black religion, argues Noel, is inspired in part by the cultural formation that results from the contact and exchange between Africans and Europeans.[17]

Noel's theoretical approach to the study of Black religion is inspired by and builds upon Charles Long's notion of materiality. For Long, materiality encompasses the matrix of human experience, contact, and exchange. Matter, the material (and immaterial) means of exchange, is endowed with religious meaning because its properties signify realities that extend beyond the physical makeup of its substance. Noel emphasizes the phenomenon of contact and non-reciprocal exchange that typified encounters between Europeans and Africans during what he terms the long sixteenth

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[16] Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
[17] James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

century. Because of these exchanges, Black bodies were reconstituted as non-human commodities. Theological maneuvering facilitated the commodification of Black bodies positing that African-descended people were soul-less beings incapable of rational thought, spiritual redemption, and cultural civilization. Black religion, according to Noel, re-evaluates the Black body insisting that an exchange with supernatural power(s) re-formulates the humanity of the Black body. It is significant that in John Marrant's case, the reformulation of Black humanity is enabled by contact with white society's god, thus suggesting a revaluation of not only white society's understanding of the Black body, but also white religion. It is also significant, as the dissertation will demonstrate, that the rituals and processes by which Marrant relates to the Euro-Christian God conform to patterns of African spirituality. As a result, both the deity and the religious culture that govern white society undergo transformation due to exchanges with Black religious culture. Thus, the affirmation of Black humanity (particularly the Black body) and reassessment of divine personality emerge as distinct features of Black religious consciousness in the New World.

It is also worth mentioning that Marrant articulates the revaluation of Black humanity and divine personality in the expressive forms of Black literature and Black preaching. Marrant's sermonic and literary expressions signify the emergence of Black consciousness from nothingness or non-being. As Noel describes, non-being is metaphorically spoken of as darkness or silence and, in the study of Black religion, is an epistemological foundation. The terror of enslavement, the Middle Passage, and the domestic slave trade forced enslaved Africans to confront Non-Being, an experience theologically rendered as a god-less existence. This existence was not entered into

voluntarily—the distress of enslavement often caused enslaved persons to recede into the depths of Nothingness as a way to escape an unimaginably horrific reality. The emergence of religious consciousness articulated in Black literature and sermonic discourse expresses the ineffable and is analogous to the metaphor of death and resurrection. The death and resurrection motif was not only a feature of Christian spirituality, but was a prominent theme in various religious cultures that enslaved Africans brought to the New World. Thus, the presence of and allusion to the resurrection motif in John Marrant's rhetoric is attributable to both Christian and non-Christian religious orientations.

The idea of Black voiced expression emerging from silence or nothingness is particularly illuminating for the study of John Marrant's spiritual narrative. As Noel explains, Black bodies were rendered commodities through the political economy of the modern world. At the same time, the western church was involved in its own debates regarding the formulations of the material body in its religio-political economy. The debates regarding transubstantiation in the Eucharist ritual contested the bodily presence of Jesus in the material elements of communion. Whereas the Protestant formulation of the Eucharist rendered Jesus' material body absent, so the material exchange of Christianity that resulted from the cultural contact between Europeans and Africans rendered Africans invisible and without significance—their bodies were regarded as non-human entities. Therefore, the reconstitution of the Black body within the human family via Black religious expression can be understood as a kind of Eucharistic ritual act. Read in this light, the re-presentation of Christianity by African descended people takes on added significance. Marrant's appropriation of Christian rituals and symbols in his

writings reclaims Black humanity and does not simply acquiesce to the norms of the dominant society. Marrant and his literary contemporaries narrate their adoption of Christian spirituality employing the rhetoric and symbols that signify periods of Non-being (via trance or altered/non-consciousness) and suggest that the terror of Black religious experience is acted out in the bodies of Black people.[18] In other words, as Mircea Eliade might suggest, eighteenth-century Black narratives depict the adoption of Christianity as a re-enactment of the primordial beginnings of Black religion and Black consciousness. In the autobiographical narratives of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Black protagonists emerge from their divine encounters with new identities and a renewed sense of purpose. The experience of forced migration from Africa and the trauma that it inspired are revisited as Black people come to terms with a new revelation of God rendered in the language and symbols of New World religion (i.e. Christianity).

My re-evaluation of John Marrant aims to complicate oversimplified understandings of Black religion and rhetoric in colonial America. The complexities and obstacles Black people faced in shaping new collective identities renders eighteenth-century Black radicalism in far different aesthetic dressing than its nineteenth and twentieth-century counterparts. Unlike those of contemporary activists of the latter periods, the social world of colonial America demanded the appropriation of Christian rhetoric and identity in exchange for access to platforms of public discourse. This

[18] Zora Neale Hurston explains that African American conversion experiences followed a widespread ritual formula with corollaries in a number of Black Atlantic locales. She emphasizes the psycho-somatic responses, seeking traditions in which "converts" wandered in the wilderness in solitude, and the prevalence of the number three in African American conversion accounts. See, Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1981).

dissertation examines the underlying meanings of this public Christian performance by employing conjure theory to make salient the radical dimensions of John Marrant's political rhetoric and organizing efforts. These aspects of Marrant's ministry stem from his revaluation of Christian orthodoxy in light of the immediate needs of his Black fellows, his efforts to institutionalize Black culture in transnational religious organizations, and his recognition of African descended people's divinely-ordered, collective purpose and identity in the trans-Atlantic world.

This dissertation argues that Marrant and his fellow eighteenth-century Black activists are aware that the appropriation and performance of Christian rhetoric and identity is not without political reward. In colonial America, Christianity, particularly of the Protestant evangelical bent, is the carrier of the cultural capital necessary for the emergence of an alternative political economy in which the re-humanization of the Black subject can be realized. The concomitant emergence of Black letters and Black Christianity is not accidental. In the political economy of the New World, literacy—or, more specifically, literary production—is the quintessential marker of civilization. Thus, as Marrant seeks to counter myths of Black inferiority and substantiate his community's capacity for self-governance and self-determination, he appropriates the dominant society's markers of civilization—Christian culture—and contributes to written and oral traditions of Black evangelicalism.

Black evangelicalism, or the appropriation of Christian identity, is not simple acquiescence to the norms and values of the dominant society. Rather, Marrant and other Black evangelicals fashion a religious outlook uniquely suited for their particular experience. The needs of the African American community, more so than the orthodox

doctrines of European and American Protestantism, determine the practices of Marrant's Christian communities. Thus, Black evangelicalism in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world is not mere Christianity, but rather it represents a pragmatic, multi-cultural and spiritually diverse endeavor primarily intended to reformulate Black humanity via religious institutions that function autonomously. Marrant and other spokespersons within this tradition establish distinct, authoritative perspectives on issues related to collective identity, religious liberty, and political sovereignty within expansive New World discourses. In locations throughout the Atlantic world that include Nova Scotia, Charleston, St. Augustine, Philadelphia, Kingston, Coral Bay, and Fort Christianborg—what Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood refer to as "citadels of African evangelicalism,"[19] African-descended people employ Christian rhetoric and symbols to articulate a vision of collective identity and destiny, and a desire for self-determination that counters notions of Black inferiority.[20] In the process, they shape a unique religious voice that challenges prevailing notions regarding the presumed irreconcilability of Christian identity and Black humanity.

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[19] Sylvia R. Frey, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Kindle edition.

[20] A broad analytical lens that considers data throughout the Black trans-Atlantic world is particularly instructive for recognizing nationalist elements in black religious phenomena. For recent works on eighteenth-century African Atlantic religion see Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sweet, *Domingos Alvares*; David T. Shannon Sr, Julia Frazier White, and Deborah Van Broekhoven, *George Liele's Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2013); Vincent Carretta and Ty M. Reese, eds., *The Life and Letters of Philip Quaque, the First African Anglican Missionary* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

In redrawing the parameters of Christian evangelicalism in the New World, African-descended people face the challenge of articulating an alternative political vision that uses the rhetoric and symbols of the dominant society. Activists and writers like Marrant accomplish this by casting vision of a collective, divinely ordained destiny for persons of African descent. Black people, argues Marrant, are uniquely situated to bring about the redemption of humanity because of their particular experience of collective suffering. The horrific and particular nature of Black suffering, he argues, signals the messianic role(s) of Black religion. Black Christians were to play a key role in the redemption of fallen humanity because they had been afforded special insight into the horrors of human depravity via their own suffering. As such, Black Christians establish a new political economy in which they assume moral authority via their religious experience. Thus, the new political economy allows African Americans to exchange presumed inhumanity and ignorance for literacy and moral authority. This exchange is facilitated through a revaluation of Christianity in which the contours of faith are reconfigured to suit the material needs of African Americans.

Scholars of Black Nationalism have all but shunned John Marrant and his eighteenth-century colleagues presumably due to an assumption that their texts do not exemplify common themes in Black Nationalist theory. The dominant theoretical models for analyzing Black-authored texts reflect the political culture of the post-1960s when Black literary theory was gaining popularity in the academy.[21] Emerging at the decline of the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of the Black Arts and Black Power

[21] See Addison Gayle, *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971); Amiri Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow, 1963).

Movements respectively, Black literary theorists privileged perspectives within Black literature that expressed and reflected the militancy of the popular contemporary political rhetoric. While theorists such as Amiri Baraka and Addison Gayle introduced a context in which Black aesthetics could be appreciated and properly celebrated, their propensity for the radical discourse of the 1960s silenced important voices in the Black literary tradition.

Similarly, as Black literary theory was formally introduced to the American academy in the late 1960s, so Black theology emerged with the publication of James Cone's *Black Theology, Black Power* in 1969.[22] Like the progenitors of Black literary and artistic aesthetic theory, Cone displayed a proclivity for militant rhetoric, or the prophetic tradition, in his characterization of Black theology. Profoundly influenced by the discourse and public action of figures such Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Cone sought to explain the emergence of the Black Power Movement on the public landscape as not only a God-ordained movement for the liberation of oppressed peoples, but also as a long-standing tradition within Black Christianity that best described African American appropriation of American Protestantism.

While Cone's reading of Black religion introduced a useful framework for interpreting Black religious discourse, his penchant for radical articulations of political militancy, like his literary colleagues, left many expressions of Black religion unexplored. In light of such an intellectual climate, it is no small feat that scholars are beginning to revaluate eighteenth-century Black literature and situate it within a tradition of radical political discourse given the dramatic aesthetic differences that characterize

[22] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969).

that historical moment. Writers like John Marrant and his eighteenth-century literary colleagues have been mostly dismissed by Black literary theorists and religious studies scholars as typifying the quintessential escapist ideology of eighteenth-century Black Christianity. Additionally, critics have argued that these writers eschew racial and ethnic identities and showed little concern for the plight of the enslaved. However, I contend these writers introduce new interpretive possibilities for understanding how Black literature sought to advance Black political aims. The authors of the eighteenth-century Black Atlantic give birth to moral nationalism, a designation within Black Nationalist discourse coined by Phillip Richards[23] that emphasizes moral and spiritual reform as a means to facilitate the emergence of autonomous Black political communities. In particular, John Marrant fuses religious and political rhetoric to shape a doctrine of Black freedom and autonomy that anticipates the writings of early nineteenth century Black writers like David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet.

Such a reading of John Marrant and his contemporaries is enabled by the construction of a hermeneutical lens fashioned from the contributions of several key theorists of black religion and black literature. Chapter 1 outlines the major theoretical frameworks that supports my contention. These include Henry Louis Gates' theory of signification within Black narrative culture along with Thee Smith's theory of conjure as religious praxis and an epistemological foundation in Black Atlantic religion. My construction of Marrant's interpretive world is aided by the contributions of scholars in three primary areas of study: 1. Black Atlantic religious history, with a particular focus

[23] Phillip M. Richards, "Nationalist Themes in the Preaching of Jupiter Hammon," *Early American Literature* 25, no. 2 (1990): 123.

on religious cultures in North America; 2. African American literary criticism of eighteenth-century authors; 3. theoretical approaches to Black Atlantic history and culture.

Chapter 1 also begins my analysis of John Marrant's autobiography. I evaluate the social history of colonial New York in an attempt to reconstruct the religious contours of Black life in the region. Drawing on pertinent secondary histories of geographies Marrant traverses during his early life, I aim is to reconstruct the cultural world into which Marrant is born. My particular interest is in evidence that substantiates the prevalence of African and African-influenced culture. Next, I analyze Marrant's move to St. Augustine, Florida. Although he lived there only a short time, the social world of the Spanish colonies—St. Augustine in particular—is crucial for understanding the fundamental development of Marrant's religious consciousness. To better access the social world of colonial St. Augustine, I turn to cultural and social histories that unearth the prominence of traditional African culture in St. Augustine and Fort Mose, an all Black Afro-Catholic community two miles north of St. Augustine.

Chapter 2 begins my analysis of Marrant's prophetic call and initiation in Charleston and the low-country wilderness of Georgia. Cultural communities formed and informed by African-descended and indigenous American religious practitioners supply the context for his religious formation. Descriptive historical accounts inform my analysis of Marrant's itinerant preaching to slave communities on the Jenkins plantation in Combahee, South Carolina and his exchanges with Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, the plantation owners.

Additionally, this chapter considers songs, narratives, and material artifacts from African American vernacular culture to supplement my reconstruction of the fledgling contemporary Black culture that constitutes John Marrant's social world. In addition to folklore and history, my phenomenological reading of Marrant's *Narrative* analyzes African American participation in American eighteenth-century revivalism and posits that pre-existing African religious epistemologies come to the fore in the revival ritual. My analysis opens new interpretive possibilities that revise the widely assumed conversion of African-descended participants in American revivalism.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the history of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia with a particular attentiveness to the religious cultures formed by these communities. Data for this section are primarily supplied by the journal accounts of both John Marrant and Henry Allen, a revivalist preacher from Scotland who introduces New Light theology to Nova Scotia. In Marrant's *Journal*, he portrays himself as a prophet by appropriating biblical symbols and narrative structures to his own autobiographical context.

In Chapter 4 I trace Marrant's movement to Boston and his chaplaincy at the African Lodge of Freemasons. Corey Walker posits that the ritual performances of Black freemasonry not only revise how scholars understand democracy but also African American institution building and nationalism. The primary sources that inform my reading of this history include a 1787 charge delivered by John Marrant and two subsequent charges delivered by Prince Hall, founder of the African Lodge. These documents espouse the ethos and political vision of eighteenth-century Black masonry.

John Marrant's navigation of trans-Atlantic geographies, cultures, and institutions reflects the voluntary and forced movements that characterize the experience of many

African-descended people in the eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic world. The circulation of bodies and ideas throughout Africa, the Caribbean, South America, North America, and Europe necessitates the consideration of transnational phenomena for scholars of eighteenth-century Black religion. However, much of the religious studies scholarship isolates African-descended people in the British North American colonies from the broader Africana world. By employing a transnational lens to the study of John Marrant's life, this dissertation intends to complicate simplistic portrayals of Black Atlantic religion by giving critical attention to the role of African-inspired religious cultures in the development of Black religion in North America. Additionally, the utilization of Black religious and literary theory elucidates hitherto under-studied dimensions of John Marrant's religious consciousness. As a result, the dissertation aims to yield new conceptual categories and interpretive possibilities for phenomena within Black Atlantic religious experience.

Chapter 2: No Continuing City

But now this tongue of the story-teller, descendant of masters in the arts of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listener. It flies faster than the story-telling mind itself. Pride in its own telling skill has made it light, more than merely light. Pride has made this tongue giddy with joy. So the story-teller forgets this rule of masters in the arts of eloquence: the tongue alone, unrestrained, unconnected to the remembering mind, can carry only a staggering, spastic, drooling, idiot tale. In such a story, told by an unconnected tongue, the middle hurls itself at the astonished ear before the beginning has even had time to be mentioned. The end itself is battered into pieces. The fragments are smashed against the surprised listener's ear, without connections, without meaning, without sense.[24]

Apart from their proper context, narratives are difficult to interpret. The eloquence of storytelling demands that storytellers must first give the audience a proper context before the unfolding of events can be understood. Critical details like the time and place in which the story takes place greatly determine its meaning. The time and location in which stories occur helps explain the relationships between characters and the motivations that influence their actions.

Thus far, most scholars have not been attentive to the historical and cultural particularities that contextualize John Marrant's early life. Marrant spent his childhood in North American urban centers (New York, St. Augustine, Savannah, and Charles Town) with substantial African communities. This means that prior to his encounter with George Whitefield in Charles Town in roughly 1770 (his first noted contact with

[24] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978), 2.

Christianity), his religious consciousness was shaped by traditional African religion and the cultural and religious communities they formed in the New World.

> My father died when I was little more than four years of age, and before I was five my mother removed from New York to St. Augustine, about seven hundred miles from that city. Here I was sent to school, and taught to read and spell; after we had resided here about eighteen months, it was found necessary to remove to Georgia, where we remained; and I was kept to school until I had attained my eleventh year. The Lord spoke to me in my early days by these removes, if I could have understood him, and said, "Here we have no continuing city." We left Georgia, and went to Charles Town, where it was intended I should be put apprentice to some trade. (49)[25]

While the background information is scant (a mere four sentences), the importance of this introductory material cannot be overlooked. It provides a framework for understanding the subsequent development of Marrant's story. The introduction, which narrates his movement in the first eleven years of his life, allegorizes Black people's existence in colonial North America. Instability, rootlessness, and wandering are themes that recur throughout Black Atlantic religious literature of the period. For Marrant, the continuous movement is not a mere matter of circumstance, but the result of divine intention. "The Lord spoke to me in my early days, by these removes, if I could have understood him, and said, 'Here we have no continuing city.'" 'Here' signifies not

[25] John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black. 4th Ed.* (London: R. Hawes, No. 40, Dorfet-Street Spitalfields, 1785) in Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, eds., *"Face Zion Forward": First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798* (Northeastern, 2002). All quotes from *Narrative* are taken from this edition and henceforth shall be cited in-text using the page number.

only geographical rootlessness, but also political exclusion, cultural ambiguity, and ideological uncertainty. Such categorizations of early Black peoples' experience in North America exhibit what James Noel refers to as the emergence of Black religious consciousness from "nothingness."[26]

Marrant's contemporaries also recognized the unsteadiness of his early life, although they drew different interpretive conclusions about the nature of his religious consciousness. On May 15, 1785, S. Whitchurch delivered a laudatory poem to celebrate Marrant's ordination as a minister in the Huntingdon Connexion in Bath, England, the first of any Black person born in North America. Whitchurch's *The Negro Convert* poetically depicted Marrant's adventurous life dramatically detailing his adoption of the Christian faith, his encounter with a Cherokee tribe in Georgia, his trials in service to the British Navy during the Revolutionary War, and his ministry to a community of Black Loyalists in Halifax, Nova Scotia. These scenes are highlighted to emphasize Marrant's conformity to Euro-American Evangelical Protestantism. Couched within an orthodox theological interpretive framework, Whitchurch's poem narrates Marrant's transformation from vice-driven sinner to devout Christian minister whose sole passion is to spread the gospel among the "Negro Loyalists" in the British North American colonies. This portrait resonated powerfully with white Christian communities in London and Boston and certainly aided the fundraising goals of the Huntingdon

[26] James Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*. Noel should not be misunderstood to mean that Black consciousness, culture, and identity literally emerge from nothing. In fact, Noel makes strong arguments about the continuity of African material cognition in the New World. Rather, what Noel refers to is the instability of Black people's collective and individual existence(s) in the New World and the culture and identity produced from this particular view of the world.

Connexion, an evangelical Methodist denomination founded and funded primarily by Selena Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon. Marrant helped raise awareness of the Connexion throughout the Atlantic world. According to its title page, Whitchurch's poem was sold in Bath, London, and Bristol by a host of publishers and merchants.

The publication and distribution of Whitchurch's *The Negro Convert* was likely related to the philanthropic goals of the Connexion. Its success as a fundraising tool depended heavily on its appeal to the British aristocracy. Whitchurch's representation of Marrant edits references to the rootless wandering that characterized his early life. What results from this careful (or careless?) process of redaction is a portrait of Marrant that obscures as much (if not more) than it reveals about his religious consciousness.

For Marrant, however, his early life was critical for understanding his subsequent development. He begins *Narrative* by stating the time and location of his birth,

> I, John Marrant, born June 15, 1755, in New York, in North-America, (sic) wish these gracious dealings of the Lord with me to be published, in hopes they may be useful to others, to encourage the fearful, to confirm the wavering, and to refresh the hearts of true believers. (49)

His exact knowledge of the time and location of his birth distinguished him from many of his fellow Black writers in North America. Since the majority of African descended residents were legally enslaved, birth records were not meticulously maintained in many early Black communities.[27] His inclusion of these biographical details means that an analysis of his writings must take into account the historical and political contexts in

[27] Frederick Douglass, for example, can only approximate the year of his birth since the slave and African American births frequently passed without record.

which his story unfolds. His most immediate primary historical and cultural contexts include the Black community in colonial New York.

Unfortunately, specific details surrounding Marrant's initial four years in New York cannot be determined; however, a general sketch of the communal and cultural existence of colonial New York's Black population is traceable. In fact, tracing such a portrait of this communal existence is indispensable for understanding his religious development. Colonial New York's Black community provides the foundation for Marrant's religious understanding.[28]

From its outset, New York colony was culturally diverse. In the seventeenth century, Dutch settlers arrived as representatives of the recently formed Dutch West India Company (WIC). Following their independence from Spanish colonialism, the Dutch, eager to compete with other sovereign European nations, began trading in slaves off the west coast of Africa. Because the Portuguese and Spanish had long established strongholds in the region, the Dutch also went to Madagascar to acquire slaves to labor in their New World colonies. Although they were never able to compete with Portugal or Spain, Dutch traders were able to establish significant trade relationships with African nations on the west coast. The majority of enslaved Africans in Dutch North American colonies were from modern-day Madagascar, Ghana, and Angola.

[28] While a number of New York's Black residents were members of various Christian congregations, it is not likely the Marrant family were among them. When John Marrant depicts his call, his family is puzzled by his insistence on their participation in his newly adapted practices such as prayer, fasting, and scripture reading. This suggests that they were not practitioners themselves, or at least unaccustomed to the Christian forms to which Marrant's rituals were adapted. Marrant's call is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Upon their arrival to the Dutch colony at New Amsterdam, African slaves encountered Christian churches that were enjoying theological and institutional freedom since their recent independence from Catholicism under Spain's imperial regime. Because of their tenuous history as a Spanish colony, Dutch settlers were suspicious of Spanish settlers and Catholicism in general, factors that would play a significant role in the colony's race relations and religious history in later years. Dutch settlers introduced African slaves to Protestantism in Calvinist and Reformed churches. Enslaved Africans were married and baptized in Dutch churches, and many attended worship services with their masters regularly. Africans were allowed to participate in these religious institutions although their membership in Dutch Protestant congregations did not alter their status as slaves.

Black New Yorkers did accommodate other aspects of Dutch culture. In addition to the widespread use of the Dutch language, New York's Black community adapted aspects of Dutch Protestantism into their own unique religious culture. Most notably, the Pinkster festival exhibits a combination of African and Dutch culture. The Pinkster festival originated as the Dutch version of Pentecost. The African practice of Pinkster, celebrated throughout the northern Middle and New England colonies, combined features of African seasonal rituals and other cultural traditions. While Dutch settlers primarily celebrated with church attendance, baptisms, and confirmation, enslaved Africans, temporarily relieved from some of their labor, celebrated with dances, songs, storytelling and most importantly, the election of the Pinkster King. Jeffrey Bolster notes the centralized authority vested in the Pinkster King in his description of the Pinkster festival.

> Since the middle of the eighteenth century, blacks in certain New England towns (including Newport, Rhode Island; Salem, Massachusetts; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and Hartford, Connecticut) had gathered on the legal election day to select their own dignitaries, called kings or governors. For the black communities that celebrated it, Negro Election Day became the highlight of the year. The Pinkster holiday in some New York and New Jersey towns served a similar function. The occasions provided slaves with an opportunity to feast, dance, and socialize, and to celebrate openly a distinct black cultural tradition. Although that often meant satirizing whites' ways, the focus of these festivals was black conviviality and leadership. Many popular kings enjoyed a long tenure. In Albany, New York, an "old Guinea Negro: named King Charles, "whose authority is absolute," ruled Pinkster from the American Revolution until about 1808. And some kings and governors had considerably more than ceremonial functions. In Newport, Hartford, and Portsmouth, informal systems of black government existed alongside white county courts. On complaints by either whites or blacks against black offenders, the African American magistrate hearing the case would sentence the defendant, and a black officer would punish him.[29]

Though the influence of Dutch culture would diminish following British conquest in the early part of the eighteenth century, the impact of Dutch-inspired African cultural phenomena would continue well into the nineteenth century in New York. Isabella Baumfree, an enslaved woman born in Rifton, New York in 1797 spoke fluent Dutch and

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[29] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seaman in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 108.

attended a Dutch Reformed church with her master's family. Additionally, Pinkster celebrations continued within African American communities and were a staple feature of New York's African American culture into the 1820s. As the historian Sterling Stuckey notes, "There were expressions of Africanity in New York State, especially in music and dance, so vivid that one doubts that they could have been blurred, let alone banished, by decree."[30] Stuckey's commentary on the cultural impact of the Pinkster celebration for New York's Black residents is telling.

> [T]he African presence was also pronounced in New York City, where Pinkster dance and music were of sufficient interest to observers to enter accounts of the period well into the century. As the century opened, slaves from Long Island went to New York City for ceremonies in the markets. New Jersey slaves and some from the city joined them in the Catharine Market place on holidays, "among which Pinkster was the principal one…and those who could and would dance raised a collection. Each slave brought a "shingle," a wide board five to six feet in length, "with its particular spring in it," on which dancing was done. That ceremony—the shingle dance—lasted many years following the end of Pinkster celebrations in Albany, and appeared to have had European as well as African Attributes. Its African rhythms, much heard, recall those of the ring shout, as part of the object of the performance…[31]

Although Dutch influence continued into the nineteenth century, their firm hold on the cultural makeup of New York began to wane following the British conquest of the

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[30] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Cary, US: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 142.
[31] Ibid., p. 143.

colony in 1664. After briefly relinquishing control of the colony a little more than a decade later, the British began to exert dominant influence over the religious and cultural life of colonial New York until the American Revolution. In an effort to secure the loyalties of disaffected Dutch settlers and to appease an ethnically diverse body of colonists, English rulers sought to foster a shared sense of belonging among the various European-descended settlers in New York. The stability of the colonial government depended on its ability to extend the benefits of British citizenship to all the white inhabitants of New York colony. Thus, institutions and rituals that established British culture were of utmost importance to the success of British rule and the development of a cohesive white identity in colonial New York. The Anglican Church facilitated the development of a collective identity among white settlers as it provided a common liturgical language as well as systematized, uniform liturgical procedure and aesthetics for worship. As Thelma Foote notes,

> For [English colonial officials], practicing the art of colonial governance involved the extension of English rights to the mainly foreign-born Protestant settler population, the incorporation of these peoples into the political community of loyal English subjects, and the transplantation of legitimating institutions of English culture for the cultivation of English civilities in the settlers. This expansion of communal boundaries of the English nation amounted to a reterritorialization of Englishness—that is, a movement from defining Englishness as primarily consisting of the external

> trait of having been born on the soil of England to positing certain internal traits of innate racial disposition as the essence of Englishness.[32]

According to Foote, this process of Anglicizing the settler population not only established the line of demarcation that excluded persons of African descent from society on the basis of identity, but, equally important, it "gave rise to the privileging of racial purity as the decisive principle of boundary maintenance" for inclusion by popularizing the myth of the Anglo-Saxon race. Through this mythic re-imagination of world history, diverse groups of people of European descent were incorporated into British identity.

The expansion of British culture in New York was largely aided by the missionary efforts of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). Prior to the mass efforts on the part of the SPG, the religious makeup of New York was perhaps best described as lacking any definite character at the onset of English rule in the late seventeenth century. An array of Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, Anglicans, and a small number of Catholics constituted the Christian denominations in New York. In general, church membership revealed the "absence of religiosity" among the majority of New York's settler population. However, by the middle of the following century, the Anglican Church could boast a significant increase in Anglican converts as well as the "nearly universal use of the English language among American-born settlers." English language instruction in addition to instruction in the fundamental doctrines of Anglicanism were the primary missionary aims of the SPG, and thus, the white settler

[32] Thelma Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Kindle edition.

population in colonial New York was thoroughly Anglicized by the time of Marrant's birth in 1755.

The SPG's missionizing efforts were not limited to the white settler population. The SPG established Sabbath schools in an attempt to teach the catechism to enslaved Africans and Indian natives. These efforts aimed not only to spread Anglicanism throughout the colony, but also fluency and literacy in English thus establishing a fairly homogenized English culture. Elias Neau, the French-born Protestant minister, led the effort to promote both the doctrines of Anglicanism and English proficiency among New York's enslaved African population. Neau's career as the first SPG catechist in New York began in 1703. His instruction to Blacks included the basics tenets of Protestantism, lessons on the creation of the world, the singing of hymns and Psalms, and recitation of the Lord's Prayer as well as responses to the Anglican catechism. Although SPG authorities in London disagreed with his pedagogical methods, the use of song and oral culture proved at least moderately successful among his Black pupils. As Thelma Foote argues,

> Neau briefly experimented with a pedagogic method that probably appealed to these catechumens, many of whom had been raised in the vibrant oral cultures of sub-Saharan Africa and the West Indies.[33]

Eventually, however, Neau acquiesced to the desires of the SPG authorities adopting a more conventional pedagogic method that emphasized Bible study and reading Anglican devotional materials. To accommodate this shift in teaching style, the SPG minister ordered transcriptions of the Lord's Prayer in Akan and Mandingo languages as well as

[33] Ibid.

Spanish, Dutch and French since many of his African pupils had proficiency in comprehending these European languages.

While Elias Neau and other SPG affiliate ministers were diligent in pursuing African converts, they were met with little success perhaps due in part to an emphasis on textually based faith instruction. Also, many slave owners were reluctant to grant missionaries access to their workers fearing that the time needed to instruct slaves would diminish the income generated by their labor. Additionally, there was some trepidation regarding the effect of baptism on the legal status of their property. The English, however, passed a law that stated that for Black slaves, their legal status would not be changed by their conversion. This did ease owners' concerns but it had an opposite effect on the enslaved themselves. Without the promise of manumission and limited opportunities for egalitarian worship, the Anglican Church was largely shunned by persons of African descent in colonial New York.

While the Anglican establishment was mostly ignored, Africans in colonial New York did exhibit vibrant religious cultures beginning with arrival of the first eleven enslaved Africans to the colony in 1626. Though their origins are unknown, these settlers were likely born in Africa and had possibly experienced enslavement in Brazil or a Spanish plantation in the Caribbean. The African pioneers would soon be joined by a growing slave population. The Dutch West India Company imported enslaved persons to supply much needed labor for the colony's food production. By 1644, enslaved Africans had established a sizable community. They had formed families, raised children, and were reputed "loyal and hardworking" farmers, skilled laborers, and artisans. A petition for freedom to Governor Kieft and the Dutch West India Company marked the earliest

record of slave resistance in New York colony. The petitioners received three hundred acres of farmland in southern Manhattan. "Negroes land," as the area would come to be known, constituted the geographic boundaries of the Black community, and, perhaps more importantly to colony officials, established a buffer zone between Dutch settlers and Native Americans whose continuous attacks were a constant threat. The petition reveals how Black people strategically manipulated diplomatic relationships between colonial governments and their enemies and allies to advance the cause of Black freedom.

The petition also provides an early example of African people attempting to recreate sovereign communities in New World locales. In Brazil, another Dutch colony that was contested by the presence of Catholic colonizers from Spain & Portugal, many African people formed *quilombo* communities to resist enslavement. Robert Nelson Anderson traces the origin of *quilombo* communities to Angola and suggests that these communal institutions were politically and culturally unifying structures for people under constant military attack in the midst of political upheaval.[34] Within these military communities, African people recreated continental political structures. In the New World, these political states did not crystallize solely around "a royal lineage of divine kings;" but rather, they also "gathered together diverse peoples in a lineageless community."

In North America, ethnically diverse African descended people formed alliances to struggle collectively for freedom. Michael Gomez details the high occurrence of inter-ethnic runaway attempts by enslaved persons and implies that colonial Black Americans

[34] Robert Nelson Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil." *Journal of Latin American* 38, no. 03 (1996): 545-566.

often eschewed traditional ties of kinship and formed relationships around the mutual pursuit of freedom. Additionally, scholars have noted the prevalence of runaway communities that populated the swamps and unsettled forest regions in places like Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina (Marrant's subsequent stops after New York). The existence of such communities in the Mid-Atlantic and New England colonies has received much less scholarly attention; however, the petition signed by eleven formerly enslaved Africans in New York in 1644 exhibits how early Black Americans sought communal associations based on common interest when kinship relations could not be sustained in tumultuous New World political climates. While there is no indication that this early New York community established armed or other violent resistance, subsequent Black communities certainly utilized violence to counter enslavement.[35] Generally speaking, large-scale missions of overt violent attack were far less frequent in North America than in South America, the Caribbean and Africa. Vastly outnumbered, Black communities were likely discouraged by their inability to mount reasonably successful militaristic campaigns. However, the relative small size of the Black population in colonial New York did not altogether preclude the development of autonomous Black communities that sought to violently resist the New World order. While beyond the scope of this project, a study of the formation of ethnically diverse, autonomous colonial Black communities in North America is fertile ground for future scholarship. A comparative study of such North American communities with their counterparts in South America and the Caribbean potentially uncovers a more widespread presence of

[35] I am referencing New York slave revolt of 1741 which will be discussed later in this chapter.

quilombo and maroon communities in North America and throughout the Black Atlantic world.

The Black community in New York started small and grew slowly. By the end of the seventeenth century, some free Blacks moved to King's County (Brooklyn), New Jersey, and Lower Manhattan. Because manumissions were increasingly rare, marriage and childbirth were vital to the growth of the free Black community. Thus, the stability of the family unit maintained some significance in the free Black community. Additionally, the reinforcement of communal ties through extended kinship networks probably helped to solidify the tenuous existence of New York's free Black community.[36]

Narratives of violent resistance likely circulated throughout New York's colonial Black community since the arrival of the first African settler to New York colony. In 1613, Jan Rodrigues, established the legacy of free Black occupancy in New York from which Marrant descended. Rodrigues, a crew member on the Dutch vessel *Jonge Tobias* captained by Thijs Volcherz Mossel, was an experienced explorer traveling up the North American coast from the West Indies. Following a dispute between crew members, Mossel left Rodrigues behind after paying him his wages of "eighty hatchets, some knives, a musket, and a sword" to secure the newly claimed territory on Manhattan Island.[37] The compensatory articles Rodrigues received as wages and his selection to protect the Dutch settlement suggests he had a military background. When a second vessel, the *Fortuyn*, arrived later that year, Rodrigues informed captain Hedrick

[36] Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Kindle edition.
[37] Ibid.

Christiansen that he was a "free man" and labored as an interpreter with Rockaway Indians negotiating trade agreement between the two parties. When Mossel returned, he was angry with Rodrigues presumably because he was working in the service of a competitor and had secured important trade agreements with locals for his rival explorer. In an ensuing fight, Mossel's crew injured Rodrigues before he was rescued by Christiansen's crew. The two vessels departed leaving Rodrigues, the first non-indigenous resident of Manhattan island, behind to father several children with Rockaway women.

By 1741, New York again was in political turmoil. While the international fallout between Catholic and Protestant imperial regimes created political loopholes that African people used to their advantage, the suspicions aroused by colonial governments often brought a greater degree of scrutiny on Black communities. As a result, many of the freedoms that Africans enjoyed in colonial New York were curtailed due to suspicions of white settlers that stemmed from the Dutch colonial history and recent liberation from Spain, as well as a broader rift between Protestants (Dutch & English) and Catholics (Spanish & French) in the competition to establish empirical regimes. Additionally, there was a general suspicion and fear of slave revolts in the North American colonies (the insurrection at Stono occurred just two years prior) and various international rebellions throughout the Caribbean territories. These violent uprisings coincided with the recent influx of slaves in North America, a grave concern given the rapid expansion of African-descended population in New York at the time.

British New Yorkers' were also weary of competition with French settlers to the north. The presence of French Catholics in the Canadian territory combined with English

suspicions of alliances between the French and Native Americans made the threat of invasion seem to be an impending, rather than mere plausible, reality. British settlers feared possible collusion between French Catholics and African slaves due to perceived reciprocity between African religions and Catholicism. Catholic ceremonies and ritual, it was presumed, had an appeal with which the abstract doctrines of Protestantism could not compete. The combination of factors greatly impacted how events unfolded in late February of 1741.

On February 28, 1741, a New York merchant, Mr. Hogg, was robbed of linens, medals, and coins (mostly Spanish) valued at roughly 60 lbs. Caesar (aka John Gwin), an enslaved man, was arrested for the robbery several days later. Caesar, notorious for theft and a supposed leader of "Negro bandits", was believed to be the father of the child of Peggy, an Irish house-servant of Hughson and alleged prostitute. About a month later, a fire at Fort George, the official seat of the royal government, burned both the fort and a nearby chapel to the ground. Over the next several weeks, a series of fires throughout the city destroyed and damaged homes and stores of many of New York's leading merchants and government officials, several of whom owned slaves. Many residents suspected that these were purposeful acts of insurrection and suspicions were aroused. The common denominator of destruction of goods & property was enough to connect the arson spree with previous robberies throughout the colony. As a result, Caesar and his alleged lover Peggy were interrogated in an attempt to uncover a conspiracy.

The suspicion of British colonists also implicated the international Black community. A fire at the home of colonial officer, Sergeant Burns, just opposite Fort Garden the following day and another several hours later at a house near Fly-Market was

attributed to the presence of "Spanish Negroes."[38] When Quaco, an enslaved man belonging to Mr. Walter, was overheard saying, "Fire, fire, scorch, scorch, a little damn it, by and by,"[39] suspicions of revolution began to circulate. The rumors of the Black uprising led to the apprehension of a recently purchased Spanish-speaking slave who was taken to City Hall to be examined by magistrates. The interrogation of the Spanish-speaking slave was interrupted when Colonel Philipse's storehouse went up in flames later that same afternoon. While the fire was being attended, another blaze began which diverted attention from this effort. One witness claimed to see a negro jump out of the window of the burning building adding credibility to the growing suspicion that "the negroes were rising."[40] The suspect was identified as Colonel Philipse's slave, Cuff, who had a bad reputation of mischief on account of his mostly absentee owner and corresponding abundant free time.

By April of 1741, colonial officials had offered a reward of 100lbs to any white person for testimony leading to the discovery of persons responsible for fires. Manumission and a 20lb reward were offered to enslaved Blacks for such testimony (their masters were to receive 25lbs.), while “free negroes, mullatoes, and Indians” would receive 45lbs and a pardon, if they came forth with evidence leading to the arrest of conspirators.[41] Many residents, fearful that more fires were coming, moved their goods out of their homes and enlisted the assistance of Black laborers; they subsequently filed

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[38] Ibid., 28.
[39] Daniel Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy or a History of the Negro Plot, with the Journal of the Proceedings against the Conspirators at New York in the Years 1741-2* (New York: Southwick and Pelsue, 1810), 27.
[40] Ibid., 29.
[41] Ibid., 32.

complaints of missing goods. Council members commissioned deputies to Black people's residences for stolen goods and also hoped that hideaways and other suspicious characters would be discovered by the searches, however, they yielded neither missing goods nor suspicious persons.[42]

In the wake of the New York revolt, the Black community's autonomy was greatly curtailed. Additionally, free and enslaved Blacks with any associations with Catholic or Spanish-speaking whites were treated with wariness. By the same token, however, these developments also shed light on the Black community's broad understanding of the international political conflicts that greatly determined their communal existence. When Quack was suspected of rejoicing over the destruction of colonial property, he explained that his excitement was not in response to the series of fires that scorched the colony in recent weeks. Rather, he celebrated "Admiral Vernon's taking Porto Bello; and that he thereupon signified to his companions, that he thought that was but a small feat to what this brave officer would do by-and-by, to annoy the Spaniards."[43] Quack's explanation demonstrates not only his awareness of international politics, but also an ability to interpret and deploy information for his own self-interest. He exhibited support for the British while simultaneously displaying disdain for the Spanish thus alleviating, albeit only temporarily, any suspicions of his involvement with the alleged conspiracy.

Of course, Quack's account could also be interpreted as mere quick thinking deployed only to avoid detection. The indeterminacy of the precise meaning of his

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[42] Ibid., 32-33.
[43] Ibid., 21. The battle to which he is referring is the English victory over the Spanish in Jamaica.

statement underscores a common feature of the Black Atlantic narrative tradition. As religious studies scholar Marcus Harvey identifies, indeterminacy of meaning is a guiding hermeneutical principle in Black Atlantic religion. In Akan storytelling culture, the precise meaning of cosmology narratives is often purposefully obscured to underscore the limitations of human perception. Quack utilized indeterminacy to acquit himself of guilt thus suggesting he understood this culturally-based principle of interpretation and applied it to achieve his most favorable outcome. My analysis of John Marrant's writings in subsequent chapters pays close attention to the multiplicity of meanings signaled by indeterminate rhetoric in Black Atlantic storytelling culture.

The story of New York colony's first Black settler, Jan Rodrigues, along with tales of the 1741 conspiracy likely impacted how Marrant came to understand his relationship to European and Euro-American political regimes in North America. As the legends of heroic acts of resistance were passed down by members of New York's Black community, Marrant's consciousness was shaped by narratives depicting struggles for freedom secured through trade negotiations, alliances formed with Native Americans, theft and insurrection plots, and adaptation to ever-changing global politics. Marrant's close identification with the cultural and political milieu of the land of his birth is signaled by the title page of *Narrative* which depicts him as both "a black" and a native New Yorker. His story is rooted in the story of a larger community of people. The narrative examples of New York colony's early Black freedom fighters like Rodrigues, who skillfully negotiated New World terrains, and the enslaved Quack, whose keen awareness of global politics was deployed within an Africana storytelling framework, contribute to Marrant's politics of resistance and his religious orientation, both of which

are established within a broader Black Atlantic culture.

The political sensibilities gleaned from his origins in New York colony are attested to by his family's constant movement throughout North America during his formative years. Eager to exploit England's international conflict with Spain to their advantage following their father's death in 1759, John Marrant's family moved to St. Augustine, the oldest European city in North America. The Florida colony was hotly contested by the Spanish and British empires throughout most of the eighteenth century. Enslaved West Africans in Florida and in the British colonies of South Carolina and Georgia sought to exploit the imperial struggle to their benefit. Fugitive slaves who escaped to Florida from British plantations were manumitted in exchange for their conversion to Catholicism and four years of service in the Spanish army. The former slaves established an all Black and relatively autonomous settlement, Gracia Real de Santa Teres de Mose (henceforth Ft. Mose), just two miles north of St. Augustine. In addition to being the first all Black settlement in North America, Ft. Mose was also the northern most defense against the British who controlled the Georgia and Carolina colonies. Although temporary British rule between 1763-1784 eradicated the Spanish colonial border, "the St. Mary's River…demarcated a political, legal, religious, and cultural divide across which a new group of Black and Indian refugees fled southward."[44]

Slavery in Florida allowed for the formation of free Black societies. While Spanish Florida was not without anti-Black racism, enslaved persons enjoyed greater legal protections and more liberal manumission policies than their counterparts in the British

[44] Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1-2.

colonies to the north. Features like the task system, paternalist relations between planters and slaves, an ability to use resources on the coast and the frontier, and a significantly smaller international slave trade account for a greater degree of autonomy experienced by enslaved Africans in Spanish Florida.[45]

Black communities in Spanish Florida existed within a complex web of cultural exchange that connected Africa, Europe, North America, and the Caribbean. Residents of Ft. Mose drew on African, European, and Native American cultural sources to create new societies. Many of the earliest African slaves formed maroon communities with Seminole and other Native American groups. These communities, like the Black community in New York and *quilombo* and maroon societies throughout the New World, strove for self-sufficiency, often raiding local plantations and trading with white planters. In urban centers like St. Augustine and Havana, Black communities developed rapidly in part because legal and religious protections made liberty and property ownership achievable. The enslaved earned wages and purchased freedom, lived in their own homes, and formed their own societies.[46]

With such relative liberties available in Spanish Florida, the appeal of St. Augustine to Marrant's family is understandable. The lure of the Spanish territory is especially plausible in light of restrictions to Black people's autonomy in the decades following the New York conspiracy in 1741. The Spanish colony consistently attracted enslaved Blacks from Georgia and the Carolinas. The founding of Charles Town in 1670 intensified hostilities between Spain and England in the North American colonies. As

[45] Ibid., 2.
[46] Ibid., 4, 16-17.

noted, many believed the New York rebellion of 1741 to have been, in part, instigated by recently arrived Spanish speaking slaves. The enslaved rebels that partook in the Stono uprising in 1739 were, it is speculated, en route to Florida where they hoped to find sanctuary in the Spanish territory. In fact, so many slaves attempted to cross into St. Augustine at the beginning of the 18th century that some scholars indicate the earliest roads to freedom ran south rather than north.[47]

The Marrant family moved in the opposite direction, however, heading north to Savannah after a brief eighteen-month residency in Florida. While their precise reasons for relocation are unknown, the decision to leave St. Augustine was likely motivated, in part, by political developments in the British colonies. The legalization of slavery in Georgia in 1750 increased the number of enslaved Africans transshipped from Charleston to Savannah. Many attempted to find sanctuary in Florida. To stem the tide of runaways leaving their colonies, British colonial officials increased their military presence to patrol routes of escape, thus making passage into Florida more difficult.[48] The increased Black population in Georgia, in conjunction with the relative disarray of Ft. Mose following a defeat at the hands of the British nearly a decade before Marrant's arrival, most likely explains why the family would eventually settle in Savannah.

The religious and cultural diversity that Marrant encountered in New York, St. Augustine, and Savannah informs my analysis of his religious writings in the subsequent chapters of this study. Black religious cultures from West and West Central Africa and

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[47] See for example, Jason Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 69; Landers, *Black Society*, 34; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slaver Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).
[48] Ibid., 29-32, 113.

the Caribbean profoundly impacted his understanding of religious storytelling and ritual performance. Marrant's understanding of Euro-American Protestantism was filtered through Africana interpretive lenses. While the term "Africana" traditionally highlights the inability to pinpoint any singular cultural or regional origin for the African antecedents that develop into African American religious consciousness in the New World, my use of the term connotes theoretically and methodological rooted ways of knowing within the dialogical space of the African diaspora.[49] However, as Jason Young's comparative study of ritual practices in West Central Africa and the lowcountry region of the American south reveals, African religious epistemologies remained operative for Black people on both sides of the Atlantic during the colonial and antebellum periods. Enslaved West Central Africans in Spanish Florida and the Georgia and South Carolina regions, explains Young, had been exposed to Catholicism via Portuguese missionaries in their homeland prior to their arrival to the New World.[50] The predilection for water baptism among enslaved Africans in the lowcountry, for example, illustrates how African water immersion rights were transshipped from West Central Africa to the American south:

> Noting the varied rituals of water immersion in Africa and the deep reverence for river priests on the continent, Melville Herskovits argued that slaves came to the Americas with strong traditions of water immersion rites that they transmuted onto Christian baptism in the New World. Certain Christian symbols, as in the river Jordan, for example, were symbolic representations of both an ostensibly Christian,

[49] See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[50] Jason Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 45.

> yet deeply African spiritual meaning. The prevalence of the imagery of the river Jordan in the musical traditions of slaves further emphasized this connection. That is, the River Jordan reflected a multitude of African rituals of water immersion in the Americas.[51]

Young also explains that while water baptism signaled Christian conversion in Kongo, the adoption of Christian faith "did not preclude one from engaging in indigenous rituals, observing prior practices, or holding fast to other beliefs."

> Baptism in no way entailed the surrender of one form of ritual practice for another. Kongolese converts continually negotiated and tested Christian precepts and tenets against other ritual forms. Some of the elite may very well have studied Christian theology in Europe (one thinks here of Henrique, Kongo's first bishop), whereas others saw it as little more than a ritual protection.[52]

The "African spiritual meaning" of "other ritual forms" to which Young alludes suggest that although water rituals often took the public form of Christian baptism among Africans in New World, West and West Central African religious orientations concerning the spiritual properties of water immersion continued to inform the practice of many early Black Americans. Ras Michael Brown's discussion of simbi spirits in the Georgia and South Carloina lowcountry illustrates this point. The nature spirits known as the simbi were integral to Kongo spiritual landscapes. They guarded the natural environment and were the "chief intermediaries" between the living and the dead marking both beginnings

[51] Ibid., 77.
[52] Ibid., 57.

in a new land or territory as well as ancestral ties to the deep past.[53] As Brown discusses, the presence of the simbi helps explain how early African settlers perceived their relationship to North American environments within Kongo epistemological frameworks.

> [The simbi] were markers of beginnings and of the deep past. They exemplified original inhabitants of a territory, and the relationships these spirits had with people imparted a status of primacy to anchor communities of the living in a country. Where people recognized the existence of the simbi, they were simultaneously making certain claims about their own relationship to their surroundings. In short, the living declared that they belonged to the land and that the land belonged to them. For captive Africans displaced from their home societies and familiar environments, such a statement served to ground them in novel settings in ways absolutely necessary to reestablishing connections between the land of the living and the land of the dead, bring children into this new world, grow food for their families, resist the ravages of disease, struggle wit the countless assaults on their humanity inherent in the experiences of captivity and enslavement, contest the claims to power the oppressors, live, and die.[54]

He continues,

> The simbi, then, tell us about the people who knew them and interacted with them as indispensable aspects of daily life. As such, the simbi are fundamental to the story of how African newcomers and their Lowcountry-born descendants conceived of their relationships with the natural environment and the meanings

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[53] Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-3.
[54] Ibid.

they attached to the spiritual landscape. This story about the formation and elaboration of the environmental and spiritual cultures of African-descended people in the South Carolina Lowcountry includes many other elements that on the surface do not appear related between the simbi and communitites of the living.[55]

In light of such insights from Young and Brown,[56] one must weigh the impact of Africana religion in North America on John Marrant's religious consciousness. In the remainder of this chapter, I construct an interpretive model that applies hermeneutical principles from African and African American storytelling and ritual culture to Marrant's religious writings. This framework guides my reading of Black Atlantic religious literature in the chapters that follow.

For many scholars in religious studies, Africana religion signifies highly emotional, embodied worship. While detailed descriptions of the dynamic outward expressions of Africana religiosity abound, accounts of the rich meanings of the symbolic and ritual forms by which Africans ponder the meaning of life receives little attention. This is perhaps due to a common misconception regarding African religion—i.e. the whole of African religion is believed to be defined in ecstatic and demonstrative worship.[57]

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[55] Ibid., p. 3.

[56] On the continuity of Africana water ritual practice and religious orientation among Black North Americans see also Margaret Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community Culture among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[57] Curtis Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The perception of Africana religions suffers tremendously because of the lack of attention to the interpretive rules that govern sacred communication within African communities on the continent and in the diaspora. The inequitable exchange that resulted from the contact among African, European, and Native Americans communities in the New World esteemed Europeans religious systems more highly than indigenous ways of knowing. Consequently, Western European modes of conceptualizing reality functions normatively in religious studies analysis. Driven by the presumptive myth of white supremacy, sacred literatures in indigenous and African religious communities were assigned meaning according to the interpretive categories of Euro-American Protestantism. This dissertation, however, uncovers inter-textual, symbolic communication in Black American literature using interpretive principles grounded in the Black Atlantic narrative tradition. African and Africana religious communities have well-established narrative traditions, however, like many features of African-derived religion, the hermeneutic principles that govern their interpretation are under-utilized in much of the scholarship on Black religion. This dissertation analyzes African sacred communication and symbolic representations of ritual forms in African American literature.

In colonial and antebellum Black Atlantic communities, literature developed as a cultural form for communicating religious meaning. The oral legacy of African cosmology narratives and African American folktales are the narrative precursors to the African American literary tradition. Both oral and literary traditions of Black storytelling evince spiritual strategies and methods that resist injustice and counter racism. The Black storytelling tradition is a repository of spirituality that offers unique insight into not only

the virtues of Black collective consciousness, but also the vices of the dominant culture's social world. Oral legacy is indispensable to understanding Black literature.[58] In Black oral traditions, spirituality is embodied within the structures, symbols, and forms that determine the rules for interpretation.

The relationship between narrative culture and Black spirituality has been explored by a host of scholars.[59] Lawrence Levine argues that narratives served a didactic purpose in African American slave communities. Folktales preserved the historical memory of the African past in the New World. Noting the absence of cosmological myths and intricate genealogies that characterize oral narratives from the Old World, Levine explains that folktales did contain a historical dimension. Historical memory was preserved in memorates and family legends passed on from one generation to the next. For Blacks enslaved in North America, these family legends often recalled days on the African continent, stories of capture and transport across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, and stories of the American Revolutionary War.[60] Increasingly, however, the focus of their stories reflected less of their previous lives in Africa, and more on their New World circumstances. The embellished anecdotes shared among

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[58] Josiah Young, "Dogged Strength within the Veil: African-American Spirituality as a Literary Tradition," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 55/56 (1999): 87-107.
[59] See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1973); Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Research and Education Association, 1999), Kindle edition; J. Deotis Roberts, "Folklore and Religion: The Black Experience," *Journal of Religious Thought* 27 (1970): 5-15; Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2006); Stephanie Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
[60] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 88.

enslaved peoples recounted the realities of their lived experience: religious meetings and festive celebrations, whippings and punishments, and stories of those who resisted by escaping or directly confronting the limitations of enslavement.

Additionally, the tales contained codes for moral behavior. Some espoused overtly religious virtues such as humility and Sabbath observance. The majority, however, focused on everyday human relationships. The importance of family ties, children's responsibility to parents, obligations to friendship, courting and marriage, and the necessity of parental love and care were frequently touched upon in the oral narratives slaves exchanged with one another. Collectively, these stories helped to solidify kinship groups, fortify communal identities, and preserve cultural memories in the collective consciousness of the slave community, all important to sustaining the inner-resolve necessary to resist myths of Black inferiority.[61]

The stories told within the slave community also attest to the profound insight and creative strategies devised by enslaved peoples from their subordinate position. Levine discusses at great length the symbolic meaning of the trickster in tales told among African American slaves. He notes that animal tricksters in African American folktales were "weak, relatively powerless creatures who attain their ends through the application of native wit and guile rather than power and authority."[62] Levine outlines the basic structure of trickster tales highlighting that "the strong assault the weak who fight back with any weapons they have." The weapon most readily at the disposal of the animal

[61] Ibid., 92-95.
[62] Ibid., 103.

trickster was an intimate knowledge of the realities of his social world. As Levine describes,

> The animals in these tales have an almost instinctive understanding of each other's habits and foibles. *Knowing Rabbit's curiosity and vanity,* Wolf constructs a tar-baby and leaves it by the side of the road. At first fascinated by this stranger and then progressively infuriated at its refusal to respond to his friendly salutations, Rabbit strikes at it with his hands, kicks it with his feet, and butts it with his head, and becomes thoroughly enmeshed. In the end, however, it is Rabbit whose *understanding of his adversary proves to be more profound. Realizing that Wolf will do exactly what he thinks his victim least desires*, Rabbit convinces him that of all the ways to die the one he is most afraid of is being thrown into the briar patch, which of course is exactly what Wolf promptly does, allowing Rabbit to escape.[63]

Armed with an understanding of their rival's patterned behavior, the animals engage in a war of wits, each attempting to outmaneuver the other. In the end, it is Rabbit, the smaller, weaker animal who emerges triumphant.

Triumph of the weak over the strong is a theme repeated in tale after tale. Levine credits this recurrence to the historical reality of slavery, a situation in which slaves, the weakest members of the social order, sought to outsmart their masters by using their thorough knowledge of patterns on the plantation. The testimony of one slave narrator's explicit reference to Brer Rabbit as a model for behavior supports this claim.

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[63] Ibid., 106, emphasis added.

> You see Missus, I is small man myself; but I aint nebber 'low no one for to git head o' me. *I allers use my sense for help me 'long jes' like Brer Rabbit*. 'Fo de wah ol' Marse Heywood mek me he driber on he place, an' so I aint hab for work so hard as de res'; same time I git mo' ration ebery mont' an' 'mo' shoe when dey share out de loes at Chris'mus time. *Well, dat come from usin' my sense*. An' den, when I ben a-courtin' I nebber 'lowed no man to git de benefit ob me in dat. I allers carry off de purties' gal, 'cause you see, Missus, I know how to play de fiddle an' allers had to go to ebery dance to play de fiddle for dem.[64]

Such examples suggest a "direct relationship between Rabbit and the slaves." Noting the metaphoric similarities, Levine points out that both the slave and the animal trickster were forced into moral ambiguity, using whatever means at one's disposal in order to survive and conquer. Thus, Black narrative culture exhibits a systemic exchange of coded messages that disclose strategic and ethical means by which slaves could wage covert spiritual warfare against the injustices of enslavement.

John Roberts agrees that African American folktales communicated coded moral instruction, but his interpretation, unlike Levine's, is not primarily informed by the enslavement of African peoples in North America. Rather, he argues, folktales exhibit an extension of the cultural heritage brought by enslaved Africans to the New World. In many traditional African tales, the trickster, a demi-god whose principal trait was "superior cleverness," secures food from the gods and disperses it among humanity.[65] One mythic tale focuses on Esu, a Yoruba trickster deity, and reveals important

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[64] Ibid., 113, emphasis added.
[65] John Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 22.

cosmological myths that establish cultural epistemologies. In this tale, Esu entices humanity to make offerings to the gods so that they will not go hungry. He consults another god who instructs him to get sixteen palm-nuts, learn their meaning, and "gain the goodwill of mankind." After securing the palm nuts, Esu consults monkeys, who applaud him saying, "You got the sixteen nuts by guile. Now go round the world and ask for their meaning everywhere. You will hear sixteen sayings in each of the sixteen places." After he learns their meaning, Esu goes to the sixteen parts of the world, returns to the sky, and shares with the gods all that he has learned. The gods sanction his mission and when humanity learns of all the impending evil, they make offerings in the hope that they can escape their fate.[66] Roberts notes that the trickster employs guile rather than supernatural means to secure the much needed resources, thus suggesting that the means by which he acts is available to a host of practitioners and not exclusively reserved for those possessing superior strength.

Henry Louis Gates contends that Esu is a symbol for divination within Yoruba oral culture. Esu, the messenger of the gods, is solely responsible for the process of interpretation. According to the interpretive rules embodied in this trickster deity, meanings can be multiple and indeterminate, reflecting perhaps the precarious nature of the cosmos from an African perspective. Indeterminacy factors prominently in Esu's role in divination. Marcus Harvey argues that mystery and irresolution are "motifs that structurally inhere in these grammars of knowing while also reflecting an opaque

[66] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 14.

epistemological orientation in black religious experience."[67] The potential duality of meaning is inherent to the Black narrative tradition.

Interpretive indeterminacy also plays a role in Black textual criticism. According to Gates, the Yoruba god Ifa can be thought of as the "text of divination." Ifa refers not only to the deity, but to the act of divination itself as well as to an immense body of poetic and narrative literature. In Yoruba religion human beings consult this text to decipher their past, present, and future. What the supplicants hear in response is not a set of commands or a literal revelation, but, rather, a series of lyrical poems so metaphorically ambiguous that they are better "classified as enigmas, or riddles, which must be read or interpreted, but which, nevertheless, have no single determinate meaning."[68] The necessity of interpretation in the act of divination underscores Esu's role as divine interpreter.

> Ifa is the god of determinate meanings, but his meaning must be rendered by analogy. Esu, god of indeterminacy, rules this interpretive process; he is the god of interpretation because he embodies the ambiguity of figurative language. Although he allowed his friend Ifa to rule and name the texts of the tradition, it is Esu who retains dominance over the act of interpretation precisely because he signifies the very divinity of the figurative. For Ifa, one's sought meaning is patently obvious; it only need be read. Esu decodes the figures.

[67] Marcus Harvey, "'Life is War.' African Grammars of Knowing and the Interpretation of Black Religious Experience" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2012).
[68] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 21.

Gates further describes Esu as a "metaphor for the uncertainties of explication, for the open-endedness of every literary text." Esu, then, represents a never-ending process of revelation characterized by indeterminacy and multiplicity.[69]

While Gates rightly identifies the West African cultural origins of the Black storytelling tradition, his analysis of early Black American literature does not take religion into account. Rather, Gates' analysis "makes liberal use of poststructural scholarship in semiotics and tropic analysis."[70] His analysis of Marrant's text, for example, considers neither the spiritual legacy of cosmology narratives from which it descends, nor does Gates scrutinize Marrant's use of the Bible as a storytelling model. Consequently, the religious epistemology that undergirds Marrant's text is unattended in his analysis.

My study, however, evaluates Marrant's texts as spiritual narratives intended to communicate ethical norms utilizing symbolic and structural forms commonly found in Black expressive culture. The Black Atlantic cultural world that Marrant inhabited utilized stories—both written and oral—to illustrate moral lessons and establish ethical norms. Sacred communication was revealed to those able to discern indeterminate messages from the world of the spirit. The Bible was the primary source from which spiritual narratives were derived in the autobiographical accounts penned by John Marrant and his contemporaries. One might say the Bible replaced Ifa as the text of divination. While the text of divination changed, the rules for interpret`tation remained the same. The redeployment of the Bible's symbols and structures in early Black

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[69] Ibid., 20-22.
[70] Donald Matthews, *Honoring the Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90.

American literature evinces an Africana cultural strategy for communicating religious meaning. African religious orientations help explain not only why early Black writers select the Bible as a model for storytelling, but also how the meanings were assigned to Bible stories in their own religious narratives.

Frances Smith Foster argues that early Black American narratives maintain a fundamental plot structure based on stories from the Bible. The Judeo-Christian mythic narrative pattern includes an idyllic beginning disrupted by tragedy. Biblical protagonists next undergo spiritual transformation (many times in a wilderness setting), followed by divine intervention and deliverance to a land of promise. This pattern is consistently observed throughout the Old and New Testaments, as well as in early Black American literature. Foster rightly identifies the Bible as a narrative source for African American literary performance. In his autobiographical writings, John Marrant bases his self-portrayal on this same narrative pattern and even includes many of the symbols that signify the various stages of development in the biblical saga. However, Marrant's understanding of the Bible's stories draws on the interpretive principles of African storytelling rather than the doctrines of Euro-American Protestantism.

Successive Black authors follow this pattern incorporating this basic structural form into their own storytelling practices. As Foster notes,

> In the slave narrative is the mythological pattern is realized in four chronological phases. First comes the loss of innocence, which is objectified through the development of an awareness of what it means to be a slave. This can be compared to the descent from perfection or mortification. The mortification process includes purgation, for as the slave learns the meaning of slavery, he also

> tries to purge himself of those elements that would facilitate enslavement. Second is the realization of alternatives to bondage and the formulation of a resolve to be free. The decision begins the ascent to the ideal, or invigoration. The resolution to quit slavery is, in effect, a climax to a conversion experience. The third phase is the escape. Whether it occurs between two sentences or forms the largest portion of the narrative, it is part of the struggle to overcome evil. The interest at this point is in the details, the pitfalls and obstacles, the sufferings and moments of bravery encountered in the process of achieving freedom. Although the first attempt sometimes ends in capture, the outcome is never in doubt. The narrative, after all, was written by a freeman. The fourth phase is that of freedom obtained. It is the arrival at the City of God or the New Jerusalem and it corresponds to the jubilation period of ancient ritual.[71]

Foster's explanation suggests that Black authors mimic the Bible in their own literary performances adapting narrative details like settings and character to their own historical contexts. Mimetic performance is a longstanding practice in Black expressive culture and implies a religious consciousness shaped by traditional African culture. The imitation of the Bible's narrative patterns and symbols in early Black narratives demonstrates how African epistemologies function in Black Atlantic religious consciousness. Mimesis implies conjuring traditions within Black cultural frameworks. Thee Smith contends that, in early African American religion, conjure was an underlying interpretive framework through which religious phenomena were made intelligible.

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[71] Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), 85.

Within the cultural framework of West African conjure, mimesis played an integral role the efficacy of ritual performance. Mimesis consists of patterned performance of operations based on an inferred relationship between one or more things. This relationship, argues Smith, is observable in a host of American American cultural forms related to magico-religious performance.

> Indeed magic itself is essentially mimetic, inferred the nineteenth century historian of religion James G. Frazeer, in his magnum opus, *The Golden Bough* (1900). With his concept of "sympathetic magic" Frazer assigned to magic generically, the element of mimesis that I have highlighted with reference to African American folk expression in particular. Among religion scholars he thereby inaugurated a mimetic theory of magic. On this view magical arts consist in first discerning, and then performing an operation based on, the imputed affinity that one thing has for another. Such affinity consists in the perception of two things as similar: similar on the basis of appearance, function, prior experience of contact or in some other way. Seizing upon such an affinity or 'sympathy', the practitioner of magic devises an effective means of turning to human advantage the perceived similarity or habitual proximity of the two objects.[72]

In Black expressive culture, mimetic performance makes explicit the relationship between distinct phenomena. As Zora Neale Hurston explains, imitation is at the heart of Black expression. Hurston theorizes the mimetic tendency as communicative expression intended to render the essence of one's experience of reality.

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[72] Smith, *Conjuring Culture*, 26-27.

> Mimicry is an art in itself. If it is not, then all art must fall by the same blow that strikes it down. When sculpture, painting, dancing, literature neither reflect nor suggest anything in nature or human experience we turn away with a dull wonder in our hearts at why the thing was done.

If expression does not imitate reality, Hurston suggests, one's intended meaning can never be known since the other has no frame of reference for knowing outside what is commonly experienced as reality. Mimetic performance communicates the performer's conception of a phenomenon and aims to make the perceived relationship between distinct phenomena explicit.

In Black Atlantic religious consciousness, the essence of a phenomenon extends beyond its material reality. Therefore, mimetic performance in John Marrant's literature imitates not only the Bible's structural forms, but his particular deployment of the Bible's symbols also reveals his conception of the relationship between symbols and their material realities. Marrant's texts illustrate how symbolic meaning was determined in early Black American religion. Subsequent chapters identify a more widespread usage of biblical symbolism in the writings of Marrant's Black literary contemporaries and successors and uncovers a coherent understanding of the material world among early Black American writers.

In the case of early African American autobiographers, the mimetic performance of the Bible's narrative structures and symbols reveals African conceptions of Biblical mythology as well as the natural world. The Bible's stories, complete with their symbols, structural forms, and moral imperatives, are imitated in the lives of Black American protagonists. However, the symbols and ethical norms are interpreted via African

epistemologies. Consequently, the meanings assigned to Bible stories—and, by extension, Black religion—diverge sharply from those of Euro-American forms of Christianity. This dissertation explains how mimetic performance in Black literature signifies Africana religious rituals and gives rise to the development of Black religious consciousness.

The discussion of symbols in early Black religious consciousness begins by first explaining Black people's perception of the material world. In Black religious thought, matter is a potential conduit of spiritual power. Consequently, the elements of the natural world are often regarded as sacred. When these material elements appear in Black oral and written narratives, they point to properties that extend beyond their superficially perceived essence. This is especially true when symbols recur in succeeding editions of a story. In the case of early autobiographical narratives, symbols from the Bible are arranged within African structural patterns to articulate a conception of humanity arising from the unique perspective of Black consciousness.

Generally speaking, in traditional West and Central African religious consciousness, one's connection to ancestors and humanity supersedes concerns with God or gods, although divine beings are theoretically held in higher regard.[73] Cosmological narratives elaborate matters of human relationships and well being rather than devotion to deities. The stories, songs, and wise sayings that were passed from one generation to the next intended to illuminate moral and ethical norms for members of the society. When early Black Americans read the Bible, they discovered a body of religious

[73] Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 12.

knowledge in expressive forms (stories, songs, and riddles) common to their own religious cultures. As these stories began to circulate among the diverse West and Central African ethnic groups of early Black American communities, their symbols and structural forms were mimicked, but the historical realities to which they were applied shifted to reflect Black people's contemporary concerns. The autobiographical narratives published during the colonial period were didactic tools intended to establish moral and ethical norms for New World Black communities. While this storytelling tradition incorporates Biblical imagery and symbolism, the rules that governed their interpretation reflected African epistemologies.

The presence of non-European religious orientations among early Black authors raises questions about the presumed religious nature of Black colonial literature, and, by extension, the diverse religious identities of early Black communities. In fact, as Lawrence Levine reminds, narratives told by early Black Americans exhibit a religious orientation in which conjure factored prominently.

> African-born slaves were associated with conjure and magical powers as exemplified in the frequently told stories of Africans who put up with the treatment accorded to them by whites in America as long as they could and then simply rose up and flew back to Africa. In some versions they delayed their escape until they could teach their American-born relatives and friends the power of flight as well.[74]

In African American storytelling, conjure is a spiritual technology to counter the effects of anti-Black racism and injustice. Representations of conjure in Black oral and

[74] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 87.

literary narratives symbolize strategies of resistance and transmit sacred knowledge of spiritual power to the wider community. In the chapters that follow, I mine the autobiographical literature of colonial and antebellum Black Americans for evidence of the systemic deployment of conjure in their storytelling culture. My reading applies Thee Smith's theory of conjure, and is supplemented by historical studies of Black life in colonial America to elucidate the texts written by John Marrant and other Black Atlantic authors. In particular, I draw on the insights of scholars who uncover the role of traditional African religious culture in shaping Black consciousness in colonial and antebellum North America. The perspective of Africana religious cultures is not accidental, but rather vital, to the formation of Black Atlantic religious consciousness given the cultural impact of West and West Central African ethnic groups in New York, St. Augustine, Savannah, and Charleston for Marrant specifically, and throughout the wider trans Atlantic world more broadly. The next several chapters analyze Marrant's texts in conjunction with the writings of his Black Atlantic contemporaries and his North American literary successors, as well as African cosmology narratives and African American folktales. The narrative and cultural frameworks are held together by insights from Zora Neale Hurston who theorizes mimetic performance as an integral aspect of Black religious expression directly informed by African religion.

Smith's theory of conjure illuminates the religious nature of Black Atlantic literature. First, conjure refers to the hermeneutical lens through which early Black Americans read the Bible. Conjure is the process of making meaning. Early Black Americans conjured meaning from texts through exegesis, or divination. As readers, they looked for the patterned repetition of symbols and narrative structures that were already

assigned meaning in their own religious contexts. Secondly, the hermeneutical lens of conjure highlights prophecy in Black Atlantic religion. For John Marrant, writing was a spiritual technology and new prophetic form. Through his written works, he foretold the revelations divined from reading the sacred text, and rendered prophecy in the stories of his life and the lives of the people around him. The didactic purpose of his narratives and sermons helped establish a new sense of identity and purpose among his people. In this sense, he conjured a new reality for Black America. Marrant, along with contemporary and succeeding Black Atlantic autobiographers, foretold the eventual freedom of America's Black population. As Frances Smith Foster explains, for every Black writer that used the Bible as a storytelling model, the plot of their narratives move from slavery to freedom. These freedom stories narrate the origins of Black Atlantic identity and religious consciousness. Their emphasis on the new identity that results from or, in many cases, catalyzes the transition from slavery to freedom conjures a new reality for Black people. For these early Black Americans, writing is one spiritual technology that allows the continued practice of conjure.

African American literature, read through the theoretical lens of conjure, opens new possibilities for conceptualizing Black spirituality and offers an alternative way of thinking about the formation of Black Atlantic religious consciousness. Using conjure as a hermeneutical framework, John Marrant's written corpus evinces a religious worldview that highly esteems African ways of knowing. Marrant's religious understanding is founded upon structural, rather than theological, readings of biblical narratives.

Consequently, storytelling, like other forms of Black expressive culture, disguise African religious orientation in the external accoutrements of Euro-American Christianity. [75]

The contention that the earliest Black Americans read the Bible through the theoretical lens of conjure rather than Christian theology is also informed by Henry Louis Gates' notion that the hermeneutical principles by which Black literature is to be read are generated from the inter-textual communication among Black authors. Black writers signify one another's texts. The rules of inter-textual discourse determine how narratives are to be understood. In particular, Gates seizes the Talking Book trope, a symbol for the acquisition of literacy found in several eighteenth-century autobiographical narratives. But Black authors also signify the oral narratives from African and American storytelling cultures. The next several chapters explore Marrant's texts in relationship to African cosmology narratives, African American folktales, and the Bible to reconstruct Black Atlantic religious consciousness as revealed by the storytelling tradition. Black authors synthesize symbols, narrative forms, and meaning making systems from Black oral culture, the narrative precursor to Black literature, to articulate the emergence of Black Atlantic consciousness. Marrant's literature, along with that of and his contemporaries and successors, evinces the Americanization of Africana storytelling culture rather than Africanized Christianity.

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[75] Josiah Young argues the spiritual legacy of the African American literary tradition is expressed, in part, by narrating Black people's "inner resolve, profound insight, and struggle against oppressive mores" in the fight against racism. This tradition is not confined to a literary tradition. As Young states, "I do not confine…spirituality to essays and novels, or hold that it—as a tradition—is exclusively literary. Music—jazz, for instance—is integral to this tradition, as are religious bodies (the Black church, the Nation of Islam), and oral legacies." See, Josiah Young, "Dogged Strength within the Veil," 88.

Chapter 3: Prepare to Meet thy God

John Marrant's arrival in Charleston in roughly 1766 marks the beginning of his transition into adulthood. Having completed his formal education, he informs his sister that he would rather learn to play music than study a trade. Despite his sister and mother's objections, he convinces them to let him study music. His mother pays his teacher a sum of twenty pounds and Marrant begins his apprenticeship as a musician. He proves a fast learner. In just six months, he learns to play the violin well enough to perform before his classmates. He is so committed to his craft that he takes up a second instrument, the French horn, after school. After another six months, he claims mastery over both the French horn and the violin, and he also learns to dance. His abilities earn him a reputation in Charleston, and he is frequently invited to perform at local parties and balls. His newfound employment proves a tremendous financial advantage, but his moral and ethical development suffers remarkably.

> This opened to me a large door of vanity and vice, for I was invited to all the balls and assemblies that were held in the town, and met with the general applause of the inhabitants. I was a stranger to want, being supplied with as much money as I had any occasion for; which my sister observing, said, "You have now no need of a trade." I was now in my thirteenth year, devoted to pleasure and drinking in iniquity like water; a slave to every vice suited to my nature and to my years. (50)

At the end of his apprenticeship, Marrant quits his master's service and begins to study with a local carpenter, an arrangement his brother-in-law secures. His commitment to learning the trade is half-hearted at best. Music, it seems, is still his primary focus.

> Accordingly I went, but every evening I was sent for to play on music, somewhere or another; and I often continued out very late, sometimes all night, so as to render me incapable of attending my master's business the next day; yet in this manner I served him a year and four months, and was much approved of by him. (51)

Despite his lack of discipline, the young Marrant earns his master's favor. He desires for Marrant to continue in his service and writes to his mother to have him bound under contract for another year. While his mother weighs the matter, Marrant answers a call to play for a group at a party in Charleston. On the way there, he is drawn aside by a frantic scene in a local meeting house.

> One evening I was sent for in a very particular manner to go and play for some Gentlemen, which I agreed to do, and was on my way to fulfil (sic) my promise; and passing by a large meeting house I saw many lights in it, and crowds of people going in. I enquired what it meant, and was answered by my companion that a crazy man was hallooing there; this raised my curiosity to go in, that I might hear what he was hallooing about. (51)

When he enters the house, his companion dares him to blow his French horn to disrupt the meeting. The young Marrant accepts the challenge and presses his way into the crowded room. However, before he can blow a single note, the minister, George Whitefield, begins his address.

John Marrant's depiction of his adolescent years sets the stage for his prophetic call. The vice-driven life of irresponsibility and ease is sharply juxtaposed by the disciplined, morally rigid life that would follow after his encounter with George

Whitefield. Marrant's narration of his prophetic call replicates many of the narrative features commonly found in Bible stories. He, like Moses at the burning bush, turns aside to observe a peculiar sight. In both cases, curiosity opens the door to their prophetic awakening. God speaks to Moses in the burning bush; Marrant discerns the presence of God in Whitefield's sermonic delivery. Marrant is struck to the ground under the power of God. The prophetic call of John Marrant at the meeting house in Charleston marks the beginning of his initiation.

While the content of his narration resonates with the call narratives of biblical prophets, the form of Marrant's story follows the stages of African initiation rituals. Donald Matthews explains the relationship between form and meaning in Black narrative traditions. The presence of African forms suggests that a free-flowing relationship exists between Native American, European, and African worldviews. The religious themes generated by African American narratives emerge not only from the content of stories, but also the forms and performance by which the narratives are communicated. In his study of the narrative quality of African American spirituals, Matthews notes stylistic elements of performance that correspond to the meanings generated by the narrative traditions. For example, the worship styles exhibited in the performance of the spirituals (improvisation, call-and-response, and polyrhythms) demonstrate the value of creativity, community, and pluralism in African cultural view world. In Black religion, the structural organization of performance communicates as much religious meaning as the content of the performance. Thus, Matthews concludes, the spirituals are a form of invocation that contain within its structure the belief that God is within reach and an active member of

the worshipping community. Because the spirituals are assigned a function, one can analyze a corresponding belief.[76]

In Marrant's case, the performance of ritual initiation is dramatized in *Narrative*, his spiritual autobiography. Marrant's dramatization of ritual initiation is likely at least partially inspired by laws that preclude the actual performance of initiation rituals by Black people. The dramatization has a twofold impact: on the one hand, Marrant, as noted, is able to simulate the performance of ritualized initiation via literary depiction; on the other hand, Marrant's literary representation allows him to construct a prophetic identity that establishes his authority as a speaking subject in the eighteenth-century world.

Laurenti Magesa details the process of initiation into adulthood and explains the symbolic and theological meanings associated with the various stages of the process. In traditional African societies, the rites of initiation that transition adolescents into adulthood represent a veritable "forest of symbols"[77] and are employed for the purpose of instruction. Magesa identifies five significant steps of initiation used to transmit the group's moral code to the initiate: seclusion, instruction, physical impression (either actual or symbolic), integration, and covenant.

The biblical model of initiation follows a similar pattern, although in the Bible, initiatory narratives typically dramatize the process by which an individual comes to understand and acknowledge his own prophetic identity. Prior to one's seclusion from his

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[76] Donald Matthews, *Honoring the Ancestors*, 24-29.
[77] Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 1st Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) quoted in, Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 95.

community, the initiate responds to a divine call which is often accompanied by a dramatic demonstration of the divine presence. The call narratives of several biblical prophets demonstrate the pattern upon which Marrant bases *Narrative*.

Typically, call narratives involve the supernatural communication of a divine message. Jesus' call story, for example, follows this pattern. The accounts of Jesus's call in the Gospel depict a scene in which Jesus' prophetic identity is confirmed by the manifestation of God's presence. After Jesus reads scripture, the spirit of God descends on him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:22-23). Also, Jesus' call occurs in the midst of community. The pattern is established that one's journey begins in community and then the initiate moves, or is moved, to seclusion.

While the gospel narratives do not include details regarding Jesus' immediate response to the confirming presence of God's spirit, Marrant's depiction of his response to his prophetic call demonstrates how Black people came to understand the Biblical narrative in light of their own traditions. Marrant details his response to the appearance of divine presence when he hears Whitefield preaching in Charleston.

> [J]ust as Mr. Whitefiled was naming his text, and looking round, as I thought, directly upon me, and pointing with his finger, he uttered these words, "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL." The Lord accompanied the word with such power, that I was struck to the ground, and lay both speechless and senseless near half an hour." (51)

Marrant's response to the call and presence of God that is perceived in Whitefield's sermonic utterance follows the initiatory pattern of spirit-possession common to Africana religious experience. Zora Neale Hurston compares African American shouting and

ceremonial possession in traditional African religion. In African American settings, ritual possession and the accompanying shout are generalized phenomena while in Africa, spirit possession is typically reserved for priests and acolytes. In either case, the experience symbolizes "special favor from the spirit that it chooses to drive out the individual consciousness temporarily and use the body for its expression."[78]

Hurston also explains that ritual shouting in African American religious experience is called forth by rhythmic song, rhythmic speech, rhythmic humming, or embodied percussive instrumentation (hand-clapping or foot-patting) that conforms to the pattern of ritual drumming in traditional African religions. The shout is a demonstrative response that enables the individual's voice to be heard in the midst of the congregation. In a literary sense, the shouter joins the public discourse so that he is heard amidst and against the harmonies of a collection of voices. Marrant's text "halloos" off the page. However, it is the form of the call, more than theological content, that evokes such emotionally expressive worship. As Hurston explains,

> The more familiar the expression, the more likely to evoke response. For instance, "I am a soldier of the cross, a follower of the meek and lowly lamb. I want you all to know I am fighting under the blood-stained banner of King Jesus" is more likely to be amen-ed than any flourish a speaker might get off. Perhaps the reason for this is that the hearers can follow the flow of syllables without stirring the brain to grasp the sense. Perhaps it is the same urge that makes a child

[78] Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 91.

beg for the same story even though he knows it so well that he can correct his parents if a word is left out. [79]

Marrant's temporary loss of consciousness also conforms to the pattern of African spirit possession that Hurston describes. When Whitefield begins his sermon, Marrant is so overcome with emotion that he is "struck to the ground, and lay speechless and senseless near half an hour." When he is finally able to regain consciousness, the impact of Whitefield's words is felt "like a parcel of swords thrust in to (sic) me." Additionally, Marrant reports that he sees "the devil on every side of me." The rhythmic impulse of Whitefield's sermon inspires a vision that compels Marrant to "halloo [holler] out in the midst of the congregation." (51) His episode of unrestrained shouting is consistent with accounts that Hurston describes.[80]

At the conclusion of the meeting, Whitefield and Marrant share a brief exchange. When he is finally able to regain consciousness, he is escorted home with the promise from Reverend Whitefield to visit in the next couple of days, schedule permitting. Whitefield is unable to visit, however, and Marrant is visited by Rev. Hart, a local Baptist minister.

Marrant's interaction with Hart is also instructive. Hart's visit, which Marrant describes as tortuous, comes three days after Marrant's encounter with Whitefield. During the three days since his experience, Marrant takes ill and goes without food and is unable to take any medications prescribed by doctors. He finds no relief from his "distress of soul" until Hart's visit.

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 91-94.

In initiation ceremonies in West Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, the experience Marrant describes is fairly common. Symbolic death marks the beginning of initiation in many societies. Typically, the initiate's semi-conscious trance-like state is followed by a period of diminished physical ability.

> He is supposed to have forgotten everything. He does not know how to talk and can only express himself in inarticulate syllables. The restrictions imposed upon him for long periods of time cause such a state actually come about. He is usually kept physically immobile, lying on a mat for days.[81]

Rev. Oliver Hart finds Marrant in a similar condition when he comes to visit him after the beginning of his initiation. Hart's visit, however, does not initially bring Marrant's distress into relief.

> [W]hen [Hart] entered the room, I thought he made my distress much worse. He wanted to take hold of my hand, but I durst not give it to him. He insisted upon taking hold of it, and I then got away from him on the side of the bed; but being very weak I fell down, and before I could recover he came to me and took me by the hand, and lifted me up, and after a few words desired to go to prayer. So he fell upon his knees, and pulled me down also; after he had spent some time in prayer he rose, and asked me how I did now; I answered, much worse; he then said, "Come, we will have the old thing over again," and so we kneeled down a second time. (52)

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[81] Sheila Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa and Afro-America: Forms, Meanings, and Functional Significance for Individuals and Social Groups* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 53.

After praying with Rev. Hart a third time, Marrant is able to answer, "all is well, all happy." (53)

The tri-fold repetition of prayer and the three-day period of fasting underscore significant elements of ritual initiation in Black religion. The number three signifies both prophetic call as well as seeking insight to discern the divine will. As Zora Neale Hurston notes,

> Three days is the traditional period for seeking the vision. Usually the seeker is successful, but now and then he fails. Most seekers "come through religion" during revival meetings, but a number come after the meeting is closed.[82]

Marrant does not "come through religion" until he is visited by Rev. Hart following Whitefield's revival. It is not until after the meeting—three days after the meeting—that Marrant's soul is finally set at ease.

Hart's visit also demonstrates the significance the number three has for call narratives in Black religious traditions. According to Hurston, in Black narratives, the prophetic call is accepted only after it has been rejected at least twice.

> Three is the holy number and the call to preach always comes three times. It is never answered until the third time. The man flees from the call, but is finally brought to accept it. God punishes him by every kind of misfortune until he finally acknowledges himself beaten and makes known the call. Some preachers say the spirit whipped them from their heads to their heels. They have been too sore to get out of bed because they refused the call. This never ceased until the

[82] Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 85.

surrender. Sometimes God sends others to tell them they are chosen. But in every case the ministers refuse to believe the words of even these.[83]

In Marrant's case, the third prayer offered by Rev. Hart "brings him through religion" and finally calms the distress caused by his awe-inspiring encounter with the divine.

The initial rejection or the reluctant acceptance of one's prophetic call is a familiar pattern in Biblical call narratives. Many times the called person objects on the basis that some physical deficiency disqualifies him from service. Moses' stutter and Isaiah's unclean lips come readily to mind.[84] While the number three does not share the same significance in biblical call narratives as in African American religious narratives, the pattern of initial rejection persists in both versions. Marrant, like the biblical prophets, experiences both an encounter with divine presence and discerns through that experience a prophetic call which he initially rejects. Marrant's acceptance of the call does not launch him into his prophetic ministry. Rather, Marrant's acceptance begins the ritual process of initiation.

Encouraged by Hart's admonition to "Hold fast that thou hast already obtained, 'till Jesus Christ come," Marrant "now read the Scriptures very much." (53) The thematic emphases and forms in the Bible provide the narrative model for his own autobiography. Mimetic performance informs his appropriation of Biblical archetypes. Marrant conjures scripture to establish his prophetic identity in his life's story. *Narrative* exhibits one of the earliest written records of African American Biblical hermeneutics.

[83] Ibid., 86.
[84] See, Exodus 3:10; Isaiah 6:5.

While Marrant develops a voracious appetite for Bible reading, his strong inclination for music wanes. Despite his sister's repeated requests and condemning insults, he refuses to play the violin. He also gives up manual labor completely devoting himself to a regiment of fasting, Bible reading, and prayer. His asceticism becomes so extreme he draws the ire of his neighbors. As accusations of madness circulate throughout Black Charleston, Marrant endures a three-day journey to his mother's home in Savannah.

When he arrives in Savannah, his mother's home is not the refuge he sought. His siblings call him "every name but that which was good" and, he adds, "at length, my mother turned against me also, and the neighbours (sic) joined her, and there was not a friend to assist me, or that I could speak to." The family's ridicule is so intense Marrant briefly contemplate suicide. The uncultivated country, however, provides the needed solace. There, he continues the ascetic practices he began in Charleston. His extended periods of isolation in the wilderness continue for a number of weeks until the fourteen-year-old Marrant leaves home altogether.

> After spending some time in the fields, I was persuaded to go from home altogether. Accordingly I went over the fence, about half a mile from our house, which divided the inhabited and cultivated parts of the country from the wilderness. I continued travelling in the desart [sic] all day without the least inclination of returning back. (56)

Marrant's seclusion is caused by the intense scrutiny he receives from family and neighbors. The communal scorn highlights his peculiarity—a popular literary device in eighteenth-century Black narratives. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw notes that his family

regarded him with contempt because of his unique insight into spiritual matters at an early age.

> I had, from my infancy, a curious turn of mind; was more grave and reserved in my disposition than either of my brothers and sisters. I often teased them with questions they could not answer: for which reason they disliked me, as they supposed that I was either foolish, or insane.[85]

Gronniosaw's inquisitiveness annoys his siblings. His incessant queries about the great "Man of Power" who "resided above the sun, moon and stars" trouble his mother and anger his father. After lingering outside to observe a thunderstorm, Gronniosaw questions his mother about the maker of creation and humanity. When his mother's answer cannot satisfy his curiosity, his father threatens to punish him if he is ever again so troublesome. This dismal portrayal of family life intends to highlight communal recognition of Gronniosaw's spiritual identity rather than the backwardness of African society. The depiction of family persecution establishes Gronniosaw's marginal status and foreshadows his transformation into the prophetic hero by the end of the narrative.

The link between family rejection and prophetic identity has a Biblical parallel as well. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus' family attempts to restrain his ministry because they doubt his sanity. The scribes and religious leaders in Jerusalem believe that his spiritual authority is derived from an evil, demonic source.[86]

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[85] James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince* (Bath: S. Hazzard, 1770) in *Unchained Voices*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 35.
[86] See Mark 3:20-27.

Family rejection and divine appointment are also connected in the story of Joseph, a prophetic figure that Marrant uses as a typological referent on other occasions in *Narrative*. In Genesis chapter 37, Joseph's prophetic dream and his father's special favor fuel his brothers' disdain.

> Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.
>
> And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.[87]

Joseph's brothers take offense at the favor he receives from their father and the dream that foretells his exalted status among them. Thus, the markers of his prophetic identity incite his brothers' fury. When Joseph has a second dream, he heightens his brothers' anger and is reprimanded by his father.

> And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and

[87] Genesis 37:3-8

> his father rebuked, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.[88]

Fed up with their younger brother's brashness, his brothers conspire against him. Joseph is held in isolation in a pit until they decide to sell him to slave traders bound for Egypt.

Marrant's narration of solitude differs from the above examples. Unlike Gronniosaw, Joseph, and Jesus, Marrant enters into solitude willingly. Although the details differ, the structural similarities between his account and their stories are striking. In each case, family rejection stems from a recognition of the protagonist's unique spiritual abilities or religious practice. For Joseph and Marrant, family persecution causes secluded isolation thus signaling the beginning of prophetic initiation. For Marrant and Gronniosaw, family rejection is a Biblically based signifier of prophetic identity and a literary pre-cursor to ritual seclusion.

Marrant's narrative shift to the wilderness setting also imitates Bible stories. Biblical prophets frequently endure isolation in uncultivated territory before embarking on a divine mission. Jesus is driven to seclusion in the wilderness for forty days of fasting and prayer. This follows his baptism by John and the confirmation of his prophetic identity by the voice from heaven. Similarly, Moses flees to the wilderness after murdering a taskmaster for mistreating a Hebrew slave in Egypt. It is there that he learns to herd sheep from his father-in-law, Jethro. When Moses returns to the

[88] Genesis 37:9-11

wilderness, he is not leading sheep, but the nation of Israel. After they escape Egypt, he leads Israel to Midian and learns from Jethro to organize his massive following.

In each of the three Biblical examples, the number forty signifies the ritual aspects of wilderness experience. Jesus spends forty days and nights in the wilderness, and each of Moses' respective stays in the wilderness lasts forty years. Thus, the wilderness setting and the number forty are literary signifiers of ritual norms in Biblical narratives.

Wilderness signifies ritual norms in Africana religious literature as well. In *Narrative*, the shift to the wilderness setting signals the beginning of ritual seclusion. Zora Neale Hurston explains that African American seeking rituals often take place in the wilderness. In traditional conversion visions, notes Hurston, the supplicant "goes forth into waste places and by fasting and prayer induces the vision." The wilderness was also a significant psycho-social space in the religious lives of Africans in colonial North America. Historian Ras Michael Brown identifies the lowcountry region of Georgia and South Carolina as places where the association of uncultivated land with spiritual significance persisted among enslaved and free persons of African descent. Gullah Joe, a Mukongo man enslaved in South Carolina, affectionately longs for his wife and children, as well as tribal kin in Africa. Additionally, he desires to once again to walk in the "*feenda*[89]." The memory, which demonstrates the association of land and spirituality in Africana religious consciousness, causes him to well up with tears. For Brown, Gullah Joe's affection for the forests of Africa is instructive.

[89] "Feenda" is a derivative spelling of the KiKongo word (*finda, mfinda*) which means "forest."

> Long after arriving in nineteenth-century South Carolina, Gullah Joe pined not only for the comfort and familiarity of his African family and people, but also for the land of his birth. He yearned particularly for the "*feenda*" where he likely spent much of his youth in Africa collecting plants, trapping small animals, practicing the hunt, and otherwise learning to become a Kongo man.[90]

Brown's analysis identifies a relationship between land and social development in African cultural thought. The *feenda*, implies Brown, is instrumental in the formation of Kongolese male identity. This religious orientation was maintained among American-born persons of African descent in the lowcountry region of South Carolina in North America—Marrant's stomping grounds.

The evidence regarding African American seclusion narratives suggests that Marrant's decision to leave home is not brash youthful impulsiveness, but rather the beginning of the seclusion phase of initiation. In traditional African societies, initiation rituals typically begin with seclusion. The initiate is removed from her or his community and sent to the wilderness or another designated place outside the community. During this time, the initiate undergoes extreme physical and psychological pressure living without the comforts of everyday life or the reassurance of one's community. The stage of seclusion, according to Barbara Holmes, affords the initiate as well as the larger community an extended period for contemplative reflection.

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[90] Ras Michael Brown, "'Walk in the Feenda:' West- Central African and the Forest in the South Carolina-Georgia Lowcountry" in ed. Linda M. Heywood, *Central African and cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 290.

> Initiates are secluded in ways that induce the contemplative journey. Although they are with peers, the fear of the unknown, the isolation from family and the community, the tasks and sojourn with ancestors all serve to disconnect them from the everyday world…The initiates are in a focused spiritual environment that forces them to view their past and future from a completely different perspective. Initiates become open vessels receiving the wisdom of the elders; more important, they take their place on the great wheel of life that turns elders into ancestors and children into adults. They learn to embrace the spirit realm and to understand that life is never linear but a cycle of spiritual seasons.[91]

Holmes contends that while the contemplative aspect of such practices is "often unintelligible" to those accustomed to understanding contemplation from the perspective of European religious traditions, the effect is evident in the life of the initiate. Laurenti Magesa affirms Holmes' contention interpreting the seclusion phase as a narrative of death and resurrection. The purpose of the ritual seclusion is to impress upon the initiate the importance of communal support and cooperation.

> The individual, alone, literally does not exist; their seclusion signals their state of limbo. Not having received formal instruction, they do not properly understand the significance of the community's socio-religious customs…Learning the values of cooperation and sharing the central importance of belonging to a family, a clan, and a community as an integral and responsible member constitutes this initial phase of the initiation process. Just as one is nothing without belonging to a community, the community disintegrates somewhat without the membership and

[91] Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 58.

> contribution of everyone. Therefore, seclusion signifies the death from which the initiates will be delivered only by integration into the community after the initiation process.[92]

In John Marrant's case, the contemplative element of his seclusion is explained by his practices in the wilderness, notably fasting and prayer. Seeking refuge from persecution at the hands of family and neighbors, Marrant withdraws to the wilderness to reflect on the mysteries of his developing spirituality.

> I betook myself to the fields, and some days staid out from morning to night to avoid persecutors. I staid one time two days without any food, but seemed to have clearer views into the spiritual things of God. (53-56)

Marrant's wilderness narrates a widely accessible trope of ritual isolation commonly deployed in Africana and Biblical spirituality.

The insights Marrant gains while secluded in the woods account for instruction, the next stage of his initiation. While the ritual of seclusion dramatizes the importance of communal membership, formal instruction, the second phase of ritual initiation, communicates this lesson more directly. In this stage, the religious and ethical wisdom is communicated from elders to initiates in songs, riddles, proverbs, and sacred dances. The initiate learns the proper forms of worship to render to the deity.

> It is during the initiation period, the duration of which varies with social conditions, that one acquires one's possessing deity and learns how to serve him. It is also during this period that personality of the god is established as an ego

[92] Magesa, *African Religion*, 96.

subsystem of the devotee's, and the signals which trigger the manifestation for the subsystem are inculcated.[93]

Formal instruction stresses the interrelatedness of religion, life and death, sex and sexuality, social virtues, and self-identity. The relationship between seen and unseen realms which house the living and the dead is emphasized, as well as the interconnectivity of humanity with the created order. In *Narrative*, these lessons are not taught by communal elders. Rather, Marrant learns directly from a Cherokee community he happens upon during his journey into the wilderness.

Marrant's instruction begins with a fortuitous encounter with an "Indian hunter" that he meets in the wilderness. Prior to this encounter, Marrant's struggles were monumental. Unable to secure clean drinking water, regularly procure food, or provide adequate lodging, he fondly anticipates death during his first days alone in the wilderness. His account of the previous days reveals the many life-threatening uncertainties he faced alone in the woods.

Marrant abides in the trees of the forest discovering in them a refuge from wild animals as well as nighttime lodging. Armed only with his Bible and a Dr. Watts hymnal, he finds the task of procuring meals difficult and nearly succumbs to dehydration, starvation, and fatigue during the first four days he is in the wilderness. The morning of the fourth day proves particularly difficult. Unable to locate food, water, or adequate shelter, and too weak to walk, Marrant is so fatigued that it takes him nearly an hour to crawl twenty yards to a meal of deer-grass and muddied water which had recently been vacated by wild pigs. He is in such a weakened state that he cannot pull up

[93] Walker, *Ceremonial Possession*, 52.

the deer grass "so I bit it off like a horse, and prayed the Lord to bless it to me, and I thought it the best meal I ever had in my life." He continues in this manner for several days and, despite the constant threat of death, says, "the Lord Jesus Christ was very present, and that comforted me through the whole." (58)

Christ's presence in the midst of fatigue and near starvation in the wilderness is likely intended to conjure images of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Jesus' temptation comes after he has endured forty days of fasting. According to accounts found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus is propositioned by the devil to forsake his prophetic calling for a life of wealth, ease, and pleasure. He, like Marrant, also briefly considers suicide when prompted by the devil to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. When Jesus sharply refuses, his time of fasting is completed and angels attend to him. Similarly, Marrant overcomes the suicidal thoughts that challenge him while fasting in the wilderness. "Not long after this," he writes, "I was sharply tried, and reasoned the matter within myself, whether I should turn to my old courses of sin and vice, or serve and cleave to the Lord; after prayer to God, I was fully persuaded in my mind, that if I turned to my old ways I should perish eternally." (56)

Determined to go on, Marrant begins the next day's journey with newly found resilience. Bypassing wolves, bears, and other wild animals, he continues for nearly fifty-five miles through uncultivated territory. At five o'clock in the afternoon, an "Indian hunter" comes to aid him like the angels in the gospel narratives assist Jesus. The encounter with the hunter marks the beginning of Marrant's formal instruction.

The initial encounter between John Marrant and the unnamed Cherokee deer hunter is instructive for understanding the formal and informal processes of cultural

exchange that occur between Blacks and Native Americans in colonial North America. Marrant's depiction of the encounter suggests that collegial relations exist between persons of African and Native American descent in the eighteenth century.[94] The conversation begins with the hunter asking Marrant a series of questions related to his understanding of spiritual presence and his survival. The hunter first asks Marrant where he was going. When Marrant explains that his destination is unknown, the hunter asks with whom Marrant has been in conversation. The conversation ensues,

> I told him I was talking to my Lord Jesus; he seemed surprised, and asked me where he was? for he did not see him there. I told him he could not be seen with bodily eyes. After a little more talk, he insisted upon taking me home; but I refused, and added that I would die rather than return home. He then asked me if I knew how far I was from home? I answered, I did not know; you are fifty-five miles and a half, says he, from home. He farther (sic) asked me if I knew how I did to live? I said I was supported by the Lord. He asked me how I slept? I answered, the Lord provided me with a bed every night; he further enquired what preserved me from being devoured by the wild beasts? I replied, the Lord Jesus Christ kept me from them. He stood astonished, and said, you say the Lord Jesus Christ do this, and do that, and do every thing for you, he must be a very fine man, where is he? I replied, he is here present. (58-59)

[94] Since their arrival to North America in the sixteenth century, former slaves and free Blacks fled to Creek communities in the Georgia and South Carolina lowcountry. Known as *Estelvste*, a Creek phrase meaning "Black people," these Afro refugees were fully assimilated learning the language and customs, sharing kinship ties, and rising to positions of influence within Creek society. See Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), xvii.

The litany of questions and answers in this initial exchange recount Marrant's previous days in the wilderness just prior to this encounter. Marrant's readers are aware of his difficulties in the wilderness up to this point, so the inclusion of this conversation in *Narrative* likely performs another function. The question and answer exchange between Marrant and the Cherokee deer hunter functions like a catechism weaved into the narrative of the text. At the prompting of his Native American instructor, John Marrant demonstrates his understanding of divine provision and protection. Food, shelter, and protection come from the realm of the divine.

Because Marrant has endured the trial of seclusion, he is nearly ready to learn the more practical lessons of survival. However, his Cherokee instructor has to first be assured that Marrant is up to meet the challenge. In a test of Marrant's fortitude, the hunter threatens to take him home. Marrant responds, "I would rather die than return home." His preference for death rather than going home demonstrates his commitment to initiation.

After Marrant professes his unwavering commitment, the Cherokee hunter teaches him practical aspects of survival. Namely, he teaches him to hunt deer for food and for trade, how to make a bed for sleeping, and how to protect himself from wild animals in the forest. The lessons that the hunter teaches the young Marrant correspond to the questions the hunter posed during their first conversation. Having demonstrated a knowledge and understanding that all provisions—food, lodging, and protection—come from God, Marrant now learns from the Indian hunter how to secure these for himself.

> Our employment for ten weeks and three days was killing deer, and taking off their skins by day, which we afterwards hung on the trees to dry till they were

> sent for; the means of defence (sic) and security against our nocturnal enemies, always took up the evenings: We collected a number of large bushes, and placed them nearly in a circular form, which uniting at the extremity, afforded us both a verdant covering, and a sufficient shelter from the night dews. What moss we could gather was strewed upon the ground, and this composed our bed. A fire was kindled in the front of our temporary lodging-room, and fed with fresh fuel all night long, as we slept and watched by turns; and this was our defence (sic) from the dreadful animals, whose shining eyes and tremendous roar we often saw and heard during the night. (59)

Lest the impact of this two-and-a-half-month experience be understated, Marrant makes clear the meaning of this period of instruction. As he states.

> By constant conversation with the hunter, I acquired a fuller knowledge of the Indian tongue: This, together with the sweet communion I enjoyed with God, I have since considered as a preparation for the great trial I was soon after to pass through. (59)

Marrant explains that the lessons taught by his Cherokee companion would prove invaluable in subsequent phases of the initiatory journey. His faith in God and his ability to wield the powers of the Cherokee language would certainly be put to the test in the next stage of initiation.

While Marrant emphasizes the religious instruction that he receives in the wilderness, that environment has long been the setting for teaching adolescent initiates about the natural world in traditional Central and West African communities. Ras Michael Brown notes that in addition to providing refuge from political rivals, forests in

West and Central African communities provided the training ground for male adolescent hunters. Brown also carefully explains the ways in which this orientation remained in tact for their eighteenth-century descendants who inhabited the lowcountry region. Under the tutelage of master hunters and their fathers, notes Brown, boys "began their education in the ways of men" learning valuable lessons regarding hunting techniques, the value of medicinal herbs for both healing and harming purposes, and how to supplicate powerful nature spirits for successful hunts.[95] The forest was also a geographical and psycho-social space that existed outside the boundaries of the plantation. The wilderness was the meeting ground for important community-forming rituals as well as the site where ancestral spirits were accessible since, for enslaved people, the burial of the dead regularly occurred in the forest. Hunting in the lowcountry, like in Africa, also marked a transition into manhood and remained a male-dominated activity. Brown demonstrates the instructional nature of this transitory period and also connects this kind of orientation to a Central African worldview.

> West Central African men, the fathers of so many Lowcountry-born generations, likely provided much of the instruction for activities such as hunting during slavery. Indeed, their descendants continued to use the KiKongo verb *tangisa*, meaning "to teach," into the twentieth century.[96]

For Blacks in the eighteenth-century South Carolina lowcountry, uncultivated and uninhabited land was commonly used as a space for religious ritual. Marrant's choice of wilderness for the setting of his encounter with the Cherokee hunter symbolizes the

[95] Ras Michael Brown, "Walk in the Feenda," 309-311.
[96] Ibid., 314.

seclusion and training that defines the first two phases of initiation in many West and Central African societies. Marrant's demonstration of endurance, knowledge, and fortitude propel him through ritual instruction. In the following phase of his initiation, his courage would be put to the test.

To illustrate physical impression, the next phase in ritual initiation, Marrant relates a dramatic scene in which he narrowly escapes death by execution. This segment of *Narrative* conjures the Daniel narrative found in the Old Testament, although the structural elements of the story are reiterated in numerous Old and New Testament texts. Not only do Marrant's "wild beasts" mirror the fearsome lions of the Biblical tale, Marrant also follows the narrative structure of prophetic identification found in Daniel to accent key prophetic features in his own profile.

Daniel, like Marrant, is taught literature and language at an early age; he receives the best training available; he lives in a foreign land and his people have names in multiple languages. The colonial, multi-lingual context of Daniel is emphasized by the remark concerning the renaming of Daniel and his companions by the Babylonian official.[97] While no evidence exists to suggest Marrant had a second name, some of his fellow Black Atlantic writers maintain their indigenous names after achieving notoriety as authors. James Albert includes his ethnic African name, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, on the cover of his autobiography, *Account*, and Oluadah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* is published under his given name rather than the one given to him by European enslavers, Gustavas Vassa. Richard Brent Turner argues that in African Americans religious traditions, naming has a seminal significance. Signification, the process by which names,

[97] See Daniel 1:1-17.

symbols, and stereotypes are assigned to human and cultural realities, was both imposed and self-affirmed in the colonial history of Black Americans. Affirmation is evident in the names that Black people chose for both themselves and the religious institutions they formed in the New World.[98] The imposition of signifying practices is seen when Equiano and Gronniosaw, like the protagonists of the Daniel narrative, are given names by their foreign captors. The continuity of African cultural orientations can be seen in the choices of writers like Equiano and Gronniosaw who continue to use their African names. Although Marrant does not use a second name, the commonality of multiple names in multiple languages among persons of African descent in colonial America aligns with the socio-political setting in the Daniel narrative.

While Marrant's text omits specific references to renaming practices, *Narrative* shares the theme of adoption with the Daniel story. In a general sense, Bible narratives that include cross-national settings or multi-ethnic contact commonly feature the adoption of Israel's prophetic hero by the ruling elites of the other culture. Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and avoids the fate of slavery when he is born under Egyptian rule. Consequently, he is trained as an elite member of Pharaoh's household thus occupying one of the highest positions in Egypt. Moses' adoption in Exodus is prefigured by Joseph's story in Genesis. Joseph is also adopted into Pharaoh's household and treated as an elite member of the kingdom. After rightly interpreting a series of Pharaoh's dreams, he is promoted to the second highest-ranking office in the Egyptian government. The Daniel saga, Marrant's choice of reference in this instance, also dramatizes the prophet's

[98] See Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in African American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 43-46.

rise to leadership in Babylon. Daniel, like Joseph, interprets the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and eventually governs the province of Babylon. In addition to his governorship, gifts are bestowed upon him and he rules over the wise men of Babylon.

Tales of foreign adoption also appear in many of the earliest African American narratives. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's enslavement begins as an apprenticeship to an elite merchant from Ghana. The Ghanaian merchant persuades his parents and grandfather to allow the young boy to travel to the coast of Africa and promises that he will "see houses with wings to them walk upon the water, and should also see the white folks." After assuring him that he would have playmates and that he would eventually be brought back safely, Gronniosaw agrees to leave his family and travel with the merchant.

> I was highly pleased with the account of this strange place, and was very desirous of going. I seemed sensible of a secret impulse upon my mind which I could not resist that seemed to tell me I must go. When my dear mother saw that I was willing to leave them, she spoke to my father and grandfather and the rest of my relations, who all agreed that I should accompany the merchant to the Gold Coast.[99]

Although the merchant eventually sells him into slavery, the scene in Gronniosaw's *Account* demonstrates the adoptive practices that grew to be commonplace in the eighteenth-century trans Atlantic world.

Adoptive kin was a common practice among Afro-Catholics in Spanish Florida, Marrant's one-time home. Under Spanish rule, colonial Floridians maintained the early Christian practice of selecting godparents to sponsor baptisms and weddings. Frequently,

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[99] Gronniosaw, 37.

African slaves selected white planters and merchants as godparents. Though godparents with higher social status were coveted by enslaved Africans, priest's assistants most frequently occupied the role. Godparenthood, or *compadrazgo*, established the spiritual paternity of the enslaved. This network of fictive kin ensured, at least in principle, that "all parties could expect trust, confidence, respect, and mutual assistance from the relationship."[100]

Marrant's godparents are not Spanish planters in Florida; he is adopted by "Indian captors." His first guide and teacher is the deer hunter from whom he learns hunting and the Creek language. When Marrant enters the Cherokee town, he is taken into custody and sentenced to death for trespassing. He is held in confinement until he receives news of his impending execution scheduled for the following morning. Rather than feeling sadness or despair, he says the news "made me very happy, as the near prospect of death made me hope for a speedy deliverance from the body." (60) Marrant gets through the night by praying and singing hymns to God. The commotion he stirs while confined prompts one of his guards to ask whether he has company in his dungeon. Marrant responds, "it was the Lord Jesus Christ," but the guard does not respond. Instead he leads him to the place of execution in front of a large gathering.

> At the hour appointed for my execution I was taken out, and led to the destined spot, amidst a vast number of people. I praised the Lord all the way we went, and when we arrived at the place I understood the kind of death I was to suffer, yet blessed be God, *none of those things moved me*. (60-61, emphasis added)

[100] Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 121-122.

Marrant's fearlessness in the face of death conforms to the pattern of African initiation. In traditional African societies, ritual death was a critical part of initiatory rites. While some traditional African groups express this concern symbolically, others enact it literally through surgical procedures of circumcision or scarification. These procedures, which Laurenti Magesa describes as "always deliberately intensely painful," are meant to fortify courage in the initiates. The surgeons dress in elaborate and colorful ritual garb and their faces are painted so that they "look as fierce and awe-inspiring as possible." As he approaches the initiate, he may jump and dance wildly displaying the knife to be used in the surgery. The drama is intended to inspire fear, yet "what is intended on the part of the [initiates] is courage." The initiates are watched closely and not expected to exhibit any trepidation. Flinching or hesitation of any kind is considered disgraceful, and such a display would cause enduring shame.

Magesa emphasizes that the purpose of the physical impression is to celebrate courage. It is believed that the initiates' display of physical courage implies the moral courage necessary to carry on the life force of the clan. Additionally, the ritual is believed to teach a lesson in self-giving. The initiate, for the good and survival of the community, endures the pain of surgery without hesitation. The procedure also establishes the adolescent's identity within a particular ethnic group and joins him or her to the group's ancestors. Those who undergo the procedure together form a bond that endures the whole of their lives. They constitute an age-group and thus a communal generation is formed. Magesa sums up the purpose of the ritual in the following:

> It is to impress upon the initiate, in one intense, unforgettable moment, the reality of life and its requirements for the living. An initiation operation gives a clear

> message that to be self-giving and to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the community is an essential aspect of life, even if this means pain or may even demand extensive suffering. Furthermore, the operation is intended to tell the initiate that to know oneself and to appreciate the worth of others demands self-denial and a certain amount of suffering. Even to enjoy pleasure…some suffering is inevitable.[101]

Literary representation of death was common in the first Black narratives. As Equiano explains, the fear of death loomed large in the minds of Black Atlantic writers particularly when they entered new territories. Equiano recalls the first time boarding a slave ship.

> The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave-ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, which I am yet at a loss to describe, nor the then feelings of my mind. When I was carried on board I was immediately handled, and tossed up, to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me.

Gronniosaw, in a scene eerily similar to Marrant's, describes a near execution that causes terror in the young protagonist. When he arrives to the Gold Coast, Gronniosaw is encouraged by the sound of drums and trumpets announcing his, and other captives', arrival. His joy, however, is short-lived; he finds out that he is to be put to death.

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[101] Magesa, *African Religion*, 101.

> This account gave me a secret pleasure; but I was not suffered long to enjoy this satisfaction, for in the evening of the same day two of the merchant's sons (boys about my own age) came running to me, and told me, that the next day I was going to die, for the King intended to behead me.[102]

Unlike his literary contemporaries, Marrant is unmoved at the moment of ritual death. His singular display of bravery signifies his successful completion of this stage of initiation. Finding his fear waning and his faith growing, Marrant's prophetic identity is confirmed by a sign. Marrant asks his executioner to allow him to pray, which he grants. He prays fluently in English and in the Creek language.

> I then asked the executioner to let me go to prayer; he asked me to whom? I answered, to the Lord my God; he seemed surprized (sic), and asked me where he was? I told him he was present; upon which he gave me leave. I desired them all to do as I did, so I fell down upon my knees and mentioned to the Lord his delivering of the three children in the fiery furnace, and of Daniel in the Lion's den, and had close communion with God. I prayed in English a considerable time, and about the middle of my prayer, the Lord Impressed a strong desire upon my mind to turn into their language, and pray in their tongue. I did so, and with remarkable liberty, which wonderfully affected the people. (61)

Marrant's shocking display of fluency is so powerful that the executioner becomes an ally. He is unable to speak for five minutes. When he is somewhat relieved of his dumbfounded state, he embraces Marrant's waist and vows "No man shall hurt thee till thou has been to the king." (61)

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[102] Gronniosaw, 39

Marrant's prayerful remembrance of the Biblical narratives in Daniel is instructive for understanding the literary impact of this passage in *Narrative*. Like Marrant, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the "three children in the fiery furnace" to which he refers, are supernaturally delivered from impending execution. Daniel also faces execution when sentenced to death by lions. In both examples, the protagonists escape death because of divine intervention.

The narrative elements that surround biblical scenes of ritual death include depictions of isolation and confinement. Often the protagonist is restrained, struck, intimidated or made to feel the pain of physical impression in some way. Joseph is bound and thrown into prison; the three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are bound and thrown into a flaming furnace; Daniel is fed to lions; Jonah suffers seclusion in the watery bowels of a whale's belly; Peter is bound with multiple chains and imprisoned; and finally, Jesus is beaten before suffering a horrific crucifixion. In each case, the initiate's looming, presumed, or actual death is encountered in isolation from his community and involves the terrifying circumstances of a painfully horrific execution.

Inevitably, however, the heroes escape death by supernatural means. Joseph delivers a prophecy received by divine communication and is elevated from prisoner to government official. The three Hebrew companions of Daniel emerge from the flaming furnace with no evidence of their fiery surrounding while Daniel is unharmed after a night in a den of lions. In each case, their survival is attributed to God's deliverance. After three days and nights in the belly of the fish, Jonah is brought to shores of Nineveh where he delivers his prophetic message. Peter's miraculous escape from prison is the

result of an angelic visitation. And Jesus escapes the hold of death by God's miraculous power of resurrection.

Ritual death and resurrection is a recurring theme in colonial literature. Joanna Brooks posits that Marrant and other early American authors symbolize death and resurrection to dramatize transformative spiritual power in early American religion. Literary death and resurrection re-enacts physical impression in Biblical and early African American literature, and thus conjures this phase of ritual initiation. While death and suffering find a host of literary representations, deliverance and resurrection is always attributed to divine intervention.

In Marrant's case, divine intervention takes the form of prophetic confirmation. Marrant prays and has the ability to speak fluently in the Indian tongue. Thus, the gift of tongues comes forth. Linguistic dexterity is a common trait in Biblical prophetic identity. Daniel, the Hebrew prophet who rises to leadership in the Babylonian empire is trained to read and speak the Babylonian language. Conversely, although he is trained in the language and literature of Babylon, he prays to the God of Israel while facing Jerusalem thus suggesting that he retains the religious ways of his ethnic identity although living as a foreigner. Fluency in multiple languages likely accounts for Daniel's ability to negotiate Babylonian religious and political terrains.

In Biblical literature, prophetic ability was often represented by oral symbolism. In the Exodus narrative, Moses' initial reluctance to accept the prophetic call stems from a presumed inability to perform his prophetic abilities. Specifically, Moses cites his slowness of speech, possibly indicating a stutter. When prompted by God to take up the prophetic mantle, Isaiah initially disqualifies himself because of his "unclean lips."

Perhaps the most well know association of prophetic identity with oral symbolism is found in the New Testament story of Pentecost. The prophetic identity of Jesus' followers is confirmed when "tongues of fire" descend upon the apostles symbolizing prophetic utterance. As the tongues divided, and came to rest upon each of them, they began to speak in other languages thus exhibiting linguistic proficiency.
Linguistic proficiency is an important symbol as it represents, in Marrant's case, not only prophetic eloquence as a public speaker, but also the ability to translate one form of expression to another. Oratorical ability is symbolized in this moment, thus establishing Marrant's prophetic authority to make the Bible speak.

Marrant's bilingual utterance confirms his prophetic identity and his life is spared. After the display of linguistic ability, he is taken before the king where he undergoes a final trial before his eventual release. It is in the midst of his exchange with the king that he introduces what Henry Louis Gates theorizes as the "Talking Book" trope, and more importantly, states directly that he can make the Bible talk.

Having narrowly escaped execution, Marrant is led to the king where he is questioned again. The Cherokee king asks him how he came to their settlement, his age, and how he supported himself prior to meeting the hunter in the woods. Marrant answers each question to the best of his ability, but when he begins to explain the omnipresence of Christ, the king is confused. The executioner, still deeply affected by Marrant's earlier display, attempts to intervene, but is interrupted when the king's daughter enters.

> The executioner fell upon his knees, and intreated (sic) the king in my behalf, and told him what he had felt of the same Lord. At this instant the king's eldest daughter came into the chamber, a person about nineteen years of age, and stood

> at my right hand. I had a Bible in my hand, which she took out of it, and having opened it, she kissed, and seemed much delighted with it. (62)

The king, perhaps alarmed by his daughter's infatuation with Marrant's Bible demands to know what the book is. "The name of my God was recorded there," he replies. Marrant is ordered to read from the book. He reads from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew. When he finishes, the king is particularly intrigued by the reverence he shows for Jesus.

> When I pronounced the name of Jesus, the particular effect it had upon me was observed by the king. When I had finished reading, he asked me why I read those names with so much reverence? I told him, because the Being to whom those names belonged made heaven and earth, and I and he; this he denied. I then pointed to the sun, and asked him who made the sun, and moon, and stars, and preserved them in their regular order; He said there was a man in their town that did it. I labored as much as I could to convince him to the contrary. (63)

The debate is interrupted by the king's daughter when she, for the second time, takes Marrant's Bible out of his hand. This time she opens it, then kisses it. She hands it back to Marrant and says to her father, "the book would not speak to her." (63)

The executioner intervenes a second time begging the king to allow Marrant to pray. As he prays, his prophetic power is demonstrated. Those gathered in the king's court, including his daughter, cry out under the conviction of sin. The king is angered and orders Marrant to be thrown in prison to await execution the following morning.

When Marrant is fetched from prison after two days, he is exhausted. The king orders him to attend to his daughter and those overcome with the guilt of their sin, or

else, face death by the sword. Marrant's prayers initially go unanswered, but after the third time he prays, the king himself is "awakened" and his daughter is "set at liberty." (64) The dramatic transformation affects the king's entire household.

> A great change took place among the people; the king's house became God's house; the soldiers were ordered away, and the poor condemned prisoner had perfect liberty, and was treated like a prince. Now the Lord made all my enemies to become my great friends. (64)

As Marrant settles in to his elevated status, he assumes the customs and dress of the ruling elite. He learns to "speak their tongue in the highest stile (sic)." Over the next two months, Marrant, travelling in the company of fifty men provided by the king, visits Creek, Catawaw, and Housaw communities. He is welcomed into each new community and passes freely throughout these territories unharmed. His exchanges with the various indigenous nations perhaps shape his understanding of colonial politics.

> When they recollect, that the white people drove them from the American shores, they are full of resentment. These nations have often united, and murdered all the white people in the back settlements which they could lay hold of, men, women, and children. I had not much reason to believe any of these three nations were savingly wrought upon, and there I returned to the Cherokee nation, which took me up eight weeks. I continued with my old friends seven weeks and two days. (64-65)

After returning to the Cherokee, Marrant acknowledges "that my affections to my family and country were not dead; they were sometimes very sensibly felt." He makes plans to

return to his mother's home to be reunited with his family. The journey home introduces reintegration, the final stage of his initiation.

The resurrection theme in Marrant's *Narrative* not only celebrates his successful endurance of physical impression; it also anticipates a new identity that is allegorized by his family's inability to recognize him when he returns. The drama of recognition is acted out in reintegration, the final stage of ritual initiation.

In traditional African cultures, initiates are reintegrated as adults into the community after passing the tests of physical impression. As adults, they participate fully in the ritual life of the community taking their place among the living, the ancestors, and the yet to be born. The process of integration is symbolized by charges given by sponsors of the initiates to protect the community and reverence both elders and ancestors. Integration into the community completes the symbolic death of seclusion and thus the initiates are reborn into the community. The children and adolescents that entered the wilderness return as young men and women.

Marrant describes his reintegration into his community near the conclusion of *Narrative*. The shift back to familial environs is signaled by his admission that "affections to my family and country were not dead; they were sometimes very sensibly felt, and at last strengthened into an invincible desire of returning home." (65) Though dissuaded by the Indian king, Marrant, after the tri-fold utterance of prayers, begins the journey home.

Marrant's first contact with non-native inhabitants reveals the extent to which he has fully embraced and been embraced by Native American culture. Coming to an

unidentified family's home in the settlements, Marrant's appearance, "purely in the Indian stile (sic)," frightens his reluctant and unsuspecting hosts.

> It was about dinner-time, and as I was coming to the door the family saw me, were frightened, and ran away. I sat down to dinner alone, and eat (sic) very heartily, and, after returning God thanks, I went to see what was become of the family. I found means to lay hold of a girl that stood peeping at me from behind a barn. She fainted away, and it was upwards of an hour before she recovered; it was nine o'clock before I could get them all to venture in, they were so terrified. (65)

After about two days, the family makes Marrant's acquaintance. He visits several other families and begins to hold Sabbath prayers with about seventeen individuals. He remains with them for six weeks and then travels eight days to his mother's neighborhood. On the ninth day, he finally locates a familiar face.

He first appears to an uncle who does not recognize him and refuses him lodging. Marrant inquires about the well being of his mother and sisters and departs when he is again refused boarding. He travels to his mother's town and spends the night with a former classmate who also does not recognize him. Marrant again inquires about the well being of his family.

> I asked him if he knew Mrs. Marrant, and how the family were? He said, he had just left them, they were all well; but a young lad, with whom he went to school, who, after he had quitted school, went to Charles-Town to learn some trade; but came home crazy, rambled in the woods, and was torn in pieces by the wild beasts. How do you know, said I, that he was killed by wild beasts? I, and his

brother, and uncle, and other, said he, went three days into the woods in search of him, and found his carcase (sic) torn, and brought it home and buried it. (66)

Marrant is is moved to tears by his classmate's story. After sharing a meal and prayer with his host, he goes to sleep, wakes the next morning for prayer, and then travels to his mother's house one block away. When he arrives at his mother's house, his family does not recognize him either. Because of his customary Creek attire, he draws everyone's attention, but no one knows who he is.

The prophet's identity is concealed in reintegration scenes from Biblical narratives as well. Notably, in the Genesis account, the patriarch Joseph, having survived a tumultuous ordeal of seclusion, instruction, and the ritual threat of death and imprisonment, is reunited with his family after having been estranged from them for a prolonged period. His brothers do not recognize him and Joseph conceals his identity. Joseph requires that his youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought before him. It is also Benjamin, the youngest sibling, who is singled out when Joseph plants his divination cup among his brothers' possessions. The youngest sibling is the member through which Joseph's reintegration into his family is facilitated.

In other Biblical narratives, the process of reintegration is facilitated through women. For example, Peter's reintegration into the Judean community of believers following his miraculous escape from prison[103] is facilitated not by the youngest sibling, but by a maid, Rhoda. Before the devotees gathered for prayer identify Peter, Rhoda, having recognized Peter's voice, announces his presence to the others gathered at the house of Mary. However, the others do not believe her and Peter's reintegration is

[103] See Acts 12: 1-19.

delayed. She is resolute, however, in her identification of Peter and eventually the others come to recognize and accept Peter's restored presence among them. Thus, Peter is rejoined to the group by the testimony of a woman.

Similarly, women are first to proclaim Jesus' resurrection in the gospel narratives. The men, however, need convincing following the women's testimonies. In fact, in several gospel accounts, Jesus is not recognized when he first appears to the people who know him after his crucifixion. In each instance, his identity is concealed and only the women can identify him.

In Marrant's case, the Biblical tropes of ritual reintegration are combined. It his little sister—both a female and youngest sibling—that facilitates his integration into the family by announcing his identity. Like in the Biblical model, Marrant's family does not believe his little sister.

> My youngest sister, eleven years of age, came in from school, with a book under her arm. I was then sitting in the parlour, and as she passed by the parlour door, she peep'd in and seeing a strange person there, she recollected me; she goes into the kitchen, and tells the servants, her brother was come; but her report finding no credit, she came and peep'd again, that she might be certain it was me; and then passing into the next room, through the parlous where I was sitting, she made a running curtsy, and says to my eldest sister, who was there, it is my brother John! She called her a foolish girl and threatened to beat her. (67)

Marrant's youngest sister is the only one who recognizes her brother and thus, the biblical trope of recognition in which either the youngest sibling or a woman facilitates ritual re-integration is collapsed in the character of Marrant's youngest female sibling. It

is also important that Marrant's sister has just come home from school and carries "a book under arm." Marrant's sister is identified as a seer in this passage. She comes home from school and is in possession of a book, Marrant's ritual object of divination. Her possession of a book suggests literacy, and also her ability as one able to divine through the Scriptures.[104] Also, this takes place when she is eleven years old, the same age as Marrant when his formal education ends and he has learned to read. She is the only one who can recognize, or "see," John Marrant when he enters the community. Thus, Marrant identifies her gift and she recognizes the same in him.

Marrant is not the only Black Atlantic author to use the youngest sister as a character that represents familial attachment during the colonial period. Equiano and Gronniosaw identify younger sisters that facilitate their separation from their families when their respective journeys begin. Equiano and Gronniosaw also express a singular fondness for their youngest female sibling. Excepting these affectionate relationships, these authors portray familial relations as tenuous at best. Gronniosaw looks forward to separating from his family because of strained relations stemming from his queries into profound spiritual matters. The same is true for Marrant. He endures the scourge of his family because his religious devotion annoys his siblings and neighbors. Special affection, however, is reserved for his youngest sister. She is the only one who does not ridicule him. Equiano and Gronniosaw also single out their youngest sisters as the relative to whom familial attachment is most strongly felt. But Marrant, unlike Equiano and Gronniosaw, revises the trope and allows his younger sister to facilitate, not only his

[104] Marrant's sister is in possession of a book, Marrant's own object of divination just as Joseph's youngest brother, Benjamin, is found with Joseph's cup, his ritual object for divination.

separation from his community, but also his reintegration into the community. In Gronniosaw and Equiano's narratives, once the younger sister is left behind, she does not make another appearance. Marrant's youngest sister, however, like the women at the tomb of Jesus, is first to announce to his return. He employs language consistent with resurrection to dramatize the scene.

> She ran and clasped me round the neck, and looking me in the face, said, "Are not you my brother John?" I answered yes, and wept. I was then made known to all the family, to my friends, and acquaintances, who received me, and were glad and rejoiced: Thus the dead was brought to life again; thus the lost was found. (67)

The resurrection of John Marrant reintegrates him into his community and the dead is made alive again. In the same allegorical sense that his seclusion represented initiatory death, so also his integration with his family, friends, and acquaintances represented the continuity of life and the African cosmological understanding of the inter-connectedness of the living and the dead.

As adults in the community, initiates are expected to marry and ensure the continuance of the life of the community. Marriage, along with vows of commitment and reverence for the community, constitutes a communal covenant that is considered to be eternally binding and sacred. Having completed the initiation, the initiates successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood and assume the responsibilities necessary to ensure future generations of the community.

Marrant's understanding of covenant is expressed when he assumes the role of preacher among a community of enslaved Africans in Charleston, South Carolina. Upon his return to Charleston, Marrant laments the lack of religious instruction among the

enslaved. He organizes a small community of about thirty persons and instructs them in prayer and scripture. Marrant describes his sense of covenantal commitment to the larger African community in America in the following:

> During this time, I saw my call to the ministry fuller and clearer; had a feeling concern for the salvation of my countrymen: I carried them constantly in the arms of prayer and faith to the throne of grace, and had continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren, for my kinsmen, according to the flesh. (73)

The transition from childhood into adulthood reflects the transformative goal of contemplation as discussed by Barbara Holmes. Holmes understands initiation as a contemplative practice, or at least as a practice that affords multiple possibilities for transformative contemplation. Initiation understood as transformative contemplation provides an illuminating lens by which religious phenomena can be evaluated. This lens is particularly informative for phenomena occurring in moments of inter-cultural contact. The making of the New World involved the subordination of African societies to European colonial powers. Many scholars presume that the cultural contact of this historical moment resulted in subordinated Africans adopting European religions and religious orientation and consequently the eradication of African traditional religious communities. However, scholars who rigidly hold to such a model of acculturation fail to understand the complexities of exchange that are involved in moments of cultural encounter. As Holmes explains, moments of encounter necessarily involve varying degrees of acculturation, particularly in those instances where power relationship are unequal; however, cultural exchange is never unilateral even when inequitable.

> Africans were not likely to supplant one belief system with another. Religions were layered upon another, and then they were tested for their efficaciousness. Throughout African history, indigenous beliefs coexisted with Islam and Christianity. If a certain emphasis developed, it was because a particular faith system seemed to improve the lives of the people. Conquerors could only affect surface practices; the prioritizing of religious allegiances remained with the people. [105]

In other words, what scholars have commonly interpreted as conversion to the religions of colonizers can perhaps be interpreted as the testing and evaluation of the efficacy of a new religious tradition. The practice of contemplative initiation provides a useful lens for evaluating what scholars have presumed to be narratives of Christian conversion. From this perspective, these narratives represent contemplative transformation and thus can be understood as repositories of an indigenous religious orientation.

Of the numerous Biblical stories that populate the Black religious imagination during colonial America, perhaps none resonates as widely as the story of the Exodus. One might imagine that a story concerning the divine deliverance of an enslaved people to possess a particular appeal to Blacks in colonial America. The centrality of this theme in the history of Black religion is well documented. However, many studies of the Exodus story in Black religious experience subordinate the hermeneutical lens of Black readers to their political status as slaves. With few exceptions, the religious orientation of the Black reading community has not been widely considered.

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[105] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 39.

One exception is Zora Neale Hurston's fictitious *Moses, Man of the Mountain* in which the Exodus narrative is told from the cultural worldview of Black America. While her characters' perspectives more closely reflect those of her twentieth-century ethnographic studies, *Moses* demonstrates how Hurston uses a Black religious worldview to interpret Exodus. Moses, the central character, is a conjure man who speaks in Black dialect. While Hurston's tale is informed by a keen insight into the religious lives of Black Americans, it is most likely grounded in the religious imagination of twentieth century Black Floridians, and not those of eighteenth and nineteenth-century African Americans that witnessed or experienced slavery directly. John Marrant, however, provides a firsthand interpretation of Exodus by an eighteenth-century Black religious authority. In fact, as North America's first Black ordained minister, Marrant's interpretation of Exodus in *Narrative* is a monumental moment in Black religious intellectual history.

Following the conclusion of prophetic initiation, Marrant demonstrates the first sign of his ministry; he conjures the exodus. Marrant's choice of the Exodus as the sign of his ministry is based on the Biblical example of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' ministry begins with the transformation of water into wine. This miraculous sign is the first that confirms Jesus' prophetic identity. In a literary sense, this moment mirrors the Exodus story when Moses transforms water to blood.

The story of Israel's escape from Egypt was a dominant theme in Biblical literature as well. Both Old and New Testament writers reference the miraculous escape making it one of the central narratives in the Biblical story. Moses, the story's central prophetic figure, meets all the narrative criteria for Biblical prophetic identity. His birth

is marked by divine intervention via a miraculous escape from death; he is noticed for exceptional beauty and unique qualities as a child; he receives special training and education as a member of Pharaoh's court; and he undergoes ritual initiation in the wilderness—in fact, the five stages of initiation are present (seclusion in the wilderness; instruction at the feet of Jethro; physical impression enacted by Zipporah, Jethro's daughter; and his reintegration to his community in Egypt after he receives a message for their deliverance from bondage). He prophesies the deliverance of his people to an unwilling leader, and orchestrates his people's escape after bringing down plagues upon the Pharaoh's house and all of Egypt. One of the first sign is the transformation of water into blood, an ominous foreshadowing of the final plague—death to the first born in every household of Egypt. In the Exodus story, the plague of death is not enacted until lesser plagues prove ineffectual.

Other versions of the Exodus narrative avoid the plague of death altogether. Abram's escape from Egypt in Genesis does not include the plague of death. When Abram goes to Egypt because of a famine, he conceals his relationship with Sarai, his wife, saying instead that she is his sister.[106] Abram's fabrication is attributed to his fear of the Egyptians who Abram supposes will kill him to take Sarai, his spouse. Abram's fear is eventually realized. Although he is not killed, Egyptians take Sarai into Pharaoh's house to be wife. However, Pharaoh's house is beseeched with plagues, and Sarai's virtue is preserved. Pharaoh sends Abram out of Egypt with his wife and all his possessions. Thus Abram, like Moses, leaves Egypt with all of his people and increased possessions.

[106] See Genesis 12:10- 13:1.

The same narrative pattern of escape is present in the account of Abraham in Genesis, chapter 20. Although the setting has shifted to the land of Gerar, and Abram and Sarai are now Abraham and Sarah respectively, the structural elements of the story are unchanged. Abraham comes to the Negev region where he was just before entering Egypt. He enters Gerar and says that Sarah is his sister. Sarah is taken to the king, Abimelech, and plagues are brought upon him and his household because of Sarah. Abraham and Sarah are again sent out of the land and, again, they leave wealthy. Abraham increases his holdings in cattle, servants, and silver.

The next repetition of the story in Genesis 26 involves Isaac, Abraham's son. Like Abraham, Isaac is driven into an alien land due to famine. He is warned in a dream, however, not go to Egypt and goes instead to Gerar with his wife, Rebekah. Fearful of the jealousy of his neighbors, Isaac pretends Rebekah is his sister. This time, however, the king discovers that Rebekah is Isaac's wife before she is taken. The king proclaims that no one is to touch Rebekah lest punishment be brought upon the land. Issac and Rebekah leave Gerar with family and increased possessions. Thus, plagues of any kind are avoided altogether.

In the Exodus narrative, the death plague takes the life of Pharaoh's first-born son and the first-born son in every household in Egypt. The death of his son convinces Pharaoh to release Israel and Moses leads them from Egypt across the Red Sea and into the wilderness.

John Marrant depicts the Exodus story at the close of *Narrative*. Marrant explains that he remains with his relations until the commencement of the American troubles.

Having returned to Charleston with his brother, "a house Carpenter," Marrant begins instructing enslaved children and their parents on a South Carolina plantation.

> I used to spend my time in reading God's Word, singing Watt's Hymns and in Prayer, the little negro children would often come round the door with their pretty wishful looks, and finding my heart much drawn out in Love to their souls, I one evening called several of them, and asked them if they could say the Lord's Prayer, &c…I used to go to prayer with them before we parted; this continued without interruption for three or four months, in which time, by the children acquainting their parents with it, I soon had my society increased to about thirty persons. (68)

Marrant's "society" mediated, if only temporarily, the harsh realities of enslavement by offering enslaved persons communal bonds on the Jenkins plantation. However, the familial environment of fellowship and learning would be short-lived.

> We are well advised in Ecclesiastes, chap. II v. 1. My Son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy heart for temptation: Nor was it long before they were made to pledge our dear Lord in the bitter cup of suffering; for now the old Lion began to roar, their mistress became acquainted with our proceedings, and was full of rage at it, and determined to put a stop to it. (68)

The mistress's efforts to break up the society began with the interrogation of two of Marrant's young pupils. After the children are brought before the mistress, they are asked to recite the Lord's Prayer and the mistress, Mrs. Jenkins, demands to know who taught them. When the children answer, Marrant is brought into direct confrontation with

the slave-owning Jenkins family. Mrs. Jenkins purposes to put an end to Marrant's meetings. She sends her husband to intimidate him and his society of pupils.

> She then stirred up her husband against us…and made him promise to examine further into the matter, and break up our meeting; which he then very soon did, for a short space; for he, together with his overseer and negro-driver, and some of his neighbours, beset the place wherein we met, while we were at prayers; and as the poor creatures came out they caught them, and tied them together with cords, till the next morning, when all they caught, men, women, and children were strip'd naked and tied, their feet to a stake, their hands to the arm of a tree, and so severely flogg'd that the blood ran from their backs and sides to the floor, to make them promise they would leave off praying, &c. though several of them fainted away with the pain and loss of blood, and lay upon the ground as dead for a considerable time after they were untied, I did not hear that she obtained her end of any of them. (69)

Mrs. Jenkins insists her husband to flog Marrant, but Marrant threatens to "take the law of him, and make him pay for it." The threat stalls Mr. Jenkins and a conversation ensues. Marrant and Jenkins discuss. Because of his knowledge of the law—the product of his ability to read, Marrant is not flogged, but rather a discussion with Jenkins ensues regarding the ethical responsibilities of slave owners to slaves in light of Christian doctrine. Marrant's knowledge of the law and religion forestalls Jenkins' attack and Marrant is not flogged like the slaves. Instead, he and Jenkins engage in conversation as equals. In Marrant's depiction, he exhibits better command of legal policy and Christian doctrine than Jenkins.

Marrant's resistance to a whipping brings to mind a similar scene from Fredrick Douglass' *Narrative*. After suffering many brutal whippings at the hand of his master, Covey, Douglass resists a beating and fights back instead. Just before the fight, Sandy Jenkins, a fellow slave, had given him a root from the woods to protect him. Although Douglass dismisses the efficacy of conjure, he accepts the root and wears it on his right side according to Sandy's instruction. A passing encounter that reveals a less ornery side of Covey causes Douglass to rethink the power of Sandy's charm.

> [U]pon entering the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey on his way to meeting. He spoke to me very kindly, bade me drive the pigs from a lot near by, and passed on towards the church. Now, this singular conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the *root* which Sandy had given; and had it been on any other day than Sunday, I could have attributed the conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and as it was, I was half inclined to think the *root* to be something more than I at first had taken it to be.[107]

If kind words prompted Douglass to reconsider Sandy's root, his own behavior in the ensuing scene may have cemented his belief in its value. The next morning, "the virtue of the *root* was fully tested" when Douglass is attacked by Covey. This time, however, rather than submit to his owner's will, Douglass "resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose." Douglass borrows the death and resurrection motif to describe his transformation.

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[107] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 81. Accessed August 11, 2016. http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html

Regeneration comes after protection is granted through Sandy's root from the wilderness. For Douglass, the impact of this moment could hardly be overstated.

> This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom.[108]

One might argue that Douglass' depiction of the scene suggests Sandy's root is responsible for his protection. If Covey's attack tested the virtue of the root, then Douglass' successful resistance proves its usefulness. Douglass neither rejects nor accepts the virtues of conjure outright. Rather, the effectiveness of conjure is represented in the narrative. In Douglass' *Narrative*, the power to resist enslavement is symbolically linked to the power of African American conjure. By the end of the scene, Douglass resembles Sandy who has not been whipped since obtaining the root. As Douglass states,

> From this time I was never again what might be called fairly whipped, though I remained a slave four years afterwards. I had several fights, but was never whipped.[109]

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[108] Ibid., 82-83.
[109] Ibid., 83.

Douglass' attitude mirrors Marrant's when he resists Jenkins. Although Marrant does not fight Jenkins, he engages him in conversation as an equal. In fact, Jenkins' own objection to Marrant's ministry is the elevated sense of self-worth that was affected in his slaves. Mr. Jenkins complains that Marrant has "spoiled all his Negroes," but concedes that Marrant's pupils exhibit virtues and qualities that cause them to be his most productive slaves. Jenkins' chief complaint is that Marrant's teaching would "make them so wise that he should not be able to keep them in subjection." Marrant then questions Mr. Jenkins about the existence of enslaved person's souls.

> I asked him whether he did not think they had Souls to be saved? He answered, yes. I asked him whether he thought they were in the way to save their Souls whilst they were ignorant of that God who made and preserved them. He made me no answer to that. I then told him that the blood of those poor negroes which he had spilt that morning would be required by God at his hands. He then left me. (69-70)

The exchange that Marrant depicts here in *Narrative* juxtaposes competing eighteenth-century ideologies concerning the theological implications of enslaved people's adoption of Christianity. Marrant's depiction suggests that the enslavement of African people was irreconcilable with Christian doctrine. The exchange with Jenkins also suggests that supporters of slave ideology have no answer for the inhumane treatment and enslavement of persons of African descent.

Marrant reports that he has the same conversation with Mrs. Jenkins shortly afterwards. His strong reason inspires laughter rather than silence for Mrs. Jenkins who adds scornfully that she "was only sorry that she had not been able to get me [Marrant]

flog'd with them." (70) Marrant discontinues meeting with his society on the Jenkins plantation because Mrs. Jenkins made life for him unbearable. Although the persecution was heavy, Mrs. Jenkins does not succeed in breaking up the society. Marrant's pupils continue meeting at midnight in various corners of the woods. The setting in the wilderness suggests that Marrant and his society continue to enact ritual initiation and seeking rituals despite the certainty of a severe beating if they were discovered at the meeting. Their moonlit meetings in the wilderness may have provided opportunities to search for natural and supernatural protection against harsh treatment from slave masters.

Although he is driven from the Jenkins plantation, Marrant has the final word in the saga. He reports that it pleased God to cause Mrs. Jenkins to suffer illness and a horrific death two months after his unfortunate encounter with her.

> In about two months after I left them, it pleased God to lay his hand upon their Mistress, and she was seized with a very violent fever, which no medicine that they could procure would remove, and in a very few days after she was taken ill, she died in a very dreadful manner, in great anger with her husband, for not preventing their meetings, which she had heard they continued, notwithstanding all her endeavours to stop it. After she was dead, her husband gave them liberty to meet together as before, and used sometimes to attend with them; and I have since heard that it was made very useful to him. (70)

The death plague from the hand of God visits Mrs. Jenkins because, like Pharaoh in the Exodus, she refused to heed the prophetic warning regarding the harsh treatment of enslaved people. She interferes with the religious life of her enslaved laborers and unfairly punishes them with beatings. She stubbornly mocks God's prophet when he

warns of her ill-treating slaves, and she suffers the plague of death. Thus, in a literary form, *Narrative* enacts the plague of death on slave-owners. The plague of death and the reckoning for spilled blood is the first sign that Marrant performs after his prophetic initiation is completed.

Harm-causing conjuration was a common practice in colonial and antebellum Black religion. Yvonne Chirreau's study of African American supernatural harming traditions identifies a standard narrative structure Blacks employ to relate accounts of supernatural harming.

> These [Conjure] narratives nearly always focus on some sort of human suffering, and they inevitably articulate a link between conflict and supernaturally induced misfortune…[T]hey describe sudden illness, with symptoms of headache, deafness, and unusual physical debilitation—all precipitated by conflict or emotional injury.[110]

Marrant's account follows this narrative pattern. The text begins with the suffering of slaves caused by the brutal beating they receive at the urging of the Mistress. Mrs. Jenkins' sudden, incurable fever is attributed to a supernatural source. As Marrant states, "it pleased God to lay his hand upon their Mistress."

John Marrant's "Conjure narrative" fits within the broader framework of African American harming traditions identified by Chirreau. In particular, Chirreau notes the role of supernatural harming in African American rebellions. The New York Conspiracy of 1712 (not to be confused with the Conspiracy of 1741 discussed in Chapter 2) was allegedly organized to retaliate against harsh treatment by slave masters. Chirreau details

[110] Chirreau, *Black Magic*, 59-60.

the role of supernatural ritual activity to demonstrate the centrality of African spirituality to insurrection. The ritual included a blood oath and the consumption of "an enchanted powder" that rendered the conspirators invulnerable.

Denmark Vesey, also a Charleston resident and carpenter, employed rituals of harmful conjure in the 1822 conspiracy. Vesey, a leader in the African Methodist Church, recruited artisans, laborers, and field hands to participate in the insurrection conspiracy that was headquartered at the church. Religious faith became a tool for both unifying and motivating participants. However, according to Chirreau, "while Christianity gave justification to the noble but dangerous cause of freedom fighting, ritual action was the catalyst." Interestingly, Vesey also deploys an exegesis of the Exodus narrative to incite his followers to action. As Rolla Bennett, a slave of the former governor of South Carolina, confesses,

> At the meeting Vesey said…that we ought to rise up and fight against the whites for our liberties…he read to us from the Bible, how the Children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage…He then read in the Bible where God commanded, that all should be cut off, both men, women and children, and said, he believed, it was no sin for us to do so, for the Lord had commanded us to do it.[111]

One of Vesey's most influential "lieutenants" was Jack Pritchard, or Gullah Jack, an acknowledged priest of African tradition. Gullah Jack was a leader in the Gullah Society, a church-based association comprised of Blacks from Carolina plantations and the Sea Islands. Commonly known as a "sorcerer," Gullah Jack's spiritual practices

[111] Ibid., 66.

included readings, prayers and oaths. Additionally, he distributed poison to be used in preemptive attacks on planters and whites.

While the use of poison aided Vesey's collective revolt, poison was far more commonly deployed in "acts of personal defiance." In many instances and in widespread settings, eighteenth-century African Americans frequently turned to poisoning as a means of resolving offenses. Because slavery and poison were viewed as forms of spiritual evil, some enslaved Blacks settled grievances by poisoning their masters. Legislative responses in Georgia and South Carolina attest to planter concerns regarding the high incidence of poisoning in the region. South Carolina's 1751 Negro Act law stated, "That in case any slave shall teach or instruct another slave in the knowledge of any poisonous root, plant, herb, or other poison, whatever, he or she, so offending, shall upon conviction thereof, suffer death as a felon." According to eighteenth-century Georgia legislation, anyone convicted for poisoning was sentenced to death.[112]

Slave owners, as well as their mistresses, had reason to fear poisoning by slaves as retribution for ill treatment. Chirreau notes the case of Sambo, a North Carolina slave convicted of conspiring to poison his slave mistress "to make her better to him." Sambo was found guilty of planning to give "touck," a harmful potion made of wild plant juice of herbs widely known among Native and African American conjurers. The association of conjure with African and Native American culture was so common that one eighteenth-century doctor referred to harming traditions as "Indian or Negro poison."[113] Marrant's time in the wilderness with the Cherokee instructor likely included instruction

[112] Ibid., 68-70.
[113] Ibid., 73.

in local botany. If Marrant did indeed possess such knowledge, then one can reasonably infer that Mrs. Jenkins sudden, mysterious illness was the result of conjure.

Before concluding *Narrative*, Marrant offers another allegory—the conversion of Mary Scott. Mary Scott is a young pupil whom the reader first encounters among the tombs of the cemetery "measuring the graves, with a tape she then held in her hand, to see if there were any so small as herself among them." She, like the adolescent Marrant, has a special inclination into spiritual things and divine realities at an early age. Marrant "takes her into his home" and she informs him that she "was ready to experience death." Mary Scott's unique caul or special sign is represented by her preference for scripture reading and prayer over playing with other children. Marrant describes her calling and her subsequent experience of seeking and ritual initiation.

Approximately four months after she has been under Marrant's tutelage, she falls ill and is bedridden for three weeks. Mary Scott's *illness* is similar to the illness Marrant suffers after he hears George Whitefield preach. The duration of her illness is three weeks, thus the ritually significant seeking number is present in the narrative. She, like Marrant, found medicine to be ineffectual for aiding her through the illness. She dies on Friday, the day of Jesus' death, bidding her parents and sisters farewell and insisting that they do not "lament for her when she was dead." Scott's death happens when Marrant makes his third visit to see her on that fateful Friday. Scott tells her family that she "hoped afterwards to meet them" and then, as Marrant writes, "fell asleep in the arms of Jesus." It seems that for Mary Scott, just as had been the case with Marrant, Jesus Christ had gotten her at last. Thus, the message to Marrant's "young *readers*" was that the call

to prophetic ministry could begin at a very young age as the case of the seven-year-old Mary Scott demonstrates.

Marrant concludes *Narrative* with a final allegorical story. He is pressed into service aboard the British sloop of war, the *Scorpion* and says that "a lamentable stupor crept over all my spiritual vivacity, life and vigour; I got cold and dead." (72) Marrant's stupor is interrupted by a reunion with his benefactor, the "king of the Cherokee Indians." The king informs Marrant that he and his daughter have been well although he "sometimes longed to get out of the body." Marrant's language here (out of the body) perhaps suggests the desire for spiritual enlightenment or it could be a metaphoric reference to the ritual death experienced in prophetic initiation that Marrant and other underwent in the Cherokee settlement.

Following this brief reunion, Marrant explains how God roused him from his spiritual stupor. Marrant was travelling along the Atlantic seas when a violent storm washed him overboard. The waves were so tumultuous that Marrant was washed back on deck. Again, he is cast into the sea and washed back on deck a second time. Once back aboard the ship, he fastens a rope around his waist for security, but the force of the storm throws him into the sea a second time before he is able to secure the rope to anything on board. The third time, the number of ritual significance, was the final time and proves to be the catalyst that revives his spiritual fervor.

> I was in the sea the third time about eight minutes, and several sharks came round me; one of an enormous size, that could easily have taken me into his mouth at once, passed and rubbed against my side. I then cried more earnestly to the Lord than I had done for some time; and he who heard Jonah's prayer, did not shut out

> mine, for I was thrown aboard again; these were the means the Lord used to revive me, and I began to set out afresh. (73)

Marrant's reference to the biblical narrative of Jonah is instructive for reasons beyond the obvious nautical setting and the encounter with a great fish. Marrant's episode follows the narrative pattern of Biblical escape narratives and allegorizes water baptism. The dramatic account of his tri-fold immersion in the "American seas" represents an initiation ritual that prepares Marrant for the next phase of his prophetic journey.

Following his deployment in the West Indies and a three-month stay in the hospital, Marrant is discharged. He eventually makes his way to London where he boards with "a respectable and pious merchant, near three years. During this three-year period, Marrant reports that his call to ministry became more lucid. After being ordained in the Huntingdon Connection, he receives a letter from his brother requesting his ministerial service in Nova Scotia. As he anticipates departure to Halifax in a matter of days, Marrant requests friends in London to prayerfully support his ministry in hopes that "Indian tribes may stretch out their hands to God; that the Black nations may be made white in the blood of the Lamb." (72-73) His final prayer is that the multitudes will "learn the language of Canaan, and sing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb." Marrant's statement seems to suggest that the appropriation of Biblical speech and narrative structure is the necessary action for making Black nations white in the blood of the Lamb.

Chapter 4 My Travels in Nova Scotia

A Journal of the Rev. John Marrant, his second autobiographical narrative, continues the story where *Narrative* ends—crossing the treacherous waters of the Atlantic Ocean. In this instance, Marrant is answering a call from his brother. In a written exchange, they discuss a plan for him to come to Nova Scotia to minister to a Black Loyalist community in Halifax. Marrant heads back to North America from London aboard the *Peggy*. For a second time, the sea is the setting for a trial by water.

During the first three weeks of travel, the ship lacks all the conventions of etiquette. There is swearing, card playing, and a generally raucous environment. Marrant's first attempt to convince passengers to modify their behavior falls flat. But after four weeks at sea, the tide turns.

> In the fourth week, it pleased God to send a violent storm, wherein we shifted a heavy sea, which almost filled the cabin; then did they cry out for God to have mercy upon them, and called for the minister to pray for them. (98-99)

At first, he dismisses their cries for help telling them "they must pray for themselves." But when water has to be removed from the cabin, he leads them in prayer. From the deck he observes, "the sea seemed to be all on fire; running mountains high," but after a night of prayer, all is calm "as though there never had been any storm." The entire ship joins him in prayer and he describes the whole affair as "sweet work." Two passengers discern the power of God in the ferocity of the storm and Marrant's status as a prophet is established.

Seizing the opportunity afforded by his recognized status as a man of god, he persuades the captain to prohibit swearing and card playing for the remainder of the

voyage. One penny is collected for every violation and Marrant aids the crew repairing the ship. For the remainder of the trip, instead of swearing and card playing, the ship is filled with "reading, praying, singing of hymns, and preaching." He even leads the sailors in Bible study, a sign of his acknowledged spiritual power after he calms the storm.

By framing his journey back to America in this way, Marrant conjures images of Jesus' calming of the storm in Luke 8. Jesus, like Marrant, is asked by shipmates to rescue them from impending doom when a violent storm arises. He rebukes the storm and the winds and the sea are instantly calm. The disciples are so amazed they ask each another, "What manner of man is this?" marveling at Jesus' command over the storm.

In Bible stories, the power to control weather is a sign of divine power reserved for prophets. Moses is rescued from a watery grave in the Nile by one of the daughters of Pharaoh at the beginning of the Exodus story. Later in the Exodus story, his power over water is dramatized when he orders the Red Sea to separate so that Israel crosses the boundary from Egypt to wilderness on dry land. According to the legend, a strong eastern wind causes the sea to recede during the night and Moses leads Israel across the sea on dry ground while the waters form a wall on each side of the nation. When the Egyptian army tries to pursue the Israelites, the walls collapse and they are drowned in the sea. For the second time in the Exodus story, escape from certain death—symbolized in this instance by the passage from bondage to freedom—takes place in the water.

The Old Testament prophet, Elijah, also demonstrates the power of the natural elements when he prophesies that a drought will afflict Israel for three years. It is also by his word that rain returns and the severe famine is ended. His ability to manipulate wind

and weather is also suggested in the story of his heavenly ascension. When he is taken up to heaven, a chariot and horses of fire appears and Elijah is ushered away in a whirlwind leaving his pupil, Elisha, behind. As Elijah ascends, his mantle falls and Elisha, his student, uses it to strike the Jordan River. The waters part and Elisha crosses the Jordan in the presence of the prophetic company gathered from Jericho. When they see Elisha's power over the natural world, they realize that Elisha has assumed the prophetic authority of Elijah, his predecessor.

Throughout West and Central Africa, water was regarded as a mythical element and the symbolic perception extended to its use in rituals. In Kongo cosmology, the Kalunga, a watery line that divides the material and spiritual world, is associated with ancestors and other divine beings. For many Kongolese people enslaved in South Carolina lowcountry, the Atlantic Ocean, along with other smaller bodies of water, was a passageway to the spirit world and part of the spiritual landscape that made supernatural power accessible.[114]

Black residents in South Carolina's Lowcountry also continued to believe in the presence and power of simbi spirits, Kongo nature spirits that function as intermediaries between the living and the dead. In colonial lowcountry Black communities, the simbi played a vital function in forming and maintaining a cultural cohesive bond.

> Although it may seem that the simbi as nature spirits belonged to a realm removed from the activities and concerns of human society, they were always profoundly interested in those who inhabited their domains. They often initiated relationships with the living by communicating through dreams or by "seizing" those who

[114] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 64-66.

> ventured near their abodes. They commanded storms, flood, and droughts to remind people of their obligations to the simbi and bestowed blessing for proper veneration.[115]

The presence of simbi in South Carolina discloses a system of religious thought that informs how the Bible's stories of storms, floods, and calamity on the seas were interpreted by African descended people in America.[116] Marrant's divine encounters crossing the Atlantic Ocean in *Narrative* and *Journal* underscore the profound spiritual importance of bodies of water within the Africana religious landscape.

Marrant's trial by water in *Journal* is also significant because it is his second literary representation of initiation by water. As mentioned, his first episode on the sea occurs in *Narrative*, his first autobiographical account, and is modeled on the Jonah legend from the Bible. While episodes of divine deliverance on the water are common, few prophets have multiple aquatic encounters. Moses, certainly a towering prophetic figure in biblical and African American religious lore, displays his authority on several occasions. He is rescued from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter, and in his initial confrontation with Pharaoh, he turns water to blood, an ominous sign that inspires Marrant's conjure narrative discussed in the previous chapter. Facing almost certain death at the banks of the Red Sea, he causes the waters to form columns so that Israel escapes slavery in Egypt, and later in their wilderness journey, he draws water from a rock when Israel complains of thirst in the desert.

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[115] Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.
[116] Ibid., 92.

In the New Testament, Jesus is first baptized by John the Baptist in the Sea of Galilee and later exhibits his divine power over water in other miraculous displays. In one account he calms the storm by the power of his voice, and in another, walks on water during the midst of a storm at sea. Marrant's second water narrative places him in elite prophetic company. His self-construction is modeled on the main characters of the central narratives the Old and New Testaments—Moses and Jesus. He develops a spiritual persona based on the prophetic profiles of Moses and Jesus by echoing the structural patterns of their narratives in his autobiography.

In his first episode of trouble and rescue on the sea, Marrant admits, with reluctance, that in his six years and eleven months aboard the Scorpion "a lamentable stupor crept over all my spiritual vivacity, life and vigour (sic); I got cold and dead." (72)[117] The intensity of battle and the ship's environment causes his faith to wane and he is swept overboard by the violence of the storm. In the second episode, Marrant is steadfast in the midst of "the passengers, in general, swearing and playing at cards all day, and impatient with a gracious God." (98) In fact, his display of fortitude is so strong it quiets the storm and brings peace to the raucous ship.

The difference in Marrant's responses to the sea in his respective accounts mirrors differences in the first and second water narratives found in the stories of Moses and Jesus. Moses is, at first, drawn from the Nile while Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan. In both instances, the prophetic hero is the passive recipient of the water's

[117] Boston King and Oluadah Equiano also narrate that their spiritual fervor wanes while at sea. W. Jeffrey Bolster writes, "Black sailors historically found it difficult to practice meaningful religion in a predominantly white, and largely skeptical, community of sailors." See Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 124-125.

blessing. Moses is rescued; Jesus is cleansed. In subsequent encounters, the prophetic heroes take action to demonstrate his power over the water. Moses parts the Red Sea and draws water from a rock; Jesus walks on water, silences a storm, and directs Peter to a miraculous catch of fish. Marrant's second water narrative also demonstrates an active power over the raging sea. His prayer calms the ocean "as though there had never been any storm." (99)

In *Journal*, Marrant's exhibition of power causes crashing waves to subside. When he moves into action, he assumes authority not only over the sea, but also over the ship. The atmosphere changes and the passengers, once dismissive of his religious authority, now conform their behavior to his desires. The transformation of the sea (from rough to calm) mirrors the transformation of the ship. Whereas the ship was a raucous environment, after the storm was rebuked the atmosphere aboard is changed. "After this we had no swearing on board; but, instead…reading, praying singing of hymns, and preaching." (100)

The shift in atmosphere brought about by Marrant's miraculous display of power also mirrors accounts of High John the Conqueror, a popular hero in African American folklore. Notably, this dynamic folk hero commands authority over both natural elements and social atmospheres. Charles Long states regarding High John,

> It is stated explicitly in the folklore that High John came *dancing over the waves* from Africa, or that he was in the hold of the slave ship. High John is a flamboyant character. He poses great physical strength and conquers more by an

> audacious display of his power than through any subtlety or cunning. He is the folkloric side of a conquering Christ, though with less definite goals.[118]

Long is not the only observer to note the similarities between High John and the Christ. Zora Neale Hurston makes the comparison to Christ more explicitly. As she states, John the Conqueror travelled to America from Africa by sea "walking on the waves of sound…walking the very winds that filled the sails of the ships." But the deification of High John does not stop there, she continues,

> High John de Conquer came to be a man, and a mighty man at that. But he was not a natural man in the beginning. First off, he was a whisper, a will to hope, a wish to find something worthy of laughter and song. Then the whisper put on flesh. His footsteps sounded across the world in a low but musical rhythm as if the world he walked on was a singing-drum. Black people had an irresistible impulse to laugh. High John de Conquer was a man in full, and had come to live and work on the plantations, and all the slave folks knew him in the flesh.[119]

As Hurston points out, High John is a powerful deity that takes the form of a man and revives the spirit of the enslaved by affecting change from within. The internal dynamics of transformation is realized in external communal expressions. Saddened slave quarters are filled with laughter and song upon High John's arrival. His movement through the wind is not bound by the laws of nature. At one moment, he is "in Texas when the lash fell on a slave in Alabama, but before the blood was dry on the back he

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[118] Long, *Significations*, 197.
[119] Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 69.

was there." Hurston also notes the symbolic significance of water in the mythical narratives concerning High John.

> Like King Arthur of England, he has served his people, and gone back into mystery again. And, like King Arthur, he is not dead…Symbolic of English power, Arthur came out of the water, and with Excalibur, went back into the water again. High John de Conquer went back to Africa, but he left his power here, and placed his American dwelling in the root of a certain plant.[120]

The exhibition of divine power over wind and water is demonstrated by deities who take on human form in both biblical and African American mythical tales. Either, or perhaps both, likely inspire John Marrant's narration of his second water narrative.

Marrant is not specific about the source of his power to control wind and sea saying only that when he reached dry land, he and his shipmates "went into the woods, and on ours knees, returned God thanks for landing us once more on shore." (100) In the woods, his hunting skills come in handy. He and the captain capture rabbits and partridges—their meal for the night. On Sunday, they begin walking at sunrise. They climb a mountain to get a view of the sea, and after prayers to God for guidance, they go separate directions—Marrant to the east, and the captain to the west. After an hour, a signal is fired to the ship and the answer comes from the east. Marrant signals the captain and they reach a boat with provisions that takes them back to the ship by noon. After refreshments, they "performed divine service" and Marrant remains with the ship two more days. On Tuesday, November 24, he and three others pay twenty dollars to hire a boat and sail to Halifax.

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[120] Ibid., 71-72.

On the way to Halifax, things get off to a bumpy start. For several days, he converses with members of the Irish Romans congregation at “a place called Littleziddo (sic)” but finds "very few souls to preach to." In Ship Harbor, he is well received by “a small number of Scotch and Irish together” many of whom, he notes, are “very desirous to hear the gospel…as many of them had not heard the gospel for many years.” After remaining with them one night, he heads to Shag Harbor but finds “very few souls to preach to.” He is held at Shag Harbor four days due to inclement weather, and when he arrives at Three-fathomed Harbor, he “attempted to perform divine service, but was prevented by the violence of the Irish Romans." (101)

When he arrives on December 2, the ship has already docked and there is a stir in the town concerning him. After lodging in Golden Ball Tavern, he wakes the next morning, heads to the ship, and is briefly reunited with the captain and members of the crew. After an exchange of greetings and well wishes, he rejoins his companions for breakfast. On the evening of the fourth, he preaches to a large gathering in Halifax, and the following day he settles accounts with the captain and they part in peace. The next day, Sunday, December 6, he preaches to a congregation of Black and white and “God was pleased to manifest his divine power…which proved the conversion of several present.” The display of God’s power through Marrant’s preaching marks the beginning of his success in ministry. Two days later, he preaches again in Halifax and the people cry out, “What shall I do to be saved.” (102)

Marrant’s notoriety is aided by Reverend William Furmage, a fellow Huntingdonian minister who was ordained with him in Bath. While in Halifax, Furmage introduces him to local residents and extends an invitation to preach to his congregation.

Marrant's sermon is affirmed by the presence of God and the people's response. He notes, "the Lord was truly present with us, so that there was groaning, and sighing, heard throughout the congregation." (102)

For Marrant, the presence of God is recognized by the reaction of the people. The congregation's emotionally charged demonstration affirms the authenticity of his preaching. The relationship between the minister's call and the people's response is a well-established pattern in African religious ceremonies depicted time and again in Marrant's narratives. In *Narrative*, Marrant's own emotional response to the preached word of George Whitefield confirms the validity of his call. In *Journal*, the similar demonstrative responses—crying, groaning, and sighing—signal the efficacy of his ministry.

Marrant leaves Halifax for Shelburne, and after a week he recognizes an old acquaintance though his friend does not recognize him. His lack of familiarity with Shelburne residents is likely, at least, partially responsible for his initial dispute with the Arminians on the morning of the 19th (104). Wesleyan church officials obstruct his ministry because he is not from John Wesley's connection and it is alleged that he is not a strict adherent to the doctrinal rigidity that characterized Methodist worship. Although he is eventually permitted to preach, the disagreement foreshadows clashes with Arminian ministers he would later endure.

Marrant's sermon after the conflict with the Wesleyans establishes his prophetic authority in the tradition of Moses.[121] Again the Spirit manifests power; people cry out,

[121] Marrant's sermon text is Acts 3:22-23, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass,

"What must I do to be saved?" Groans, sighing and crying are heard throughout the congregation, and later that night, he announces to those gathered that the dead shall be resurrected—an allusion to the initiatory ritual that he underwent. The Spirit's presence is so powerfully tangible that Marrant is unable to speak for five minutes.

The form of the worship service in Shelburne signals a transition in Marrant's prophetic persona. No longer the initiate, he now demonstrates his ability to summon the Spirit's presence. His preaching is the catalyst that invokes the presence of God and the people respond as he did when he heard George Whitefield preach in Charleston. When they respond with expressive emotion, they are brought to life and the process of initiation begins again.

On Christmas day, he does not administer the sacrament, he says, because the people had not yet gained his trust. During his next week of ministry, ten people are baptized and he performs four weddings. "The Lord," notes Marrant, "was pleased to rise and shine in the hearts of those that were wounded." Marrant preaches three times a day for three days in a row. Each time the Spirit accompanies his preaching with power and the response from the people is overwhelming. Seven are "awakened" and "many precious souls" are added to his ministry. Though unworthy of such divine favor, Marrant returns thanks to God for thirteen people who "testified the love of God in Jesus Christ." On New Year's Day, just one week after his arrival, he offers the sacrament to those gathered for divine service. The response to his preaching is so overwhelming that

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that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

many are left groaning for redemption in the blood of Christ" when he heads to Green Harbor by the end of the week.

His passage to Green Harbor is hampered by a snow storm and he arrives at a ferry house in the evening. After asking for directions, he is guided to "the Indian's (sic) wigwam," and after prayer, is accompanied by three members from the Micmac nation. Marrant and company arrive safely and the next day he preaches in Green Harbor. After his morning sermon, he learns that none of them has been baptized. In his next sermon that afternoon, he explains that believers will be saved while non-believer will be damned.[122] The crowd is stirred by his message—so much so, in fact, that he finds "the greater part of the people would not go home" after service, "so I got no sleep this night; but conversed with them till five o'clock, and found that the master of the house, with his wife and seven children had not been baptised (sic)." Marrant, it seems, is disturbed by this. His next sermon addresses the identity of John the Baptist, the prophet who purifies initiates by water.

Over the next week and several days, Marrant admonishes the crowds that gather to hear him preach. His sermons on God's judgment (Luke 23:40), God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and the necessity of baptism and repentance (Mark 6:12 & Acts 2:38) are accompanied by powerful demonstrations of God's Spirit. The multitudes groan, wail, and exclaim "what shall we do to be saved." (106) A sermon from Genesis 1:2 contextualizes the nearly two-week long mission. The prophet who was twice initiated in the waters of the Atlantic went from town to town throughout Nova Scotia and, as he explains to the congregation, "at this time the Spirit of God did move upon the waters."

[122] See Mark 16:16.

When Marrant returns to Green Harbor on Saturday, January 20, he focuses his attention on his hosts—the man, the woman, and their seven children—who have not been baptized. He instructs the man to prepare his children for baptism at once. His direct tone and the man's silent, non-combative compliance imply Marrant's spiritual and social authority. While the master of the house is busy with preparations, Marrant visits his Micmac friends and invites them to the baptismal ceremony the following day. On the 21st, thirty Micmac gather with the family and Marrant begins the ritual by reminding those gathered of the promise of eternal life to those that do good. "The power of God," he comments, "was present to wound, and to heal." The ritual continues the following morning. Marrant's sermon from Romans 6:3 explains that water baptism joins the initiates in the death of Christ.

Following the sermon, many of those gathered go home weeping. The master of the house, his wife and three of their children are left to consider "much upon the nature of the ordinance they were about to submit to." At ten-thirty that morning, the people make their way through four feet of snow to the site of the baptism. Before proceeding, Marrant preaches the story of the resurrected Christ who commissions his followers to baptize and teach in the authority of the Spirit. The people's ecstatic response to both his sermon and the baptism confirms the presence of God.

> My soul was filled with the glorious power and love of God; I could perceive solemnity in the faces of all the people within the audience of my voice; so that the convincing power of God was manifested; instead of nine, the number of the family, there were added to it twelve, which made twenty-one; and in the time of baptising, I desired all the grown people to kneel down upon their knees; fourteen

> kneeled, then did I lift up my voice aloud to the Lord for the baptising Spirit to fall upon us; and here I would have my readers take notice, that, for about five minutes, I was not able to speak, being overpowered with the love of God; when, rising from my knees, I looked upon the people, and saw tears in their eyes, and the congregation at large, filled with solemnity. I took the bason (sic) in my hand, and attempted to baptise (sic) them; when I had baptised five, the rest were fallen to the ground; however I baptised them on the floor, while they were crying out, and saying, "Lord Jesus have mercy upon us." (109)

At the height of the drama, Marrant calls for the children to be brought forward. He takes two of them in his arms while five are made to kneel. They are baptized "with tears running down their cheeks." His prayer for God's blessings upon them is barely audible above the sound of the weeping throughout the congregation.

As the cathartic worship approaches its peak, Marrant is drawn to a twelve-year-old girl who calls continuously for the mercy of God.

> I went to her, and asked her, what she cried out so much for after the rest. Her answer was, that she was afraid she should not be able to fulfil (sic) the charge that was then given her. I asked her if she was not afraid her soul would be lost to all eternity? Looking earnestly in the face, she burst out in tears. I left her, finding that she was not able to express her feelings. (109)

The crowd is dismissed and Marrant retires to give thanks to God for the day's proceedings and to intercede on behalf of the twelve-year-old. When he preaches again later that evening, he is still preoccupied with the young girl. He encourages those gathered to receive the Spirit's comfort, and the remainder of the night is spent "reading,

praying, and singing." The following morning—three days after initial preparations for baptism had been made—he reminds his congregation of the peace they have in Christ. During the sermon, the girl finally is relieved of torment. She "rose up in the time of preaching, crying out, and declaring to the congregation—that her sorrow and sighing had fled away, and she had received that peace from God, which the tongue could not express." Marrant and the others acknowledge her confession with singing, and in the wake of the celebration, the girl's mother also "was able to testify of the love of God." Like Mary Scott in *Narrative*, this young girl's faithful response to the call of Christ leads to the salvation of her mother.

The story of the twelve-year-old girl and her mother intends to prescribe behavioral norms for Marrant's audience. For Marrant, storytelling is a didactic art form that communicates moral and ethical standards of behavior. Through the lives of the characters and Marrant's own adventures, readers are admonished, encouraged, and warned to adopt the espoused virtues and heroic qualities of the author. These stories within the story function on primary and secondary levels. On the primary level, the story narrates the sequence of his life's events. On a secondary level, however, the stories within the story function as parables that reveal important spiritual lessons.

At his next stop in Ragged Island, he reminds those gathered that God is good to the pure in heart.[123] There is a love feast after the service, and Marrant retires to bed while the others continue praying, singing, and worshipping God. When he wakes at three in the morning, the people are still praising God and continue to do so until daybreak. At the next morning's service, Marrant promises renewed strength for those

[123] See Psalms 73:1.

that wait on God. When the service ends, he goes to a woman's house to minister to her despite being warned by the people to stay away from her.

The woman, who was abandoned by her husband, spent time during the war aboard a British naval ship. If her experience was like that of many colonial women pressed into British naval service, she likely suffered physical and sexual abuse while on the vessel.[124] When Marrant and his young pupil enter the house, they are greeted with a less than cordial reception. Instead of receiving the man of God with hospitality, she accuses him of being a common thief. Marrant, noticing her meager accommodations, says she has nothing he would steal from her. Insulted, she attacks him with a pair of tongs striking him on the head. He grabs her to restrain her, and his young pupil runs out of the house terrified. After several minutes she seems to calm, but when he lets her go she strikes him on the head with several blows. A vicious final blow draws blood from his head and he escapes to check on his boy.

After checking on the boy, he finds solace in a barn nearby. He goes inside to pray for strength.

> I kneeled down, and laid my complaint before my God, and lifting my hand up which was then bleeding, and the blood trickling all over my face, begging the Lord to search my heart, whether I had lost these drops of blood for the gospel of Christ, and the good of souls; that he would be pleased to show me a token for good, so that I might not deceive myself. The Lord was pleased to pour down his blessing upon my soul, in answer to my poor petition; then was I strengthened and

[124] During the colonial period Black women were employed aboard ships in domestic roles. Abandoned women frequently worked aboard ships as prostitutes. See Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 166.

> encouraged to go back, and said, If it is his will that I should spill more blood, in his cause, I was willing, for I know that he will not let the words return void. (112)

When he returns to the house, she attacks him again—this time with tongs and a poker from the fireplace. He restrains her by her shoulders and though she is more violent than at first, her blows do him no harm. After considerable time, Marrant is able to subdue her by repeating words from the story of Jesus' suffering at the hands of Pontius Pilate. At last, she is exhausted and can contend no longer. Marrant's ensuing brief exposition on the suffering is insightful.

> She struggled hard as long as she could, till she was allmost (sic) out of breath; she then set herself down, and I [was] continually speaking to her concerning the sufferings of Christ, and his resurrection power, and she seemed to be somewhat calm; I continued speaking of the glory of God, and the happiness of the saints in heaven, who had suffered for his names (sic) sake; and of the dreadful torment of hell, and of the long continuance of the same. (112)

Several minutes of silence follow his discourse on Christ's suffering, the suffering of the saints, and eternal suffering. After a while, Marrant, with her permission, begins to pray. During his prayer, the power of God is activated and the ritual of death and resurrection begins to play out.

> Whilst I was in prayer, I felt much of God's spirit, and about the middle of the prayer, she fell from off the bed, as though she was shot, and screamed out with a loud voice, and stretched herself off, as though she was going out of the world. I

rose from off my knees, and put a smelling bottle to her nose, and washed her face with cold water. (112-113)

He prays a second time, "but found I was shut up." He leaves her lying on the floor and goes to the house of the woman's son. At the son's house, they are astonished when Marrant shows up bleeding with torn clothes looking like he has been in a fight. The son and his wife check on the woman to make sure she is not injured. When they find her uninjured but unresponsive to their questions, they bring her to their house through the snow on a sled. Panic sweeps through those gathered as the woman "continued as though she was dead." Her son and his wife frantically debate calling a doctor, but Marrant confidently assures them that "she was only sin sick, and no doctor in this life could cure her; but there was a good physician in Gilead, and in his good time he would apply his balm of Gilead to her soul." Marrant requests permission from the family to pray for her a third time. Desperate, the frightened family members agree but "the poor creature was slain worse, and cried out—she was sinking into hell." Weary from the evening's events, Marrant advises everyone to get some sleep. The woman cries out all night imploring God for mercy.

The following day, before morning service, Marrant checks on her but she remains filled with anguish. His sermon that morning exhorts those gathered to repent or perish, and his evening sermon reminds them that no one will see the kingdom unless born of the Spirit. Before bed, he tries to speak to the woman once more but "finding she was not able to contain herself, by reason of her distress, I left her in the hands of God and went to rest." (114)

The next morning Marrant proclaims the word is the foundation of the creation—his lone sermon that day, and notes that the woman's condition seemed to grow worse and worse. The following day, the third since she had fallen ill, Marrant preaches only the sacrificial Lamb can blot out transgression. Although many of those gathered give an affirming response, the woman's condition does not improve. In fact, her agonies seem to worsen. That evening, however, Marrant preaches that the light of God rises and shines to remove darkness from the earth and from God's people. After the sermon, the woman rises from her stupor and allows the light of God to rise in her.

> She got up, and praised God in a remarkable manner, which surprised all the people in the room; and, after I had dismissed the people, I had some conversation with her, and her joy was so great, that she could not express herself, but looking upon my hand which she had cut, she burst out in tears and fell upon her knees, and begged me to pardon her for the blood she had spilled. I told her that Christ had pardoned her, and I had nothing against her. She then got up and clasped me round my neck, then sat down again, and was not able sometimes to speak for five or six minutes, being so filled with the peace of God.(114-115)

The abandoned woman's conversion is instructive for understanding Black religious culture. Marrant's description of the woman's transformation emphasizes its communal nature. When she enters an unresponsive, trance-like state, the community flies into action to usher her through the experience. Her son and daughter-in-law rush to her side and check her body for wounds. They place her on a bed and bring her into their own home. Over the next three days, Marrant is by her side to pray for her and to attend to her bodily needs.

When she is placed on a bed and brought to the house where Marrant is staying, it mimics the story of Jesus healing the paralytic.[125] The paralyzed man is brought to Jesus on a bed, and as he is lowered into the house, Jesus forgives his sins. The man's paralysis is linked to his need for repentance. In Marrant's parable, the woman's immobility is connected to her unrepentant heart. Additionally, her healing is a communal matter. The abandoned woman is brought to the healer by others, just like the paralyzed man is brought to Jesus. In both cases, community members are needed to facilitate the spiritual and bodily restoration of the one afflicted.

Her reintegration into the community is facilitated by the ecstatic worship that takes place over the course of the three days that she remains in trance. Jason Young explains the communal nature of conversion for Black Atlantic religious communities.

> Most observers discuss spiritual ecstasy as an individual experience, something that, in a given ritual context, occurs to a certain person: a particular flailing and flinging of the body to and fro. But this is clearly not the case. For indeed, the faithful regarded religious excitement and ecstasy as community events. The community produces the ecstasy, and the trance only emerges once the community of believers conspires to create the necessary conditions—a particular percussive rhythm, a certain hymn, a special ritual practice (i.e., baptism). In this way, ecstasy does not belong to the individual as much as it belongs to the entire community. God does not speak to the person in trance as much as through the person in trance, the body in ecstasy being little more than a vessel, a line of

[125] See Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12.

communication through which the community comes into closer contact with God.[126]

Marrant recognizes the communal nature of the story of healing in the Bible and also recognizes that bodily ailments are not unrelated to one's spiritual condition. The story of the abandoned woman's conversion exhibits that in Black religious consciousness, bodily healing requires both communal and spiritual care. Young's insight helps elucidate the woman's erratic behavior and the intended meaning of Marrant's story. "In the moment of ecstasy, the body in trance is not controlled (or even controllable for that matter). Rather, the spirit that moves through the body and, by extension, the body itself is communally shared and protected."[127]

Over the next several days Marrant launches a brief mission to various communities around Sable River with reflections on the apocalypse. Five days later, he delivers the story of Jesus among criminals on the cross to those gathered to hear him in Little Harbor. Inclement weather keeps him there longer than expected, but after a month, he is off for Birchtown.

After a brief visit with the Micmac tribe near Green Harbor, he arrives at Birchtown where he receives a request to preach in Jordan River. He debates whether to accommodate this request—"I thought it best to take it before the throne of grace, to know whether it was the Lord's will." But a second letter from John Lock recommending that he visit his son's congregation at Jordan River determines the matter.

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[126] Jason Young, *Ritual of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 100.
[127] Ibid.

On the 19th, Marrant enters the home of Lock's mother-in-law. They are joined by her four adult daughters and his boys.

> I sat down, and was in deep contemplation, and they walked about, viewing of me. A little while afterwards, I held up my head, and looking the old lady in the face, asked her if she knew Christ? She never answered me a word, but began to cry. (116)

Marrant leaves abruptly while the old woman is still crying. At Lock's house, he delivers the letters of recommendation from his father, but Lock cannot read them. Marrant reads the letter and learns, after talking with him, that he, like his mother, is "ignorant of God and himself." "What would become of your wife and three children?" Marrant asks. Lock does not answer, but sobs uncontrollably. Marrant offers a prayer for him, and then leaves him as he left his mother—weeping with anguish.

The next day's sermon on repentance and the remission of sins from Luke 24:47 displays the power of God to the congregation who "all seemed to be astonished, having lived there above twenty years, and never heard the word of God." Despite their likely exposure to Christianity in the United States and Canada, this community, had never heard the gospel. Their response is overwhelming. Seven people cry out during the sermon, and when the theme of repentance is reiterated in his evening sermon "there was a wonderful display of the power of God among this people; they went away, hanging down their heads like bulrushes (sic)." When the service concludes, Marrant converses with Lock and his wife. They make arrangements to be baptized in the following days. Large crowds gather to hear him preach the resurrection of Jesus and his commission to the disciples. Eight people come forward to be baptized. Marrant has them kneel and

when he begins to baptize them, "God was pleased to set Mr. Lock at perfect liberty." (117)

Marrant's insistence that Lock and his family are baptized underscores the importance of baptism in early Black conversion rituals. Jason Young explains that water immersion rites informed the conversion experience of African slaves in the American south. The gravitation towards Protestant denominations that practiced water immersion is explained by West and West Central African predispositions to similar rituals in Africa. Water baptism conformed to the cycles of death-resurrection-reintegration common in many African religious communities.

> Noting the varied rituals of water immersion in Africa and the deep reverence for river priests on the continent, Melville Herskovits argued that slaves came to the Americas with strong traditions of water immersion rites that they transmuted onto Christian baptism in the New World. Certain Christian symbols, as in the river Jordan, for example, were symbolic representations of both an ostensibly Christian, yet deeply African spiritual meaning. The prevalence of the imagery of the river Jordan in the musical traditions of slaves further emphasized this connection. That is, the River Jordan reflected a multitude of African rituals of water immersion in the Americas.[128]

[128] Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 77.

Marrant's depiction of water baptism in *Journal* demonstrates how early Black Americans utilized Christianity to transfer African religious beliefs and practices across the waters of the Atlantic.[129]

Other than a storm that keeps them at Jenkin's Point a few hours, their passage to Green Harbor is safe. His reflections on the balm in Gilead[130] the next morning brings the congregation "under deep convictions." (118) A series of preaching engagements keep Marrant busy around Green Harbor for the next couple of weeks. Sermonic reflections on the teachings of Jesus, the story of Moses and the serpent in the wilderness kick off his ministry, followed by the performance of baptismal rites, and then a sermon from the story of Jesus baptizing in Judea. Later, he eulogizes two persons of whom he has "no reason to believe that they died in peace, having neglected God's great salvation, and died without any evidence." (118) "Redeeming the time," he read to mourners, "because the days are evil."

Near the end of his time at Green Harbor, just before leaving for Shelburne, Marrant is told of an eighty-seven-year old woman on her sick bed without the knowledge of God. He goes to her immediately and, at first, she is not convinced that her ignorance is of eternal significance. She claims to have a good heart, but Marrant tells her that "if she had not a better heart than what she was born with, it was a wicked heart, and full of enmity against God." Change your heart, he warns, or else you will not be with God. Marrant prays for her but, when prayers are concluded and he asks how she

[129] Ibid., 78.
[130] See Jeremiah 8:20-22.

feels, she does not answer. When Marrant exits, she maintains a somber look while tears stream down her face.

The next day, in the morning, a little girl has a message for Marrant just as he is leaving Green Harbor. The old woman, the girl's grandmother, wants him to visit again before he departs. Marrant leaves his pupil with the boat and follows the girl to her grandmother's house. Once inside, the woman confesses to him that her heart is wicked. When he asks her how she came to know this, she says because she "felt it." Marrant prays with her again and notes "here I was obliged with her all day reading, praying, and conversing." (120)

Travel to Jordan River is hampered by a winter storm. The snow, at one point, is so thick Marrant cannot see the boy seated next to him in the boat, but they eventually arrive unharmed. Back in Birchtown, he learns that the Arminian minister has stirred up trouble in his absence. Wesleyan ministers attempted to poach Marrant's members by spreading rumors of his death. He declares that God promises to counsel and restore those who had been "drawn aside through error, came, trembling, and expressed great sorrow because they had been deceived, and had joined the Arminians (sic)." (121) The dispute in the congregation is settled, and, for a second time, Marrant answers the challenge of the Wesleyans.

After nearly a month in Birchtown, Marrant heads to Barrington. The minister who receives him is reluctant to let him preach despite the strong letter of recommendation that accompanies him. Marrant attributes his cold reception to a sharp division among local Protestant groups in the area. Most notably, Freeborn Garretson, an Arminian minister, threatens to remove the names of any parishioners who follow

Marrant from their society's membership role. Throughout *Journal*, the Arminians challenge the legitimacy of Marrant's ministry. Their disapproval is mostly inspired by his membership within the Huntingdon Connexion and the corresponding presumption that he is theologically unsound.

The Arminians are like the Pharisees from the gospel tradition. The Pharisees routinely challenge Jesus on issues of doctrinal orthodoxy. They, like Garretson and other Arminian leaders, dispute Jesus' interpretation and application of the Mosaic law. In a similar fashion, Marrant is hampered by his prophetic rivals, the Arminians.

They continue to challenge him when he returns to Birchtown nearly two weeks later. The community nominates him to submit their request for tools and supplies to the governor in Halifax. He is initially reluctant and tries to persuade them to go to their colonel instead. But after a week of inactivity and the people's continued pleading, he sails for Halifax to present the petition to the governor. The petition is granted and Marrant entrusts delivery of the supplies to Birchtown by an unnamed man. Before heading out for a brief preaching mission, Marrant gives strict instructions not to distribute the supplies before he has returned to oversee the process.

While he is away, chaos ensues. Just five days into his mission, Marrant receives letters informing him that not only have the supplies already been distributed, they had been delivered to Marrant's chief nemeses, the Arminians. When he arrives in Birchtown, the town is in an uproar. Besides the missing supplies, Moses Wilkinson, the "old blind man, who preaches for the Arminians," (sic) has sold their meeting place and refuses Marrant an opportunity to preach. Determined to address the crowd, Marrant and his elders take the key and open the doors that night.

The people assemble in anticipation of Marrant's address. Wilkinson, however, steps into the pulpit to prevent Marrant from speaking.

> The doors were opened, and the people went in and prepared for preaching. The old man, in order that I should not preach, came and sat in the desk, and began to give out an (sic) hymn, but nobody would sing with him until I came in, and he not knowing that I was in, I gave out the same hymn over his head when the house rang with the praises of God. (124)

When Wilkinson realizes the people's determination is firm he leaves.

> After singing, he went immediately to prayers. Some of the people touched him, and asked him whether he knew what he was about; and while they were talking together, I went to prayer, and when he heard me, he crept out, and I saw him no more that night. (124)

With Wilkinson gone, Marrant warns the people of the danger of false brethren adding, "we found that the devil was disappointed of his hope, and hell of her expectation." (124)

The next day, Marrant gathers the people to get to the bottom of the missing supplies. He learns the items were not given away, but rather sold, and the people are unwilling to return them without recompense. Marrant warns them, however, that there will be legal repercussions if the supplies—the rightful property of the king—are not returned immediately. The items are delivered one day later.

When Jesus is confronted by Pharisees, he usually reprimands their hermeneutical rigidity. Because they operate by a strict, legalistic adherence to the Mosaic law, they often miss the figurative dimensions of textual or rhetorical interpretation. The Ariminians also challenge Marrant's adherence to the demands of Methodist orthodoxy.

In his prophetic showdown with Marrant, Freeborn Garretson's authoritative text is the Methodist Book of Discipline, not the Bible. Marrant, who has already established his ability to make the Bible talk, juxtaposes his source of authority with that of the Arminian ministers. In doing so, he underscores their ministerial ineptitude.

For the remainder of June, Marrant is busy "setting all right again" after the conflict with Wilkinson causes chaos. He sails for Jordan River on July 1, but returns to Birchtown just three days later after hearing news that the "Arminian preacher had been among them and insinuated into their mind that I was not right." This time it is Freeborn Garretson who tries to lure his followers away. When Marrant arrives in Birchtown on July 4, a showdown ensues.

One of his members details Garretson's plot to undermine him. A meeting was scheduled and Garretson would address the people later that night. Marrant devises a plan to attend the meeting secretly. He warns his people sternly "not to make a noise that I was come." (125) That night, he arrives undetected by Garretson.

> So in the evening a vast concourse of people gathered together; after the candles were lighted, I went in, but was not discovered by the preacher, nor them that accompanied him. I got pretty close to the pulpit, that nothing should slip; he began with a hymn, and then engaged in prayer, and told the people he should not preach, but read Mr. Wesley's society book, and expound from that, and shew (sic) them how the order of their society was, and it was the best order that could be adopted, and expressed himself thus to the people—that he was very sorry that they had a man come from England, and was not of Mr. Wesley's society, and had sown the seeds of discord; he even so far as to call me a devil. (125-126)

Before Garretson can finish, he is interrupted by one of the elders who stands in defense of Marrant.

> But one of the elders rose up, and told him if he came to preach the Gospel of Christ, for to preach it; if not, to come down out of the pulpit; for, says he, you had no business to rail against a person that you never discoursed with, nor have seen; but this one thing we know, we never heard the Gospel of Christ till he did come, and we know that God hears not the prayer of a sinner. (126)

Garretson concludes his reading and asks those who wish to join the Wesleyan society to remain seated while all others are invited to leave. The congregation hesitates, but not because they are persuaded to abandon Marrant for the Arminian church. They wait for Marrant to give them their cue.

> The people all fixing their eyes upon me, I stared about five minutes to see if any person or persons left the place, and finding that they would not go without me, I thought I would give them to leave to go on with their plan, and see how far the devil could go. So I moved towards the door, and the whole house moved and went out, all but fourteen. (126)

When Marrant moves, the people move. The implication of the narration is clear: the congregation follows the movement of its leader, and his authority in their midst is affirmed. The demonstration of power completed, Marrant and the congregation re-enter the meeting house and Garretson is made to come out of the pulpit. At Marrant's behest, he leaves and the door is fastened behind him.

The story of Marrant and the Arminian persecutors is structured on the biblical model of competition narratives. Competitive conflict is a common theme in Bible stories. Moses outwits Pharaoh's magicians and later endures Miriam and Aaron's sibling rivalry. Jesus prevails in various duels with Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the law. In this instance, the Old Testament prophet Elijah is Marrant's narrative inspiration. In I Kings 18, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal. He proposes a contest in which each make an offering to their god, and the one answered by fire is declared the prophet of the true God. Elijah's offering is consumed by fire; when the prophets of Baal make their offering, nothing happens. No one responds to their call. Marrant's contest with Garretson illustrates a similar dynamic. The people move in unison with Marrant. However, no one answers Garretson's call.

In both stories, prophetic authority is signaled by a demonstrative response to the prophet's call. The genuine man of God evokes a response. Elijah is answered by fire; Marrant silently inspires the people to coordinated movement. Also in both stories, false prophets are removed. The prophets of Baal are put to death at Elijah's command. Marrant's adversary suffers a much gentler fate. Garretson is cast out of the congregation and the door is shut behind him.

Marrant's competition story is also recognizable by the way he constructs the Arminians' identity. Wilkinson, a fairly notable minister in his own right, is consistently referred to him as the blind minister. His blindness juxtaposes Marrant's ability to see prophetically. Their fundamental dispute concerns Marrant's adherence to the doctrinal orthodoxy, an oft-repeated source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees in the gospel narratives. Wilkinson and his followers are strict adherents, while Marrant has the

autonomy to perform communion and preach and pray extemporaneously. Wilkinson's blindness symbolizes his spiritual, and not just his physical, condition.

Similarly, Garretson's lack of self-awareness is demonstrated by Marrant's ability to manipulate his congregation without Garretson's knowledge—even though he was right under Garretson's nose! Thus, in the classic narrative of competition, Marrant demonstrates greater prophetic authority than either of his rivals. He exploits his opponents' lack of awareness. In both accounts, he is able to move within close proximity of both rivals without their knowledge of him. In Wilkinson's case, his blindness is his disadvantage, while for Garretson, ignorance is the exploited flaw. In each case, the rival prophet's weakness is taken advantage of and ultimately leads to his defeat.

The following morning, Marrant and Garretson reconcile in a show of solidarity. In a farewell sermon to the people of Birchtown, Garretson "gave great satisfaction in recommending that love which he destroyed the night before." (127) At breakfast in Marrant's home after the service, Garretson admits "the impropriety of his own conduct." Before they part company, they go "aside into the wood, and kneeled down to prayer, and then parted in peace and love." Marrant's evening sermon addresses what he may have perceived as naivety in the congregation. He admonishes his congregation as he reads I John 4:1 to be discerning regarding the ministers they allow in their midst.[131] At the morning service, he reads the virtues of humility from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The

[131] I John 4: 1 states, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

competition narrative ends with a stern warning against the proud, foolish behavior demonstrated by his Arminian adversaries.

Marrant decides to stay home all summer since his school has now enrolled one hundred four children. In the early summer, most of his time is spent at home attending to the enrichment of more than one hundred children enrolled in his school. This arrangement, however, prevents him from preaching during the week in the communities surrounding Birchtown. By mid-summer, he delegates the daily administration of school activities to an assistant and resumes his preaching itinerary. He maintains this schedule until the early part of November.

The Christmas holiday is spent at Green Harbor where he arrives after a dangerous passage. On Christmas morning, his reads the nativity story from the Gospel of Luke, the text of his sermon. Several people are "pricked to the heart" and cry "what shall we do to be saved?" The service concludes with a celebratory feast. Although Marrant does not preach that afternoon, the work of the Spirit continues. His afternoon nap is interrupted by singing in the chapel. His heart is overjoyed by the shouts, groans, and cries that confirm the Spirit's presence among the people.

> God's word went as a two-edged sword, and poor sinners were slain. I concluded the discourse, and came out, leaving several of them lying on the floor stretched out as though they were dead. (129)

Over the next week, his activities include preaching and visiting people in their homes. At the watch meeting on New Year's Eve, three souls are reborn—one person from Marrant's group and two Arminian congregants. On New Year's Day, he administers the sacrament. The Wesleyans join him for communion because their

ministers are not authorized to do so. Marrant's ministerial autonomy juxtaposes Arminian rigidity and orthodoxy.

Nine days later, Marrant delivers a morning sermon before leaving for Jordan River. He and his company are lost when a snowstorm overtakes them in the woods. A guide from the Micmac community leads them back to the path and they arrive at Green Harbor later that evening, but Marrant is too tired to preach. Unfortunately for Marrant, he is not simply fatigued from the hours expended in the woods. For three days he is bed-ridden and he can only perform the morning service due to fatigue and illness. In nearly two month's time, he preaches only a handful of times and travel is eliminated. Subtle references to his infirmities, like the text of one of the few sermons he preaches that winter, reminds readers and congregants alike that Christ is strong in human frailty.[132] When he is well enough to travel, he has to walk slowly and is accompanied and assisted by people from Ragged Island. It is several days later before he is able to walk across the floor unassisted. He does not preach again until early spring. Illness is prolonged because the food and medicines needed are inaccessible.

> Although the people did all that they could, and gave the best attendance that laid in their power, yet that was very poor nourishment for a sick person in the state I was then in; for I must inform my readers, that in my greatest illness my chief diet was fish and potatoes, and sometimes a little tea sweetened with treacle, and this was the best they could afford, and the bed whereon I laid was stuffed with straw, with two blankets, without sheets; and this was reckoned a very great advantage in these parts of the globe; for in some places I was obliged to lay on stools,

[132] See II Corinthians 12:10

> without any blanket, when the snow was five and six feet on the earth, and sometimes in a cave on the earth itself. (132)

Days later, he spends the morning visiting members in their homes but still is not well enough to perform services. By evening, a "violent fever" confines him to bed again. This time, he seeks the aid of his Micmac neighbors. When he arrives at their village, he converses with one of the physicians "in his own language." His "strong desire of something fresh to eat" is satisfied by a diet of "mouse-meat" (possibly moose). The food is plenteous, but he is "prevented from eating so much as I would for fear of its hurting me." Although there is no sign of fever when he goes to bed that evening, he is not permitted to preach until a week later.

By the middle of March, Marrant is reinvigorated. He travels to Sable River but only preaches one time that week. His exposition on the good shepherd who sacrifices for his sheep[133] is accompanied with power. Groans and tears are heard throughout the congregation and, after the service, children are brought to be baptized. But when his health declines again, he cannot perform the service just a few days later. When the children are baptized the following week, he is healthy enough to resume home visits, but still not strong enough to preach. Before heading back to Green Harbor, he eulogizes one of the elders. After just a couple days in Green Harbor, his illness flares again.

> On the 29th I was not able to travel, felt my spirits low and dull, having a very poor night's rest, having only a stool for my bed, and I found that I had caught a fresh cold. (133)

[133] See John 10:11.

Rumors of his death circulate in Shelburne. The people are astonished when he arrives unexpectedly a day later since many "had heard in time past that I was dead." The unplanned visit is due to the freezing of Jordan River which delays his passage to Birchtown. After a night in Shelburne, he and his boys stumble upon a tragedy on the road the next morning.

> We sat out for Birch Town, (sic) and when we had got about half way, we came up with two women in the road, one was lying down and just expiring, and the other stood over her weeping; they had both been over to Shelbourn, (sic) to beg something to eat, and were then returning back to Birch Town, and had got a little Indian meal, but had not strength to reach home with it. When I came up to her, I found that she was irrecoverable; and had I not arrived as I did, the other would have been soon dead also, for her body was partly chilled with the cold, the snow being four feet on the earth, and was then snowing. (133)

While one of his boys runs ahead to get help, Marrant tends to the women. He warms one with rum from his knapsack and helps her to move so that her limbs do not freeze. Though they mostly stumble through the snow, he able to get her a mile closer to the town. They are met by two men who rush her to town where medical treatment awaits. Marrant, "so weak after my late illness," follows behind. When he arrives, he dispatches the men to retrieve the body of the other woman who died in the snow.

Perhaps the familiar themes of transformation (death and resurrection, slavery and freedom) were repeated in Marrant's eulogy. Perhaps, as he committed her body to the ground, he reflected on the substandard living that categorized Black Loyalist communities. Their homes consisted of tents, huts, and pit houses—crude structures

comprised of a hole in the ground covered by a roof. In the winter, families were kept warm by chimneys made from mud and stone.[134] The provisions distributed by the British government were hardly adequate, and freezing to death was all too common for Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. A passage from the memoirs of Boston King, a Black Loyalist preacher from South Carolina, describes the desperation that typified the harsh winters.

> Many of the poor people were compelled to sell their best gowns for five pounds of flour, in order to support life. When they had parted with all their clothes, even to their blankets, several of them fell down dead in the streets, thro' hunger.[135]

Whether Marrant's funeral sermon made mention of their collective suffering or not, Blacks living in colonial Nova Scotia could attest to the hardships that *Journal* illustrates. Just a week after guiding mourners through the woman's tragic death, he is again seized by an aggressive illness.

> In about six days after I was taken very ill myself, and was not able to go about, and did spit blood for eight days continually. (134)

Over the next week his condition improves from bedridden to "somewhat better" when he is strong enough to walk across the floor. The following day a doctor prescribes honey with all his food and beverages. He can only afford one pound of honey, but the doctor gives a second on credit. Marrant, perhaps feeling invigorated after a week of treatment and rest, resumes his pulpit reading the story of the creation to his congregation

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[134] Ruth Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2013), 159-164.
[135] Boston King, *Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher* (1796), in "*Face Zion Forward:" First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798,* ed. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 222.

one morning. Before he can bring his message to a close, he starts to bleed and has to be helped from the pulpit. Though confined to bed rest, he continues to receive visitors, many of whom are congregants in need of assistance.

> [I] staid in doors (sic) till the 6th of May, and had many distressing objects before me, who were continually coming begging, and were really objects of pity, and were perishing for want of their natural food for the body. (134)

After nearly two weeks indoors, he leaves for Jordan Point in early May. Once there, he finds more who are in distress. His time there is spent preaching and "hearing their complaints and distresses, by reason of a long winter, and for want of provision and clothes." The harsh winter and dire scarcity suffered by many Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia led to widespread death and illness. Blacks in colonial Nova Scotia, as Marrant seems to suggest, were afflicted by famine and plague.

Over the next week, Marrant resumes his ministry travelling through Green Harbor, Ragged Island, Sable River, and Little Harbor with one of his students. In Liverpool, an inhospitable New Light minister challenges his reading of a passage in the New Testament. Marrant is not allowed to preach in their chapel anymore and his host "ordered us out without any breakfast." He and his pupil start immediately for Halifax but are persuaded by "a gentlemen (sic) who heard me preach in the New-light meeting." The unnamed gentleman sends word by his son for Marrant and his boy to come to his house where they are provided room and board. "I had everything I could wish for," remarks Marrant. The nameless host extends his hospitality for Marrant's future travel and says of the behavior of the New Light minister,

> I think it was not the Spirit of a Christian; and said, that he only turned you out of one door, in order that you might come in a better; whenever you are travelling through this country, when you come to Liverpool, take my house for your home. (136)

His host insists that he leave his pupil in his care while he goes ahead to the next towns. Marrant agrees, and the host furnishes him "with such things as were necessary for my passage."

He continues to Halifax, Preston Town, and Cold Harbor. When he finds no suitable place for worship in Preston Town, he proposes they build a chapel. The people unanimously agree and, for a second time, Marrant is elected to procure materials from the governor in Halifax. When he returns two days later, their petition is signed by His Excellency; they begin work immediately "some cutting down, some hewing and some sawing, and the women bringing it out from the woods." Later that evening, he reminds them that the New Testament carpenter from Nazareth spoke of building a mansion with many rooms. The next morning, he encourages them to see the project through completion. He bids them farewell and leaves them in the care of Mr. William Furmage, who had come from Halifax to help "keep the people in order." (137)

He returns to Liverpool to retrieve his pupil before heading off for Port Murtoun. This time, he reveals the name of the gracious host, Mr. Benjamin Collins. On the way to Sable River, Marrant and his disciple have "much difficulty" passing through a "very thick swamp." (137) The trouble starts when his unnamed pupil falls into a brook in the middle of the swamp.

> I got over [Big] Port Jolly, we had a very thick swamp to go through; in the midst of the swamp there was a brook, I stepped over, my little boy heedless fell in, and with a little difficulty I got him out again, and by the help of Almighty God we got out of this place, and he went down to a little pond to wash the mud from off him, without acquainting me any thing of it; so I went on for a mile and an (sic) half, not knowing but he was following me; but looking round I missed him, sat myself down on the rock to wait till he came up. After waiting half an hour, and not seeing him, I turned back to seek for him, but found him not; I hallowed, but hearing no answer, it gave me great concern, which caused me to wander part of the afternoon in pursuit of him. In doing so, I lost myself, and did not find that I was lost till five o'clock, when I was surprised to find myself in the situation I was then in, but a great deal more concerned for the boy. (138)

Marrant spends the afternoon combing the swamp in search of the boy. Fatigued from the effort, he lies down to sleep. After thirty minutes, a strong push wakes him up. When he sees no one around, he dismisses it and goes back to sleep, but, fifteen minutes later, a second, stronger push wakes him again. It occurs to him that it could be his lost pupil. He walks but does not discover him after going a short distance. Overcome with sorrow, he reads from the Bible, prays, and falls back asleep for half an hour. The third time he is awakened by an even more powerful touch.

> I was touched again in the former manner, but more powerfully, which was accompanied with a voice which I thought said arise, why sleepeth thou in a dangerous place? I arose with surprise, and searched all about for a quarter of a mile round, and fancying that there was some human person laid by, but had hid

himself; but after a little while it came into my mind that it was the Lord, then I wept and was full of trouble, because of my slothfulness in going to sleep in a wilderness, where I was certain I had lost my way. (138)

Marrant wanders for the remainder of the evening and finally settles by the side of a rock for the night. The following morning, he's concerned for the boy's safety and searches all day "sometime praying, sometime reading, and sometimes crying" until nearly six o'clock that evening. When he spots a house on the other side of the river, he signals to the occupants with a handkerchief. He is rescued by two women and a little girl in a boat. They take him into the house and learns the boy arrived safely at Sable River yesterday afternoon. Marrant greets news of the boy's safe landing with joy and his hosts serve refreshments, the first food he has had since being lost in the swamp two days earlier.[136]

When he arrives in Birchtown nearly a week later, Marrant is penniless and fatigued having spent his last shilling for travel. He and his boy "were bare-footed, (sic) and covered with rags. Despite his destitution, Marrant still manages to preach the people into a frenzy. "There was crying and groaning through the whole congregation" when Marrant preaches near the final week of June. A love feast on July 5 invigorates Marrant and signals that, perhaps, the terrors or last winter's misery were fading from memory. But, in the midst of the celebration at which several are set at liberty and convinced of sin, Marrant perceives an ominous foreshadowing. "Here the Lord was preparing me for a sick bed." (141)

[136] Marrant's fast, like the death and resurrection of Jesus, spans three days--from Friday until Sunday. He describes, "I wandered in this manner till evening, and having not a mouthful of victuals from Friday dinner till now, which was Saturday, evening, I went to prayer."

Over the next week and a half, his health declines steadily, then, all of a sudden, he is seized be a "violent fever." He suspends preaching duties for the next week when traces of blood show in his saliva. A week later, he revisits the creation story in a sermon during morning worship service though the elders uselessly argue against it. Marrant, who last attempted to preach this sermon several months earlier in spring, triggers his illness when he gets too excited.

> About the middle of the discourse, I found myself pretty warm, had much liberty, so exerted myself, forgetting my former illness. But before I concluded, I was nearly strangled with blood. The blood came running out at my nose and mouth, so that the people were all frightened. They took me out of the pulpit and carried me into my house, which was next door to the chapel, where I laid for two hours in that condition. (141)

Marrant is, again, carried out of the pulpit spitting blood before he can finish his sermon on creation. For a second time, illness prevents him from making a new world through preaching. An unnamed minister arrives to relieve him for the evening service, and Marrant is allowed time to recover.

Rest is cut short, however, by a legal matter stemming from an accusation made by Methodist ministers. Marrant is summoned to court where he is accused of performing a wedding for a woman who was already married.

> I was called up before the judge in the open court, and the first question that was put to me was, "How came you to marry a woman that was another man's wife." I asked the justice for the woman's name, and when I knew it from him, I told him that she was not another man's wife. (142)

As Marrant explains, a notice of the woman's pending marriage to her current husband had been published several weeks prior to the wedding. The alleged husband was a servant hired to drive the woman's cattle. When Marrant, with the woman's husband present, contests the accuser's story openly, there is no response and he walks out of the court.

> Here the devil was disappointed again of his aim, and hell of her expectation; I came right through the body of my enemies, some gnashing their teeth, and I laughing them to scorn. After this my enemies were silent as to bringing me before courts, they could do nothing but backbite and give me an ill name, which upon examination they could not prove; so I did not think it was worth my while to mind them any more. (142)

A month and a half later, the inventors of the scheme come forward and confess their iniquity. They ask to join Marrant's congregation, but he is skeptical. He "examined them closely" to test their sincerity and learns that they are leaders in the Methodist church. For Marrant, this is the final straw; he cuts them off from his society.

> So we see here the greatest enemies of Christ's church frequently make a great profession, and have a name or an office in the church, when at the same time [they] are destitute of the vital power of true godliness; they live by a name themselves, and they want a great many names to be set down in their society books to make a fair shew, but they care nothing about real religion; from such religion as this, good Lord deliver us. (143)

He spends the summer in Birchtown occasionally visiting the surrounding communities. In November, finally healthy enough to resume travel, he sets out for

Liverpool accompanied by two men and five boys. A late autumn snowstorm at Green Harbor redirects them through the woods at Ragged Island. With the snow falling thick, they are unable to follow the marked trees so they "wandered in the woods for two hours." Marrant prays to God for direction, but the men cannot decide which way to go. He takes the boys with him and leads them to a newly cut section of the road a mile away. The other two men join them and they arrive at Sable River later that afternoon. During his morning sermon two days later, he reads from John 3:14. After he has delivered five boys and two men from being lost in the woods, a new standard must be lifted up in the wilderness.

After a brief stop at little Port Jolly, Marrant starts out for Port Martoun. He is told, but not convinced, that an outbreak of small pox plagues the town.

> I did not believe them, and was not afraid of the small-pox (sic) for myself but my little boy never had it. (144)

Still determined to reach Port Martoun, he continues until a fellow traveler confirms the rumors of plague. The threat is considered so serious, in fact, that the people of Liverpool prohibit entry to anyone coming from the general direction of Port Martoun. Marrant and company head back to Sable River but first stop at Little Port Jolly. He sends the men ahead with the boys intending to join them at Sable River a day later. When Marrant sets out through the woods to join them, he gets lost again.

In the early afternoon, a massive snow storm causes him to lose his way. Visibility is reduced to a mere twenty yards. He wanders all day "sometimes reading, sometimes praying, and sometimes crying" until the bitter cold of night forces him to take shelter in a cave. He inspects the cave to ensure its vacancy before he resolves to stay,

and after he is convinced of its safety, he settles to record the day's events in his journal and reposes for the night. An hour later, he is awakened by strange sounds coming from the mouth of the cave.

> I heard something walk on the snow, my little dog ran away to the mouth of the cave. I arose up and went and met a bear at the mouth of the rock, but was prevented from coming in by seeing me. He drew back, and growled very fiercely, and continued for an hour; whilst he was raging, I was praying to God to encourage me and strengthen me to stand against him. But, I must confess to my Readers, at the first sight of the beast I trembled and became very faint, and had he attempted then to attack me, I should have fell an easy prey in his paws. (145)

The bear returns at two-thirty in the morning, but this time Marrant is more courageous when he faces him.

> At half after two I had another visit from him, but met him in the name of the Lord, and with much boldness, trusting upon the promises of the Lord. He strengthened me wonderfully; he staid (sic) three quarters of an hour this time, and then the Lord turned him away again, and I saw him no more until half after eight in the morning on the 1st of December. (146)

On December 1, he and the bear cross paths again "but he never growled at me," Marrant reports. After a brief standoff, the bear re-enters the cave and Marrant continues to Sable River adding, "I began to find myself so weak that I was not able to travel, having eat (sic) nothing from the 30th of November to the 2d of December."

Overcome by hunger and fatigue, he does not make it very far before he stops and unloads all of his belongings except his Bible. He is so faint that he cannot answer a

search party's horn when he hears it in the distance. His dog's barking, however, bring rescuers to his aid. Two women take him to a home where he spends three days in recovery. Once strengthened, he continues to Sable River. Upon arriving, he finds his pupils lodging safely and the congregation awaiting his return.

Marrant's gripping narration of hunger, disorientation, and near death in the wilderness near Sable River signifies a narrative pattern repeated throughout the Bible. When the prophet Elijah flees from Jezebel, he leaves his apprentice in Judah before continuing to the wilderness. He, like Marrant, stops to rest and falls asleep. Twice, he is awakened by an angel and told to eat. After eating, he journeys to the Horeb mountain fasting along the way. Marrant's fast in *Journal* is three days; Elijah goes without food or drink forty days and night until he reaches Horeb, the mountain of God. At Horeb, he too finds lodging in a cave and there, he is asked by God why he has come. Elijah explains that he is escaping those that seek his life. He is instructed to stand on the mountain to witness the presence of God. Instead of a blizzard, Elijah witnesses a windstorm, earthquake, and wildfire. When the natural disasters fail to reveal God's presence, Elijah is met by silence. In the silence, God again asks him why he has come. Elijah explains that he is fleeing for his life and, this time, he is instructed to return through the wilderness to appoint a king.[137]

The parallels in Marrant's story and the Biblical account are numerous. Elijah and John Marrant go to caves in the wilderness to fast and pray. Each time Marrant is separated from his pupils; Elijah leaves his assistant in Judah. Both prophets witness natural disasters--Marrant a blizzard, while Elijah sees a windstorm and earthquake

[137] See I Kings 19:1-18.

followed by wildfire--before hearing the voice of God. In Elijah's case, the sequence of natural events represents the ritual number commonly observed in African American seeking rituals.[138] His fast lasts forty days and nights--a numerical representation of purification in many Biblical narratives, while Marrant twice goes three days without food.[139]

In both stories, deliverance comes on the third attempt. Strengthened by the word of the Lord, Elijah returns to continue his prophetic mission without fear of those who sought to kill him. On Marrant's third standoff with a bear, he faces him without trepidation before continuing to Sable River to preach. So, in both stories, the prophets make solitary journeys without food to caves in the wilderness. Both fall asleep in the wilderness and are awakened three times. Inclement weather precedes a divine revelation that inspires each to continue their respective journeys with renewed confidence.

The cave setting is also significant in the respective stories. In numerous biblical stories, the presence of God is encountered in caves, or rocks. Additionally, the Bible contains a number of stories in which caves are selected as the final resting place of the dead. In Genesis, following the death of Sarah, his wife, Abraham requests a sepulcher to dispose of her body. He selects the cave of Machpelah belonging to Ephron as the place where Sarah's body would repose. The patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) along with their wives are also buried there when they die.[140] For Moses, the

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[138] On African American seeking rituals, see Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*.
[139] The number forty (40) is a common numerical representation of purification in Bible narratives. Moses spends forty years in the desert; the children of Israel spend forty years in the wilderness before entering the promised land; Noah's spends forty days and nights on the ark before the rain subsides; Jesus fasts forty days and nights in the wilderness before his trial.
[140] See Genesis 23:9-19; 25:9; 49:30; and 50:13.

cleft of the rock on Mt. Sinai is where the glory of Yahweh passes before him while he remains hidden. It was also, according to biblical legend, the place where Moses' body was buried.[141] Joshua, Moses' successor, entombs five opposing kings in a cave after defeating them in battle. He has a large rock placed at the entrance of the cave so that their corpses are not disturbed and cannot be rescued.[142] Placing a stone at the entrance of the tomb also prevents the army from entering the tomb to either retrieve their bodies, dress or prepare the bodies for burial, or visit the tomb to commune with the spirits of the dead. This same concern is echoed by the women who come to anoint Jesus' body when they find a stone blocking the entrance to the cave where his body had been laid by Joseph of Arimathea.[143] In biblical narratives, caves were the resting place of the dead as well as the setting for dramatic encounters with God. In Elijah's story (Marrant's narrative model), the cave does not house the deceased, but is rather the place of divine communication. However, in Black Atlantic religious consciousness, the spirits of the dead were commonly sought for communion and revelation.

As Gary Laderman notes, burial rituals, including how corpses are cared for, reveal a given society's foundational principles as well as how that society comes to terms with the passing of its members. The rituals and symbols that accompany disposal of the body disclose a society's belief about the interconnectedness between the living and the dead. Laderman explains,

> But the dead do not simply vanish when life is extinguished; although their final physical disposition is managed by specialists, the dead must also be accounted

[141] See Exodus 33:18-33; Deuteronomy 34:6.
[142] See Joshua 10:15-27.
[143] See Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-16:3.

> for in the imagination. In contrast to the relative simplicity and uniformity of the ritual activity surrounding the corpse, the life of the spirit—if it is affirmed at all—is described within a variety of symbol systems and imaginative constructs.[144]

Within Black Atlantic religious thought, burial practices and tomb visitation maintained ancestral ties. Noting the "massive reinstatement" of Kongo and Angola burial traditions in North America, Robert Farris Thompson characterizes the tomb as "a charm for the persistence of the spirit." Decorative objects including bottles, shells, and trees function as "medicines of admonishment and love" and "mark a persistent cultural link between Kongo and the black New World."[145]

Additionally, John K. Thornton notes that in Kongo and Mbundu areas of West Central Africa, graves were the center of ancestral cults. Their adorning insignia indicated the deceased person's status in life. Tombs were often located beyond the inhabited territory and were frequently attended by surviving family members. On festive days, the deceased person's birthday, for example, offerings were made at the gravesite to ensure good fortune for the living. Failure to carry out such responsibilities was a believed cause of misfortune within the living community. The location of gravesites outside the inhabited territory was not only a measure of sanitary health in seventeenth and eighteenth century Kongo, but also intended to ensure that the soul of the deceased enjoyed maximum rest outside the clamor of the village. Thornton notes "the dead were carefully buried in cemeteries located in the deep woods or away from

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[144] Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 3-4.
[145] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 132-145.

inhabited areas so that the soul could have 'maximum rest,' and would lay quietly in the grave and not bother the living."[146] Marrant's mimetic performance of the Bible's cave stories reveals not the continuity between African and Black Atlantic religious consciousness, but also a belief that the spirits of the deceased exist on a continuous plane with the living.

Marrant's allusion to Elijah's story in *Journal* discloses an important dimension of early African American religious thought. Structural rather than theological modes of narrative analysis primarily inform Black religious consciousness in the eighteenth century. The presence of African narrative forms in early Black religious literature implies corresponding African meanings.[147] In Marrant's texts, the explicit religious rhetoric and symbols are Christian, but the structures by which they are made intelligible are African. They exhibit the free-flowing relationship between form and meaning that characterizes narrative expression in African Diaspora communities. Marrant's texts reveal a theological perspective and communal ethic common to both African and African American religious contexts. In Africana religion, ritual experience reintegrates individuals to community life via mystical, transcendent encounter with divine realities. Additionally, Marrant displays a pattern—disintegration-rejuvenation-reintegration—found in both African initiation & African American conversion experiences. This mythic community ethos is understood as a process of creation out of destruction and corresponds to the improvisational dimension of Black cultural sensibilities. This feature is compatible with evangelical Christianity's emphasis on death and resurrection and

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[146] John K. Thornton, *The Kongolese St. Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 79-80.
[147] Matthews, *Honoring the Ancestors*, 15.

perhaps provides an additional (if not better) explanation of the frequent recurrence of the resurrection theme in Marrant's autobiographical writings.[148]

After he is rescued from near death in the woods, Marrant remains at Sable River until December 6. In recovery he learns that his boy's precise communication guided rescuers to the right part of the woods. No less than ten men blew the horn in search of him. Marrant's reflection on the rescue effort is telling.

> So by this way I perceived I was found by the commandment of God. Here we see the ama[z]ing (sic) and boundless love of God, in delivering his people from the jaws of death. O where shall we find language sufficient to celebrate his praises? Whilst our pilgrimage is here below, may we not join with Paul, and say, "O the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God." I assure thee, Reader, I am at a loss for words; but this I know, experience goes beyond expression. All I can say upon this is, that whilst I am in this mortal body, by his mighty power I will praise him with my stammering tongue; and when I am swallowed up in death, and faith is lost in sight, then shall I praise him in a nobler strain around his throne in glory, where I hope to meet all who are made perfect through suffering, to suffer no more, where suffering will be turned into joys and praises. Then what are all my suffering here, if I be made[meet] (sic) at last for eternal glory. Many more things could be said on the head, but I forbear, fearing it will tire my Readers. (147)

In one of his most reflective moments, he breaks the narrative flow and appeals directly to the readers. The sufferings he encountered during his itinerancy in Nova Scotia cannot

[148] Ibid., 114-116.

compare with the future glory of eternity. As he summarizes the impact of his life in Nova Scotia, he declares "experience goes beyond expression." This critical statement captures one of the fundamental differences between his and the dominant society's religious consciousness. He resolves that he will praise God with his "stammering tongue" but he is aware that his expression will fail to capture the fullness of his experience and certainly will not facilitate the same kind of understanding that his experiences have. In other words, truth of his tale can only be verified by those who go through the wilderness and face death themselves. In this way, he calls the reader into the initiatory ritual that he has undergone and described in the pages of *Journal*.

After his soliloquy ends, Marrant resumes the narrative description of his activity. His travels in Halifax are nearly completed. Three days later he gets a letter from Halifax telling him that supplies have arrived for him from England. When he gets to Shelburne on the 10th, he learns from Esquire White that James Earl received a letter with money for his relief although he does not know how much money or where Earl can be found. After some weather-related difficulty, Marrant arrives in Halifax on the 16th, and remains nine days, but he never sees James Earl. When he fails to turn up after two weeks, Marrant leaves Nova Scotia for Boston. (148)

By the beginning of February, Marrant is in Boston where he knows hardly a soul. He goes from house to house with his letters of recommendation. He meets Dr. Stillman and is refreshed at his house before he is shown to the house of Samuel Beans. Bean's wife is hospitable and introduces Marrant to Prince Hall, "one of the most respectable characters in Boston." (148) He divides his lodging and time between the homes of Hall and Beans and on the February 3, he preaches his first sermon to Dr. Stilliman's people.

The text for his sermon declares the time has come; the long awaited prophet is present.[149]

Marrant's notoriety spreads quickly in Boston and it is not long before he is preaching before "a large concourse of people" weekly, as many as two to three times per week. Not all who hear him respond to him favorably, however. A group of local hooligans chase and threaten him when his popularity interferes with their romantic lives.

> I was preaching at the west end of the town, on the 27th day of February, 1789, after preaching to a large concourse of people, there was more than forty that had made an agreement to put an end to my evening preaching, and in order to accomplish it, they came prepared that evening with swords an clubs, and other instruments to put an end to my life. So they set watches at the two gates, in order that I should not escape their hands, and all this time I was innocent of any danger of that kind near at hand until a gentlemen (sic) came in who saw what they were about to do. (149)

Marrant's companion aids his escape so that he is able to pass through the crowd unharmed. He gets to the gate without being seen—"The Lord seemed to blind their eyes"—he reports, and arrives safely at his companion's home. Marrant outmaneuvers the men, who are waiting for him at his home, and escapes the trap they had set for him. When they realize that he has eluded them, they throw stones through his window. The homeowner disperses them and next morning, the neighborhood is abuzz with news of the previous night's drama. The responsible parties are identified, apprehended, and brought before a judge. They confess to the accused crimes adding, "we used to and see

[149] See Acts 3:22.

our girls, and when we came to their houses, we always found they were gone to meeting, and we were determined to put an end to the meeting." (150) A fine is levied and Marrant states, "I was never disturbed by them any more." (sic)

In addition to preaching, Marrant is employed by a Boston school as an administrator. In June, the recently chartered African Freemason Lodge asks him to deliver a charge for the Festival of St. John the Baptist. The sermon is heard by "a great number of people" and reprinted with the publication of *Journal*. Other than short preaching engagements in Bridgewater Town, East Town, and Sherham, he remains occupied with preaching and running the school. Ongoing financial woes cause him to write to England repeatedly. When his letters go unanswered, he travels back to England to learn "what her Ladyship intended to do."

Journal concludes with the narration of the passing of several people with whom Marrant has become acquainted in Nova Scotia. John Lock, who lived only a short time after his conversion, is the first to be remembered. Lock dies of small pox and is lauded for his steadfastness in the face of illness. On his deathbed, he admonishes his family to forsake "dancing and swearing, and following foolish diversion, and begging them to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in this world, and to forsake all the ways of sin, that they might meet in glory, to part no more." (153) He insists that Marrant preach his funeral and shortly after passes from this life.

In the death story of twelve-year-old Kitty Bligh, Marrant recycles a tale motif used in *Narrative*. Bligh, like Mary Scott, the twelve-year-old student in *Narrative*, dies in an extraordinary manner. Young Kitty, a student in Marrant's school, is not considered a promising pupil. His frequent conversations with her are seemingly

fruitless. However, when she requests the minister's presence just four days before she dies, she relates "the great display of God's glory that was shewn to her on the evening past." (154) Her family and classmates gather to hear her deliver an inspiring charge for them to carry on after her death. A particularly strong admonishment is given to her mother.

> [She] turned round to her mother, and said, "O my mother, I am afraid I shall never see you any more, (sic) for you are not serving God," said she, "and you cannot mother deceive God, but you will deceive your own precious soul. Mother leave off backbiting God's people, and persecuting the church of God; mother God is angry with you every moment of the day." (154)

For the next three days, Kitty continues to address all her visitors this way. On her final day, the elders of the church, along with her family and classmates come together "so the room was filled with small and great." They sing and pray, and after she bids them all farewell, she "fell asleep in Christ."

Kitty Bligh is the third twelve-year-old girl whose awe inspiring transformation leads to the conversion of her mother in Marrant's writings. At the conclusion of *Narrative*, Mary Scott also charges her family to uphold the standard of Christ from her deathbed. All those gathered to witness her final words are deeply moved by her address. In particular, her mother is profoundly affected.

> She shook hands with them, and bade them farewell; desiring them not to lament for her when she was dead, for she was going to that fine place where God would wipe away all tears from her eyes, and she should sing Hallelujahs to God and the Lamb for ever and ever, and where she hoped afterwards to meet them; and then

turning again to me, she said—"Farewell, and God bless you," and then fell asleep in the arms of Jesus. This afterwards proved the conversion of her mother.

The story of the awakening of the twelve-year-old girl told earlier in this chapter omits the deathbed confession that precedes the mother's salvation in the other two examples. The girl from Green Harbor, as we may recall, makes a dramatic declaration of faith after enduring three tortuous days. The congregation rejoices gladly when it sees her set at liberty during morning worship. Marrant makes note of the particular effect of the girl's confession on her mother.

> On the 23d, the girl I have already mentioned, rose up in the time of the preaching, crying out, and declaring to the congregation—that her sorrow and sighing had fled away, and she had received that peace from God, which the tongue could not express. Then we sung, for joy, one of Dr. Watt's hymns, "My God, the spring of all my joy[s]." In singing the hymn, the mother was able to testify of the love of God; and, after conversing with them, I commended them in the hands of God. (110)

The relationship between the salvation of twelve-year-old girls and adult women is established in a familiar Biblical story. Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, asks Jesus to heal his twelve-year-old daughter. As Jesus follows him to his home, a woman who has suffered from a blood illness for twelve years touches him and is healed. Jesus asks who touched him, the woman comes forward, and he commends her faith. Then, he continues to the home of Jairus where he finds the girl lying dead. He declares the she is only sleeping and then raises her back to life.[150]

[150] See Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43.

The story of the ruler's daughter and the woman with the issue of blood demonstrate the relationship between the salvation of adults and children. Jesus cannot comply with Jairus' request until he first heals the adult woman. The children cannot be well if the adults are sick. Marrant inverts the pattern each time the story is related in his writings; the daughter's salvation leads to the mother's deliverance.

In both cases, Jesus and Marrant deliver adults and children. Whereas Jesus first dismisses those gathered from the dead girl's home, in each of Marrant's scenes, salvation comes when the community is gathered. Family and friends come together to hear the tearful farewell of Mary Scott and Kitty Bligh. The unnamed daughter from Green Harbor is delivered at church during morning worship. Even the repetition of the narrative in Marrant's texts is likely founded on the trifold appearance of the story in the synoptic gospels.

In *Journal*, John Marrant carefully constructs a public persona that conforms to the biblical model of the prophets and also preserves the religious orientation from Black Atlantic narrative culture. He credits his success in ministry is to his weakness, rather than his strength. In fact, he takes great pleasure in knowing that "God was pleased to work, by so weak an instrument, to his glory, and the good of precious souls." (97) The work of God, he states, disappoints human expectation because God chooses "the base things of this world" and "things that are despised" so that no human "should glory in his presence." Marrant's rendering of I Corinthians 1:26-29 is critical for understanding how he wants to be perceived. Marrant does not suggest that he is fierce or powerful, but rather without power and lowly.

While contextualized by a particular people's historical experience, *Journal* is not primarily, at least, a historical account, but rather a collection of parables intended to illustrate the religious vision of a charismatic leader. The stories in *Journal* reveal a spiritual economy in which weak and unassuming characters (Negros, Native Americans, women, and children) are conduits of incredible power. Countless tales throughout the African diaspora feature rabbits, spiders and monkeys outmaneuvering and besting larger, more dangerous predators like lions, wolves, and alligators. Commonly designated tricksters, these mythic heroes embody a structure of ethical behavior in African American narrative culture. Tricksters deploy strategic maneuvering and supernatural power to secure resources and resolve conflicts.

As mentioned in the Chapter 1 of the dissertation, trickster tales replaced oral cosmological myths from Africa in many colonial African American communities. The narratives told by Black people in America, like their African counterparts, contained codes for moral behavior and focused on everyday human relationships: family ties, responsibility to parents, friendship, courting and marriage, and the necessity of parental love. The work of French cultural historian, Pierre Nora, is helpful in explaining how Marrant's stories preserve cultural memories even as New World political realities exacerbated the distance from the African past.

Nora's *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, are identifiable where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular historical moment. Sites of memory are produced when there is a conscious break with the past. They exist, according to Nora, in the absence of an environment of memory. He notes the specific disappearance of rural

culture (in his case, the transformation of peasant in culture in French history) that serves to mark the creation of sites of memory. [151]

As members in a society become aware that a particular cultural aspect is slipping away they create *sites* meant to preserve culture in collective memory. In other words, they give a tangible expression to the cultural aspect before it is lost from memory into history. Usually, the disappearance of culture is brought about by a rupture in the daily life of the community. Nora points to the colonial invasions by European nations as the cause of rupture for indigenous cultures across the globe during the period of the Enlightenment. In Marrant's case, the rupture of African culture was brought about by the forced migration of Black people from Africa to the Americas. With the geographic and demographic shifts in Black culture brought about by the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Marrant sought to crystallize Black narrative in formal literature, thus preserving African storytelling in the cultural context of the New World. In this sense, he preserves African cultural memory even as it gives way to the uncontrollable ruptures of history.

Nora explains a sharp distinction between history and memory. History is the reconstruction of the past. It is the organization of the events according to a linear chronological understanding of time. Memory, on the other hand, is an actual phenomenon, "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting."[152] Memory, classified as dynamic and ever evolving, is directly oppositional to static history. This lively aspect of memory is demonstrated in his mimicry of Bible narratives. The Bible, as his autobiography demonstrates, was not merely a historical account of the past, but

[151] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 284.
[152] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 285.

rather a collection cosmology tales that informed ethical behavior for his contemporary community in colonial North America.

Sites of memory are created by the interplay of history and memory. A prerequisite for this creative process is a "will to remember." Nora explains that a community must exhibit purposeful actions that reconsider the past, or reappraise one's socio-historical location.[153] Marrant's desire to capture Black religious experience in written form, and share it with a trans-Atlantic audience before it was forgotten evinces his will to remember. In *Journal*, he illustrates Black religious life in Nova Scotia. His depictions of wilderness initiations, baptisms, and the sermonic tradition bring his vision for Black American identity into focus. Black consciousness, according to Marrant's representations, extends African religious culture. Written narratives, like his own autobiographical account, derive from African narrative culture which was fundamentally oral in nature. Marrant's site of memory envisions Black people at the center of African American culture, a notion that challenges historical assumptions given the reality of migration.

Nora describes the three senses by which sites of memory are formed: symbolic, material, and functional. He uses the example of a generation to explain how a site of memory is simultaneously symbolic, material, and functional. As he states,

> "Take, for example, the notion of a historical generation: it is material by its demographic content and supposedly functional—since memories are crystallized and transmitted from one generation to the next—but it is also symbolic, since it

[153] Ibid., 295.

characterizes, by referring to event or experiences shared by a small minority, a larger group that may not have participated in them."[154]

Marrant's written corpus constitutes a site of memory because it is a collection of material documents. It symbolically represents a particular geographic place (colonial North America) and a particular people (Black North Americans). *Journal*, then, is a creative and improvisational re-contextualization of collective memory given the rupture of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its deleterious effect on African narrative culture. As a site of memory, it is not frozen in time, as is history, and therefore it is appropriate that Marrant's literary performance elucidates the vibrant nature of Black narrative culture that *Journal* commemorates.

[154] Ibid.

Chapter 5 As Men and as Masons

On January 27, 1789, John Marrant set sail from Halifax to return to the United States for the first time since he was pressed into the British naval service nearly a decade earlier. Arriving in Boston after a five-day voyage, he finds himself "in a strange country, knowing nobody; but having a few letters of recommendation." Marrant quickly becomes acquainted with Prince Hall, founder of the African Lodge of Free and Accepted, and resides with Hall and his wife in their home. Soon after, Marrant is initiated as a Freemason and appointed to the chaplaincy of the African Lodge by Hall.

The formation of the African Lodge occurs during a period of racial tension among Black and white Masons in Boston. Within their lodges, white Masons maintained the practice of segregated seating. Additionally, white lodges refused to grant Hall and his fellow Black Masons a charter, nor did they recognize the legitimacy of the African Lodge after Hall secured a charter from the Modern grand lodge in London. Tensions were likely exacerbated by the anti-slavery political organizing conducted by Hall and the earliest members of the African Lodge.

Prince Hall was a prominent leader in Boston's fledgling abolitionist movement. In the years preceding and following the founding of the Lodge, Hall and fellow Masons petitioned the Massachusetts' colonial legislature for various measures related to African American freedom and inclusion. By 1777, at least ten published articles were submitted to the court including petitions for individual manumission, support for a public school for Black youth in Boston, and the abolition of slavery in the state of Massachusetts. As

religious studies scholar Chernoh Sesay notes, "Abolition steeled Black Masonic leadership, and Masonry provided an institutional frame for antislavery organizing."[155]

The political activity of the first members of the African Lodge underscores how they sought to foster racial solidarity for Black people in the new republic. Black Freemasons' notion of racial solidarity in part derives from what Sesay terms "ambiguities of emancipation" in northern and upper southern states in post-revolutionary North America. In several northern states, gradual and conditional emancipations were applied unevenly and did not always improve Black people's lived experience in the ways that their altered political status implied. Although they held it as an inalienable right to which all men were entitled, white Boston abolitionists believed that Black people had to earn their freedom.

Members of the African Lodge also held freedom to be the universal right of every human being. In fact, their increasing frustration with the gradual abolition of slavery was caused by their continued exclusion from Boston's civic institutions. Elaborate public demonstrations which included funeral services, parades, and festive celebrations exhibited the bonds of Masonic brotherhood and gained the respect of Black non-Masons as well. Their appeal to Black non-Masons helped establish the African Lodge as a leading institution among Boston's African American community.

Gaining approval from established lodges and elite whites was also part of a broader strategy of inclusion deployed by Prince Hall. In a letter to Massachusetts governor James Bowdoin, Hall pledged the support of Black Masons in efforts aimed at

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[155] Chernoh Sesay, "Emancipation and the Social Origins of Black Freemasonry," in *All Men Free and Brethren: Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry* ed. Peter Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 26.

squelching Shay's rebellion in 1786. That same year, he petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for support to emigrate to Africa. Just two years prior in 1784, he had requested funding for a Negro school from Boston selectmen. When the African Lodge received its charter that same year, it marked an important recognition of their autonomy but fell short of the goal of full political citizenship in the new republic.[156]

Although many scholars have classified Black Freemasons as an elitist group, the emphasis on class stratification seems overstated. Poll tax records indicate that only a small fraction of Black Freemasons in Boston were property owners. Some members of the Lodge were able to acquire property and suitable occupations but their relative wealth was not substantial enough that it could be transferred to subsequent generations; nor did the limits of ambiguous freedom allow them sustained economic security. Because of the scarcity of employment for free Blacks, solid economic footing was difficult to secure. Many of the early members of the African Lodge were seamen and were frequently away from Boston while employed. For others the dangers of being kidnapped into slavery kept them out of maritime employment.

Masons' ability to hold their own funerals exhibited their elite status because Blacks were required to be buried in segregated cemeteries and whites were the gravediggers. This was another example of how the Lodge's autonomy was witnessed in the public arena. Black Masons were afforded public visibility uncommon to non-members. Thus they were elite within Black Boston even as they were representational of the masses.

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[156] Ibid., 28-29.

John Marrant had grown accustomed to a degree of autonomy as a minister in Nova Scotia, and possibly saw collaboration with Hall and the members of the African Lodge as more opportunities for the same. Their shared interest in the education of Black children and the possibility of emigration to Africa were important points of agreement around which their friendship likely developed. When Marrant was appointed to the chaplaincy of the Lodge, he continued to spread the message of freedom and autonomy that began in Charleston and continued in Nova Scotia. His initial sermon to the members of the African Lodge celebrating the feast of St. John the Baptist in June of 1789 highlights these principle themes.

This chapter analyzes John Marrant's *Sermon* as a ritual performance. My analysis situates *Sermon* within the broader context of Masonic oratory using the theoretical lens of African American conjure. *Sermon*, I argue, is a ritual performance intended to conjure a new society in which Black Americans realize the ideals of equality and acceptance upheld in Freemasonry's most basic tenets.

Marrant's public proclamation should be understood within the broader context of Masonic oratory. Masonic public rituals demonstrated the principles and symbols of the fraternity to the wider public. Officers and the most distinguished members of the various American lodges presented the ideals of universal brotherhood and egalitarianism. As historian Corey Walker notes, these public demonstrations intended to reveal the communal foundation of Freemasonry that distinguished them from non-Masons. Members of Euro-American lodges immersed themselves in the sanctifying virtues and values of Freemasonry so that they could be purified to "then act for betterment of society with a purity of intentions and motives." Public orations were part

of the ritual culture designed to represent the highest ideals of Freemasonry to both members of the craft and external audiences.[157]

When Prince Hall founded the African Lodge along with the original fourteen members, he enacted "the cultural practice of Freemasonry on the same ideals as his European American counterparts." However, their articulation of universal fraternity and mutual support was unique because of the legal and extra-legal prohibitions that excluded them from the universal fellowship of Freemasons due to racial ascription. Consequently, their ritual and rhetorical performance is ironic because it highlights their exclusion from American Freemasonry even as they proclaim the craft's most sacred ideals of universality and egalitarianism. According to Walker, because Black Freemason's rhetorical performance inherently calls into question the integrity of Euro-American Freemasonry, it is not only a Masonic ritual, but also a ritual of race. Rituals of race are a codified performance of Masonic rituals that signify political and religious meanings shaped by the phenomenon of race in America.

> [T]he appropriation and development of the rituals of Freemasonry as enacted in the space of African American Freemasonry were coextensive with what I have termed the "rituals of race." In other words, although African American Freemasons based their fraternal order on similar principles as their European American counterparts, they were nevertheless unable to act freely from this foundation because of the racial privileges that structured American society. At strategic moments, the culture of European American Freemasonry became

[157] Corey D. B. Walker, *A Noble Fight: African American Freemasonry and the Struggle for Democracy in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 63.

> complicit with the racial prerogatives of an anti-Black racialist and racist ordering of society. Indeed, European American Freemasonry failed to transcend the particularities of the social, political, and economic context, and was a willing accomplice in the racial hierarchy of American civil society. The positing of this difference is not a radical contradiction. As Stuart Hall argues, "Difference, therefore, persists—in and alongside continuity." In other words, in light of the racial economy of the United States and the experiences of diaspora, the European American and African American members of this fraternal order came to understand the intimate connection of an African American racial difference. This difference transformed the rituals of Freemasonry into the rituals of race. It is this "difference of diaspora" that operates in the intersections of the rituals of Freemasonry and race.[158]

According to Walker, rituals of race are most salient in the performance of African American Masonic oratory. The ritual aspects of Black Freemasons' rhetorical performance is rendered more intelligible by Thee Smith's notion of conjure within African American religious experience. As he explains, three variants of the Greek word *pharmakon* form the theoretical basis for understanding conjure rituals in Black religion. The first variant, *pharmakos*, refers to the conjure client or victim; the second variant, *pharmakon*, refers to curative and toxic conjure prescriptions; and the third variant, *pharmakeus,* refers to the conjure practitioner. Smith notes that variants are not always distinct and can coincide in the same person or object. "It is notable, in this regard, that the pharmakos (victim) and pharmakeus (practitioner) may coincide in the same person in

[158] Ibid., 64.

those cases where the practitioner is also a target of malign phenomena requiring conjurational transformation. Notable as well is the coincidence of the pharmakos (victim) as an embodied pharmakon (tonic/toxin)."[159] John Marrant's *Sermon* exhibits how the three variants of Black conjurational performance are deployed as rituals of race. As the first public orator in African American Freemasonry, Marrant conjures a vision for a new social order as a practitioner (pharmakeus) of Masonic rhetorical ritual. Because he is a member of a victimized social group, he is also a client (pharmakos) seeking the transformation brought about by conjurational performance. *Sermon* itself prescribes the foundational principles and teachings of the craft as the tonic (pharmakon) that cures American society by revising the perception of Black humanity. Marrant's Masonic oratory is a ritual of race that demonstrates how conjurational performance is operative in the religious consciousness of early African American Freemasons.

Public oration affords Marrant the opportunity to share the African Lodge's vision for a transformed American society. In his previous publications, Marrant's religious consciousness comes to view through his narration of his life's story. *Sermon*, on the other hand, expounds biblical texts in epistolary form. The shift from narrative to expository writing mirrors the forms and structural patterns found in the New Testament. Following the story of Jesus in the gospels and the early church in Acts, the Bible's literary form shifts in the pastoral letters. The letters interpret the story of Jesus and the early church and assign spiritual meaning to contemporary events and phenomena in the first century of the ancient world. In the same way, Marrant's shift in literary forms also signals an attempt to state more explicitly the implications of biblical spirituality in the

[159] Smith, *Conjuring Culture*, 209.

New World. Addressing a mixed-race audience that included the most prominent names in Boston, he argues that America's moral consciousness and religious devotion is determined by its treatment of its Black people. Freedom, universal fraternity, and relief from suffering are central themes in his oration. The egalitarian principles of Freemasonry, combined with the Bible's mythic history, are utilized to (re)position Black people squarely within both the human family and American society. Marrant's conception of humanity is inspired by African spiritual values and demonstrates the centrality of African religion to his notion of collective Black identity in America.

Marrant reformulates Black humanity by connecting Black people's ancestral legacy to the Bible's creation stories. As he explains, creation stories trace Black history to the foundation of world. Because they tell the story of the beginning, the cosmology narratives explain how the social order is meant to be arranged.[160] Society is organized according to the collective understanding of human nature and humanity's purpose in the earth. Creation stories determine (and derive from) social structure and the formation of a social group's collective identity.

John Marrant traces African American ethnogenesis to the biblical story of creation found in the opening chapters of Genesis. Marrant's rendering of the creation of the world highlights three temporal modalities: creation, revolt, and restoration. In the initial phase, the cosmos comes into being through the purposeful design of the Creator.

[160] In African religious thought, cosmology narratives not only explain how the world comes to be, but also the purpose and nature of human existence. See Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 29.

> After the Grand Architect of the Universe had framed the heavens for beauty and delight for the beings he was then about to make, he then called the earth to appear out of darkness saying, let there be light, and it was so; he also set the sun, moon and stars in the firmament of heaven, for the delight of his creatures—he then created the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, then the beast of the earth after their various kinds, and God blessed them. (79)

African cosmic orientations are inferred in Marrant's rendering of the creation of the cosmos. After the world is formed by divine utterance, God actively sets the celestial bodies in place, then creates the various creatures of the animal kingdom. In a Dogon cosmology narrative, the creation is established when the one God, Amma, creates the stars and other celestial bodies from the same material substance that forms the earth.

> The stars came from pellets of earth flung out into space by the God Amma, the one God. He had created the sun and the moon by a more complicated process, which was not the first known to man but is the first attested invention of God: the art of pottery. The sun is, in a sense, a pot raised once for all to white heat and surrounded by a spiral of red copper with eight turns. The moon is the same shape, but its copper is white. It was heated only one quarter at a time.[161]

In both stories, the earth is created by the supreme deity whose creative acts mirror mundane human activity. Amma, the high god in Dogon cosmology, forms the sun, moon, and stars by pottery. In the Genesis account, the creative activity of God is likened to farming. The earth is commanded to yield vegetation, plants, and trees bearing

[161] Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religion Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1970), 17.

fruit.[162] The likening of divine creativity to mundane human activity suggests an imitative relationship between God and humanity in both stories. Marrant makes this relationship more apparent as he continues.

The creation of the world sets the stage "for the most excellent accomplished piece of the visible creation, Man." Marrant is careful to emphasize the splendor of humanity as the crowning achievement of the created order. Humanity, he explains, shares in the same divine nature as God, the cosmic bodies, and other living beings.

> Man is a wonderful creature, and not undeservedly said to be a little world, a world within himself, and containing whatever is found in the Creator.—In him is the spiritual and immaterial nature of God, the reasonableness of Angels, the sensitive power of brutes, the vegetative life of plants, and the virtue of all the elements he holds converse with in both worlds.—Thus man is crowned with glory and honour, he is the most remarkable workmanship of God. (80)

Because God and humanity are made of the same spiritual and immaterial nature, a continuum rather than a separation constitutes their relational existence. One might certainly infer such meaning from Marrant's identification of the members of the African Lodge as replicas of the divine. In African religious thought, human beings do not exist in isolation from larger communities. As Benjamin Ray explains, "African views of man strike a balance between his collective identity as a member of society and his personal identity as a unique individual. In general, African philosophy tends to define persons in terms of the social groups to which they belong." African social groups include deities and ancestors, both of whom are frequently central characters in the stories that inform

[162] See Genesis 1:11.

the community's self understanding. One's identity is drawn from one's community which includes deities and ancestors along with the living.[163]

Marrant's conceptualization of humanity balances individual and collective identities. On the one hand, human beings reflect the splendor, majesty and inventive power of the Creator while simultaneously sharing in the fragility of the created order. As Marrant explains, humanity is unique because each person possesses "not only a body in common with all inferior animals, but into his body was infused a soul of a far more noble nature and make—a rational principle to act according to the designs of his creation." Collectively, humans are designed to "converse with his fellow creatures that are of his own order, to maintain mutual love and society, and to serve God in consort." Human nature provides the basis for the social order.

In *Sermon*, Marrant utilizes the Bible's creation story to establish the foundation for understanding the nature and purpose of Black people's contemporary identity and purpose. Their collective purpose and identity is rooted in their ancestral legacy which is mythologized in the Bible's cosmological narrative. The story of Black humanity begins in the Garden of Eden. Though the exact location of the idyllic, mythical garden is undetermined, Marrant nevertheless situates its presence in Africa.

> Concerning this garden, there have been different opinions about it by the learned, where it was, but the most of them agree that it was about the center of the earth, and that the four rivers parted or divided the four quarters of the world. The first was Pison, that was it which compasseth the land of Havilah; this river Pison is called by some Phasis, or Phasi Tigris, it runs (they say) by that Havilah wither

[163] Ray, *African Religions,* 132.

the Amalekites fled, see I Sam. Xv. 7. And divides it from the country of Susianna, and at last falls into the Persian Gulf, saith Galtruchius and others; but from the opinions of christian (sic) writers, who hold, that Havilah is India, and Pison the river Ganges. This was first asserted by Josephus, and from him Eustubius, Jerom,(sic) and most of the fathers received it, and not without good reason; for Moses here adds, as a mark to know the place by, that there is gold, and the gold of that land is good; now it is confessed by all, that India is the most noted for gold, and of the best sort. It is added again, a note whereby to discover that place that there is bdellium and the onyx stone—and India is famous for precious stones and pearls.—The name of the second river is Gihon, the same is it which compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia (or Cush as it is in the original) there is reason to believe that this Gihon is the river of Nile, as the forenamed Josephus and most of the ancient writers of the church hold, and by the help of the river Nile, Paradise did as it were border upon Egypt, which is the principal part of the African Ethiopia, which the ancient writers hold is meant there: The name of the third river is Hiddekel, that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria, ver. 14. That it was a river belonging to Babylon is clear from Dan. X. 4; this is concluded to be the river Tygris (sic), which divides Mesopotamia from Assyria, and goeth along with Euphrates, this being the great middle channel that ran through Edom or Babylon, and may be thought to take its name from tis fructifying quality. These are the four grand land marks which the all-wise and gracious God was pleased to draw as the bounds and habitations of all nations which he was about to settle in this world. (80-81)

This setting establishes African people as the inhabitants of the promised land. Marrant supports this claim with corroborating references from Old Testament texts, early Christian writers, and the first century historian, Josephus. Each affirms his point: The African Lodge, as modern descendants of ancient Africa, claim the biblical legacy as part of their spiritual and natural ancestry. As heirs of "all the nations which [God] was about to settle in this world," they enjoy special favor from God. Marrant's repositioning of Black identity and Biblical ancestry demonstrates how Black consciousness is oriented around notions of collective identity and land even as the vocabularies of Christian spirituality were utilized.

After describing God's creation of the world, Marrant moves to the next phase of the narrative, revolt. When Adam and Eve transgress the commandment of God by eating from the forbidden tree, human relationships quickly disintegrate and chaos ensues. Cain, Adam and Eve's son, murders his brother, Abel, and is banished from his home just as his parents are expelled from Eden after their transgression. Humanity's violent inclinations dominate their relationships for several generations until the great flood destroys all humanity except Noah and his family.

Within the lodges of Euro American Freemasonry, the bonds of fraternity were severed when white Freemasons refused to accept Black Masons because of racial differences. John Marrant could not "converse with his fellow creatures that are of his own order," nor were members of the African Lodge able "to maintain mutual love and society, and to serve God in consort" with their white counterparts. In their Euro American counterparts, African American Freemasons had to contend with "God-provoking wretches…who despise their fellow men, as tho' they were not of the same

species with themselves, and would if in their power deprives them of the blessings and comforts of this life, which God…hath freely given to all his creatures to improve and enjoy." (80) In eighteenth-century American society, anti-Black racism demonstrated America's revolt against God's established order and accounted for the chaos that defines African American experience.

In many African cosmology narratives, the revolt phase narrates acts of transgression that render the created order in a radically altered state from the creator's design. In the Dogon cosmology narrative, after Amma, the supreme deity, stretches the earth in the four cardinal directions, the earth resembles a body.

> The God Amma, it appeared, took a lump of clay, squeezed it in his hand and flung it from him, as he had done with the stars. The clay spread and fell on the north, which is the top, and from there stretched out to the south, which is the bottom, of the world, although the whole movement was horizontal. The earth lies flat, but the north is at the top. It extends east and west with separate members like a fetus in the womb. It is a body, that is to say, a thing with members branching out from a central mass. This body, lying flat, face upwards, in a line from north to south, is feminine. Its sexual organ is an anthill, and its clitoris a termite hill. Amma, being lonely and desirous of intercourse with this creature, approached it. That was the occasion of the first breach of the order of the universe.[164]

Amma approaches the earth desiring intercourse, but the earth refuses his advance. He insists, however, and overpowers the earth. Their coerced union results in the birth of the

[164] Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, 17.

jackal, who is subsequently given the power speech. The jackal, is given the power of speech and is thus responsible for the confusion that results from human communication, yet another symbol for the chaos of creation in rebellion against its creator.

In both the Dogon cosmology narrative and the Genesis account, transgression is fundamental to the story of creation. However, as Marrant explains, the chaotic nature of the cosmos that results from transgression is not irreversible; through the craft of Freemasonry, redemption is possible. Restoration, the third phase of the cosmology narratives, subdues the chaotic nature of the world.

> What was it but this [envy and pride] that made Cain murder his brother, whence is it but from these that our modern Cains (sic) call us Africans the sons of Cain? (We admit it if you please) and we will find from him and his sons Masonry began, after the fall of his father. (82)

Cain's murder of his brother Abel (likened to the mistreatment of Blacks by whites in America[165]) causes him to be banished from society as an accursed wanderer. However, his unjustified transgression does not permanently seal his fate. He builds a city east of Eden and teaches his sons the craft of Freemasonry.

> But to return, bad as Cain was, yet God took not from him his faculty of studying architecture, arts and sciences—his sons also were endued with the same spirit,

[165] Cain was believed to be the father of the African race. This belief was attributed to his accursed status represented by a mark on his skin. See Genesis 4:15. The association of Cain with African-descended people was popular in eighteenth-century Black literary culture. In her noted poem "One Being brought from Africa to America," Boston poet, Phillis Wheatley, writes "Remember, Christians, Negroes, Black as Cain/ May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train." See, Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Valerie A. Smith (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014).

> and in some convenient place no doubt they met and communed with each other for instruction. It seems that the allwise (sic) God put this into the hearts of Cain's family thus to employ themselves, to divert their minds from musing on their father's murder and the woful (sic) curse God had pronounced on him, as we don't find any more of Cain's complaints after this. (82)

Marrant informs the African Lodge that their Masonic legacy descends from Cain, the father of arts, sciences, and architecture. Consequently, Cain is simultaneously a symbol for vice and virtue. On the one hand, he commits the first act of violence and thus, represents the transgression of God's created order. But after he is banished from Eden, he uses his knowledge of arts, science, and architecture to build the first city, a symbolic representation of the restoration of human society. Cain passes this knowledge to his sons and they develop culture and technology to build the world's first civilizations. For Marrant, the teachings of the African Lodge restore the cosmos. Equally important for the members of the African Lodge, Marrant explains that Freemasonry, the redemptive plan of God, originates in Africa.

Restoration also comes from children in the Dogon cosmology narrative. When Amma approaches the earth a second time, the twin spirits of Nummo result from this union. The Nummo, born of the same divine essence as Amma, represent the ideal unit. They descend to earth to restore the creation bringing with them heavenly plant fibers full of divine essence. The plant fibers facilitate communication with Amma for creatures of the earth, and are the vehicle through which the Nummo restore the world.

In both the Dogon and Genesis creation stories, children bear the gifts that redeem society. The twin spirits of Nummo bring the word of Amma to earth to reconcile the

creation with its creator. Similarly, in the Genesis account, Cain restores God's plan for society when he builds a city and teaches the mysteries of arts and science to his children. In either case, the passing of divine knowledge (symbolized by the plant fibers and the teachings of Freemasonry respectively) signals the restoration of the cosmos. The significance of progeny and ancestry are, thus, underscored. Divine restoration requires that ancestral wisdom passes to the next generation.

As Marrant implies, the creation story has particular meaning for the African Lodge. Like humanity's first parents, Black American Freemasons come from Africa. Just as human transgression causes Adam, Eve, and Cain to be removed from "that choice piece of earth," Black people are forced from Africa not for their own sins, but because of the envy and pride of the "God-provoking wretches" that brought them to America. Their restoration could be accomplished, however, if they learned and applied the art and science of Freemasonry to build a new society. Just as the tradition is passed from Cain to his offspring, *Sermon* teaches the plan of redemption to the members of the African Lodge.

As Marrant instructs in *Sermon*, Cain assuages the trauma of dislocation when he builds a city east of Eden thus ending the nomadic existence he was punished to endure after he murdered his brother, Abel. For the members of the African Lodge, the promise of a new society had yet to realized, but, like their ancient biblical ancestors, they were endowed with "the faculty of studying architecture, arts and sciences," and were capable of learning the patterns and principles needed to build new societies. If the prescriptions revealed in the mysteries of the craft were adhered to precisely, then a new society in America was possible. (82)

Sermon explains the prescriptive ethical duties of a Mason according to the principles found in the creation narrative. These moral lessons form the foundation of the new society the African Lodge aimed to build. As Marrant explains, mutual support and benevolence are critical to the success of the fledgling community.

> [W]e ought to apply the gifts we have received to the advantage of our brethren, those of us especially who are called to any office in the church, by discharging it with zeal and integrity and benevolence, which is the most important duty, and comprehends all the rest, and particularly the following—which the apostle here sets down—which are to love one another sincerely, to be ready to all good offices—to sympathize in the good or evil that befals (sic) the brethren, to comfort and assist those that are in affliction, and to live together in a spirt of humility, peace and unity. Benevolence does yet further oblige Christians to love and bless those who hate them and injure them, to endeavor to have peace with all men, to abstain from revenge, and to render them good for evil; these are the most essential duties of the religion we profess. (78)

The foundational principle of the new society was unity. To recreate an American public sphere that included and respected Black humanity, the men of the African Lodge would have to work collaboratively, and fostering a shared identity was an important first step towards building a new society.[166] Because the myth of white supremacy presumed

[166] Loretta Williams notes that Prince Hall, the African Lodge's founder, was highliy regarded for his erudtion by whites and Blacks alike. He was known to preach the "virtute of solidarity and collective action. See Loretta J. Williams, *Black Freemasonry and Middle Class Realities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 19.

Black inferiority, African humanity had to be reformulated. As Corey Walker explains, one of the African Lodge's primary functions was to create a sense of cultural identity.

> By participating in the functions and structures of African American Freemasonry, Black Freemasons in the diaspora occupied this "first position" of cultural identity as articulated by Stuart Hall. The rituals of this fraternal institution, along with its emphasis on a universal brotherhood based on the values of honor, love, virtue, integrity, and discipline, encode a shared cultural identity for all Freemasons with certain attendant political implications. These values became a dominant frame of reference for African Americans who enacted the rituals of Freemasonry.[167]

As the African Lodge became more established in the nineteenth century, it was known as a center for radical activism within Boston's Black community. Many of the city's early Black abolitionists were initiates of Prince Hall Freemasonry including David Walker, Robert Morris, and Lewis Hayden.[168] These pioneering members formed a covenant to support one another out of the dutiful call to brotherhood. The values that would inspire Prince Hall Freemasons well into the next century were articulated in Marrant's inaugural address.

For John Marrant, the teachings of the African Lodge revive Black humanity. *Sermon* revives the members of the African Lodge just as the Nummo's plant fibers transform the earth and Cain's teachings secures a future for his progeny. Historian of religion, Mircea Eliade notes that in pre-Enlightenment or non-western religious

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[167] Walker, *A Noble Fight*, 61.
[168] Albert J. Von Frank, *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 43.

communities, rituals are enacted to mimic the founding of the world. Marrant's retelling of the creation story intends to re-form human society free from the prejudice of anti-Black racism. America, as Marrant explains, is plagued by the sin of anti-Black race-based discrimination and slavery, a clear violation of a created order established on principles of mutuality and benevolence. The restoration of the original design is yet to be realized. It can, however, become reality if those in Marrant's audience adopt the actions and perspectives he prescribes. He implores the members of the African lodge to give mutual support to one another. To the whites in his audience, he asks that they accept Black people as equals in a society of free men and turn away from the sin of anti-Black racism.

Marrant's narration of Black ethnogenesis indicates that unlike the compartmentalism that develops from bifuricated Enlightenment thinking, the arts and sciences exist are a unified body of knowledge inseparable from an understanding of God and the nature of the world within Masonic lore. His holistic approach to spirituality incorporates arts and science not as value-neutral bodies of knowledge, but rather as applications of the craft that instruct humanity on how to live. Study is a spiritual discipline and applied learning is a way of life. Of course, for Marrant to hold such a position must entail that he sees meaning in the arts and sciences that extend beyond their most obvious interpretations. Life lessons emerge from studying the work and affairs of humanity and this includes mundane tasks like homebuilding and gardening. Reflection on one's own history (i.e. legacy) and work reveals the meaning of one's existence. Marrant's categorization of masonry as an honorable tradition that descends from God counters myths of Black inferiority.

Sermon concludes with Marrant's explanation of the development and spread of Freemasonry. He narrates two biblical stories that involve massive building projects. The first story, the Tower of Babel, teaches that Freemasonry begins in northeast Africa and moves west. In Shinar, under the leadership of Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson, the Babylonian monarchy is established. Nimrod presides over the construction of the Tower of Babel, but when new languages cause their communication to breakdown, the people scatter in various directions. The dispersal after Babel catalyzes the diffusion of Masonic teachings, notes Marrant. "The confusion of languages," he states, "gave rise to Masons (sic) faculty and universal practice of conversing without speaking, and of knowing each other by signs and tokens."[169]

The dispersal after Babel allegorizes Black people's displacement in the New World. When the disparate ethnic groups arrived from Africa to the Americas, their distinct ethnicities gave way to broader racial categorization. New collective identities required new forms of communication.[170] For Marrant and the members of the African Lodge, the Bible was key in the development of the new vocabularies they used to signify meanings undetected by the dominant society. Nirmrod and the Babylonian ancestors validate the use of their secret and symbolic styles of communicating.

After the scattering of nations at Babel, Freemasonry is extended to Egypt. As Marrant recounts, "there [Nimrod] built the city of Heliopolis—Thebes with an (sic) hundred gates—they built also the statue of Sphynx, (sic) whose head was 120 feet

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[169] In the Dogon cosmology narrative, the jackal, who symbolizes the confusion of human language, is the offspring from the coerced union between Amma and the earth. In the Bible's story and the Dogon cosmology tale, human language is the source of confusion that catalyzes revolt. See Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, 84.
[170] Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

round, being reckoned the first or earliest of the seven wonders of arts." (84) The Hebrews discover the craft when Abraham is forced to reside in Egypt because of a famine. Before the journey to Egypt, Marrant explains that ancient Hebrews lived in tents and "practised (sic) very little the art of architecture till (sic) about eighty years before their Exodus." In Egypt, Abraham's descendants were "trained up to the building with stone and brick, in order to make them expert Masons, before hey possessed the promised land." (84) In the same way, Freemasonry empowered Black North Americans to transform their land of bondage into a land of promise. Marrant's mythological history suggests that restoration and salvation necessitate connection to the ancestral past.

Marrant concludes his narration of Freemasonry's mythic origins with the story of the construction of Solomon's temple, the crowning achievement of ancient Freemasons. The temple's construction included the labor and cooperation of people from "different nations and different colours, yet were they in perfect harmony among themselves, and strongly cemented in brotherly love and friendship." (86) Marrant carefully details the contributions of Sidonians, Canaanites, and Phoenecians highlighting their various roles as stone setters, timber cutters, layers and builders to underscore the egalitarian collaboration that defines the craft. He also intimates the Temple signifies meaning beyond its physical structure.

> Thus Solomon as grand master, and Hiram as his deputy, carried on and finished that great work of the temple of the living God, the inside work of which, in many instances as well as the tabernacle, resembles men's bodies; but this is better explained in a well filled lodge; but this much I may venture to say, that our blessed Saviour compared his sacred body to a temple, when he said, John ii. 19.

> Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days; and the Apostle, I Peter, i. 44 says, that shortly he should put off this tabernacle. I could show also that one grand end and design of Masonry is to build up the temple that Adam destroyed in Paradise—but I forbear. (86)

As Marrant points out, Solomon's Temple refers to both the physical structure of the building and the human body. The symbolic relationship between human bodies and sacred edifices highlights that the true essence of the craft is the restoration of people. The redemptive work that creates new societies is the shared responsibility of all humanity. Thus, the Masons employed to construct the temple "were of different nations and different colours." (86) As the ancient principles of the craft dictate, no one is barred from the craft on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Upon the temple's completion, the builders depart "unto their several homes, and carried with them the high taste of architecture to the different parts of the world." Their dispersal reenacts the scattering of humanity at the Tower at Babel. However, in this instance, Solomon's Temple is completed by humanity's collective effort whereas the Tower of Babel was left unfinished. The completion of Solomon's Temple juxtaposes the unfinished Tower of Babel. The story of the Tower of Babel teaches that human society collapses when cultural and ethnic differences are not overcome by the Masonic principles of egalitarianism. When new languages are introduced, factionalism causes the people abandon their collective work. The new territories they settle are according to the parochial commonalities of language and culture. The story of Solomon's Temple, on the other hand, celebrates the inclusivity of diverse laborers. Masonic forms of non-

verbal communication circumvent spoken language, the symbol for divisiveness in the cosmology tale.

In Dogon religious cosmology, a model granary allegorizes human society. The granary's structure, which represents the order of the cosmos and the function of human society, is carefully described.

> He took a woven basket with a circular opening and a square base in which to carry the earth and puddled clay required for the construction of a world-system…This basket served as a model for a basket-work structure of considerable size which he built upside down, as it were, with the opening, twenty cubits, in diameter, on the ground, the square base, with sides eight cubits long, formed a flat roof, and the height was ten cubits. This framework he covered with puddled clay made of the earth from heaven, and in the thickness of the clay, starting from the centre of each side of the square, he made stairways of ten steps each facing towards one of the cardinal points. At the sixth step of the north staircase he put a door giving access to the interior into which were eight chambers arranged on two floors.[171]

Just as Solomon's Temple symbolizes humanity, the granary replicates the divine order of the cosmos. Each of the eight compartments on the two floors is designated for a different species of the earth's creatures. The north for men and fish; the south for domestic animals, the east for birds, and the west for wild animals, vegetables, and insects. The eight compartments represent "the eight principal organs of the Spirit of water which are comparable to the organs of men." The celestial granary, like Solomon's

[171] Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, 31-32.

Temple, symbolized the human body and "was therefore a picture of the world-system of the new order."[172]

In the same way that the Dogon celestial granary symbolized the cosmic order, so also Solomon's Temple and the Tower of Babel are stories about buildings that symbolized human society. Both stories involve building projects that require the cooperative efforts of diverse people. In the Tower of Babel, the introduction of linguistic differences results in the abandoning of project. Human beings are not able to reach God because they can not work together beyond their differences. In the story of Solomon's Temple, the builders have learned the non-verbal coded communication of the Masonic craft, and, as Marrant narrates, are able to complete the temple's construction without difficulty. Once completed, each man returns to his own place of origin. Marrant's pairing of the two stories suggests that the categorization of people into national and ethnic groups does not prevent cooperative labor and universal fraternity according to the teachings and principles of Freemasonry.

Throughout Marrant's retelling of the African Lodge's story of origin, the correspondence to contemporary members of the African Lodge is implied and, at times, made explicit. The disciplines of mathematics, the arts, and science are treasures of their African past and therefore, within their collective grasp. Just as envy and pride did not permanently disrupt the transmission of Freemasonry from one generation to the next, the contemporary Black Masons of the African Lodge were also capable of bypassing whatever barriers prevented them from the highest achievements in formal learning and moral living. Contrary to presiding opinion held by the majority culture, they were

[172] Ibid., 39.

qualified for full participation in American society. Because the noble legacy of ancient Masons extends to the African Lodge, Marrant's identification of the Bible's most prominent characters is akin to a veneration of ancestors. He reveals the greatness of the people from which they descend to reform their self-understanding.

Marrant's application of the metaphoric language of building to his role as chaplain of the African Lodge is likely at least partly inspired by his former employment as a carpenter on the Jenkins' plantation in South Carolina. John Saillant argues that Marrant's *Sermon* is the first part of a three-part series of addresses that outlines Masonic ideology. Marrant and Prince Hall, founder of the African Lodge, each explain complimentary foundational aspects of Freemasonry that mimic an initiate's progression through the Lodge. Marrant's text lays the foundation or most basic understanding of Prince Hall freemasonry. Hall's subsequent addresses[173], delivered in 1792 and 1797 respectively, build on the foundation that Marrant establishes in his 1789 address. Joanna Brooks also notes how the three sermons function collectively. As she explains, they correlate to the three elements of the Masonic motto, "Wisdom, Strength, Beauty."[174] Additionally, she speculates that the three lectures are designed to initiate new members in preparation for the Lodge's three symbolic degrees: Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master.

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[173] See Prince Hall, "A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 25th of June, 1792," and "A Charge, Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797, at Menotomy," in *"Face Zion Forward": First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798*, ed. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).
[174] Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146.

Using the governing metaphors of Freemasonry, Prince Hall framed the lectures as steps in a building process. Marrant's 1789 *Sermon* provided a foundation of "anciency," Hall's 1792 *Charge* introduced the pillar of civic duty, and his 1797 *Charge* established the second pillar of sympathy, or racial solidarity. Within the context of Freemasonry, the pillars represent the two columns in the porch at Solomon's Temple. One pillar is named Jachin, meaning strength; the other is Boaz, meaning establishment (I Kings 7:21, II Chronicle 3:17). Together, they refer to the scripture: "In strength shall this house be established." Cabalists and mystics have interpreted them as active and passive principles, the binary and the unitary, the spiritual and the material. Together, they form the portal to the Holy of Holies, between them hangs the veil, which marks the divide between worlds. According to Masonic ritual, the lodge is not just a fraternal gathering place but a model of the universe itself like the temples of Solomon and Ancient Egypt. Entering the temple, under the scrutiny of brother Freemasons, is a ritual enactment of the passage from the prosaic and profane world in the real of mystery, the Holy of Holies. Perhaps Prince Hall and his fellows saw in this ritual configuration of space and symbol a semblance of their own passage through the profane logic of racial formation into the more sacred realm of community. From outside to inside, from confusion to understanding, from bondage to freedom, from death to life—the initiations and rituals of Freemasonry allowed the African Lodge to sacralize their bond as black people.[175]

[175] Ibid., 146-147.

As Brooks explains, Hall and Marrant allegorize initiatory rituals via oratorical performance. Public oration substitutes the constructions of a physical edifice and inaugurates the creation of a new society. Their teachings help form the spiritual body that their physical meeting place symbolizes. By recreating the ritual structure, they mimic the original act of creation that ordered the material world from the cosmic, primordial world.[176] The lectures disclose the meaning of narrative symbols and the realities their Masonic rituals signify.

Brooks and Saillant's insights concerning the dialogical relationship between Marrant's and Hall's texts raises questions regarding *Sermon*'s relationship to Marrant's other writings. *Sermon* is not only a symbolic text for the primary phase of Masonic ritual initiation, it is also a capstone for Marrant's own written corpus. The third of his published works, *Sermon* reveals the communal covenant announced in the prophet's public ministry. As Saillant remarks, the covenant community underscores a distinctly African influence in Marrant's consciousness.

> One of the uniquely Africanist elements of Marrant's theology was his merger of an orthodox notion of conversion with a notion of the covenanted community, which had faded out of late eighteenth-century Calvinism but was still convincing

[176] Mircea Eliade explains the relationship between territory, ritual, and conquest in his discussion of ancient civilizations and their cosmological narratives. The cosmological myth of creation is ritually reenacted when space is consecrated. Ancient civilizations believed that space was differentiated by theophany, or a revelation of a god in a particular location. For Eliade, the differentiation of space is critical to understanding how religious humanity apprehends sacred reality. The manifestation of sacred space ontologically founds the world because orientation implies a fixed point; the center is constructed at the place of sacred manifestation—"real living" is made possible as a result. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959).

> to the dispossessed Blacks of Nova Scotia. Had Marrant merely used the sentimentalist language of the New Divinity—affection, benevolence, charity, and the like—he would have established himself as a theologian of the Black community, a theoretician of the way in which conversion integrated Blacks into a community of believers. But Marrant added to New Divinity sentimentalism an older notion of the covenanted community—in his formulation a Black community in a particular covenant with God to pass through suffering to a Zion.[177]

The formation of the covenanted community culminates Marrant's prophetic journey. In *Narrative*, his first text, his prophetic identity is established through the narration of his call and prophetic initiation. *Narrative* is structured on the pattern of the Old Testament's principle story, the Exodus. *Journal* mimics the prophetic ministry of Jesus. His prophetic authority is demonstrated via parabolic reports of miraculous deliverances, healings, and stories of personal transformation. In *Journal*, Marrant initiates Nova Scotia's Black worshipers into a covenanted community seeking restoration and political autonomy. *Sermon* explains the contours of the covenant upon which Marrant's ministry is based. It is his most explicitly articulated vision for a new society based on his understanding of the order of the cosmos. He expounds the message of the gospel through by retelling the Bible's creation story according to the narrative principles of the Black Atlantic storytelling tradition. *Sermon* is the foundation of the series on freemasonry with Prince Hall's contributions, but it is also the culmination of

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[177] John Saillant, "'Wipe Away All Tears from Their Eyes': John Marrant's Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785-1808," *The Journal of Millennial Studies* (Volume 1, Number 2: Winter, 1999).

his own written corpus. Marrant's three texts mimic the central narratives and components of the Bible, the foundational text in American religious consciousness. His body of work signifies the Bible and thus completes his construction of Black prophetic identity even as it opens the way for a new social order founded on the principles of Freemasonry.

Conclusion

In her seminal article, "The Race for Theory" Barbara Christian lamented what she called the "academic hegemony" that determines how texts ought to be read. In short, Christian critiques the "preoccupations with mechanical analyses of language…and gross generalizations about culture" that typify scholarly interpretations of American literature.[178] Her concerns are relevant for the study of African American religion as well. The dominant theoretical modes for analyzing early Black American religion reflect interpretive biases that privilege Euro American ways of knowing. Consequently, African American religious experience is presumptuously described within the rubrics of American Protestantism. While Christian interpretive models can provide useful frameworks, many articulations of Black religious culture remain unexplored ultimately obscuring more than what is revealed pertaining to Black Atlantic religious phenomena. Additionally, the constitutive impact of African and other non-Christian religious influences remains undervalued. This study has attempted to render visible the substantial contribution of Africana religious cultures to John Marrant's religious development and religious consciousness in the broader Black Atlantic world.

The dissertation has also sought considered religious cultural resources beyond the geographical boundaries of the the British North American colonies as foundational to the development of Marrant's religious consciousness. My study has emphasized the generative impact of Africana religion in colonial urban centers such as New York, St. Augustine, Savannah, and Charleston on Black Atlantic religious literature evinced in Marrant's corpus. These coastal colonial centers were major hubs for the Trans Atlantic

[178] Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique*, no. 6 (1987): 51-63.

Slave Trade and Marrant's residency in each of these cities afforded extensive cultural contact and exchange with enslaved and free black communities throughout the Black Atlantic world.

American historian Anthony Kaye posits that for the enslaved communities in the nineteenth century, the neighborhood is the conceptual center around which spatial epistemology is oriented. Throughout the South, adjoining plantations that comprised the geographical communities in which slaves lived formed the nexus of intimate relationships, shared labor, and broadly defined political action. The neighborhood, while still confined within the boundaries of American legal slavery, often enabled some free and enslaved Blacks to circumvent the authority of individual landowners even as they remained under the jurisdiction of American slavery. In the same way, Marrant's writings and those of his contemporaries reveal a network of exchange through which New World Black communities transmit rituals and storytelling forms move across the waters of the Atlantic. The trans continental exchange of Africana religious culture through literature and storytelling is critical to the formation of Black Atlantic consciousness. This study has attempted to redress the lacuna of emphasis on the constitutive role of Africana religion in the formative process of Black Atlantic religious consciousness.

Because John Marrant and other early Black Atlantic writers utilize the autobiographical narrative to exhibit religious consciousness, my analysis challenges overly simplistic readings of Black religious narratives. For nearly all early Black Atlantic writers and public figures during the colonial period, gaining access to public platforms required the appropriation of Christian rhetoric and identity. However, this

process of adaptation was rendered possible via epistemologies rooted in traditional African religious culture. Black Atlantic epistemologies were grounded in structural, rather than theological, modes of analysis. Structural analyses of Bible stories enabled early Black Americans to modify African-based ritual practices, such as wilderness initiation and water baptism, under the guise of Christianity much like African-descended communities in Spanish Florida where Catholicism was the dominant religion.

The unique epistemological foundations and theoretical assumptions operative in Black Atlantic religious imagination enable practitioners to pen texts exhibiting novel understandings of American religious phenomena. The dissertation has emphasized that the narratives composed by Black Atlantic writers and their North American successors utilized the Bible as a storytelling model. Consequently, early Black American autobiographies illustrate a tradition of biblical criticism rendered via the storytelling forms of early Black Americans. The inter-textual dialogue within this body of literature discloses a critical conversation that reveals the epistemological foundations and hermeneutical proclivities that shape Black Atlantic consciousness.

My analysis of John Marrant's literature demonstrates that the deployment of Christian vocabularies does not always denote corresponding Euro-American Protestant beliefs in Black Atlantic religion. Although Marrant's literary imitation of the Bible utilizes the vocabularies of orthodox Christian worship, he does not not simply recapitulate the doctrines of Protestantism. Rather, he establishes a new trajectory in American religious thought, one that integrates biblical criticism with hermeneutical and theoretical foundations of Black Atlantic narrative culture. This ideological trajectory reformulates Black humanity and offer a counter narrative to presumed notions of black

inferiority. Through his writings and preaching, Marrant allegorizes Black Atlantic rituals of regeneration and provides a sacred interpretation of Black people's shared experiences of loss and displacement. Though he would not live to see the self-governing Black community materialize, in 1792 his followers would depart from Nova Scotia for Sierra Leone to bring Marrant's lifelong pursuit of a free Black community to fruition. As Joanna Brooks, notes, Marrant's ministry demonstrated his belief in his own prophetic identity and his communities' messianic role in the redemption of African descended people throughout the Atlantic World and beyond.

> As an emissary of the Huntingdon Connexion, he was sent to Nova Scotia to preach the Connexion's brand of evangelical Calvinism, do battle against "free-thinkers" and Wesleyan Arminians, and serve the province's indigenous and black populations. The Huntingdon Connexion—and especially the late George Whitefield—had long demonstrated an interest in the religious welfare of the blacks and Indians. Publicly, the ordination of John Marrant was a commitment to this end. Privately, Marrant was not motivated by patronistic or charitable but rather by more radical views: he believed himself a prophet, sent to Nova Scotia to initiate the redemption of scattered Africa.[179]

Marrant's understanding of the messianic role of African Americans stems from his understanding of religious ritual in the Bible's storytelling forms. His rendering of the biblical saga in his literary corpus enabled him to establish an alternative vision for Black people's collective future. The political economy established by African American Christians in the eighteenth century would not endure intact, but would, in fact, be

[179] Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus*, 87.

reshaped and reconfigured in subsequent generations as material needs shifted in response to changes in the broader social world. However, Marrant's belief in a collective, salvific destiny for black people continued to profoundly shape Black authors' religious consciousness well into the nineteenth century. While an in-depth study of Black authors' Bible reading strategies before Emancipation is beyond the scope of this project, Marrant's texts and those of his contemporaries and successors uncover a hitherto unexplored tradition of biblical criticism within Black religion and is potentially fertile ground for future research.

For Marrant and other early Black writers, direct experience with God along narrative interpretive traditions and rituals grounded in Africana religious culture established the ideological parameters of Black faith communities and informed how they adapted the structures of Euro American Protestantism to their own contexts. In Marrant's case, the process of adaptation and exchange is crystallized by his literary depiction of his meeting with George Whitefield. When he is apprehended by the Lord's overwhelming presence, Marrant also seizes the authority to speak in the public sphere. Moreover, the structural pattern of his call narrative and the subsequent development of his ministry in Nova Scotia and Boston unfolds along a parallel trajectory as the pattern of ritual initiation in traditional African religion. The representation of initiation throughout his writings suggests that his religious consciousness remains rooted in traditional African modes of thought even while modified by Christian rhetoric and symbolism.

African cultural orientations are also operative in Marrant's reading of the Bible. His deployment of the Talking Book trope signals a shift from oral to textual modes of

expression. The Talking Book trope suggests that black communities understood literacy as a spiritual technology akin to divination. Talking books (the Bible in each of these authors' narratives) were perceived as oracles and thus, the practice of reading was represented in black literature as divination and prophecy. African American biblical interpretation demonstrates how the appropriation of Christianity conformed to pre-existing African modes of religious thought. The acquisition of literacy rendered God accessible to Marrant and his contemporaries and successors. Additionally, they declare the barrier of illiteracy permeable, and thus God is made accessible to those who possess the power to read. Black-authored texts reveal important developments in African American religious consciousness and exhibit the process by which Black people in North America exchanged and modified religious ideas. Pre-existing African religious epistemologies were neither abandoned nor did they remain intact, but were adjusted to fit the demands of New World contexts. African religious epistemologies operationalized how and why Biblical symbols and narratives derived meaning for African descendants in the eighteenth-century New World. Because African-inspired ways of knowing provided that organizational schemas for accessing biblical, Christian and other phenomena, the study concludes that structural, rather than theological modes of analysis guided Black Atlantic religious consciousness. The religious writings of John Marrant, his contemporaries, and successors reveals that early African Americans practiced biblically-based, but not necessarily Christian, religion. While an extended study of early Black Church religious thought is beyond the scope of this project, my analysis suggests that early Black Church religiosity is informed by African ways of reading scripture rather than the Euro-American Protestant orthodoxy.

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