Self-Publication, Self-Promotion, and the *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

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Self-publication—that is, the funding of a book's publication by its author—has a long and influential history in African American autobiography, a history that has only occasionally been discussed or even considered. Like so much of African American literature, we can trace that history back to the Afro-Briton Olaudah Equiano, whose *Narrative* (1789), Vincent Carretta argues, established Equiano as "one of the earliest self-publishing entrepreneurs" ("Property" 144). Even if we ignore Carretta's provocative claim that Equiano was a mythmaker who fabricated the place of his nativity and much of his life story, we cannot ignore the fact that Equiano was—from the first—focused on selling that life story to audiences around the world (*Equiano*). From his subscription publishing method, to his printing and distribution arrangements, to his energetic book tours and door-to-door sales, Equiano demonstrated marketing savvy and business acumen that helped him become one of the wealthiest Afro-Britons of the eighteenth century ("Property" 143). His successes were about more than money, too: Ross Pudaloff suggests that Equiano's deft manipulations of his printed commodity enabled him to avoid "the dependency on others central to patriarchy and slavery," and instead manage "a relationship between equals that emerges from exchange" (513). Pudaloff, like Carretta and John Bugg, insists that it is not just Equiano's writing of the *Interesting Narrative* that enabled him to "purchase" equality, but how Equiano managed its publication, marketing, and sale.[1]

In this respect, Equiano has something in common with Phillis Wheatley, whose *Poems on Various Subjects* was published in 1773 with substantial support from Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. Though Wheatley was not a self-publisher, she did attempt to produce several volumes by subscription, and she demonstrated a keen understanding of self-promotion and marketing during her short career. As Jennifer Young explains, both before and after *Poems* was published in England, Wheatley published broadsides that were printed throughout New England. From Young's point of view, Wheatley had a "perception of the major marketable issues in the print market" and tailored her work for the widest possible

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sale (43).[2] And, though Wheatley could not secure a sufficient number of subscribers to publish her own work, Christopher Felker reminds us that she still "concentrated on the coordination of production and commercial activities and the securing of the credit necessary to bring her book to the public" (159). Perhaps most notable among those efforts were her letters to Obour Tanner in which she asked him to circulate "proposals for her book" (i.e., a new edition of *Poems*) in Newport, Rhode Island (Wheatley). Considering all of these efforts, Kirstin Wilcox argues that Wheatley's use of "concerted marketing initiatives" helped to "insert an enslaved black woman" into the literary marketplace, thereby positioning Wheatley on something approaching equal terms with white male authors (8).

The stories of Wheatley's and Equiano's efforts toward a market-based form of equality suggest that some African American writers understood the literary market as a site where notions of value might be recalibrated. And, despite the explosion of insightful work on Wheatley, Equiano, and African American book history over the past decade, few critics have moved to rethink these early writers' role in African American literary history by repositioning them as the founders of a tradition rooted in entrepreneurship and commerce. Perhaps this critical avoidance of the authors' economic motivations and business successes stems from the longstanding suspicion of the marketplace that Leon Jackson identifies as fundamental to African Americanist literary criticism ("Talking Book" 257).[3] Or, perhaps believing that Equiano and Wheatley are historical outliers in terms of their marketing efforts, critics have focused on thematic and stylistic elements of their writings that unite them with others in the African American canon. I believe, though, that Wheatley's and Equiano's efforts as marketers, publishers, and self-promoters should be viewed as representative rather than unique. Both authors remind us that from the very beginning of the African American literary tradition publication and marketing have gone hand in hand, and that those activities have an important history of their own.[4]

Some pieces of that history have been told, though mostly for the leading lights of the abolition movement whose manuscripts, letters, and publishing records are relatively accessible. Witness Frederick Douglass, who left the United States in 1845 soon after publishing his bestselling *Narrative* and spent six months in Ireland where he oversaw the production of two new editions of the *Narrative* that he sold at antislavery lectures (Ferreira). When he returned to the US in 1847, he self-published a new edition of the *Narrative*, probably so that he could benefit more directly from the enormous profits attending the sales of his life story. Sojourner Truth was an accomplished self-publisher and self-promoter; she not only sold copies of her *Narrative* at speaking engagements around the country, but she also famously "sold the shadow" (her photograph) to "support the substance." As both Nell Irvin Painter and Augusta Rohrbach have argued, Truth was both a principled civil rights advocate and a cunning entrepreneur; like Douglass, she seems to have sensed no tension between righteousness and remuneration (Painter; Rohrbach 31–48). Likewise, Moses Roper, Henry Bibb, and William Wells

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Brown sold their life stories at abolitionist meetings where they spoke, and they benefitted from newspaper, broadside, and word-of-mouth advertisement that helped to draw crowds to their speeches.[5] While organized abolitionism was not without its downsides for Black authors and speakers, the movement at least helped to solve what Julie Rak identifies as one of the key challenges associated with memoir: how to "construct, package, and market identity so others will want to buy it" (7). For authors who tried to promote and distribute their autobiographies without speaking engagements or an organized abolition movement to back them, the problem of selling a self-published narrative was much more difficult, and so men and women developed unique marketing and sales strategies in order to surmount the economic challenges endemic to African American life and entrepreneurship in the antebellum United States.[6]

In this essay, I assess one marketing and sales strategy through a case study of *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*, a book that Grimes self-published in 1825 in an effort to make money. The few critics who have assessed Grimes's book have treated its author in heroic terms, both because he asserts himself as a publisher and a stylist and because he critiques the flawed notions of "race" that undergirded the system of slavery.[7] Living within that system for nearly forty years, Grimes learned how to manipulate his self-presentation, and using that knowledge, ultimately made his escape. In his autobiography, Grimes insists on his ability to use artful self-presentation to outwit the men who enslaved him and shows how artful self-presentation might function in print contexts as well. By constructing and packaging his identity in both the *Life* and in a series of advertisements that he published in newspapers around his Connecticut home, Grimes highlights what Meredith McGill calls the "generative aspects of the development of a market for books" (19). Indeed, Grimes's creative powers flourished in the book and newspaper markets—even though those and other markets operated according to rules that were sometimes threatening to him—and there is some evidence that his initial marketing and sales efforts were relatively successful, at least in economic terms. Creative though he certainly was, Grimes's decision to develop and circulate an accessible persona and to recirculate that persona in the second edition of his autobiography reminds us of the difficulties inherent in African Americans' efforts to control fully their life stories for sale in the marketplace.

Grimes's *Life* and the Meanings of Value

William Grimes was born in Virginia in 1784. He was sold nine times during his years in slavery (most of which were spent in Georgia) before he escaped on board a ship bound for New York in 1815 and eventually made his way to Connecticut. There, Grimes split his time between Litchfield and New Haven; in both cities he worked as a barber and laborer, and he enjoyed a solid reputation and some economic success. All of that came to an end in 1824 when Grimes's former owner located him and threatened to re-enslave him. As a result, Grimes was forced to use

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most of his savings ($500) to purchase his freedom. Broke and embittered, Grimes published *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* in 1825 in a bid to recoup some of the money he had lost, and at the same time to rail against the injustices that had placed him in such a dire situation. As William Andrews indicates, Grimes's narrative is unlike most antebellum slave narratives that speak dispassionately about the facts of enslavement and the need for redress; instead, Grimes uses his autobiography as a "means of venting his outrage and baring the bitterness he had accumulated during forty years of life" in the United States (*To Tell* 78). And, unlike the slave narratives that would eventually dominate the antebellum abolition movement, Grimes's *Life* includes no authenticating or supporting documents of any kind. Indeed, the only form of authentication appears in the final paragraph of his text:

> If it were not for the stripes on my back which were made while I was a slave, I would in my will leave my skin as a legacy to the government, desiring that it might be taken off and made into parchment, and then bind the constitution of glorious, happy and free America. Let the skin of an American slave bind the charter of American liberty! (103)

Offering his skin as evidence of his experiences, Grimes gives readers a shocking image that serves as a powerful indictment of the "charter of American liberty," a document that remains bound and haunted by the skin of slaves.

Grimes imagines the skin-bound Constitution in the concluding sentence of a text that is itself bound in paper, a material far less durable than the skin on the author's back. In other words, Grimes is thinking not just about his text but about textuality more broadly, and he does so with the hard-earned and certain knowledge that just as human skin signifies differently in different situations, so too do texts. In both the slave market and the book market, changes in form precipitate changes in reception and interpretation. Indeed, who better to understand and explain the complicated relationship between form and meaning than a man whose body had been read and examined for forty years. Moreover, Grimes's move to claim copyright for his book underscores his efforts to control its circulation even in the absence of a widespread market for fugitive slave narratives like the one that would emerge in the 1840s.[8]

In addition to the well-known passage that concludes his *Life*—the first North American slave narrative to be written, published, and copyrighted by the author himself—Grimes correlates books and bodies as objects subject to interpretation and valuation throughout the book. Indeed, he presses this point by foregrounding the meaning of his body in slavery and freedom and by questioning the nature of value and how value is assessed. Value, for Grimes, encompasses two different (and sometimes competing) ideas. First, there is market value—the value assigned to various objects or commodities within the antebellum United States—that became more and more dominated by a "capitalist hegemony over economy, politics, and

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culture," so that market values came to dominate not only economic transactions but also how we think about ourselves and our fellow citizens (Sellers 5). As an enslaved man, the commodity that concerned Grimes most was his own body, and Grimes sought to master all of the market contexts in which that body was valued. One of those contexts was the slave market in which Grimes's body held value for others and could profit the men who owned and then sold him. Such a market would seem to offer no agency for Grimes or any other person, but Grimes exerted a measure of control over both his value and his destiny through canny self-presentation within a slave market where, as Walter Johnson writes, "racialized salability . . . had to be acted out by the slaves" (157). I argue that this was one of Grimes's crucial insights while he was enslaved: though his body was subject to the whims and desires of slaveholders, and though his body could be sold according to the dictates of the inhumane slave market, Grimes could present his body in ways that enabled him to control his own destiny.

Grimes reveals his understanding of the slave market and its possibilities early in his narrative after he is sold to a Mr. A— and taken south from Virginia to Savannah, Georgia. Finding Mr. A— a harsh and demanding owner, Grimes realizes that his best chance for survival lies in finding someone else to buy him, but Mr. A— tells prospective purchasers "no, I did not buy him to sell, and I will be damned if I do sell him, I bought him for my own use." Even so, Grimes "was determined to get a new master," and, therefore, Mr. A— "was the more determined to keep me" (54). In order to realize his own goals, Grimes begins to fast; he refuses all food when he is around Mr. A—, and he "would stagger along, to make [Mr. A—] think that he should fall every moment" (55). Finally believing that Grimes would die and that he would lose both his money and his slave, Mr. A— sells Grimes to a buyer whom Grimes himself had selected. When Mr. A— comes to tell Grimes of the transaction, he gloats at having recouped his investment: "there is the very money I gave for you: I have got my money again" (56). Mr. A— believes that he has outfoxed the buyer, but he has just been playing according to Grimes's script. Ensuring that Mr. A— gets his money again is but a precondition for Grimes finding a new home, and it is Grimes who has the last laugh when, a few weeks later, he "rode down by my old master's, and cracked my whip with as much pride, spirit and activity, as one of Uncle Sam's Mail carriers" (56).

This anecdote within *Life* is of a piece with the rest of the narrative, for it highlights not only the capriciousness and brutality of enslavement but the ability of the enslaved man to resist slaveholders through performance. Over the course of his enslavement, Grimes notes, he was sold eight times "for five hundred dollars each time," thereby limiting the profit his owners derived from his sale (81). Grimes also manages the markets for himself with remarkable savvy, and rather than wait for his owners to arrange sales, Grimes selects a buyer for himself every time he faces a particularly challenging situation. True, Grimes's performances in these instances do not set him free, but they demonstrate quite clearly that the market undergirding the system of slavery was rooted in white perception rather than the intrinsic differences sometimes attributed to Black men and women. Grimes underscores

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the extent to which he had *always been* performing race in the preface to his *Life* when he announces with obvious irony that he was "three parts white [but] passes for a negro" (29). As Grimes reminds us by describing his fasting and concomitant fashioning of an emaciated body, outward appearances were just that—appearances. And, as a man who could claim both whiteness and Blackness, Grimes understood that "race" was really just a matter of passing—that is, it was an action rather than an essence.

This brings us to the second form of value that Grimes addresses in his *Life*, which is what we might call civic value: Grimes's ability to claim the same rights and privileges as other (white) Americans. Unlike market value, this form of value could be absolute rather than relative, as it was rooted in laws rather than market prices; even in the "free" North, though, it proved not to be so. While a resident of Litchfield, Connecticut in the 1810s and 1820s, Grimes found that his business rivals made "misrepresentations about town against [his] character" and used their authority to drive him out of town. On another occasion, when Grimes was living in New Haven and attending on various students, he was removed from the Yale dining hall by a cook named Kennedy, who "according to law" had "a right to put [Grimes] out" (98–99). These instances (and many others like them) demonstrate Grimes's frustration with the nation's failure to ensure equal treatment for all of its inhabitants. Grimes believed quite firmly that "no law, no consequences, not the lives of millions, can authorize [others] to take my life or liberty from me while innocent of any crime" (101). What Grimes understood to be an absolute standard—the law—appeared to be anything but absolute; in fact, civic value seemed to Grimes to be just as variable and just as dependent on race as the market values assigned to the bodies of the enslaved. A disgusted Grimes decides, finally, that "a black man, if he will be industrious and honest, can get along [in the North] as well as anyone who is poor and in a situation to be imposed on" (102). This frustrated acknowledgment precedes Grimes's invocation of a skin-bound Constitution, a document that is—as Grimes discovered—bound by its failure to transcend the racist structures undergirding its creation.

It is this Grimes whom scholars and readers (including this one) like best: a man "demanding a full hearing and fair treatment" who rails against the systems of slavery and injustice that seemed to limit him at every turn (Andrews, "Introduction" 7). But the defiant and rebellious Grimes who speaks so directly and honestly at the end of his 1825 *Life* is not the Grimes who seems to have inhabited various Connecticut towns in subsequent years. That Grimes was a man who managed to survive in the sometimes-hostile North by employing techniques of performance and self-presentation that he had first drawn upon when he was enslaved. Perhaps it is no surprise that Grimes produced such artful versions of himself for public consumption; he had worked in a Georgia printing office while he was enslaved, and he seems to have understood quite well how to use print to shape a public image.[9] His skill as a self-promoter also manifested in various advertisements he created when he published his book in 1825 and in his efforts to market himself as a barber, a

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clothes cleaner, and a lottery agent in subsequent years. Based on the text of his book advertisements (which Grimes himself signed and which include language from his *Life*), Grimes almost certainly wrote the notices himself. The same is true for Grimes's advertisements of his clothes cleaning business, which describe specific cleaning techniques. These advertisements underscore his belief in both the possibilities of print representation and the importance of a useful public image for navigating economic and political worlds in which values were never entirely stable.

Becoming "Old Grimes"

Sometime before Grimes published his *Life* in 1825, he began what would become a long-term marketing campaign aimed at linking his public image with the well-known ballad "Old Grimes," a poem authored by Albert Gordon Greene and published (along with other poems and songs) in book form in 1867.[10] Before it appeared in a book, though, "Old Grimes" was reprinted in American newspapers numerous times, was frequently alluded to in columns and notes, and spawned a number of parodies. It would also appear in various collections of children's poetry, including *The Real Mother Goose* in 1916 (Wright 87). This is getting ahead of things a bit, though. The ballad was first printed in the *Providence Journal* in January 1822 and was reprinted in newspapers around New England, including the *Connecticut Herald*; we know that Grimes was at least familiar with the *Herald* since he advertised in that paper the following November.[11] Whether he read it in the *Herald* or somewhere else, Grimes found the poem and then—apparently without any kind of proof—transformed it into family history when he reprinted it in his own *Life* in 1825. Claiming that "Old Grimes" was already a "famous old song" in 1825, Grimes also insisted that the poem was originally written about his (white) grandfather, Colonel Benjamin Grimes of King George, Virginia.

Old Grimes is dead—That good old man
We never shall see more;
He us'd to wear a long black coat,
All button'd down before.

His heart was open as the day;
His feelings all were true;
His hair was some inclin'd to gray—
He wore it in a queue.

When'eer was heard the voice of pain
His breast with pity burn'd—
The large, round head, upon his cane
From ivory was turn'd.

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Thus, ever prompt at pity's call,
He knew no base design—
His eyes were dark, and rather small;
His nose was aquiline.

He liv'd at peace with all mankind,
In friendship he was true;
His coat had pocket-holes behind—
His pantaloons were blue.

Unharm'd—the sin which earth pollutes,
He pass'd securely o'er:
And never wore a pair of boots,
For thirty years, or more.

But poor old Grimes is now at rest,
Nor fears misfortune's frown;
He had a double-breasted vest—
The stripes ran up and down.

He modest merit sought to find,
And pay it its desert:
He had no malice in his mind—
No ruffles on his shirt.

His neighbors he did not abuse,
Was sociable and gay;
He wore large buckles in his shoes,
And chang'd them every day.

His knowledge hid from public gaze,
He did not bring in view—
Nor make a noise town-meeting days,
As many people do.

His worldly goods he never threw
In trust to fortune's chances;
But liv'd (as all his brothers do)
In easy circumstances.

Thus, undisturb'd by anxious care,
His peaceful moments ran;
And ev'ry body said he was
A fine old gentleman.

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> Good people all, give cheerful thought
> To Grimes's memory:
> As doth his cousin, ESEK SHORT,
> Who made this poetry. (31–33)

According to the *Traditional Ballad Index*, 1822 is the earliest known date for "Old Grimes," and I have located neither allusions to nor parodies of the song in print before 1822. So, while I cannot say for certain that "Old Grimes" was not a "famous old song" in 1825, it seems quite unlikely (Waltz and Engle). The purported author Esek Short gets us no closer to the truth either, for while there are tenuous connections between a Short family and Benjamin Grimes, I have not been able to locate anyone named Esek or Isaac Short in Virginia in the 1770s (when Benjamin Grimes died). Finally, the poem is so generic as to resist any kind of biographical reading, which leads me to believe that "Old Grimes" is what it appears to be: a piece of doggerel that Grimes found and appropriated.[12] In this, at least, Grimes adopts a time-honored literary and commercial practice, for, as Matthew Cohen argues, ballads have always been "contested property. Though they often lack authors, they never lack claimants" (138).

As one of those claimants, William Grimes performed a kind of literary citizenship that united him with the various New England communities of which he was a part. As he promoted his connections to "Old Grimes," William Grimes may have hoped to hasten the day when the song would become famous; after all, that fame would suit his needs as both an entrepreneur and a man seeking to write himself and his multiracial family story into the nation's history. So, whether it was already famous or not in 1825, "Old Grimes" would come to be a very popular song indeed. And, seizing on the possibilities of the image of "Old Grimes," and on the possibility that the oft-reprinted poem could be leveraged as a form of free publicity, William Grimes was happy to become "Old Grimes" in his advertisements for his various businesses. The first example of this form of appropriation appeared in 1831 when Grimes returned to New Haven and reopened his clothing shop. Soon thereafter, he placed an advertisement in the *Columbian Register* that includes a poem authored by "Dragon Bard":

> Old Grimes [sic] not dead
> But you may see him more
> Cleaning coats, and Shaving head,
> Just as before.
>
> Though long old Grimes hath slept,
> "He only slept to wake,
> And those that tho't he dead and gone,
> Will laugh at their mistake." ("Advertisement")

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This use of "Old Grimes" must have been successful, or perhaps it just amused Grimes, who obviously had a keen sense of humor. In either case, Grimes was not done with the poem. In 1833, a friend of Grimes who is identified only by his initials wrote and had published (perhaps at Grimes's behest) "Old Grimes's Son," a poem that capitalized on the popularity of the now famous song and recapped a few important moments from Grimes's remarkable life story:

Old Grimes's Son

Old Grimes' boy lives in our town,
A clever lad is he,—
He's long enough, if cut in half,
To make two men like me.

He has a sort of waggish look,
And cracks a harmless jest;
His clothes are rather worse for wear,
Except his Sunday's best.

He is a man of many parts,
As all who know can tell;
He sometimes reads the list of goods,
And rings the auction bell.

He's kind and lib'ral to the poor,
That is, to number one;
He sometimes saws a load of wood,
And piles it when he's done.

He's always ready for a job—
(When paid)—whate'er you choose;
He's often at the Colleges,
And brushes boots and shoes.

Like honest men, he pays his debts,
No fears has he of duns;
At leisure he prefers to walk,
And when in haste, he runs.

In all his intercourse with folks,
His object is to please;
His pantaloons curve out before,
Just where he bends his knees.

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His life was written sometime since,
And many read it through;
He makes a racket when he snores,
As other people do.

When once oppressed he prov'd his blood
Not covered with the yoke;
But now he sports a freeman's cap,
And when it rains, a cloak!

He's drooped beneath the southern skies,
And tread on northern snows;
He's taller by a foot or more,
When standing on his toes.

In Church he credits all that's said,
Whatever preacher rise;
They say he has been seen in tears,
When dust got in his eyes.

A man remarkable as this,
Must sure immortal be,
And more than all, because he is,
Old Grimes' posterity.

J.W.B. ("Old Grimes's Son")

Several of the verses in "Old Grimes's Son" highlight Grimes's various labors, his willingness to work, and his larger-than-life persona. Though Grimes had admitted in his *Life* that he was poor, he had also insisted that he was "no beggar," and this poem helps to reinforce his status as a free man, a willing worker, and a well-known author who has no creditors and fears no duns. One year after "Old Grimes's Son" was published, a poem titled "Old Grimes's Daughter" appeared in the *Columbian Register*. There is no direct evidence that the poem referred to one of Grimes's daughters, but my research has not turned up any other instances of this poem in New England newspapers, which suggests that it may well have been original. Of course, even if it did not refer to Grimes's daughter, Grimes had already set up a context in which further invocations of "Old Grimes" might be read. Poems about "Old Grimes" no longer had to be about Grimes himself to conjure Grimes for readers; so popular was his new appellation that he was consistently identified as

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"Old Grimes" by local newspapers.[13] Using "Old Grimes" to his advantage was one way that William Grimes transformed himself into what the newspapers called "a fixed institution" (104). It was as such an institution that Grimes would reenter the literary marketplace in 1855 with an expanded version of his book: *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, Brought Down to the Present Time*, published when its subject was 71 years old.

The 1855 edition of Grimes's *Life* was published in New Haven, but the author did not claim the copyright for this revision even though his initial claim had expired in 1853. No one knows why Grimes decided not to reclaim copyright; at his advanced age, he may well have found it too difficult, too inconvenient, or simply unimportant. Whatever the reason, this refusal to claim the copyright is of a piece with the text as a whole, for it seems a slapdash affair. The new version reprints the entirety of the 1825 *Life* (which Grimes had to acquire from others since he had sold all of his copies) and appends only ten pages of new material. As Grimes explains in his new preface, he published a new edition "for the purpose, in the first place, of raising, if possible, a small amount of money, for I believe almost everybody will purchase a copy of my Life; and in the second place, to gratify the laudable curiosity which so many of my friends have exhibited to procure a true and perfect Life of 'Old Grimes'" (104). But, whereas the 1825 *Life* insisted on the injustices that Grimes faced in and out of slavery, the new material in the 1855 edition presents a figure that has mellowed considerably. The grand pronouncements and skin-bound Constitution of the 1825 edition remain, but they are but a prelude to new concluding statements, such as "on reflection I have concluded not to rake up old affairs, and as all the wrongs which I have met with in my eventful life have no doubt been ordered wisely, I have forgiven all" (112).

There are a number of other crucial changes as well. Gone is the plain cover of the 1825 *Life*; in its place is a version featuring a picture of Grimes holding a basket that he (apparently) carried with him wherever he went. It seems likely that Grimes acquired the engraving for his new book by promising to include an advertisement in the final paragraphs of his narrative:

> The book, as will be seen, is illustrated by a likeness of "Old Grimes," engraved by Sanford from a Photograph by Wells, Daguerreian Artist, Nos. 10 and 11, Mitchell's Building. I am indebted to the generosity of Mr. Wells for this likeness of myself, and I here return him my thanks, and would recommend all my readers to visit his rooms, examine his specimens of Photograph and Daguerreotype likenesses, and then have their own taken. . . .
>
> I hope, however, long to enjoy the kind regards of the good people of New Haven, and when this old, weary, worn out body is lain in that place prepared for all living, the silent tear may be dropped for "poor Old Grimes," and his frailties, whatever they be, forgotten. To all I now bid FAREWELL! (112)

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Though Grimes is once again talking about the cover of a book at the end of his narrative, this conclusion registers far less forcefully than his description of the skin-bound Constitution he imagined in 1825. Rather than focus on how the national charter was itself a flawed document, Grimes asks his readers to forget those contradictions and consider where they might want to have their daguerreotype made. As he invites his audience to look to the engraved likeness on the cover (and to imagine purchasing their own likenesses), Grimes redirects attention away from his "striped back" and onto a far less troubling image. Grimes's final words reinforce this redirection, too: by forecasting his own death and bidding the town farewell, Grimes overshadows the defiant language of the 1825 version, even though that language appears just a few pages before his new conclusion.[14]

Ultimately, then, instead of "venting [his] outrage" in the 1855 version of his *Life*, Grimes seems to be promoting a version of himself as "Old Grimes," the fictional persona who appeared in newspapers around the country. To cement this transformation, Grimes refers to himself as "Old Grimes" five times in the final pages of the 1855 edition; he also reprints the "Old Grimes" verse from his advertisements and the "Old Grimes's Son" poem that had been printed in both the *Herald* and *Register*, all of which work with the original "Old Grimes" to reinforce the narrator's status as a fixed institution, a status that goes hand in hand with Grimes's dependence on others. Although Grimes had proudly announced his defiance of slaveholders' authority in the 1825 version of his *Life*, in the 1855 version, he invites others to see him—and buy him—as "Old Grimes." Susannah Ashton quite rightly argues that Grimes's widespread print identity represents a "successful infiltration of a self-created, unthreatening identity into print" (132). I agree with Ashton's assessment, but believe that his "success" in this regard represents a double-edged sword, a fact made clear in some of the notices printed after Grimes's death in August of 1865.

First, we have the short mention of his death that appeared in the Connecticut and Boston papers soon after Grimes's passing, perhaps because Grimes had acquired some renown, but more likely because his name fit with the now-famous verse "Old Grimes is Dead":

> *New Haven, Conn., 21st*. William Grimes, better known as "Old Grimes," a quaint darkey, once a slave, known to all our citizens and to thousands of Yale College graduates, died in this city yesterday, at the advanced age of probably ninety years. ("Death of 'Old Grimes'")

This "quaint darkey" notice appeared—in one form or another—in papers throughout the US, including those as far away as Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Augusta, Georgia.[15] Even in *The Liberator*, there is no mention of Grimes's self-published book but only the same insistence that Grimes was a "quaint darkey," well-known around Yale. The reason for this widespread reprinting seems to have had nothing to do with Grimes's *Life*, which only sold in and around its subject's

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Connecticut residences, nor does the wording of the notice necessarily underscore what Ashton calls the "condescending culture of the radical press" that could "not acknowledge his rebellious legacy" (135). This is not to say that Grimes was not a rebel against slavery and racism or that the abolitionist press was not prone to condescension. Rather, I insist that since this particular notice about Grimes's death appeared in so many newspapers around the US and none of those notices mention his book, it seems that the radical press was not so much "condescending" as indifferent. I believe that the reason that *The Liberator* reprinted a notice of Grimes's death was the same reason so many other papers did the same: because William Grimes had finally become "Old Grimes," the dead man whose name he had claimed for so long. The joke could finally be told, and the joke was on Grimes.

Indeed, Grimes appears diminished in the obituary notice appearing in the *New Haven Daily Palladium* on August 25, 1865 under the familiar title "Old Grimes is Dead." Interestingly, though, the obituary notes that whereas the character in the "old song" was a "myth," William Grimes was "a verity": an aged man who "settled down into a quiet daily circuit of the thoroughfares of the city in quest of odd bits of happiness" and spent his Sundays "visiting the churches where the best wine was to be procured" (2). There would be some reason to doubt these descriptions, since the *Daily Palladium* was a Whig paper with a virulent anti-lottery stance and Grimes was a well-known lottery agent for the better part of two decades, but Grimes is described in similar terms in an August 26 snippet from the *Columbian Register.* There, William Grimes was, again, remembered as "Old Grimes" and described much like the old man pictured on the cover of the 1855 *Life*: the local institution who peddled his book and other wares on the streets of town. Grimes reportedly "gained a precarious subsistence by the sale of his 'life,' in pamphlet form, lottery tickets, and whatever 'the gods' dropped into the inevitable basket that was inseparable from his arm." It is this man—the "quaint old darkey" of the obituary notice—who in death has been reimagined as a slave, and is said to have gone "'where the good niggers go'" ("City" 2).[16]

This is the final memorial for a man who was never willing to accept the very kind of mistreatment that he receives in this printed notice: not in slavery, and not in freedom. Though it may be that Grimes's real-life actions in his later years helped to inaugurate his transformation into "Old Grimes," we cannot ignore the role the print must have played. The public image of "Old Grimes" was one that its creator nurtured carefully, and this "unthreatening" image allowed William Grimes to circulate widely and to call on his fellow residents' sympathy, but it also turned him into a character, a name in a famous poem. This character is someone quite different from the defiant figure that speaks throughout the 1825 version of the *Life*.

The stories of Grimes's two different books (and his canny use of other printed materials) remind us of the promise and perils of self-publication for African Americans. While publication could help a man like Grimes make money and gain a measure of recognition, so too could his marketing efforts unmoor him from his local reputation and turn him into a "quaint old darkey." Of course, this aspect of

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African American writing has been the subject of critical lament for some time, but it bears noting that stories of failure and limitation were not absolute. Indeed, the story of William Grimes's *Life*, just like the life of its subject, does not fit neatly into any of the regnant critical paradigms for African American writing or the slave narrative. Grimes's story is neither one of heroic resistance nor one of cooperation with powerful slaveholders; his story is neither one of economic ascent nor one of unremitting hardship and ostracization; his story is neither one of literary triumph nor complete anonymity. Throughout his life, Grimes found that neither race nor status were stable signifiers in the antebellum US, and he tried to play on that instability in order to advance his social and economic fortunes; however, building his literary and professional houses on unstable foundations led to uncertain results. Perhaps it is best to say that Grimes's struggles to work within the various markets that defined much of his life underscore the shifting rationales for slavery and discrimination that bedeviled (and bedevil) so many people in the US. Time and again, Grimes altered his tactics in order to stay one step ahead of those who sought to limit him, and, time and again, Grimes found that his choices carried unintended and unforeseen consequences; the "Old Grimes" saga is the clearest evidence of those consequences.

There is a larger story lurking in Grimes's personal and literary battles, one that asks us to rethink the critical structures that do not quite fit Grimes's *Life* or many of the writings published by African American men and women in the nineteenth century. This rethinking is certainly underway since Benjamin Fagan, Frances Smith Foster, Eric Gardner, and Joycelyn Moody, among many others, have reminded us of the significance of periodical publication, and P. Gabrielle Foreman and the editorial group associated with the Colored Conventions Project have shown readers new ways of thinking about Black publication and self-presentation that have been ignored for too long.[17] What these crucial projects do not do, though, is reconsider the remarkable diversity of Black autobiographies produced throughout the nineteenth century. By studying the careers (and not just the writings) of lesser-known authors like Grimes, we can bring to light the various authorial and business strategies that went hand in hand with African American self-publishing—and perhaps reconsider the meanings of authorial success and how we think about the connection between commercial engagement and creativity.[18]

I have documented how Grimes's branding choices worked for and against him, but the dark side of his story should not mask the innovation, experimentation, and entrepreneurship that defined his authorial endeavors. Nor should limitations or marketplace failures blind us to the variety of African American life writing in the nineteenth century. Books like Grimes's *Life* stand alongside Venture Smith's *Life* (1798), Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* (1851, 1875, 1884), James Mars's *History* (1864–78), and Robert B. Anderson's *Life* (1890, 1891, 1895, 1900) as examples (but not the only examples) of self-published texts oriented toward the author/publisher's economic advancement. As is true for most authors, these men and

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women made deliberate choices and compromises that yielded varying results in terms of both monetary gain and social advancement, but the variety of results or aftereffects should not obscure the efforts themselves. Indeed, self-published narratives and their paratexts remind us that, as Frances Smith Foster suggests, African Americans "developed a print culture as one means of creating and nurturing their own individual and communal agendas" (720). An author, publisher, and marketer like William Grimes shows that those agendas were as diverse as the authors themselves, and by attending to the stories of other self-publishing and self-promoting autobiographers, we can move beyond limiting critical and pedagogical paradigms to better understand the complicated literary markets in which African American narratives were circulated and sold.

Notes

1. Unlike Pudaloff, Bugg is not focused on Equiano's mastery of the market but on his book tour as a tool for increasing the popularity of his work and forging class-based alliances with workers around Britain.
2. On Wheatley's marketing and sales efforts, see Isani.
3. The influential work of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Houston Baker also falls into this category. Writing in the 1980s, both men strove to connect Equiano the writer to a tradition in African American letters, and in so doing avoided Equiano the publisher/bookseller.
4. Very few critics have explored the significance of self-publication in relation to African American writing; Teresa Goddu is one notable exception. In a provocative essay she calls for scholars to read the slave narrative within the "broader contexts of the [antebellum] period's print culture systems" (154). Others to make notable contributions in this area include Cossu-Beaumont and Parfait; Jackson, *Business of Letters*; and Roy, "Cheap Editions" and "Slave Narrative Unbound."
5. On overlaps between speaking engagements and bookselling, see Fabian and Gara.
6. The challenges faced by what might be called "unaffiliated" authors mirror the challenges faced by scholars researching lesser-known books. For African American writers who published their own books with job printers, it is extraordinarily difficult to develop printing and publishing histories, and so scholars must use methods that help them reconstruct histories even if they cannot recount them.
7. Beyond passing mention in several of the standard histories (see Bruce and B. Jackson), Grimes has gone more or less unremarked by literary historians. The only critics who have treated Grimes at any length are William L. Andrews, Susannah Ashton, and Regina Mason, all of whom read Grimes as a heroic (if sometimes compromised) figure. See Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story* 77–81 and "Introduction" 3–26; Ashton 127–139.
8. Susannah Ashton reads Grimes's claim of copyright in political terms and she insists that "receiving copyright was predicated upon one's citizenship." Though I agree wholeheartedly that Grimes's claim for copyright was an important act, the 1790

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copyright statute (still in effect in 1825) reads, "the author and authors of any map, chart, book or books already printed within these United States, being a citizen or citizens thereof, or resident within the same, his or their executors, administrators or assigns . . . shall have the sole right and liberty of printing, reprinting, publishing and vending such map, chart, book or books, for the term of fourteen years from the recording the title thereof in the clerk's office, as is herein after directed. . . ." In other words, Grimes's status as a resident of Connecticut (irrespective of citizenship) would have permitted him to claim copyright protection for his *Life*. See Ashton 128–29.

9. On this relationship between Grimes's life story and his decision to publish his *Life*, see Ashton 137–39.
10. Interestingly, in *The Bench and Bar of Litchfield County, Connecticut 1709–1909*, Dwight C. Kilborn writes about the story of "Old Grimes": "Albert G. Green, of Rhode Island, who afterwards became a distinguished man, United States Senator, etc. was a student of the Law School in 1812, and was very fond of making rhymes about all manner of things, and upon all occasions, and [William] Grimes importuned him to make some poetry for him, the result being" the well-known poem (329). There are two problems with this story. The first is that Grimes did not move to Litchfield (the home of the Litchfield Law School cited in Kilborn's book) until 1820; the second is that Albert C. Green attended the law school and became a senator; Albert G. Greene attended Brown University and wrote "Old Grimes."
11. In addition to the *Providence Journal* and *Connecticut Herald*, in its first year "Old Grimes" also appeared in *The Portland Gazette* (ME), *The Essex Register* (MA), *The Windsor Republican* (VT), *The Hartford Times*, *The Washington Gazette* (DC), *The Dutchess Observer* (NY), *The New Hampshire Sentinel*, *The Baltimore Patriot*, *The Vermont Journal*, *The Scioto Gazette* (OH), *The Palladium of Liberty* (NJ), *The Westchester Herald* (NY), *The American Advocate* (ME), and *The Arkansas Weekly Gazette*. By 1826, the *National Advocate* (NY) published a "new song for Christmas" that was supposed to be sung to the tune of "Old Grimes." All of this suggests something about the widespread popularity of the song even before Grimes published the first edition of his *Life*.
12. Though both Andrews and Ashton have mentioned Grimes's use of the "Old Grimes" poem, neither critic (nor any other critic) has examined in great detail the history of the poem and Grimes's appropriation/remaking of it.
13. See, for example, notices in *The Columbian Register* (New Haven, CT), May 11, 1850 and April 19, 1856. Grimes did not appear in print very often until his death, but every newspaper mention of William Grimes after 1840 refers to him as "Old Grimes."
14. It is possible that Grimes did not write the 1855 addition to his *Life*, as an August 22, 1865 story in *The New Haven Daily Palladium* notes that S. H. Harris wrote the narrative in the "composing room" while Grimes was "sitting by . . . furnishing the writer with the 'heads'" (presumably, the headlines or most important elements of the story). This may well be true, but the account still places Grimes at the center of the composition and printing processes, so it does not alter the relationship between the 1855 edition and Grimes's original *Life*. See "Multiple News Items."

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15. An incomplete list of newspapers outside of New Haven that reprinted the notice of Grimes's death: *Albany Argus*, August 22, 1865, p. 2; *Albany Evening Journal*, August 21, 1865, p. 3; *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist*, August 26, 1865, p. 2; *Baltimore Sun*, August 23, 1865, p. 1; *Boston Herald*, August 22, 1865, p. 4; *Boston Traveler*, August 21, 1865, p. 3; *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, August 22, 1865, p. 3; *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, August 22, 1865, p. 3; *Daily Missouri Democrat*, August 22, 1865, p. 1; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, August 22, 1865, p. 3; *Hartford Daily Courant*, August 22, 1865, p. 5; *Macon Telegraph*, September 12, 1865, p. 3; *Massachusetts Spy*, August 25, 1865, p. 3; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 22, 1865, p. 1; *New York Evening Post*, August 21, 1865, p. 3; *New York Tribune*, August 22, 1865, p. 4; *New York World*, August 22, 1865, p. 8; *New Orleans Times*, August 28, 1865, p. 1; *Newark Daily Advertiser*, August 21, 1865, p. 3; *Providence Evening Press*, August 21, 1865, p. 3; *Sandusky Register*, August 22, 1865, p. 3; *Salem Observer*, August 26, 1865, p. 3. A cursory search of those same papers reveals that Grimes is the only man referred to as a "quaint darkey" throughout the 1860s.
16. Unlike "quaint darkey," this phrase appears with disturbing regularity in newspapers published between 1850 and 1900.
17. See Fagan; Gardner. Witness, too, recent special issues of *MELUS* (edited by Joycelyn Moody and Howard Rambsy) and *American Periodicals* (edited by Eric Gardner and Joycelyn Moody) that highlight African American print and periodical culture (respectively). Finally, for a description of the Colored Conventions Project (coloredconventions.org), see Foreman.
18. In addition to the work of Meredith McGill, Julie Rak, and Augusta Rohrbach, two excellent examples of this kind of work are Leon Jackson's *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* and Karen Weyler's *Empowering Words: Outsiders and Authorship in Early America*.

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significantly less power. In reflecting on the overt and subtle abuses of power that underlie the exchange of "intimacy" for other kinds of commodities and means of advancement, I also examine the forms of backlash I faced for reviewing an art show that represented a woman's experiences of sexual misconduct in academia.

Open-Forum Articles

Self-Publication, Self-Promotion, and the *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

Bryan Sinche 825

This article sketches the early history of self-publication by African American authors and focuses on the life and work of the formerly enslaved William Grimes, who published two editions of his *Life* in the antebellum period. A savvy self-promoter, Grimes appropriated the ballad "Old Grimes is Dead" and marketed himself as "Old Grimes" to garner customers for his barbering and clothes cleaning business and sell copies of his book. These efforts helped Grimes realize a measure of success as a businessman and author, but the unintended consequences resulting from his self-promotion and marketing strategies highlight some of the challenges attending entrepreneurial self-publication by African American writers.

Listening to the Grandmother Tongue: Writers on Other-Languaged Grandparents and Transcultural Identity

Mary Besemeres 846

This article considers Patricia Hampl's *A Romantic Education* (1981) and John Hughes's *The Idea of Home* (2004) as third-generation "language migrant" memoirs. The texts evoke a dual sense of strangeness and familiarity in childhood experiences with migrant grandparents who spoke another language. Although cultural transmission appears more tenuous here than in second-generation migrant narratives, these two memoirs suggest that the transcultural remains defining of third-generation migrant lives.

Reviews

***Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Brenda Ayres**

Reviewed by Meritxell Simon-Martin 869

***Medical Humanities in American Studies: Life Writing, Narrative Medicine, and the Power of Autobiography*, by Mita Banerjee**

Reviewed by Sam Allen Wright 873

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