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**DIPLOMA THESIS**

**Slave Narratives as a variation on motivational self-help  
books**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled Slave narratives as a variation on motivational self-help books, is my own work and that all the sources I used are included in the reference list.

Prague, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to examine the representative of classic Enlightenment self-help text, Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth*, and two representatives of the slave narrative genre, Frederick Douglass's and Olaudah Equiano's works, in terms of their possible affinity. The thesis compares and contrasts the individual texts and seeks to find analogies in structure and content which would indicate the influence of the self-help genre in American literature on the narratives and demonstrate the presence of the self-improvement element in the reading of slave narratives. The thesis consists of two key parts, the theoretical introduction onto the issues and practical part which analyses the texts themselves.

## **KEY WORDS**

Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, Benjamin Franklin, slave narratives, self-help books, self-improvement, US history, uplift, autobiography, slavery, Enlightenment, 18<sup>th</sup> Century, 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této práce je nahlédnout na klasické dílo osvíceneckého motivačního textu, *Way to Wealth* od Benjamina Franklina, a na dva představitele tzv. slave narratives, příběhy uprchlých otroků, z hlediska jejich případné příbuznosti. Práce porovnává jednotlivé texty a hledá strukturální a obsahové analogie, které by poukázaly na vliv motivačního žánru v americké literatuře na příběhy otroků a prokázaly přítomnost motivačního aspektu v recepci "slave narratives". Práce sestává ze dvou hlavních částí, teoretického úvodu do problematiky a praktické části, jež analyzuje samotné texty.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Frederick Douglass, Olaudah Equiano, Benjamin Franklin, autobiografie uprchlých otroků, motivační literatura, self-improvement, dějiny USA, uplift, autobiografie, otroctví, osvícenectví, 18. století, 19. století

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# 1.Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the topic of the relationship of two seemingly distinctive classic genres in US literature – the eighteenth century self-help book and slave narrative. Specifically, it seeks to align the self-improvement aspect inherent in the self-help books (and traditional rags-to-riches stories) with the social uplift impetus endorsed by late 18th and 19th century African American slave narratives. The author of this thesis has chosen its subject for several reasons and the exact topic was specified after a consultation with the supervisor. Firstly, the author is building on his expertise of the slave narrative genre, acquired in the course of writing his bachelor thesis, which consisted of the translation and stylistic analysis of possibly the most canonical 19th century slave account, *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* into Czech. The thesis is therefore a sort of continuity of subject. After the bachelor thesis, the author also became more interested in the slave autobiographies and wanted to explore them more from a slightly different point of view and examine the possible influence of the Puritan and Enlightenment genre on the structure, content and general outcome of slave narratives.

A classic piece of the self-help genre, Benjamin Franklin's *Way to Wealth*, has been chosen as a representative and a basic text for exemplifying the typical features of the genre to be applied on the other texts. It is a cornerstone of the self-improvement literature with almost all of the typical features condensed within a single canonical text whose echoes reverberate throughout 19th and 20th century American literature.

The slave narrative genre in this thesis is represented by two seminal and frequently anthologized narratives, Olaudah Equiano's and Frederick Douglass's first autobiography, *The Narrative*. They have been chosen on the grounds of their years of publishing, which makes it possible to point out the slightly different conceptions across the span of over fifty years and, as a footnote, to briefly outline several rather important changes in the situation of the slaves, between the two works, while also retaining the obvious analogies and similarities of the genre.

The thesis seeks to find meeting points and influences of the classic eighteenth century self-help literature on the later slave narratives and to prove that these slave narratives could be

read as a specific kind of motivational/self-help books themselves. The thesis focuses primarily on the analogies, while also addressing the differences which are, however, not structurally incorporated into the synopsis of the thesis.

## **2. THEORETICAL PART**

### **2.1 „Rags to riches“ and the self-help book tradition in the US**

According to Mercé Mur Effing, self-help literature represents a basic pillar of North American culture and society, which has been present since the beginnings up until now and it is only logical, considering the ubiquity of the American dream myth. He argues that there are three distinct periods in the development of the self-help phenomenon in the American literature – the culture of „industry and effort“, culture of „leisure and ease“ and self-mastery and self-knowledge spiritually-oriented literature of the end of the twentieth century. The primary subject of most of self-help books and treatises is the pursuit of happiness, which is deeply rooted in the American culture since it is an inalienable right embedded in the Declaration of Independence. The analyses of self-help books from different times and the changes in their focus, attitude and outcomes allow us to examine and survey the gradual shift in American society’s notions of success and happiness, thereby reflecting upon its needs and wants (Mur Effing 126). The whole history of the US culture is accompanied by the message of self-help and self-improvement, often induced via literature. It is related to self-making and taking charge of one’s own destiny and it helped to create the unique American self-identity projecting itself into the so called American Dream, the term first used by James Truslow Adams in 1931 (Mur Effing 127). Originally, the American dream meant the very essence of the self-help spirit. A dream of a “social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (Mur Effing 127).

The roots of the concept can be traced as far back as the late sixteenth century, when America was presented in England as the land of plenty, land of opportunity and the land of destiny with a view of encouraging the British population to settle in the colonies. Nevertheless, by adding the ubiquitous Puritan religious drive to these elements we arrive at the core essence of the American dream whose fulfilment serves as a goal of the majority of self-help books. The circumstances and the skin of the essence, however, change over time.

The first period beginning with Benjamin Franklin is indeed the most relevant for the purpose of this work. Franklin is generally accepted and considered the first major American author of motivational self-help books. Building upon the strong Puritan tradition, with its emphasis on hard work, education, the need for self-examination, discipline and frugality, Franklin uses these with Enlightenment human rationality and the ideals of justice, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of man, Franklin tried to help the people by providing a model for a new morale which would lead to personal success through systematic character development and adhering to a certain set of rules with emphasis on industry, frugality, self-discipline and virtue (Mur Effing 127, 128). It also helped to solidify some of the best-known proverbs and practical maxims known to every American.

By this set of values and qualities which subsumed and blended material, spiritual and social uplift he inspired later classic well-known works of the nineteenth century such as Alger's *Ragged Dick* or Swett Marden's *Pushing to the Front or Success under Difficulties* (Mur Effing 129). Towards the end of the century and at the beginning of the twentieth, however, there was a growing emphasis on material wealth as symptomatic of, or even synonymical with, success. The self-help books focused on selling and business and proclaimed that creating wealth was a moral obligation and a sign of virtue: "To make money honestly is to preach the gospel" writes Conwell in 1915 (Mur Effing 129).

After the World War II, the phenomenon of self-help literature adjusted itself to the budding of consumer culture. It reflected the even bigger accentuation of materialism and the desires get rich quickly and easily, with as little effort as possible. Warshauer notes that by that time, the Americans "consumed by desires for status, material goods, and acceptance, [...] apparently had lost the sense of individuality, thrift, hard work, and craftsmanship that had characterized the nation" (Warshauer). Because of the growing anxiety and stress, in the second half of the twentieth century, Americans looked for literature about coping with the high demands they kept imposing on themselves and to achieve peace and harmony. It foreshadows the coming of the third period concerning itself with the influence of Eastern philosophies and concepts of spiritual well-being, the connection between mind and body etc.

## 2.2 The history and development of slave narratives

Fugitive slave narratives as a specific genre of the US literary tradition have always been closely tied with the efforts of abolitionist movements and the genre progressed along with the development of slavery itself as a legal institution and a hot issue in contemporary American society. It is safe to say that by mid-nineteenth century, the African American slave narratives had become an immensely popular literary form building upon and at the same time causing the increasing public debate about slavery, the interest of public in these first-person, often moving, stories and autobiographical forms. Most of the slave narratives were written by former African American slaves who had managed to escape from the South (Bland 17). After their escape, they decided, frequently with the aid and financial sponsorship of white abolitionist activists from the North, to present first-hand accounts of the hardships and difficulties of a slave's life, as well as the gross injustice of slavery to ultimately sway the public opinion in favour of the abolitionist cause. However, it is not easy to pinpoint the concrete social, political and cultural circumstances which led to the development and popularisation of the genre.

Because virtually all of the narratives were written or at least published with the noble goal in mind, using proven techniques and methods of processing the life stories of the unfortunate slaves, effectively constraining them inside what is in essence a generic literary genre form with quite strict rules of structure and content. Within these borders, the slaves struggled to “bring together disparate thoughts and experiences. [...] The narratives these authors produced are illuminating in terms of what they say, what they refrain from saying, and the varying techniques used to achieve their intended results” (Bland 17). Below is a brief overview of the development of slavery in America to illustrate the background of the development of the literary genre itself.

There is substantial anthropological, linguistic and ethnological evidence provided by some scholars such as Leo Wiener that the presence of black Africans in the Americas is indeed older than it was originally considered and that African people were in contact with the American continent well before the arrival of European explorers (Bland 18). With these adventurers, several men of colour landed in southwest America to accompany the Spanish adventurers; and they were not slaves, but rather explorers, too. The records that speak about

the twenty Africans landing with the settlers in Jamestown in 1619 do not list these as slaves, either, describing them as indentured servants. Indentureship meant that after fulfilling contract which was usually set to seven years, the individuals could start living as free people, owning land and generally enjoying fully citizenship (which was rather loosely defined in the makeshift legal framework of the royalist British settlements in Virginia, anyway) (Bland 18). This system applied to both blacks and whites. However, within the next fifty years, it had faded away and by the second half of the seventeenth century, the customs shifted towards fully-fledged slavery. All Africans coming into America were considered slaves for life. Slave trade established itself well in the new land and virtually all of the territories benefited from it, directly or indirectly. The slave trade thrived as well as the slave work-dependent expanding economy of the southern colonies producing rice, cotton, tobacco and indigo. The shipping industry also made a large profit of the trade with humans extracted from their land and forcefully taken to another continent to toil without any rights. However, it is worth noting that the slave trade in Africa was thriving even before its contact with the American continent, mostly because of Arab and local slave traders (Bland 19). Laws were passed allowing to consider Africans a property and writers of that age spread the idea of the inferiority of Africans. During the colonial times, African slaves were often used with military conflicts with the Native Americans or the French and eventually, they were used in the Revolutionary war against the British (Bland 19).

After the drafting of the US constitution, there were 757,208 African Americans in the United States and 697,681 of them were slaves, which amounts to more than 92%. The Constitution granted the continuation of the slave trade until 1808 and only taxed it (Bland 19). Thanks to massive industrialization of cotton production, the Southern states boosted their economy, which brought the issues of slavery back into the spotlight in which it had been shortly after the Revolutionary war. There were voices proposing the removing of black Americans to the Western parts of Northern America or returning them to Africa. This was, however, no option for the generations for slaves already born in America and moreover, it presented no less danger and uncertainty for them (Bland 20). The growing unrest and discontent among the blacks provided a fertile breeding ground of black insurrections. There were some organized uprisings, the most famous one being led by Nat Turner; these were, however, dealt with swiftly and mercilessly. Since then, the slaves in the South were closely watched and their activities and communication possibilities severely restricted.

As the country grew and expanded, slavery became possibly the most divisive issue in the political discourse in the first part of the nineteenth century. It is worth noting, that it was addressed by the Congress as a clearly political issue regarding the economic growth, rather than a moral one (Bland 22). Until 1860, the political and social balance had been very fragile and the relationships between the South and the North were deteriorating as the abolitionist forces were gaining strength and public support. It all concluded in the secession of the Southern states and the Civil War, which eventually led to freeing all slaves in the Emancipation proclamation in 1863 (Bland 23).

As far as the slave narrative in the purely literary sense is concerned, its form and stylistics developed and changed from the first accounts from the eighteenth century like Equiano's and the narratives written at the peak of the fight for abolition like Douglass'. The eighteenth century slave narrative was very much shaped by the literary conventions of its age, particularly by the writing of Enlightenment period. They were often framed in term of their spiritual and adventurous components (Bland 23). It is especially evident in Equiano's narrative, which features long passages describing his thrilling experiences and adventures out on the sea and also his spiritual and religious search. Like him, most of the first slave narrative writers were also Afro-British. These narratives were an indirect product of enlightened thinking, emphasizing fundamental, individual freedoms. Of course, the fundamental and essential issues of the works were the issues of bondage and freedom, slavery and its injustice scrutinized from the moral, religious and social perspective (Bland 23). They generally drew on the belief that abolishing the slave trade would effectively bring end to the whole slavery business in the American continent. However, the above mentioned African Slave Trade Act proved otherwise.

After its adoption, the slave narratives continued to be published, their focus shifting to other social concerns, although they still emphasized the element of adventure and religious conversion. They became very popular and eventually renewed the interest of white abolitionists who realized the need for first-person accounts of the effects of slavery (Bland 24). Public demand for slave narratives rose dramatically and the abolitionists saw the opportunity of using them to persuade the readers of their cause. The intertwined triangle of slaves, abolitionists and their readers was created. The socio-economic issues of slavery became the prevailing motive and the direct connections to Africa as were present in the eighteenth century narratives disappeared. The stories became more sensational in order to

capture the attention of the public and featured vivid depictions of beatings and cruel practices of slaveholders. It also criticised the religious grounds for Southern slavery, although abolitionist efforts were mostly fuelled by and cloaked in religious rhetoric. Many of the slaves first gave numerous speeches and their stories were delivered in oral form. Slavery became a political issue and the narratives were often used as leverage for public opinion in the North and the crystalized structure of the genre with a clear goal made it increasingly difficult for the slaves to project their selves into the works. „But the African-born freeman who expressed his independence by attempting to gain control over his financial, spiritual and social affairs was gradually replaced by the fugitive slave narrator who coupled explicit examples of physical violence and psychological abuse with candid objections to the morality of self-professed Christians who allowed the system to continue“ (Bland 24). Bland’s quote captures perfectly the differences between the two narratives explored within this thesis, Douglass’s and Equiano’s. However, there are still numerous analogies and continuities connecting the two works together and ultimately also with Franklin’s self-help ethos as it is demonstrated in this thesis.

## 2.3 Benjamin Franklin and The Way To Wealth

Benjamin Franklin is undoubtedly one of the most one of the most versatile public figures in the US history and possibly in the world. A vastly influential figure in many fields ranging from science to politics, he is considered to be amongst the first „true and self-made Americans“ and in a large way responsible for establishing the values of independent American society, bridging the gap between the Puritan values stressing hard work and thrift, and the age of Enlightenment with its focus on human reason, individual spirit and science. Being one of the Founding Fathers of the USA, he engaged himself in the first political years of the new republic, effectively shaping its emerging institutions. Since this thesis uses Franklin’s Way to Wealth as a skeletal code for subsequent artistic renditions of *personal* social uplift, typically African American slave narratives, the analysis should be preceded by some basic biographical information.

Benjamin Franklin was born in January 1706 in Boston into a small businessman’s family. His father originally intended for young Franklin to embark upon a career in the church, because of lack of financial means, he eventually ended his schooling at the age of ten. However, he never lost his keen interest in education and learning and continued to read by himself while helping out in his father’s business, becoming quite erudite and scholarly with respect to his young adolescent age. He even contributed into local newspaper under a pseudonym.

Later, he moved to Philadelphia where he worked as a typesetter in a printing house, but was already thinking about establishing his own business. After an episode of working in London, the young man returned to Philadelphia, set up a printing house and started publishing his newspaper that became renowned for its critical approach towards British colonialism in America. Franklin was also still very active in the general intellectual realm. He was the man behind the first subscription library in America. He often engaged in debates and disputes with a group of fellow scholars he had formed, as well as wrote books, essays, treatises and letters on all things philosophical, political or scientific.

America’s „first great man of letters“ became quite affluent as a publisher and author and still continued his intellectual endeavours (Mur Effing 128). He was one of the men responsible for the founding of the University of Pennsylvania, as well as an influential and respected

public figure in the society. He became an ambassador in France and played an active role in the American Revolution. After returning to the fledgling republic, Benjamin Franklin was elected governor in Pennsylvania and held the post until his death in November 1788. Towards the end of his life, he had become an abolitionist and freed all of his slaves, although his general stance on slavery had been somewhat ambiguous for his whole life.

His most famous works include his notorious Autobiography, being regarded as a masterpiece and a model for such kind of writing. However, at his time, the most successful literary project of his was Poor Richard's Almanack, a best-selling yearly tome published under a pseudonym from 1732 to 1758 featuring a calendar, weather tips, practical advice, proverbs and aphorisms and entertainment.

The subject of this work is *The Way to Wealth*, a short essay published in 1758. *The Way to Wealth* has been chosen for the purpose of this work because it more or less summarizes the majority of the key values, notions and advice Franklin had expressed and offered to the reading public in Poor Richard's Almanack. The instructive nature of the essay is crystal clear and there is little doubt that it can qualify as a typical example of 18th century self-help book. It is concerned with Franklin encountering a mob of people waiting for a vendue to open. There is a figure of „father Abraham“, an elderly experienced man, who preaches a collection of maxims and pieces of wisdom from Poor Richard's Almanack for people to be economically and spiritually independent, self-sufficient and virtuous. Franklin records the speech, which actually takes form of a sermon. In the end, the people still fail to heed the advice and act in the opposite way. In this manner, the author only confirms his foremost saying that „God helps those who help themselves“ (Franklin 2:1).

## **2.4 Frederick Douglass and *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself***

Probably the most famous of all the escaped former African-American slaves in the USA, Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 in the state of Maryland. He had been separated from his mother in the early months of his life and had seen her only occasionally until her death. His father was an unknown white man and there were speculations that he could have been also his master. Already in his early years he was fully employed and worked around the house and in the fields. He witnessed all the hardships of enslaved life such as malnutrition, lack of shelter and clothing, poor healthcare, excessive workload and violent floggings first hand and later gives a summary account of these grievances in his books. He was lucky to have been sent to work in Baltimore, where he succeeded in learning to read and write. It sparked the interest in abolition and instilled serious doubts about the institution of slavery in him.

After several years, in 1838, he managed to escape to the North and began a series of lectures and speeches. As with many other slave orators, voices emerged expressing doubts that a speaker of such quality could have been a former slave. He proceeded to write his first autobiography, partly to silence these skeptics. It was published in 1845 and it scored an immediate success both in terms of sales and acceptance by critics.

Following the success of *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself.*, he decided to sail to Great Britain and Ireland to give lectures and speeches. When he returned to the USA, he was very active as an orator and writer among abolitionists and also in movements for women's rights. He was a relentless critic of the situation in the USA and the hypocrisy prevalent in the society, particularly with regard to the "peculiar institution" of slavery which was justified or acquiesced by the nominally Christian community. The Christian church, especially in the South, also became a target of his criticism, for being responsible for maintaining the current state of affairs, if not encouraging it. His popularity grew and he served in several public functions, even having been nominated as the first African-American candidate for a Vice-president in 1872. He died in 1895 one of the most famous and respected black people in the USA and is remembered as a fierce fighter for equal rights, whether based on race, gender or nationality.

His most notable works are, of course, his autobiographies, which depict the reality of a slave's life as well as expose the reasons and arguments for the unacceptability of slavery. He produced three editions of his autobiography, *The Narrative...* being the first one and the most influential one. To this day, it remains a symbol and as classical piece of a slave narrative it has achieved almost a canonical status in the terms of the genre.

## **2.5 Olaudah Equiano and The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself.**

Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, as he was been renamed at the beginning of his enslavement was, according to his account, probably born in today's Nigeria in circa 1745. Although there have been disputes in the academic field concerning his actual place of birth and some scholars argue that he may have been born in South Carolina instead and that his early recollections of his childhood in Africa could be fabrications, his legacy and profound impact on society lay elsewhere (Egan). He had become one of the most influential figures of the British abolitionist movement at the end of 18th century, to which he proved an extra valuable as a former slave who had bought his freedom and first-hand eyewitness of the abhorrence of contemporary intercontinental slave trade.

His chief contribution to the anti-slavery cause which eventually achieved earned him a modest claim at immortality, was his autobiographical piece, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*. It was first published in 1789 and almost instantly claimed unprecedented success. Its extensive list of subscribers boasting a substantial number of very high-profile names is a proof of its immensely popular status. He could be probably considered the first African author with widespread readership in Great Britain. After the publication, several voices stated that the whole book was indeed a fabrication and rather a propagandist pamphlet than an authentic account of a slave's life. These were, however, soon disproved and dismissed. Equiano personally traveled through the country to promote the book and as he was gaining some fame and notoriety, gave speeches. Besides the engagement in the abolitionist movement and fighting for the end to the oppression of black slaves, he was also active in the efforts to improve the conditions in Africa, having been sent on a mission by the Crown, although a limited success was been achieved, allegedly because of lack of financial and other support.

The two-volume autobiography is a very gripping and interesting story even for a modern reader, especially in its first part. At the beginning, the author describes the life in his home back in Africa and the customs of his native Igbo tribe. After being captured by slave-traders, he is transferred by a slave ship to Virginia where he is sold to an English master and made to serve aboard ships in the West Indies, an area infamous for its mistreatment of slaves and

brutality in contrast with the beauty of the tropical Caribbean islands. The story is definitely not short of adventure, as the list of Equiano's experiences comprises shipwrecks, naval battles, encounters with pirates, daring escapes from kidnappers and even an expedition to the North Pole. The action parts are complemented by a fascinating psychological insight into the mind of an African discovering the European culture and, as he is becoming more acquainted with its inner workings, contemplates the institutionalized slavery and growing into a fervent fighter for freedom, both his own and his fellow unfortunates as well struggle with his religious search for his relationship with God and the right confession and church.

### **3. PRACTICAL PART - ANALOGIES**

The aim of the thesis is to examine the works in terms of structure and content for any underlying analogical tendencies, which would hint at the connection between the genres and accentuate the self-improvement aspect of the slave narratives. The most desired outcome of a self-help/motivational book is indeed one's personal uplift in a certain way.

In *Way to Wealth*, the desired outcome is an individual uplift toward individual freedom and virtuousness by focusing on the material aspect of attaining and maintaining prosperity wealth and using common sense and reason in the best of Enlightenment tradition. Uplift of the protagonist is naturally also a major narrative feature of the slave stories.

Olaudah Equiano shows almost Protestant perseverance and endeavour in obtaining sufficient means towards buying his freedom. Various metamorphoses of this self-improvement mechanism can be traced through many slave narratives, perhaps most famously in the attempt of the canonical narrative by Frederick Douglass who tries to run as a direct consequence of having learned to read and write in the first place, for literacy amounts to both social and spiritual uplift. These tendencies and thoughts start to loom in Douglass's mind shortly after he has moved to the city of Baltimore to serve in the family of one of his masters and by the efforts of his friendly wife, who later turns quite aggressive and hostile towards the slaves, succeeds to learn to read and write. He expresses the thought that literacy is the greatest gift a slave can obtain (Douglass 275).

There are two levels of the motivational/self-improvement aspect relevant for the purpose of the work in slave narratives: motivation for the white readers to steer them into the direction of abolition and the more subtle layer of motivation and improvement of individual qualities as shown by the authors. It is an integral part of the narrative, and it could serve as an inspiration for the fellow slaves to try and emancipate themselves from the shackles of slavery or general reading public to act on their example of personal qualities and efforts at uplifting themselves from the unfavourable conditions. The protagonists of the autobiographies and their conducts, modes of behaviour, attitudes and ways of thinking in various hardships could serve as a certain kind of role models for an average reader without being necessarily connected to the theme of slavery and abolition. Theoretically, the narrators

could thus well be employed in a completely different and arbitrary setting and still achieve a similar effect on the reader's mind in this respect, to try to improve their own character and personal traits and qualities based on the example set by the books.

In the following chapters, the work shall focus on different elements of the uplift, a central issue for self-help books in the texts in question and analogies or contrasts, respectively. The basic narrative matrix or skeletal code of uplift in both the genres of Enlightenment self-help books and later slave narratives is very similar and by analysis, it could be specified in three parts – the economic and material uplift, the spiritual or intellectual uplift/gaining knowledge and the co-occurrence of these.

### **3.1 Economic or material uplift**

As far as the material aspect of the individual uplift is concerned, Franklin's *Way to Wealth* provides the readers with a somewhat theoretical perspective determined by the formal arrangement of the work. He employs the framework of a story within a narration purpose to impose critical thinking on the readers and not to sound patronising, but also to achieve greater impact on less-educated readers who are more capable of grasping this classic self-help conception (Mur Effing 133). The material uplift and personal enrichment through certain principles and modes of behavior or thinking is a prominent focus of Franklin's classic essay. It can be legitimately argued that, over the course of years, Franklin has inspired millions of people to loosely follow his matrix of self-improvement (Mur Effing 128).

In the slave narratives, even though they practically adhere to the same principles and modes of behavior as Franklin suggests, the impact is on one hand subtler, for the possibly instructional content is scattered across the narrative curve of the story, usually rich with events and actions. On the other hand, the sheer notion that these are first-hand accounts of actual lives and stories of former slaves and their conduct which helped them reach their goals creates a powerful impression of plausibility and efficacy of the ideas expressed by Franklin and ultimately put in practice also by Equiano, Douglass etc.

Both Franklin's and the slave authors' works in question promote generally the same qualities in people who wish to improve their respective situation. Naturally, the settings and the forms differ dramatically. As mentioned before, Franklin presents the ideas leading to personal material freedom through a narrative framework, and delivers them through fictitious character, whereas the autobiographical nature of the narratives places the slaves themselves into the position of role models. The qualities could be roughly enumerated as follows: industry, frugality and strict financial discipline, and self-reliance. Of course, achieving them is considerably more difficult for slaves and it is much more connected with also achieving a certain degree of self-awareness and determination through spiritual emancipation and knowledge. That is why slave narratives generally put a greater emphasis on education and literacy acquisition..

In agreement with this embracing own identity is yet another analogy between Franklin's doctrine and the slave narratives. It resides in the fact that all of the slaves actively took charge of their lives, in one way or another, thus effectively adhering to one of the most prominent maxims from *Way to Wealth* – "God helps those who help themselves" (Franklin 2:1). This is especially true for Douglass, but also Equiano. They take some action on their behalf and now, through their works, they are reaching out towards others, maybe in similar situation as they had been, or rather who could be galvanized into action, too. The slaves are also an excellent example of Franklin's saying that „constant dropping wears away stones“ put to practice (Franklin 2:3). It can be observed in all narratives that their protagonists always show great perseverance and patience in finally obtaining their freedom. „As Poor Dick says, when the well's dry, they know the worth of water“ (Franklin 2:5). The desire for freedom is natural and who should know more about it than those who had had none - the slaves. They know the value of it and know it should not be wasted. And with the notion of the complex nexus of material, spiritual and formal, legal freedom in mind, they do not distinguish between these categories. They, even financially, hold on to freedom. Franklin's quote is originally about debts, but could be extrapolated and applied also in this sense, and the meaning inferred is very similar. Both Equiano and Douglass are financially very disciplined, they save what they can, quite in accordance with the principles outlined in *Way to Wealth*, because they believe that it is an inseparable part of their journey to freedom.

Industry and diligence stand first and foremost in Franklin's roadmap towards of personal success and uplift. Sloth "consumes like rust" and prevents one from reaching happiness (Franklin 2:2). Franklin himself lived by his rule to set an example and worked tirelessly in all of his employments, whether in his print shop or a public function. He developed a strict system of daily routine which designated each hour for a certain purpose so that not a minute will be lost in idleness (Franklin 81). In *The Way to Wealth*, Franklin states:

“[...] for industry pays debts, while despair increaseth them, says Poor Richard. What though you have found no treasure, nor has any rich relation left you a legacy, diligence is the mother of good luck, as Poor Richard says, and God gives all things to industry. Then plough deep, while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell and to keep, says Poor Dick. Work while it is called today, for you know not how much you may be hindered tomorrow, which makes Poor Richard say, one today is worth two tomorrows“ (Franklin 2:2)

There is a bizarre twist to this principle, when we try to apply it to the slaves, whose sole purpose and function in the eyes of the slaveholders was to work as hard as possible to the brink of and more than often beyond total exhaustion. If we examine the accounts of the authors of the narratives, we see that it is clearly not the kind of industry that Franklin meant. The work is only imposed on the slaves by their masters and they have naturally no or little interest in seeing it done properly other than fear of punishment. Both Douglass and Equiano, however, manifest a profound tendency to use their free time productively, to scrounge a little coin, to make a new floor mat, study etc. Therefore, to advance and help themselves in any way possible in their current situation, and that is the kind of diligence *The Way to Wealth* preaches.

For Douglass, industry and determination is a key quality. Industrious slaves have before them the vision of freedom, the „silver trump“ (Douglass 279). They want to secure their tomorrow by embracing today and making use of it. The most prominent part of the narrative to show this is the description of Christmas time of 1833. Between Christmas Eve and New Year’s day, the slaves usually had free time.

“This time, however, was spent in various ways. The staid, sober, thinking and industrious ones of our number would employ themselves in making corn-brooms, mats, horse-collars, and baskets; and another class of us would spend the time in hunting opossums, hares, and coons. But by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriments as playing ball, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling, dancing, and drinking whisky; and this latter mode of spending the time was by far the most agreeable to the feelings of our masters. A slave who would work during the holidays was considered by our masters as scarcely deserving them” (Douglass 299).

The author then elaborates on the common practices among slaves and provides a distinction between those who would, through industry and diligence, seek to improve their future situation and those who would keep themselves in ignorance by drowning their sorrows in alcohol and idle games.

Some limited material and financial self-sufficiency begins to unfold for Douglass only in the last chapters of the narrative, when he is once again transferred from the country to work in the city of Baltimore, this time at a shipyard, as an apprentice of calking. He is hired to a

certain William Gardner by his master, Hugh Auld. At the outset, he has quite a difficult year marked by violent fights with white workers at the shipyard, who are afraid of black craftsmen taking their work. It is at this very stage that young Douglass gets to truly follow in the tradition of essential personal financial management as laid out by Franklin nearly one hundred years before. His slow, gradual progress in earning money for himself also provides a yet more solid base for other emancipation efforts. As it has been pointed out, the fight with Edward Covey marked a point for Douglass, where he resolved to refuse the enslavement of his mind and to never more bow to the whip of the slaveholder striking without justice. The spiritual independence and emancipation ultimately also gains a company of a certain material independence and it is evident that such a person cannot be confined to the grasp of slavery for a long time. His self-confidence and self-awareness springing from the combination of education, critical thinking and the newly found ability to make money for himself finally climax in his final and successful attempt at escape to the north.

His plan follows Franklin's financial discipline. In the following quotes, it is very interesting to watch Douglass progress in his views of his subordinate state towards his master and employer along with his capability to make more money.

“I was able to command the highest wages given to the most experienced calkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing him from six to seven dollars per week. I sometimes brought him nine dollars per week: my wages were a dollar and a half a day. After learning how to calk, I sought my own employment, made my own contracts, and collected the money which I earned. My pathway became much more smooth than before; my condition was now much more comfortable. When I could get no calking to do, I did nothing” (Douglass 314).

“I was now getting, as I have said, one dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it; I earned it; it was paid to me; it was rightfully my own; yet, upon each returning Saturday night, I was compelled to deliver every cent of that money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it,--not because he had any hand in earning it,-- not because I owed it to him,--nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to compel me

to give it up. The right of the grim-visaged pirate upon the high seas is exactly the same” (Douglass 315).

“In the early part of the year 1838, I became quite restless. I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master [...] He would, however, when I made him six dollars, sometimes give me six cents, to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I regarded it as a sort of admission of my right to the whole. The fact that he gave me any part of my wages was proof, to my mind, that he believed me entitled to the whole of them. I always felt worse for having received any thing; for I feared that the giving me a few cents would ease his conscience, and make him feel himself to be a pretty honorable sort of robber. My discontent grew upon me. I was ever on the look-out for means of escape; and, finding no direct means, I determined to try to hire my time, with a view of getting money with which to make my escape” (Douglass 316).

Clearly, the development of his attitude towards giving up the money he has earned to his master who made no effort whatsoever is growing from a passively negative stance to explicit outrage and planning to set himself free of it. He realizes the individual value of himself and the value of his work. Previously, when he worked at a field or in the house, he did not come into direct contact with the finances generated by his hard work. Now, however, he receives the money directly and is forced to hand them over, and so he is provoked to think and contemplate – the money could be all his, he deserved it for his diligent work and should have every right to it, except that he was born a slave. He eventually manages to hire his own time, so he has to pay a fixed sum to his master, as well as pay for his lodgings, but whatever extra money he is able to make is his. He works endlessly and finally carries out his plan for escape.

The narrative curve of Equiano’s story is completely different, yet there are striking similarities in the points which are relevant for the theme of material uplift. Olaudah Equiano, since he came from an indigenous tribal environment of Igbo area of today’s Nigeria, had, prior to his enslavement, no concept of money and economical relationships as the European/American society knew it. He describes his land’s customs at the beginning of his story:

“Every one contributes something to the common stock; and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious” (Equiano 17).

However, he learns very quickly after becoming a part of the lively sea trade in the West Indies. His career, in the end quite a successful one, is full of violent swings and ups and downs, which also pertains to his economic fortune. Thanks to his diligence and eagerness to learn, he swiftly masters the English language as well as culture and becomes acquainted with Christian religion (an acquaintance which will eventually turn into a long-lasting relationship, see further). Last but not least, he succeeds in learning to read and write and in time becomes quite a valuable asset to the crew of every ship he serves on as a skilled clerk. He has usually a relatively good relationship with his masters and ship captains and is eventually even granted his freedom, which is sadly not much respected in the Caribbean and he falls into slavery again as he is prevented from leaving by the captain himself. He “made an offer to go for my books and chest of clothes”, but is denied access (Equiano 57). It is not the last time he loses all his belongings to white people. He is not tight-lipped about his endeavours to save as much means as he can and then invest the money, however, quite often he is robbed of it and left to his own devices, thereby forced to start over. Once, he uses his savings to bribe a free-man sailor to aid him in his attempt to escape, but ends up betrayed and caught, having some satisfaction only from the despise and detest the other sailors have for his fellow (Equiano 60). It does not discourage him in the long run, though. When he is sold to one Robert King, a merchant and since he is given the responsibility and authority to conduct small trades with the islands for his master, he is always in touch with the world of money, trading and economical decisions. He even managed an estate with other slaves for some time (Equiano 66). He himself is, however, rarely paid well. Nevertheless, he tries to do extra work on any occasion that presents itself and saves up enough to buy his way to freedom and invest in his education and self-improvement.

“After I had been sailing for some time with this captain, at length I endeavoured to try my luck and commence merchant. I had but a very small capital to begin with; for one single half bit, which is equal to three pence in England, made up my whole stock” (Equiano 73).

For his first earned money he bought a Bible. “At one of our trips to St. Kitt's I had eleven bits of my own; and my friendly captain lent me five bits more, with which I bought a Bible” (Equiano 75).

“In process of time I became master of a few pounds, and in a fair way of making more, which my friendly captain knew very well; this occasioned him sometimes to take liberties with me: but whenever he treated me waspishly I used plainly to tell him my mind, and that I would die before I would be imposed on as other negroes were, and that to me life had lost its relish when liberty was gone. This I said although I foresaw my then well-being or future hopes of freedom (humanly speaking) depended on this man” (Equiano 76).

Besides buying a Bible to read in and broaden his knowledge, he also actively tries to learn some new trades and skills, particularly playing musical instruments and hair-dressing (Equiano 109). Especially his mastery of hair-dressing mastery proves a very valuable skill and enables him to make a few more coins on the sea.

"So much for industry, my friends, and attention to one's own business; but to these we must add frugality, if we would make our industry more certainly successful. A man may, if he knows not how to save as he gets, keep his nose all his life to the grindstone, and die not worth a groat at last” (Franklin 2:4).

Franklin highlights the importance of frugality, defining it as strict financial discipline and not allowing yourself spending on fancy items of clothing or exquisite food or alcohol. His argument is that “[w]omen and wine, game and deceit, Make the wealth small, and the wants great” (Franklin 2:4)

Again, he truly lived by his code, which can be traced numerous times in his autobiography. Frugality equals economic freedom which is the ultimately desired state and attributes to general freedom of an individual. Because possessing smaller amount of your own money at your disposal and knowing how to manage it without it being wasted away is preferable to borrowing and living in perpetual debt, even though it may make life more comfortable at face level. For, according to Franklin, “[b]y these, and other extravagancies, the genteel are reduced to poverty, and forced to borrow of those whom they formerly despised, but who through industry and frugality have maintained their standing; in which case it appears

plainly, that a ploughman on his legs is higher than a gentleman on his knees, as Poor Richard says” (Franklin 2:5).

And “the borrower is a slave to the lender, and the debtor to the creditor, disdain the chain, preserve your freedom; and maintain your independency: be industrious and free; be frugal and free” (Franklin 2:6)

Interestingly enough, the latter quote even directly features the very word “slave” for debtors. The actual slaves in the narratives both try hard not to be slaves and to provide for themselves, although their options are severely limited. Given the circumstances, they are extremely frugal and always try to have some money to help them in their quest for ultimate and formal freedom. They try to observe and the world and actions around them and learn from it, as well as make use of it. Equiano, for example, describes how he encountered a coloured man who had become free and ran a prosperous business on one of the islands. He makes an example of him and admires him for his frugality and ability to multiply his wealth, particularly because he started from the severely underprivileged position of an ex-slave.

“This poor man was very industrious; and, by his frugality, had saved so much money by working on shipboard, that he had got a white man to buy him a boat, unknown to his master. Some time after he had this little estate the governor wanted a boat to bring his sugar from different parts of the island; and, knowing this to be a negro-man's boat, he seized upon it for himself, and would not pay the owner a farthing” (Equiano 64).

Unfortunately, it was a common practice for free coloured people to be the victims of complete disrespect and disregard of their legitimately acquired freedom and suffer sanctions, property seizures and violent excesses. There were also roving bands robbing and scamming the slaves of the little money they had saved, as Equiano documents. It was also not uncommon for black people doing business with white people to not get paid for their work or wares and often being subjected to verbal or physical assaults, Equiano included (Equiano 64). He remarks: “In this situation is it surprising that slaves, when mildly treated, should prefer even the misery of slavery to such a mockery of freedom?” (Equiano 78)

Because of the nature of his work, he was quite well traveled and in the second part of his memoirs he ponders on the conditions in which coloured slaves are forced to work in from

purely economical point of view. He exposes the paradoxical nature of the arguments that slaveholders do not profit from slaves and that their incomes do not even cover their purchasing price and that the only instances in which the slaves do not generate enough profit for their masters is when treated inhumanly.

“But surely this assertion refutes itself; for, if it be true, why do the planters and merchants pay such a price for slaves? And, above all, why do those who make this assertion exclaim the most loudly against the abolition of the slave trade? So much are men blinded, and to such inconsistent arguments are they driven by mistaken interest! I grant, indeed, that slaves are some times, by half-feeding, half-clothing, over-working and stripes, reduced so low, that they are turned out as unfit for service, and left to perish in the woods, or expire on a dunghill” (Equiano 65).

Self-reliance and individual efforts as the qualities of the Enlightenment period are another analogy between Franklin’s suggestions and the stories of slaves turned free men. Way to Wealth phrases the following maxim:

“But with our industry, we must likewise be steady, settled and careful, and oversee our own affairs with our own eyes, and not trust too much to others; for, as Poor Richard says” (Franklin 2:3).

Of course, they develop several tight relationships and cordial bonds throughout their slave careers, but in the end, they are left to themselves to take charge of their situation and help steer it in „the right direction“ and not expect any outcome from passivity or waiting for „somebody to do something“. And above all, keep the information about their desires for freedom for themselves. Both Equiano and Douglass had been betrayed and disappointed in other people in their narratives and the latter one sums the universal advice for he had heeded during the course of his escape – “Trust no man” (Douglass 320).

Franklin’s essay, being primarily focused on business, also features a quote, similar in meaning, which could be considered beneficial rather to the slave owners: “Wise men, as Poor Dick says, learn by others' harms, fools scarcely by their own, but, *felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum* [...] And again, the eye of a master will do more work than both his hands; and again, want of care does us more damage than want of knowledge; and again, not

to oversee workmen is to leave them your purse open. Trusting too much to others' care is the ruin of many" (Franklin 2:3). At least one of them, Edward Covey, one of Frederick Douglass's masters, definitely did not take it lightly (Douglass 292).

Finally, an indicator of success for Franklin was the amount of sold works – and by that criterion, both Douglass's and Equiano's narratives were immensely successful and popular, thus having a profound impact on the reading public.

### 3.2 Spiritual/intellectual uplift and the importance of knowledge and education

“We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly, and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an abatement” (Franklin 2:1).

In the preceding quote, the economic metaphor of human folly or ignorance being the greatest setback of a person’s ambitions illustrates the need to improve oneself in terms of their capabilities of their reason and knowledge of the world and generally increase their intellectual value. Of course, Franklin’s perspective lacks the aspect of not being able to obtain sufficient formal education that is inherent to the slaves’ experience. However, Franklin also stresses the common sense available to everyone and the authors of the examined narratives are eventually able to find a way how to educate themselves. After some spiritual enrichment, they both show a tendency towards thinking about the nature of slavery and contemplating its origins, effects and moral and legal grounds for it. In the process, they come to despise it and provide arguments for the readers why they should do so, as well.

In comparison with Olaudah Equiano’s narrative, Douglass seems to be more secular in his thoughts. After learning to read and write, he seems to have embraced a whole new identity, found a new dignified and self-conscious personality within him. He begins to contemplate the problems of slavery and see the very obvious flaws in its argumentation and he despises the whole wretched institution. Equiano, on the other hand, also displays a major change in the attitudes and the course of his whole life upon learning to write and read, but he pursues a different direction. He is more religious and less expressive in his views of slavery as such. It is probably a remnant of the age of enlightenment and its empirical approach. Both Franklin’s works and slave narratives appeal to the individual mind, the effort to change his modes of thinking and by exposing them to certain information or providing examples, explanations and/or illustrations to accompany the message and assist to deliver it effectively. They are all in favour of further education.

For Franklin, reading and gaining knowledge is an essential part of one’s advancement in life, should it be a successful one. Examination of his famous autobiography reveals that the passion of reading and education was a part of him since very young age. He used to read every minute of his free time, quite controversially, even instead of Sunday’s religious

service. The Enlightenment focus on human reason, knowledge and public service provides solid ground for his prioritizing the acquisition of reading and also writing over church attendance. Later, reading becomes an integral part of every day in his system and order of a day he had developed for daily self-improvement effort (Franklin 81).

For both of the slaves, education is the key to everything. Their desire for freedom, thoughts about escaping and ultimately their attempts to uplift their desperate position invariably begin by learning to read and write. For a slave kept by the slaveholders in ignorance throughout his whole life, literacy suddenly amounts to freedom. The world becomes much more complicated and offers many more opportunities. That is why obtaining literacy is undoubtedly a major turning point in the careers of both slaves. Especially in Douglass's case, the story of his learning to read and write is both an interesting and dramatic one. He stresses the importance and markedness of absence of basic knowledge at numerous points throughout the narrative, for example right at the beginning, where he complains about the slaves not knowing their birthday: "I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or falltime. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood" (Douglass, 255). He very correctly well identifies the deprivation of essential education to be a primal tool of oppression from the slavers. An ignorant slave is not likely to think elaborately about the injustice of slavery and plot plans to escape, as well as reinforce his identity and self-consciousness.

Both of the slave authors express this hunger for knowledge numerous times and prove it by their actions. Douglass, having been already born in the USA did not have many difficulties learning the language, but for Equiano, who was allegedly dragged from the heart of Africa, it all begins with learning to speak English on the board of a ship which is destined to carry him to England. There, he is given a new name which would suit more to his European master. Equiano was not happy about it. "But I was reserved for another fate, and was soon undeceived when we came within sight of the English coast. While I was on board this ship, my captain and master named me Gustavus Vassa. I at that time began to understand him a little, and refused to be called so, and told him as well as I could that I would be called Jacob"

(Equiano 36). Initially, he lives in constant fear of white people, partly because of his dreadful experiences aboard the slave ship which took him from his home continent – it is estimated that only roughly fifty percent of the transportees survived the Middle Passage (Bland 23). Partly, it is owing to his incapability to understand their culture and way of life. He is afraid of paintings or clocks and he he even confides the following:

“I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent” (Equiano 39).

During the course of time, he grows more familiar with white people and their customs and becomes “astonished at the wisdom of the white people in all things I saw; but was amazed at their not sacrificing, or making any offerings, - and eating with unwashed hands, and touching the dead” (Equiano 39).

There was also a particular strange occurrence, when young and astonished Equiano “often observed that when her mother washed her face it looked very rosy; but when she washed mine it did not look so: I therefore tried oftentimes myself if I could not by washing make my face of the same colour as my little play-mate (Mary), but it was all in vain; and I now began to be mortified at the difference in our complexions” (Equiano 40).

After these early stages of his enslavement when he had witnessed miraculous and incomprehensible (for him, then), some two or three years later, he “no longer looked upon them as spirits, but as men superior to us; and therefore I had the stronger desire to resemble them; to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners; I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement” (Equiano 46). It is the desire to improve, to advance himself which always proves profitable to him. He is eventually baptized and sent to school in England, where he is taught how to read and write, which opens up a completely new passage for him. He is appointed captain’s steward and after the months and years in service, he is no longer the simple-minded fresh-off-the-boat young slave, but further hones his seafaring skills and improve knowledge of reading writing, mathematics and, importantly enough, religion (Equiano 51). He is ever curious about the Christian religion, the Bible and how he, aspiring to be a good Christian, should behave and live. His curiosity and interest are an asset to him,

as he is keen to learn useful information about the function of ships, the guns, fortifications, salt water distillation etc. By the time he becomes a clerk on Robert King's vessel, he boasts his skills:

“Mr. King soon asked me what I could do; and at the same time said he did not mean to treat me as a common slave. I told him I knew something of seamanship, and could shave and dress hair pretty well; and I could refine wines, which I had learned on shipboard, where I had often done it; and that I could write, and understood arithmetic tolerably well as far as the Rule of Three” (Equiano 63).

At that time, he also starts to be significantly more attentive to the and thoughtful towards the whole business of slavery and how inhuman and unjust it is in nature, as he sails the West Indies and witnesses a substantial amount of disturbing events and can assess the general situation of slaves in the region. His continuous education and gradual realization of facts along with abstract contemplation on the subject speed up the edifying process and spark the strong want of freedom in him. He ultimately arrives at the conclusion that the very institution of slavery corrupts the minds and cripples the morality of people involved. Equiano writes: “Such a tendency has the slave-trade to debauch men's minds, and harden them to every feeling of humanity! For I will not suppose that the dealers in slaves are born worse than other men—No; it is the fatality of this mistaken avarice, that it corrupts the milk of human kindness and turns it into gall” (Equiano 70). A long monologue reflecting his thoughts and sentiments follows, expressing his attitude.

The very same process of spiritual uplift can be traced in *The Narrative...* by Frederick Douglass. Luck grants him that he is sent away from the back-breaking toil of the fields of the rural parts of Maryland to the city of Baltimore, to become a city slave in the family of his former master's son-in-law. There, he is given the chance to learn the alphabet and to read. Although his learning is abruptly interrupted by his master who is enraged at it, Douglass's path had already been set. As he puts it, “From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (Douglass 275). He understood that it lies in education. Analogically to Equiano, he searches for any and every opportunity to improve his knowledge of reading and writing. He finally succeeds by cunningly employing the skills of free children he knew from the streets. He took advantage of every opportunity get hold of a book or a newspaper, even though he had been watched and punished for being caught reading. But already, it was all in

vain. "The first step had been taken" (Douglass 277). The unavoidable chain of events led to young Frederick's discovery of books, essays and speeches about slavery and abolitionism. The realization comes and Douglass becomes interested in the issues of slavery as much as desperate from it. He is determined to achieve freedom one day. Like Equiano, as an effect of the education he had provided for himself, he begins to see the whole picture of the tragic state of his and fellow slaves as well as the gross injustice of it. He is able to carry out profound analysis of the anatomy of slavery and its maintaining by the slaveholders. For Douglass, the chief tools of the enslavement of the blacks are deprivation of education and any spiritual and intellectual stimulation. The slaves are kept in complete ignorance of the nature of their condition, they are made to think the state is normal and take slavery for granted, that it is a normal state of affairs. For example, in the passage also mentioned in the chapter on material uplift, he describes how the slaves are kept in ignorance by being encouraged to drink and fight in their holiday time and on Sundays, not be interested in the slightest intellectual endeavours and not have any desire to change their condition, ultimately to not even think such change is possible. In the story, Douglass regresses to address certain point in his life from a different point of view of an educated gentleman and abolitionist and contrasts it with his ignorant stance at the time they had occurred. The climactic part of the second chapter is the description of the peculiar chorus that the slaves given the privilege to work at the Great House Farm would sing, a song of immense woe, sorrow, regret and hopelessness.

"I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish" (Douglass, 263).

By employing vivid imagery accompanied by his own insightful commentary of an eyewitness he draws the readers into the action, they can imagine the situation and identify with it. He then proceeds to disprove the notion that the songs of the slaves are a sign of their content and happiness. He explains that it is actually the other way around and reinforces his stand by his personal emotional involvement to increase credibility of the statement. The greater his knowledge gets and his ignorance wanes, the more resolute and strict he is in his

beliefs that slavery is indeed evil and must be exterminated. He provides logical reasons for this and disproves the very notion of slavery as a legally sustainable matter (the story of Ham, logical analysis of the relationships between the master and the slave, his realizations that in the docks he makes money for the master who does not have any right to them. Why should he, as essentially independent and self-defined human being, give him the money? He realizes the individual value of himself and the value of his work and refuses to be used and abused anymore.

As mentioned earlier, Douglass also notes the corruptive effect slavery has on the attitude and demeanor of people, especially the slaveholders, of course. He illustrates the change of character of the slavers on more occasions, let us, however, concentrate on the most prominent one, and that is the transformation of his new mistress directly after arriving to Baltimore.

“My new mistress proved to be all she appeared when I first met her at the door,-- a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings. She had never had a slave under her control previously to myself, and prior to her marriage she had been dependent upon her own industry for a living” (Douglass 274).

She was not familiar with owning a slave and she was highly uncomfortable with treating slaves in a then usual manner, which means rather mistreating. The servility with which slaves were used to approach their masters for the fear of being whipped upset her. However, from the initial kindness and tenderness towards slaves, she let her spirit get devoured by the power she wielded over the unfortunate blacks.

“But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon” (Douglass 274).

Such unfavourable change of character is also described by Douglass in the case of the combination of slave-holding and conversion to church in the South.

In „The Narrative“, the romantic notion of American national self-image is detectable at certain points, in comparison with Equiano, who praises and respects the British colonial power and the nation, it is more extrinsic and not interiorized in his character, however.

It is worth noting, that both of the slave authors use rich and sophisticated metaphors of freedom (Equiano 88,90; Douglass 279) and, besides the obvious literary quality of the works, provide the reader with occasional allusions and quotations of other authors, which only proves their knowledge, eg. reference to classical Greek mythology (Equiano 62).

### 3.3 Concordance of self-improvement and social uplift

The two aspects of individual uplift examined above could not, however, work separately. “But, ah, think what you do when you run in debt; you give to another power over your liberty. If you cannot pay at the time, you will be ashamed to see your creditor; you will be in fear when you speak to him, you will make poor pitiful sneaking excuses, and by degrees come to lose you veracity, and sink into base downright lying; for, as Poor Richard says, the second vice is lying, the first is running in debt. And again to the same purpose, lying rides upon debt's back” (Franklin 2:6)

This quote from Franklin's *Way to Wealth* captures perfectly the intertwined, spiral-like nature of wealth, freedom, virtue and vice inherent to Franklin's model of uplift and successful life. Honesty is indeed a virtue and you cannot be truly honest if you run in debt and generally are not a good manager of personal wealth, since you will be dragged down to the vice and bad habits alongside with your material difficulties. The spiritual and material uplift go hand in hand with each another and are like two communicating vessels. By growing wealthier, you grow more virtuous – if you do it right, by Franklin's standards – and vice versa. He was convinced that all people are good and capable of becoming better. He took the Puritan characteristic of self-scrutiny to its highest degree by contriving a method in which he set up his own chart of virtues, and methodically tried to acquire them one after another until they became a habit. His objective was, according to his own words, the achievement of a sense of happiness and fulfillment (Mur Effing 128). The Puritan ideals of hard work, self-examination, discipline and virtue were necessary ingredients for the development of the nation at that time: “National progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness, and vice” Therefore, in American nineteenth-century culture, success, hard work and discipline were three inseparable terms (Mur Effing 129). Franklin, in his *Autobiography*, claims about Poor Richard's *Almanack*:

“I consider'd it as a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any other books; I therefore filled all the little spaces that occur'd between the remarkable days in the calendar with proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality, as the means of

procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue; it being more difficult for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those proverbs, it is hard for an empty sack to stand up-right” (89).

The general outcome of all the works in question is ultimately influenced by the co-occurrence of the above mentioned types of an individual’s uplift in the world. For the “rags to riches” phenomenon of obtaining decent wealth after having virtually started from the bottom may seem appealing and a sign of successful life as it is, for Franklin, Douglass and Equiano it is thinkable and achieves full legitimacy only when accompanied by a corresponding level of the spiritual uplift, gaining knowledge and wisdom through industrious education. In slave narratives, education in the fields of philosophy, literature or mathematics must be, of course, preceded by obtaining literacy, successfully learning to read and write, which is, obviously, not always a minor task for the slaves.

In the aforementioned paradigm of these literary works, material freedom becomes one with individual freedom and freedom of the spirit— be it from slavery, debts etc. In essence, an affluent man is a free man; and by following certain rules and obeying certain advices while simultaneously developing certain character qualities, anyone can become and affluent and spiritually free man and in the end a happy man. Put in simplified terms, this theory underlying Franklin’s work marks the beginning of the notion of the myth of the so called American dream.

### 3.3.1 The treatment of religious topics and rhetoric

It can be safely assumed that all of the works in question relevant to the subject of this thesis employ religious matter and rhetoric in themselves as principal literary devices with an intention or a certain „illocutionary or perlocutionary“ purpose of the author behind them. Of course, it by no means that they are not sincere in their faith, particularly Equiano, who had become very devotional and in the later stages of his „Interesting Narrative“ frequently contemplates theological issues with the reader. At one point at his life, he even proceeds to try to become a priest. However, he is rejected, much to his dismay and disenchantment. Equiano’s story and his relationship towards religion is interesting in several aspects. The central distinctive difference from the other authors is certainly the fact that he had been born in Africa and spent his childhood in the environment of native tribes, ignorant to the existence of Christian religion. When later captured by the slave traders, he is transported to the West Indies, and it is only during his career as a slave around the American continent and in England when he gradually unfolds the secrets of Christian belief and discovers faith in one universal God, unlike Franklin or Douglass, who had been born into the Christian environment and considered it only natural. Olaudah Equiano, on the other hand, learned about it bit by bit and piece by piece along with the whole Western culture which impressed and amazed him greatly and it had definitely had a profound impact on his approach and attitude towards God.

Through the course of the book, regarding religious matters, he is very gullible and self-conscious, troubled greatly when told that he will have difficulties achieving salvation. His worries about not „meeting the entrance conditions“ of heaven’s pearly gates manifest themselves numerous times in the text. Shortly after being introduced to Christianity and when he begins to embrace it as also his one and only religious belief, he is overcome by his solemn faith and sees God’s power demonstrate itself virtually everywhere.

“Every extraordinary escape, or signal deliverance, either of myself or others, I looked upon to be effected by the interposition of Providence” (Equiano 52).

He seems very enthusiastic about his new place in the world, new adventures such as naval battles and everyday fight with the natural forces of the sea. The adventurous nature of the story is a typical feature of the eighteenth century narrative (Bland 23). He also addresses the

newly embraced wonder of Christianity. He feels the presence of God's touch everywhere around him. One of the first instances of this occurs in England in 1759: "While I was attending these ladies their servants told me I could not go to Heaven unless I was baptized. This made me very uneasy" (Equiano 47). Surely enough, whenever he is plagued by such existential worries, he takes steps to eliminate the obstacles; he secures for himself to be baptised as soon as possible.

Throughout the whole book, he is very sincere in his faith and, with a little exaggeration, we are able to witness his transformation from an animist heathen into a fervent and devoted Christian in Equiano's book. He takes the alleged interferences of Providence very seriously every time (Equiano 52). Numerous pages are dedicated to the demonstration and justification of his strong belief in the almighty power of God and how God should be feared more than men. His characteristic account and literal interpretation of the Bible make for a specific kind of faith, based mainly on the Old Testament and fear of God's power and punishment for slightest violation of the ten Commandments. Later in the book, he admits and confesses to regularly keeping eight of them (Equiano 125). When juxtaposed with the harsh and largely unscrupulous nature of life of mariners, among whom Equiano spends the largest part of his time as a slave, it makes up for rather interesting situations.

He builds the notion of God's divine power through many examples of his own experiences, be it explicit events he was part of in the world or psychological insight into his mind of an intelligent ex-savage educating himself in things both Godly and worldly. Then, he connects this religious point with his observations and reservations against slavery and crafts it into one solid argument of a faithful human being against the business with other fellow human beings.

While serving on board of the ship named Aetna, Olaudah Equiano became acquainted with one Daniel Queen, the ship's clerk, who instructed him in the reading and using of the Bible, apart from also teaching him how to shave and cut his hair. Interestingly enough, he remarks on his quite wonderful discovery of a striking similarity, almost identical, of the Scriptures with the unwritten laws and rules of his original tribal nation (Equiano 56). This could be understood as bearing the underlying purpose and effect of diminishing the sense of overall inferiority of the „savages“ in Africa and the inhuman or subhuman nature of the slaves.

He attributes much of his sufferings and bad fate to the God's way of punishing him. For example, after his fall into slavery right after obtaining temporary freedom for the first time in the West Indies he proclaims to spend his one free day in London by „rambling and sports“. However, he immediately feels ashamed for his swearing and in fear of God, he repents. Eventually, through faith, he acknowledges and accepts his position and “considers that trials and disappointments are sometimes for our good, and I thought God might perhaps have permitted this in order to teach me wisdom and resignation” (Equiano 59).

This realisation and recognition of God's plan in concordance with his own sense of confidence in himself and his capabilities is evident, he “could plainly trace the hand of God, without whose permission a sparrow cannot fall” (Equiano 53). Note the similarity with Franklin's proclamation that all things and qualities, however excellent, “may all be blasted without the blessing of heaven“ (Franklin 2:7).

In the first half of the book, there are numerous occasions of vivid descriptions of the injustice and suffering imposed upon the poor slaves. The author writes about the almost sadistic means of punishment definitely defying the laws God has given to people via the ten Commandments and places them in direct opposition to God's will and Christian principles generally. The treatment of the slaves led to numerous suicides, which Equiano mentions. Such issue is not frequently addressed in other slave narratives, although the authors express their own suicidal tendencies in the most desperate times, eg. Frederick Douglass himself. Equiano also did not escape the temptation of considering death to be the best solution to his misery, although he never contemplated doing so by his own hand. He rather “called upon God's thunder, and his avenging power, to direct the stroke of death to me, rather than permit me to become a slave, and be sold from lord to lord” (Equiano 61).

Equiano's Old Testament-like perception of God as a fearsome and menacing figure in his mentality projects itself again in his desperate lamentation in hope that God would intervene in favour of the slaves.

“Is not this one common and crying sin enough to bring down God's judgment on the islands? He tells us the oppressor and the oppressed are both in his hands; and if these are not the poor, the brokenhearted, the blind, the captive, the bruised, which our Saviour speaks of, who are they? [...] I now, in the agony of distress

and indignation, wished that the ire of God in his forked lightning might transfix these cruel oppressors among the dead” (Equiano 68).

The latter part of the quotation is addressed to two robbers who rid him of all his belongings and left him without any hope for remedy or advocating for it was a frequent source of pleasure and enrichment of white people to rob colored slaves for whom nobody would stand up. Equiano calls them „Christian depredators“ (Equiano 75).

Equiano then proceeds to describe his encounter with a badly abused slave who complains about his master’s wicked behavior, taking away the slaves’ food and leaving them to fare for themselves. The slave exclaims that it is no man he can look for help to, only the God above, which moved Equiano greatly. There is also a Biblical reference to Moses and the Egyptians (Equiano 74). He also uses the device of irony like Frederick Douglass (will be addressed further later) in his portrayal of the hypocrisy of Southern US clergymen and ministers. The use is considerably more subtle in this instance: “The last war favoured this poor negro-man, and he found some means to escape from his Christian master” (Equiano 64).

More than once he exclaims his yielding to God’s will and his dependence on him more than on people. “Notwithstanding, I was resolved to have fortitude; thinking no lot or trial is too hard when kind Heaven is the rewarder” (Equiano 79). Religion and faith are a source of strength and the engine to keep him going – whereas for Douglass and Franklin, faith in God is not their primary source of will and purpose, it is rather the pursuit of knowledge and individual freedom, respectively.

Dreams are elaborately mentioned very often. He deems them quite significant and always tries to infer some deeper meaning, sign from God of foreshadowing of the future from the dreams. Apart from the dream of the fellow mariner, there is a typical example of it in the dream he has about his ship wrecking (Equiano 96). In it, he swears and automatically reproaches himself and feels bad in the morning. The ship then really wrecks like in the dream and Equiano pins it on God’s vengeance for his sins. The situation of the crew is actually very bleak and he starts to accuse himself of it more and more, he feels responsible for swearing in the dream. He tries to make up for it, takes care of the ones who got drunk. Shortly after, some crew members swore again and they got into a complicated weather situation, everyone suddenly prayed to God and he saved them – Olaudah Equiano attributes all crises that turn out well to God’s help and Providence, without them, all effort would be in

vain, although it is necessary for people to make the effort nevertheless and pray. “Let us again face the winds and seas, and swear not, but trust to God, and he will deliver us” (Equiano 104).

Once, Equiano sees a pastor fervently preach and exhortate, which impressed him greatly. He begins to consider trying to become a priest (Equiano 87). This is preceded and possibly influenced by a situation when he is asked by a woman in the West Indies whose child had died shortly before to perform a service for the deceased kid. He had replied that he is no parson, but eventually consented (Equiano 105). It is evident that by that time, Equiano must have been considered a very pious character; she would probably not ask a person who is not known for his love of God.

After 1770, he travels to Turkey, where he notes the Turkish inquisition checking the cargo for hidden Bibles (Equiano 111). He experiences several dangerous and life-threatening moments where he barely escapes with his own life in the following years, including eg. a great fire or a failed expedition to the North Pole. After the expedition, he “began seriously to reflect on the dangers I had escaped, particularly those of my last voyage, which made a lasting impression on my mind, and, by the grace of God, proved afterwards a mercy to me; it caused me to reflect deeply on my eternal state, and to seek the Lord with full purpose of heart ere it was too late. I rejoiced greatly” (Equiano 118).

He realizes the thoughts and elaborates on his search of a suitable confession for him in London (Equiano 119). Eventually, he becomes disenchanted of the Christians and claims that Turks will be closer than salvation than them. As Franklin does in his Autobiography, he analyzes the different churches and confessions and does not hide their flaws, which would discourage them from entering the said church, too (75). In this passage, Equiano is the closest to the criticism of Christian religion as it was practiced to the other works, mostly to Frederick Douglass’s gathering of exhortators in the house of one of his later masters (Douglass 286).

Equiano had a great desire to educate himself in the biblical matters, while he was still in the process of searching for the church that would best fit his religious beliefs and attitudes, he attends the meeting (love-feast) with the „Old Christians“. Several pages of his religious endeavours, theological disputation with himself and other churchmen follow.

There are long, by no means concise, passages describing his thorough „conversion“. He is frequently put off by people who look down on him. When he is told that he cannot enter the heaven, for he was not born a Christian it perplexes him greatly (Equiano 123). However, being fairly erudite in the issues of theology by then, he finally comes to a conclusion that God is not confined to time or place, it is the relationship and most importantly (for him) the scriptures that matter, in the end.

“Now every leading providential circumstance that happened to me, from the day I was taken from my parents to that hour, was then in my view, as if it had but just then occurred. I was sensible of the invisible hand of God, which guided and protected me when in truth I knew it not: still the Lord pursued me although I slighted and disregarded it; this mercy melted me down” (Equiano 127).

“I thought it extraordinary to see grand operas acted here on Sunday nights, and even attended by their majesties. I too, like these great ones, went to those sights, and vainly served God in the day while I thus served mammon effectually at night” (Equiano 112).

With the progress of the book, Bible quotations are becoming more frequent, it is almost like a sermon towards the end. He teaches the son of an Indian chief who knows nothing of Christianity. Thus he completes the symbolic full-circle, his journey from an „African savage“, ignorant of Christian religion, to a pious man able to instruct others who are as he once were in matters religious (Equiano 136).

“How comes it that all the white men on board who can read and write, and observe the sun, and know all things, yet swear, lie, and get drunk, only excepting yourself?” I answered him, the reason was, that they did not fear God; and that if any one of them died so they could not go to, or be happy with God” (Equiano 137).

The key element for rising to the top and prosperity lies in pious activity and moral integrity (Equiano 154).

All the above facts taken into account, Equiano’s intention underlying his use of religious themes in the work is to demonstrate the ever-present and almighty power of God and his commandments. The unrelenting force of God’s wrath leaves no space for a mortal to shun life without His laws unless they want to eternally burn in the eternal blaze of hell’s furnaces. Had everyone behaved according to the Holy scriptures, there would be no issue of enslaving

the African people and toiling them in the name of commerce without respect and right to a just reward, for as far as human and worldly matters are concerned, he values liberty and freedom above all, with the exception of faith. The true believers should unanimously stand against this dubious business of stealing and selling human beings as to be used as tools for it is by no means God's will and it actually stands directly in opposition to it. This mixture of religious passion and desire for individual freedom, which he exercised more than actively in his endeavours for the abolition of slavery, is very evident in the following quotation from the final chapter of his Narrative. It is rich in using extracts from the Bible and also appeals on the national pride of the British.

“May Heaven make the British senators the dispersers of light, liberty, and science, to the uttermost parts of the earth: then will be glory to God on the highest, on earth peace, and goodwill to men:—Glory, honour, peace, &c. to every soul of man that worketh good, to the Britons first, (because to them the Gospel is preached) and also to the nations. 'Those that honour their Maker have mercy on the poor.' 'It is righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people; destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity, and the wicked shall fall by their own wickedness.' May the blessings of the Lord be upon the heads of all those who commiserated the cases of the oppressed negroes, and the fear of God prolong their days; and may their expectations be filled with gladness! 'The liberal devise liberal things, and by liberal things shall stand,' Isaiah xxxii. 8. They can say with pious Job, 'Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?' Job xxx. 25” (Equiano 160).

The enlightenment focus on reason is evident here, as is, on the other hand, his loyal and strong faith. He is trying to find arguments in Bible and in general Christian ethics to back up his resolute stance in favour of abolishing slavery by appealing on the audience's conscience as Christians. The effect on the readers is possibly boosted by the fact that Equiano was a convertite.

In Frederick Douglass's well-known autobiography, religious themes are treated somewhat differently, although they still have their own agenda and purpose. Instead of theological contemplation, Douglass concentrates on exposing the common religious practice in the southern states and ultimately puts to trial. He criticizes its hypocrisy and superficiality, the

“two-facedness” of the whole milieu. Where Bible and God’s laws are used arbitrarily in inappropriate situations (predominantly the Old Testament) and in direct contradiction with the teachings and true values of Christianity, where slaveholders are also major figures in local churches, where they take part in devoted revivals, carry out elaborate sermons, recite the Old Testament by heart and fervently pray at any occasion as well as torment their African-American slaves with hunger, work them recklessly to the brink of (and more than less frequently beyond) collapse without any opportunity for respite, whip them in the most cruel manner and spread utmost hatred and intolerance. As a result of Douglass’s upbringing in such conditions, he naturally adopts a different stance towards God and church than Equiano. He sees particularly the church in the South as a “mere covering for the most horrid crimes,--a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,--a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,--and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me” (Douglass 301).

And he has solid grounds for such statement, for among several of the masters Douglass had most of them were religious, and not only by denomination, but also active in the church. The most notable examples of their hypocritical conduct as Douglass describes it are Thomas „Captain“ Auld and Edward Covey, the infamous „nigger-breaker“.

The former one, along with his wife, frequently engaged in depriving their slaves of sufficient supply of food, while simultaneously letting it go bad unused and praying to God for blessings and victuals, see the original quote: „A great many times have we poor creatures been nearly perishing with hunger, when food in abundance lay mouldering in the safe and smoke-house, and our pious mistress was aware of the fact; and yet that mistress and her husband would kneel every morning, and pray that God would bless them in basket and store!“ (Douglass 286)

The paradoxical nature of it is self-evident. Captain Auld, by the way described as lacking any amount of respect from the slaves, due to his meanness, weak character, inconsistency and charisma, which he made up for by hypocrisy, later attended a Methodist church meeting (Douglass 287). He converted and became a generally more pious person, which is usually

considered to improve the character of a person. Not in the case of Thomas Auld. As Douglass describes:

“If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before. Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. He made the greatest pretensions to piety. His house was the house of prayer. He prayed morning, noon, and night.” (288)

Considering the fact that Douglass had been living with him and encountering his character on a daily basis, such accusations can be deemed quite trustworthy. Despite, or maybe because all this, Mr. Auld soon advanced in the ranks of the Methodist church and became a minister. He began to organize meetings with other officials of the church. It did not change him at all and he continued to treat his slaves in an ungodly manner as he used to do before (Douglass 288). He must have been very well aware of the injustice done upon the slaves. When one of the preachers known to possess some sympathy for the slaves and in favour of their emancipation came, he made sure to present his good treatment and behaviour towards the slaves. The portrayal of this bizarre figure used as a representative would not be complete without an example of arbitrary misinterpretation and misuse of Biblical quotes. Let the narrative speak for itself: “I have seen him tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cowskin upon her naked shoulders, causing the warm red blood to drip; and, in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of Scripture--"He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. [...] Finally, my benevolent master, to use his own words, "set her adrift to take care of herself." Here was a recently-converted man, holding on upon the mother, and at the same time turning out her helpless child, to starve and die! Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them” (Douglass 288).

The chief device used by the author in the second part of the extract is irony, and a bitter one. Irony is also present in the subsequent depiction of Edward Covey, another “fine” Christian who boasted the reputation of a firm slaveholder capable of “breaking” young and potentially rebellious (whether in body or spirit) slaves by excessive workload and frequent physical

abuse. And: “Added to the natural good qualities of Mr. Covey, he was a professor of religion--a pious soul--a member and a class-leader in the Methodist church. All of this added weight to his reputation as a “niggerbreaker”” (Douglass 289). Mr. Covey and Douglass’s stay at his farm turned out to be quite essential for further development of Frederick’s character and eventually his gain of freedom. The hypocrisy of Edward Covey reached extreme heights according to the author’s account. He was cunning, sly and unpredictable. He liked to spy on his slaves using disguises and various concealments to catch them off their guard and perhaps enjoying a little rest only to have them whipped and punished for it.

“Every thing he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty. He would make a short prayer in the morning, and a long prayer at night; and, strange as it may seem, few men would at times appear more devotional than he... In this state of mind, he prayed with more than ordinary spirit. Poor man! such was his disposition, and success at deceiving, I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery” (Douglass 292).

The last comment addresses Edward Covey’s decision to buy a female slave (because he was not particularly wealthy, all of the slaves he disposed were only leased) for the sole purpose of profit by impregnating her and keeping the children for himself, thus having his own slaves for free. This was not a unique phenomenon in the South, but rather a widely-used habit among the slaveholders (Douglass 257).

Therefore, through exposing all the wrongdoings of Christianity practiced by members of the church in the southern slaveholding states and ironizing the superficial and insincere nature of it Douglass finally comes to a conclusion that these are not individual excesses, rather than that it is a systematic thing, as mentioned above. He has little sympathy for the Christian leaders of the south who are like pharisees, who lack the moral roots necessary for such a calling, who blatantly disrespect God’s laws and elementary human compassion and tolerance. As a result, Douglass identifies the church in the South as one of the tools of preserving the current undesirable and unjust state of things regarding slavery. There are at

least two instances in the narrative where ministers are scrutinized and the outcome which proves the point.

“While I lived with my master in St. Michael's, there was a white young man, a Mr. Wilson, who proposed to keep a Sabbath school for the instruction of such slaves as might be disposed to learn to read the New Testament. We met but three times, when Mr. West and Mr. Fairbanks, both class-leaders, with many others, came upon us with sticks and other missiles, drove us off, and forbade us to meet again” (Douglass 288).

“It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionists. Very near Mr. Freeland lived the Rev. Daniel Weeden, and in the same neighborhood lived the Rev. Rigby Hopkins. These were members and ministers in the Reformed Methodist Church. Mr. Weeden owned, among others, a woman slave, whose name I have forgotten. This woman's back, for weeks, was kept literally raw, made so by the lash of this merciless, ~religious~ wretch. He used to hire hands. His maxim was, Behave well or behave ill, it is the duty of a master occasionally to whip a slave, to remind him of his master's authority. Such was his theory, and such his practice” (Douglass 302).

“And yet there was not a man any where round, who made higher professions of religion, or was more active in revivals,-- more attentive to the class, love-feast, prayer and preaching meetings, or more devotional in his family,-- that prayed earlier, later, louder, and longer,--than this same reverend slave-driver, Rigby Hopkins” (Douglass 302).

After examining the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, one must arrive at a conclusion that his attitude towards religious matters was in the best tradition of the Enlightenment period a rather Deist approach, he would even balance on the brink of atheism, as a modern, 21st century person would understand the term. Evidence can be found in his seminal autobiography of himself, widely considered to be a prototype of the genre and one of the most commonly read autobiographies. Of course, he was brought up in the religious fashion since young age. Soon, he began to be intrigued by many tempting books that would enrich his mind and satisfy his infinite hunger for knowledge. Since he worked in his father's printing house by day, he found very little time for reading and decided to sacrifice the

attendance of a public Church service, which he then already considered rather a duty than a sincere manifestation of his affection for the church.

“My time for these exercises and for reading was at night, after work or before it began in the morning, or on Sundays, when I contrived to be in the printing-house alone, evading as much as I could the common attendance on public worship which my father used to exact on me when I was under his care, and which indeed I still thought a duty, though I could not, as it seemed to me, afford time to practise it” (Franklin 16).

Later on in the autobiography, he proceeds to address the issue of religion and describe how, roughly at the age of fifteen, under the influence of his educational endeavours, he discovered the doctrine of Deism. He first “began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle’s Lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist” (Franklin 54).

First and foremost, Franklin believed that the relationships among people themselves are more important than the relationship of people with God. He discards the ten commandments as solid moral imperative, although he does not doubt their good nature. He acknowledges that the actions should be forbidden or commanded not because it satisfies any higher power, but because it is harmful or beneficial to the people themselves to behave in such a way (Franklin 55). Nevertheless, Franklin respected all religions in their essence, preaching the immortality of the soul and providing people with the moral framework to which they would perhaps not arrive by themselves and their reason (Franklin 75). Though, like Franklin and Equiano, he does not automatically match morality with religion, particularly where people are concerned, and addresses cases of hypocrisy (for example regarding the political efforts of Quakers) (Franklin 76, 107). He develops his own complex system of virtues, or moral code independent of religion and concentrated around the human being and their behavior in this world and to this world.

With the above mentioned facts about Franklin’s attitude towards religion, it is of no surprise that in *Way to Wealth*, Christianity plays a rather marginal role. The Enlightenment focus on human reason and sense leave little space for distractions of the afterlife and the theme of

God is used as a device essential for achieving the desired goal, that is prosperity and affluence in this case, see the notorious saying: “However let us hearken to good advice, and something may be done for us; God helps them that help themselves, as Poor Richard says, in his almanac of 1733” (Franklin 2:1).

In addition, there are more instances of the need of “heavenly approval” to aid the striving reader with their intentions to reach material (spiritual, respectively) well-doing. These are in line with Puritan values and the proverbial “God helps those who help themselves”, effectively conditioning God’s blessing with the need of personal effort. See:

“What though you have found no treasure, nor has any rich relation left you a legacy, diligence is the mother of good luck, as Poor Richard says, and God gives all things to industry” (Franklin 2:2).

The final lines of the essay only conclude what had been hinted at earlier.

“This doctrine, my friends, is reason and wisdom; but after all, do not depend too much upon your own industry, and frugality, and prudence, though excellent things, for they may all be blasted without the blessing of heaven; and therefore ask that blessing humbly, and be not uncharitable to those that at present seem to want it, but comfort and help them. Remember Job suffered, and was afterwards prosperous” (Franklin 2:7)

However, had not the Benjamin Franklin admitted to being a firm and “thorough Deist” since quite an early age? One of the main premises of deism is that The Creator (God) who had built the world and set it upon its course does not intervene in its functioning anymore. Therefore, he would not be able to acknowledge the diligence and industry of people and reward them with success. Of course, there is the notion that it is only one of the laws of the nature that hard work brings bliss and as such could be considered a gift from God. On the other hand, *Way to Wealth* is largely told from the perspective of “Father Abraham”, hence it does not necessarily need to reflect Franklin’s beliefs utterly completely. It should have affect its readers first and foremost, and most of the readers probably did not share Franklin’s opinion of religion and the necessity of God’s consent and blessing was deemed only appropriate and increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the text, thus making it another literary device to increase the impact on its audience.

All slave narratives have in common the generally critical approach towards religious practice among the slaveholders (Douglass 258) – they behave inhumanly to the slaves while simultaneously proclaiming to be very and deeply religious people to the outside world. The resulting question is whether Christianity could (in retrospect) be seen as a positive influence which fostered the emancipation process or as a docility inducement element.

### 3.3.2 Anecdotes and stories used to illustrate the motivational and cautionary content

The structure of all the texts in question employs various anecdotes and stories within a story mostly with the purpose of illustrating the communicated values and/or serving as cautionary tales of a sort. Each of the works uses slightly different approach and purpose. Franklin's tactics is the most subtle and covert at the first look, however, an attentive reader who sees beyond the myriad of the wise maxims and aphorisms realises that the whole *Way to Wealth* is in fact an anecdote about „Father Abraham“ told by Franklin himself and the ultimate wisdom springing from the story lies in one of the very last lines: “Thus the old gentleman ended his harangue. The people heard it, and approved the doctrine, and immediately practiced the contrary, just as if it had been a common sermon” (Franklin 2:7).

It tells the reader that all of the advices in the book are generally well-known and approved by people, but only few can actually manage to live by them and stay „above the water“.

Equiano, apart from using several proverbs and sayings in their original forms and commenting on them, like Franklin, also features some quite interesting accounts of his foreseeing and warning dreams, as well as cautionary stories about other people (Equiano 127). The following has been chosen as a representative, for it is a typical one. In it, Equiano illustrates the power of Heavenly Providence, a motive which greatly concerns him, and also the benefits of regulating alcohol consumption and general sinful behaviour.

*Equiano's* crew had a sailor named John Mondle on board. He was a gunner, and as Equiano puts it, a man of very indifferent morals (52). His cabin was situated between the decks. One night, about four o'clock, he had a terrible dream and, frightened by it, he rose to the deck as he was no longer able to rest in his bed, nor even remain in the cabin.

“He went upon deck about four o'clock in the morning extremely agitated. He immediately told those on the deck of the agonies of his mind, and the dream which occasioned it; in which he said he had seen many things very awful, and had been warned by St. Peter to repent, who told him time was short. This he said had greatly alarmed him, and he was determined to alter his life. People generally mock the fears of others when they are themselves in safety; and some of his shipmates who heard him only laughed at him. However, he made a vow that he

never would drink strong liquors again; and he immediately got a light, and gave away his sea-stores of liquor” (Equiano 52).

It was still not sufficient a solution for the conscience-ridden sailor. He started reading the Scriptures with a hope of finding some relief. He was not able to fall asleep and was stricken by agony.

“By this time it was exactly half after seven in the morning: I was then under the half-deck at the great cabin door; and all at once I heard the people in the waist cry out, most fearfully—'The Lord have mercy upon us! We are all lost! The Lord have mercy upon us!' Mr. Mondle hearing the cries, immediately ran out of his cabin; and we were instantly struck by the *Lynne*, a forty-gun ship, Captain Clark, which nearly ran us down. This ship had just put about, and was by the wind, but had not got full headway, or we must all have perished; for the wind was brisk. However, before Mr. Mondle had got four steps from his cabin-door, she struck our ship with her cutwater right in the middle of his bed and cabin, and ran it up to the combings of the quarter-deck hatchway, and above three feet below water, and in a minute there was not a bit of wood to be seen where Mr. Mondle's cabin stood; and he was so near being killed that some of the splinters tore his face. As Mr. Mondle must inevitably have perished from this accident had he not been alarmed in the very extraordinary way I have related, I could not help regarding this as an awful interposition of Providence for his preservation” (Equiano 53).

Further, Equiano approves of the positive effect this occurrence had on Mondle.

“This escape of Mr. Mondle, which he, as well as myself, always considered as a singular act of Providence, I believe had a great influence on his life and conduct ever afterwards” (Equiano 52-53).

Douglass also presents several sayings and maxims in the *Narrative*... and, interestingly, uses several instances of a device of nomen omen in his narrative, eg. the names of Mr. Severe and Mr. Gore as particularly cruel overseers (Douglass 261, 267).

### 3.3.3 Conversion narrative

A relation to conversion narrative, a classical genre of American Puritan tradition can be traced in both self-help books as well as in the slave narratives. Although *The Way to Wealth* is not an ideal example, the latter category of slave narratives, in the case of this thesis Douglass's work, provide substantial matter for exemplification. A conversion narrative was "a testimony of personal religious experience [...] spoken or read aloud to the entire congregation of a gathered church before admission as evidence of the applicant's visible sainthood" (Campbell). The author of a conversion narrative was to look back, find in his life and put to paper (or spoken words) his personal encounter with acts of God's grace as well as his account of realizing God's divine power, developing fear and modesty and repenting and documenting their uplift from the wicked realm of sinnery to the heights of becoming a good Christian and a valuable member of the church indeed. It is therefore the author's recapitulation of their life up to then through a strictly religious perspective, public confession and justification of their true faith and relationship with almighty God, a verification of one's personal value as a Christian in front of the religious community. In its essence, they are to showcase his devotion to God and gain respect of the rest of their fellow believers. Conversion narratives are distinctive regarding their form, which was rather strict.

In Franklin, the original testimony of a religious experience of an individual is transformed into a rather economic one. It is a story and a subtle confession of a materially successful man and a well-respected figure, who had decided to share it with his readers. In *The Way to Wealth*, Franklin ventures in a perfect neo-classical enlightenment tradition to attempt to carry out an analysis of the anatomy of material success through a simple narrative framework and a variety of short anecdotes and advices put in a proverbial manner. He preaches from the authority of a man who "had made it", had earned his place among the elite of the society and creates the impression that any reader, provided he follows his simple, yet sophisticated rules of wisdom, can get to a similar point of acquiring wealth, regardless of circumstances.

From Daniel Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*: "The spiritual autobiographer is primarily concerned with the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been

accepted into divine life, an acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes which the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience” (Shea).

The psychological and moral changes which occur in the main protagonists during the course of the slave narratives are not primarily described to illustrate their faith in their ideals and to secure themselves a place among leading abolitionists, however, there is a major similarity between these two types of American antebellum literature. Whereas the original Puritan conversion narratives were predominantly the tools to determine an individual “worthiness” of being accepted and respected into the church and strived to make impression of the author and his faith on the readers or listeners, they also drew attention to the enormous, awe-inspiring greatness of the powerful God and moved the audience to contemplate it. Ultimately, they could motivate other, maybe not-so-resolute Christian people to try to become more erudite and passionate about their knowledge of God.

Similarly, the slave narratives, using the identical retrospective autobiographical form aim at their audience by describing the development of their development and gradual change of their view of slavery. They expose the issue of slave-holding, slavery and its effects to the reader for what it is from their own personal point of view and provide a source for the reader’s approach to the matter. The motivation for the creation of conversion narratives was inherently rather intrinsic, to express one’s faith and to reinforce it by trying to find acts of God in their lives. However, the slave narratives, to a certain degree, spring up from the desire to make an impact on the general audience and motivate them for the cause of abolitionism.

There are some striking similarities and analogies as far as the formal structure of both conversion and slave narratives is concerned. Below is a general morphology of a typical Puritan conversion narrative as stated by Thomas Hooker, an influential Puritan figure and one of the colonial leaders of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, founder of the Colony of Connecticut (Campbell).

- Contrition. Man should look into the Law of God and make an examination of his life and state according to the Law.
- Humiliation. Conviction of conscience by which seeker realizes that he is under sin.
- Vocation. Despair of salvation, in respect to strength of self and other creatures.
- Implantation. True humiliation of heart, grief and fear because of sin. Confession.

- Exaltation. First entrance into the state of saving grace.
- Possession. Awareness of presence of faith.

A looser formulation of the essential steps of a conversion narrative is provided by Yale historian Harry Stout which is better suited for direct comparison with a selected canonical piece of slave narrative, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life...* (Campbell).

- Agitations of the soul lead to the sinner's deep sense of humiliation at his condition.

Young Frederick is shocked to witness the first acts of barbaric violence conducted upon his aunt Hester at the beginning of the narrative. It was the first time he was to be an observer to such atrocity and it shakes him greatly. He then further proceeds to realistically depict the conditions in which the slaves were kept, their everyday routines and the unfortunately too frequent acquaintance of the slaves with the “gory lash” of the overseer. There are numerous other instances of the author's self-pity and realizations of the poor state he finds himself in. The difference between the discourse of a conversion narrative and a slave narrative is that while the author of the former one is disturbed and humiliated by the condition of their soul from their own accord and they can be held responsible for their lack of religious fervor and faith so far, in the latter instance the slave is only an object that had been planted into the hugely unfavourable condition and it is seemingly not within his power to change such situation. The slave gradually realizes that their situation is unnatural and inhuman in its very essence despite it being justified by any means available by the slaveholding populace and also comes to the conclusion that escape is his only hope of gaining freedom and confirmation of his identity.

This very realisation instills bitter despair and pity upon the slave, even though it is still very vague and avoids an explicit and complex formulation, as it happens at later stages of slave narratives, when the protagonist is given more chances to contemplate and is usually confronted with external sources of abolitionist nature. It is prominently displayed in the *Narrative* in the memorable passage describing the songs the slaves used to sing when marching in columns to the Great House Farm, an agricultural center of the neighboring fields, which was considered a prestigious assignment, of course, within the bounds of slavery. Which means that it still presented the slave with exhausting hard work, physical and mental abuse and little space for respite, but at least the absence of a whip-wielding overseer of the fields was certainly an advantage, along with the perceived confidence the master

supposedly put into their slaves chosen to work on the farm. Douglass admits that at the time when he was still a slave and would hear the songs frequently, he was not able to fully grasp the “deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs” and view them as symbols of the above mentioned sensation, for he “was himself within the circle”, he “neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear” (Douglass 263). His eyes were yet to be fully opened, however, from his the importance he attributes the songs and the much elaborated on feelings of sadness and sorrow that overcome him when recollecting them it is possible to estimate that he had been indeed deeply touched by hearing the songs already when firmly rooted within the confinements of physical and spiritual slavery, though obviously not in the same way as later on and that the foundations of the above realization of his poor state and by extension the state of all his fellow slaves could be attributed to this point in his story.

- The stricken sinner attempts to redress the wrongs he has done through “legal obedience” to the covenant of works. He turns to good works as a remedy, but this effort fails and he is brought to deeper despair.

After Douglass is transferred to Baltimore as a young slave, he is surprised at the finding that his new mistress, the wife of Hugh Auld. Coming from the harsh reality of life of a rural slave, the so called “field hand” toiling at the plantation under the strictest supervision, he is quite shocked at the kind welcoming he receives upon arrival to his new “family” and his treatment by Mrs. Auld. He is to look after the little son of the Aulds. He embraces his new situation with hope and prospect. From a later perspective of a free man, he regards this point as a turning one in the respect of his subsequent way to freedom and considers it source of his “deep conviction that slavery will not always be able to hold him within its foul embrace” that would later materialize itself within him and ultimately shape his entire life (Douglass 273). Such sentiment must have been strongly reinforced by an event of utmost importance to Douglass – the chance to learn how to read and write. He is given the most unusual privilege for a slave by his new mistress who, originally unacquainted with the institution of slavery and instead a person used to working at their own, treats Frederick with much kindness and understanding, as mentioned before The course of Douglass’s path towards literacy is but shortly abruptly obstructed by an intervention of Mr. Auld who discovers that his wife had been teaching the slave his ABCs. He is thus prevented from further learning and becomes a witness to an explanation his master gives to Mrs. Auld as to why “a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best

nigger in the world”, he proclaimed (Douglass 274). As elaborated in the chapter on the importance on knowledge and education, this act served as a catalyst to spark the desire for freedom in youthful coloured boy and he resolves to gain literacy by any means available to him. By a blend of neoclassical common sense and romantic intuition he realizes that it is his gateway towards future freedom (Douglass 275). Optimistically, he continues to support his endeavours by employing various stratagems to learn to read and write, including taking advantage of local boys as teachers or stealthily snatching books to practice on from his master’s household. This way, he happened to stumble upon a compilation of essays, poems and other literary works called *The Columbian Orator*, which was then widely used as a material for schoolchildren to practice their reading. Its spirit is generally Republican, patriotic and in favour of human rights and it features a dialogue between a slave and his master. All of the basic arguments against and for slavery are put across there and the anti-slavery stance prevailed, effectively exposing all that is rotten about slavery and that the relationship between a slavemaster and a slave is based upon a superior power only and nothing else (Orator, 242). Douglass claims and it is evident from his *Narrative* that after a relatively optimistic period of pursuit of literacy and positive hopes for the future, the “good works” in our context of analogy with conversion narrative, he falls into great despair and depression from his state.

- The sinner experiences abject despair and misery. He sees all his efforts as vain and inconsequential before a perfect God.

After Douglass’s eyes had been opened by his seek of knowledge and the internalization of the argumentation provided by the dialogue in *The Columbian Orator*, accompanied by a lively interest in all things connected with the efforts of abolitionism. He is desperate and loses his hope for a better future. For now he understands the gross injustice of slavery and possesses the intellectual material to back it up, however, he is unable to change his situation in any way. Later, he is removed from Baltimore back to the plantation and the farm he was brought up at for a valuation and ranking of property.

The scene is very vividly and touchingly described in the *Narrative*... It is a scene of heart-breaking acts of separating the slaves and selling them. The sorrow felt at the loss of dear family members, children torn from their parents’ embrace to never be seen again, forced separation of siblings and close family members, brothers eternally deprived of the sight of

their sisters and vice versa could symbolize the mental trauma most of the slaves had endured and eventually had had to grow resistant to (Douglass 284). Such disintegration of a family community must take its toll on young men and women born into slavery by causing such disintegration of their mind and soul, making them suppress their own identities and become the apathetic beings waiting to meet their sad fate. It is described by Douglass. Douglass' depression and awareness of his hopeless condition and simultaneously the loathing of the slavemasters grow. He is sent back to work in the field. After an episode with an incompetent and hypocritical master, a recent convert, he is deemed "unsuitable for his purpose", for "his city life had ruined him" (Douglass 275). It is therefore safe to assume that his intellectual endeavours and his views of slavery did not remain discrete and he had caught the attention of his master who proceeded to lease him to Edward Covey.

Mr. Covey has a reputation for treating his slaves with great cruelty and inconsideration, and being sent to him is usually intended as a punishment or means of pacifying, demoralizing and both physically and mentally abusing ("breaking") potentially disobedient slaves and making them "drink the bitterest dregs of slavery" (Douglass 293). Such was the case of Douglass. Here, after months of hard work for which he was not qualified stretching from sunset to sundown, daily bloody whippings and humiliation and far from the reach of any means of intellectual stimulation he reaches the deepest bottom of the abyss. Douglass eventually admits in one of the long lamenting monologues, which are characteristic for this point in the narrative, that Covey had indeed succeeded in breaking him and making a brute out of him (Douglass 293). This phase of desperation, or implantation, in the terminology of Thomas Hooker finally reaches a climactic point, another of several defining moments in the whole story.

- At the most abject moment of despair, the soul begins to understand God's grace and is elevated to an appreciation of it.

Just when Douglass starts to give up on his hopes of freedom and better life, as it is reduced to simply surviving, a sudden occurrence takes place which will newly define him and change the course of the narrative. Douglass is severely beaten again and forced to work even though he is by no means able to. After an impulsive decision, he staggers from the view of the slavemaster and manages to run away. Few days later, he comes back to the farm and gets into a struggle with Edward Covey, during which he at one point refuses to comply and

retaliates. He successfully fights off the master and his two companions. This ejection concentrated grievances and injustices manifested itself in this act of revolt and self-assertion (Douglass 299). The desperate and ruined person turned „brute“ finds his dignity again along with a strong sense of identity and determination to never let himself descend to be violated by the slaveholders again without defending himself to his last breath. In the confrontation, he starts to see the “light” of freedom yet again in the distance, discovers the power of self, as he is on his way to “salvation” from now on.

- Gratitude causes the sinner to live a life of obedience and thanksgiving, although human nature and pride may cause the sinner to backslide and to rely on his own will and works once again. Because of this temptation, individuals must continually monitor their spiritual state and repeat the process of conversion if necessary.

“This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence and inspired me again with a determination to be free” (Douglass 298). The quote from the *Narrative...* itself illustrates best how important a change the confrontation caused in the psyche of the main protagonist.

Since the incident with Edward Covey, Douglass had been on his way toward obtaining freedom, had a goal and a moral code, he had followed it throughout the remainder of his story. He vowed to never let any white man lay hand on him and he adhered to the resolution. As by the effect of such moral power, Covey never attempts to abuse him again and when he returns to Baltimore he makes an intrepid stance and fights with the carpenters in the shipyard. Also, he undertakes concrete steps to remove the burden of slavery from him and escape to the north. During this second stay in Baltimore, it is at this stage that the above mentioned aspects achieve concourse with the spiritual and material uplift aspects.

The aforementioned structural similarities indeed serve as evidence that in American literary tradition, the genre of slave narratives is indeed preceded and influenced by an older phenomenon of the so called Puritan conversion narratives. It is obvious that there are certain points which differ diametrically, especially in the last stage and in the overall outcome and moral of the whole narrative. Eg. the slave, unlike the convert, ultimately relies heavily upon himself and his own deeds instead of God’s grace and is unlikely to “backslide” into the mindset of a “broken” slave, once free. Structurally, though, the two forms share several

traceable similarities and overlaps. It is clear that the genre of slave narrative builds upon and is influenced by the Puritan conversion narrative.

Olaudah Equiano's story is partly also a conversion narrative in itself, from several perspectives. It can be viewed either from the perspective of an African converting to the Western way of life and Christianity or a story of a black slave becoming free after many blunders and stumbles to fight against slavery as a prominent figure of the Abolitionist movement in the Great Britain.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The thesis has compared and contrasted the works by Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass and Olaudah Equiano, in which it looked for signs of possible influence, specifically of the former on the latter, and meeting points.

As the thesis demonstrates, there are indeed meeting points. It was not the aim to historically prove the direct effect, but the analogies and meeting points of self-help books and slave narratives are rather obvious and detectable in the texts, although probably not intended.

After examining and juxtaposing the works, there are traceable analogies exposing the elements of the self-help genre in the slave narratives despite the difference of the time of production of all three, especially the narratives. Moreover, the application of the structural framework of the conversion narrative on Douglass's *Narrative* also revealed influence and connection with the said genre.

The analogies are both structural and in content. There is the possibility to see slave narratives as a specific variation of the self-help books, or at least to allow the possibility of them being interpreted thus by recognition of typical self-improvement elements certainly present in the works. These, among others, feature the focus on individual uplift. The taxonomy of uplift comprises of distinct aspects of material and spiritual self-improvement, yet inter-connected and inseparable in the conception of a virtuous and free man and citizen. Religion provides undisputable moral scaffolding for the uplift. However, it also provides grounds for social criticism, particularly elaborated in the slave narratives.

Therefore, slave narratives not only to inspire towards abolitionism with their primary objective, but also can lead the reader to improve their own life in a variation on the archetypal self-help literature. It could, in a limited fashion, work even with present readers. There is an affiliation between the self-improvement books of eighteenth century represented by *The Way to Wealth* by Benjamin Franklin and the slave narratives of both eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century origin, along with the influence of other literary genres and social and political phenomena. These would be the subject of a different research, however.

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