

Frontispiece Portraiture and the Shaping of Authorship



Dr. Rachael Isom (risom@astate.edu)

Assistant Professor of English, Arkansas State University
for the Bradbury Art Museum, Jonesboro, AR, May 2024

Guiding Questions

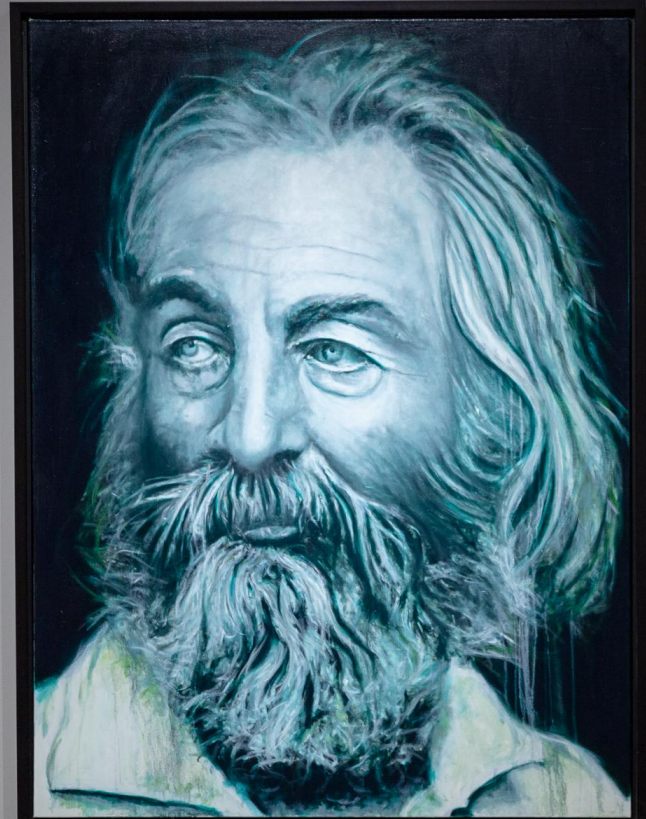
What are frontispiece portraits?

How did their conventions develop and change over literary history?

How have writers used them to assert their authorship and promote their work?

How might this history inform our approaches to viewing the author portraits in Ray Allen Parker's *Panoply* at BAM?

Ray Allen Parker, *Leaves of Grass: Walt Whitman* (2021), oil on canvas, Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.



frontispiece

“an illustration preceding and usually facing the title page of a book or magazine” (*Merriam-Webster*)



FRANKENSTEIN.

*By the glimmer of the half-extinguished
light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the
creature; there it burst forth, and a
convulsive motion agitated its limbs.
... I rushed out of the room.* Page 40.

London, Published by H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1821.

FRANKENSTEIN,

BY

MARY W. SHELLEY.



*The day of my departure at
length arrived.* Page 51.

LONDON:
COLBURN AND BENTLEY,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1821.

Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library. "Frankenstein: or, The modern Prometheus; to which is added vol. 1 of F. Schiller's The Ghost-Seer." [New York Public Library Digital Collections](https://www.nypl.org/digital/collections/nypl/frankenstein).

The Frontispiece Portrait in Literary History

“From the 1520s onwards, the number of books of living scholars and poets published with an author’s portrait increased rapidly By the 18th century the frontispiece portrait had become the most common type of image in books.”

“[T]hey were also instruments for the production of authority and reputation”—tools for ensuring both “prestige” and “publicity.”

(Hole Rößler, “The Frontispiece Portrait and Its Critics,” pp. 127, 124)

The Frontispiece as Promotion

“[A]uthors deploy non-narrative print artifacts to shore up desired readings and anchor their books in print tradition.”

For many books, the frontispiece image served as “graphic self-promotion.”

(Janine Barchas, “Prefiguring Genre,” pp. 118, 123)



William Faithorne, *Katherine Philips (née Fowler)*, line engraving, 1667, NPG D22901, National Portrait Gallery, London.

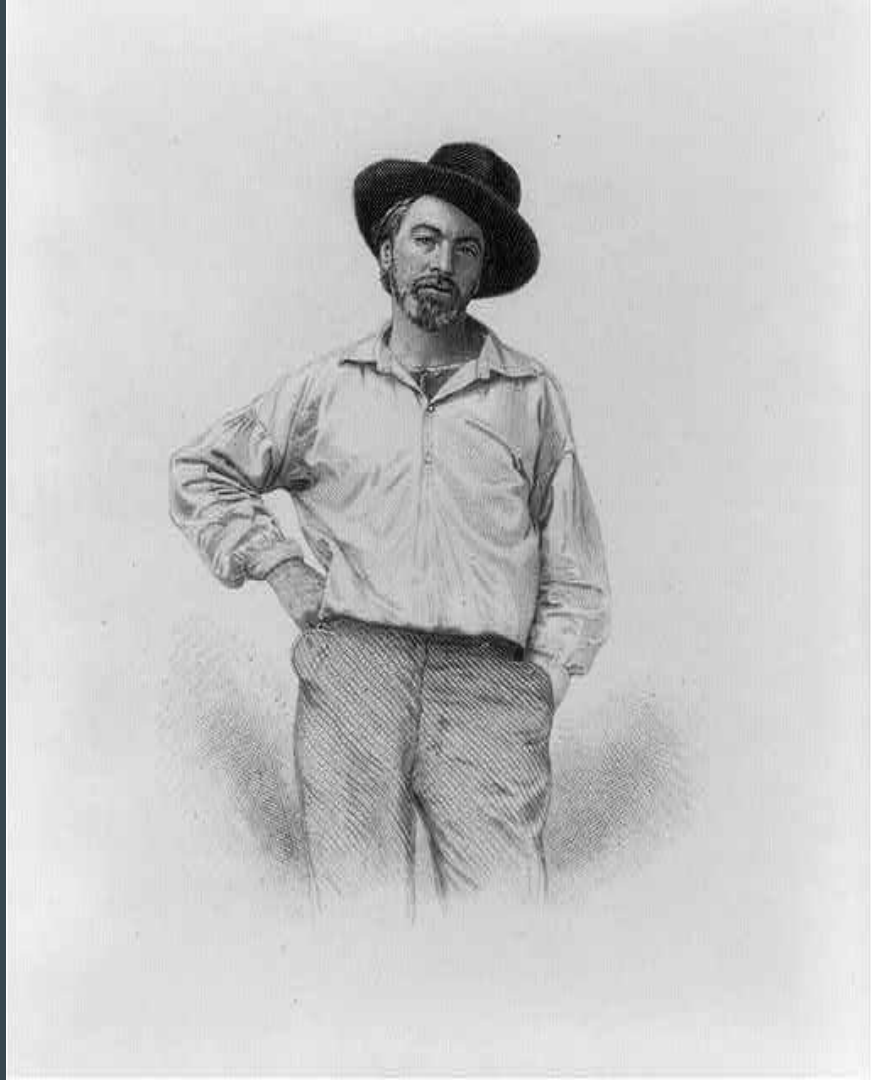


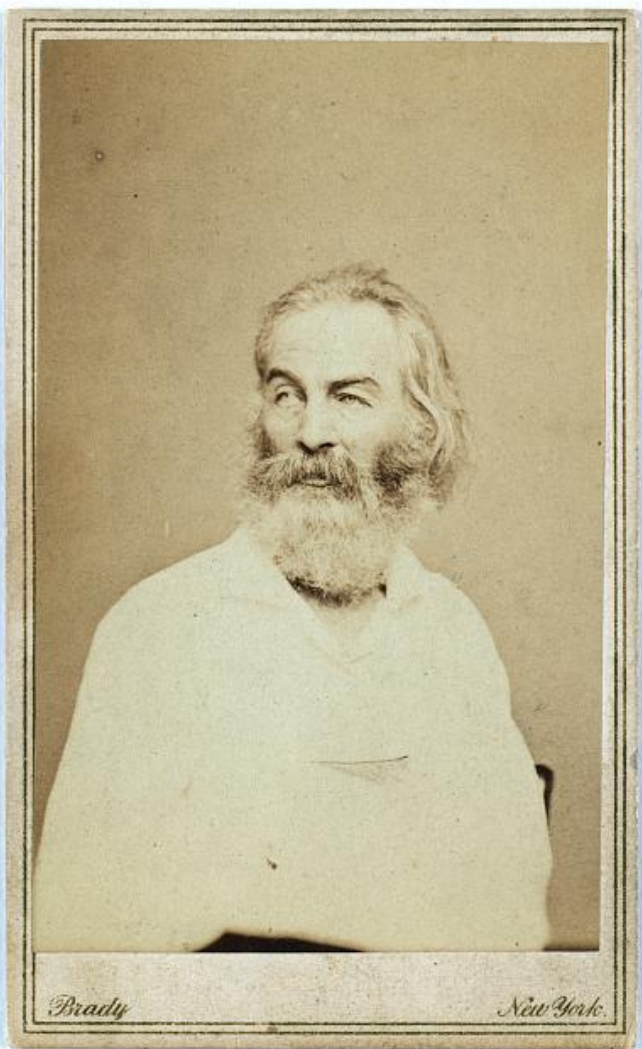
Leaves
of
G r a s s .

Brooklyn, New York:
1855.

"Leaves of Grass, 1855." Walt Whitman at the Lilly. Indiana University Bloomington.

Samuel Hollyer, *Walt Whitman* (1854), steel engraving after a lost daguerreotype by Gabriel Harrison, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-82784

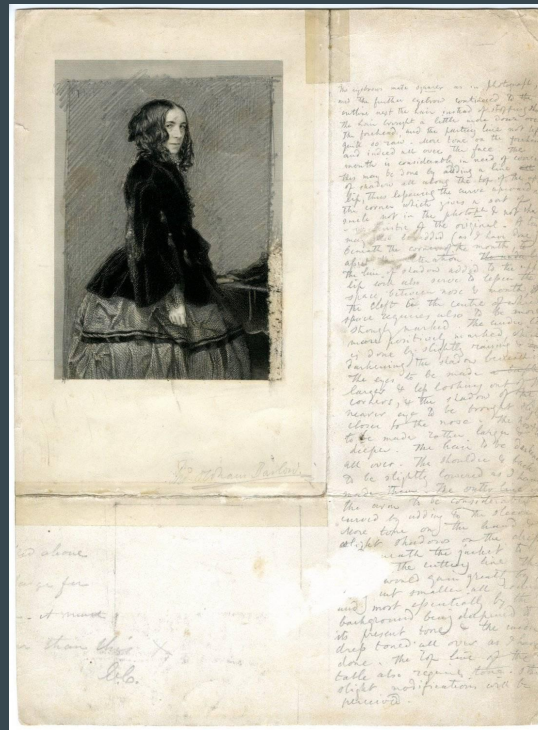




Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, [Walt Whitman, half-length portrait, seated in chair, facing left] (1862), albumen print on carte de visite mount, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-08541.

Mathew Brady, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1859), retouched photograph of an ambrotype by Louis Cyrus Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, EBB32, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University.





Dante Gabriel Rossetti, correction notes, pencil on engraver's proof, *The Browning Collections*, L0229, Armstrong Browning Library.

T. O. Barlow, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1859), engraving of an ambrotype by Louis Cyrus Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, EBB34.

The Frontispiece Portrait as Expression of Genius

“Portraits of literary authors have their own unique set of conventions. Key elements include the tools of the trade—the pen, inkpot, paper, book, and sometimes writing desk. The pose expresses the author’s mental state, typically one of absorption or melancholy, and physiognomy, which a painter might exaggerate to signify the sitter’s genius.”

(Michele Martinez, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture,” pp. 63-64)



Published according to Act of Parliament, Sept. 1773 by Arch.^d Bell.

Bookfeller N^o 8 near the Saracens Head Aldgate.

P O E M S

O N

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL.

B Y

PHILLIS WHEATLEY,

NEGRO SERVANT to Mr. JOHN WHEATLEY,
of BOSTON, in NEW ENGLAND.

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. BELL, Bookfeller, Aldgate; and sold by
Messrs. COX and BERRY, King-Street, BOSTON.

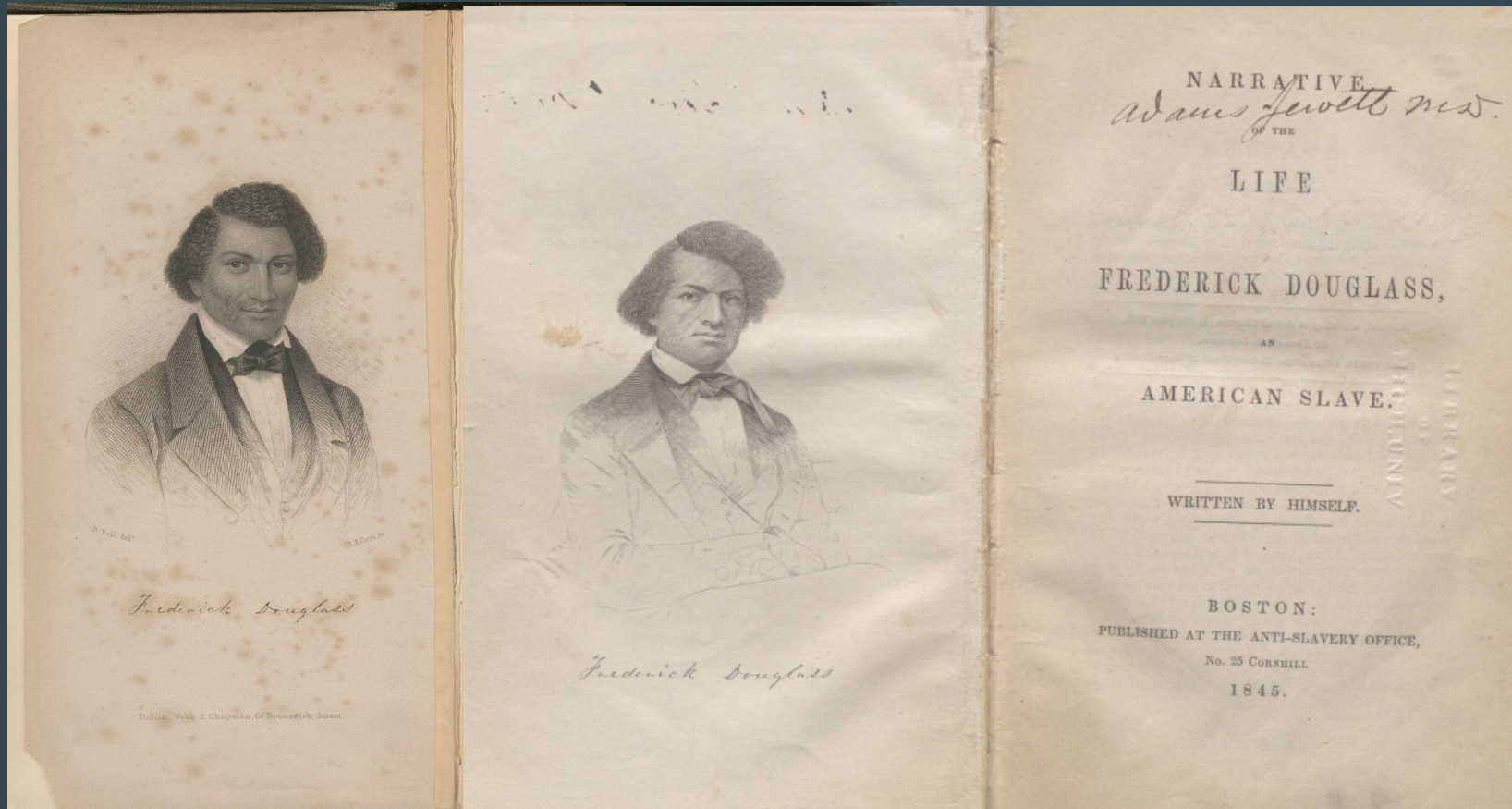
MDCCLXXIII.

“The Author’s Image: Frontispiece Portraits.” *Framing Identity: Representations of Empowerment and Resilience in the Black Experience.* William L. Clements Library.

The Frontispiece Portrait as Assertion of Identity

“Engraved portraits . . . served as particularly appropriate openings to slave narratives, a genre centered on confirmations of identity and celebrations of free individuals emerging from an institution that strove to keep such individuality invisible, blank, and unformed.”

(Ed Folsom, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Slave,” p. 425)



Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave (frontispiece and title page)." [New York Public Library Digital Collections](#).

"Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave (frontispiece and title page)." [University of Michigan Library Online Exhibits](#).

The Frontispiece as Legacy

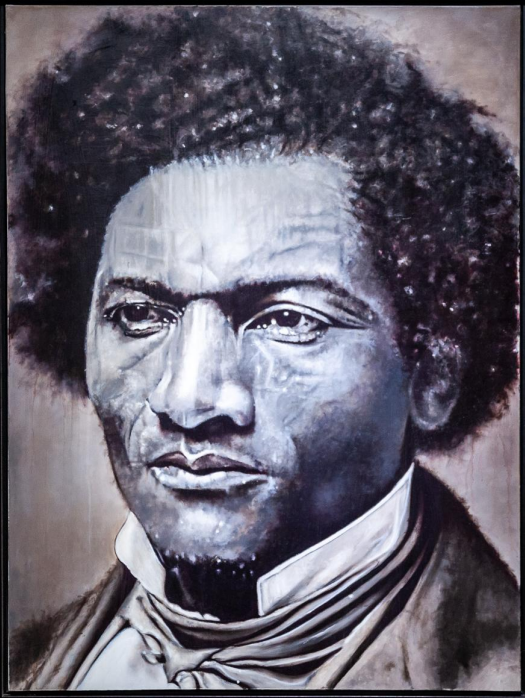
“The circulation of her image was used to shape her own brand of authorship—and . . . has continued to shape how we think and write about her in the present day.”

(Sarah Creel, “[Re]framing Eliza Haywood,” pp. 25-26)

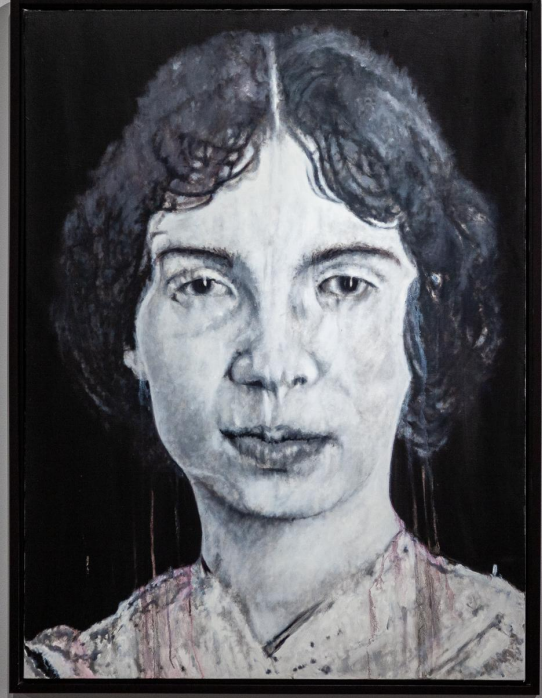
Frontispiece, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, by Martha Dickinson Bianchi
(Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924. [Internet Archive](#).)



Ray Allen Parker's *Panoply: 26 Painted Lives*



Ray Allen Parker, *American Slave: Frederick Douglass* (2022), oil on canvas, Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.



Ray Allen Parker, *Because I could not stop for death: Emily Dickinson* (2022), oil on canvas, Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.

Ray Allen Parker's *Panoply: 26 Painted Lives*

As we've seen, historical frontispiece portraits reflected the aims of authors, editors, or publishers. *Panoply*, on the other hand, offers an avid reader's view. How does this perspective shift inform our viewing of the exhibition?

In *Panoply*, Parker emphasizes a specific work for each author. What does it mean for a book to influence a portrait (rather than a portrait, as paratext, shaping a book)? Do your own readings of these books affect your experience?

How are portraits like these similar to and/or different from author photos that we see on book covers or dust jackets today? What do such conventions say about the changing priorities of authors, publishers, or readers?

Images (in order of appearance)

Parker, Ray Allen. *Leaves of Grass: Walt Whitman* (2021), oil on canvas. Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.

Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library. "Frankenstein: or, The modern Prometheus; to which is added vol. 1 of F. Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer*" *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b3fb8df5-e0c9-458f-e040-e00a18064389>.

Faithorne, William. *Katherine Philips (née Fowler)*, line engraving, 1667, NPG D22901. National Portrait Gallery, London. Accessed April 16, 2024. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw39786/Katherine-Philips-ne-Fowler>.

"1855 frontispiece." *The Lilly Library Online Exhibitions*. Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/lilly/exhibitions/items/show/1436>.

"1855 title." *The Lilly Library Online Exhibitions*. Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/lilly/exhibitions/items/show/1437>.

Hollyer, Samuel. *Walt Whitman* (1854). Steel engraving after a lost daguerreotype by Gabriel Harrison. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-82784. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002710162/>.

Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, [Walt Whitman, half-length portrait, seated in chair, facing left] (1862). Albumen print on carte de visite mount. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-08541. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99406018/>.

Brady, Mathew. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1859). Retouched photograph of an ambrotype by Louis Cyrus Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod. *The Brownings' Correspondence*, EBB32, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/browning-likenesses/?browning-likenesses%2F=&id=1&action=browningLikenesses&page=3#likeness-gallery-10>.

Barlow, T. O. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1859). Engraving of an ambrotype by Louis Cyrus Macaire and Jean Victor Macaire-Warnod. *The Brownings' Correspondence*, EBB34, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/browning-likenesses/?browning-likenesses%2F=&id=1&action=browningLikenesses&page=3#likeness-gallery-12>.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. Correction notes, pencil on engraver's proof. *The Browning Collections*, L0229, Armstrong Browning Library. Accessed April 4, 2024. https://www.browningguide.org/_images/generated/123e53f1380ba43f73093ff8acb24da2_1280733324-70.jpg.

Frontispiece and Title Page, *Aurora Leigh*, 4th ed. London: Chapman and Hall, 1859. In Megan Van Horn, "Images of Elizabeth Barrett Browning." *Nineteenth-Century Research Seminar*. Armstrong Browning Library. Baylor University. Accessed April 4, 2024. <https://blogs.baylor.edu/19crs/2016/06/30/images-of-elizabeth-barrett-browning/>.

"The Author's Image: Frontispiece Portraits." *Framing Identity: Representations of Empowerment and Resilience in the Black Experience*. William L. Clements Library. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/framing-identity/frontispiece-portraits/>.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave (frontispiece and title page)." *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. Accessed April 16, 2024. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/f2caf3f0-0a87-0130-2bbb-58d385a7b928>.

"Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave (frontispiece and title page)." *University of Michigan Library Online Exhibits*. Accessed April 16, 2024. <https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/items/show/8543>.

Frontispiece, *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, by Martha Dickinson Bianchi (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924. *Internet Archive*. Accessed April 16, 2024. https://archive.org/details/dicklife_544424/page/n7/mode/2up.

Parker, Ray Allen. *American Slave: Frederick Douglass* (2022), oil on canvas. Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.

Parker, Ray Allen. *Because I could not stop for death: Emily Dickinson* (2022), oil on canvas. Permanent Collection, Arkansas State University Collection.

Works Cited and Consulted (listed alphabetically)

- Barchas, Janine. "Prefiguring Genre: Frontispiece Portraits from Gulliver's Travels to Millennium Hall." *Studies in the Novel* 51.1 (2019): 118-144.
- Blake, David Haven. *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Casmier-Paz, Lynn A. "Slave Narratives and the Rhetoric of Author Portraiture." *New Literary History* 34.1 (2003): 91-116.
- Chaney, Christine. "The 'Poet Prophet's Book.'" *SEL* 48.4 (2008): 791-799.
- Creel, Sarah. "(Re)framing Eliza Haywood: Portraiture, Printer's Ornaments, and the Fashioning of Female Authorship." *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14.4 (2014): 25-48.
- Earnhart, Brady. "The Good Gray Poet and the Quaker Oats Man: Speaker as Spokescharacter in Leaves of Grass." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 24.4 (2007): 179-200.
- Egan, Gerald. "Radical Moral Authority and Desire: The Image of the Male Romantic Poet in Frontispiece Portraits of Byron and Shelley," *The Eighteenth Century* 50.2-3 (2010): 185-205.
- Folsom, Ed. "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Slave: Douglass's Frontispiece Engravings." In *Approaches to Teaching Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, edited by James C. Hall, 55-65. New York: MLA, 1999.

Genoways, Ted. "‘One goodshaped and wellhung man’: Accentuated Sexuality and the Uncertain Authorship of the Frontispiece to the 1855 Edition of *Leaves of Grass*." In *Leaves of Grass: The Sequicentennial Essays*, edited by Susan Blasco et al., 87-123. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

Longworth, Polly. *The World of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Norton, 1990.

Martinez, Michele. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Perils of Portraiture." *Victorian Review* 37.1 (2011): 62-91.

Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. s.v. "frontispiece." Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/frontispiece>.

Peterson, William S. "‘My Spiritual Face’: A Newly Discovered Portrait of Mrs. Browning." *Browning Institute Studies* 5 (1977): 1-22.

Rößler, Hole. "The Frontispiece Portrait and Its Critics: Visual and Verbal Tactics for Undermining the Social Productivity of Printed Portraits in Early Modern Scholarly Culture." In *Gateways to the Book: Frontispieces and Title Pages in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Gitta Bertram and Nils Büttner, 124-148. Boston: Brill, 2021.

Simonsen, Peter. "Self Generations: On Wordsworth’s Frontispiece Portraits." In *Angles on the English-Speaking World*, volume 3. Edited by Lene Østermark-Johansen, 113-127. Copenhagen: Museum of Tusulanum Press, 2003.

Waldstreicher, David. *The Odyssey of Phillis Wheatley: A Poet’s Journey through American Slavery and Independence*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023.

Walsh, Susan. "‘Doing the Afra Behn’: Barrett Browning’s Portrait of the Artist." *Victorian Poetry* 36.2 (1998): 163-136.

Yook, Eun-Jung. "Aurora Triumphans: Portraits and the Gaze in Aurora Leigh." *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 12.2 (2004): 181-208.