

First & Last name

Professor Martin

Eng 2327

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*Text: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Passage: “There were no beds given the slaves, unless one coarse blanket be considered such, and none but the men and women had these. This, however, is not considered a very great privation. They find less difficulty from the want of beds, than from the want of time to sleep; for when their day’s work in the field is done, the most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day...”

Question: How does Douglass’ repetitive use of a passive voice emphasize the suppressed and deprived living conditions of the slaves?

Issue: Issue of Pattern. The question deals with the author’s use of repetition in passive voice and the support it gives to the text. Douglass used a passive voice in a repetitive matter when describing the living conditions of the slaves.

Critical Approach: The New Criticism approach is the appropriate approach for this issue. New Criticism deals with focusing on the structure of the piece as it relates to literary language and how the specific language assists with that meaning. By examining the passive voice Douglass

uses, the reader can detect the how he was supporting the portrayal of a suppressed lifestyle and the slaves' living conditions.

Answer: By Douglass employing a passive voice in this passage, he is emphasizing the helplessness and suppression of the slaves by highlighting the subjects (the slaves) as being effected by actions instead of being the creator of those actions (“There we no beds given the slaves”). Also, by repetitively shifting the emphasis from what the slaves were given, or the lack thereof, to how it affected their lives also supported his point of suppression, “They find less difficulty from the want of beds, than from the want of time to sleep...”