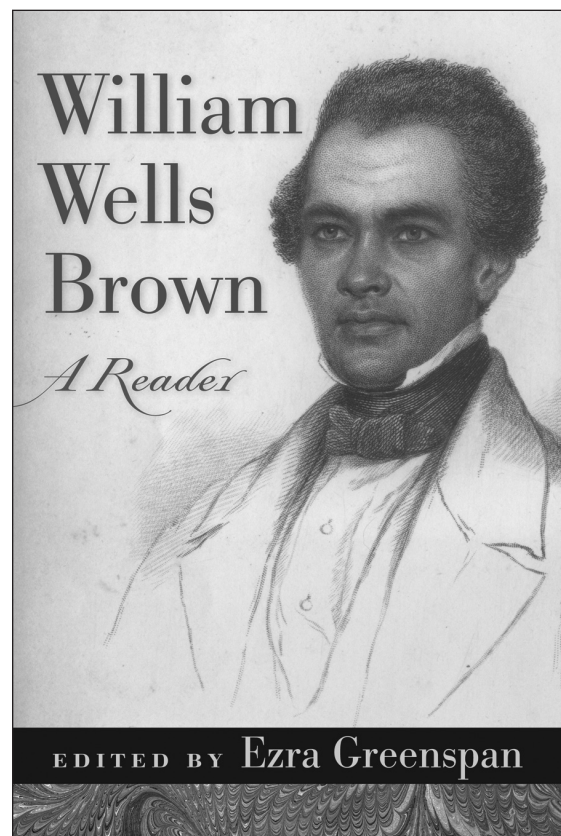


William Wells Brown

A Reader

Edited by Ezra Greenspan

An introduction to a pioneering African American writer



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Born into slavery in Kentucky, William Wells Brown (1814–1884) was kept functionally illiterate until after his escape at the age of nineteen. Remarkably, he became the most widely published and versatile African American writer of the nineteenth century as well as an important leader in the abolitionist and temperance movements.

Brown wrote extensively as a journalist but was also a pioneer in other literary genres. His many groundbreaking works include *Clotel*, the first African American novel; *The Escape: or, A Leap for Freedom*, the first published African American play; *Three Years in Europe*, the first African American European travelogue; and *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, the first history of African American service in the Civil War. Brown also wrote one of the most important fugitive slave narratives and a striking array of subsequent self-narratives so inventively shifting in content, form, and textual presentation as to place him second only to Frederick Douglass among nineteenth-century African American autobiographers.

Ezra Greenspan has selected the best of Brown's work in a range of fields including fiction, drama, history, politics, autobiography, and travel. The volume opens with an introductory essay that places Brown and his work in a cultural and political context. Each chapter begins with a detailed introductory headnote, and the contents are closely annotated; there is also a selected bibliography. This reader offers an introduction to the work of a major African American writer who was engaged in many of the important debates of his time.

Ezra Greenspan holds the Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Chair in Humanities and is professor of English at Southern Methodist University. He is the author or editor of seven books and a founding editor of the journal *Book History*.

"Greenspan's careful editing and deft commentary make this book an especially rich introduction to the life and work of William Wells Brown. The volume succeeds not simply as a collection of Brown's writings but also as a remarkably coherent and compelling sketch of the larger text Brown wrote over the course of his career."

—John Ernest, author of *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794–1861*

"Greenspan offers selections from all of Brown's major writings, demonstrating Brown's great skills as an autobiographer, travel writer, novelist, dramatist, lecturer, and historian. With its excellent introduction and annotations, and skillfully chosen selections, the volume makes an essential contribution to our understanding of Brown and nineteenth-century African American literature."

—Robert S. Levine, author of *Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism*

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