

and back, one in which the success of the spectator's journey depends on submitting to the apocalyptic visions of a nation coming undone. Punctuating the American landscape with "burning" bodies, the "tarring," "feathering," and "whipping" of black flesh in the wide open fields and cityscapes of Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., this *Mirror* replaces the phantom menace of blackness in the popular panorama. In effect, Box Brown's display transformed the lay of the American panoramic land so as to include, according to *The London Times*, "pictures" of "the flogging of female as well as male slaves, and also the burning of slaves alive." In doing so, his project responded to the contemporaneous efforts of those white artists who constricted and at times altogether extinguished black figures from nineteenth-century American landscape art.<sup>79</sup>

Like the popular 1850s panoramas, this genre of painting was deeply associated with expansionist rhetoric and nationalist identifications.<sup>80</sup> An art form that yoked the realist and the sublime as a means to locating and evoking a putative "American" character inextricably linked to "Nature," nineteenth-century landscape art sought to align the social and political evolution of the nation within a naturalized cycle of meaning. Geography and national identity merge in popular American landscape art to create what Angela Miller calls a "Romantic nationalism" of dehistoricized visual imagery intended to forge a national body politic.<sup>81</sup> A "quasi-utopian endeavor" (*Empire of the Eye*, 13), the landscape painting of this period enacted a visual order and stability onto an unwieldy American topography and spoke back to the threatening sociopolitical tensions bound up in sectionalist debates and fiscal instability.

Box Brown's moving panorama, then, reappropriated the conventions of landscape art, reversing and revising this nationalist rhetoric for black abolitionist ends. The *Mirror of Slavery* rehearsed and redeployed the painterly techniques of African American artist Robert Duncanson, called by some the "greatest landscape painter in the west."<sup>82</sup> Just as Duncanson used literary subject matter in his paintings which "helped to organize the meaning(s) of landscape imagery" around identifiable narrative and thematic structure, Box Brown imported the content of his own autobiographical text into Part II of the panorama.<sup>83</sup> Like Duncanson, Brown revised "the old formulaic comprehension of the 'magisterial gaze' (as an evolutionary movement from wilderness to civilization) to one about slavery and emancipation." But whereas art historian Sharon Patton has argued that Duncanson's work invoked the "escapism em-

bodied in landscape painting” so as to level “a critique at the abusive social order that produced the need for such escape,” Box Brown tapped into the genre so as to (re)frame the utility of landscape painting altogether.<sup>84</sup> Brown’s use of landscape painting recycled the generic tactics of this visual form for counterrepresentational purposes. His *Mirror* posed the ability to interrupt the conventional “magisterial gaze” of the viewer, carrying him/her back into the “wilderness” of plantocracy America in order to realize social and political revolution. Unfurling itself out of a transnational ordeal of captivity and punishment, his panorama barreled into a reformist future by affirming the necessity of millennial upheaval and a fundamentally violent rupture with the antebellum present. If “millennial thinking” turned on the “unanswered question central to national identity: where was the country headed, and where was it situated in the millennial timetable?” (A. Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 109), Brown essentially responded to this mode of inquiry by creating a panorama which posits the “future” as unapologetically Fourier-ist in the final frames of his exhibition.<sup>85</sup>

Black abolitionist panoramas such as Henry Box Brown’s complicated the fundamental “aim of nearly” all art of the antislavery movement, which Reilly contends was produced “to create an ennobling image of the African, arouse the compassion of white Americans for the plight of the slave, or generate outrage among northerners toward the South.” Instead, the *Mirror of Slavery* posed a way for the fugitive slave to literally and figuratively work his way out of the social, political, and editorial mazes erected by white abolitionists and white supremacists in the antebellum era. This “fleeing,” exhibitory space transformed the spectacle of escape into revolutionary fugitive art. It offered a way of responding to the “suffocation” of the circumscribed slave narrative by mounting a wide open space in which to map a representational frontier. It enacted a kind of peristrepthic insurrection, a revolt in perpetual, moving process which grates against the political restrictions and the representational constrictions placed on fugitive slaves and black abolitionist cultural and political production. Redirecting the rebellious spirit of Nat Turner, whose legend reverberates as a distant echo in the 1849 edition of the *Narrative of Henry Box Brown*, Brown’s panorama imagines a land of simultaneous Gothic abjection and emancipation, a nightmare of disunionism and apocalyptic redemption. Rather than merely representing the scene of the crime—America itself—this *Mirror* converts the nation into a rough and uncanny outback frontier, a monstrous “other” place for both U.S. and U.K. audiences alike.<sup>86</sup>

Box Brown's *Mirror* reflected back a multiplicity of "revolutions" in space and time, a kind of dystopian visual translation of the captive's experience aimed at freeing the nation of its bondage and imminent destruction as a slaveocracy. Anticipating the biblical and bloody anarchy actuated by abolitionist John Brown some nine years later, Brown's exhibition merged this philosophy with the pacifist Garrisonian ideology of "root and branch abolitionism" and millenarian landscape art. His fugitive panorama took the gruesome visions of (corporeal) ravishment and waste in slavery and suggested the painful yet paradoxical ways in which this "slash and burn" representation of the nation, this display of the ruination of flesh and land might bring about the eventual overturning of political power structures.<sup>87</sup> Deploying a miasma of black torture and desolation to operate alongside the heroic escape, the *Mirror* purposefully convolutes landscape imagery so as to unmake and rehistoricize mythical "America." Like a mobile representational storm, Brown's panorama produces scenes of harrowing and unrecognizable nationhood. This teeming swampland, in effect, on display for transatlantic audiences announced a kind of representational unruliness and operated as a radical form of black abolitionist cultural production and narrative authority for the fugitive slave.

### **Geography without Boundaries**

According to newspapers, advertisements, and printed testimonials, the *Mirror of Slavery* opened its doors to a largely sympathetic audience of clergymen, educators and schoolchildren, journalists and antislavery activists.<sup>88</sup> Lauded by fellow abolitionists as a major contribution to the movement, Box Brown's display successfully circulated in the United States in northeastern antislavery hubs of dissident activism for some four and a half months before its subsequent reappearance in the U.K. Yet despite seeking asylum in Great Britain and encountering British audiences who were largely swayed by black abolitionist sentiment, Brown would face his most notoriously resistant spectator while in England. After the editor of the tiny *Wolverhampton & Staffordshire Herald* printed slanderous remarks on the panorama, Brown sued his detractor, and an English jury ruled in Brown's favor. The episode remains a significant example of how the exhibition and Box Brown's complex network of performance strategies posed a representational crisis to viewers who were seemingly tethered to narrow and troubling racial authenticity politics.<sup>89</sup>

The *Herald* ran its scathing review of the *Mirror* in two sep-

arate segments in March of 1852, while the exhibition was on display in Staffordshire, a northwestern part of the industrial Black Country in England. The initial review disparages the exhibition for “its very partial, unfair, and decidedly false view of American slavery.” Condemned for its “gross and palpable exaggeration,” the *Mirror*’s seeming representational transgressiveness and hyperbole presents a quagmire of visual potholes and pitfalls for the *Herald* journalist. Placing Brown’s panorama into direct dialogue with the sterilized ahistoricism of contemporaneous American panorama shows, this particular critic’s heated review bristles with unchecked racial hostility:

If the best and most authentic descriptions of American slavery are to be credited; if the pictorial illustrations of the Southern States, given us by Banvard, Ripley, Smith, Russell, and other artists; if the evidence of travellers in the slave States is to be relied upon; and lastly, if the statements of even former slaves themselves are to be accepted and credited—then is Mr. Box Brown’s panorama without a feature of resemblance, and his so-called ‘eloquent and poetical address’ a jumbled mass of contradictions and absurdities, assertions without proof, geography without boundary, and horrors without parallel. The representation, to our thinking, instead of benefitting the cause of abolition, is likely, from its want of vraisemblance and decency, to generate disgust at the foppery, conceit, vanity, and egotistical stupidity of the Box Brown school. To paint the devil blacker than he is is, certes, [*sic*] a work of supererogation, and to make the slave States a series of inquisitorial chambers of horrors—a sort of Blue Beard or Giant Despair den, for the destruction, burning, branding, laceration, starving, and working of negroes; and the owners of slaves a class of demi-fiends, made of double-distilled brimstone is about as reasonable as giving his Satanic Majesty a coat of black paint to increase his hideousness. How clergymen and other respectable individuals could lend themselves to such a juggle, we do not know; but testimonials from such men (who doubtless received Box Brown’s descriptions as unmingled gospel), are read before the audience, and they are full of fullsome compliment to the bejewelled “darky” whose portly figure and overdressed appearance bespeak the gullibility of our most credulous age and nation.<sup>90</sup>

This visual site which defies “resemblance” to any recognizable place proves an outrage to the critic invested in the simple and picturesque images of the American South commodified and exported by panorama entrepreneurs, travel writers, and even a

dubiously perceived array of “former slaves themselves.” Lying at the root of the critic’s embittered response is a resistance to the *Mirror’s* engagement with spectacle as a means unto itself, as a device conveying extravagant representation which lacks “vraisemblance.” An errant and “indecent” endeavor, this panorama defies and transcends the genre’s paradoxical goal of validating the “truth” of history via spectacular theatrical illusion. It also deviates from the slave narrative’s attempts to deploy a discourse evoking authorial transparency and veracity. Rather, according to the observations of this nonplused critic, the exhibition manifests “a jumbled mass of contradictions and absurdities, assertions without proof.” The strategic scrambling of “historical” progress, the trace of black figures made captive and yet again making themselves free, are images scripted as “absurd” in the eye of this spectator.

While New England’s *Liberator* praised Brown’s exhibition for “advancing the anti-slavery cause” and for producing “a faithful delineation to the eye of the principal features of the traffic in human flesh” and while the English *National Anti-Slavery Standard* marveled at the *Mirror’s* putative accuracy, its “vivid and genuine description of each passing scene,” the *Herald’s* editor remained stymied by the panorama’s failure to execute narrative veracity. Such a critique however, perhaps veils the publication’s deeper concerns regarding black labor, black capital, and black aesthetic innovation in the antebellum era. The conflict with the *Herald* demonstrates how Brown’s moving panorama show perhaps offered *too much* of something for the average spectator. As one audience member reportedly “called out when the performance was half done, ‘Mr. Brown, we have seen sufficient; not that we are tired, but you show too much for so little charge.’”<sup>91</sup> What was it that the *Mirror* had reflected back too extensively, too fully, too relentlessly? What line had Box Brown’s display transgressed? For the *Herald* editor, the superfluity of the panorama alone elicited a response that was at once oblique and yet dogged in its attempts to police black narrative agency and innovation.

In the March 17 review of the display, the critic calls the panorama’s excess of representation into question; its “geography without boundaries,” its “horrors without parallel” provide evidence of the crime of “supererogation.” The subtext of this discontent bears the question, how can this place of ritualistic imprisonment and torture, how could this be “America”? Or perhaps these remarks simply demand, how could this elaborately rendered “American” scene in all its “foppery, conceit” and “vanity,” how could this rousing machinery of “artifice”

from the “Box Brown school” come forth from the mind and mouth of a fugitive slave? For these images appear to follow no previous script; they deviate, according to this incredulous and discriminating viewer, from even the texts of “former slaves,” those essentially truth-bearing icons of experiential wisdom. The *Mirror of Slavery*’s scene titles and the scathing critique suggest that this moving panorama was willing to disrupt the codes of a “[n]ineteenth-century high theatrical realism.” By rendering “the slave States” as “a series of inquisitorial chambers of horrors—a sort of Blue Beard or Giant Despair den, for the destruction, burning, branding, laceration, starving, and working of negroes,” Brown’s panorama exacerbated the restrictive aesthetic conviction that “the [panoramic] picture” remain “utterly faithful to external reality” (Altick, 189) and that African Americans remain deeply entrenched within putatively anti-extravagant expressive forms.<sup>92</sup>

It comes as little surprise, then, that the *Herald* critic’s review would so clearly conflate the presumed excesses of the panoramic exhibition with Brown’s own body (of work). What begins as a diatribe over the inauthenticity of the display’s representations of slavery devolves into a condemnation of sartorial and corporeal transgressions emanating from Brown’s own “bejewelled,” “portly,” and “overdressed” figure. To the *Herald* critic, the chaos of graphic images of slavery parallels the disorder elicited by a “dandyfied” black fugitive redressing the body in accoutrements of leisure and wealth. For this flummoxed viewer, the panorama’s spectacular visual politics are, by extension, reanimated in the body of Box Brown himself. In a provocative leap of logic, the putative extravagance of the black abolitionist figure runs counter to the credibility of the panorama’s political goals; the sartorial markings of this performing body threaten to yield what can only be read by this cynical spectator as a meretricious narrative about “blackness” itself. The *Herald* journalist makes this point even clearer one week later in his second article on the *Mirror*. Revisiting the spectacle of a “bejewelled and oily negro,” the critic counterposes Brown’s body to that of the exhibition’s political intent in even more blatant terms. Accordingly, Brown’s “obese and comfortable figure and easy nonchalance” is said to “remin[d] one of various good things and sumptuous living at the expense of those whose marvel-longing developments have been called into ‘lively exercise,’ by the terrible wonders” of the panorama.<sup>93</sup> With its own bit of florid and equally excessive prose, the article places Brown’s free and “easy” corporeality at odds with the Uberationist platform of the exhibition. Brown’s vestibularity here contra-

venes the purpose of elevating the cause of the enslaved.

Wedding Brown's figure to the "supererogation" of the panorama, however, exposes the complex social and cultural anxieties running amuck in the *Herald's* reports. The critic's insistence on utilizing the trope of "blackness" lays bare the true "offense" of this black abolitionist project. If Brown's *Mirror* adds "coats of black paint" to an already "hideous" endeavor, his project presumably resembles an elaborate minstrel act. Like blacking up with burnt cork, laying the "black paint" on thick calls attention to both the object of inquiry and the subject wielding the paintbrush. Thus, to rephrase the above observation: "to paint the [fugitive slave], blacker than he is" places the expected transparency and artlessness of the black abolitionist narrator in doubt. It is Brown's narrative skills which are on display and which, like those of late-nineteenth-century African American minstrel performers, raise all sorts of questions regarding racial performance and property. Akin to "the elements of derision" involved in blackface culture which were, according to Eric Lott, "an attempt to 'master' the power and interest of black cultural practices it continually generated," the *Herald* review works to divest black artistry of its social and cultural power and meaning.<sup>94</sup> Writ large in both the panorama's broad strokes of spectacular imagery and in Brown's questionable self-stylizing practices are the "painterly" skills of the artist in question. In turn, the newspaper offers a counternarrative aimed at resituating this disorderly black body of work in its "proper" place.

By remanufacturing and refraining the *Mirror* production as a figurative blackface act, the *Herald* journalist shifts the referent of Box Brown's performance so as to return it to the realm of white authorial control. Both the May 17 and the May 24 articles redeploy Box Brown's speech patterns in thick dialect. Brown's accounts of torture and subjugation in slavery amount to "de burnin of slaves to death for stealing, and de beating dem wid hard wood bored troo wid holes." Such descriptions reinforce this critic's effort to render the black body static in minstrel caricature, frozen in popular blackface racial typologies which discount and disrupt African American vernacular systems of expression.<sup>95</sup> The use of approximated dialect insidiously conjoins Box Brown's aesthetic work to that of white supremacist artistry. In other words, if antebellum culture heavily policed blackface minstrelsy in such a way that "the standard was set by whites," then the redeployment of minstrel dialect here safely reconfigures Box Brown's appearance so that it remains dependent on white expressive forms derived from African American culture.<sup>96</sup> The introduction of dialect holds Brown's otherwise

superabundant project in abeyance, potentially disrupting the scope, range, and political efficacy of black performance. As if to emphasize the *Herald's* histrionics, the *London Times* offers a sobering counterpoint to this description of Henry Box Brown's public appearances. Noting the curious spectacle of the activist's sartorial guise, the *Times* reports that "his dress was rather fine, and he displayed some jewellery [sic] about his person." The *Times* article likewise observes that Brown's "manner of giving his evidence was quiet and creditable; and his pronunciation altogether correct" while in court.<sup>97</sup> If, for the *Herald*, Brown's visual grandeur precludes narrative credibility, it remains only a passing incongruity for the *Times* reporter.

The fixation on Brown's dialect-ridden speech highlights a struggle over black performance strategies and discounts the politics of black labor in a transatlantic context. Labor is in fact the central topic in the *Herald's* second review of the *Mirror*. Setting out to sardonically "judge" Brown's lecture on the merits of its "eloquence, poetry, and truth," the article attempts to reveal his "ludicrous and semi-baboonish agility" as a speaker by offering yet another dialect-laden narrative of bondsman's labor and exploitation in the slaveholding states. Here Brown's speech imports the sermonizing of his own master who reportedly proclaimed that

"My dere brederin—De white man was made by Ger Amity with sish white delekit hands that He saw at once he was not fit nor able to work, and He therefore made de black men to work for dem; but de black man were so idel he no work, and Gor Amity give him a whip to make him work, cos he was such a nasty idel nigger he no work. But he could no work wid his hands, and in answer to de prayers of de white man Gor Amity sent a shovel and a hoe, and I shall sing a song about it gemmen and ladies, dat is ladies and gemmen at de close, a shovel and a hoe in bag, so dat de damn'd idle nigger should hah no 'scuze for not working." Now den dere's a pretty master for you.<sup>98</sup>

The reproduction of the sermon is key as the text reveals Box Brown's effort to expose religious hypocrisy resulting in the exploitation of black slave labor so as to preserve and protect "white delekit hands" from the hardships of plantation life. Buried in this crude transcription, the content of Brown's narrative shrewdly underscores the southern plantocracy's brutal intent to utilize black bodies as instruments of labor and to legitimize this effort via theological doctrine which putatively recognizes both that white men are neither "fit nor able to work" and that



black men must conversely work for them as both a punitive and disciplinary measure. More still, Brown's retelling of the sermon demonstrates the extent to which the enslaved are rendered "idel" and inept, incapable of "working wid [their] hands" and are in need of "a shovel and a hoe in bag, so dat" [they] will "hah no 'scuze for not working." Dialect is transposed onto what other critics noted to be his "correct" and "eloquent" pronunciation so as to seemingly divest Brown's words of their cogency. Yet the resulting intertextuality of the master's "song about... a shovel and a hoe" offers an alternative agenda to that of which neither Brown's master figure nor the *Herald* critic is perhaps fully aware. Brown's insertion of the "shovel and hoe" minstrel song, a melancholic composition which laments the passing of an "Uncle Ned" who is worked to death in slavery, sets up Brown's reclamation of black labor in his public performances.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps the troubling situation of U.S. black labor remains the greatest "horror" for this particular English audience member. The labor exploitation of African American captives problematizes nationalistic chauvinism for Englishmen who might take Brown's extensive rendering of black torture and abjection as a competitive slight. The "burnin of slaves to death for stealing," the "whippin wid de lash till de blood bathes de ground and dey swim in it," these "scenes of subjection" yield a call to arms for the English critic invested in affirming the superior hardships of his own nation's artisan underclass.<sup>100</sup> As this journalist sees it, the "fact is that bad as slavery is, the condition of the American slave generally is infinitely superior to many of our agricultural and even our be-tommied slaves, and all reliable testimony corroborates it." Brown's panorama competes for philanthropic and political attention; his images threaten, from this critic's viewpoint, to obfuscate the problem of English poverty and industrial exploitation. In this context then, the overriding obsession with excess only intensifies the construction of Box Brown as a spurious and representationally feckless black dandy figure. For just as such a figure embodied the class conflict and racialized labor competition in the U.S. northeast of the 1830s and 1840s, so too did this figure, perhaps, pose a similar threat to English laborers struggling simultaneously to assert their unchallenged role as victims of a tyrannical class system and their (social) superiority to black transatlantic figures.

Lost in an abyss of blackness, the panorama's audiences are, to the *Herald* editor, in danger of losing sight of their most pressing domestic class privileges and problems. It would seem as well that, from this critic's standpoint, they are in danger

of losing sight of themselves altogether. With its shades “dark and gloomy” and with its dense visual imagery, the panorama’s surfeiting “blackness,” its surplus representation, poses an obstruction to the mystified Englishman who cannot visually identify, locate, and police his own subjectivity in the scene before him.<sup>101</sup> Further still, the *Mirror*’s “black excess” threatens to resonate as a kind of contagion; its opaque spectacles run the risk of swallowing the spectator’s gaze altogether. The *Herald* journalist’s condemnations of excessiveness and his analogous pairing of the panorama’s representation of slavery with a blackening effect convey a deeply rooted fear and hostility toward the putative disease-laden stain of “blackness.” Though the extra “coat of. . . paint” presumably “increase[s]” the “hideousness” of representation, its very opacity proves an uncontrollable threat to the reviewer. This relentless resistance to excess points to the spectator’s fear of his own implication and abjection in the scene of slavery, of becoming caught up in the sweep of the panorama’s “bottomless pit.” Warning the spectators to “be chary in giving credence to the astounding and horrified details,” the *Herald* articles anxiously attempt to protect Brown’s “wide-mouthed and wonder-gasping audiences” from swallowing the poisonous blackened narratives leaping from the frame.<sup>102</sup>

The *Herald* editor’s palpable repulsion toward the *Mirror* makes visible the panorama’s darkest mysteries. The critic’s seeming obsessions with the darkness of the exhibition begs the questions: what is the form and content of this “blackness” running through Brown’s fugitive art and why do these spectatorial opacities prove so troubling to some? From where does this opacity figuratively emanate and toward what end? To answer such questions, Brown’s *Mirror* demands that its audiences step into a “third representational space” where the complex subjectivities of the fugitive escape artist are made manifest. In a sustained performance of resistance, Brown’s realism-eluding “vision” of a dark and submerged fugitive frontier poses a critical reversal of Charles Stearns’s ghostwritten proclamation that the purpose of Box Brown’s 1849 narrative is not to “descend into the dark and noisome caverns of the hell of slavery” (11). Instead, the *Mirror* boldly attempts to forge precisely this kind of a journey while underscoring Brown’s agency as a narrator and impresario of the panoramic form by making plain his manipulation of hyperbole and “artifice” to construct the “Truth” of slavery’s many levels of “hell.”<sup>103</sup> Brown’s exhibition affirms and occupies a generic “wildzone” outside of the conventional slave narrative. In the process, it speaks back to the elisions of

the fugitive slave autobiographies with, according to Raymond Hedin, “no gap, no ambiguous period of floating free—not to mention roaming wild—in the interim” period between slavery and freedom.<sup>104</sup> It is a visual narrative wherein the spectator is made to hover—like the slave in flight, like William Wells Brown above the Parisian Tuileries—between bondage and liberation as the panels progress and collapse into poetically elliptical strategies of narrative upheaval and revision.

## **Dark Adventures: Trapped in the I/Eye of the Opaque Swamp**

It is the only thing which gives you an idea of what Milton meant when he talked of darkness visible. There is a kind of light to be sure; but it only serves as a medium for a series of optical illusions; and for all useful purposes of vision, the deepest darkness that ever fell from heavens is infinitely preferable.

—William Wells Brown, “A Description of William Wells Brown’s Panoramic Views”

One of the most chilling images in Henry Box Brown’s panorama, the “Dismal Swamp” scene was perhaps foreshadowed by its absence from the “Song, Sung by Mr. Brown on being removed from the box.” Brown reportedly broke into a spirited version of the fortieth Psalm once Still, McKim, and company cut loose the hoops strapped to the crate of his confinement.

A Psalm of lament, the scripture’s first four verses detail the trials and tribulations of a biblical sufferer who proclaims that s/he is waiting patiently for the Lord:

he inclined to me and heard my  
cry.  
He drew me up from the desolate  
pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.  
He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the Lord.  
Blessed is the man who makes  
the Lord his trust,

who does not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after false  
gods!<sup>105</sup>

In contrast, Brown's celebratory "Hymn of Thanksgiving" extracts key verses of Psalm 40 in order to create a new narrative of survival and resurrection. His verse announces:

I waited patiently, I waited patiently for the Lord, for the Lord,  
And he inclined unto me, and heard my calling;  
I waited patiently, I waited patiently for the Lord,  
And he inclined unto me, and heard my calling;  
And he hath put a new song in my mouth,  
Ev'n a thanksgiving, Ev'n a thanksgiving, Ev'n a thanksgiving  
unto our God.

Blessed, Blessed, Blessed, Blessed is the man, Blessed is the  
man,  
Blessed is the man that hath set his hope, his hope in the Lord;  
. . . The Lord be praised.<sup>106</sup>

Marcus Wood has argued that Brown's hymn operates as a resistant vernacular mode of performance that Brown preserved and crafted in the wake of Charles Stearns's "sanitized account of his experience" ("All Right!," 81). "[I]ts enthusiastic repetitions and energetic anti-intellectualism" offered a refreshing alternative to "the sobriety of the lecture hall or biblical scholarship" (83). Yet the elision of verse 2 of the Psalm, a conspicuously haunting passage which alludes to the biblical speaker's past ordeals trapped in the well of a "horrible pit" and ensnared in "miry clay," points toward a more complicated and intertextual reading of Brown's song. The curious excision of Gothic imprisonment and trauma from the popular "Hymn of Thanksgiving" remains a significant conundrum in the abolitionist's multifaceted work. All the raging torment and suffering from which the fugitive slave flees is subsequently displaced in the joyousness of Brown's hymn, which celebrates the "new song" that has been put in his mouth. The hymn eschews horror in favor of joy, entrapment in favor of redeemed liberation. It creates a discursive gap between the effusive ebullience at work in Brown's song and Psalm 40's wary and tempered oscillation between past despair and present reinvigoration.<sup>107</sup>

The key verse which Brown's performance eradicates is all the more provocative in that it resurfaces as an indelible image in his abolitionist panorama. Positioned as the fifth installment in Part II of the *Mirror of Slavery*, the "View of the Lake of the Dis-

mal Swamp” scene disrupts and redirects the process of viewing, at once obstructing and resituating the spectator’s wide and roving gaze, which Part I of the exhibition has cultivated to inspect the scene of slavery. Figuratively ineluctable, the image of the Dismal Swamp looms like a deep and aphotic representational cavity at the center of Box Brown’s panoramic storm. The site of the swamp marks the most crucial turning point in the panorama. Deeply entrenched in antebellum historical memory, the Dismal Swamp scene synechdochically references a legacy of past slave rebellion as well as future revolts. In the *Mirror*, it provides the narrative bridge out of captivity and into fugitive escape and apocalyptic reform. Operating as the liminal space between entrapment and freedom, between the excruciating labor and relentless sunlit fields of the “Cotton Plantation” and the stealthy nocturnal routes of “Nubians, escaping by Night,” the “Dismal Swamp” scene triggers the exhibition’s critical transmogrification from a trajectory of abject turmoil into one of intensified fugitive resistance. The panorama’s “Dismal Swamp” iconography serves as a dense form of black abolitionist narrative subversion and as a device that registers the return of the “pit of tumult” from its mysterious submergence in the “Hymn of Thanksgiving.” The swamp was linked in the antebellum period to upheaval and historical liberation, a site familiar, if only by its mythology, to Box Brown. As a fugitive of Virginia, Box Brown perhaps utilized the *Mirror* to excavate metonymically the infamous topography of his state of enslavement. Located on the borders of Virginia and North Carolina, the Great Dismal Swamp was a territory linked by legend to the Nat Turner rebellion. Immortalized by historian Samuel Warner in his account of the Southampton Revolt, Virginia’s Dismal Swamp garnered cultural infamy as a haunting and treacherous territory. Warner imagines a suffocating ecological universe at the heart of the South:

[T]he ground of the swamp is a mere quagmire, impression is instantly filled with water. The skirts of the swamp, towards the east, are overgrown with reeds, 10 or 12 feet high, interspersed every where with strong bamboo briers. . . . Near the middle of the Dismal the trees grow much thicker. . . . Neither beast, bird insect or reptile, approach the heart of this horrible desert; perhaps deterred by the everlasting shade, occasioned by the thick shrubs and bushes, which the sun can never penetrate, to warm the earth.

A place of eerily “everlasting shade,” this “vast body of filth and nastiness” swirls in “noxious vapors” which “infect the

air round about, giving agues and other distempers to the neighboring inhabitants.”<sup>108</sup> Written while Turner was still a fugitive, Warner’s text announces to readers the viability of the swamp as a space where fugitives might spirit themselves away, and where, within “the deep recesses of this gloomy Swamp” and “beyond the power of human conception,” the runaway Slaves of the South” might “secret themselves for weeks, months and years, subsisting on frogs, tarrapins, and even snakes!”<sup>109</sup>

Warner’s description canonized antebellum perceptions of the Great Dismal as an ominous environmental obstacle course, and Turner’s vigilant band of insurrectionists perhaps gained additional notoriety for their steely demeanor as they sought refuge from capture in the swamp. As redeployed through Warner’s text, the legend of Turner’s fleeting maroonage made explicit the link between swamp territory and black rebellion. Swampland imagery became particularly synonymous with radical black subterfuge and resistance efforts in the antebellum era.<sup>110</sup>

This crucial territory of social significance for the runaway was thus an identifiable marker of black liberation efforts; the lore of the swamp as a site where revolt might gestate informed its lingering status as a charged and tumultuous symbol in slavery’s cultural imaginary. Thus the Dismal Swamp imagery in the panorama potentially signifies on the collective consciousness of that dark and foreboding territory. The script’s positioning of the swamp as a site that prefigures Brown’s personal maroonage in the box establishes a vital link between that tropical location and fugitive escape. We might, then, examine the potential for swamp iconography to signify on the politics of representing black resistance efforts in antebellum popular culture. The *Mirror*’s ability to tap into the historical memory of black revolutionary machinations underscores the critical and creative utility of the swamp panel in the panorama.<sup>111</sup>

Although plantation authorities sought to quell the practical threat of swamp-residing black maroon warriors, the image of the bellicose and bloodthirsty guerilla fighter with weapon in hand and plot afoot while lurking in the everglades had a lasting impact on antebellum perceptions of swamp territories. Long utilized as an allegory for self-immolating, psychic distress and cultural anxiety in American letters, nineteenth-century cultural images of the swamp often focused on its foreboding psychological suggestiveness, how it symbolized a region that “lives off its own decay and produces so much vegetation that it can actually be seen to strangle itself.”<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless the

aestheticization of the swamp in mid-Victorian literature underwent a dramatic shift in perspective and intent. “[T]he distinctive ‘imagistic’ features of the landscape: the arabesque of its vines and tendrils, the shifting patterns of light that played about its fastness, the surprising prospects offered at almost every step” all transformed from serving as the thematic locus of infection and entrapment into “more positive” emblems of self-renewal, discovery, and imaginative agency in the 1850s (D. Miller, *Dark Eden*, 3).

In the literature of slavery and abolition, however, cultural images of the swamp remained vexed through the onset of the Civil War. In the immediate aftermath of the Turner revolt, perhaps no other Southern writer articulated dominant cultural anxiety toward the swamp as a domain for black resistance more than Edgar Allan Poe. Beyond importing the visual specificity of Warner’s text, the imaging of “ghastly landscape” in Poe’s fiction communicated Anglo fears of “insurgent slaves hiding in the shadows of the Dismal Swamp.” By repeatedly returning to the metaphorical entanglement of whiteness and blackness in the swamp, as well as the abyss of the sea, and in the thick and blackened centers of the forest, Poe’s work continuously envisioned the nightmarish scenario in which “white becomes utterly imbricated in and absorbed by blackness.” Poe’s Gothic tales set in motion a particular cultural discourse of Southern anxieties regarding black seditiousness buried in the mire of the swamp. Whether dreading the threat of being consumed by this darkness, as did Poe, or fearing the risk of being hunted down in the tendrils of the Dismal’s everglades by murderous figures in black, as did Robert Frost, American writers persisted well into the twentieth century in imagining swamp terrain as a nightmarish site where black rebellion was on the loose.<sup>113</sup>

Abolitionist literature sought varying ways of appropriating the construction of the swamp from the point of view of the tremulous white voyager and conversely worked to manipulate, rewrite, and redeploy the power of this image in the fight to eradicate slavery. Particularly in the genre of the fugitive slave narrative and as early as Henry Bibb’s 1850 text, African American authors made reference to the swamp as a site of protection and subterfuge. Dense and often foul and repellent regions that were primarily scattered throughout parts of the South, swamp lands posed both a threat to and an opportunity for the resourceful fugitive. An unseemly home for amphibious creatures, thick, unwieldy, harsh weather, disease and pestilence, swamp territories represented the thorny geographical minefields awaiting runaways in the flight for freedom. In his 1853

narrative, Solomon Northrup, for instance, describes a number of wetlands which he is forced to traverse during his torturous odyssey into captivity. These “haunted place[s],” were the site of the “paths of wild beasts,” “alligators,” and “serpents,” “a dreary picture of desolation,” and they represented the hazardous terrain which the fugitive must learn to conquer and command in a bid for survival.<sup>114</sup> Yet as these authors demonstrate, it is the threateningly perilous opacity of the swamp itself that simultaneously offers an avenue for fugitive liberation. Although Longfellow weeps, in his famously romantic racist vision of the tragically abject “Slave in the Dismal Swamp,” for the “hunted Negro” who lays passive, static, debased, and “mangled,” crouching like “a wild beast in his lair,” other anti-slavery sympathizers saw fit to champion the powers of black agency accruing power at the site of the swamp.<sup>115</sup>

Most notoriously regarded for having popularized the image of the docile slave in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe utilizes the trope of the swamp as a means to revising representations of black resistance in her 1856 novel *Dred*. In a radical departure from her construction of a Christ-like and passive martyr Uncle Tom, *Dred*’s title character recalls the subversive legacies of Turner and Denmark Vesey, as well as the aggressively resistant rhetoric of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. As Robert Levine contends, Stowe drew from the activism of the aforementioned figures as well as William Cooper Nell’s historical text, for which she provided the introduction, in order to create a novel that might participate “in the political terror inspired by the prophetic tradition of the black heroic deliverer.” Levine argues that Stowe “presents violent rebellion as a logical, perhaps even sacred, response to slavery,” and she situates this rebellion as emanating from a swamp terrain that neither Warner, Poe, nor Longfellow could imagine.<sup>116</sup> Although written six years after Henry Brown introduced his swamp in the *Mirror* to U.S. and British audiences, Stowe’s construction of that physical site as a trope of black sedition illuminates the narrative suggestiveness of the swamp in the panorama. If *Dred* “ultimately asks its readers to consider slavery from the point of view of black revolutionaries lurking in the recesses of the Dismal Swamp,” then the *Mirror* demands that audiences, at a critical juncture in the exhibition, submit to a narrative and epistemological shift in the display’s series of images.<sup>117</sup> In this context, the swamp serves as an allegory for a distinct readerly opacity, in the same vein as Stowe and before her Herman Melville in his *Benito Cereno* equally played with exposing the blindness of the spectator who is unable to prop-



erly identify and translate the emergence of black revolutionary activity before his very eyes. If, as Levine has argued, Stowe builds on Melville's strategy of exposing "the limits of whites' perspectives on slavery and race," then I would suggest that it is the metaphorical darkness of swamp iconography itself which transforms the *Mirror's* narrative trajectory and offers a critical commentary on the seen/scene and the unseen/unscene of slave culture.<sup>118</sup>

The swamp forces the *Mirror's* travelers to make a radical shift in vision, to accept the wild, dark, and unknowable frontier of the narrative landscape. Like the readers of *Dred* who must succumb to the novel's transition into the swamps and its focus on black revolutionaries, the panorama shifts its lens out of the scene of abjection to follow the path of the runaway; it therefore demands that the viewer resituate his/her gaze to follow a new narrative, one that tracks a fugitive movement toward agency and freedom. Passing through this dismal location with the slave in flight, the spectator's perspective must presumably shift to look a different way at the conditions of the captive who has broken free of his bonds.

In the darkness of the swamp, in this place known for its lack of light, a kind of clarity presents itself. The figurative opacity presents multiple forms of liberation as the panorama moves swiftly toward its spectacular emancipatory images. The rich and symbolic darkness of the swamp is itself a form of black aesthetic resistance. It signifies on the potential for imaginative possibility and creativity agency. Just as Stowe drew on images of "[uncontrolled growth, allowing] no expanse" as "the source of the dense and convoluted nature of the swamp . . . as a metaphor" (D. Miller, *Dark Eden*, 97) for her black rebel Dred's imagination, the swamp's "superabundance of life" (120) yields a kind of (representational) excess linked to black fugitive imagination. As the site of ecological excess, overflow, and unmitigated foliage, the swamp allegorically extends the surplus form and content of the panorama. It is the place where the unbridled strategies for historical black insurrection could literally take root, and figuratively its iconography represented yet another moment when the exhibition exceeds the putative limits of black representation and white spectatorial control.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, this imagery marks a significant philosophical turning point in black fugitive narration. The opacity of the swamp arms the black escape artist with perhaps his most potent weapon.<sup>120</sup> For it is this scene that resituates the centrality of the opaque as a mode of narrative agency for the fugitive slave activist who might manipulate darkness as a trope of narrative

insurgency, discursive survival, and epistemological resistance. Resonating as a visual signifier that calls into question the very politics of representing slavery, it is this black hole of the swamp which affords Brown a rich method of apocalyptic narrative revolution in the panorama.

The *Mirror's* darkness enables a different kind of spectatorial sight, and it makes spectatorial blind spots visible. At the same time, darkness in all its myriad shades instills the fugitive with multiple forms of power. In this era of, what David Reynolds calls, the "Dark Adventure" narrative, the *Mirror* utilizes the trope of darkness to conjure intersecting literary, theological, and social meanings. A genre which flourished from the mid-1830s to the Civil War, the mode of dark adventure "featured pirates, monsters, orgies, the macabre, and other sensational topics with apocalyptic endings." Consonant with the broader millenarian-inspired, apocalyptic melodramas of the period which envisioned catastrophe as a necessary and inevitable bridge to social reform and communal redemption, this subgenre of popular narrative manipulated the trope of harrowing, metaphorical darkness embedded in cultural anxiety of the apocalypse in order to level social and political critique.<sup>121</sup> Darkness in this context alludes to bleak and decadent environmental conditions; it serves as an allegorical trope for a cataclysmic and amoral universe. With its sequential images of violence strewn across the road to freedom, the *Mirror* effectively resituates the dark adventure within an abolitionist context. Both the fugitives of the panorama and the spectator alike must traverse the darkest images of slavery before reaching earthly emancipation.

The "darkness" of the panorama appears to extend beyond the stark and generic trappings of apocalyptic effect to illuminate the complexities of fugitive narration, as well as epistemological, ontological, and theological turmoil and transformation located at the philosophical center of Box Brown's exhibition. As religious studies scholar Vincent Wimbush suggests, darkness is "a particular orientation, a sensibility, a way of being in and *seeing* the world. It is *viewing* and experiencing the world in emergency mode, as through the individual and collective experience of trauma."<sup>122</sup> Darkness is an interpretative strategy, a structure of reading the world through a dark lens and from a particular and dark position. The introduction of the Dismal Swamp image can be read, then, as both a reinsertion of the "dark script" of the Bible into Box Brown's fugitive narrative and as the announcement of an epistemological juncture in the panoramic exhibition. For as Wimbush himself queries, "dark-

ness is not necessarily the end” but perhaps “one can survive it and can see things differently in and through it.”<sup>123</sup> In this light, the “Dismal Swamp” scene serves as a kind of plateau in the panorama that presumably redirects the spectator’s strategy of looking (at the scene of slavery). No longer enmeshed in the “Sugar Plantation and Mill” or toiling alongside the “Women at Work,” the panoramic traveler’s perspective must shift at the point of the swamp. The figurative darkness rooted in swamp imagery elevates fugitive slave narration at this very moment of transition in the display.

This movement into the “unknowable” is of unique value to the black abolitionist narrator, and it is a move that places the *Mirror* firmly within the literary and cultural tradition of the Gothic. For the scene of the swamp, a “dark and grotesque” netherworld in the abolitionist literary canon, makes plain the complexities of fugitive slave narration.<sup>124</sup> Slightly akin to the theological darkness described by Wimbush, this Gothic opacity invokes the discursive mode of terror in order to expose and emphasize the powers of black abolitionist public expression, the potential blindness of the spectator, and the unseen/unscene horrors of slavery. By playing on the portent of black rebellion in-the-making, Gothic opacity shifts the balance of authority to the putatively transparent slave on the run.

Gothic narration depends on the negotiation of two critical and yet arguably oppositional modes: terror and horror. Each subgeneric style, as Robert Hume contends, mediates the boundaries of discursive opacity and disclosure. Terror operates as a narrative device of deflection and deferral, while horror pivots on sharp and disturbing exposure. Terror manipulates the use of “suspense or dread,” while horror exploits that which is most fearful to the reader. Terror-Gothic “works on the supposition that a reader who is repelled will close his mind . . . to the sublime feelings which may be roused by the mixture of pleasure and pain induced by fear. Horror-Gothic assumes that if events have psychological consistency, even within repulsive situations, the reader will find himself involved beyond recall.” Through concealment, terror holds the audience in the realm of anxious and apprehensive waiting, while horror assumes that through the act of revealing, readers become irreversibly immersed in narrative development.<sup>125</sup> Thus Gothic opacity exploits the narrative intent of terror. Shrouding its secret of horror, the Gothic opaque has the ability to conjure anxiety at the site of the unknown. As the Gothic narrator who possesses the knowledge of what lies beneath, of what swims in the terrifying murkiness of the swamp, the fugitive slave narrator utilizes

Gothic opacity as a way to signify on the limits of what can be retrieved, restored, and re-membered in slavery. The fugitive may know, but may choose not to tell. Through its use of opaque symbolism, the panorama illustrates how “darkness emblemizes the gothic’s disruptive potential.”<sup>126</sup> By calling attention to the dark spaces in representing slavery, Brown’s politically oppositional *Mirror* plays with narration and epistemological stability at the site of the swamp. The *Mirror* utilizes the politics of horror-Gothic by unveiling the most gruesome narratives of the nation and by converting “America” into a treacherous frontier populated by marauders and torture victims. Yet the “Dismal Swamp” scene’s topography of terror also provides the pivotal point of liberation in black abolitionist discourse. The hidden escape route of the fugitive slave is paradoxically exposed as a dark and impenetrable zone of illumination and elusion for the escape artist.<sup>127</sup> This very “foul blot on the star-spangled banner” operates as a transitory medium for the panorama’s runaways as they engage in their “nocturnal antics.”<sup>128</sup>

The opacity of the swamp creates a trick mirror of its own as it provides the hunted with a source of refuge and release. This darkness visible serves in the panorama as a historical affirmation of the role of opaque landscape as a resource for fugitives and as a site of figurative representational refuge for black abolitionist cultural producers searching for methods to protect their own narrative agency. In short, the swamp scene’s resonant darkness serves to powerfully underscore the trappings of visibility. Similar to the panopticon devices which, Foucault asserts, “arrang[e] spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately,” the view offered by the panorama promotes the inflated sense of far-reaching vision, a way of seeing which enacts an enclosure over all objects on display. This “panoptic mechanism” ultimately “reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. *Visibility is a trap.*”<sup>129</sup> Brown’s mammoth exhibition perhaps poses an affront to the panoramic viewer’s encroaching spectatorial eye/I, an eye which has the power to free him from the residual bonds of slavery and yet also threatens to visually fetishize his fugitive body on display through the “new physics of power represented by panopticism.” Panopticism’s focus on policing “irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations,”<sup>130</sup> hovers as an obstacle which Brown must confront

as the author of this panorama if he is to finally claim the exhibition as a truly “fugitive” art form, if he is to finally subvert the “trap” of visibility which pursues ocular possession of a “bejewelled and oily negro” in the frame of the canvas and on the stage.

Brown’s exhibition scrambles and undoes the systemically punitive dynamics of the panorama. If panopticism depends on the invisibility of the viewer and the hypervisibility of the viewed, then the spectacular opacity of the swamp reorders these spectatorial dynamics. Just as the panorama offered a “way of seeing” (A. Miller, “Panorama,” 47), it also opened up a possibility for transforming the viewer into “an instrument, a tool for producing vision, not one who passively reproduces reality. As such, the spectator is himself open to manipulation” (A. Miller, “Panorama,” 51).<sup>131</sup> Brown’s *Mirror* plays with the optical agency of the viewer, thereby allowing for the visual technologies of nineteenth-century spectacular culture to take an unlikely twist. Perhaps in this panorama show, there is no escape for the spectator.<sup>132</sup> Tellingly, it is the *Wolverhampton & Staffordshire Herald’s* own reportage that exposes the very ways in which the panoptic viewer’s disappearance remains impossible in Box Brown’s panorama. Wary of the pestilence of the panorama and the seductiveness of its “calumny in colors,” the critic attempts to police the spectator’s empathic entanglement in the *Mirror’s* narrative. Fixating on the “blackness” of the exhibit at hand, the *Herald* editor’s language renders the panorama analogous to that of the infectious atmosphere of a swamp. His passionate bid to the audience to look away from Brown’s display makes plain his fears that it is the viewer who runs the risk of becoming trapped “beyond recall,” affected and thus “infected” by the dark epistemological cavities at the center of the exhibition. In Box Brown’s panoramic narrative, the panoptic viewer’s disappearance is thus denied, in part by executing the very thing the *Herald* journalist fears so much—by capturing the (white) audience in the eye of its storm.<sup>133</sup>

The *Mirror* resuscitates “the pit” of tumult from the Psalter, then, as a way to make darkly vivid the existence of a “completely wild and untamed state” of black historical change in-the-making for the panoramic spectator. Like the “black hole at the center of every slave narrative,” the “Dismal Swamp” scene operates as the emphatically opaque center of the *Mirror of Slavery*, yet it turns this mortal coil and excruciating struggle into a renewal and resistance.<sup>134</sup> With a “new song” and an old box, Henry Brown would triumphantly emerge out of the pit of his exhibition with a few more tricks up his sleeve and on his journey toward liberation.

## Performing Deliverance: A New Song, an Old Box, and a (Black) Magic Trick

Was Henry Box Brown singing his “Hymn of Thanksgiving” during the English exhibitions of the *Mirror*? The *London Times* fails to specify but reports that he performed various “sacred songs” during his U.K. exhibitions in the summer of 1852.<sup>135</sup> If the songs were indeed “sacred,” then, in all likelihood, Brown would have found a place to insert at least one version of the hymn made legendary at the time of his “resurrection” from the box. Both the 1849 and 1851 versions of his narrative describe how Brown emerged from his entombment to perform a spiritual melody. A song of deliverance, the “Hymn of Thanksgiving” fulfills what Richard Newman reads as the “prophecy” of Psalm 40 by responding to the scripture’s call for a “new song.” The presence of song in both the unboxing episode and in the panoramic exhibit makes plain the ways in which singing serves as another method of spectacular escape for Brown. If the panorama restores the excised “pit” of lament, then perhaps a sacred song of deliverance allows for Brown to once again stage his own rescue from within this apocalyptic visual exhibition. From this standpoint, Brown’s translation of Psalm 40 from lament into exaltation creates a path out of despair and into an even broader performative cultural universe. A kind of escape vehicle in its own right, Brown’s “new song” emerges along a continuum of spectacular exits in his transatlantic activist career. Vividly bringing to life Joanna Brooks’s cogent claim that “near death experiences yield more movement” for the marginalized, Box Brown would surface in the years following his initial mounting of the *Mirror* in order to reproduce the act of his own flight and deliverance in a variety of ways.<sup>136</sup>

Brown ambitiously enacted a crucial kind of discursive liberation from one form of sacred text into another. An able revisionist, he appears to have independently composed the transformation of Psalm 40 into his “Hymn of Thanksgiving.” Indeed, he was said to have carefully envisioned building the Old Testament scripture into the very poetics of his flight. William Still describes how Brown reportedly “remarked that, before leaving Richmond he had selected for his arrival-hymn (if he lived) the Psalm beginning with these words: ‘I waited patiently for the Lord, and He heard my prayer.’” Brown’s 1851 retelling of the incident, however, casts the moment as highly spontaneous. “I had arisen,” the narrative states, “from the dead; I felt much more than I could readily express; but as the kindness of Almighty God had been so conspicuously shown

in my deliverance, I burst forth into the following him [*sic*] of thanksgiving.”<sup>137</sup> In either version of the event, the choice of Psalm 40 remains significant as it represents Brown’s engagement with the Psalter’s mediation of visceral extremes. Brown’s greatest challenge in utilizing Psalm 40 as his oral entrance back into the world of the living was that he had to figure out a way to turn that closed and impervious scripture of suffering, stasis, and “patiently waiting” for divine salvation into a vehicle and a verse that literally and figuratively *moves* him (and presumably his audience) to a new state of being.

Psalm 40 is a particularly distinct “song of lament” that stands apart from others in the genre precisely because of its relative uniformity. Unlike other psalms of its kind that “begin with lament and end with praise” and thus are texts of transformation and “significant change,” this psalm, for the most part, remains the same, in a holding pattern of longing and supplication. Although Psalm 40’s content resembles other canonical scriptural passages that function as affirmations of faith in times of trial, its structural quirks call attention to the elliptical nature of human suffering and redemption. If other psalms of lament are characterized by transitioning out of abjection, if these other texts end with blessed reversals of fortune, Psalm 40 asserts an emphatic cyclicity by ending with a plea. While verse 9 proclaims to have “told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation,” verse 17 returns the speaker to the place of waiting, enduring, and identifying the Lord as the speaker’s “help and . . . deliverer; do not tarry, O my God!”<sup>138</sup> The passage simultaneously calls attention to a deferred liberation since it delays the point of deliverance. Ending