World Literature

Ms. Womer

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*The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* Essay

In *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* there were many literary, biblical and historical allusions. An allusion is a reference to a piece of literature, the Bible, history or other pieces. Biblical references were the most common within this piece of literary work. During the 1845 time period slaves turned to God for spiritual relief and slave-owners looked to him for confirmation that what they were doing was righteous. For example: “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” This passage referenced Luke 12:47 in the Bible.

Slave-owners used various forms of dehumanization to get the slaves to obey them. Slaves were punished through the act of whippings, beatings, hanging, sexual abuse and many other cruel ways. Most slaves were afraid to lash back out upon their slave-owners simply because of their fear of the consequences. Though they weren’t living for much, killing themselves was not an option because suicide is a sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:20 it says, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” This kept many slaves from doing what they felt was the only and most logical way out.

Slave-owners justified the way they treated their slaves with the Bible. They would take scripture passages out of context to justify themselves. One of Douglass’ masters, Thomas Auld, used the scripture Luke 12:47 to justify himself brutally beating a lame young woman on her shoulders with cow skin. Masters often compared themselves to the “master” used in the Bible which was actually referring to God. After Thomas Auld found and started looking to God, he became an even crueler person and master. He became crueler because he took the Word of God out of context and misunderstood.

Frederick Douglass used Luke 12:47 to elaborate on the mental state difference between slaves and slave-owners. “He knoweth his mater’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” In the Bible this passage was not meant to be taken literally, it simply means that those who do not follow God’s will, will be punished. The slaves understood what this passage meant deep down but someone else’s beliefs were being beaten into their heads, literally. The masters’ felt that this passage was for them because they owned slaves. They wanted their slaves to know who was in charge so they enforced their power and whipped the disobedient slaves till deeply engraved gashes appeared.

It often felt like there were two types of Christianity. There were the good Christians and the bad Christians. There were those who truly understood the word of God and those who thought they did and took it out of context. Lastly, there were those who knew God was the only true master and those who thought they were.

Works Cited

“Luke 12:47.” *The Bible,* King James Version.

“1 Corinthians 6:20.” *The Bible,* King James Version.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.* Gutenberg Press. 2012.