

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by S. Scott Blue entitled "Alex Haley and the Writing of the Autobiography of Malcolm X." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communications.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul Ashdown", written over a horizontal line.

Paul Ashdown, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "CB Canfield", written over a horizontal line.A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Cynthia Griggs Fleming", written over a horizontal line.

Accepted for the Council:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Leorninkel", written over a horizontal line.

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

Alex Haley and the Autobiography of Malcolm X

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

S. Scott Blue

December, 1994

Copyright © S. Scott Blue, 1994
All rights reserved

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife

Mrs. Susan R. Blue

who is my best friend

and to my parents

Dr. Edwin G. Blue

and

Mrs. Judith C. Blue

who taught me what to value in life

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major advisor, Dr. Paul Ashdown, for his persistence, motivation and guidance. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Ed Caudill and Dr. Cynthia Fleming, for their expertise and advice. Thanks also to my wife Susan, without whom this project would have never been completed. Thank you, as well, to friends Dr. Ralph Joly, Joe Fields, Jerry Andrews, Lyndon and Charlie Johnson, Judy Higgins, Adrian Dawson, Ericka Prentice, Jose Parrilla, Charles Oliver, Marwin Kline, Darius Pemberton, Lawrence Johnson, Donnell Dunning, George and Pearl Watts, and Gladys Beach. Finally, much appreciation and thanks to Mr. George Haley for allowing me to use the Alex Haley Papers as a resource in this project.

ABSTRACT

This thesis provides insight into Alex Haley's writing of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, first arguing that it resembles Haley's earlier *Playboy* Interview with Malcolm X via Kenneth Burke's form of rhetoric known as dramatism. Second, through his technique, Haley practically invented a new form of journalism that shares many elements with a relatively new genre of reportage known as literary journalism. Third, a look at the initial reviews of the *Autobiography* were summarized. Fourth, the unique collaborative process between Malcolm X and Alex Haley explored. Finally, Alex Haley's own correspondence was studied to reveal firsthand the process of the book's writing.

These exercises tell a story of Alex Haley's six-year struggle with the "as told to" *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. It concludes that Haley's challenge was to create a humanized Malcolm X, and he did so building on the same method used in his *Playboy* Interview with Malcolm X, a method that Haley himself pioneered and is similar to literary journalism. He created a drama of everyday human experience through a collaborative venture with Malcolm X. In the end, Alex Haley facilitated a tragic hero of the 1960's civil rights struggle who is part cultural icon, part "Everyman."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF ALEX HALEY'S LIFE	1
Early Years	2
School and Service	2
Freelancer	5
Malcolm X -- The Book	8
Roots	9
II. HALEY'S MALCOLM X	16
The History of the <i>Playboy</i> Interview	16
Structure of the <i>Playboy</i> Interview With Malcolm X	20
The Book and the Interview: A Comparison	25
Structure and Comparison Analyzed	37
Literary Journalism and Malcolm X	38
III. THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND THE ALEX HALEY PAPERS	44
The Initial Reviews of the <i>Autobiography</i>	44
The Collaborative Process and A.E. Stone	50
The Alex Haley Papers	57
IV. CONCLUSIONS	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	69
APPENDIX	72
APPENDIX A: CHARTING THE CLIMACTIC ELEMENTS OF THE BOOK AND INTERVIEW	73
VITA	74

CHAPTER I

A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF ALEX HALEY'S LIFE

I sit here fascinated for hours, sometimes fuming on the typewriter as the unbelievable chrysalis spreads, unfolds, opens -- and from the little boy whose home burned, whose father was murdered, whose mother insane, a hornet finally emerges.
*Alex Haley - 1963*¹

Author Alex Haley brooded alone in a Greenwich Village basement apartment about the figure "spreading, unfolding and opening" onto his typewritten page that night in 1963. At 38 years old, he had fulfilled a long-time dream of residing in this literary and cultural center to succeed at writing. This evening found him struggling with one whom he often termed "America's Foremost Demagogue." He was working on the "as told to" autobiography of Malcolm X. Haley's six-year struggle with this man and his story is the subject of this thesis.

First, the thesis examines passages that are in both the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Alex Haley's *Playboy* Interview with Malcolm X. An analysis of both works using Kenneth Burke's form of rhetoric known as dramatism ensues. This exercise reveals that the *Autobiography* is an extension of the earlier interview and, as a result, that Alex Haley virtually invented a specialized form of journalism that shares many elements with a relatively new genre of reportage known as literary journalism. Literary journalism is then defined and those similarities exumed.

Third, a look at the initial reviews of the *Autobiography* takes place, followed by discussion of the unique collaborative process between Malcolm X and Alex Haley. Finally, Alex Haley's own correspondence is combed for clues concerning what he was thinking throughout the book's writing.

¹ From the Alex Haley Papers. The Estes Kefauver Special Collections Library at the University of Tennessee: Knoxville. Box 2, Folder 11. Letter dated October 20, 1963. This letter was written by Haley to his book agent, Paul Reynolds.

EARLY YEARS

Alex Haley was born on August 11, 1921, in Ithaca, New York, the oldest of Bertha George Palmer and Simon Alexander Haley's three children. At the time, both Haley's parents were in their first year of graduate school. His mother attended the Ithaca Conservatory of Music, while his father studied at Cornell.²

Mrs. Haley took her son to Henning, Tennessee, when he was just six weeks old. There he met some of his extended family for the first time and was coddled by his mother's parents, Will and Cynthia Palmer. After Bertha and Simon Haley completed their academic study, they moved to Henning so they might be closer to these relatives.³ It was here that Haley spent evenings on the porch as the women of the family told stories about their African past.

"I remember vines growing all around that porch," Haley told a Swiss television interviewer, "and things called fireflies would illumine the night as the women told stories about the slave days. I visited that porch from when I was quite small, up through my teenage years."⁴ The character that cropped up most often during those tales was a slave who, when "any of the other slaves called him by his slave name Toby, he would strenuously rebuff them, declaring that his name was 'Kin-tay'." These sessions stuck with Haley and later served as his inspiration for researching his family's past, leading to the epic *Roots*.⁵

SCHOOL AND SERVICE

Haley was a bright student, but his grades did not reflect his ability. He graduated from high school at the age of 15 with a C average. He progressed to undergraduate

² From Marilyn Kern Foxworth's "Alex Haley" entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Pg. 115.

³ From the Matteo Bellinelli directed *Alex Haley: A Conversation with Alex Haley*. RTSI-Swiss Television. 1992.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 116.

studies at Alcorn A&M in Lorman, Mississippi, and then transferred to Elizabeth City State Teachers College in North Carolina.⁶ Early on, it was apparent that Haley was an underachiever. This was not because "I couldn't, but because I didn't care that much about it," Haley explained. Teachers and professors described Haley as a day-dreamer. "They were absolutely right," Alex recalled. "I would think up stories in my head during class. I would imagine a scene and it would make me weep, while another would make me laugh."⁷

Because of his daydreaming tendencies, he was looked upon "like many who do that kind of thing--as one who is traveling down the beaten path because one is not conforming to what one should do." Simon Alexander Haley, Alex's father, was one such conformist. He knew his oldest son was doing poorly in school, and as an excellent teacher who expected the best, seeing his first-born's sub-par performance caused him embarrassment.⁸

The lad needed discipline. And where better could this be found than in one of America's armed forces. Simon Haley had served in WWI and found it pivotal in his own development as a man. Thus, he went shopping among the services for Alex. Upon discovering that the Air Force, Army, Marines and Navy all required a four-year enlistment, Simon Haley figured that the Coast Guard's three year commitment would be sufficient to benefit his son.⁹

"And so, at my father's urging (to put it charitably) I signed up," Haley said. "I discovered immediately that my father had done me a big favor. Life as a sailor was better in every aspect than the life of a student."

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Bellinelli. Op. Cit.

⁸Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

In 1939, being an African-American in the Coast Guard meant beginning in the "Steward Department." If one did well enough fetching items and shining shoes, one would ascend to cook. Haley rose quickly. He assumed the post of cook on an AKA95 known as USS Merzun, which was cruising in the Southwestern Pacific.¹⁰

"After fixing meals all day," he said, "I would go down to the mess and start writing letters--mainly to some of my father's friends, attempting to convince them that I was living a highly adventurous life." When mail call came, the typical sailor would receive around five letters. Haley averaged 35. He acquired the reputation of his ship's most prolific correspondent.¹¹ This acclaim quickly garnered crowds of sailors wanting Haley to write letters for them, especially to girlfriends. Haley recalls the scene:

I would sit in the mess with a stack of 3x5 cards. I would interview each sailor concerning their girlfriend and obtain vital information such as the color of their hair and eyes. After recording a card per girl, I would later write the letters using as much creativity as possible. Let's say they had blonde hair, I would write, 'Your hair is the color of the moon,' or something like that. When the men would return from shore leave, they came enthusiastically bearing tales of how they were received. Soon I was making a dollar a letter, and was writing enough letters to take in more than my Coast Guard salary.¹²

Haley's success as a letter-writer resulted in a career decision. Soon, Haley was sending in stories to "true-confession" magazines. Four years of rejection slips ensued. Murray Fisher, a *Playboy* magazine editor, discussed Haley's reaction when Haley received a note back from one of the publications that included a handwritten memo at the bottom stating, "Nice try."

"That was the most encouragement I'd ever received since the day I'd started writing four years before," Haley said, "but it was all I needed. I went back to work and,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

four years later, I finally made a sale," Haley said. That sale was to *This Week*, a syndicated Sunday newspaper supplement."¹³

Haley retired from Coast Guard service at 37. At the time of his departure, he held the rank of Chief Journalist. During his two-decades with the Guard, he married Nannie Branch. They had two children, William Alexander and Lydia Ann. Later separated for many years, they finally divorced in 1964. That same year, Haley married Juliette Collins. That marriage, too, ended in divorce. Collins bore Haley one child, Cynthia Gertrude.¹⁴

FREELANCER

Upon his return to civilian life, Haley was determined to continue writing. Once back into mainstream America, Alex began to see that life in the military served as a womb from which he drew money, camaraderie and support. When he found himself struggling as a free lancer, it became scary.¹⁵ He moved to New York, taking a basement apartment in Greenwich Village. Constantly in debt, Haley struggled while refining his craft.¹⁶

I owed everyone. One day a friend called with a Civil Service job as a public information specialist that paid \$6000 per year. Although I knew I was more than qualified for the position, I turned it down, I wanted to make it writing. My friend banged the phone down. I owed him \$15, too.

I looked around and saw that in this one room I had a desk consisting of a door laying across two sawhorses and a fold-out ottoman for a bed. Sitting on the ottoman, I took psychic inventory. I looked in the cupboard and there were two cans of sardines, marked for 21 cents. I had 18 cents in a sack and I said to myself that I'd keep them.¹⁷

¹³ From the Murray Fisher (ed.) 1993. *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Ballantine Books: New York. Pg. iii.

¹⁴ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 116.

¹⁵ Bellinelli. Op. Cit.

¹⁶ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 116.

¹⁷ Bellinelli. Op. Cit.

That next day, Haley received payment for a piece of published work. It served as a confirmation of his "psychic inventory."¹⁸ After receiving a \$20,000 check for doing the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, he happened to find the sardines and coins still in the sack. He subsequently framed the coins and cans and put them on display in his private library. He described them as a symbol of his "determination to be independent."¹⁹

As Haley began establishing himself in the late 1950's, he was assigned by *Reader's Digest* to do an article on the Nation of Islam and its spokesman, Malcolm X.

I'll never forget the first time I met Malcolm. I went to the Muslim restaurant in Harlem and said to the man at the counter that I wanted to speak with Malcolm X. The man, in turn, began asking me questions as to why I needed to see him. I didn't know that Malcolm was behind me, listening to our conversation in a phone booth. He popped out and took over the questioning when he realized I was harmless.²⁰

In 1962, Haley was approached by *Playboy* to write a "new type" of article on jazz frontiersman Miles Davis. *Playboy's* founder, Hugh Hefner, wanted to establish a niche not present in American magazines by running question and answer interviews with controversial/avant guard personalities of the day. As part of the plan, *Playboy* asked the approachable, easy-going journalist Alex Haley to try his hand at this format.²¹

Haley went the extra mile to satisfy Fisher on this assignment. At one point, he climbed into the ring and sparred with Davis for a couple of rounds at the jazz artist's gym.²² "Two weeks later he walked into my office and emptied a half dozen audiocassettes from his briefcase," Fisher said. This extended Q&A format became known as the "*Playboy* Interview." It enabled the interviewer to shape the direction of the

¹⁸ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 116.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bellinelli. Op. Cit.

²¹ From the Murray Fisher (ed.) 1993. *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Ballantine books: New York. Pg. iii.

²² Ibid.

conversation and hear an interviewee out without worrying about brevity.²³ The product from this first attempt proved successful. Haley became the crucial figure in the genre. "It stirred a hornet's nest of controversy, and set the tone for those that followed," Fisher said.²⁴

A year later, Haley was assigned Malcolm X. Even after cooperating on the *Reader's Digest* article, Malcolm X was skeptical. He told Haley to first ask the Nation of Islam's leader, the Rev. Elijah Muhammed. Haley flew to visit Elijah Muhammed and asked for permission. He was granted the interview. "True to his testy reputation," said Fisher, "Malcolm ran Alex through a gauntlet of distrust--taunting him for being a lackey of the 'white press,' suspecting him of being wiretapped by the government--before what grew slowly into a warm rapport."²⁵

May of 1963 saw the *Playboy* presses run "Malcolm X: A Candid Conversation with the Militant Major-domo of the Black Muslims." Malcolm X simply refused to believe that any white man would print any of his statements concerning the white man in America. He was shocked when *Playboy* ran the interview verbatim. It introduced the United States to both a powerful movement in America and its prime mover.²⁶ Malcolm X, known for his sharp dress and articulate manner, talked about injustices endured by minority blacks at the hands of a majority white population in the United States. He called for an end to white oppression by separating the two races in different land-masses. "Separation, not integration," was his cry.

²³ Ibid. Pg. iv.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. Pg. v.

MALCOLM X -- THE BOOK

The interview caught Doubleday Books' editor-in-chief Ken McCormick's attention. He was so moved by the piece that he approached Malcolm X and asked him to tell his life story to Haley. Although Doubleday dropped the book due to its content, Grove Press published it.²⁷

The book's writing was a roller-coaster ride for Haley. For weeks, he could not get Malcolm X to talk about his life; he would simply explain his beliefs and expound Nation of Islam rhetoric. Haley would say, "Mr. Malcolm, we have to have something about you." Malcolm X would immediately get angry. Haley knew that if he could not get something out of Malcolm X, there was little use continuing the book. The difficulty ended on a chilly evening in the Village:

Then came a cold winter's night in New York, with snow up to your knees. I turned to Malcolm once more and said, 'Mr. Malcolm, we have to get something about you.'

He was angry. He snatched up his coat, headed for the door and jerked it open. I said, and why I do not know, for it was not likely something I would have ever said under normal circumstances to Malcolm. I said, 'Mr. Malcolm, could you tell me something about your mother?'

I remember he just almost froze and he turned around, closed the door behind and began to walk the floor in a counter clockwise motion. 'It's funny you should ask me that,' he said. 'I remember the kind of dresses she used to wear--old, faded and gray. She was always bent over the stove.' He talked from that time, which was 11:30 p.m., until daybreak.²⁸

Haley struggled with money, missed deadlines and a Malcolm, whose life seemed to be continually metamorphasizing every month, week and sometimes day. Haley's first attempt at a larger work proved successful. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* sold 50,000 hard cover copies and five million paperback. It now is required reading in many high schools and colleges. Kern-Foxworth writes that "it was not uncommon to find young

²⁷ Ibid. Pg. vi.

²⁸ Bellinelli. Op. Cit.

black men on street corners, in subways or walking along the streets with copies of the book in their hands."²⁹

ROOTS

Just two weeks after the *Autobiography* was completed and sent off to his editors, Haley "wandered into the National Archives building in Washington D.C." and began researching his own genealogy.³⁰ The idea germinated and Haley even discussed it with his publishers during the writing of the *Autobiography*. He wanted to write something on his heritage and the heritage of all black people who found themselves in America.³¹ "Haley did not know that his initial search would eventually lead him to 50 or more archives, libraries and research repositories on three continents before his curiosity would be satisfied," Kern-Foxworth says.

Twelve years later, on October 1, 1976, *Roots* was published. Kern-Foxworth describes the work:

Roots is the story of Kunta Kinte, a Mandinkan from the small village of Juffure, Gambia, in West Africa, and his American descendants; he was 'the African' about whom Haley's grandmother and other relatives told stories. Haley imaginatively recreated his ancestor's life in Africa, his capture into slavery and his experiences in the new world

Haley had been fascinated and intrigued by the story from early childhood, because Kunta Kinte, he was told, refused to accept the ways and customs of his white masters and never forgot his African Heritage.³²

On the porch in Henning, Haley heard how Kinte would always remember his freedom. He would never give up the thought of escape until, after an unsuccessful fourth try, his foot was cut off by his owner. Alex Haley's grandmother, Cynthia, was a fourth

²⁹ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 116.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. Pg. 117.

generation relative of Kunte Kinte. She was the most significant influence on Haley's writing of *Roots*. Haley and his aunts, Viney, Mathilda and Liz, perpetuated the story of Kunte Kinte. Kern-Foxworth states that their porch became a forum. "Hundreds of thousands of Americans identified vicariously with the story of *Roots* both in its book form and in the television adaptation."

As with many of Haley's projects, the writing of *Roots* became an adventure. The dozen years of research and writing took him "hundreds of thousands of miles across three continents in an extraordinary search for his own origins."³³ Finally, in Gambia, West Africa, Haley said he encountered a tribal griot (an oral historian) in a remote village. The griot related the story of the most "distinguished family in the village." Haley learned that a fifth-generation ancestor from this family known as the Kintes went into the forest one day to chop down trees and was never heard from again.³⁴

"Using shipping records and cargo manifests, Alex found out the name of the actual ship that carried that 17-year-old boy, Kunta Kinte, to America, and the very day it docked in Annapolis: September 15, 1767."³⁵ Haley was obsessed with authenticity. He attempted to make his *Roots* as lifelike as possible. *Ebony* records one such attempt:

He somehow scrounged up some money and flew to Liberia where he booked passage on the first U.S. bound ship. Once at sea he spent the night lying on a board in the hold of the ship, stripped to his underwear to get a rough idea of what his African ancestor might have experienced....That same night, he says, he went back into the hold. Lying again on that board, it was as if some kind of catharsis had occurred. I felt for the first time that I was Kunta Kinte. From that moment on, I had no problem with writing what his senses had registered as he was crossing the ocean.³⁶

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alex Haley: *The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. xvi.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ From Hans J. Massaguoi's "Alex Haley in Juffure." *Ebony*. July, 1977. Pgs. 31-33.

Haley began writing. Five years past the project's deadline, "Kunte Kinte had not even made it to the shores of America," writes Fisher. Assuring his publisher that he could wrap the rest of the piece in six months, Alex "pried loose enough expense money to keep going and plunged onward. On shipboard and planes, in hideaways from San Francisco to the West Indies, he led the publisher on a merry chase for the next three years."³⁷

The last 200 pages of the book went directly from his desk to the typesetter after the manuscript was already in the galleys.³⁸ *Roots'* twelve years of writing did not take nearly as long to gain popularity and recognition. It won 271 awards in the two years following its publication, including the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1977.³⁹

Much of *Roots'* overnight success can be attributed to the mini-series which accompanied the book. It penetrated all sorts of barriers.⁴⁰ Kern-Foxworth said: "Instead of writing a scholarly monograph of little social impact, Haley has written a blockbuster in the best sense--a book that is bold in concept and ardent in execution, one that will reach millions of people and alter the way we see ourselves."⁴¹

Prior to its release in paperback, the book was used in over 250 college courses.⁴² Vernon Jordan, once the director of the National Urban League, said in a *Time* magazine

³⁷ *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. xvi.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ From Marilyn Kern Foxworth's "Alex Haley" entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Pg. 117.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ From W. Marmon's "Haley's RX: Talk, Write, Reunite." *Time*. 109:72. July, 14, 1977.

article that the televised version of *Roots* was "the single most spectacular educational experience in race relations in America."⁴³

Roots the television miniseries was aired eight nights in a row beginning on January 23, 1977. Over 130 million Americans tuned in.⁴⁴ "If it weren't for the fact that it's a true story *Roots* might well be the Great American Novel. In the months since its publication, it has been compared to both *Moby Dick* and *War and Peace*, and at least one reviewer called it 'among the most important books of the century,' according to Fisher.⁴⁵

Haley was an instant celebrity and significant figure in America. Kern-Foxworth adds that Haley turned into an instant entrepreneur. He began the Kinte Corporation, which produces films and audio productions, in California. He immediately recorded a record, "Alex Haley Speaks," that featured tips on how to research one's own genealogy.⁴⁶ "{I} feel that I was merely a conduit for a story that was intended to be told, and I know that it's the story I tell, not me, that (the public) has responded to," Haley said.⁴⁷ *Roots* gave way to *Roots II* (aired on television as *Roots: the Next Generation*, it documented the 85-year span that followed the stopping point of the original *Roots*).⁴⁸

Haley also began a grueling schedule of autograph tours, press interviews and lecturing. He produced television projects, such as "Search," a detailed account of how he traced his ancestry. He also put together *Palmerstown, U.S.A.*, which dealt with the friendship of a black boy and a white boy as they grew up in a rural southern community in the 1930's.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. xvii.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Pg. 388.

⁴⁷ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 118.

⁴⁸ From the Murray Fisher (ed.) 1993. *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Ballantine Books: New York. Pg. 389.

⁴⁹ Ibid. xvii.

About his success, Haley said, "The funny thing is that all that money has almost no meaning to me. I was broke so long that I got used to being without money. The few things I do want, including a decent stereo set, don't cost more than \$5000. All I'm concerned about is just being comfortable, being able to pay my debts, and having enough to buy something or make a gift to somebody."⁵⁰

When Haley became a conduit, his health slowly deteriorated. His schedule was humanly impossible. He related the following story in an article he wrote for *Playboy* titled "There Are Days I Wish It Hadn't Happened":

Finally, after three a.m., practically out on my feet from exhaustion, I locked my hotel room door behind me, pulled off my clothes down to my underwear and flopped onto the bed for whatever rest I could manage to get before running to catch the next plane at seven. A few hours before, I'd been among the 80,000,000 Americans who had watched the concluding eighth episode of the original *Roots* television miniseries, which had ended with me on camera speaking for several minutes to that unprecedented national audience. Of the earlier seven *Roots* episodes, I'd had to miss six. While they were on, I had been hurrying between airports, hotels and myriad other places in an effort to maintain a blurring schedule of back-to-back appointments in a grueling coast-to-coast promotional tour of interviews, speeches and personal appearances seven days a week, usually from before breakfast to midnight and frequently beyond.

But most assuredly, I wasn't -- and still am not complaining. After some 20 years of having crossed my fingers every time I mailed to editors something I had written, now *Roots*, which represented 12 of those years of work, had already sold close to 1,000,000 hard cover copies, and the television miniseries and collectively attracted the largest audience in the history of the medium. I lay there on the hotel bed, thinking about how lucky I was, no matter what bone weariness it involved, and with those ambivalent thoughts I was drifting into sleep when the loud door buzzer jolted the silence. I couldn't be my wake up call already! I peered at the night table clock's luminous dial: 3:30! Again the buzzer sounded.

Stumbling to the door in the darkness, I fumbled it open. A young blond-haired bellboy stood there stiffly, his hands at his sides, swallowing hard looking very solemnly at me standing the doorway in my underwear, blinking at him.

"Yes!" I managed.

He stuck out his hand. "Sir, I want to thank you for what you've done for America."

He couldn't have been more sincere. That's all he had to say. I wanted to hug him for feeling that way--and to punch him for getting me out of bed. I shook his hand, said I appreciated his saying that, and he marched away...

In retrospect, that bellboy pushing the hotel door's buzzer was really kind of a signal that at least major aspects of my life were about to change abruptly, maybe forever.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid. xviii.

⁵¹ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 118.

With success came controversy. Haley soon found himself embroiled in two lawsuits concerning plagiarism. The first was a charge by Margaret Walker Alexander, author of *Jubilee* (1966). Walker said Haley had committed copyright infringement. The charges were dropped (after Haley paid \$100,000 in lawyer's fees).⁵¹ Yet another accusation came from Harold Courlander, author of *The African* (1968). Courlander said Haley plagiarized certain passages in his book. On December 14, 1977, Haley paid Courlander \$500,000 in an out-of-court settlement.⁵²

His busy schedule and time spent defending the originality of his work slowly ate away at Alex Haley. The conduit showed signs of failing. He began taking long cruises to get away, and he attempted to do some writing. In 1988, Haley published *A Different Kind of Christmas*, which Fisher described as a sort of "short coda to *Roots*." Haley and Fisher also began working on a sequel to *Roots* dealing with the white side of his family (tracing them back all the way to Ireland) called *The Merging*.⁵³

Alex Haley's final complete work was *Queen*, a six-hour miniseries based on his paternal grandmother. On the evening of February 9, 1992, Haley lay in a Seattle apartment after suffering a heart attack. A close friend said he started crying, "seemingly not just from pain, but from seeing all his hopes for a new beginning slip away just as they seemed to be within reach." Alex Haley died.⁵⁴

A bowl of Gambian dirt was mixed in with the deep Tennessee soil at the site of Haley's burial. As his body was lowered into the dust, placed beside six of his relatives,

⁵² *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 119.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. xviii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

two preachers led those present in Haley's favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace."⁵⁶ His resting place was just ten steps from his boyhood home in Henning.⁵⁷

Kern-Foxworth completed her discussion of Haley's life by stating that Haley became America's first black person to trace his ancestry back to Africa. She said he is also responsible for improving race relations in the U.S.⁵⁸ "Hence, his indelible mark on history will not only be as creative artist, but also a great civil rights advocate." She contended that Haley "bridged a part of the gap between the historical liaisons of Africans and Afro-American, and his name has become synonymous with the desire to know about heritage and roots."⁵⁹

Matteo Bellinelli concluded that through the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Roots*, two sides to Alex Haley may be observed. "In the characters of Chicken George and Kunte Kinte we see a Haley showing gratitude for the amelioration of black life in America. In the character of Malcolm X we see the demands for what the United States owes its blacks. He has left a legacy unparalleled in American letters."⁶⁰

⁵⁶"Amazing Grace," incidentally, was written by John Newton, a slavetrader-turned-Christian.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Pg. xviv.

⁵⁸ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Op. Cit. Pg. 119.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bellinelli Op. Cit.

CHAPTER II HALEY'S MALCOLM X

This chapter argues that definite structures are at work in both the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Alex Haley's *Playboy* Interview of Malcolm X, and that these structures are similar. Second, it shows that the *Autobiography* exhibits some characteristics found in the genre of non-fiction called literary journalism. Viewing this work as a form of reportage will enable the reader of this important social document to more fully understand the creation of Malcolm X as a cultural icon.¹

THE HISTORY OF THE *PLAYBOY* INTERVIEW

William Grimes states that through its Q&A interview, *Playboy* developed a journalistic form that has become a virtual trademark in the same way that *The New Yorker* put its own stamp on the personality profile.² Born in 1962, the *Playboy* Interview was a feature set in motion by Hugh Hefner not only to provide credibility to a magazine that was attempting to synthesize "the elements of the bawdy and baroque," but also give the public lengthy, in-depth insight at culturally significant figures who would talk, as Frank Sinatra commented, "turkey, not trash."³

Russell Miller argued that the *Playboy* interview was widely applauded for its consistent intelligence and depth, and that it was *Playboy's* single most important contribution to American journalism.⁴ It began one afternoon in 1962. Hugh Hefner

¹ For works that discuss literary journalism, see Norman Sims' *The Literary Journalists*, (which is quoted extensively in this work) and *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*; Paul Ashdown's *James Agee: Selected Journalism* as well as his essay on James Agee in the Michael A. Lofaro edited *James Agee: Reconsiderations*; Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism*; John Hellman's *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction*; and Geoffrey Stokes *The Village Voice Anthology*.

² From William Grimes' "Behind the Number 2 Feature at *Playboy*," *New York Times*, September 23, 1992:C1. The article was in celebration of thirty years of the *Playboy* Interview.

³ From *The Playboy Interviews*. Playboy Press:Chicago. 1967. Pg. i.

⁴ From Russell Miller's *Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston:New York. 1984. Pg. viii.

wanted to launch "an interview feature in *Playboy* that would treat a subject in unusual depth." He told *Playboy* Editorial Director A.C. Sectorsky that Hefner's recently folded *Show Business Illustrated* had in its inventory some interviews with performers and musicians, and that maybe one of those would serve as the basis for a *Playboy* Interview. Sectorsky told associate editor Murray Fisher to "rummage through the inventory and see what he could come up with."⁵

Fisher chanced upon Alex Haley's interview with Miles Davis. Golson writes that Fisher was taken more "with Davis's remarks of rage about being a black man in white America than the 'obligatory talk about music'."⁶ Fisher sent Haley back for more. Haley promptly returned with a dozen tapes. The *Playboy* Interview had taken shape. First, Hefner "insisted that the Davis conversation run as a Q&A, with the journalist serving as the magazine's voice." The first *Playboy* Interview appeared in the September 1962, issue of the magazine.⁷

⁵ From the G. Barry Golson edited *The Playboy Interviews II*. Wideview: New York. 1981.

⁶ Ibid. The story behind Haley's interview with Davis was briefly covered in Chapter 1. However a less abridged version gives insight into Haley's personality. Miller writes in *Bunny* that Davis was "a recalcitrant, prickly character with no love for journalists, particularly white journalists, (thus) the *Show Business Weekly* editors hoped Davis might feel some kinship with Haley. It was the kind of assignment a writer less desperate than Haley might have given up."

Haley contacted everyone in the Davis camp, including his press agent, recording company and wife. He was turned away by each of them. He found out Davis would be playing at the Village Vanguard in New York and attended, trying to ask Davis questions between sets.

"Davis replied in monosyllabic, overtly hostile answers," Miller says. "Haley waited outside by the stage door to try to speak to him at the end of the concert and was brushed aside as the trumpeter swept out."

Somehow, Haley discovered that Davis sparred at a gym in Harlem. He showed up just in time to see Davis standing in the ring in full boxing gear.

"At that moment, the musician was looking around for a sparring partner, and when he spotted the writer who had been pestering him at the Village Vanguard he cocked his head and told him to get into the ring."

Haley, who Miller describes as "small, shortsighted and gentle by nature," shed his glasses and ducked under the ropes.

"Davis began to pepper him lightly with punches and Haley did his best to defend himself while gamely trying to get in a couple of questions," Miller says. Clinched, Haley "grunted something about reporters being a hateful, untrustworthy lot and Davis laughed out loud. They began talking in the shower stalls and Davis eventually invited the other man back to his house on West 77th where Haley got his interview."

⁷ Ibid.

A basic philosophy emerged from that first issue. Hefner, SPECTORSKY and FISHER were looking for prominent people of accomplishment and notoriety as prospective subjects. Not every famous person, however, would be eligible for the *Playboy* Interview. "It was the ability of a subject to express himself or herself verbally with candor that FISHER researched before suggesting to Hefner," according to GOLSON.⁸ The roll of *Playboy* interviewees over the years is impressive. From MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., JEAN PAUL SARTRE and BERTRAND RUSSELL, to JOHN LENNON, JOHNNY CARSON and SAMMY DAVIS, JR., the *Playboy* Interview has consistently big names presented at (or near to) the peak of their fame.⁹ "As time went on," GOLSON says, "it was not merely the roster of prestigious names that established the *Playboy* Interview as an increasingly respected journalistic forum. It was the questions.....in an era when the press traditionally shied away from discussing the private behavior of public figures, and largely protected its readers' sensibilities from colloquial or vulgar language, the *Playboy* Interview presented people's language as it was actually spoken."¹⁰ FISHER encouraged his writers to bring up topics and issues that were controversial, "from childhood traumas, to failed marriages, to sex."¹¹ While these candid conversations astounded many readers, the subjects themselves were sometimes surprised -- worn down. Interviews usually took no fewer than six hours and sometimes as long as 40. Deadlines were rare. Sessions with subjects had been known to go on for six months. GRIMES refers to it as "equal parts of psychoanalysis and jury trial -- with the interviewer reserving the right to cross-examine."¹² FISHER told GRIMES:

⁸ Ibid. Pg. ix.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. Pg. x.

¹² From William Grimes' "Behind the Number 2 Feature at *Playboy*." *New York Times*. op. cit.

Celebrities are used to being interviewed. They have a ready-made set of answers to questions they've been asked before. So you ask those, but then you don't leave. You let them exhaust their repertoire of defense mechanisms, and after three or four hours, you're down to bedrock. That's when it gets interesting."¹³

Grimes says that despite resistance to other parts of *Playboy*, such as the nude centerfolds, the *Playboy* Interview "made the leap from curiosity to a kind of institution, one that shows durability at a time when the *Playboy* philosophy and the 'Girls of the Big Eight' pictorial seem headed for the time capsule."¹⁴ He says that while the Q&A format remained consistent, things changed throughout the *Playboy* Interview's history. The tone, for instance, is more conversational and transition less laborious. Also, early on, subjects were able to edit their own interview before it was published. Golson discontinued this practice, known as "sanitizing," when he took over in 1975.¹⁵ This policy, then, would have applied to the *Playboy* Interview with Malcolm X. If "sanitizing" took place, and if it did, how much of the conversation was revised, is unknown.

Many of the Q&A fundamentals stayed the same as well. Fisher insisted on a "breadth, thoroughness and candor unprecedented." He was legendary for demanding

¹³ Ibid. Golson starts out his forward in *The Playboy Interviews Two*. Wideview/Perigree: New York. 1983, by describing a hot summer's day in Plains, Ga.:

Jimmy Carter arose from the armchair in his living room. Because the two journalists from *Playboy* had deliberately ignored several hints that their time was up, Carter apparently felt it was the only way he could bring the interview to a close. It was a week after his nomination at the Democratic convention, and just a few minutes before he would answer one last question at his front door. He was moving across the living room, stepping over the tape recording equipment. He shook his head and said in a bantering tone, 'You guys must have some kind of blackmail leverage on Jody Powell, I've ended up spending more time with you than with *Newsweek*, *Time* and all the others combined.' He paused. 'Of course you have an advantage the way you do your interviews, coming back again and again with follow-up questions. I don't object, but it sure is exhausting.'

¹⁴ From William Grimes' "Behind the Number 2 Feature at Playboy." Op. Cit.

¹⁵ Ibid. Grimes uses the example of Bob Dylan's interview. In Nat Hentoff's version of a conversation with the singer, Hentoff pressed Dylan on his lack of involvement with the antiwar effort. "When he reread it," Fisher told Grimes, "he completely disavowed the entire interview and we had nothing else ready for that month. I said: 'If you don't like it, give us a new interview. Take the same questions and write new answers.'" Dylan did just that and Fisher ran Dylan's version.

total, excruciating preparation by the writer.¹⁶ Lawrence Grobel, who has conducted more than 300 *Playboy* Interviews and written three book-length conversations, says research is the most critical step in the interview. "You should know as much about your subject as they remember about themselves," he says.¹⁷ Grobel reads all the interviews ever done by a subject and often picks up where others have left off. Then he constructs questions, highlighting the subjects he must cover. Once, he wrote out 55 single spaced pages totaling 850 questions for an interview with James Michener.

Getting acquainted and taking control are two other important building blocks in the *Playboy* Interview. "I play on anything I see when I walk in to their habitat and try to build rapport immediately," he says. What results is what Fisher termed "a verbal autobiography" that Grobel says still needs molding. "If it's good, you can (shape it into) a three-act play. You create your moments of highlight, dilemma, and challenge. You become friends, you become enemies, then you have a catharsis."¹⁸

STRUCTURE OF THE *PLAYBOY* INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM X

Grobel's description of the three-act play shaping of *Playboy* Interviews provides a gateway to analyze the interviews using a form of rhetoric known as dramatism. Developed by Kenneth Burke, dramatism is a method of analysis that looks at words and actions, explaining them via the pentad of act, actor, scene, purpose and agency. An act, says Burke, is a word from which the other related "pentad considerations" emanate. Agents must be present, and they must be contained in a scene in order to carry out acts. The scenes can be as broad as creation under one god or many, and as narrow as Darwin's

¹⁶ From the G. Barry Golson edited *They Playboy Interviews II*. Op. Cit.

¹⁷ From John Wood's, "A Conversation with the *Playboy* Interviewer." *Writer's Digest*. October, 1991. Vol. 71. No. 10:Pg. 28. Grobel's three book-length interviews are *Conversations with Brando*, *Conversations with Huston* and *Conversations with Capote*.

¹⁸ Ibid.

naturalistic limits or Western Civilization or 10 Downing Street. These agents who act must have a purpose (or ends) toward which they work.¹⁹

Each element of the pentad is related to the other, and that give and take. Burke sites "purpose-agency ratios" that consider the logic of "means selection" or "the relation of means to ends (as the Supreme Court might decide that an emergency measure is constitutional because it was taken in an emergency situation) as one example."²⁰

Robert Tobia quotes Burke as saying "My job [in formulating the pentad] was not to help a writer decide what he might say to produce a text. It was to help a critic perceive what was going on in a text that was already written."²¹ Tobia asserts that dramatism makes analysis of the reader's involvement possible. He explains well Burke's "understanding of man as a symbol-using animal":

(He is one who) *acts* in the world on the basis of meaning that symbols hold for him. For Burke, man is the only organism capable of *action* rather than motion. In this sense, drama is not a metaphor for action, but a real description of human action. 'In this sense,' Burke wrote 'man is literally as an animal characterized by his special aptitude for 'symbolic action,' which is itself a literal term. And from there on, drama is employed, not as a metaphor but as a fixed form that helps us to discover what the implication of the terms 'act' and 'person' *really are*.' (his emphasis)²²

Burke's idea of dramatism comes to life in Malcolm X's *Playboy* Interview. It is shaped through symbolic action. Malcolm X is the primary actor. *Playboy* provides the stage. Alex Haley develops three premeditated acts and directs them through questioning Malcolm, providing Malcolm with a stage upon which to act. The interview is ten

¹⁹ From Kenneth Burke's entry "Dramatism" under the subject heading "Interaction" in the D. Sills edited *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 1968. Pg. 446.

²⁰ Ibid. He uses also "agent act ratio" that "would reflect" the correspondence between a man's character and the character of his behavior" but cautions, "as, in drama, the principles of formal consistency require that each member of the dramatis personae act in character, though such correspondences in art can have a perfection not often found in life."

²¹ From Robert Tobia's "A Journalism of Outrage: A Rhetoric Analysis of Books About Public Education, 1967-1991." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Tennessee, Knoxville. (1994). Pg. 145.

²² Ibid. Pg. 146.

magazine pages in length and moves along a path of ideology peppered with biography, feeling and history.

Before high drama begins, however, *Playboy* sets the scene with a short introduction. Written like the italics present in a script, Malcolm X is a man vs. the world. He is contextualized within the "American Negro Struggle." *Playboy* concludes by stating that Malcolm's words are a "damning self-indictment," saying that "In the belief that knowledge and awareness are necessary and effective antitoxins against the venom of hate, *Playboy* asked Malcolm X to submit to a cross-examination on the means and ends of his organization," while in essence saying "sit back, relax and enjoy the show."²³

To discover a dramatistic three-act structure at work in the interview, one need only look as far as the questions. Haley builds his three-acts with three sections that each provide climax. All three climaxes center on the single theme of race. These climaxes are surrounded by four other subjects that either set the scene for the next climax, or act as a denouement following the previous climax. Mapped out, the interview would look something like this: the Nation of Islam movement, race, history, race, biography, civil rights, race. (See chart in Appendix A.)

Haley begins with the subject of the movement to set the scene clearly for the first climax. He immediately asks about the Nation of Islam's ideas concerning separation totally from the white man. The singularity of the Nation's beliefs reveals itself, including the tenets of the faith.²⁴

Malcolm sets in motion the first climax by defining what Armageddon means to the Black Muslim. It is seen as a time when the white man will be destroyed, finished. The preamble is over; act one is well underway, searching to and fro for an outlet to voice its fullest energy. Even as the readers reel from the fundamentals of the cult, Haley

²³ Alex Haley: *The Playboy Interviews*. Edited by Murray Fisher. Ballantine Books: New York. 1993. Pg. 20.

²⁴ Ibid. Pg. 22

provides that outlet, asking the first question of section two on race. "You refer to whites as guilty and the enemy, prophesying divine retribution -- preaching separation -- is not your movement predicated on race hatred?"

Malcolm erupts. He begins talking (and the reader can tell this) in quick, clipped tones:

Sir, it's from Mr. Muhammad that the black masses are learning for the first time in 400 years the real truth of how the white man brainwashed the black man, kept him ignorant of his true history, robbed him of his self-confidence, The black masses for the first time are understanding that it's not a case of being anti-white or anti-Christian, but it's a case of seeing the true nature of the white man. We're anti-evil, anti-oppression, anti-lynching. You can't be anti- those things unless you're also anti- the oppressor and the lyncher, You can't be anti-slavery and pro-slave master; you can't be anti-crime and pro-criminal. In fact, Mr. Muhammad teaches that if the present generation of whites would study their own race in the light of their history, they would be anti-white themselves.²⁵

He goes on to address the motives of the white man and how middle class blacks are a tool of the white man.

The first act ends as Haley poses a religious question concerning the ethnicity of Jesus. This is no less astonishing than what has been heard up to this point, but it is less of a direct attack. It leads to discussion of history. When Haley senses this line has been played out, he shifts the question toward Act II, dealing again with race and pointing toward the second climax. The central idea here is the inferiority of whites:

Haley: As one of this vast elite (blacks) do you hold the familiar majority attitude toward minority groups -- regarding the race, in this case, as inferior in quality as well as quantity to what you call the "black nation"?

Malcolm X: Thoughtful white people know they are inferior to black people. Even Eastland knows it. Anyone who has studied the genetic phase of biology knows that white is considered recessive and black is considered dominant. When you want strong coffee, you ask for black coffee. If you whiten it, you want it weak, integrated with white milk. Just like these Negroes who weaken themselves and their race by this integrating and intermixing with whites. If you want bread with no nutritional value, you ask for white bread. All the good that was in it has been bleached out of it, and it will constipate

²⁵ Ibid. Pg. 26

you. If you want pure flower you ask for dark flower, whole wheat flower. If you want pure sugar, you want dark sugar.²⁶

This act ends swiftly. It gives way to a quick study of Malcolm's life. He provides the story of his salvation through the teaching of Elijah Muhammad. Then he back-tracks through his life in Harlem. Haley points Malcolm toward his fast rise through the sect's ranks and even prompts Malcolm to muse about what the future might hold when Elijah Muhammad dies. Malcolm waves this question off and a talk concerning civil rights ensues.

After a while, Haley once again turns the questioning toward what he knows will provide another climax -- race. The third to last question provides the climax:

Haley: Despite the fact that the goal of racial equality is not yet realized, many sociologists -- and many Negro commentators -- agree that no minority group on earth has made as much social, civil and economic progress as the American Negro in the past 100 years. What is your reaction to this view.

Malcolm X: Sir, I hear that everywhere almost exactly as you state it. This is one of the biggest myths that the American black man himself believes in. Every immigrant ethnic group that has come to this country is now a genuinely first class citizen group -- every one of them but the black man, who was here when they came. While everybody else is sharing the fruit, the black man is just now starting to be thrown some seeds. It is our hope that through the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, we will at last get the soil to plant the seeds in. You talk about the progress of the Negro -- I'll tell you mister, it's just because the Negro has been in America while America has gone forward that the Negro appears to have gone forward. The Negro is like a man on a luxury commuter train doing 90 miles an hour. He looks out of the window, along with all the white passengers in their Pullman chairs, and he's thinking he's doing 90 too. Then he gets to the men's room and looks in the mirror -- and he sees he's not really getting anywhere at all. His reflection shows a black man standing there in the white uniform of a dining-car steward. He may get on the 5:10, all right, but he sure won't be getting off at Westport.²⁷

This final climax is different, because it shows that Malcolm X will not let anyone rest. Like the ax striking the cherry tree in Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, it is the concluding blow to an arbor of majority whites, but at the same time its din serves as the

²⁶ Ibid. Pg. 34-35.

²⁷ Ibid. Pg. 43-44

symbol of a beginning -- because of Malcolm X, things in America will never be the same.

THE BOOK AND THE INTERVIEW: A COMPARISON

This work led Haley and Malcolm X to team up and write the latter's autobiography. Doubleday Books editor-in-chief, Ken McCormick, was struck by it. He planted and fertilized the idea of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Eventually dropped by Doubleday due to its content, the book was later bought by Grove Press. Published in November of 1965, the work sold 50,000 hardback copies and around five million paperbacks by 1989.²⁸

The issue here is not an exacting similitude. There are obvious differences between an autobiography and an interview that appears in a periodical. There is a dedication, a foreword, an epilogue and a postlude included in the *Autobiography*. Other obvious dissimilarities, such as voice and lack of printed questions, are not at the heart of this matter. A comparison, however, will yield clues as to whether Alex Haley utilized similar techniques in crafting both the Q&A interview and the "as told to" book.

Because the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* is 450 pages longer than the interview, it is difficult to pinpoint a single structure in the work. In fact, many times Haley seems to use multiple structures, or, in Burkeian terms, employs different ratios in a plurality of scenes. In this study, the *Autobiography* and the interview will be compared via the three-act dramatistic structure seen in the *Playboy* Interview. Also, separate passages will be aligned to compare content and voice. This will evidence whether the *Autobiography* takes the form of an extended *Playboy* Interview.²⁹

²⁸ Kern-Foxworth, Marilyn. *Alex Haley* entry from *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Pg. 116.

²⁹ See Appendix I for a chart of these compared structures.

As previously discussed, the *Playboy* Interview often institutes three acts that result in climax to hold a reader's attention. In Alex Haley's *Playboy* Interview with Malcolm X, these acts or climaxes are seen as three specific subjects around which supporting subjects, serving as "scene setters" or denouements, flow.

It is apparent that in the *Autobiography* there are acts with climaxes used. While an effort could be made to fit the book into three acts, doing so would be like overstuffing a suitcase. Pages would be sticking out and the potential for an all-out explosion would be dangerously present. This is because the *Autobiography* is an entire personal record. It is an unabridged image of a man. It does not need to rely on a strict three-act structure, but is given the luxury of possessing as many acts as it needs to tell Malcolm's story effectively. In this case, there are four acts that include four climaxes in the *Autobiography*.

Act I encompasses Malcolm X's childhood and adolescence. His early life is fraught with strife. His father is killed, his mother goes insane, and Malcolm enters the homes of various foster care-givers in his small Michigan city of Mason. The idea behind this act is to illustrate Malcolm Little's introduction, interaction and initial negative reaction toward white society.

In his last Michigan abode, a home for boys, Malcolm flourishes. He does well in his seventh grade year at school and gains popularity. A summer trip to Boston follows, and Malcolm drinks in the sights and sounds of a bustling black community in a huge city. Malcolm returns to Michigan only to find himself beginning to hate small town and white life. This becomes most intense as school begins again. After finally making progress and being provided positive outlets for his talents, the bottom drops out on Malcolm when Mr. Ostrowski, his English teacher, asked Malcolm if he had given any thought to a career. Malcolm replied:

'Well, yes sir. I've been thinking I'd like to be lawyer.' Lansing certainly had no Negro lawyers -- or doctors either -- in those days, to hold up an image I might have

aspired to. All I really knew for certain was that a lawyer didn't wash dishes, as I was doing.

Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised, I remember, and leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. He kind of half-smiled and said, 'Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic, Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer -- that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you *can* be. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person -- you'd get all kinds of work.'

The more I thought afterwards about what he said, the more uneasy it made me. It just kept treading around in my mind.³⁰

This moment led to Malcolm leaving for Boston to live with his half-sister Ella. It led to his interest in ghetto life and was a main contributor to a career as a hustler.

Act II deals with Malcolm in the underworld. He starts out shining shoes in a Boston ballroom and is intoxicated by the fast life. Later, he progresses into the life of full-time hustling, dealing in drugs and sex. His survival skills diminish as the effect of dope slowly dulls his senses. This act climaxes in Harlem. He reported that he'd "hit the numbers" to his bookie, West Indian Archie. Archie went ahead and paid him \$300 for this win. When Archie checked his written slips later, he found that Malcolm (called Detroit Red at this point in his life) had lied. He came to hunt Malcolm down and provided a deadline for payment. Malcolm went on the run throughout New York. A battle of words commenced through the "wire," a complex grapevine in this world, and threats of death by each man followed.

In the next hours Malcolm "knew (he) had to get high." He consumed opium, Benzedrine, marijuana and cocaine. He made it to a friend's apartment and fell asleep for a day and a half past Archie's deadline:

I went back uptown. It was on the wire. I could see people who knew me finding business elsewhere. I knew nobody wanted to be caught in a crossfire.

But nothing happened. The next day either. I just stayed high.

Some raw kid hustler in a bar, I had to bust in his mouth. He came back, pulling a knife blade; I would have shot him, but somebody grabbed him. They put him out, cursing that he was going to kill me.

³⁰ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit.

Intuition told me to get rid of my gun. I gave a hustler the eye across the bar. I'd no more than slipped him the gun from my belt when a cop I'd seen about came in the other door. He had his hand on his gun butt. He knew what was all over the wire; he was certain I'd be armed. He came slowly over toward me, and I knew if I sneezed, he'd blast me down.

He said, 'Take your hand out of your pocket, Red -- real carefully'

I did. Once he saw me empty handed, we both could relax a little. He motioned for me to walk outside, ahead of him, and I did. His partner was waiting on the sidewalk, opposite the patrol car, double-parked with its radio going. With people stopping, looking, they patted me down there on the sidewalk.

'What are you looking for?' I asked them when they didn't find anything.

'Red, there's a report you're carrying a gun.'

'I had one,' I said. 'But I threw it in the river.'

The one who had come into the bar said, 'I think I'd leave town if I were you,

Red.³¹

"Red" does leave town and heads for Boston and hooks up with his old buddy Shorty, a musician, and his white girlfriend, Sophia. They set up a thieving ring by which the three, aided also by Sophia's sister, break into homes, then sell the goods. He is later caught and arrested. It seemed as if Malcolm and Shorty were sentenced because they were black and their girlfriends were white. In any event, Malcolm was sentenced to ten years. "This was February, 1946. I wasn't quite twenty-one. I had not even started shaving," he said. The scene illustrates to what depths Malcolm had sunk and provided a threshold for him to cross from life as a hustler to life as a criminal.

Upon entering Charlestown State Prison, Malcolm sank further and then began a steady rehabilitation that serves as Act III. The climax of this act is marked by a pre-vision Malcolm has. It was not a dream, because Malcolm contended that "It's impossible to dream, or to see, or to have a vision of someone whom you never have seen before -- and to see him exactly as he is. To see someone, and to see him exactly as he looks, is to have a pre-vision." This "he" was later believed by Malcolm to be Master W.D. Fard, the Messiah, the one Elijah Muhammad said had appointed him -- Elijah Muhammad -- as his Last Messenger to the black people of North America. The pre-vision took place in Malcolm's prison cell. Malcolm was searching for truth at this point

³¹ Ibid. Pg. 131.

in the book. His brother Reginald, who has not practiced the moral restraint required of Black Muslims, has been suspended from the sect and comes to visit Malcolm. It was evident Reginald was slowly losing his sanity. Malcolm was confused. His searching culminated in a prayer to Allah for some relief "from my confusion." The pre-vision occurred the next night as he was lying in bed:

I suddenly, with a start, became aware of a man sitting beside me in my chair. He had on a dark suit. I remember. I could see him as plainly as I see anyone I look at. He wasn't black, and he wasn't white. He was light-brown-skinned, an Asiatic cast of countenance, and he had oily black hair.

I looked right into his face.

I didn't get frightened. I knew I wasn't dreaming. I could move. I didn't speak, and he didn't. I couldn't place him racially -- other than that I knew he was a non-European. Then, suddenly as he had come, he was gone.³²

This calmed Malcolm. It gave him confidence and served as a sign of things to come for the prisoner who would eventually be a minister in the Nation of Islam after being released.

The next major act in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* occurs when Malcolm confronts Elijah Muhammad concerning the leader's sexual impurity. The scene of the climax is Elijah Muhammad's office in Phoenix.

'Well, son,' Mr. Muhammad said, 'what is on your mind?'

Plainly, frankly, pulling no punches, I told Mr. Muhammad what was being said. And without waiting for any response from him, I said that with his son Wallace's help I had found in the Quran and the Bible that which might be taught to Muslims -- if it became necessary -- as the fulfillment of prophecy.

'Son, I am not surprised,' Elijah Muhammad said. 'You always have had such a good understanding of prophecy, and of spiritual things. You recognize that's what it is -- prophecy. You have the kind of understanding that only an old man has.'

'I'm David,' he said. 'When you read about how David took another man's wife, I'm that David. You read about Noah, who got drunk -- that's me. You read about Lot, who went and laid up with his own daughters. I have to fulfill all of those things.'

I remembered that when an epidemic is about to hit somewhere, that community's people are inoculated against exposure with some of the same germs that are anticipated -- and this prepares them to resist the oncoming virus.³³

³² Ibid. Pg. 186.

Malcolm's belief in Elijah Muhammad was struck a death blow. He had taken great pains with his own purity, and now his leader had fallen. The event was a pivotal event in Malcolm X's life and prepared him for the split from the Nation, a change in ideological direction and martyrdom to come.

The final climax would be this shift in ideology, and it occurs when Malcolm makes the pilgrimage to Mecca. He flies to Egypt to begin the journey. After boarding a plane, Malcolm is first struck by the friendliness of his co-Muslims. He is also struck by the various colors of skin.

"Packed in the plane," he said, "were white, brown, black, red and yellow people, blue eyes and blond hair, and my kinky red hair -- all together, brothers! All honoring the same God Allah, all in turn giving equal honor to each other."

He continues on to Mecca, and, after some initial difficulties in assuring authorities of the authenticity of his faith, he circled the Ka'ba. As he spends his final days in the capital of Islam, he writes an open letter to the people of the United States. In it contains this scene's climax.

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white. America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white' -- but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I never before seen *sincere* and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color. You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to *re-arrange* much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside*, some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my former convictions, I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experiences and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth.³⁴

³³ Ibid. Pg. 298-299

³⁴ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 340.

Malcolm is redefined, and although he returns to America only to find struggle and ultimate death, his conclusions concerning the white man's ability to be equal and their capacity to treat black people as equal fully redefined what Malcolm was about and where he and his movement were headed.

These five climaxes serve as crucial guideposts throughout Malcolm's story. They reveal that a dramatic structure similar to the *Playboy* Interview was in place, and that it created the similar effects elicited from the interview.

A second way to compare the *Autobiography* to the *Playboy* Interview is to extract passages from the interview and autobiography to see if they include similar language and substance. In the interview, the line of questioning covered essentially five subjects: the Nation of Islam movement, race, history, biographical information and civil rights. Malcolm includes statements on each of these subjects in the book. Portions of these similar excerpts were compared for content, context and meaning.³⁵

Out of the book and interview, four representative examples of either similar content or wording were extracted. Two of them deal with religion, one deals with Malcolm's life and another deals with middle-class blacks. Prefacing each excerpt is a brief description of first, the interview passage and then, second, the book passage. The quotes are then transcribed in that same order for side-by-side comparison.

The initial passage for comparison is a discussion of Jesus' ethnicity. In the interview, Haley raises the question as a contrast to Malcolm's assertion that white men were the devil. Haley asks: "You say that the white men are devils by nature. Was Christ a devil?" Malcolm then asserts that Christ is black. This same assertion occurs in the *Autobiography* during one of Malcolm's prison Bible classes. Because of his zealous recruitment of blacks into his new-found religion in the freer environment of the Norfolk

³⁵ See appendix 1 for a chart illustrating this parallel development.

Prison Colony, he was sent back to Charlestown Prison, the facility in which he originally was incarcerated. Here, first, is the interview:

Malcolm X: Christ wasn't white. Christ was black.

Haley: On what scripture do you base that assertion?

Malcolm X: Sir, Billy Graham has made the same statement in public. Why not ask *him* what Scripture he found it in? When Pope Pius XII died, *Life* magazine carried a picture of him in his private study kneeling before a black Christ.

Haley: Those are hardly quotations from Scripture. Was He not reviled as 'King of the Jews' -- a people the Black Muslims attack?

Malcolm X: Only the poor, brainwashed American Negro has been made to believe that Christ was white, to maneuver him into worshipping the white man. After becoming a Muslim in prison, I read almost everything I could put my hands on in the prison library. I began to think back on everything I had read and especially with the histories, I realized that nearly all of them read by the general process either had left out great things that black men had done, or some of the great black men had gotten whitened.³⁶

Now here is the book:

Conducting the class was a tall, blond, blue-eyed (a perfect 'devil') Harvard Seminary student. He lectured, and then he started in a question and answer session....Finally, I put up my hand; he nodded. He had talked about Paul.

I stood up and asked, 'What color was Paul?' And I kept talking, with pauses, 'He had to be black...because he was a Hebrew...and the original Hebrews were black...weren't they?'

He had started flushing red. You know, the way white people do. He said, 'Yes.' I wasn't through yet. 'What color was Jesus...he was Hebrew, too...wasn't he?'

Both the Negro and the white convicts had sat bolt upright. I don't care how tough the convict, be he brainwashed black Christian, or a 'devil' white Christian, neither of them is ready to hear anybody saying Jesus wasn't white.

The instructor walked around. He shouldn't have felt bad. In all of the years since, I never have met any intelligent white man who would try to insist that Jesus was white. How could they? He said, 'Jesus was brown.'

I let him get away with that compromise.

Exactly as I had known it would, almost overnight the Charlestown convicts, black and white, began buzzing with the story. Wherever I went, I could feel the nodding.³⁷

³⁶ Alex Haley: *The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. 32.

³⁷ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 189-190.

While both of these views are related in both works, the intention of their use is different. Haley's purpose in including this issue in the interview is to further bolster Malcolm's point that the white man is a devil, for his Christ is not white. For Malcolm, this would also show that Christ is not a threat to the Nation of Islam, but sympathetic, even an ally. The *Autobiography*, on the other hand, uses the view as an illustration of how Malcolm attempted to be a witness for the Nation of Islam even when he was unable to have usual direct contact with his fellow prisoners. Both have the same shock value.

This discussion of Christ leads into another passage that can be found repeatedly in the *Autobiography*. Malcolm insists that Christianity is a white man's religion used to oppress the black people. Haley asks in the interview if Malcolm's views represent a black consensus, and if they do not, "is it possible that your separationist and anti-Christian doctrine have the effect of alienating many of your race?" Malcolm launches into a monologue about how Christianity is the religion of the white man:

But Mr. Muhammad says that Allah is going to wake up all black men to see the white man as he really is, and see what Christianity has done to them. The black masses that are waking up don't believe in Christianity anymore. All it's done for black men is help to keep them slaves. Mr. Muhammad is teaching that Christianity, as white people see it, means that whites can have their heaven here on earth, but the black man is supposed to catch his hell here. The black man is supposed to keep believing that when he dies, he'll float up to some city with golden streets and milk and honey on a cloud somewhere. Every black man in 'good old Beulah's Land' The Promised Land that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad talks about is right here on this earth. Intelligent black men today are interested in a religious doctrine that offers a solution to their problems right now, right here on this earth, while they are alive.³⁸

Two portions of the *Autobiography* concern the same issue of Christianity as a white religion; one is quoted here.

'My brothers and sisters, our white slave master's Christian religion has taught us black people here in the wilderness of North America that we will sprout wings when we die and fly up into the sky where God will have for us a special place called heaven....The blond-haired blue-eyed white man has taught you and me to worships a *white* Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's *his* God, the white man's God. The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we *die*, to wait until *death*, for some

³⁸ Alex Haley: *The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. 25

dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we are *dead*, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars right here on *this* earth.³⁹

The interview excerpt assumes intelligent black men are already turning their backs on Christianity, while the *Autobiography* is an attempt to convince black people that white Christianity is an oppressor. In the interview the oppressor is recognized; in the *Autobiography* it is introduced. In the interview, "The black man is supposed to keep believing that when he dies, he'll float up to some city with golden streets and milk and honey," while in the book "this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars right here on this earth." In the respective passages, context and meaning have been molded differently, but not much differently.

The third passage involves a tidbit of ironic information that appears in both the interview and the autobiography. It has to do with Harvard University. In the interview, Haley had asked Malcolm to give a brief synopsis of his conversion experience. Malcolm obliges, mentioning he was in prison in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for 8 to 10 years, and wasn't it interesting that he was back for a Harvard Law School Forum later in his life? The same twist appears in the *Autobiography* under totally different circumstances. Malcolm is an adolescent who has just moved to Boston. He wanders the streets, at the prompting of his half sister, getting acquainted with his new home. Here is the interview's version:

I often think, sir, that in 1946, I was sentenced to 8 to 10 years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a common thief who had never passed the eighth grade. And the next time I went back to Cambridge was in March, 1961, as a guest speaker at the Harvard Law School Forum. This is the best example of Mr. Muhammad's ability to take nothing and make something, to take nobody and make somebody.⁴⁰

The books states:

³⁹ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Pg. 220

⁴⁰ Alex Haley: *The Playboy Interviews*. Pg. 38.

I roamed everywhere. In one direction, I walked as far as Boston University. Another day, I took my first subway ride. When most of the people got off, I followed. It was Cambridge, and I circled all around in the Harvard University campus. Somewhere, I had already heard of Harvard -- though I didn't know much more about it. Nobody that day could have told me I would give an address before the Harvard Law School Forum some twenty years later.⁴¹

In one instance, we see a hardened, uneducated criminal evolve into one who gains recognition from an elite university. In the next scene we are walking with a bright manchild breathing in the city. The Malcolm X in the interview provides a strong image of what the Nation of Islam has done for him. In book form the scenario at once provides the smell of steam that gives way to the greenery of campus and foreshadows what Malcolm Little will become.

Yet another interesting idea presented in both pieces is that of Malcolm's Muslim identity. Malcolm discusses himself in terms of both a Muslim and an African to Haley in the interview as he replies to a question dealing with relations between African-Americans and Africans. While it is made before his split with the Nation of Islam, the same statement can be found after Malcolm's departure from the Black Muslims in the *Autobiography*. When he's making the Hajj to Mecca, he and a fellow-Muslim find themselves in a German airport where the Europeans are kind, and Malcolm is quick to notice. Here is the Black Muslim identity found in the interview:

When I'm traveling around the country, I use my real Muslim name, Malik Shabazz. I make my hotel reservations under that name, and I always see the same thing I've just been telling you. I come to the desk and always see that "here-comes-a-Negro" look. It's kind of a reserved, coldly tolerant cordiality. But when I say "Malik Shabazz," their whole attitude changes: they snap to respect. They think I'm an African. People say what's in a name? There's a whole lot in a name. The American black man is seeing the African respected as a human being. The African gets respect because he has an identity and cultural roots. But most of all because the African owns some land. for this reason he has his human rights recognized and that makes his civil rights automatic.⁴²

⁴¹*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 41.

⁴²*Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. 40.

The post-Black Muslim experience elicits similar thoughts:

We'd walk in a store, any store, every store, and it would be Hello! People who never saw you before, and knew you were strangers. And the same cordiality when we left, without buying anything. In America, you walk in a store and spend a hundred dollars, and leave, and you're still a stranger. Both you and the clerks act as though you're doing each other a favor. Europeans act more human, or humane, whichever the right word is. My brother Muslim, who could speak enough German to get by, would explain that we were Muslims, and I saw something I had already experienced when I was looked upon as a Muslim and not as a Negro in America. People seeing you as a Muslim saw you as a human being, and they had a different look, different talk, everything.⁴³

While the interview leaves a bitter taste in the mouth and Malcolm illustrates racism in the U.S., the second use of this story finds an almost giddy traveler who is marveling at every new experience abroad. Perhaps that is due to two different identities in the two contexts -- one feels less than human, the other feels human.

A final segment to be compared discusses the separation of the white man from the black man. The interview provides this early, as Malcolm volunteers the beginnings of this ideology after Haley's question concerning the ambition of the Black Muslims:

We are taught by Mr. Muhammad that it is very important to improve the black man's economy, and his thrift. But to do this, we must have land of our own. The brainwashed black man can never learn to land on his own two feet until he is on his own. We must learn to become our own producers, manufacturers and traders; we must have industry of our own, to employ our own. The white man resists this because he wants to keep the black man under his thumb and jurisdiction in white society. He wants to keep the black man always dependent and begging -- for jobs, food, clothes, shelter, education. The white man doesn't want to lose somebody to be supreme over. He wants to keep the black man where he can be watched and retarded. Mr. Muhammad teaches that as soon as we separate from the white man, we will learn that we can do without the white man just as he can do without us. The white man knows that once black men get off to themselves and learn they can do for themselves, the black man's full potential will explode and he will surpass the white man.⁴⁴

⁴³ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 321.

⁴⁴ *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Op. Cit. Pg. 23.

The same subject arises in the *Autobiography* when Malcolm provides samples of how he handled radio and television interviews:

'No! We reject segregation even more militantly than you say you do! We want separation, which is not the same! The honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that segregation is when your life and liberty are controlled, regulated by someone else. To segregate means to control, Segregation is that which is forced upon inferiors by superiors. But separation is that which is done voluntarily by two equals -- for the good of both! The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that as long as our people here in America are dependent upon the white man, we will always be begging him for jobs, food, clothing and housing. And he will always control our lives, regulate our lives, and have the power to segregate us. The Negro here in America has been treated like a child. A child stays within his mother until the time of birth! When the time of birth arrives, the child must be separated, or it will destroy its mother and itself. The mother can't carry that child after its time. The child cries for and needs its own world!'⁴⁵

This is the only issue raised in this comparison that owns the same meaning in both instances. The cry for separation is the same. In one we see the African-American surpassing the white man. In the next we see the African-American as a child separating from its mother. This similarity of context results from the institutions being addressed by Malcolm X: the media. He deals with them on the same plane in this instance.

STRUCTURE AND COMPARISON ANALYZED

The studies executed on the works reveal some valuable information. The structure evident in both the interview and the *Autobiography* point to Haley's premeditated crafting of factual information. The use of tantamount climax in various acts enables Haley to elicit emotion and provoke thought. It makes the personal record more dramatic, and it provides the reader some guideposts to measure the growth of the main character.

Comparison of content revealed that the same information could be used in different contexts or the same context with the same effect. Malcolm X used creativity

⁴⁵*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 246.

and charisma well when he spoke. Haley has maximized those attributes by turning offhanded monologues into explosive issues that ignite at the precise moment. Christ becomes a racial snare for the white man and an axis of black pride for the African-American. Christianity as religion is seen as both postmodern and a tool of oppression that, if given up by the African-American, can be a source of liberation. A geographic point is a site at which a lowest low and highest high are experienced and prophecy both delivered and revealed. A name is a weapon for dignity and a feeling of dignity. Separation is a final solution.

These exercises point to similar fundamentals working in both pieces. It girds well the idea that the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* could be taken as an extended *Playboy* Interview.

LITERARY JOURNALISM AND MALCOLM X

The interview experience moves this work into the realm of journalism. But this is not the stuff of feature or straight news. It is larger than that. Malcolm X is larger than that. It points to ultimate truths and man's search for identity. Norman Sims, in his book *The Literary Journalists*, writes that literary journalism "unites two forms." First, it reports the normal, "everyday" happenings in people's lives. Second, it recognizes that the "crucial moments of everyday life contain great drama and substance."⁴⁶ Sims says that while fiction writers do essentially the same thing, their characters can never reach the power level of a literary journalist's because, "we know these stories (and characters) are true."⁴⁷

The literary qualities are gained through technique, as well as the "collision of worlds from a confrontation with the symbols of another, real culture." He sums up the

⁴⁶ From the Norman Sims ed.. *The Literary Journalists*. Pg. 3

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pg. 4.

former by stating it "draws on immersion, voice, accuracy, and symbolism as essential forces." While some may argue that this method is "nothing more than a hybrid, combining the fiction writer's techniques with the facts gathered by a reporter...the motion picture combines voice recording with the photograph," thus the hybrid still deserves a name.⁴⁸ Finally, Sims argues that literary journalists "bring themselves into their stories to greater or lesser degrees and confess to human failings and emotions." Ordinary people in crucial contexts are at the crux of this style.

Sims uses the example of Joan Didion's *Salvador*. When Didion was walking down the street in an El Salvador city, she reached for her handbag and immediately heard "the clicking of metal on metal all up and down the street" as guns were cocked in expectation in that volatile city. When we read something like that, states Sims, "we involuntarily take sides over social and personal issues." It is feeling and emotion and culture. He concludes that standard reporting is based on events rather than "on an understanding of everyday life," and that, "Whatever we name it, the form is indeed both literary and journalistic, and it is more than the sum of its parts."⁴⁸

To investigate this form of reportage in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, an analysis using Sims' loose prerequisites is useful. We must read the *Autobiography* to see if any elements of immersion, voice and symbol are in place. Second, we must review Haley's involvement in the story. A synthesis of the two should reveal if the work holds up to any of these presuppositions of the genre.

Immersion revolves around the reporter's involvement with the subject and the subject's life. Alex Haley's first contact with Malcolm X was in 1960 in the Nation of Islam's Harlem cafe. Haley knew and had personal contact with him until his

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pg. 6

⁴⁸ Ibid.

assassination in 1965. His involvement with both Malcolm and the Nation are described in the Epilogue at the end of the *Autobiography*.

Malcolm and Haley's interaction came in two to three hour sessions in Haley's Greenwich Village apartment. This was supplemented by phone calls. Haley also followed the leader around the nation, listening to him speak at various venues, from Muslim temples to universities to television studios. Haley did not live with Malcolm X or his family; he did not saturate himself in the life of the Muslim community. But this book is about neither Malcolm's everyday routine, nor the Nation of Islam. It is about Malcolm. To the degree that the book is about the character, Haley was immersed himself in that character.

Much of literary journalism revolves around voice. The choice of first person often symbolizes the involvement by the author, or third person exemplifies an author who wishes to watch from the wings. This is critical for the genre to prove effective. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is a personal record of a man's life, so it would be logical that the voice of the work would be in Malcolm's. While this does not reveal a great deal as to the author's involvement, it should be noted that Haley's epilogue is in first person. This facilitates a smooth transition from the life of Malcolm X to Haley's account of their relationship and other insights.

Symbol in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is abundant. The book itself is both the story and manifesto of an icon. We see the proactive role the author took in recording Malcolm's story through the use of symbol. Chapter names have double meanings. Chapter one is titled "Nightmare." Its name not only gives an idea of a chaotic childhood, but also foreshadows the equally brutal end to a short life. Chapter two's name "Mascot" not only speaks to the Malcolm's role in a predominantly white community, but also foreshadows his descent into the Everyman of the ghetto hustler, pimp and drug dealer. Chapter three, "Icarus," represents Malcolm's flying so high in the sky of public

figurehood, his wings are soon melted by the sun of Elijah Muhammad's jealousy over his talented, brave leader's heights.

Several passages may be extracted to see symbol at work. Perhaps one of the most vivid of these is found in the first few pages when a rabbit serves an important role. Malcolm and the other Little children arrive home from school to find their mother and father arguing. Tension had been high due to threats against the family by white supremacy groups (Malcolm's father was a follower of the black nationalist Marcus Garvey). The Littles raised rabbits, and their "father had taken one of the rabbits which we were raising, and ordered my mother to cook it."

We raised rabbits and sold them to whites. My father had taken a rabbit from the rabbit pen. He had pulled off the rabbit's head. He was so strong, he needed no knife to behead chickens or rabbits. With one twist of his big black hands he simply twisted off the head and threw the bleeding necked thing back at my mother's feet.⁴⁹

On the next page we find out that Malcolm's father, Earl Little is severed in half by a train. The animal's death undoubtedly foreshadows Malcolm's father's death. In a sense, though, the rabbit does much more than that. The rabbit finds itself caged, much like Malcolm will later in his jail cell. For a brief moment, the father lifts the rabbit from the cage and, through that action, elevates it to the center of attention amid a bitter civil debate, even as Elijah Muhammad raises Malcolm and Malcolm finds himself at the center of the civil rights upheaval of the late fifties and early sixties. Violent, quick deaths descend on both creatures, their carcasses flung to Mrs. Little and Betty X, respectively.

Another motif is suggested by Albert E. Stone. He calls the *Autobiography* a "multilayered story -- simultaneously an inverted success myth, a spiritual quest for utopia, and a psychological search for the father lost on the bloody streetcar tracks of Lansing. Among Stone's observations is the realization that the "most common of these

⁴⁹*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 9.

unifying tropes...is the actual yet symbolic journey from west to east." Malcolm's metaphor is "the traveler who symbolically moves counter to the traditional movement of American and European history: not East to West, but from Mason, Michigan, back to Boston and New York, then finally all the way east to Mecca and Africa."⁵⁰

The second discussion relevant here is Haley's involvement in the story. His humanness and frailties are exposed to heighten the work's effectiveness. Haley stays out of the work until the very end, when he writes a pre-arranged epilogue. Within the epilogue is the partial experience Haley lived while writing the book. He gives a detailed account of the two's relationship. He supplements that explanation from anecdotes along the way. Haley traces Malcolm's ideological shift from Haley's vantage point, explains the assassination and describes the funeral. All of these elements join to show Haley's vulnerability. There are several instances when he is frightened by the charismatic leader.

Two experiences in particular illustrates this point:

Tense incidents occurred. One night a white friend was in the studio when Malcolm X arrived a little earlier than anticipated, and they passed each other in the corridor. Malcolm X's manner during all of the session suggested that his worst doubts had been confirmed. Another time when Malcolm X sat haranguing me about the glories of the Muslim organization, he was gesturing with his passport in his hand; he saw that I was trying to read its perforated number and suddenly he thrust the passport toward me, his neck flushed reddish: 'Get the number straight, but it won't be anything the white devil doesn't already know. He issued me the passport.'⁵¹

Also exposed is Malcolm X's humanness. Discussions of his habits, food he enjoyed and coffee he incessantly sipped add to our knowledge of the unknowable one. Malcolm X's intelligence is eulogized as well. Haley provides books he read and notes he scrawled on Haley's napkins to illustrate this. He also showed a Malcolm X who possessed a quick wit. "The white man's crazy," Malcolm once said of someone wanting

⁵⁰ Albert E. Stone. *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw*. University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia. 1982. Pg. 249.

⁵¹ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Op. Cit. Pg. 388.

to print his life, "I'll prove it to you. Do you think I'd publicize somebody knocking me like I do him?"

All of these elements combined form the life of the slain Malcolm X. These elements elevate Malcolm to a new level and, at the same time bring him down to earth. They could be dismissed as simply good elements of every autobiography. However, combined with the comparison of the *Playboy* Interview, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* shows many characteristics of literary journalism.

CHAPTER III THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND THE ALEX HALEY PAPERS

The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* resulted from a collaboration of two talented communicators. Malcolm X was able to put together words and illustrations effortlessly from a vocabulary largely built during his self-education in prison. Alex Haley was able to weave those words into a drama that holds attention, provokes thought and tugs at emotions. This collaboration and, more specifically, Alex Haley's role in the book's writing is discussed in this chapter. To put the work in context, the book's initial reviews will be examined. The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* was published in 1965 and fell under critical scrutiny during the late part of 1965 and early 1966. Critics' opinions of the book's content and treatment of Haley's role are explored. A discussion of the epilogue and the collaborative process ensues using the *Autobiography* and the work of Albert E. Stone, author of *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw*. This will shed light on the techniques and motifs Haley used to so effectively construct the narrative.

Finally, for the first time, a portion of Alex Haley's correspondence with his book agent, Paul Reynolds, will be examined to provide Haley's thoughts and perspective through a two-year span of the book's writing.

THE INITIAL REVIEWS OF THE *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Perhaps due to Malcolm X's assassination, reviews of the *Autobiography* simultaneously tried to eulogize the fallen man, discuss his life and contextualize him. The *New Yorker* provided a typically compact look at the work in its "Briefly Noted" section. It suggested Malcolm's metamorphosis as the central motif. It outlined the changes "as dictated to a journalist friend shortly before his assassination last February"

from "Malcolm Little (straight-A student in Lansing, Mich.) into Detroit Red (Harlem pimp, thief and drug pusher), into Malcolm X (Elijah Muhammed's right hand Fruit of Islam man), into El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Afro-American Muslim and pilgrim to Mecca)."¹

The *New Yorker* wrote that the story is not only hard to understand, it is also difficult to believe. Even still, it does possess a "ring, though somewhat amplified," of the truth. The *New Yorker* points out that Malcolm's documented evidence leaves it "impossible to question the essential accuracy of Malcolm's cold, unruffled assertion the 'white man is the devil.'"² Equally undeniable is that upon Malcolm's return from the Hajj he had redirected his thinking. His death marked a serious loss. Malcolm died with the conviction that "no man has believed perfectly until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself."³

Most reviews were not so concise, although many came to similar conclusions. *Newsweek* writes, "From the last time a white man called him nigger, to the last time he called the white man the devil, his life was a never-completed search for his rightful name."⁴ Much of this search occurred in front of the bright lights of a modern media age, replete with camera and microphone. Malcolm is described as the invisible man suddenly made visible, "but in just two dimensions -- dark menace vs. bright hope wherein there is no resolution. " Using flowery, sometimes fantastic language, *Newsweek* personifies Malcolm as a "born evangel," whose tongue is a "scimitar" and whose alienation began when his junior high English teacher put him in a box -- labeled nigger.⁵

¹ From "Briefly Noted: General." *The New Yorker*. November 11, 1965. Pg. 246.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. Pg. 247.

⁴ From "Satan in the Ghetto." *Newsweek*. November 15, 1965. Pg. 130.

⁵ Ibid. Pg. 131.

He sank to the lowest degradation, followed by conversion and rise in the Nation of Islam; *Newsweek* asserts that when Malcolm X split with Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm's symbol to his race and nation was shattered. He lost his Muslim image, and became a tortured creature who says to Haley in the epilogue, "We had the best organization the black man's ever had -- niggers ruined it."⁶

Newsweek's Malcolm X, found curled in a ball of tearful disappointment, who failed his religion and self, is in contrast to Truman Nelson's view of the man and book that is described as a "delinquent's progress" in *The Nation*. "It is the real American tragedy," Nelson says, "(to) fall from great heights of promise, not from inner-weakness or self-betrayal but because assassins stood up in plain sight, like a firing squad, and put 13 shotgun slugs into his chest and bullets in his legs as he lay dying." Malcolm traveled along a rough road that included dizzying childhood and adolescence, a life of crime and the depths of jail, to finally a "stupendous transformation" under the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. Elijah Muhammad is compared to Luther, who "knows how to look in the mud for the fallen and redeem them."⁷

Nelson suggests Malcolm's own revolutionary edge was honed on the abrasive rhetoric of the great abolitionists Garrison and Phillips; when he left prison he had obtained the "blessed assurance of the converted man" while assuring himself a place in "a community destined to redeem an oppressed people." Once up and running in that environment, Malcolm transformed a "store-front cult" into a full-fledged religion with more than 100 places of worship throughout the United States.⁸

But just as he reached his peak as a minister, Malcolm became distracted. The white mass media "disastrously diverted Malcolm from the necessary organizing of his

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ From Nelson, Truman. "Delinquent's Progress: The Autobiography of Malcolm X." *The Nation*. November 8, 1965. Pg. 336.

⁸ Ibid.

own people." He became the victim of the great American 'image psychosis' and began, once again, hustling among whites. While psychic victories before microphones, TV cameras and forums were gained, they "had very little to do with building a liberation force among his own people." This, according to Nelson, was Malcolm X's ultimate downfall. Besides, he had become a giant -- an international figure who had outgrown Elijah Muhammed. When justification of his cause became the focus, Malcolm's force began to disintegrate and Elijah Muhammed had no recourse but to get rid of him. When Malcolm X was expelled, Nelson said, the media again hustled to his elbow, "urging him, daring him to talk, explain, justify!" His last days were spent spreading himself thin in attempting to organize, justify and find himself.⁹

Commonweal's Nat Bentoff placed new significance on Malcolm's legacy when he wrote that Malcolm's life was an odyssey destined to influence civil rights causes for years to come: "While some Negro 'spokespeople' state the mass media made Malcolm X, this doesn't account for the respect in which he was held as he walked the streets of the ghetto, nor for his continued impact on more and more black activists."¹⁰

For Bentoff, Malcolm X created one race's movement and its pride. Malcolm was still credible and his influence apparent even after his split with the Nation of Islam. "Clearly the man had charisma and understanding and could also articulate his own American experience," wrote Bentoff. From it all, Malcolm emerges "warm, furious, wryly perceptive with the ability to change and grow."¹¹

The *New York Review of Books* states that to understand Malcolm's experience, one must go to the literature of conversion. For when Malcolm X discovers the white man is the devil, he is elated and born anew. His split with Elijah Muhammed was

⁹ Ibid. Pg. 337.

¹⁰ From Bentoff, Nate. "The Odyssey of a Black Man." *Commonweal*. January 28. 1966. Pg. 511.

¹¹ Ibid.

destined because in the Nation of Islam's creed there resides "none of the love for the negro one finds in W.E.B. DuBois," and Malcolm loved his own.¹²

Thomas Kertz, in *Christian Century*, believed Malcolm's life was a journey toward truth. After sinking to every kind of crime and exploitation and "unable to convince himself that he was a man, he did not act like one; and he blamed all troubles, even his own evil, on the collective white man. The last 100 pages offer relief and softening to the reader (who, black or white, must be furious at this point); irritation at the ideals and commitments set forth in the first half of the book will be salved in the final chapter."¹³ He is convinced that Malcolm's actions were governed by sincerity:

Ideas (that were) erroneous in the beginning (were) close to the truth in the final years. Shortly before his death he said, 'My whole life has been a chronology of changes...' Largely through his pilgrimage to Mecca, where he saw the oneness of races, Malcolm arrived at a philosophy of brotherhood, but he did not live long enough to preach it.¹⁴

Library Journal commented on Malcolm's perspective as "that of one who sees himself as the white man's victim until he earned self respect as a follower of Elijah Muhammed...Malcolm was a victim of the handicaps of race, but also the burdens of the urban life of the past two decades."¹⁵ While Malcolm and his life are dealt with comprehensively, the actual reaction to the writing can go almost unnoticed. In most cases, Haley's role and the book's style are summed up in a paragraph or a mere sentence. Sometimes, as in the case of the *New Yorker* and *Commonweal*, they are not mentioned at all. *Newsweek* comments that while the *Autobiography* is able to conjure up such vivid imagery and Haley has captured Malcolm's style and anger, "the book is somehow a

¹² From Stone, I.F. "The Pilgrimage of Malcolm X." *The New York Review of Books*. November 11, 1965. 246.

¹³ From "Journey Toward Truth." *Christian Century*. December 8, 1965. Pg. 1513.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ From "Urban Problems." *Library Journal*. January 1, 1966. Pg. 101.

curiously external record, a verbal kinescope that sheds little light on Malcolm's tormented soul."¹⁶

Nelson, in *The Nation*, did not call into question the lack of soulful introspection. Instead, he praised Haley for his outstanding effort: "The reader must put aside any prejudice he may have about an 'as told to' book. It is a superb job of transcription. (The tapes seem to run onto the paper with the clacking efficiency of a wire service machine.)" Nelson says later (supporting his own claim that the Nation of Islam could not have killed Malcolm) that Haley's epilogue is a revelation. Malcolm's barred entrance into France by the government gave him the impression that the Nation of Islam was not trying to kill him:

On Saturday, February 20, he made a most significant phone call to Alex Haley. I'm going to tell you something, brother. The more I think about what is happening lately, I'm not at all sure it's the Muslims. I know what they can do and I know they can't do some of the stuff that's happening to me lately. The more I think of what happened to me in France, I think I'm going to quit saying it's the Muslims....¹⁷

Nelson's conclusion that this "marvelous book is not a book, but a man, a tragic, agonizing, palpable man" is outstanding:

Viewed in its complete historical context, this is indeed a great book. Its dead level honesty, its passion, its unsolved ambiguities will make it stand as a monument of the most painful of truths: that this country, this people, this western world has practiced, unspeakable cruelty against a race, an individual, who might have made its fraudulent humanism a reality.¹⁸

Commonweal's Kretz stated that Haley is an "admirably unobtrusive and astute organizer of the material...almost a footnote,"¹⁹ while the *Library Journal* wrote that

¹⁶ *Newsweek*. Op. Cit.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Library Journal*. Op. Cit.

Haley carries out his task with "sensitivity and devotion. Here one may read, in agony of this brilliant negro's self-creation, the agony of an entire people in search of their identity."²⁰

THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND A. E. STONE

Albert E. Stone authored *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw*. The seventh chapter titled "Two Recreate One: The Act of Collaboration in Recent Black Autobiography -- Ossie Guffy, Nate Shaw, Malcolm X," examines comprehensively Alex Haley and Malcolm X's work together on Malcolm's story. He prefaces his examination by saying that *Autobiography* among black Americans "is one of the richest, most varied, and most revealing modes of personal expression since 1945."²¹ He believes that taken as both history and literature, autobiography provides a roomy mechanism that is "flexible enough to satisfy the expressive needs of diverse talents and careers."²² It has played a serious role "in the struggle for cultural achievement within the black community....It has also provided some compelling visions of what it means to be black in white America."²³

Beyond normal biography and autobiography is collaborative autobiography, two coming together to record the life of one. "This practice," says Stone, "has characterized American autobiography since ante-bellum times, when some slave narratives appeared (either openly or secretly) as the work of a ghostwriter or maneunsis."²⁴

Not confined to black autobiography, this method can sometimes be "essential to powerful artistic narratives which possess great historical significance as well." Black

²⁰ Stone. Op. Cit.

²¹ Ibid. Pg. 231.

²² Ibid. Pg. 232.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

autobiography merely provides a ready context for "considering collaboration as a distinctive occasion of contemporary literary culture."²⁵ Stone thinks this collaboration goes beyond biography/autobiography and questions whether it enters an "intermediate mode." He also asks:

Must or can one read collaborations in the same way one reads and reality-tests conventional life-histories? How are details of the collaborative process itself communicated, if at all, and where does this occur in the text? Is such "background" information important? Can one come to trust a collaborative work as one trusts (or distrusts) a traditional narrative? How is that trust earned or forfeited?²⁶

The "high watermark" of this collaborative activity for Stone is the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. He starts his examination of the *Autobiography* by using Malcolm's quote following his father's own violent death, "It is my belief that I, too, will die by violence....I have done all that I can to be prepared." Stone believes that the autobiographical act is part of that preparation, and notes that the book is closed by a similar quote: "Anything I do today, I regard as urgent. No man is given but so much time to accomplish whatever is his life's work. My life in particular never has stayed fixed in one position for very long. You have seen how throughout my life, I have often known unexpected drastic changes."²⁷

Changes were routine near the end of Malcolm X's life. How he was "captured on the run" by Alex Haley and his life constructed into some sort of coherent narrative "is part of the mystery of this remarkable collaborative act."²⁸ The combination of "an ex-hustler, pimp, prisoner and streetcorner preacher and an ex-Coast Guardsman and journeyman writer for popular magazines" Stone found quite unlikely. Yet to record a life

²⁵Ibid. Pg. 233.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid. Pg. 246.

²⁸Ibid.

moving full throttle, a recording which took place in the nick of time, could only have been executed via collaboration.²⁹

The result, says Stone, is a story of passion and power and the most realistic "experience of living at break-neck speed in 20th Century" ever put together. He adds that "no autobiography exerts a stronger moral leverage upon its readers, black and white."³⁰

Before the book was written, Malcolm X and Alex Haley made an agreement. Malcolm X insisted, "Nothing can be in this book's manuscript that I didn't say, and nothing can be left out that I want in it." By agreeing to this, "Haley won an equally important concession," Stone says. Haley writes in the *Autobiography*, "I asked for -- and he gave -- his permission that at the end of the book I could write comments of my own about him which would not be subject to his review."³¹

Stone states that Malcolm wanted a writer, not an interpreter: "But by the time the epilogue was written and the book published, Malcolm X was dead. As biography therefore, a major burden of Haley's section is to record the tragic last months of the black leader's life. " Yet more essential, Stone writes, is not their separate tasks, but the image of them both working. The vision is of Malcolm pacing, talking and jotting notes down on napkins while Haley "adroitly questions" him, looking afterward on the napkins. Stone says:

All the while the black leader was living through the agony of his split with Elijah Muhammed. A split with portentous consequences for both the public and private self. The temptation was therefore extreme to revise the past already revisited, including his conversion in prison. Haley saw this as a great danger. "Telephoning Malcolm X, I

²⁹Ibid. Pg. 247.

³⁰Ibid. Stone goes on to mention here that Larry Neal states listening to Malcolm X tell his story is both a beautiful and painful experience. "To set this against other collaborations brings out the extraordinary intensity of idea and emotion of this story of a driven man, who in the words of Robert Hayden, "became much more than there was ever time for him to be," concludes Stone.

³¹Ibid. Pg. 248.

reminded him of his previous decision, and I stressed that if those chapters contained such telegraphing to readers of what would lie ahead, then the book would automatically be robbed of some of its building suspense and drama. Malcolm X said gruffly, 'Whose book is this?' I told him., 'Yours, of course' and I only made the objection in my position as a writer." Though Haley's suggestion was finally accepted, the narrative does signal future changes in Malcolm's viewpoint and values, Yet these announcements are not intrusive enough to disturb the vivid sense of a self living and moving fully in each moment and milieu of the past. Here, as elsewhere, compromise between competing impulses in the two collaborating reflects the dual perspective -- then seen from now -- of all autobiography.³²

Stone writes that Malcolm X's story cannot be contained by the label memoir. It has elements of it, yet it also owns elements of "testament, polemic, apology and eventually a searingly honest baring of the inner self." When arrested in Boston, Malcolm interjects that he's never told anyone about his sordid past. This past serves as example and "will be outweighed by evidence of society's systemic evils." This past is also a powerful tool. Malcolm's voice recounting it "re-endows the actors of the past with their onetime reality, even though he always brackets them within the perspective of the older narrator who has been twice saved."³³ This past enables skeptical readers to balance Malcolm's truth with what others have said. For the poor black person in the Northern ghetto, however, this past confirms the persona of their "straight-talking hero," who has walked in their shoes and trod where they have trod.

Malcolm as historian provides a "bitter viewpoint" of the depression. His family becomes fatherless and utilizes welfare. Malcolm is also adept at reconstructing pre-war Harlem, its night life and music scene expressed through the eyes of a "young, yet not morally innocent newcomer who enters that glittering Mecca and embraces it false values."³⁴

³²Ibid. Pg. 248-249.

³³Ibid. Pg. 250-251.

³⁴Ibid. Pg. 251.

Malcolm's life is then propelled by three temples in this holy city. The Roseland, Savoy and Audubon ballrooms "stitch together this parable of small-town boy in the city":

Each is vividly recaptured, though the last only in Haley's epilogue. Thereby the basic tension of black urban life are dramatized from within, below and outside, for these are Malcolm X's moral perspectives on American social experience. Each new situation and role -- the hungry welfare child mooching a meal from neighbors, the single black boy in a Midwestern school, the shoeshine kid snapping his rag over Johnny Hodges' shoes, the hustler, the draft-dodger, the prisoner known as Satan -- is rendered precisely and unsentimentally.³⁵

Religion, of little interest to a young Malcolm Little, is seen now from the perspective of a Malcolm who was both in the Nation of Islam and an orthodox Muslim. Thus, Stone says, Malcolm's younger life is fertile with prophecies concerning this end. "At every stage of the story then," writes Stone, "the autobiographer grounds his moral and social criticism in historical circumstance and personal experience."³⁶

The *Autobiography* thus records "a time obsessed vision of an individual's and a group's twentieth-century experience." It is ideological and mythic and successfully provides drama and emotion. Haley enjoys this achievement because he "(recreates) another's voice as well as words." Haley provides this speaker, a "midnight monologist pacing Haley's flat and telling specters of his haunted past into reappearance." We are presented with a voice that is a natural "outgrowth of earlier articulate selves."³⁷ Each of these selves possess a different vernacular style that enriches the moment.

³⁵Ibid. Pg. 252

³⁶Ibid. Stone states:

His mother's vision and dietary practices, for instance, are on one level simply Seventh-Day Adventist delusion, but on another level they foretell the son's final Islamic allegiance, as A.L. Elmessiri has pointed out. His father's Southern Baptist religion and Garveyite politics are similarly sorted out: one is irrelevant, the other an invaluable legacy. The explicitly theological proclamations by the later Nation of Islam convert read less convincingly that the often anguished memories of childhood and youth. Even Minister Malcolm is a necessary stage in the evolution of this strong black identity. Though some of his historical and social statements as a Muslim sound biased or even absurd, these must be understood, like the beliefs and speculations of the older Henry Adams, as in part dramatic reverted of the intellectual life of a changing mind.

³⁷ Ibid. Pg. 253 These "selves" are, Stone writes:

Haley's re-creation of Malcolm's voice doesn't fully explain "all the book's moral intensity and emotional density." It finds itself being carried along by various other unifying "tropes." These include the aforementioned journey, his names and nicknames "which mark successive stages in the transformation from Malcolm Little to El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. Clothes and personal belongings serving as "emblematic images." His clothes define him at certain stages of his life, from the zoot suited Detroit Red, to the black tie and glasses Minister Malcolm. Stone says they reflect social reality.³⁸ But the metaphor also goes deeper than the possessions themselves. The act of taking off clothes is symbolic. "Imagination is not necessary...to complete the meaning of the scene when Sandwich Red gets the drunken 'red-face cracker soldier' on the Yankee Clipper to strip in preparation for a fight, which dissolves in laughter and ridicule at the white man's expense." This may be contrasted with Malcolm on the Hajj, losing his western clothes and donning the white towels of pilgrimage "as the visible sign of rebirth." The grown man is willing to become an infant once more.³⁹

Yet, according to Stone, these images are rendered weak by vivid "reflection of the inner self "seen in the "repeated pattern in Malcolm X's life of two persons face-to-face -- one a dark-skinned Negro, the other a light-skinned or white partner or opponent."⁴⁰ In rapid fire succession, Stone identifies a dark father and light mother arguing and fighting his light skinned then-insane mother and dark half sister embracing (signs of weakness and strength), Malcolm dancing with Laura and then Sophia and his

The youth in Boston avidly soaking up street slang; the prisoner copying the first page of the dictionary in preparation for a debate; the Nation of Islam preacher fishing for converts on a Harlem street. Even a small error like printing Fanny Kemble's name as Kimball" underlines the spoken quality and sincerity of the narrator. A close look at this familiar literary device confirms the subtlety of Haley's manipulation of Malcolm X's voice. For one thing, the reader's assumption that memory works spontaneously and accurately as a kind of blurring out is exploited. 'They had a white cook-helper, I recall -- Lucille Lathrop. (It amazes me how these names come back, from a time I haven't thought about for more than twenty years)', he remarks of his stay in the juvenile detention home.'

³⁸Ibid. Pg. 255.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid. Pg. 255-256.

final handshake at the traffic light with the white man. To Stone, they are not only persons interacting, but also signify a man attempting to balance these forces in his own psyche. They are thus an "important means of expressing psychic dimensions of the autobiographical act."⁴¹

The language of the *Autobiography* suggests to Stone that the "trajectory of Malcolm X's recreated life leads through and beyond history and social experience." It dramatizes a "proud man's will to live, learn, and change on his own terms." That underlying impulse, telegraphed first in the opening prophecies about his father and his own fate, points according to Stone, to Roger Rosenblatt's observation that many black autobiography subjects "take a calm, celebratory attitude toward death." This traditionally Christian posture towards death is an ironic twist in the life-history of a muslim Malcolm X.

Malcolm X, then, expresses a "vision" of his life's history that is much bigger than "survival." His story goes beyond any human definition. Stone inserts a quote from the epilogue here: "'If I'm alive when this book comes out, it will be a miracle,' Haley recalls Malcolm saying at one of their last sessions. 'I'm not saying it distressingly,' He leaned forward and touched the buff gold bed-spread. 'I'm saying it like I say that's a bed spread.'"

Stone remarks in conclusion that authors of collaborative autobiographies use "simulated oral performance, a legendary success plot and traditional metaphors of the self like the journey or clothes." He posits that as a literary occasion, the collaboration has to be examined not as one man's work, but "a tandem or group performance, essentially dramatic and historical in nature...as the end product of a prior process or set of gestures partly hidden and partly known." The collaborative processes yield can only endure if the subject is captivating enough to last through the years. This is accomplished in the

⁴¹Ibid.

Autobiography, says Stone, because as Haley himself said of Malcolm, "he was the most electric personality I have ever met, and I still can't quite conceive him dead."⁴²

THE ALEX HALEY PAPERS

The Alex Haley Papers provide an actual look at what Alex Haley was doing as he put together Malcolm X's personal history. This portion of the papers, a body of correspondence to Alex's book agent at the time, Paul Reynolds, includes instances when Haley wrestled with larger truths, struggled through material and attempted to piece a life together while surviving as a budding literary giant in his Greenwich Village basement apartment. These letters illustrate the unfolding drama of the book's writing over a two and one-half year period (from 1963-1965). The letters can be divided into three categories: organization and editing considerations, discussions of truth and Haley's marketing of chapters. Sometimes much can be gleaned from a single letter, other times multiple letters combine to illustrate a single theme.

This first series of letters deals with the treatment, as well as the organization of material in the autobiography, and Haley's role. The overall organization changed throughout the book's writing. So did the way Haley wanted to see himself portrayed. Fearing that the original arrangement of labeling his by-line "co-author," Alex Haley made the decision to change it to "as told to":

I consider my role that of doing a purely clinical job of shaping a great volume of Malcolm X's printed and taped material into the form of a book.

Co-Authoring with Malcolm X would, to me, imply sharing his views -- when mine are almost a complete antithesis of his. I respect Malcolm's talents, and I am sometimes awed by his skill as a demagogue. Malcolm's respect for me as a writer has been cumulative over the last three years that I have done three major magazine articles about the Black Muslims. It was through this mutual professional understanding of our different perspectives that I was willing to do the book and he consented to give that exclusive right.⁴³

⁴²Ibid. Pg. 264.

Alex believed he played the role of a "shaper" who would add form to Malcolm's life experiences, putting them together into a resulting book. This shaping was an inexact science. Early on, Haley wrote an outline of how he believed the book would progress. It included an outline of all the chapters after number four, each of which seem like a series of essays, but which are all addressed in narrative form in the end product.⁴⁴

Elijah Muhammed is mentioned twice. First, Haley reports that he enjoyed a successful interview with the leader and was able to get a short-course on the Nation of Islam's theology. It was during this encounter that Elijah Muhammed proclaimed that Malcolm was one of his best ministers.⁴⁵ In another instance, Paul Reynolds asks Haley to stop using the prefix "Honorable" so much, or even his first name, for Reynolds felt it was giving too much credence to the sect's leader.⁴⁶

⁴³From the *Alex Haley Papers*. The Estes Kefauver Special Collections Library at the University of Tennessee: Knoxville. Box 2, Folder 11. Letter dated August 5, 1963.

⁴⁴Ibid. Labeled PR2493 Gregory J. Reed, a Detroit lawyer, recently purchased four unpublished chapters of the *Autobiography* at Alex Haley's estate auction. The April 12, 1993 issue of *TIME* magazine highlighted a chapter titled "20 Millions" in which Malcolm sketches a step-by-step program for establishing black schools, libraries and banks. While this may have been previously written, it should be noted that the shift of the book changed from straight essay into a narrative that seemed to encompass much of Malcolm's ideology. Nevertheless, these original chapters are as follows:

Chapter five - "Slave Trade" dealt with slave traffic in its present and past forms.

Chapter six - "Christianity and the White Man" was to attack the religion as a tool of oppression. Haley includes a quote from Malcolm that states it took Martin Luther King sitting in a Birmingham jail "to remind white ministers and rabbis in his famous letter...that Christianity and religion were supposed to be preach brotherhood and the equality of man."

Chapter seven - "The Liberal" was to express Malcolm's preference for the racist Southerner vs. the hypocritical Northern liberal.

Chapter eight - "Brutal Police" would have discussed law agencies' brutality against the black man.

Chapter nine - "Why Are We Attacked" would have rebutted arguments against Black Muslims.

Chapter ten - "Farce on Washington" would have discussed the hypocrisy involved in the March on Washington.

Chapter eleven - "What the Emergence of Africa did for the Black Man" was to show what the reawakening of Africa was doing in America.

Chapter twelve - "The Potential of 20 Million Muslims in the United States" would have outlined what a land of majority Muslims could do.

Chapter thirteen - "The End of the White Man is Near" would have dealt with the Nation of Islam's theology that preached God's judgment upon the white man.

Chapter fourteen - "Questions I Get Asked" would have focused on just that.

Chapter fifteen - "What We Muslims Want -- What We Believe" would have provided a better understanding of the Nation of Islam.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Letter dated September 5, 1963 and labeled PR2492.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Letter dated Oct. 14, 1964 and labeled PR 2518.

This letter also includes Malcolm's request to change the name of a white woman he dates in the chapter titled "Laura" from Karen to Sophia. Haley was unable to figure out why. Could it be that Malcolm, aware of Haley's use of symbolism, wanted the name changed to represent the goddess of wisdom? Sophia taught him a great deal not only about women in general, but also his perception of the black man's attitude toward white women.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1964 Haley wrote a note to Reynolds that perhaps unlocks some insight as to how Haley shaped facts into Malcolm X's voice. He discusses in an April 28, 1964 letter about the poignant story of Malcolm and Betty X's courtship. Haley writes "I began to wheedle on the phone day by day from the reticent Mrs. Malcolm X their love story, which I hadn't expected." While the actual words of the conversation are not included in the letter, it shows that Alex was researching outside of his discussions with Malcolm X to put together the minister's history. It could be, as well, that Haley was merely trying to figure out the right questions to ask.⁴⁸

"Gentleman, we have on the road an awesome, living drama," wrote Haley to his agent and publishers in 1964.⁴⁹ Perhaps even more dramatic are Haley's own marketing of chapters as he turned them in and his attempts to placate editors as deadlines came and went. They represent Haley at his best, the sheer improvised thoughts on a story in the making. The words speak for themselves.

On September 22, 1963, Haley dropped an initial letter to "Mr. Reynolds of Doubleday" and announced, "To this end I am being careful that order and coherence is being given to the iconoclastic, thought provoking or rather, thought demanding Muslim perspective. Of course that is precisely my job.....and I am doing it with care."

⁴⁷Ibid. Letter dated Jan. 19, 1964. Labeled PR 2572.

⁴⁸Ibid. Letter dated April 28, 1964. Labeled PR2601.

⁴⁹Ibid. Letter dated Jan. 28, 1964. Labeled PR2581.

His intent was further defined when he wrote one of the editors on the project, Wolcott Gibbs, and stated his purpose was "to present the style of Malcolm, the demagogue, sometimes ragged at the edges, sometimes hounding, sometimes dulcet, without obvious intrusion by the 'as told to author.'"

Early on it was evident that Haley was taken by his subject. He wrote to Reynolds:

I sit here fascinated for hours sometimes, drumming on the typewriter as the unbelievable chrysalis spread, unfolds, opens -- and from the little boy whose home burned, whose father was murdered, whose mother insane, a hornet finally emerges.... (Malcolm), too, is caught up in this project now. You will perceive a manuscript that you will join me in feeling sure is going to be the impact book of 1964.⁵⁰

The impact, if delayed for the public, continued for Haley:

As yet, the drama of this book is only scratched. Malcolm X is a product, a victim of the social evils of his era.....Set yourselves for the next, the swift, the chilling emergence of the Boston to New York dining car worker, 16-years-old, passing for 21, who becomes Harlem's incredible predatory Detroit Red. And finally, the addict gunman emerges whose life is beginning to close in. I have often been so fascinated with the development of America's #1 demagogue today.⁵¹

His next letter further developed the emergence of the "addict gunman" while revealing a tidbit concerning Communist interests in Harlem:

III. Homeboy -- a symbol -- an everyman. A galvanic drama of a catharsis of a man, a highly singular man. "Ultimate heartbreak" in Laura. The Wolfshark hustler X reveals for the first time Communists infiltrated the streets of Harlem using white women to proselytize among the negro -- and made acceptable public intermingling. It was a harsh nether-world in which this wolf-shark foraged.⁵²

⁵⁰Ibid. Letter dated Oct. 20, 1963. Labeled PR2523.

⁵¹Ibid. Letter with no date. Labeled PR2526.

⁵²Ibid. Letter dated Nov. 18, 1963. Labeled PR2527.

The chapter "Laura," Haley says in a later letter, was "weaved carefully" to present a scene in which Malcolm the "shark-like hustler, the criminal," Malcolm "the prisoner so evil that others named him 'Satan' in admiration," Malcolm "the incredible prison convert into a "quasi-religious, Islamic 'Muslim'" and that movement could best be portrayed. He reviews the many faces of Malcolm Little, from a 16-year-old who possesses a chivalrous quality to an American Negro wildly dancing and serving as an "universal image." He also reveals an initial mission here: "I've come to feel that this book, among its other potential mission, (should) hold up a clear dramatic mirror of the distortions of human values which may be induced by climates which our society lets exist."⁵³

In early 1964, Haley proclaimed that Malcolm was "so hot, so hot a subject!":

Gentlemen, not in a decade, two decades, has there been a book that is going to sweep the market like wildfire to equal this one. The real excitement begins in the forthcoming Satan, when he begins to be converted in prison, and then it will grip and clutch at emotions and in places shock and even horrify all the rest of the way. You can't name me a book that will begin to touch it. Wait and see! We are going to have the man making history of sort, report behind the scenes, telling to me as (death threats and assassination attempts) as it happens to him. Things none of the press is even close to -- things that, when the book appears will make it sensational.⁵⁴

This seemingly gets to the second phase of Haley's mission, which would be to assure his agent and editors that the book would be a guaranteed money maker. The money theme came to a climax when Haley stated he would show that the Nation of Islam was a "fantastic, always gripping, completely proselytizing and conversion mechanism (that could be classified as) America's first indigenous cult. Think of this book's dramatic impact wherever books are read. Paul, think of the bidding for rights!"⁵⁵ In these

⁵³Ibid. Letter dated Nov. 26, 1963. Labeled PR2534.

⁵⁴Ibid. Letter dated March 21, 1964. Labeled PR2586.

instances, Haley has donned the roll of "Detroit Red," becoming a sort of hustler as he peddles the book's drama to stave off a cancellation and quell an growingly impatient host. This hustler characteristic embodied by Haley and Malcolm X emerges in dense, evangelical monologues. Both enjoyed a charisma all their own: Malcolm X's expressed primarily through speech, Haley's through the pen.

Along with this self-marketing strategy came dialogue concerning truth and method. From the beginning, Reynolds was concerned about the public's perception of Haley. "Get in somewhere," Reynolds wrote, "you are not a Black Muslim. (I am) concerned that the reader not think he is spouting truth."⁵⁶

Reynolds made it known when he saw things he disliked. Laura, particularly, caught his displeasure because he didn't find the situation initially astounding. "What I basically don't like about this chapter," he continued, "is that you've suddenly decided to write fiction -- How can Malcolm remember all this dialogue that took place 25 years ago? You or he are making it up.....I don't think you ought to write fiction or use fiction. This should be told in Malcolm's language of today, when he is writing the book."⁵⁷

Alex responded: "The secondary situation was that some of Malcolm's recollections by him or me induced a feeling of fiction. To be sure, certainly no such crutch is needed by this explosive drama. (So far, society's chrysalis still is building, wait until the last half dragon emerges and turns upon his creator)."⁵⁸

Reynolds again responds by writing, "The only thing that can go into this is what he remembers, what happened to him that he remembers. Never can you insert what

⁵⁵Ibid. Letter not dated. Labeled PR2590. It seems as if Haley was not taking in to consideration the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints when he made this claim. Known as the Mormons, this "proseletyzing and conversion mechanism" was organized in 1830 by Joseph Smith.

⁵⁶Ibid. Letter dated Oct. 1, 1963. Labeled PR2507.

⁵⁷Ibid. Letter dated Dec. 4, 1963. Not labeled.

⁵⁸Ibid. Letter dated Dec. 28, 1963. labeled PR2542.

might have happened or should have happened or could have happened."⁵⁹ This discussion is never resolved in the correspondence. But it is played out in the book, where dialogue and situations seem to have been left.

The process of writing the *Autobiography* had a direct effect on Haley. He was able to refine his skills as a reporter and writer, he successfully promoted his skills and his product, he engaged in dialogue of literary importance, and he discovered within himself a passion for understanding the black experience in America. That passion is what he is most remembered for, having authored *Roots* and spending the rest of his life telling what he learned. His correspondence provides insight as to those subjects and raises questions concerning content, form and structure. It ultimately provides a very real way to view Haley's own metamorphosis and thoughts. Said Haley:

In its process, too, something is happening to me, a thing I have read about sometimes, in author's autobiographies...books about writing, but that no one could begin to understand, really, until it happens to him. It is the difference inside the thing that forms inside and comes up to clutch and consume you when you get more and more into a book, when the material begins to direct you and command you into what must be done with it.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Ibid. Letter dated Dec. 30, 1963. labeled PR2537.

⁶⁰Ibid. Letter dated November, 1963. Labeled PR2530.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS

Here at the center is a creature: it would be our business to show how through every instant of every day of every year of his existence alive he is from all sides streamed inward upon, bombarded, pierced, destroyed by that enormous sleeting of all objects forms and ghosts how great how small no matter, which surround and whom his senses take in as great and perfect and exact particularly as we can name them:

This would be our business, to show them each thus transfixed: but it is beyond my human power to do. The most I can do -- the most I can hope to do -- is to make a number of physical entities as plain and vivid as possible and to make a few guesses, a few conjectures and to leave to you much of the burden of realizing in each of them what I have wanted to make clear of, them as a whole: how each is itself; and how each is a shapener.

James Agee - 1932¹

While James Agee and Alex Haley were worlds apart in subject matter (Agee researched white tenant farmers of Alabama), their challenge was the same. When writing about a person's life, upon what does one focus and why? That is the ultimate struggle of the writer.

Haley's struggle was to create a human character out of Malcolm X, the militant proclaimer of Elijah Muhammad's message. Haley went about the task of shaping a seemingly unapproachable demagogue into someone that was once a little boy who laid on the ground watching clouds forming and thinking of what his future would hold. Haley created the picture of a lindy-hopping teenager having a good time in the height of the Harlem Renaissance. He enabled us to sit in a prison cell with Satan and on a platform with the messiah and in a mosque among those totally unknown. Haley's was a process of humanization.

This study has attempted to identify and prove this process. Haley's life, his various writings, and his correspondence have all been scoured in hopes of illustrating the humanization of Malcolm X. Along the way, two other points have been argued and

¹ From James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston. 1988. This study has been concerned with what Agee agonized over in his book concerning Alabama tenant farmers in the late 1930s.

substantiated: that the *Autobiography* was, in reality, an extended Q&A interview that followed the construction principles inherent in a *Playboy* Interview and that the *Autobiography* showed some of the characteristics found in literary journalism.

Norman Sims says, and Haley confirms that "the crucial moments of everyday life contain great drama and substance," for everyday in Malcolm X's life held the utmost urgency.² Malcolm X was a driven man, whose glance at his watch revealed the psychological reality of an obsession with time - time that ran out and time that brought together two African-Americans from different worlds.

A glance at Haley's life reveals the cross section of a natural-born story teller. Evenings spent on his grandmother's porch in Henning, Tennessee, listening to family slave stories trickled into days of school that resulted in dreaming of far away places and characters. Haley traversed abroad while bringing some of those characters into existence while on a Coast Guard vessel. Small successes within that experience fueled a career in journalism and other forms of writing.

Haley's stock as a writer rose when he helped pioneer the *Playboy* Interview. The *Playboy* Interview is unique because its depth and breadth are substantial, and because this form of Q & A technique uses the method of shaping questions and answers along a premeditated path. To test this claim, the *Playboy* Interview of Malcolm X was explored, and, after using Burke's method of dramatic rhetoric, a structure similar to a play in three acts became evident. As a result of his work with Malcolm X on various interviews in the late 1950's and early 1960's, Alex Haley was approached about recording the life of Malcolm X. The *Autobiography* was written.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X illustrates a form of rhetoric known as dramatism in its structure, although in a more unabridged form. Similarities between the interview and the *Autobiography* abound also in content and wording. Thus, a connection

² From the Norman Sims' edited *The Literary Journalists*. Pg. 3.

between the methods used in Haley's *Playboy* Interview and Haley's *Autobiography of Malcolm X* definitely exists.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X also exemplifies some of the elements found in a genre of reportage known as literary journalism. Devices of narrative, voice, characterization, symbol, the everyday experience and a distinct pointing toward ultimate truth are apparent in the text. In light of the similarities between interview and the *Autobiography*, this assertion that the *Autobiography* exhibits characteristics of the reporting form becomes solid.

When published, the *Autobiography* drew mainly positive reviews from the critics. Most of the time, Malcolm's life, and not the book itself, was reviewed and contextualized. Alex Haley was praised in many instances for being an accurate chronicler, a scribe who turned the tape recorder on for a couple of years and placed those tapes dutifully on paper.

But in essence this was not Haley's function. He was instead a potter who threw the clay of Malcolm X's life on his wheel and spun away, shaping and molding it into an epic journey of continual change. Malcolm X came through the kiln as a pilgrim whose humble, dirt-poor beginnings became the foundation a strong, down to earth leader. In the end it is this pot and not the potter who is visible.

Albert E. Stone believes the invisibility of the potter was due to the collaborative process between Alex Haley and Malcolm X. The imagery of Harlem's former hustler of Harlem and the countrified story teller from Tennessee coming together in a Greenwich Village flat is incredible. Their working agreement resulted in a document that flourished under the personality, charisma and vocabulary of Malcolm X, while containing thick layers of symbolism, idea and storyline from the one so gifted in storytelling (with a knack for the intuitive) Haley.

Haley was aware of the impending drama that was unfolding before him. The correspondence between Haley and book agent Paul Reynolds illustrates that not only did

Haley realize he had a significant subject on his hands, but a subject whose life was in danger. Haley was the only person able to penetrate deeply into Malcolm X's well insulated self to witness the day-to-day up until Malcolm X's assassination. Haley revealed to Reynolds that he was the only reporter unlocking one of the biggest stories, or, as Haley called it, dramas, of the century. Beyond the obvious excitement of a writer who was anticipating material benefits of such a story was an African-American who was aware that he was walking with history. He knew he was in a position to make a mark. The catalyst for making that mark fell into place:

On the mild afternoon of Sunday, February 21, 1965, (the Audubon Ballroom) was filled with a wan wintry light.....Appearing on the platform to an explosion of cheering and applause -- that familiar tall and gangling figure, his face wrapped in one of his spacious grins -- he waited for silence and then offered the Muslim greeting 'As-salaam alaikum, brothers and sisters,' and the audience chorused in turn, 'Wa-alaikum salaam.' At that instant about eight rows back in the crowd below him, a man leaped to his feet crying, 'Get your hand out of my pocket!' As heads turned and Malcolm's security guards at the foot of the platform began moving toward the distraction, Malcolm lifted both arms and called, 'Hold it! Hold it! Don't get excited. Let's cool it, brothers.' But now a man was scrambling toward him, hunched forward over a long glint of metal. And, with Malcolm's arms still lifted in that becalming gesture, a shot-gun blast blew him backward with a perfectly circular seven-inch pattern of holes over his heart. He toppled, with blood spattered across his face and shirt, down through two empty chairs to the platform, his head hitting with a loud thunk, and the shotgun, a sawed-off double-barrel twelve-gauge, blasted him again where he lay.³

Malcolm X was the only man in Harlem who could reprimand thugs on a street for throwing their lives away without fear of losing his. He was the only one who could walk through his neighborhood and get greeted by drunks as "My Man!" Alex Haley saw in a dead Malcolm X, as he did some years later in Kunte Kinte, a powerful, timeless figure whose significance in American history held both "Great" and "Everyman" potential. The *Autobiography*, then, became more than mere life story. Under the intuitive

³ From Marshall Frady's "The Children of Malcolm" that appeared in the October 12, 1992 issue of *The New Yorker*.

pen of Alex Haley, Malcolm X flourished. Haley's realization that he was on the trail of Malcolm's life assured Haley he could capitalize on his idea.

In the end, Malcolm X became a cultural icon. Malcolm had always been bigger than any situation or time he found himself occupying. This is evidenced especially after Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam. Eldridge Cleaver relates the impact of Malcolm's split with the Nation on Cleaver's own position:

I had been a part of the Black Muslim movement in prison. And after Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X split, I went with those who followed Malcolm X.....You have to understand that at that time, Elijah Muhammad had put out such a damning opinion against Malcolm X that you risked your life by displaying his picture. Since I really owned Black House, 'cause I had rented it, I forbade Elijah Muhammad's picture to be put up, and put up Malcolm X's picture. And this was really the device that created the sparks for people to come to see. The more racial blacks at that time were of the Malcolm X persuasion, even though it was just coming into their consciousness. And when they were walking through the Black House and experiencing the cultural environment plus the speeches and things that went on there. We were obviously and consciously creating a Malcolm X-type mentality. ⁴

Alex Haley not only facilitated the representation of this cultural icon, but he skillfully framed a human Malcolm X -- one who traveled to Mecca and experienced firsthand the brotherhood of man. This change, said entertainer Harry Belafonte, "would create grave problems for Malcolm, but he was a man of enormous courage; he would not deny his sense that a new alliance would have to be forged."⁵

⁴ Hampton, Henry and Fayer, Steve. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. Bantam: New York. 1990. Pg. 362-363.

⁵ Ibid. Pg. 259-260.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Alex Haley Papers. The Estes Kefauver Special Collections Library at the University of Tennessee: Knoxville.

Haley, Alex. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Ballantine: New York. 1992.

Fisher, Murray (ed.). *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*. Ballantine Books: New York. 1993.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES ABOUT THE PLAYBOY INTERVIEW

Golson, G. Barry (ed.). *The Playboy Interviews II*. Wideview: New York. 1981.

Grimes, William. "Behind the Number 2 Feature at *Playboy*." *New York Times*. September 23, 1992: C1.

Miller, Russell. *Bunny: The Real Story of Playboy*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York. 1984.

The Playboy Interviews. Playboy Press: Chicago. 1967.

Wood, John. "A Conversation with the *Playboy* Interviewer." *Writer's Digest*. October, 1991. 71:10: Pg. 28.

REVIEWS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

Bentoff, Nate. "The Odyssey of a Black Man." *Commonweal*. January 28, 1966: 511.

"Briefly Noted: General." *The New Yorker*. November 11, 1965: 246.

"Journey Toward Truth." *Christian Century*. December 8, 1965: 1513.

Nelson, Truman. "Delinquents Progress: The *Autobiography of Malcolm X*." *The Nation*. November 8, 1965: 336.

"Satan in the Ghetto." *Newsweek*. November 15, 1965: 130.

Stone, I.F. "The Pilgrimage of Malcolm X." *The New York Review of Books*. November 11, 1965: 246.

"Urban Problems." *Library Journal*. January 1, 1966: 101.

ARTICLES AND VIDEOS CONCERNING ALEX HALEY

Bellinelli, Matteo. *Alex Haley: A Conversation with Alex Haley*. RTSI-Swiss Television. 1992.

ARTICLES AND VIDEOS CONCERNING ALEX HALEY, CONTINUED

Foxworth, Marilyn Kern. "Alex Haley" entry from the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

Marmon, W. "Haley's RX: Talk, Write, Reunite." *TIME*. 109:72. July 14, 1977.

BOOKS CONCERNING LITERARY JOURNALISM

Ashdown, Paul (ed.). *James Agee: Selected Journalism*. University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville. 1985.

Hellman, John. *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction*. University of Illinois: Urbana. 1981.

Sims, Norman (ed.). *The Literary Journalists*. Ballantine: New York. 1984.

Sims, Norman (ed.). *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press: New York. 1990

Stokes, Geoffrey. *The Village Voice Anthology*. Quill: New York. 1982.

Wolfe, Tom. *The New Journalism*. Harper and Row: Evanston. 1973.

Wood, Joe. *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*. St. Martin's: New York. 1992.

OTHER MATERIALS USED IN THIS STUDY

Burke, Kenneth. "Dramatism" under the subject heading "Interaction" in the D. Sills edited *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 1968.

Frady, Marshall. "The Children of Malcolm." *The New Yorker*. October 12, 1992: 78.

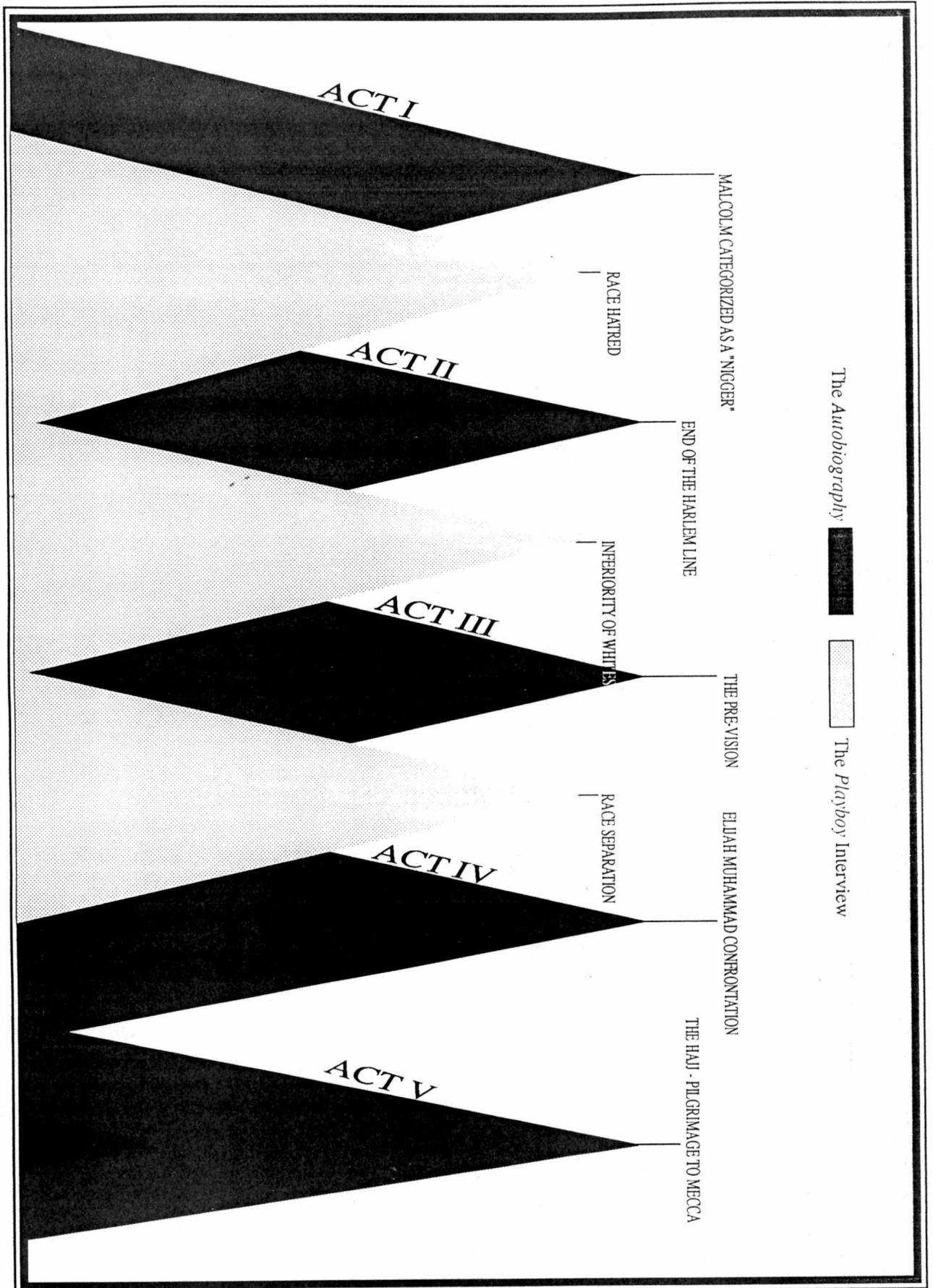
Hampton, Henry and Steve Fayer. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. Bantam: New York. 1990.

Haley, Alex. *Roots*. Dell: New York. 1977.

Stone, Albert E., *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw*. University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia. 1982.

Tobias, Robert. "A Journalism of Outrage: A Rhetoric Analysis of Books About Public Education." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Tennessee: Knoxville. 1994.

APPENDIX



APPENDIX A: CHARTING THE CLIMACTIC ELEMENTS OF THE BOOK AND THE INTERVIEW

VITA

S. Scott Blue was born in Goshen, Indiana on August 24, 1994. He attended elementary schools in the Lakeland Community (Syracuse, Indiana) School District and Jessamine County (Nicholasville, Kentucky) Schools. He graduated from Jessamine County High School in August, 1986. The following September, he entered Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky and in August, 1990 received a Bachelor of Arts degree in broadcast communications. In August, 1992 he entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and in December, 1994 received a Master of Science degree in communications with an emphasis on print journalism.

He is presently employed as the assistant director of public relations and marketing at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota.