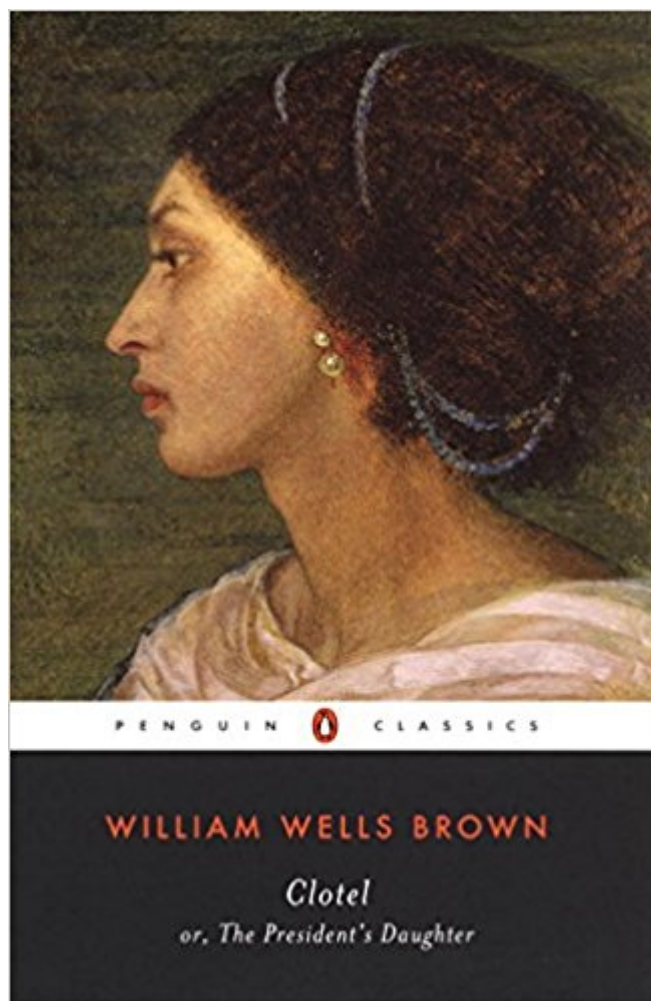


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# Clotel: Or, The President's Daughter (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

First published in December 1853, *Clotel* was written amid then unconfirmed rumors that Thomas Jefferson had fathered children with one of his slaves. The story begins with the auction of his mistress, here called Currer, and their two daughters, Clotel and Althesa. The Virginian who buys Clotel falls in love with her, gets her pregnant, seems to promise marriage—then sells her. Escaping from the slave dealer, Clotel returns to Virginia disguised as a white man in order to rescue her daughter, Mary, a slave in her father's house. A fast-paced and harrowing tale of slavery and freedom, of the hypocrisies of a nation founded on democratic principles, *Clotel* is more than a sensationalist novel. It is a founding text of the African American novelistic tradition, a brilliantly composed and richly detailed exploration of human relations in a new world in which race is a cultural construct. First time in Penguin Classics. Published in time for African-American History Month. Includes appendices that show the different endings Brown created for the various later versions of *Clotel*, along with the author's narrative of his "Life and Escape," Introduction, suggested readings, and comprehensive explanatory notes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A remarkable beginning for African-American fiction."--Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

William Wells Brown (1814–1884) was born a slave, escaped to the North and then to England, and became one of the most prominent abolitionists of his time. During his prolific literary career, Brown was a pioneer in several different genres, including travel writing, fiction, and

drama. M. Giulia Fabi is the author of *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*. She teaches American literature at the University of Ferrara, Italy.

This is a review on the printing of the edition, not the actual text. Yes, this edition is the cheapest one available, but you get what you pay for! The text inside looks like it was printed straight from a Word document; it is unformatted, meaning the epigraphs at the beginning of the chapters run in with the text and cannot be differentiated. The type is RIDICULOUSLY tiny -- I'm a young college student without eye problems, but even I had a hard time reading this book because of how much they tried to cut down on costs. The Penguin Classics edition is 320 pages. This edition is 89 pages. That should tell you just how tiny the type is in this edition. Even though it is "sold and shipped" by , you will get a "print to order" book made using CreateSpace. I ordered this book January 16th, 2016. Inside it says it was printed January 17th, 2016. This is not a quality book. The cover is a pixellated image copy and pasted from Google images that has nothing to do with the text. The back cover text is literally just the first bit of the preface. Terrible, terrible, terrible. Spend the extra seven bucks and get the Penguin Classics version! You won't regret it!

What if Founding Father Thomas Jefferson had an affair with a slave and fathered an illegitimate mulatto daughter? Author William Wells Brown uses this as a point of departure for *Clotel, or the President's Daughter* to examine race relations in 1800s America. Often billed as the first novel published by an African American, *Clotel* establishes many of the themes and introduces the stock characters that would populate what scholars refer to as the "slave narrative." This is, then, a seminal work in American letters. Just don't call it a novel. While the narrative contains romance, intrigue, breathless escapes and a cast of memorable characters, Brown is less interested in telling a typical 1800s melodrama than he is in presenting a series of polemical arguments that systematically reveal the "peculiar institution" as inhumane, un-American and, ultimately, sacrilegious. Time and again, Brown interrupts the story to deliver a pages-long diatribe meant to convince the reader of slavery's evils. As a result, the story keeps tripping over its own agenda. The story doesn't even concentrate exclusively on Clotel and her adventures. Rather, it focuses on Clotel, her sister and their mother, and traces the three women's lives after they are cruelly separated from each other. Clotel becomes a "kept woman" to a white, liberal-leaning gentleman. Cloistered in her own home, she

dreams of seeing her mother, sister and eventually her own child again. This sets in motion numerous daring escapes as Clotel travels across the country, chasing her dreams and her freedom. This brief summary actually makes Clotel seem like a page-turner. It is not and Brown never intended it to be. It is a series of polemical essays built around a story. As the introduction to this Modern Library edition notes, Brown wrote the book for a European audience and he has no interest in writing a Dickens-esque or Dumas-like adventure, which is too bad since that is one reason why a more troublesome piece of literature like Uncle Tom's Cabin, with its propulsive narrative, remains on high-school reading lists while Clotel is consigned to graduate seminars and usually buried deep within university curriculum. After all, if you are motivated enough to pick up this book, chances are that you hardly need convincing that slavery can never be justified on any level. It is best, then, to approach Clotel as a historical document or a snapshot of a moment in time that captures what pro- and anti-slavery Americans were thinking just before the Civil War that would forever change the course of American history.

This novel is interesting even though it is as much narrative essay against the evils of slavery as a piece of fiction. Mr. Brown aims his pen squarely at Christians, challenging them to live their faith. Himself an escaped slave who helped others escape, his story is an authentic indictment of slavery and it's interesting that rumors of Jefferson's children with Sally Hemings were well known long before modern historians had DNA evidence to prove it.

Excellent written book with very good story

If judged by the usual standards, it was only fair. However, when one considers that it was written by an escaped slave who should not have been taught to read, it was excellent. Then, when one considers that it is the first novel written by a Negro in this country, it becomes a historical gem and an open door to very interesting history.

It is so interesting to read what someone experienced during that time period of American History, something not taught in the classroom. It was so sad but an eye opener.

Very well written Kept my attention and learned more history lessons about the shame of slavery. A good book to teach our children.

The book was not enough about the president's daughter as one might have expected. But it did have some interesting facts about history.

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