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The African-American Slave Narrative in Context: Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs

Vyprávění afroamerických otroků v souvislostech: Frederick Douglass a Harriet Ann Jacobs

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1. Introduction

Although predominantly associated with plantation slavery of the antebellum period and the iconic figure of Frederick Douglass, the slave narrative as a genre is an extensive body of diverse texts established on the conventionalized framework pre-defining the narrative outline and themes. Bound by conventions, the slave narratives either suppressed personal identities of the majority of fugitive slaves who dictated their stories to amanuenses or presented heroic portrayals of those, who like Douglass or Jacobs extricated themselves from some of the genre stereotypes. Therefore, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* (1845)[1] and Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861)[2] are explored in the thesis in separate chapters as the most proverbial and popular representatives of the slave narratives. However, the primary concern of this thesis is to bring new perspectives to these testimonies by considering their wider historical, socio-political and gender contexts. Therefore, circumstances surrounding the development of the genre will be briefly outlined and relations of power under which the texts were drafted and edited will be mentioned. Since these specific aspects are vividly illustrated in Sherley Anne Williams's neo-slave narrative *Dessa Rose* (1986),[3] the novel is, as are its historical predecessors by Douglass and Jacobs, singled out and analyzed in a separate chapter.

As an introduction, the genre of the slave narrative will be introduced through the juxtaposition of definitions that vary depending on the critical approach of the scholars who select different criteria for the subject of definition. Then, narratives dislocated from the traditional plantation setting presenting unconventional perspectives on the condition under which a small, perhaps privileged group of exclusively male slaves lived, will be discussed. Specifically, the *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America* (1843),[4]

[1] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies; Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave, My Bondage and My Freedom, Life and Times of Frederic Douglass* (New York: The Library of America, 1994).
[2] Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[3] Sherley Anne Williams, *Dessa Rose* (New York: Quill, 1999).
[4] Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America* (London: C. Gilpin, 1843), Jan 2006 < http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html> 10 Nov 2014.

an account of the maritime slave life, will be analyzed with an attempt to delineate its traditional and, in a sense, uniform narrative structures. It will be demonstrated that Grandy's narrative patterns confirm James Olney's comprehensive critical treatment of conventionalized structures and themes of the genre as he describes them in his essay "I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature."[5] Then, aspects of Moses Grandy's identity will be discussed pointing to the undeniable fact that the institution of slavery complicated any sense of identity and problematized perceptions of manhood. The issue of silence characterized by John Sekora as "a necessary condition of being in the slave narrative"[6] will be addressed. Then a brief outline of some fundamental pro-slavery assertions opposed by many slave narrators including Grandy or Douglass will be presented. John Pendleton Kennedy's popular novel *Swallow Barn or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832),[7] an antithesis to slave narratives, will be mentioned as an example of a text which contains pro-slavery arguments defending slave owners and mythologizes the slave system. It is Henry Louis Gates, Jr. who emphasizes the significance of the impact that these genres of the slave narrative and the plantation novel had on each other. Gates writes that "the two forms seem to have been locked together in a bipolar moment, as it were, or a signifying relationship."[8] Therefore, if the contexts of the genre should be outlined, the existence of the plantation novel has to be mentioned.

The second chapter will present an analysis of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*. The detailed analysis will, at least partially, reflect the extensive critical readings devoted to Douglass. Its focus will be narrowed to the issues of editorial control, readership awareness and the triangle of interrelated issues of freedom, literacy and masculinity. Douglass's effective narrative strategies will be analyzed with an attempt to disclose the basis upon which his established masculine image contradicts, in its essence, the pre-defined conventional narrative framework suppressing personal identities of the majority of ex-slave narrators. Opposing the racial prejudices and assertions of inferiority spread by influential explorers,

[5] James Olney, "I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *The Slave's Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[6] John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 510, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930465> 3 Mar. 2015.
[7] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832).
[8] Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) xvii.

philosophers, or slave-holding presidents like Thomas Jefferson, Douglass addresses his readers and, in fact, demonstrates awareness of his readers throughout the text presenting his indisputable humanity and intellectual capacities that were threatened by the horrors of living under enslavement. Further, the chapter will claim that William Lloyd Garrison's traditionally superior position as an editor is, rather unconsciously, weakened by his ambition to promote his image of an influential and well-read public figure. In other words, Garrison's personal ambition prevents Douglass from being introduced as a bodily demonstration of slavery preoccupied with humbleness toward his readers. Instead, as will be argued, Douglass's intellect is promoted and his narrative position is strengthened from the beginning of the testimony, emphasizing his self-established identity and individualism that goes, as Olney quite aptly expresses, "beyond the single intention of describing slavery."[9]

The following chapter will explore Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* and her views of slavery giving prominence to the female voice focusing on a unique experience of the female slave Linda Brent who is keenly aware of the structures of power marginalizing her existence and leaving her vulnerable to persistent sexual abuse and harassment of her master. Jacobs questions the concept of true womanhood and its nature. Essentially, it excludes enslaved women, because it operates on the presuppositions of moral virtues that cannot be cultivated by them. Through the voice of Linda, Jacobs quite daringly asks her readers, whom she assumes to be white northern middle-class ladies, what their destiny would be if they were born as slaves yearning for survival and freedom at the same time. In fact, she rejects the tragic mulatto stereotype through her desire to live. A point of departure will be Jean Fagan Yellin's study testifying that the real author of the testimony is Jacobs, who spent nine years in search for a publisher willing to publish her life story that, as she believed, could help to change public opinion of the institution and, consequently, abolish slavery. As will be argued, Jacobs presents herself as a heroic slave mother who, in her quest for freedom, relies on the power of her intellect and, most importantly, on the community of women. Her quest for freedom is, therefore, associated with sexual liberation, decommodification of her motherhood, and with a persistent desire for home, which remains unresolved.

[9] Olney 154.

The main body of the analysis of Sherley Anne Williams's neo-slave narrative *Dessa Rose* is the problematization of the general view that history and literacy present an objective record of the past emphasizing the necessity to revise our interpretation of written historical records including the slave narratives written by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs. Therefore, the fourth chapter will draw attention to the issue of cultural superiority relying, among other tools of power, on the power of the printed word. Sherley Anne Williams's novel presents literacy as a means of control over subordinated human beings who are constantly dehumanized. Thus the supremacy of the white culture is maintained through physical power and through negative stereotypes conveyed in texts. The biased texts circulated within the general society and fortified the opinion that the slaves are culturally and emotionally inferior. In the novel, the stereotypical images are directly associated with racial bias. In consequence, when the blacks and the whites interact, members of the dominant society inevitably misunderstand the signs, deeds or utterances of the slaves or fugitive slaves, because they are influenced by the stereotypes in their judgments. Further, the novel takes over the theme of silence from the slave narratives and discusses the issue in a sense of something missing, inexpressible or unspeakable. Since Williams decisively rejects stereotypes, scenes echoing the lines from the slave narratives written by Frederick Douglass or Harriet Ann Jacobs are traceable in the novel. Williams deliberately revises them in order to point to the issues of gender appropriation and female emancipation. In other words, Williams undermines the dominance of male figures and rejects the myth of a powerless heroine through her literary revision of the most popular and widely read slave narratives.

The conclusion of the thesis will delineate the black women's literary tradition, claiming that female slave narratives, contrary to conventionalized but obsolete critical approaches, should not be seen as a minor, subordinated group of testimonies. The ambition of the chapter is to increase understanding of the fact that black women and their voices were silenced both by the dominant culture and by patriarchal social structures. It will be pointed out that the earliest surviving text by a person of African descent in America and the predecessor of the entire African-American literary tradition was written by a woman who, before her collection of poetry was handed to a publisher, had

to defend herself in front of a commission in Boston in 1773. The commission of men decided upon whether she was actually capable of writing the text in question. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. delineates the historical contexts recorded in "Attestation,"[10] Phillis Wheatley convinced the commission of her authorship and intellect. In spite of this, her literary achievement was later belittled by Thomas Jefferson because her intellectual capacities, most probably, opposed his pseudo-scientific theories and doctrines of racial inferiority.

As the fourth chapter shall proceed, specific cases of black male writers who adopted stereotypical images of women in their texts will be presented. This will be based on the conclusions drawn in the preceding chapters. Therefore, David Walker's deliberate erasure of Dinah, a black heroine, from historical memory will be discussed. Then, the case of Anna Murray, whose active agency remains unknown to the majority of readers even today, will be mentioned as a reminder that Douglass almost erased his wife from historical memory, because he was likely afraid that the truth might spoil his public image of a self-made man. Rather, his *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave* fortified stereotypical perceptions of female slaves who were described as helpless victims of brutality and outrage. With the completion of the thesis, black feminist criticism represented by critics like Deborah E. McDowell, Hazel V. Carby or Mary Helen Washington will be mentioned, pointing to new approaches to the genre and to the growing interest in the field contextualizing slave narratives using the earliest works of fiction.

The ambition of the thesis is not to elaborate on the issue of abolitionism. The term "abolitionism" is therefore used in its general sense without acknowledging developments of the movement that might be broadly divided into two periods: before and after William Lloyd Garrison's establishment of *The Liberator* promoting immediate abolition of slavery. Also religion, its influence upon the emergence of the genre, functions, and representations is beyond the scope of this present analysis. Similarly, assertions of the inferiority of slaves will not be discussed in greater detail and the thesis will solely concentrate on the fact that racist theories, voiced by figures such as, William

[10] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Foreword," *Iola Leroy: Or Shadows Uplifted*, Frances E.W. Harper (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) viii.

Bosman, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson or Friedrich Hegel existed. Only some of Jefferson's and Hegel's influential writings will be quoted to illustrate the subject and the manner of reasoning of the era. In this respect, especially Jefferson's thoughts might be seen as widely recognized and resonating in the American society. Certainly, other authors, travelers, slave traders, and racist thinkers could be traced, but they are outside of the scope of the thesis.

1.1 The Impossible Task of Defining the Genre

The slave narrative as a genre has been submitted to critical reading from the beginning of its emergence in the eighteenth century. According to a chronologically organized study of Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Slave's Narrative*, the first critical text interpreting the slave narrative appeared around the year 1750 reviewing the case of Job Ben Solomon[11] (1731). Solomon's dictated autobiography is, however, associated with the British literary tradition. Therefore, Frances Smith Foster postpones the year of the genre emergence to 1760. Foster identifies two major periods demonstrating "clusters of structural and thematic characteristics which are limited fairly accurately by the following dates: 1760 – 1807 and 1831-65."[12] William L. Andrews labels *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man* (1760) as the first autobiography and, at the same time, draws attention to the salient fact that any specification of primacy depends on the criteria selected for the definition of the genre. Therefore, it should be mentioned that literary critics commonly refer to Briton Hammon's narrative as to the first slave narrative (in compliance with Williams). However, the group of the earliest documented testimonies surviving in print also includes *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert 'Ukawsaw Gronniosaw,' an African Prince* (1770) and *The Interesting Narrative and the Life of 'Olaudah Equiano' or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), which, as Vincent Carretta says and most critics would probably agree, "established all of the major conventions."[13] In conformity with the conclusions reached by literary genealogies, however, the works by Gronniosaw and Equiano are not

[11] Davis and Gates vi.
[12] Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979) xi.
[13] Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano" *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* Graham Maryemma, Jerry W. Ward, Jr., eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 44.

seen as the initiators or the earliest examples of the African-American literary tradition. They might be rather classified as illustrations of "transatlantic antislavery print culture,"[14] which is a phrase used by Philip Gould comprising all three geographical traditions: African-American, Caribbean, and English in its pre-origin.

Andrews adopts the term Afro-American autobiography for the delineation of the genre in its broadest conception and he also uses a term "the classic fugitive slave narrative"[15] specifying that the autobiographies of Charles Ball (1836) and Moses Roper (1837) are its first representative examples. The term 'the classic fugitive slave narrative,' which Andrews uses, refers to testimonies of fugitive slaves representing the eye-witnesses used by abolitionists to disseminate evidence against slavery. Abolitionists believed that, as Andrews puts it, "the facts of slavery as detailed by a fugitive himself would be much more readily believed"[16] than the declarations delivered by abolitionists during their public lectures. This attitude explains why the narratives of experience in slavery are rather affirmations of the abolitionist rhetoric. Nevertheless, Andrews does not provide any detailed definition of the genre, does not discuss which writings of slavery he regards as classical, and on what grounds the decision should be made, or who should have the right to decide.

Contrary to Andrews whose major study *To Tell a Free Story* approaches the genre in broad terms predominantly adopting more general classification of an autobiography, Robert B. Stepto argues that "a slave narrative is not necessarily an autobiography."[17] In his narrative analysis, Stepto does not see the first person narration as the most distinct category determining that a text should be interpreted as a slave narrative, but he distinguishes four narrative modes of narration, which, as he says, have "a direct bearing on the development of subsequent Afro-American narrative forms."[18] Stepto calls these modes of narration: eclectic narrative, integrated narrative, generic narrative and

[14] Philip Gould, "Early Print Literature of Africans in America," *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, eds. Graham Maryemma and Jerry W. Ward, Jr. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 47.
[15] William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 62.
[16] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 62.
[17] Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 6.
[18] Stepto 6.

authenticating narrative. He also provides definitions for the terms he coins, but they are beyond the scope of this study.

In fact, the classification of the genre and the subsequent inclusion or exclusion of specific texts considerably vary among literary critics. Apart from the fact that a generally recognized definition that would be adopted by the notable scholars in the field does not exist, major inconsistencies can be also observed in connection to the early slave narratives that are, as Philip Gould keenly points out, "more generically fluid."[19] Gould does not specify the time span of 'the early slave narratives,' but it might be assumed that narratives printed in the eighteenth century should be included in this category. However, he clearly states that these heterogeneous texts were also read and described as "spiritual autobiography, the conversion narrative, the providential tale, criminal confession, Indian captivity narrative, sea adventure story, and the picaresque novel."[20]

John Sekora in his essay "Black Message/White Envelope" explains that the term slave narrative was originally adopted for the testimonies written in the antebellum time and afterwards applied in a wider context. It might be the reason why some critics prefer a more specific term, the antebellum slave narrative, for the second phase of the development outlined by Foster, as has been mentioned, from 1831 to 1865. The narratives from this period are known for their radicalization of the voice demanding the immediate abolition of slavery and for their "obsession with 'evidence,'"[21] as Gould puts it, because they were, metaphorically speaking, at war with the pro-slavery supporters. However, any concise definition even for the narrowed term is not provided by critics perhaps for the fear that any such description would be challenged on the basis of its inadequacy or ambiguity that would cause subsequent exclusion of some texts. Some kind of vigilance is perceptible in the definition published in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, which provides a rather inaccurate outline of the slave narrative:

[19] Philip Gould, "The Rise of the Slave Narrative," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 13.
[20] Gould, "The Rise of the Slave Narrative" 13.
[21] Gould, "The Rise of the Slave Narrative" 19.

> The genre characteristics include prefatory or appended authenticating material (paratext), a homodiegetic narrator who speaks as an 'unlettered' slave (to minimize the distance between narrating- and experiencing-I), a journey from South to North culminating in an escape from slavery, an achievement of freedom both externally and internally, often indicated by a change of name.[22]

Because of the wide range of texts that should be embraced in the definition and the heterogeneous nature of the earliest examples, Olney prefers to provide broader characterization of the genre and does not strive to present a definition, which would be, probably, inaccurate in its entirety, as is the case of *The Routledge Encyclopedia*. Olney's approach is different in a sense that his introduction to the character of the genre already embraces his critical reading, pointing to disputes over authenticity of these texts. Olney maintains that "the slave narrative is most often a non-memorial description fitted to a pre-formed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there-virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances, and authentications that carry over from narrative to narrative."[23] In spite of the fact that Olney's critical approach to the narrative conventions of the genre was described in 1985 by Davis and Gates as "'against' contemporary narrative theory,"[24] it is one of the most comprehensive studies disclosing the established uniformity of the genre and one of the most recognized essays on the topic by contemporary critics. Olney gives it an ironical name, "Master Plan for Slave Narratives."[25] It is a detailed analysis of the conventionalized framework limiting the ways in which personal identities could be expressed. Olney draws up a check-list of features he finds to be commonly adopted by the majority of the slave narratives.

It should be mentioned that Olney is not the first critic who noticed that some regularities are traceable in the narratives. Some patterns were established, for example, by Sidonie Smith in *Where I'm Bound* (1974), or by Charles T. Davis in *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), but Olney's study is the

[22] Ester Fritsch, "Slave Narrative," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, eds. David Herman, Manfred John and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2008) 537.
[23] Olney 151.
[24] Davis and Gates 147.
[25] Olney 153.

most thorough one on the subject. Another critic who identified some stereotypical features of the testimonies was Sekora. Sekora specifies that the abolitionists asked the slaves about "the names, dates, places of the slave's family, the owner's family, cruel overseers and resisting slaves, brutal punishments and harsh suppression of the will to read and write, [...] the effect of slavery on the subject, plans and attempts to escape."[26] However, the indisputable features ensuring a high degree of uniformity of the texts listed by Olney include, for example, a portrait of an ex-slave, a testimonial written by a white person, and specific reflections on the attitudes and behaviors of masters and mistresses. Rather than transcribing the complete list drawn together by Olney, some of the traditional themes and issues that he traces will be illustrated on *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*. It is a narrative dictated by an illiterate man who is not connected to plantation slavery. In spite of its dislocation from the plantation setting, the narrative explores the very same themes and issues as if the narration followed the outline Olney puts forward. Some of these features will be named and illustrated on specific examples. Further, Grandy's narrative will be analyzed alongside some literal and socio-cultural resonances that will enrich our understanding of the text.

1.2 African-American Maritime Culture and Moses Grandy's Conventionalized Narrative in Context

An unconventional perspective on the conditions under which some of the southern male slaves lived is presented by David Cecelski, whose study focuses on the neglected maritime culture, which remains generally unknown, in spite of the fact that it is closely associated with Olaudah Equiano, with the free black activist David Walker and even with Frederick Douglass, who was a caulker. As Cecelski states:

> Scholars tended to view the black South mainly in terms of agricultural slave labor – picking cotton, cutting sugar cane [...] for example, not trimming sails or casting nets. But in recent years a new generation of scholars has begun to explore [...] the

[26] Sekora 502.

complex and important roles played by black watermen and sailors in the Atlantic maritime world.[27]

The most important aspect of the maritime life stressed by Cecelski is a relative freedom that the slave captains could have, because the conditions of their employment prevented their close supervision. While the plantation slaves could not even supervise their children properly, because their masters were in power to make decisions including, as John W. Blassingame points out, "how much care and attention slave women received when they were pregnant and the treatment that infants received,"[28] the slave captains could claim their time and make their own choices. Also, they had a privilege to earn some money and possibly buy their freedom, if they hired their time efficiently, undergoing necessary risks and hardship. It might be argued that the black sailors played dual, public and undercover roles. On the one hand, the boatmen, as Cecelski explains, "dominated most maritime trades,"[29] and the business relied on their professional labor. On the other hand, as Cecelski stresses as well, they "played key roles in the escapes to freedom."[30] In fact, the slave sailors created among themselves and free black men information nets, quickly spreading news about abolitionist activism and slave rebellions in North Carolina or even across the Atlantic. In Cecelski's words, black watermen served "as key agents of antislavery thought and militant resistance to slavery."[31] His opinion might be supported by Matthew D. Brown, who calls these nets "the Sailor's Telegraph"[32] and by Jeffrey W. Bolster, who maintains that "sailors thus became for black people in the Atlantic world what newspapers and the royal mail service were for white elites: a mode of communication integrating local communities into the larger community of color."[33]

[27] David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) xii.
[28] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972) 93.
[29] Cecelski xiii.
[30] Cecelski xiv.
[31] Cecelski xii.
[32] Matthew D. Brown, "Olaudah Equiano and the Sailor's Telegraph: The Interesting Narrative and the Source of Black Abolitionism," *Callaloo* 36. 1 (2013):197.
[33] Jeffrey W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 39.

Cecelski's literary survey of maritime history explores a limited number of the surviving texts connected to North Carolina coast including aforementioned *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Moses Grandy discloses details of his unique maritime experience that in several cases stands in contradiction to a figure of an every-slave that the slave narratives should represent from the point of view of their abolitionist sponsors. Among the strongest features of his story is his determination to purchase his liberty repeatedly. It reflects his strong sense of moral pride and non-militant attitude. Nevertheless, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy* is predominantly governed by the conventions affecting the form and themes. In other words, the editorial interventions creating "sameness,"[34] the key argument of Olney's study on the slave narratives, are self-evident in the text presenting infrequent occasions when some aspects of Grandy's personality penetrate through the otherwise chronologically organized descriptive text.

1.2 a) Narrative Conventions

The narrative starts with a traditional formal feature, namely the "Introduction," where George Thompson authenticates the tale and declares that the text is "as nearly as possible in the language of Moses himself."[35] Blassingame discloses that "there is a clear separation between the editor's and the narrator's view"[36] throughout the narrative, because Thomson as a former member of the House of Commons "had such a reputation for fanaticism that he realized that anything he wrote would probably be greeted with skepticism."[37] For that reason, Thomson added footnotes in passages that needed an additional explanation. However, the first sentence of the "Introduction" written by Thompson points to the secondary status of the illiterate man who was subjectified by slavery and whose subjectivisation is carried over to the text. To be specific, Thompson introduces the text with the following words, "the subject of the following brief Memoir came to me with a letter from a dear friend."[38] Since some readers might question the existence of the narrator, because some ghost-written

[34] Olney 148.
[35] Grandy vi.
[36] John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Lectures, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1977) xxxi.
[37] Blassingame, *Slave Testimony* xxxi.
[38] Grandy iii.

stories also appeared, Grandy follows the narrative conventions and introduces himself by these words: "My name is Moses Grandy, I was born in Camden County, North Carolina."[39] This, as Olney characterizes such existential claims, specifies "a place, but not a date of birth."[40]

A string of conventionalized themes follows. Grandy mentions that slaves "are not allowed to write or read,"[41] and speaks on the subject of family separation: "[M]y mother had more children, but they were dead or sold away."[42] Further, he describes cruelty of his master and whipping his mother received for her resistance to the master who wanted to sell her little son. He states: "She made much outcry, for which the master tied her up to a peach tree in the yard, and flogged her."[43] Then, an account of a slave auction is given. Grandy announces: "I was hired out for the year, by auction, at the Court House."[44] Also, Grandy specifies how much food or clothing were the slaves given every time he works for a new master: "I was next with Mr. Enoch Sawyer of Camden county: [...] we had not near enough of either victuals or clothes; I was half-starved for half my time."[45] As the quoted lines confirm, Grandy's language is rather plain and descriptive throughout the testimony. However, some imprints of his identity as well as qualities that can be associated with stereotypical manhood, are identifiable in the narrative.

1.2 b) Aspects of Grandy's Identity - Manhood in Context

In general, black masculinity is problematized by the institution of slavery based on the supremacy of the white male slaveholder. As Charity R. Carney observes, "[m]anhood in the antebellum South typically relied on adherence to honor culture and the maintenance of mastery. [...] White men proved their worth through mastery. [...] They [...] commanded the submission of their wives, children and slaves."[46] If we assume that white masculinity is characterized by power over other people, it might be identified as the main restraint for black manhood. In fact, Grandy's

[39] Grandy 7.
[40] Olney 153.
[41] Grandy 7.
[42] Grandy 7.
[43] Grandy 8.
[44] Grandy 9.
[45] Grandy 10-11.
[46] Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011) 6.

testimony sheds similar light on the subject. Grandy's manhood is described as deliberately denied by his masters. Frances Smith Foster explains that slaves were generally prevented from fulfilling their role as husbands. They could not become "the heads of their households."[47] Grandy touches upon the subject of family separation when he mentions that also the slaves themselves purposefully avoided situations that might lead to their humiliation arising from their denied manhood and from their disempowerment. In other words, they avoided moments when they would be forced to remain silent in spite of all the witnessed injustices. Grandy straightforwardly describes their position which prevents them from living with their wives and children when he maintains, "no coloured man wishes to live at the house where his wife lives, for he has to endure the continual misery of seeing her flogged and abused, without daring to say a word in her defense."[48] By these concise words, in fact, Grandy describes a specific example of a scene of punishment, whipping, based on manifestation of power reinforcing hegemony of the white male and, at the same time, subjugation of the black manhood, its emasculination. Clearly, a sense of being unable to protect one's children and wife, a theme which appears in African-American literature, is present in his confession.

In addition, the theme of black manhood and its inevitable problematization is also addressed in other literary sources written by Grandy's contemporaries. These works provide us with a relevant context that should be considered. Comparably, slavery is clearly identified as a force marginalizing black male identity in the speech given by Henry Blake, a slave from Martin R. Delany's novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (1859-62), who should represent a picture of a true black character distinguishing himself from the religious pacifism of the figures produced by writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, to use Eric J. Sundquist's[49] example. Henry Blake says:

> Even was I to take the advice of the old people here, and become reconciled to drag out a miserable life of degradation and bondage under them, I would not be permitted to do so by this man, who seeks every opportunity to crush out my

[47] Frances Smith Foster, *'Til Death or Distance Do Us Part* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) xi.
[48] Grandy 25.
[49] Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 183.

lingering manhood, and reduce my free spirit to the submission of a slave. He cannot do it, I will not submit to it, and I defy his power to make me submit.[50]

Blake's monologue discloses that the slaves cannot become 'fully masculine' until they achieve freedom. In fact, this view is analogous to assumptions of scholars who, similarly to Valerie Smith, associate freedom of the most representative male narrator Frederick Douglass with his masculinity. For Smith, Douglass's escape to freedom is also "the journey from slavehood to manhood."[51] It should be emphasized that Delany's fictionalized character Blake illustrates a direct bearing of the themes discussed in the slave narratives on the African-American fiction attempting to redefine the established stereotypes. Also, Delany's novel represents a direct criticism of black male identity presented in Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Considering the common characteristics of Grandy and Blake, it might be inferred that a quest for freedom is one of the signs of black masculinity. In other words, Grandy's unceasing determination to attain his liberty could be seen as his persisting attempt to gain his manliness that was constantly diminished by his masters.

However, the quest for freedom terminating the reduction of black manhood is not the only sign of Grandy's masculinity. If we embrace Judith Butler's view, also Grandy's intelligence might be perceived as another sign of his masculine identity. "The cultural association of mind with masculinity"[52] is, according to Butler, a common stereotypical perception. As is documented in the narrative, Grandy is a qualified and efficient captain of canal boats who "had never lost a single thing of the property."[53] It is his intellect that brings disgrace to his master Sawyer who is less gifted in this matter. As the narrative declares, "people had jeered [Sawyer], by saying [Grandy] had more sense than he had."[54]

However, there are further Grandy's personal qualities that might be associated with masculinity reflecting its traditional white paradigm. For example, the ability to stand for oneself that

[50] Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) 29.
[51] Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 34.
[52] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990) 12.
[53] Grandy 19.
[54] Grandy 21.

Martin Sommers calls "an act of resistance"[55] might be perceived as another attribute of Grandy's manhood. William L. Andrews points out that "[o]ne of the most remarkable features of Grandy's narrative are the detailed accounts he gives of the arguments he had with the white men who cheated him."[56] Readers learn about Grandy's refusal to submit to injustice when he describes his dispute with Mr. Sawyer: "I said I was almost starved to death [...] I told him, [...] that his overseer was the worst that had ever been on the plantation."[57] In spite of the censorship limiting his ways of expression, Grandy managed to stage several scenes reminiscent of his speaking. The following example documents his solitary refusal to endure harsh treatment. Grandy recounts that "[o]ne day [Mr. John Micheau] came into the field, and asked why no more work was done. The older people were afraid of him; so I said that the reason was, we were so hungry, we could not work. He went home and told the mistress to give us plenty to eat, and at dinner time we had plenty."[58] Grandy's brief words might be, perhaps, seen as a self-conscious act of resistance standing in contrast to the occasions where he had to remain silent because of his disempowerment.

Indeed, Grandy's occasional verbal resistance, as in the case of his master Mr. John Micheau, should be seen as a "manly," exceptional, and conscious deed. This evaluation of Grandy's sporadic verbal bravery becomes more objective and less exaggerated when his speeches are set into the context of his social standing and powerlessness in terms of the existing law. In other words, Grandy spoke from a position of a slave who, as the double consciousness warned him, will be immediately punished for overstepping the line. The passages devoted to Grandy's verbal resistance are moments when Grandy extricates himself from the formal conventions of the genre that otherwise distinctively shaped his testimony.

The exceptional character of Grandy's verbal defense might be better understood if we compare it to scenes developing the theme of silence as a voice's suppression in literature by Grandy's

[55] Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: the Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 13.
[56] William L. Andrews, David Davis and Tampathia Evans, eds. *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) xv.
[57] Grandy 30.
[58] Grandy 12.

contemporaries. A widely popular memoir written by Richard Henry Dana Jr. titled *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840)[59] contains a passage describing flogging of a free black man for talking back to the captain. The scene acknowledges that the superiority of the masters is indisputable and a breach of silence is inevitably and immediately punished. The captain warns the free black man: "You see your condition! You see your condition! Will you ever give me any more of your jaw?"[60] Subsequently, the captain enforces his superior position when he flogs a Swedish sailor John who dares to ask why the black man deserved the beating and who, in addition, does not understand why the captain should whip him as well. The captain's response is self-explanatory, "I flog you for your interference – for asking questions. [...] nobody should open his mouth aboard this vessel, but myself."[61] Douglass in his *Narrative* also explicitly addresses situations disclosing slaves as deprived of the right to speak up. For example he says: "When [the master] spoke, a slave must stand, listen, and tremble."[62] Several pages further, Douglass repeats the rule to emphasize its uncompromising character saying that "[t]here must be no answering back to him; no explanation was allowed to a slave."[63]

1.2 c) An Antithesis to the Slave Narratives

Therefore, if we take into account scenes from contemporary pro-slavery literature such as *Swallow Barn* and juxtapose them with the slave narratives, the scenes from the plantation novels and the ideologies they convey will be disproved as a result of the comparison. For example, the introduction to the farm as to a place where the slaves hold their master "in profound reverence, and are very happy under his dominion,"[64] can be regarded as ideologically toned. Further, there is an extensive but implausible elaboration on the apparently well balanced dialogues taking place between the master and his old slave Carey:

> He and Frank hold grave and momentous consultations upon the affairs of the stable, in such a sagacious strain of equal debate, that it would puzzle a spectator to tell

[59] Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast* (London: Sampson Low, 1869).
[60] Dana 103.
[61] Dana 105.
[62] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 23.
[63] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 25.
[64] Kennedy 28.

> which was the leading member in the council. Carey thinks he knows a great deal more upon the subject than his master, and their frequent intercourse has begot a familiarity in the old negro that is almost fatal to Meriwether's supremacy. The old man feels himself authorized to maintain his positions according to the freest parliamentary form, and sometimes with a violence of asseveration that compels his master to abandon his ground, purely out of faint-heartedness. Meriwether gets a little nettled by Carey's doggedness, but generally turns it off in a laugh.[65]

The myth of the free speeches delivered in homely peaceful environments embracing happy slaves who are provided for by their generous and caring masters is a specific example of the arguments asserted by the pro-slavery texts that are contradicted by slave narratives in general, including Grandy's narrative, and by Frederick Douglass in particular. Douglass almost rewrites the quoted scene from *Swallow Barn* when he says: "[F]or in nothing was Colonel Lloyd more particular than in the management of his horses. The slightest inattention to these was unpardonable, and was visited upon those, under whose care they were placed, with the severest punishment."[66]

In fact, Grandy's conventionalized narrative dictated to his amanuense represents an antithesis to the myth of kind slaveholders who are described as profligate and dishonest men suggesting, in accordance with the abolitionist rhetoric, that slavery has power to corrupt people involved in the institution. However, Grandy's description of the corruptive power of slavery is not as effective as Douglass's portrayal, frequently quoted by scholars, of his mistress Mrs. Auld: "But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work."[67] Contrary to Douglass, Grandy's argumentation is based on economical aspects of the slave system. In his opinion, the system is not as economically profitable as the pro-slavery supporters try to convince the general public. His manner of reasoning is rather unique in comparison to other slave narratives. He claims:

[65] Kennedy 31.
[66] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 26.
[67] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 35.

> The proprietors, though they live in luxury, generally die in debt: their negroes are so hardly treated, that no profit is made by their labour. Many of them are great gamblers. At the death of a proprietor, it commonly happens that his coloured people are sold towards paying his debts. So it must and will be with the masters, while slavery continues: when freedom is established, I believe they will begin to prosper greatly. [68]

Further, Grandy's attitude towards the institution of slavery, his readiness to repeatedly pay for his freedom, is significantly different from Douglass's growing militant attitude reflected in his fight with a slave breaker Covey. As Andrews maintains: "Without threatening his master physically, Grandy goes on the verbal offensive, demanding his rights in accordance with the contract, which to his mid-nineteenth-century northern readers, especially those males who believed that man's word should be his bond, would have been all but sacred."[69]

As has been shown, Grandy's narrative is predominantly based on conventional features that his editor, most probably, intentionally extracted from his maritime life story. It is debatable how much could have Grandy known about abolitionists strategies and rhetoric. However, he extricated himself from the genre conventions, those carefully listed by Olney, at least to the extent that his masculine identity is retrievable from the lines written down by his editor, whose decisive role is in this specific case indisputable. The attributes of Grandy's manhood, always dependant on our definition of manliness, are his quest for freedom, his resistance to injustice done to him by his masters and his intellect.

1.3 Definition

To conclude this chapter, while conventionalized stereotypical features of the slave narrative have been analyzed in detail and enumerated by many critics, in particular by Olney, current scholarly consensus on the definition of the genre does not exist. That is not to say that scholars like Stepto do

[68] Grandy 33.
[69] Andrews, Davis, and Evans eds. *North Carolina Slave Narratives* 10.

not define the genre. However, Stepto's critical approach towards the genre might be used as an example of literary criticism that, in Joanne M. Braxton's opinion, "disregards the narrative experience of the articulate and rationally enlightened female slave."[70] In general, most respected figures in the field are of the opinion that the earliest texts of the African-American literary tradition including slave narratives should be approached from new perspectives. Current literary criticism, especially black feminist criticism, might be characterized by its appeal for careful examinations and redefinitions of the concepts which the previous generation of scholars, often preoccupied with issues of authenticity and authorship (like Ulrich B. Phillips), considered to be completed. Also, many critics call for broadening of the canon, for plurality of its voices, to include a wide range of surviving texts. Among these accounts could be listed, for example, "the pre-abolition narratives written or dictated by women of African descent."[71] As Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor cite, the extended canon could be comprised of, for example, *1782 Petition by Belinda to the State of Massachusetts*, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear, a Native of Africa by a Lady of Boston* (1832) and *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831).[72] Further, the expanded literary canon could also include texts specified by Braxton: *Memoir of Jane Blake* (1834), *Narrative of Joanna, an Emancipated Slave of Surinam* (1838), and *Aunt Sally; or the Cross the Way to Freedom* (1858).[73] For all the reasons named above, any generally recognized definition of the genre does not exist. Nevertheless, in the scope of this study, the term will be defined as follows: the African-American slave narrative as a genre is an extensive body of diverse chronologically organized texts established on the conventionalized framework pre-defining the narrative outline and themes written or, in most cases, dictated by an ex-slave to a white editor with an intention to provide a testimony of an every-slave that, given a suitable authentication, would stir public discussion and advocate for the abolition of slavery.

[70] Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1989) 19.
[71] Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 116.
[72] Mitchell and Taylor 116.
[73] Braxton 22.

2. Frederick Douglass – The Masculine Voice

Despite Frederick Douglass's ability to extricate himself from the limited ways of expression that the formal conventions of the slave narrative allowed, Douglass is widely recognized by literary scholars as the most representative author of the genre. A clear political message calling for the abolition of slavery is argued through the lines written down by Douglass, who is, as a close reading of the text can prove, perfectly aware of the genre conventions and who, at the same time, traces potential gaps in the traditional narrative structure of the genre that enable him to turn the testimony on the living conditions of slaves into a self-representation. Therefore, this chapter provides a detailed examination of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* published in June 1845, pointing out, among frequently discussed themes and issues such as editorial intervention, readership consciousness, narrative strategies, freedom, literacy, and gender representations, the aspects in which the established narrative framework of the genre is transformed into the powerful portrayal of a heroic slave whose acquired masculinity characterizes his self-established identity. In addition, the chapter will address the facts Douglass deliberately excluded, because they could problematize his image of a strong self-made masculine character.

2.1 The Position of the Writer

The point of departure of this historically oriented analysis is the question why Frederick Douglass decided to write the *Narrative*[74] when a detailed testimony providing the general audience with the names of his masters could bring the fugitive in danger of being captured and re-enslaved. This inquiry, if we rely on his words, is solved in Douglass's third autobiography *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* published in 1881 where he casts light on the subject. Being aware of the possible risks, claiming that he "had reason to believe that an effort would be made to recapture [him],"[75] Douglass wrote the *Narrative* in support of the public speeches he delivered as a fugitive slave and, in a manner, as an abolitionist. Frances Smith Foster touches upon the subject when she

[74] Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* will be throughout the chapter referred to in an abbreviated form as the '*Narrative*.'
[75] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 186.

specifies what motivated Douglass to reveal his history. She argues that "[i]t was written to stifle rumors that Douglass was not really a fugitive slave."[76]

It should be pointed out that even among the Northerners the common opinion of the era was that the slaves are culturally and emotionally inferior. For example, when Thomas Jefferson contrasted qualities of the slaves with members of the dominant culture, he arrived at the conclusion that "[c]omparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior […] and that in imagination they are quite dull, tasteless and anomalous."[77] It is Jordan D. Winthrop who explains to us that remarks on the inferiority of slaves, "the most influential utterances on the subject,"[78] were, especially, written down by thinkers like Thomas Jefferson. As a respectable public figure, Jefferson elaborated on the subject of racial prejudices further when he wrote: "I do not mean to deny, that there are varieties in the race of man, distinguished by their powers both in body and mind. I believe there are, as I see to be the case in the races of other animals."[79] Strangely enough, it was the same Jefferson whose reasoning of equality of all men claimed in "The Declaration of Independence" was in the Post-Reconstruction Era adopted by the blacks who were striving against the racial segregation and discrimination generally known as Jim Crow laws. However, Jefferson's influential, widely recognized, and supposedly scientific characteristics of the slaves might be seen as the fundamental concept defining the slaves, or re-defining them in the new socio-political environment, as inferior to the whites. Douglass resolutely opposes this view in the *Narrative*.

Even the audiences attending abolition meetings were influenced by the existing racial stereotypes. Regardless of the fact that the abolitionists called for the end of slavery, their approach to inferiority of slaves might be seen as problematical through current lenses. To give a specific example, one of the most read texts of the era, written by an abolitionist, was Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery As It Is* which compared the institution to a curse. However, the "Introduction" to

[76] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* 47.
[77] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes On The State Of Virginia* (South Bend: Infomotions, 2001) 84.
[78] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969) xii.
[79] Jefferson 40.

the collection reveals some hesitations or doubts considering mental capacities of slaves in contrast to a decisive tone condemning slavery: "There is not a man on earth who does not believe that slavery is a curse. Human beings may be inconsistent, but human nature is true to herself."[80]

When Douglass documents the underlying motives of people who attended abolition meetings, he is aware of the existing racism. According to his observation, people come to public abolitionist gatherings, "no doubt of curiosity, to hear what a negro could say in his own case."[81] As he expresses his discontent, even at the public assemblies organized by the abolitionists, a fugitive slave is most likely to be introduced "as a 'chattel,' a 'thing,' – a piece of Southern property"[82] that is actually capable of speaking. Based on the widespread assumption that a former slave, a dehumanized piece of property, could not become educated, Douglass's profound oratory raised questions about his history. As Douglass recalls, "people doubted if I had ever been a slave,"[83] because, as he elaborates on the subject further, people generally called into question his past, saying: "He don't tell us where he came from – what his master's name was, nor how he got away; besides, he is educated and is, in this, a contradiction of all the facts we have been concerning the ignorance of the slaves."[84]

In spite of the uncertainties about his true history, Douglass's public speeches and his passion for reading are emphasized by Foster in her work on slave narratives. She claims that Douglass "knew literary traditions,"[85] which equipped him with thorough knowledge he fully utilized when he wrote the *Narrative*. If John Stauffer claims that "his *Narrative* was an artistic synthesis of the speeches he had been delivering over three years,"[86] he is certainly right. In this manner, Douglass was not an exception, because successful public lecturers were asked to write their life stories under instructions of the abolitionists. As Davis and Gates jointly inform us, "many ex-slave narrators confess that their printed texts are structured formal revisions of their spoken words organized and promoted by anti-

[80] Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery As It Is* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 7.
[81] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 185.
[82] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 185.
[83] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 186.
[84] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 186.
[85] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* 56.
[86] John Stauffer, "Frederick Douglass's Self-Fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man," *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 203.

slavery organizations."[87] Nevertheless, Douglass's *Narrative* is something more than a collection of orations structured according to requests of the abolitionists who made sure that "the proper content [is] observed, the proper theme [is] developed, and the proper form [is] followed,"[88] as Olney accurately sums up the editorial influences forming the genre. As a public speaker and a regular reader of an abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, Douglass was familiar with the narrative conventions of the slave testimonies, he was acquainted with the abolitionist rhetorical strategies and he was even aware of the pro-slavery rhetoric, because, as was mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, he deliberately challenged some pro-slavery assertions such as, for example, the myth of the homely environments. All the acquired knowledge and experience strengthened Douglass's position and, most importantly, made him more effective as a writer when he drafted his story under the supervision of William Lloyd Garrison.

In spite of the fact that later in their lives their ways and views parted, at the time when Douglass wrote the *Narrative*, they had a common goal in their minds – to advocate immediate abolition of slavery. As a publicly known figure and an influential man who presided over the American Anti-Slavery Society and edited *The Liberator*, which, as Foster underscores, "would ultimately publish many slave narratives,"[89] Garrison must have been aware of the fact that he was endowing Douglass with greater writing freedom than was customary at that time. However, even Douglass had to face restrains of the politically motivated genre that became, together with the stereotypical assumptions about inferiority of the slaves, a source of his growing disenchantment resulting in composition of two subsequent autobiographies[90] clarifying some significant matters omitted in the first *Narrative* written under Garrison's inspection.

Critics like Foster hear Douglass's complaints about limitations that forced him to restrain his analytical views on the subject of slavery and "leave the philosophy and interpretations to the (white)

[87] Davis and Gates xvi.
[88] Olney 158.
[89] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* 52.
[90] *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, revised 1892)

orators who preceded and followed him."[91] To use Douglass's words, he felt to be pinned down when Mr. John A. Collins asked him to say the plain facts, because they would "take care of the philosophy."[92] On the other hand, William L. Andrews presents some relevant ideas about the American aesthetic standards of the era. He gives an additional perspective explaining that restriction on Douglass's speech might not be caused by racial bias only. As Andrews explains, in the period when thinkers like R. W. Emerson insisted that the best writers focus on plain facts, "the most reliable slave narrative would be one that seemed purely mimetic, in which the self is on the periphery instead of at the center […] transcribing rather than interpreting a set of objective facts."[93] Thus, abolitionists, in anticipation of conflicts with proslavery defenders, were interested in testimonies based on verifiable plain facts.

Unlike most slave testimonies, Douglass's non-mimetic *Narrative* intentionally blurs genre boundaries. Apart from his personal ambitions and aspirations searching for potential gaps in the narrative structure that would allow self-representation, Douglass's aim was to disapprove assertions of inferiority. If Jefferson stated that "never could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration,"[94] Douglass reverses Jefferson's survey, for example, when he quite aptly appeals to his readers to imagine themselves or a regular slaveholder in similar circumstances. He exclaims: "Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land […] where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey."[95] Clearly, Douglass disproves Jefferson's theory when he sees the potential dangers and even adopts metaphorical language in order to describe the situation to white readers.

2.1 a) Preface

Indeed, for the nineteenth century readers, plainly descriptive language of the *Narrative* would, in a sense, advocate the subordinated status of its writer based on what they would perceive as

[91] Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 82.
[92] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 186.
[93] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 6.
[94] Jefferson 85.
[95] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 81.

the intellectual void of his story. Perhaps, it is the reason why Garrison stresses the fact that in comparison to the traditional narrative structure an additional dimension describing Douglass's feelings is added: "I think the most thrilling [passage] of them all is the description Douglass gives of his feelings."[96] However, Garrison's usage of the word 'thrilling' is slightly ironical and even possibly suggestive of some racial stereotypes perceiving the capacity of an ex-slave to speak on the subject of his inner thoughts as something rather extraordinary. It should be mentioned that Douglass is, contrary to Garrison's statement, sometimes suppressed from the articulation of his feelings. For example, when he ambiguously expresses his desire: "I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it,"[97] he might be referring to the incommunicability of human experience, but he may have other restrictions in his mind. Perhaps, he might be aware of the fact that such a detailed description could offend his readers.

Considering Garrison's downgrading comment from a different angle, it reestablishes, at least partially, traditional allocation of roles in the "Preface." In general, a preface of the slave narrative verifies existence of an ex-slave rather than glorifies his personality. Indeed, Douglass's remarkable achievements exceeded the level of an average slave or ex-slave that the *Narrative* sponsored by the abolitionists should, above all, represent. Foster also finds a specific example supporting the argument that Garrison consciously decreased the relevance of Douglass's personal qualities upon his achievements presenting him as a more average person. According to Foster, Garrison "avoids any suggestion that success was a result of personal talents and efforts, while he emphasizes the influence of the time and opportunities which freedom allegedly offers."[98]

If Jefferson uses his argumentation to advocate that the blacks are not capable to become part of the society in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Douglass writes the *Narrative* to prove him wrong. Even the fact that Douglass wrote the lines by himself can be understood as a constitutive element of his argument. As Davis and Gates explain, "[s]ince the Renaissance in Europe, the act of writing has

[96] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 6.
[97] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 18.
[98] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* 68.

been considered the visible sign of reason."[99] However, Jefferson rather emphasized oratory as a reflection of the speaker's mental capacities. It might be the reason why the traditional "Preface" to the *Narrative* is altered in a manner that readers are not exposed to a fugitive slave who humbly apologizes for his inadequacies claiming the truthfulness of his story as the established narrative convention dictated, but they are ushered into a scene of the public gathering of the white abolitionists who listen to a spectacular speech delivered by Douglass. It is not Douglass's scarred body without a shirt as evidence exhibiting the horrors of slavery that is given the primary attention as the conventional approach would favor, but Douglass's voice and his secured social position are at display in the "Preface." This narrative strategy strengthens Douglass's position from the very beginning of the *Narrative* and visually separates his considerable achievements as public speaker and abolitionist from his older slave-self devoid of any personal identity, a self that William L. Andrews calls "the no-self."[100]

In spite of the fact that Olney considers the "Preface" to be conducted in compliance with the genre conventions based on the point that a preface in the slave narrative is generally written "by a white abolitionist friend of the narrator,"[101] the *Narrative* explicitly extricated itself from the tradition in terms of its narrative strategies that are outside of the scope of Olney's scrutiny establishing the "master outline"[102] of the slave narratives. However, the "Preface" does not function as a mere authentication of the testimony. In fact, critics argue differently over who authenticates the text. In Robert B. Stepto's reading, the *Narrative* is authenticated by Douglass, because "[his] tale dominates the narrative."[103] Stepto's approach to the issue of authentication could be supported by Andrews who advocates that it is Douglass himself who self-authorizes the tale through his rhetorical strategies. To be specific, Andrews regards Douglass's manner of narration as constitutive element of authenticity based on his contextualization of the events with remarks on how he "felt about the incident."[104] Linda Hutcheon defines reflexivity, the textual consciousness employed by Douglass for

[99] Davis and Gates xxiii.
[100] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 143.
[101] Olney 52.
[102] Olney 50.
[103] Stepto 17.
[104] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 103.

the purpose of self-authorization of the tale, as "textual self-consciousness mak[ing] the story-telling part of the story told."[105] Not only does Douglass authenticate his story through reflexivity, he even presents the first interpretation of his words to his readers.

On the other hand, according to Lara Langer Cohen's research based on historical sources, the authenticity of the *Narrative*, the verification of Douglass's existence and, most importantly, the acknowledgement of his abrupt mental development over the years was, indeed, retroactively verified by "a Delaware planter A.C.C. Thompson."[106] Strangely enough, Thompson sought to argue that Mr. Covey's slave Frederick could not be capable of writing the story, because he was not literate when Thompson met him. In fact, Thompson's announcement published after the *Narrative* reached wide readership and public recognition confirmed Douglass's slave history that has been questioned by the audiences attending public abolitionist gatherings.

However, Stepto's reading of the "Preface" problematizes Garrison's deliberate engagement to the genre alternations. Garrison, most probably, diminished his superior editorial position unintentionally. Traditionally, editor's words had power to verify the truthfulness of the ex-slave's story. As Stepto puts it, Garrison rather wrote the "Preface" from a self-centered position of a man who sought to record "his own place"[107] in the history reenacting "his own abolitionist career"[108] by stressing his presence and, most importantly, his contribution in the 1841 Nantucket Anti-Slavery Convention launching Douglass's career. Garrison's preoccupation with *his* active role in recognizing Douglass's intellectual capacities is highlighted, as Stepto points out, by a chain of stance declarative expressions such as, "I rose, and declared,"[109] "I reminded the audience"[110] and "I appealed to them."[111]

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[105] Linda Hutcheon, "Reflexivity," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, eds. David Herman, Manfred John and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2008) 494.
[106] Lara Langer Cohen, *Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 119.
[107] Stepto 17.
[108] Stepto 17.
[109] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 3.
[110] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 3.
[111] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 3.

Further, Garrison also attempts to create his public image of a well-read man. When he describes Douglass as a publicly useful figure who "gave the world assurance of a MAN,"[112] he visibly quotes the line, modifying it slightly, but the source is not specified. The primary source of the citation is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[113] Nevertheless, the same line can be traced in other contemporary texts. For example, the same words, 'gave the world assurance of a MAN,' are used for the description of Tom Earle, a character from the story *Christopher on Colonsay* published in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1834)[114] edited by John Wilson who was, as his daughter in the memoir written in honor of her father declares, "respected, and his writings [were] well known"[115] in America. Though this approach is questionable, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* might be a potential source of Garrison's quotation. However, the most relevant point for our study is the undeniable presence of the Shakespeare's quote in Garrison's "Preface." The incorporation of Shakespeare in the "Preface" is not surprising, because Garrison commonly quoted a variety of Shakespeare's lines from, for example, *King Lear*,[116] *Henry IV*,[117] *Macbeth*[118] or *Othello*[119] even in his personal correspondence. Garrison's writing strategy corresponds to contemporary literary tastes. Further, it is suggestive of Garrison's literary tastes that he presents as highly cultivated. In fact, Garrison turns the attention of readers to his knowledge and emphasizes his personal significance for the abolitionist case. In its consequence, his self-concerned lines prioritize his public image and actions, and reduce the traditional apologetic attitudes at the same time. Thus, Douglass's position is strengthened even before he starts to speak on the subject of his personal experience gained in slavery. In Stepto's opinion, Garrison "directs the

[112] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 2. (original emphasis)
[113] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III, iv, 69 (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007).
[114] *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 34 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1834) <https://books.google.cz/books?id=GvdFAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA13&lpg=PA13&dq=%22gave+the+world+assurance+of+a+man%22&source=bl&ots=MCtIUfvLSt&sig=rtwuGQPb4Fno37p01qWbHqQqdk&hl=cs&sa=X&ei=IptdVdq4B8auU5D-gcAN&ved=0CD8Q6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=%22gave%20the%20world%20assurance%20of%20a%20man%22&f=false>2 Mar. 2015.
[115] Mary Wilson Gordon, *Christopher North: A Memoir of John Wilson, Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh* (New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1863) ii. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=5tZpAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA298&lpg=PA298&dq=%22Christopher+on+Colonsay%22&source=bl&ots=BNN1UAY45k&sig=AoPg9_ORn0sOla8BVho14wzgJ0I&hl=cs&sa=X&ei=audeVfDaD8qhsgH4oYCoCA&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=%22Christopher%20on%20Colonsay%22&f=false> 2 Mar. 2015.
[116] Walter M. Merrill, ed. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: Let the Oppressed Go Free, 1861-1867* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 75.
[117] Merrill 11.
[118] Merrill 363.
[119] Merrill 357.

reader to the tale"[120] and, rather subconsciously, acknowledges its "singular rhetorical power."[121] It should be stated that in order to keep up with the literary aesthetic demands of the period preferring humble tones of the narrators, Douglass's hesitation to become a professional public lecturer is at least mentioned by Garrison by these words, "he expressed his conviction that he was not adequate to the performance of so great a task."[122]

2.1 b) Non-Conventionalized Aspects - Individualism

Although the "Preface" is not written by Douglass, it starts a chain of instances where the *Narrative* adopts the conventionalized form, mirrors the established narrative structure, and transfers Douglass's personal identity on a frame that was originally designed to use its narrator only as a general example illustrating the peculiar institution of slavery. However, a literary critic Venetria K. Patton misunderstands Douglass's narrative strategies when she says: "by presenting his story within the framework of the lives of other slaves, Douglass is able to construct his history as the history of slaves,"[123] because Douglass was doing exactly the opposite thing. As an author writing under the editorial intervention of his sponsors, he writes within the tradition of universal testimonies describing the horrors of slavery, but, contrary to conventional slave narratives, he focuses on his personal growth, on his self-representation and on his individuality. Even in the slave narratives where some aspects of personal identities are traceable, like in the narrative dictated by Moses Grandy, descriptions of personal development and conscious self-cultivation are not provided, because they are not compliant with the conventionalized narrative outline of themes that should be developed. Douglass's narrative strategies stand in contrast to standardized plainly descriptive texts. Moreover, his supposed mental inferiority, stereotypically associated with slaves, is rejected based on his brilliant intellect, which is reflected in his profound mastery of the language distinguished by a frequent use of non-mimetic depictions in passages, where the editorial intervention allowed expressions exceeding the plain descriptiveness demanded by the genre standards.

[120] Stepto 19.
[121] Stepto 19.
[122] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 4.
[123] Venetria K. Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 42.

Nevertheless, Patton's problematic interpretation points to a paradox on which the slave narratives are based. Any slave narrative is presented by the abolitionists as a truthful story derived from memory of an ex-slave assuming that the mimetic reproduction of experience of a single slave can be used as solid evidence against slavery in general stressing the union between the slaves and ex-slaves by expressions such as "being bound with them!"[124] The dichotomous nature of testimonies is well summarized by Andrews who says: "Slave narratives often illustrate the contradictoriness of […] objectivity based on subjectivity."[125] In a manner, Patton's simplistic interpretation rather reflects expectations of the abolitionist sponsors who employed a fugitive slave into writing his or her memories on slavery showing the rottenness of the whole institution and calling for its immediate abolition. Patton's neglect of Douglass's specific writing strategies might be influenced, perhaps, by Davis's and Gates's general observation on the nature of the slave narratives summarizing that "the narrated, descriptive 'eye' was put into service as a literary form to posit both the individual 'I' of the black author, as well as the collective 'I' of the race."[126] Nevertheless, Douglass's *Narrative* does not fully embrace the traditional uniformly homogenous representation of the collective slave body, but it is rather an exploration of Douglass's individualism and self-determination exposing personal ambitions and aspirations that penetrate even through the censored text. As Andrews reminds us, Douglass was even accused of "egotism and conceit."[127] Thus, Douglass does not 'construct his history as the history of the slaves,' he does not, as Sidonie Smith rephrases Lawrence Buell's words, "subordinate the 'I' to communal discourses of identity,"[128] as the nineteenth century narratives mostly did, because he strives to escape the pit of uniformity limiting any aspects of self-definition. Traditionally, readers were given an initial impression that the narrator is an average representative of "millions of his manacled brethren."[129] In this sense, Garrison proves himself guilty of editorial

[124] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 2.
[125] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 6.
[126] Davis and Gates xxvii.
[127] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 101.
[128] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) 122.
[129] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 2.

encroachment when he declares that Douglass's case "may be regarded as a very fair specimen of the treatment of slaves in Maryland."[130]

As has been mentioned, Douglass complained about the limitations forcing him to restrain some of his views and opinions. The specific effects of Garrison's editorial supervision might be disclosed, for example, by comparing the scenes where Douglass speaks on the subject of holding a school. While the *Narrative* focuses on the fact that Douglass was persuaded to teach his fellow slaves by these words, "nothing would do but that I must keep a Sabbath school. I agreed to do so, and accordingly devoted my Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves how to read." [131] The same occasion written without Garrison's editorial interference fully displays Douglass's ambitions and, mainly, his active agency. Douglass writes: "As summer came on, and the long Sabbath days stretched themselves over our idleness, I became uneasy, and wanted a Sabbath-school, where to exercise my gifts, and to imprint the little knowledge I possessed to my brother slaves."[132] The passage does not develop a communal sense of Douglass's existence or identity as Patton's interpretation would anticipate, because other slaves, as Shirley Samuels puts it aptly, "remain narratively silent."[133] They function as a background for Douglass's story accentuating his individualistic nature. Indeed, when the two scenes are juxtaposed, the existing editorial restrictions are revealed pointing to the intentional reduction of Douglass's profound individualism described by Andrews as "literary egotism"[134] driven by a desire to demonstrate the acquired knowledge that allows Douglass to stand out of the crowd in both versions of the story.

Even if we look at other frequently discussed passages establishing communal sense of slave identities, Douglass's narrative strategies prevent him from being fully embraced into the collective self. For example, scholars, including Jeannine Marie DeLombard, oftentimes mention the murder of a resistant slave Demby, who refuses to be whipped and thus sets "a dangerous example to the other slaves, one which […] would finally lead to the total subversion of all rule and order upon

[130] Douglass *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 5.
[131] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 63.
[132] Douglass, *Autobiographies: The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* 186.
[133] Shirley Samuels, ed. *Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1992) 250.
[134] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 101.

plantation"[135] as the overseer Mr. Gore argues when he is confronted with a slave owner Colonel Lloyd. The scene of murder is structured in a manner giving us an impression that, as DeLombard points out, "Demby stands in for every soul on the plantation,"[136] creating a sense of communal identity. However, it should be noted that it is Demby, not Douglass, who represents the collective identity of slaves who are deprived of the voice. As the scene is described, Demby remains silent only to become silenced forever. Douglass declares: "the first call was given. Demby made no response, but stood his ground. The second and third calls were given with the same results."[137] In contrast to Demby, Douglass's voice speaks of the resistance. He distinguishes himself by the power of his voice and retrieves parts of history that would be, without his agency, lost from historical memory.

2.1 c) Narrative Strategies - Syncretic Phrasing

Another narrative feature setting Douglass apart as a writer is "the syncretic phrasing,"[138] which has attracted attention of scholars who frequently quote the lines "conjoin[ing] past and present,"[139] as Stepto describes the elaborated rhetorical strategy and coins the term. Douglass's syncretic phrasing is a specific example of his intentional blurring of the uniform genre boundaries. It is Olney who sheds light on the subject of general writing perspectives of the narrators saying that "the ex-slave […] cannot afford to put the present in conjunction with the past […] for fear that in so doing he will appear, from the present, to be shaping and so distorting and falsifying the past."[140] In spite of the recognition that Douglass "transcended the slave narrative mode,"[141] Olney does not explain why Douglass could *afford* to alter the established convention without being pinned down by the editorial supervision. One of the plausible reasons might be traced back to the "Preface," which, in comparison to an average slave narrative, strengthens Douglass's writing position as a by-product of Garrison's self-promoting attitude suggesting that without his active agency a brilliant speaker like Douglass

[135] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 26.
[136] Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 120.
[137] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 26.
[138] Stepto 20.
[139] Stepto 20.
[140] Olney 49.
[141] Olney 51.

could remain unnoticed by the public. Douglass is allowed wider narrative scope corresponding with his narrative position, because he does not speak from a position of an average humble narrator who underestimates his qualities and speaks of his inadequacies.

Further, Douglass might escape the editorial intervention, because he makes sure that the passages describing traditional elements of the slave narrative, to name several of them, whipping, poor sleeping conditions, "monthly allowance of food,"[142] "yearly clothing"[143] and the names of his masters are delivered in a strictly mimetic nature, while the passages cultivating the non-mimetic insight on the living conditions of slavery are related to more personal and less constitutive issues for the abolitionist case. Even when Douglass comments, for example, on the name of Mr. Severe saying that he was, "rightly named: he was a cruel man,"[144] he makes sure that the given example of his cruelty following the pun is plainly descriptive reducing the comment on Severe's obvious perverse delights to a mode of a possible appearance. Douglass recalls: "I have seen him whip a woman, causing the blood to run half an hour at the time; and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, pleading for their mother's release. He seemed to take pleasure in manifesting his fiendish barbarity."[145] Furthermore, Douglass's syncretic phrases establish a sense of authenticity of the *Narrative* that was seen as a positive quality of testimonies by the abolitionists. According to Douglass's claim, authenticity was a crucial aspect of his writing. As he explains: "I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false."[146]

In addition, the non-mimetic syncretic passages can be read as an evidence of Douglass's readership consciousness constantly disapproving the racial stereotype of innate inferiority. Stepto states quite aptly that "Douglass seems to fashion these passages for both his readership and himself."[147] He stresses his mastery of the language. In the frequently cited and rhetorically highly cultivated lines like: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am

[142] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 21.
[143] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 21.
[144] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 22.
[145] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 22.
[146] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 36.
[147] Stepto 20.

writing might be laid in the gashes,"[148] Douglass juxtaposes the dehumanized self that was purposefully "degraded in the scale of humanity,"[149] as Garrison puts it in the "Preface," by slave owners who "cripple the […] intellects, darken the […] minds, debase the […] moral nature, obliterate all traces of the […] relationships to mankind,"[150] with the uplifted new *self* aware of his mental capacities proudly displaying the results of the systematic but concealed self-cultivation. In Stepto's view, the most prominent aspect of the quoted line is the emphasis on "evolution from slavery to freedom"[151] stressing the ascendency of the self-centered aspects of the *Narrative*.

On the other hand, in Olney's reading, Douglass's syncretic phrases are structured with the aim to detach the writer and "the illiterate, inarticulate subject of the writing"[152] manifesting rather the outcomes of Douglass's self-education than the process of its acquisition. In other words, Douglass is distancing himself from the dehumanized slave self dramatizing, as Olney puts it, "how far removed he is from the boy once called Fred."[153] Douglass's aim is to distinguish between the two diverse social positions related to different periods in his life. When Olney analyses the quoted syncretic phrase, he emphasizes the fact that the pen is a vivid image unifying three fundamental themes "literacy, identity, and freedom, the omnipresent thematic trio of the most important slave narratives."[154] In fact, the triangular relation of the issues could be regarded as a distinct sign of highly-developed narratives, because, as Judy A. Ronald says, average testimonies elaborated only on two of these issues. In her words, "the primary pregeneric myth for the slave narrative is the quest for freedom and literacy."[155] The unification of the three themes into the singular symbol mirrors Douglass's approach to the issues presenting them, undoubtedly, as inseparable and mutually conditioned. "Literacy, identity and a sense of freedom are,"[156] in Olney's understanding of Douglass's assertions, "all acquired simultaneously and without the first […] the two latter would

[148] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 33.
[149] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 6.
[150] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 6.
[151] Stepto 20.
[152] Olney 55.
[153] Olney 55.
[154] Olney 55.
[155] Judy A. Ronald, *DisForming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993) 38.
[156] Olney 54.

never have been."[157] Since Olney does not elaborate on the subject of identity any further, the fact that the identity is, in Douglass's case, always determined by his gender, thus masculine, passes unnoticed by him.

2.2 Evolutionary Triangle: Freedom, Literacy and Masculinity as Interrelated Core Issues

If the primary task of slave narratives in general is to spread ideas about the abolition of slavery through the widely read genre, Douglass adopts reasoning that challenges racial stereotypes and pro-slavery assertions presenting them as rather irrational. Apart from Thomas Jefferson, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel may be regarded as one of many influential thinkers who reinforced the racial prejudices of inferiority. In 1821 Hegel published *Philosophy of Right* expressing, among other issues, his thoughts upon the nature of slaves: "The slave knows not his essence, his infinitude, his freedom; he does not know himself in his essence, and not to know himself is not to think himself."[158] In a manner, Douglass's *Narrative* could be juxtaposed with the points Hegel makes, because his individualism penetrates throughout the self-reflexive lines he writes to demonstrate his full awareness of his existence and the self-established identity going hand in hand with a hunger for freedom. Douglass expresses no doubts regarding his humanity claiming, as well as Garrison in the "Preface," that the institution of slavery is the primary cause of inferiority of its victims when he exclaims, "O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute. […] God, deliver me! Let me be free!"[159] From the narrative point of view, the deliberate repetitions of themes like humanity or freedom draw attention of the readers to these issues and points to their significance.

As Douglass realizes, uneducated slaves who are broken in their psyche thus unresisting are the kind of slaves masters desire: "I have found that, to make a content slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to

[157] Olney 54.
[158] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001) 42.
[159] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 59.

annihilate the power of reason."[160] Contrary to Hegel's conclusions about the nature of slaves, not only does Douglass demonstrate his clear apprehension of his living conditions presenting *cogito* as an inevitable aspect of his daily existence when he says: "I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me,"[161] he is even determined to achieve freedom. He speaks on the subject of liberty repeatedly, for example, when he says: "The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness,"[162] highlighting the fact that it was the possibility of liberation from slavery preventing him to commit a sin: "I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed."[163] For Douglass, freedom becomes an omnipresent drive expressed, for example, by the claim: "I look forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape."[164]

Indeed, a distinctive quality of Douglass's character is his determination to escape. In spite of the fact that Hegel would not assign an unbreakable will to a slave, his definition of a self-will fits Douglass. Hegel maintains: "This self-will is a feature of modern times, being indeed the peculiar principle of Protestantism."[165] Therefore, it could be inferred that the *Narrative* is written in concordance with the values of Protestantism regarding self-will, individualism and progress oriented attitude as its essential qualities. Frances Smith Foster identifies Protestantism, its Afro-Protestantism branch in particular, as "[t]he most consistent and influential element in the first century of African-American literary production [...], an organic synthesis of African, European, and new-world theologies, traditions, and exigencies that was as much political as personal."[166] As Foster emphasizes, one of the imperatives is an appeal to become literate. While abolitionists saw literacy as a conventional theme of the slave narratives, Douglass addresses the issue in a broader manner. His

[160] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 47.
[161] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.
[162] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.
[163] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.
[164] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 39.
[165] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* 20.
[166] Frances Smith Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture," *American Literary History*, 17.4 (2005): 715, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/alh/summary/v017/17.4foster.html>, 2 May 2015.

determination to acquire reading skills also reflects the principles of Afro-Protestantism as described by Foster. When Douglass says, "[t]hough conscious of difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read,"[167] he, in fact, contradicts both Hegel's assumption and Jefferson's assertions that a slave does 'not think himself.'

2.2 a) Literacy

Literacy, the ability to read and write, was of a high importance to slaves who could prove, based on their education, their humanity. In fact, references to reading and writing are, in compliance with Olney's check-list, conventions of the genre. The relevance of education to slaves in general is explained similarly by most scholars. To give a specific example, William L. Andrews states that the ability to read is "treated in many slave narratives as a matter equal in importance to the achievement of physical freedom."[168] It should be noted that not all the slaves who managed to escape to freedom were literate as was the case, for example, of Moses Grandy who dictated his story to his editor. In her historical survey, Foster maintains that, "[i]n Kentucky, over 20 percent of the African Americans advertised in the nineteenth century as "runaways" were described as being able to read and about 10 percent as being able to write as well."[169] On the other hand, Andrews names the most famous ex-slaves who, according to his study, own their freedom to reading and writing including, apart from Douglass, Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown and James W. C. Pennington.

Furthermore, Davis and Gates see literacy as a significant conventional theme of the slave narratives. They divide references to this issue into three thematic categories. The first category includes traditional apologies for educational inadequacies and other possible deficiencies confessed by the ex-slaves in the prefaces. The second category is comprised of the passages where the narrators "recount vividly scenes of instruction in which the narrator learned to read and then to write."[170] Douglass, indeed, adopts traditional narrative strategies when he recalls how he acquired his reading

[167] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.
[168] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 13.
[169] Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture" 720.
[170] Davis and Gates xviii.

skills. The passages disclosing how he continued in his self-education are especially designed for those readers and abolition meetings attendants who publicly questioned Douglass's origin, for those who saw his education as incongruous with the qualities that were commonly ascribed to slaves. Yet, Douglass hesitates to give the specific names of the little boys who instructed him in reading. He says: "I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;--not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them."[171] In order to explain how he acquired his knowledge, what his first steps were, Douglass adds a detailed description of how he learned to write without actually drawing attention of the whites towards his desire. He illustrates how he observed ship carpenters and their manner of marking the logs. Equipped with the partial knowledge, he successfully uses the few letters in a contest with some unnamed literate white boy with the primary intention to trick him into teaching him how to write few more letters.

The third category of references to literacy delineated by Davis and Gates comprises of the passages that "underscore polemical admonishments against statuses forbidding literacy training among black slaves."[172] Douglass ironically comments on the obstacles slaves commonly faced and he reveals his dissent towards discrepancies between the religious doctrines and the actual practice in the South when he says: "It is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country."[173] Nevertheless, the most relevant passage frequently quoted and commented upon by scholars is the scene describing the moment when Mr. Auld realizes his wife is teaching young Fred to read and spell words. The scene discloses the truth that the masters wanted their slaves to be ignorant and illiterate for obvious reasons. They believed, as Mr. Auld maintains, "[a] nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. […] He would at one become unmanageable, and of no value to his master."[174] Mr. Auld's words, his "invaluable instruction"[175] explaining why slaves should be prevented from the access to

[171] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 36.
[172] Davis and Gates xviii.
[173] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 41.
[174] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 78.
[175] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.

education, excite Douglass's attention and, having high impact on him, they launch his quest for freedom, making literacy a vehicle for its acquisition. Douglass keenly emphasizes the moment of epiphany. He declares, "[f]rom that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom."[176] The specific moment of "radical discontinuity,"[177] to use Shirley Samuel's phrasing, separates the dehumanized slave who was, as he declares, "ranked with horses, sheep and swine,"[178] from the slave who recognized his intellectual potential.

2.2 b) Freedom

On the other hand, the moment of epiphany does not have to be approached in terms of its detaching qualities only, but it can be analyzed with an emphasis on the rhetorical coherence that is created between the themes of freedom and literacy. In is Samuels who finds Douglass's narrative strategies unique in a sense that he fosters cohesiveness of these issues, of freedom and literacy, by prioritizing his individualism that, consequently, narratively silences "the voices of other slaves."[179] Nevertheless, considering the details about the specific conditions of Douglass's escape to freedom that Douglass himself never discloses in any of his three narratives, the freedom emerging from literacy he speaks of is rather theoretical, open to possibilities that are close to the description Francis Smith Foster provides us with, "literacy gained African Americans access to other forms of freedom. Those who could read and write could find spiritual freedom, could write themselves passes or read their way to physical freedom, or could serve their people as interpreters."[180] However, there was no guarantee that a literate slave would be provided with a path to liberty. In Douglass's case, education made him restless in finding means for his escape, but without the help of his future wife Anna Murray, as will be discussed further, he would have never become a free man no matter how literate he was. On the other hand, the significance of literacy for slaves should not be totally belittled or viewed through current lenses, because, as Davis and Gates jointly argue, "[l]earning to read and write

[176] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 38.
[177] Samuels 251.
[178] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 46.
[179] Samuels 251.
[180] Foster, *Written by Herself* 17.

meant that this person of African descent took a giant step up the Great Chain of Being; the 'thing' became a human being."[181]

As Samuels explains, literacy "helped white people to define black people as commodities, while providing the means to disseminate a discourse justifying the institution of slavery."[182] Perhaps, Douglass might be influenced by Jefferson's theories presenting oratory as a reflection of the speaker's intellect when he deliberately recalls the specific moment when he read *The Columbian Orator* for the first time. He explains how he developed his excellent speech skills to the wondering public and, at the same time, he emphasizes his ability to think ascribed to humans solely. The occasion that Samuels labels as testimony of the impact of "an experience of reading,"[183] customary in the nineteenth century, is described by these words: "I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled *The Columbian Orator*."[184] The most significant passage from the anthology is, based on Douglass's assertion, the conversation between master and his slave privileging oratory as an instrument of power resulting in the liberation of the slave. The master plainly declares: "I do it, then; be free."[185] When Douglass outlines the most important point, he concludes: "What I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder."[186] Douglass, perhaps unintentionally, expresses his trust in the power of the word to disclose the truths about slavery making the institution unbearable for the society thus fit for immediate abolition.

2.2 c) Masculinity

Apart from the power of the word and the power of his intellect, Douglass also believed in physical power, in the active resistance when no other means of survival were possible. In this manner, he diverted himself from Garrison's pacifistic attitude. When Davis and Gates maintain that

[181] Davis and Gates xxix.
[182] Samuels 253.
[183] Samuels 18.
[184] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 41.
[185] Caleb Bingham, *Dialogue Between a Master and Slave* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1999) <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/pageviewer-idx?idno=00acf6728m;c=nietz;cc=nietz;rgn=full%20text;didno=00acf6728m;view=image;seq=245;node=00acf6728m%3A1.6.63;page=root;size=s;frm=frameset; >5 May 2015.
[186] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 42.

the slaves, perceived by the Southerners as a chattel thus objectified by the society, "could become subjects only through expression of the will to power as the will to write,"[187] they stress the equal significance of the issues of literacy and masculinity for the constitution of Douglass's de-objectified identity. It brings us to the second moment of epiphany, the moment of a sudden recovery of Douglass's consciousness bonded to the scene of the fight with a slave breaker Covey, which is frequently analyzed by scholars and which, as Wilson J. Moses articulates, "admits of more than one interpretation."[188] The scene is introduced in a manner which indicates that Douglass perceives the declared act of resistance as a constitutive aspect of his masculine identity standing in contrast to subordinated, dehumanized chattel-like self. Adopting the trope of chiasmus, Douglass claims: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you should see how a slave was made a man."[189] In Henry Louis Gates's view, Douglass uses his rhetorical strategy to "calle[] upon to reverse the world's order, […] to show that what seemed fixed was actually arbitrary."[190]

In general, critics predominantly interpret the fight with Covey, which Len Gougeon calls "the climactic scene,"[191] in accordance with Andrews's opinion. Andrews sees the fight as a crucial moment when Douglass revives "within himself his own manhood."[192] Strictly speaking, Andrews's claim is a mere reformulation of Douglass's words presenting the first interpretation of the escalated conflict to readers. Douglass clarifies the fact that the acquired masculinity should be understood as a primary sign of his new identity when he maintains: "This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood."[193]

Contrary to Moses's statement, there are only several diverse readings of the scene among scholars. Tim A. Ryan quotes Nancy Bentley's examination of the passage focusing on the fact that

[187] Davis and Gates xxx.
[188] Wilson J. Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 26.
[189] Douglass, *Autobiographies*: *Narrative* 60.
[190] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura: Representing the Antislave 'Clothed and in Their Own Form,'" *Critical Inquiry* 42.1 (2015): 34.
[191] Len Gougeon, "Militant Abolitionism: Douglass, Emerson, and the Rise of the Anti-Slave," *New England Quarterly* 85. 4 (2012): 651.
[192] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 227.
[193] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 65.

both, Douglass and Covey, blurred the legal boundaries banning slaves from attacking their masters making Douglass "temporarily a white man,"[194] a man who could equally attack his rival. In this context, whiteness is associated with power. Thus, Douglass is, in Bentley's opinion, "claim[ing] white manhood."[195] On the other hand, Bill E. Lawson and Howard McGary focus on the issue of otherness as relevant for the understanding of the fight when they say that "Frederick Douglass's refusal to be beaten by the 'nigger breaker' Covey can be thought to have exemplified the virtue of courage out of a desire to preserve his self-respect, a self-regarding reason rather than an other-regarding reason."[196] However, Lawson and McGary do not focus on the fact that Douglass and Covey reciprocally recognize their self-esteems, and the value of their lives at the very moment of imminence. These details are, in fact, indicative of the possible parallel with some of Hegel's ideas.

Even though literary critics like Davis and Gates suggest that Hegel's opinions on the nature of 'Africans' could affect the emergence of a large body of slave narratives, saying, "[a]ccused of having no collective history by Hegel in 1813, blacks responded by publishing hundreds of individual histories,"[197] their assertion seems to be rather hypothetical considering the fact that it is highly questionable how many ex-slaves or their editors were acquainted with Hegel's thoughts. Based on the generally available historical materials, it is not verifiable if Douglass read Hegel prior to writing the *Narrative*, and if the resemblance of the scene to Hegel's dialectic is purely accidental reflecting Douglass's superior intellect. It is Paul Gilroy who believes that Douglass was familiar with "the German idealist tradition,"[198] most probably owning the knowledge to his German translator Ottilia Assing who could possibly mention, besides Goethe or Feuerbach, Hegel in the frequent conversations she carried on with Douglass around the year 1860. Nevertheless, a plausible analogy between Hegel's master and slave dialectics is so suggestive of itself that it is striking only Eric J. Sundquist and Gilroy juxtapose Douglass's battle with Covey and Hegel's passage from *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thinking

[194] Tim A. Ryan, *Calls and Responses*: *The American Novel of Slavery Since Gone with the Wind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008) 86.
[195] Ryan 86.
[196] Howard McGary and Bill E. Lawson, *Blacks in the Diaspora: Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 96-97.
[197] Davis and Gates xxiii.
[198] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 61.

of the German translator Assing, Gilroy says: "with the suggestive connection in mind I want to propose that we read a section of Douglass's narrative as an alternative to Hegel."[199] In Sundquist's analysis of the scene, "Douglass accentuates his own conversion to mastery – mastery of Covey, in a reversal of the relationship of power, and mastery of himself, in a release from the condition of chattelism."[200] If we contrast Douglass's lines with Hegel's "trial by death,"[201] although unverifiable, Douglass's lines could be interpreted as a revision of Hegel. In the battle with Covey, Douglass risks his life expecting that "even death itself"[202] might follow. Since both participants perceive each other as rivals equally valuing their own lives as the most precious, it may be inferred that Douglass denies his subordination. Phyllis Lynne Burns classifies this fairly short stretch of time as a "moment of self-definition [and as a] moment of existential freedom."[203] Indeed, Douglass's delineation of the fight and the conclusions he consequently makes about the changes of his identity seem to echo the following Hegel's proclamation:

> The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. Similarly, just as each stakes his own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no more than itself.[204]

In fact, the scene describing the details of Douglass's active rebellion stresses the masculine, power based qualities of his established identity that were traditionally ascribed to white manhood. Since male slaves had a lower status based on subordination to their masters, Douglass's newly established identity conditioned by his gender is and, indeed, must be derived from the conventions set by the dominant white culture. In other words, Douglass prefers the same characteristics defining manhood of his masters and white men in general, because there was no other definition of

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[199] Gilroy 61.
[200] Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations* 123.
[201] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Phenomenology of Spirit," *Self and Subjectivity,* ed. Kim Atkins (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) 67.
[202] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 65.
[203] Phyllis Lynne Burns, "I Kill White Mens …Cause I Can: The Rewriting of Liberation and Mastery in Dessa *Rose*," *Criticism* 55. 1 (2013): 126, JSTOR <http:// www.jstor.org/stable/10.13110/criticism.55.1.0119.html> 3 Mar 2015.
[204] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* 114.

masculinity recognized by the hegemonic society. Similarly, since the dominant culture preferred pictures of subordinated female figures, Douglass adopts comparable, stereotypical images for black women resembling the social organization of the patriarchal system.

2.3 Marginalization of the Black Women and Simplification of their Identities

If Douglass silences other slaves in order to emphasize the bond between freedom and literacy, his representations of the black females prioritizing scenes of their victimization, specific for the slave narratives, and erasure of their active agency jointly result in simplification of the black female identities. Through these narrative strategies, on top of that, Douglass accentuates his stereotypical masculine qualities and his individualistic nature. It is Rachel A. Blumenthal who points out that Douglass's intentional prioritization of his masculinity "push[ing] black femininity to the margins of the text"[205] caught attention of black feminist critics like Deborah McDowell in 1980s.

A specific case of victimization of women outlined by Douglass is a passage frequently mentioned by scholars, which describes the whipping his aunt Hester received after she "went out one night […] and happened to be absent when her master desired her presence."[206] Douglass's introduction to the scene, "I was quite a child,"[207] suggests that it was the specific moment when he was, by an unfortunate coincidence, initiated into the horrors of slavery. Another example pointing out to the systematic exploitation of black women is Douglass's notification that the lowest status of female slaves, who were legally transformed into breeders multiplying property of their owners, was imposed on them for the economical benefits of slave owners. In the nineteenth century when the issue of sex was regarded as a taboo, Douglass openly describes the practices of Christian slavers: "Mr. Covey was a poor man; […] he was only able to buy one slave; and, shocking as is the fact, he brought

[205] Rachel A. Blumenthal, "Canonicity, Genre, and the Politics of Editing: How We Read Frederick Douglass," *Callaloo* 36. 1(2013):179, MUSE <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cal/summary/v036/36.1.blumenthal.html>, 2 Jan 2015.
[206] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 15.
[207] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 15.

her, as he said, for a breeder."[208] His statement discloses the fact that motherhood of black women was commodified by slavery.

Indeed, Douglass's representation of femininity is highly stereotypical, marginalizing women in spite of the fact that he could find examples of strong female figures, including his grandmother or his future wife Anne. According to Sundquist's study, "[h]is grandmother, Betsy Bailey, born in 1772, was a strong, self-reliant woman who, although a slave, lived a comparatively independent life and was considered a community leader."[209] Nevertheless, the most striking is the case of Anne Murray. While it is understandable that Douglass could not specify the details of his escape from slavery in the *Narrative,* claiming his ultimate responsibility: "I am alone responsible […], no one can be made to suffer but myself,"[210] he could disclose the truth in his later autobiographies. However, it should be considered how different the public perception of Douglass would be, if the most important aspects of his flight were known. It is Mary Helen Washington who ironically comments upon the existing discrepancies between the written record and the truth when she says: "Douglass tells the story of his escape as though he were a solo artist – self-initiating, self-propelling, and self-sustaining – making the plunge into the dark night of freedom alone and unassisted."[211] It should be mentioned that Douglass was not an exception in his approach towards female figures. Male slave narrators commonly "diminished or omitted references to women's roles,"[212] as Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson jointly summarize assertions made by Washington.

Nevertheless, Douglass's disclaimed dependency on Anne Murray's help could be motivated by his effort to present himself as a self-transformed hero. New perspectives on this subject are presented by Gougeon who calls Douglass "the self-reliant Emersonian anti-slave"[213] and who reviews existing connections between Douglass and Emerson. Among other historically verified details, Gougeon speaks of their personal encounter at the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society on 1 August

[208] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 105.
[209] Sundquist 95.
[210] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 85.
[211] Mary Helen Washington, *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960* (New York: Anchor, 1987) 8.
[212] Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller, eds. *Women and Slavery* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008) 255.
[213] Gougeon 633.

1844 where Emerson delivered his speech "Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies," significant for its militant rhetoric inspired by transcendentalism. Gougeon summarizes Emerson's assertions about emancipation of slaves by these words: "For the slave, this revolution would depend upon the rise of what Emerson called the 'anti-slave.' One of the men seated on the stage with him, Frederick Douglass, was both a model of and inspired by that avatar of resistance as Emerson conceived of and presented him."[214] Further, Gougeon is convinced that "Douglass was increasingly using his own life to develop the paradigm of the anti-slave."[215] Yet, it would be impossible to situate oneself within such a paradigm if Anne Murray was a part of the history.

Undoubtedly, masculinity as connected to power is a prominent sign of Douglass's self-established identity. In Patton's understanding of the issue, "Douglass constructs his escape to freedom as a maturation into manhood."[216] Therefore, the confession of Anna Murray's active agency would, ultimately, problematize Douglass's image of a strong self-made masculine character, because his heroism that culminated in his escape is, in fact, a post-product of a female courageousness. We own the truth to Douglass's daughter Rosetta, who paid tribute to her mother after her death, declaring her father's flight from slavery was "a story made possible by the unswerving loyalty of Anna Murray."[217] Washington provides us with more detailed descriptions shedding light on the subject of Anna's more than active participation. She claims that "not only did Anna make the sailor suit that Douglass wore in his daring escape disguised as a sailor, but […] she used funds from her savings as a valued household worker to help him get safely to New York."[218] Her words might be even supported by William S. McFeely, who goes into detail considering the coverage of Douglass's travel expenses, declaring that "[i]n the privacy of the family, it was always said that Anna sold a featherbed to finance the journey."[219]

[214] Gougeon 623.
[215] Gougeon 651.
[216] Patton 64.
[217] Rosetta Douglass Sprague, "Anna Murray-Douglass - My Mother as I Recall Her," *The Journal of Negro History* 8.1 (1923):93-101, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713462>, 17 Mar. 2015.
[218] Washington 8.
[219] William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Norton, 1991) 70.

It might be claimed that if a public speaker like Douglass, who had endless opportunities to share his story after the Civil War, kept the specific details of his flight secret, he had a compelling argument for it. The most plausible argument seems to be Douglass's ego. Most probably, his public reputation and credibility would suffer. According to conclusions Gates draws on Douglass's personality, it is possible to interpret his autobiographies, additional writings and social activism as "his own personal quest for fame."[220] If we imagine his public confession and set it in the context of the masculine pride, which was expressed by another Garrisonian abolitionist John S. Jacobs, it is almost inevitable to come to a conclusion that Douglass's public image would, indeed, greatly suffer. The image of a self-made man would be ruined. It becomes almost unthinkable to picture Douglass telling the truth to the same audiences who listened to the words of Harriet Jacobs's brother declaring that he once refused to take an advantage of an opportunity to escape, because "pride will not allow [him] to let a man feed [him] and clothe [him] for nothing."[221]

To conclude this chapter, the primary goal of the *Narrative* is to challenge negative stereotypes and myths that pro-slavery supporters adopted in order to justify the institution of slavery. Therefore, if we juxtapose assertions made by Jefferson or Hegel on the nature of slaves with the *Narrative*, we may come to the conclusion that their racial theories are in a sharp contradiction to the declarations made by Douglass, who clearly advocates for abolition of slavery. His narrative strategies are effective. Douglass is aware of the well-established genre conventions and follows them. This aspect of his writing is reflected in the lines that present traditional facts such as the amount of food and clothing, working and sleeping conditions, or describe the moral and psychological impacts on those who are involved in the institution either as slaves or as masters. For example, when Douglass describes kindness of Mistress Hugh, he holds to the conventions and uses her as a living example of the disturbing impacts that slavery has on the souls of slavers proclaiming that "[s]lavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. […] Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the

[220] Gates, "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura" 38.
[221] John S. Jacobs, "A True Tale of Slavery," *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, Harriet Ann Jacobs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) xxxviii.

lamblike disposition gave was to one of tiger-like fierceness."[222] It might be relevant to mention that Isaac Knapp, a co-founder of an abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* and Garrison's close friend, issued a title written by George Bourne called *Slavery Illustrated in its Effects upon Woman and Domestic Society*[223] in 1837, which focuses on the issues that Douglass consciously voices in connection to Mistress Hugh. It might be even claimed that Douglass narrated this specific scene knowing what the major abolitionist rhetorical strategies and topics are. Perhaps, he deliberately searched for an occasion in his life that could be set in the pre-defined narrative frame. Possibly, he might be asked by his editor if he could recall any occasion that would provide evidence of the issues that Bourne addressed in his title. This speculation raises the question of the editorial interferences and their nature in Douglass's specific case. Even though many aspects of Garrison's editorial intervention are noticeable in the *Narrative*, it must be admitted that Douglass was allowed a wider narrative scope corresponding to his status of an abolitionist speaker established in the "Preface." While Garrison most probably assumed that it is his approval, his "Preface," which authenticates the testimony, Douglass's narrative strategies make him the real authenticator of his story.

Apart from the passages where the genre conventions are properly developed to argue the abolitionist case, there are scenes narrated in a manner that is outside of the scope of the narrative framework where Douglass extricates himself from the uniformity of the genre. These unique lines of the *Narrative* become Douglass's exploration of his masculine individualism. He manifests his self-determination, self-education and even self-will. The traditional myth of the slave narratives based on the quest for freedom and literacy is enhanced by the issue of masculinity, making these three themes undoubtedly and almost naturally interrelated. Thus, Douglass's masculine identity is fully accomplished when he successfully escapes to freedom. At that moment, all three goals, three drives in a manner, are completely achieved. Nevertheless, considering all the mentioned historical facts, Douglass's image of a strong self-made or self-reliant masculine character is problematized by the truths related to his escape he consciously omits in the *Narrative*. Only through the distortion of

[222] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 40.
[223] George Bourne, *Slavery Illustrated in its Effects upon Woman and Domestic Society* (Boston: I. Knapp, 1837).

reality, erasing the deeds of his wife Anne Murray, Douglass's self-imposed image of a heroic masculine slave, Emerson's prototype of 'the anti-slave,' has been preserved over generations.

3. Harriet Ann Jacobs – The Feminine Voice of Linda Brent

The primary task of this chapter is to analyze Harriet Ann Jacobs's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* whose treatment of slavery and the relations of power connected to the white patriarchal hegemony is, as Francis Smith Foster claims, "more complex and varied than that of male narrators."[224] Jacobs does not narrow her perception to the binary opposition of slavery and dominance, but she is conscious of different social relations and clearly recognizes varying degrees of power. The narrative was published under the pseudonym of Linda Brent for precautionary reasons. While some critics like Thomas G. Courser might be of the opinion that the adoption of the pseudonym reflects "Jacobs's conflicting desire to give public testimony and to retain her privacy,"[225] Jacobs followed the customs of the time. The public sphere was seen as the domain of men, while women were associated with domesticity. Therefore, as Foster explains, "women writers generally used pseudonyms or published anonymously."[226] Based on available historical sources, the narrative is considered to be the first woman's fugitive slave narrative *written by*[227] an ex-slave in English in the United States. When Jean Fagan Yellin juxtaposes Jacobs's testimony with her brother's narrative titled *A True Tale of Slavery*, striking differences in their gendered perceptions are revealed. John S. Jacobs's omission of the nature of her suffering establishes the emergence of the female voice as crucially important for the black woman's case. William L. Andrews briefly explains the basic distinction when he maintains: "For a black woman, a slave, and unmarried mother of two in the first half of the nineteenth century, [...] a quest [for home] constituted as heroic a struggle against overwhelming odds as any male fugitive slave would ever record."[228] Further, Jacobs's portrayal of a heroic female slave and her resistance to slavery does not suppress the community as Douglass's *Narrative* does, but it demonstrates its existence clearing the way for other voices to be heard. Therefore, the subsequent lines of this thesis will discuss Jacobs's long-term search for an editor, then

[224] Foster, *Written by Herself* 95.
[225] Thomas G. Couser, *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1989) 144.
[226] Foster, *Written by Herself* 99.
[227] Sojourner Truth dictated her narrative (*The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*) to Olive Gilbert and it was published by William Lloyd Garrison in 1850. *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) by Harriet E. Wilson is classified as the first autobiographical novel.
[228] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 240.

the focus will be shifted towards unconventional aspects of her narrative, such as gender-specific treatment of slavery and motherhood challenging the concept of true womanhood as a socially constructed perception that excludes black women living at the mercy of their slaveholders who ultimately see them as *the Other*.

3.1 The Position of the Writer

While Frederick Douglass's process of publishing his narrative was quite uncomplicated, as the only crucial and irreversible decision he had to make was to settle whether he is willing to undertake the risks associated with the public announcement of his masters' names and other details that could cause his re-enslavement, Jacobs's experience with publishers and possible editors was comparatively more complicated and even discouraging. It is Jean Fagan Yellin[229] whose extensive research into Jacobs's private correspondence illuminates the difficulties Jacobs experienced and, most importantly, whose historical investigation acknowledges Jacobs as the author of the narrative, which was, as a result of speculation by literary critics like John Blassingame[230] sometimes ascribed to its editor Lydia Maria Child. However, Yellin confirms the authenticity of the narrative when she maintains: "Both its style and its content [...] are completely consistent with Jacobs's private correspondence and with her pseudonymous public letters to the newspapers."[231]

From her days of slavery, Jacobs was used to spending years in hiding and she was accustomed to living in constant threat. Similarly to Douglass, who was freed by Hugh Auld in 1847 after a reformist lawyer Ellis Gray Loring launched the case[232] and his British admirers, as John Stauffer informs us, "raised enough money for him to purchase his freedom,"[233] Jacobs was also secured against the Fugitive Slave Law passed by the Congress in 1850 after "her manumission had been purchased,"[234] as Foster states. Jacobs addresses the political issue several times in *Incidents,*[235]

[229] Jean Fagan Yellin, "Introduction," *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself,* Harriet Ann Jacobs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[230] Davis and Gates 147.
[231] Yellin xxiii.
[232] Gougeon 36.
[233] John Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 158.
[234] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* xxxvi.

comparing those who enforce the Fugitive Law to "bloodhounds."[236] However, when she secretly drafts her manuscript, she is more concerned about the controversy that her confession might cause if she openly speaks on the subject of sexual exploitation of female slaves than about her own safety.

Comparably to Douglass, she is also acquainted with abolitionist literature. As Yellin mentions, her brother John S. Jacobs was one of Garrison's ex-slave lecturers who went on a tour with Douglass in 1849. Further, Jacobs worked for the family of Nathaniel Willis, who was, according to Foster's investigation, "brother to the best-selling novelist Fanny Fern and a prominent editor and author in his own right."[237] Thus, Foster arrives at a probable conclusion that, "Jacobs was familiar with the white literary establishment, and she moved in the circles of the best abolitionist writers."[238] Considering all the hardship she had to undertake to publish her history, she could not rely on the male centered connections to the publishing business. In fact, Jacobs's experience with publishers reflects the conditions other female slave narrators had been facing. It might be documented by the fact that, as Minrose C. Gwin claims, "there are fewer than thirty written [slave narratives] by black women [...] published as books during their lifetimes."[239] Even the abolitionists were not ready to give the floor to black women on a larger scale instantly. Some felt that if the movement was associated with black women, it could, in Foster's words, "weaken its political impact,"[240] while others rejected women on the basis that their involvement might result in "additional compromises."[241]

In comparison to black male abolitionists, Jacobs did not have the advantage of public speakers who could adopt different rhetorical strategies and, in a manner, test the reactions of the audiences at the various public gatherings in order to find the most effective manners of narration for their planned testimonies. As an anonymous contributor to *New York Tribune*,[242] Jacobs could rely merely on second-hand, mediated responses of the reading public. Her additional advantage was the

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[235] Throughout the chapter, Jacobs's narrative will be referred to in an abbreviated form as the '*Incidents*.'
[236] Jacobs 44.
[237] Foster, *Written by Herself* 101.
[238] Foster, *Written by Herself* 101.
[239] Minrose C. Gwin, "Green-Eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy," *Conjuring*, eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 41.
[240] Foster, *Written by Herself* 100.
[241] Foster, *Written by Herself* 100.
[242] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 23.

fact that "she knew the literary precedents and she knew how readers had responded to them,"[243] as Foster maintains. In spite of the fact that the only encouragement in her writing she had received was from her friend Amy Post, Jacobs honestly believed that a publication of her story could help the abolitionist case. In fact, she became a spokesperson for black women directly addressing a white female audience. However, she was not the first writer who turned to female readership for understanding, who "attempt[ed] to move women to political action,"[244] as Yellin puts it. For example, George Bourne in his 1837 publication titled *Slavery Illustrated in its Effects upon Woman and Domestic Society* claims, "[t]he abolition of slavery in America is emphatically the duty and privilege of women."[245] In *Incidents*, Jacobs repeatedly expresses her hopes that the informed public might launch some changes to structure of society. To be specific, Jacobs addresses her readers and, perhaps bitterly, points to the controversial 1850 Fugitive Act insisting that "if you credited one half of truths that are told you concerning the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke."[246] Several lines later, she briefly but honestly outlines her reason for publishing *Incidents* when she declares, "I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered."[247]

In one of her letters to Post, Jacobs speaks of her hopes that the influential writer Harriet Beecher Stowe to whom was, according to Thomas G. Couser, "assigned responsibility for the Civil War"[248] by Abraham Lincoln, might become her editor. Therefore, Jacobs asks her friend Post if she could send the draft on her behalf. Jacobs probably believed that if Stowe becomes acquainted with her story through Amy Post, the attestation of Post's active involvement will advocate the truthfulness of her words. However, Stowe's response was shocking. According to Yellin, Stowe responded that, "she was forwarding Amy Post's sketch of Jacobs's sensational life to Mrs. Willis for verification; and that, if Jacobs's story was true, she herself would use it in her forthcoming *Key to Uncle Tom's*

[243] Foster, *Written by Herself* 101.
[244] Yellin xxxiv.
[245] Bourne vii.
[246] Jacobs 28.
[247] Jacobs 29.
[248] Couser 138.

Cabin."[249] Jacobs was devastated, because she had assumed that a woman would understand the delicate nature of the details of her suffering. Moreover, without her consent, Stowe acquainted her employer Mrs. Willis with the sensitive details of her past. Yellin puts it quite aptly when she claims that Stowe "betrayed her as a woman, denigrated her as a mother, and threatened her as a writer."[250] When Couser describes the same incident, he insists that Stowe "violated the confidence on which any collaboration would have to depend."[251] It should be mentioned that it is not the only historically documented occasion of the instability of Stowe's character. In his correspondence with Douglass, Martin Delany suggests that Stowe's literary achievements are the results of her arbitrary mixture of imagination and reproduction: "I am of the opinion, that Mrs. Stowe has draughted largely on all the best fugitive slave narratives."[252] As Robert Steven Levine speaks further on the subject of Delany's opinion on Stowe, Delany even accused Stowe of racism claiming that her willful treatment of certain themes was ideologically stained. In Delany's view, "Stowe's idealization of Tom's religiosity would serve mainly to perpetuate black subserviency and degradation."[253]

According to Yellin's research based on a variety of historical sources, Jacobs did not succeed in finding a publisher even on her travels in England. About three years after her adverse experience with Stowe, she was finally promised that her narrative might be published, "if she could provide an introduction by Lydia Maria Child."[254] This suggestion turned out to be beneficial if we rely on Couser's words, "unlike Stowe, Child proved respectful of her manuscript. Although she reorganized what Jacobs had supplied, asked on elaboration of some episodes, her editing was not particularly aggressive."[255] However, Foster presents a slightly different view on the relations between Jacobs as a writer and Child as her editor, "Jacobs had to confront her editor [...] in order to retain control over the form, the emphasis, and even the proofreading of her text."[256]

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[249] Yellin xxi.
[250] Yellin xxi.
[251] Couser 138.
[252] Robert Steven Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
[253] Levine 80.
[254] Yellin xiv.
[255] Couser 139.
[256] Foster, *Written by Herself* 106.

For Child, it was not the first experience with a story of a female slave. However, if we compare it to the testimony made by, for example, Charity Bowery[257] published in *The Liberty Bell* in 1839, significant dissimilarities between Bowery's fabrication of events and Jacobs's description of the customs come to the surface. Both women speak of their endless drive to gain freedom for their children. Contrary to the fact that it was very rare for a slave to marry a person of his or her choice, Charles T. Davis even lists "the lack of legalized marriage between slaves"[258] as one of the genre conventions, Bowery insists that marriage ceremonies were set by her mistress. She says, "I had a wedding when I was married; for mistress didn't like to have her people take up with one another, without any minister to marry them."[259] Also Foster's historical investigation contradicts Bowery's words claiming that, "informal marriages represented the majority of unions formed among the working class and poor."[260] As John W. Blassingame argues, "the marriage ceremony in most cases consisted of the slaves' simply getting the master's permission and moving into cabin together."[261] Therefore, Bowery's reference to her official wedding ceremony should be rather approached as an appeal to her middle class readers who, as Foster stresses, "seemed to value legally sanctioned and formally ceremonialized marriages."[262] Bowery's plausible fabrication partially explains why Jacobs was so conscious about the moral standards of her middle-class female readers who were accustomed to moral myths established in the popular sentimental literature of the era. Regardless of the fact that Douglass briefly mentioned slaveholders who bought female slaves as breeders to expand their property, Jacobs was one of the first women[263] to confess her sins before her target readers, middle-class northern white ladies, who were probably shocked while reading about what they certainly viewed in the nineteenth century, as Linda's moral inadequacies. Her confession is significant for its

[257] Lydia Maria Child, "Charity Bowery," *The Liberty Bell* (1839) Emory Women Writers Source Project 2005 < http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu/content.php?level=div&id=child_charity_001&document=child_charity > 2 Mar. 2015.
[258] quoted in Patton 41.
[259] Child 27.
[260] Foster, *'Til Death Or Distance Do Us Part* 156.
[261] Blassingame, *The Slave Community* 87.
[262] Foster, *'Til Death Or Distance Do Us Part* 157.
[263] Mary Prince, who is connected to Caribbean tradition, published her story in the United Kingdom in 1831.

primacy among autobiographies, because, as Andrews maintains, "never before had an American slave woman pleaded her own case."[264]

3.2 The Cult of True Womanhood

However, Jacobs's confession represents a fundamental conflict, because she writes in a tradition of the sentimental novel portraying positive female figures as predetermined by the prescribed virtues of the dominant culture. The socially enhanced image of the true womanhood is outlined by Shirley J. Yee who declares that "contemporary magazines, books and religious literature instructed women on their responsibility for upholding the four basic virtues that supposedly governed women's nature: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness."[265] It is Gwin who explains the roots of the contradiction, saying: "the ideals of sensibility and virtue were incompatible with the slave woman's experience."[266] Jacobs is clearly aware of the conflict and attempts to resolve its divergence; she tries to explain her situation and inform her northern readers about true conditions determining the dehumanized existence of slaves in the south, of those who are "no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend."[267]

In a manner, the narrative might be read as a self-defense pointing to the fact that, in spite of her desire, Jacobs could not remain morally pure. Repeatedly, Jacobs speaks of her exclusion from the discourse of morality and asks her readers for indulgence, "do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice."[268] Several lines later, the topic reoccurs and Jacobs draws attention of her readers to the fact that slave women are in a vastly different position in comparison with the white women. The institution of slavery prevents them from cultivating their virtues despite their aspirations. Insisting on the significance of her claim problematizing the basis of her exclusion from the discourse of morality, she should not be, therefore, judged by the same principles. Jacobs exclaims, "[p]ity me, and pardon me, O

[264] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 241.
[265] Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activitism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1992) 40.
[266] Gwin 42.
[267] Jacobs 8.
[268] Jacobs 54.

virtuous reader! You never knew what is it to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the law reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another."[269] Similarly to Douglass who, through his narrative strategies, diminishes the uniformity of the genre, Jacobs adopts 'syncretic phrasing' connecting the past and the present when she speaks from a position of a writer who retroactively evaluates her actions and their inevitable consequences. At the same time, she distances herself from her once dehumanized existence when she repeats her appeal for indulgence, "[s]till, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel, that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others."[270]

According to nineteenth-century standards, black women were associated with uninhibited passions. The stereotypical image imposed on them by the patriarchal culture enabled white men to take advantage of their female slaves without losing moral credibility. As Winthrop D. Jordan explains the reasoning of the era, "[f]or by calling the Negro woman passionate they were offering the best possible justification for their own passions [...], it helped shift responsibility from himself to her."[271] In Carby's opinion, the white male "was represented as being merely prey to the rampant sexuality of his female slaves."[272] Therefore, when Linda turns for help to her mistress Mrs. Flint, she responds with hatred. While Linda could see, as Andrews puts it, that "it was their mutual interest to confide in each other against their common harasser,"[273] blinded by racial bias, Mrs. Flint placed responsibility on Linda. As Jacobs speaks of her hostile attitude, "[t]he mistress, who ought to protest the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage."[274] Further, Jacobs maintains that Mrs. Flint "had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. [...] She was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave

[269] Jacobs 55.
[270] Jacobs 56.
[271] Jordan 151.
[272] Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 27.
[273] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 256.
[274] Jacobs 29.

was placed."[275] Thus, Linda becomes, as Gwin describes her powerless existence, "a double victim of the two-headed monster of the slavocracy, the lecherous master and the jealous mistress."[276]

In Gwin's reading of *Incident*s, Jacobs transformed her narrative into "a vehicle of rage directed toward her former mistress."[277] Her opinion might be supported by the lines where Jacobs draws a comparison between Mrs. Flint's personality and Christian hypocrisy. These lines might be perceived as a mockery of southern ladies:

> Mrs. Flint, like many southern women, was totally deficient in energy. She had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash. She was a member of the church.[278]

However, we may find passages where Jacobs expresses her sympathies towards women like Mrs. Flint, because they are, in her view, also tricked and deceived. Jacobs maintains: "The poor girls have romantic notions of a sunny clime, and of the flowering vines that all the year round shade a happy home. To what disappointments are they destined! The young wife soon learns that the husband [...] pays no regard to his marriage vows."[279]

Despite Jacobs's relation to Mrs. Flint based on, in particular, hate and betrayal, Jacobs, as a spokesperson of the black enslaved women, attempts to transcend ethnicity and seeks help among northern females. However, the solidarity of white women is conditioned and influenced by many aspects including racial stereotypes and social standing. Therefore, when Yellin claims that "[a] central pattern in *Incidents* shows white women betraying allegiances of race and class to assert their stronger allegiances to the sisterhood of all women,"[280] she rather describes prospects of Jacobs's editor Lydia Maria Child. In her authentication of the narrative, Child establishes the alliance when she calls black women her sisters. She discloses her motivations: "I do this for the sake of my sisters in

[275] Jacobs 33.
[276] Gwin 40.
[277] Gwin 48.
[278] Jacobs 12.
[279] Jacobs 36.
[280] Yellin xxxv.

bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them."[281] Although Jacobs points to subordination of women in the world dominated by men, the bonds are not, in fact, established. It is Carby who explains that Jacobs "place[s] white female readers in the position of having to realize their implication in the oppression of black women, prior to any actual realization of the bonds of 'sisterhood.'"[282] Even if we think of the diverse community of women who helped her escape from the bonds of slavery as Jacobs presents it, it is based on secrecy and silence. The secret networks must be kept, as Andrews explains, "outside of male awareness because they are subversive of patriarchy."[283] Therefore, when a white lady intervenes, she insists on her anonymity: "If you think there is any chance of Linda's getting to the Free States, I will conceal her for a time. But first you must solemnly promise that my name shall never be mentioned. If such a thing should become known, it would ruin me and my family."[284] Therefore, it might be claimed that the themes of abolition and feminism are, as Joanne M. Braxton emphasizes, both explored in *Incidents* and "interweave[d]."[285] Also, Andrews is convinced of the significance that *Incidents* played in the feminist argumentation, characterizing slavery as "the most egregious manifestation of the tyranny of patriarchal power in America."[286] In fact, Jacobs is addressing, perhaps in its most simplified form, the phenomenon of women's oppression.

3.3 Motherhood

The second ground-breaking topic addressed by Jacobs in *Incidents* is the theme of motherhood connected to both issues, resistance to slavery embodied by her lustful master Mr. Flint and her self-established identity developed outside of the cult of true womanhood. It might be argued that the theme of motherhood is redefined by Jacobs through her persistent commitment to her children, because female slaves were stereotypically perceived as having no real tenderness, no true affection for their offspring. Jacobs argues that it is slavery that prevents her from fulfilling

[281] Jacobs 4.
[282] Carby 51.
[283] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 254.
[284] Jacobs 99.
[285] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 23.
[286] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 247.

the traditional role of a mother. Undeniably, the sense of being unable to protect her children is present in *Incidents*. Indeed, Linda's reclaiming of motherhood is used as her salient argument against slavery. Motherhood, thereby, gains political dimensions. In Braxton's critical reading of *Incidents*, Jacobs's motherhood is, "a rite of passage, a vehicle for a new identity."[287] Braxton even identifies Linda as the missing archetypal slave heroine pointing to the fact that critics like Stepto ignored the presence of female figures in the slave narratives and defined only a masculine archetypal hero. Braxton claims, "we consider as a counterpart to the articulate hero the archetype of the outraged mother. She is a mother because motherhood was virtually unavoidable under slavery; she is outraged because of the intimacy of her oppression."[288]

However, there are critics like Jenny Sharpe who see Linda's motherhood as serving her purpose, as a willful action. Sharp claims that "her pregnancy removed her from the immediate threat of [Mr. Flint's] sexual abuse."[289] Shirley Samuels also describes Jacobs's motherhood "as an active choice."[290] Linda knows that masters want their female slaves to become mothers as soon and as often as possible. As she describes her fears, she "shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by [her] old tyrant."[291] Since she "resolved never to be conquered,"[292] the only possible chance of escape, following Jacobs's manner of reasoning, is to choose a white man who will become the father of her children. In fact, it is her pregnancy that prevents her from being sent to a remote cottage. She uses her maternity as a demonstration of resistance to her master when she exclaims: "I will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother."[293] Stephanie Li argues that Linda "[c]onvert[s] her body and reproductive abilities from sites of exploitation to vehicle of resistance."[294] However, moral concerns and a sense of wretchedness phrased as, "[m]y mind was full

[287] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 3.
[288] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 19.
[289] Jenny Sharpe, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) xxi.
[290] Samuels, ed. 262.
[291] Jacobs 55.
[292] Jacobs 19.
[293] Jacobs 56.
[294] Stephanie Li, "Motherhood as Resistance in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Legacy* 23.1 (2006): 15, MUSE < http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/legacy/v023/23.1li.html> 3 Mar. 2015.

of horrid thoughts. I prayed to die,"[295] or, "[m]y self-respect was gone!"[296] rob her of any sense of victory. Reconciling with her grandmother, her real model of morality, is the only thing that is on her mind. If Braxton insists that "[b]lack women have been carriers of tradition, and values of care, concern, nurturance, protection, and, most important, the survival of the race,"[297] these are the qualities Linda's grandmother represents. In a manner, Jacobs juxtaposes values embodied by Aunt Martha with the artificial moralities and Christian hypocrisy of the majority of the southern ladies who are represented by Mrs. Flint.

To conclude this chapter, the primary goal of *Incidents* is to argue for the abolition of slavery from a woman's perspective. Therefore, Jacobs challenges the representation of femininity in male slave narratives. Her gender-specific treatment of slavery is fortified by descriptions of her psychological suffering. She establishes a distinctly feminine voice which speaks of the institutionalization of rape, commodification of motherhood, as well as of her persistent resistance to her master and to the institution that dehumanizes her existence. However, a detailed description of sexual abuse is not presented, as it would most likely be shocking for her middle-class readers. It is Carby explains that "[f]eminine sexuality was limited to a display of heightened sensibilities and refinements and a titillating charm."[298] Instead, Jacobs juxtaposes commodification of enslaved women with their futile effort to remain morally pure. Her confession, however, represents a fundamental conflict in the environment of sentimental literature based on the ideals of piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. Attempting to resolve the divergence, "Linda Brent speaks at once as a hero and as a fallen woman,"[299] as Braxton points out. Therefore, her quest for freedom is associated with sexual liberation, reclaiming of motherhood, and a persistent but unresolved desire for home. The uniqueness of Jacobs's feminine approach to slavery might even be seen in her unprecedented use of dialect, unthinkable for Douglass, who insisted on standard English, or in her use of sass as an effective manner of verbal defense against her lustful master. Braxton asserts that Linda's mastery of

[295] Jacobs 57.
[296] Jacobs 56.
[297] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 19.
[298] Carby 26.
[299] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 24.

language, and sass "preserves [her] self-esteem and increases the psychological distance between herself and the master."[300] However, *Incidents* reflect even larger social contexts than the practices of southern slave owners and the personal experience of one slave girl. It might be interesting to consider the extent to which Jacobs' insights on the relations of power may have been directly or indirectly influenced by her editor Child or by her friend Post. Nevertheless, Harriet Ann Jacobs is one of the first African American writers presenting a feminist view on the structures of power in patriarchal society.

[300] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 30.

4. *Dessa Rose* - Literacy and Subjectivisation of Historical Memory in Slave Narratives

Sherley Anne Williams's complex novel *Dessa Rose* published in 1986 problematizes objectivity and reliability of written mementos of slavery conveyed in the slave narratives and encourages readers to re-consider how they approach these written sources. The novel tells a story of a fugitive slave woman Dessa who is rescued from a prison where, while waiting for her execution, she is forced to respond to questions asked by Nehemiah concerning her past. The attention of readers is drawn to the superior position of the amanuenses who recorded their perspectives on slavery in the narratives and who, most importantly, preserved their personal views for the generations to come. As a neo-slave narrative, the novel employs some of the narrative conventions specific for the genre of slave narrative and rewrites particular scenes and issues coined in the most renowned narratives by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. However, Williams's problematization of the perception of the genre is not concerned with historical inaccuracies only. If the slave narratives in general entered into ongoing dialogue with the pro-slavery literature of the same period, Williams continues in the tradition of responsiveness to current issues when she writes her novel in reaction to William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. As she declares in the "Author's Note,"[301] her objective is to temper the outrage caused by Styron among a significant number of African-American critics. Inspired by two unrelated historical events, a female rebel Dinah and a white female farmer who helped runaway slaves, Williams's fictionalized insight into the human natures of Nehemiah, Ruth and Dessa living in the antebellum South attempts to correct the inaccurate widespread perceptions, myths and misreading. Williams's urge to dispel the misconceptions might be even set in the context of the academic discussion among Black feminist critics such as Mary Helen Washington or Hazel V. Carby who dismissed the stereotypical perceptions of slaves and slavery in 1980s. In general, they highlighted the fact that texts are not produced in a vacuum, therefore they should be considered in their cultural, historical and political contexts. As Washington clarified their calls for revision, they challenged "the old male-dominated accounts of history refusing to be cramped into the little spaces

[301] Williams 5.

men have allotted women."[302] In fact, Williams's novel relativizes the objectivity of historical memory as it is conveyed through the slave narratives and reproduced by writers like Styron. The main objective of this chapter, therefore, is not the contextualization of power and literary production as it is mirrored by the figure of Nehemiah only, but the analysis also discloses some specific scenes that echo *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* revealing that the double-subordination of female slaves consequently resulted in the marginalized status of the African-American female figures in literature that strong female characters like Dessa Rose rewrite, redefine or perhaps even regenerate.

4.1 Contextualization of Power and Literacy

In general, Williams's narrative strategy undermines the established perceptions of history as a science based on accurate data and objective evidence. If Alun Munslow points out that "history is presented as a written interpretative narrative [and historians] assume that it corresponds to what actually happened,"[303] Williams undertakes a critical inquiry into the firmly established view. However, distinction between history and fiction is still recognized. Her perspective might be seen as coinciding with Hayden White's theory emphasizing "the problem of historical knowledge."[304] White claims that in the twentieth century, "European thinkers [...] stressed the fictive character of historical reconstruction,"[305] which resulted in problematization of the realistic nature of literary representation. To simplify the matters, the interpretations of history are not ideology-proof and ideologies do not produce purely mimetic texts. Therefore, the readers should, ideally, approach the texts with knowledge of their contexts. Similarly, Jenny Sharpe reminds us that "Roland Barthes was one of the first critics to describe the problem of history as not simply one of the writing but of reading as well."[306]

[302] Washington xxvii.
[303] Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 2006) 39.
[304] Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 1.
[305] White 1.
[306] Sharpe xiii.

Nevertheless, the assertion of fictiveness might be seen as relevant especially in the specific case of the slave narratives accompanied by the conventionalized paratexts declaring reliability of its content. Because of all the omissions, pseudonyms and other intentional gaps leaving out some data predominantly for precautionary reasons, all slave narratives might be interpreted as fictionalized texts in terms of their intentional or unintentional inaccuracy. If we realize these facts, we can arrive at a better understanding of Williams's words. She claims to own the story in the "Author's Note." Williams asserts: "This novel, then, is fiction [...] And what is here is as true as if I myself had lived it. Maybe it is only a metaphor, but I now own a summer in the 19th century."[307] She suggests that the line dividing a work of fiction written with the intention to reflect events and experiences of people as close to the truth as possible on the one hand, and a historical text narrating the past with an intention to present a one-sided, prejudiced or nonobjective perspective of those who are in power to record their views on the other hand might not be even visible. To the contrary, a work of fiction presenting model situations, relations of power and plausible ways of behavior can be more veracious than a fictive record of history written from a position of cultural and racial superiority deliberately spreading mythology, as is the case of Nehemiah's narrative. That is not to say that fiction can be freely interchanged for history. It rather suggests that historical narratives should be reconsidered and read with thorough knowledge of their historical contexts. Readers should attempt to detect passages where mythologies prevail over objectivity. Williams's juxtaposition of Nehemiah's narrative and Dessa's true story might be, perhaps, interpreted as a guideline for future ways of readings.

It seems then that Williams's fictionalized insight into the human nature of the fictive heroine Dessa might be more trustworthy and closer to the truth than the recorded documents of slavery written down by the white scriveners like Nehemiah. Indeed, the amanuenses were influenced by their sense of superiority. They created a virtual barrier preventing or perhaps even eliminating a truthful comprehension of the slave's position in the racist South. It is Frances Smith Foster who aptly outlines the traditional or stereotypical image of female slaves conveyed in the slave narratives produced under the supervision of editors like Nehemiah: "Mention the slave woman, however, and noble images

[307] Williams 6.

fade. They see her as victim – to be pitied, perhaps – but neither respected nor emulated. [...] the common association of slave women is with fornication."[308] In fact, the white self-educated tutor of the rich southern planters strives to record Dessa's story that, consequently, should become his story qualifying him for public recognition. "The book would establish Nehemiah as an important southern author."[309] The narrative emphasizes that "the idea for this book about the origins of uprisings among slaves had come from Nehemiah's publisher, Browning Norton,"[310] pointing to structures of power influencing publication of any literature. As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy puts it, Williams "directs our attention to the disparity in access to power between those who write master texts and those who produce slave narratives."[311] Nehemiah stands for the white dominant patriarchal society that conceptualizes Dessa's identity and interprets her actions and nature.

The issue of objectivity is scrutinized through Nehemiah's attempt to read Dessa and preserve his cultural translation in a form of a practical guideline that, according to his words resembling pro-slavery assertions, should help others "to be happy in the life that has been sent them to live."[312] It might be inferred that social stratification and dehumanization of slaves seems natural to him. Therefore, Dessa is presented as dehumanized throughout the text narrated by Nehemiah. She is constantly objectified by being referred to as the darky and she is perfectly aware of her inferior status. This might be deduced from her claim, "[a]nd you was always darky or nigger or gal to them, never your name."[313] Nehemiah's prejudices and culturally instigated double subordination of the African-American women is revealed, for example, when he says, "I must constantly remind myself that she is but a darky and a female at that."[314]

Indeed, Nehemiah's approach to Dessa's story is highly interpretative and, in a manner, manipulative as well. As a result, Dessa does not even recognize her life story written down by him, "[h]e told her and even read a little to her, an innocuous line or two. She was entranced. 'I really say

[308] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* xxix.
[309] Williams 25.
[310] Williams 24.
[311] Ashraf Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 136.
[312] Williams 45.
[313] Williams 211.
[314] Williams 23.

that?'"[315] In fact, Nehemiah's manipulation of Dessa's testimony is disclosed from the beginning of the novel: "[he] hadn't caught every word [...] Or he had sat, fascinated, forgetting to write. Yet the scene was vivid in his mind as he deciphered the darky's account from his hastily scratched notes and he reconstructed it in his journal as though he remembered it word for word."[316] The words 'as though' actually point to the fact that he wrote from his memory that is not accurate, but rather selective depending on the part of Dessa's speech that seemed to him as the most remarkable and effective for the purpose of his guideline.

Therefore, the issue of Nehemiah's subjectivity is also related to the issue of memory. He decodes or retells Dessa's memories based on his notes and impressions derived from his remembering of her words. Olney draws our attention to interpretative nature of memory that unintentionally "creates the significance of events in discovering the pattern into which these events fall."[317] In his essay on the slave narratives, Olney presents the subject of memory as one of the weak aspects of the slave narratives disproving their objectivity, because they were written based on the recollection of the past events. In a sense, Williams undermines purely observational character of Nehemiah's guideline by questioning a similar argument as might be traced in the pro-slavery literature such as *Swallow Barn*. The narrator of *Swallow Barn* Mark Littleton is also a white northerner like Nehemiah. He comes up against 'prejudices' about slavery with what he sees as an accurate and immediate record of events. From his nineteenth-century point of view, his perceptions should be regarded as authentic and he, as a white northern narrator, should be seen as a credible eyewitness. From Nehemiah's angle of view, his words are indisputable when they are contrasted with the assertions made either by white businessmen deriving stories from their memories or when they are compared with recollections of fugitive slaves. Littleton also says: "It is wonderful to think how much more distinct are the impressions of a man who travels pen in hand, than those of a mere business voyager."[318] In other words, if the pro-slavery texts privilege their assertions claiming that, unlike texts based on memory, they represent an immediate and, most importantly, accurate

[315] Williams 45.
[316] Williams 18.
[317] Olney149.
[318] Kennedy 5.

record of events, Williams disapproves Nehemiah's guideline on the same principle. The authenticity of the resulting tale is doubly doubted, because Nehemiah relies on the memory of a slave only to reinterpret the recollection of her experience through his prejudiced eyes veiled by racial bias.

Therefore, the issue of memory is not the only aspect of Nehemiah's narrative unreliability. His deep-rooted cultural prejudices about the inferiority of slaves and superiority of his culture cause his misreading of Dessa's nature. Being aware of the cultural, racial and gender hegemony, Nehemiah attempts to interpret Dessa's actions and words and, based on her story, draws general conclusions that will instruct the farmers on how to treat the slaves in order to disciple their behavior. The attempt to control manners of slaves through the guideline simplifying the maintenance of the established social stratification reflects, according to Rushdy, Nehemiah's assumption of "mastery over others."[319] As Rushdy puts it, Nehemiah's "reading [of Dessa] is an act of control."[320] However, his approach entirely omits the existence of personal identities of slaves. His interpretation of Dessa's nature eliminates any insight or true understanding of her. Consequently, he becomes convinced that "the female of this species is as deadly as the male."[321] As Angelyn Mitchell states quite aptly, "Nehemiah is incapable of attending to what Dessa says because he has already defined her as the Other [...]. His misinterpretation of Dessa symbolizes the misinterpretations of Black female subjectivity."[322]

The misinterpretation is also symbolized by Dessa's scars pointing to stereotypical perception of female slaves. Nehemiah comes to the assumption that Dessa bears "history writ about [the] privates."[323] He thinks to himself that "though the darky had no scars or marks of punishment except on her rump and her inside of her flanks – places only the most careful buyer was likely to inspect – these bespoke the history of misconduct."[324] Similarly, Ruth regards the scars as a sign of adultery. She says, "I bet she was making up to the master. That's why the mistress was so cruel. I bet that's what it was."[325] While Ruth gradually realizes that the scars are telling a false story, that a heavy

[319] Williams 139.
[320] Williams 139.
[321] Williams 43.
[322] Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) 76.
[323] Williams 21.
[324] Williams 21.
[325] Williams 136.

reliance on stereotypes will not shed light on the events from Dessa's past, Nehemiah's sense of cultural superiority prevents him from disclosing the truth in spite of the fact that he listened to Dessa's recounting. Regarding Dessa as the darky, the inhuman other, he thinks, "[a]nd were darkies the subject of romance, he thought sardonically smiling at his own whimsy. He didn't for a minute believe that was all there was to the young buck's attack on his master-a busted banjo!"[326] Nehemiah carries the idea of misconduct resulting in a murder of a white slave owner further when he declares, "[i]t's obvious the back shared the mistress's suspicion."[327]

4.2 Silence

The issues of misinterpretation of the truth, inaccuracy and misreading are also connected to the issue of silence. Even though the slave narratives "represent the voices of the normally voiceless,"[328] as C. Vann Woodward points out, they consciously omit some disturbing issues that could be outrageous for white readers. In other words, they remain silent about some aspects of slavery. Williams presents silence as a complex issue. Not only does she exploit situations when some things are missing, inexpressible or unspeakable, she also puts silence forward as a salient part of Ruth's and Dessa's lives, as a feature that connects them. After her encounter with Dessa, Ruth, similarly, realizes that there are some conditions in her life that she, intentionally or unintentionally, suppresses. For example, she comes to realize that she is not a middle-class woman anymore because of her husband's imprudent deeds, "[t]hat were the dreary parts of the story and Rufel tried never to tell herself those."[329] Later, she is shocked to learn that her perception of her husband cannot be regarded as accurate in any sense and she starts to question herself how much the reality differs from her idealized ideas about the life, "[s]he didn't know Bertie either, had purposefully kept herself from knowing him [...]. What else had she refused to see?"[330] Thus, silence might be regarded as a common aspect of Dessa's and Ruth's lives as southern females. Both women are mutually disadvantaged by

[326] Williams 39.
[327] Williams 42.
[328] C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources," *The Slave's Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 53.
[329] Williams 109.
[330] Williams 153.

the patriarchal culture; both are pinned down by the silent southern deceptions. In fact, Ruth's meditation over the discrepancies between her expectation and the shadowed reality of her marriage echoes Harriet Jacobs's declaration that northerners give their daughters to southern slavers out of lack of knowledge:

> The poor girls have romantic notions of a sunny clime, and of the flowering vines that all the year round shade a happy home. To what disappointments are they destined! The young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regret to his marriage vows.[331]

While Jacobs as an enslaved woman almost daringly suggests that in spite of the racial boundaries, women are similarly exploited and tricked by southern men, in Williams's treatment of the subject, it is the white lady who realizes the analogy and its complex implications. Probably, an average nineteenth century white middle-class woman would not come to such a conclusion disillusioning herself of her advantaged position based on her cultural superiority. That is the reason why Williams establishes a nuclear environment detached from the rest of the society where its members are mutually dependant on themselves in terms of their survival.

Another treatment of the theme of silence approaching the subject as something unspoken appears when Nehemiah questions Dessa. In this case, her moments of silence are, again, caused by his mistaken assumptions and incapability of critical thinking in relation to the issues of race:

> [Dessa] couldn't always follow the white man's questions; often he seemed to put a lot of unnecessary words between his "why" and what he wanted to know. And just as she had puzzled out what that was, he would go on to the next question. "Who had the file?" he would ask, and how could she answer that? There had been no file.[332]

It should be mentioned that the passage echoes David Walker's description of the outrage committed in Kentucky and, mainly, the conclusion of the whites that there must have been a file involved in the

[331] Jacobs 36.
[332] Williams 56.

organized escape. Walker writes: "It appears that, by means of a file the negroes, unobserved, had succeeded in separating the iron which bound their hands, in such a way as to be able to throw them off at any moment."[333] Walker's analytical treatment of the incident will be examined later in connection to the issue of his deliberate silencing or erasure of positive female heroines.

While the previous scene shows Dessa maintaining her silence so that Nehemiah does not learn any significant details concerning the outrage leaving him in ignorance of the truth, Dessa also lapses into silence on occasions when the memories are too painful for her, "[e]ven when the others spoke around the campfire, during the days of their freedom, about their trials under slavery, Dessa was silent. Their telling awoke no echoes in her mind. That part of the past lay sealed in the scars between her thighs."[334] If Frances Smith Foster claims that "most of what we know today about the antebellum America does not include stories that the antebellum African-Americans told among themselves,"[335] Dessa attempts to break the silence, to fill in the gap in our historical knowledge at the end of the novel when she tells *her* story from her point of view to her son to pass it on to future generations privileging, in a sense, the spoken tradition. This time, she decides to reveal the dreadful but whole truth. Therefore, her story-telling, in its symbolic sense, may be regarded as an act of freedom.

Nevertheless, the complex issue of silence could be also analyzed from the point of view of the African-American literary agency and gender inequality. As William L. Andrews and Foster jointly emphasize, "traditionally African American women have been silenced."[336] Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson maintain that one of the principal reasons for marginalization of the African-American women was the fact that "the slave literature has focused on more formal, public forms of slavery, where more male slaves were involved."[337] However, Mary Helen Washington claims that

[333] David Walker "Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829," (1829) < http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html> 5 Feb. 2015.
[334] Williams 60.
[335] Foster, '*Til Death or Distance Do Us Part* xii.
[336] William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, Trudier Harris, eds. *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 109.
[337] Claire Robertson and Marsha Robinson, "Re-Modeling Slavery as if Women Mattered," *Women and Slavery*, eds. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and, Joseph C Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008) 256.

"not only had scholars ignored women but the narratives of male ex-slaves also diminished or omitted reference to women's roles." [338] As has been argued already in the second chapter of this thesis, Frederick Douglass, for instance, outlines his final flight as if his escape was solitary, when he could not have succeeded without the help of a free black woman.

4.3 Erasure of the Black Female Heroine

In fact, Frederick Douglass was not the only influential African-American male writer who erased female heroines from his *Narrative* and from his two succeeding autobiographies. David Walker also expelled the agency of the African-American women from his well-known pamphlet titled *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* published in the first black-run newspaper *Freedom's Journal* [339] that had been widely distributed in North Carolina's ports since 1827. There Walker writes on the subject of the Kentucky 1829 uprising of a coffle that, together with the essay titled "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves"[340] written by Angela Davis, inspired Williams in writing the novel as she declares in the "Author's Note." However, the account Walker gives to her readers is not, according to the latest studies, objective. Since Williams's neo-slave narrative is historically inspired, Mary Kemp Davis scrutinized the historical records related to the novel, Walker's retelling of the rebellion in particular, to discover that "the process of selection,"[341] as she calls the interventions of editors or writers "which submerges, when it does not erase completely, the female slave rebel's history,"[342] was also heavily employed by Walker. According to her significant disclosure, Walker, a controversial activist proclaiming murder of the white men enslaving his brothers, was one of the male African-American writers who misrepresented women in his commonly known texts. We may question Walker's motives for "ignor[ing] the acts of the female rebel"[343] who remains nameless and whose active participation in the revolt is

[338] Robertson and Robinson 255.
[339] Armistead Pride and Clint C. Wilson II., *A History of The Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997) 11.
[340] Williams 5.
[341] Mary Kemp Davis, "Everybody Knows Her Name: The Recovery of the Past in Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose*," *Callaloo* 40 (1989): 546, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2931302> 1 Jan 2015.
[342] Davis 546.
[343] Davis 546.

overshadowed by another black woman who betrayed the uprising. In Davis's reading, it is the figure of the black female traitor who is given prominence in Walker's pamphlet accentuating "the force of degraded ignorance and deceit among [...] black people."[344] Even though Walker is highly critical to the actions of the male slaves saying "the black men acted like blockheads,"[345] he pays greater attention to a complete repudiation of the female slave saying "the actions of this black woman are really insupportable. For my own part, I cannot think it was any thing but servile deceit, combined with the most gross ignorance: for we must remember that humanity, kindness and the fear of the Lord, does not consist in protecting devils."[346]

Davis states quite aptly, Walker made Dinah, the historical figure who co-lead the rebellion with men and who inspired *Dessa Rose*, "the Invisible Woman."[347] In other words, the historical prototype of a female rebel is silenced and remains nameless while the image of a black female betrayer involved in the slave mutiny whose actions are described by Walker as "ignorant and deceitful"[348] are preserved in his text. Walker's striking omission is even more incomprehensible, if we realize he lists the names of the men who were in charge of the supervision of the coffle. In a manner, Walker might be found guilty of historical manipulation, subjectivization of history and diminution of female agency.

Further, Mary Kemp Davis's revelation of historical discrepancies in records written down by the African-American males justifies Mary Helen Washington's assertion that men, without distinguishing their race, have jointly limited the roles ascribed to women by allotting them "the little spaces."[349] Ironically enough, Dessa's deeds and their consequent vindication seem to answer Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* for rebellion and violence. As the narrator says, Nehemiah was "startled by that casual revelation of violence against a master."[350] Dessa's

[344] Davis 546.
[345] Walker 29.
[346] Walker 28.
[347] Davis 546.
[348] Davis 546.
[349] Washington xxvii.
[350] Williams 20.

straightforward confession, "I kill white mens cause the same reason Masa kill Kaine. Cause I can,"[351] echoes Walker's words: "kill or be killed."[352] Being a rebel, Dessa surpasses the limits established by the patriarchal social structures that became a matter of concern to black feminist writers like Hazel V. Carby or Mary Helen Washington, who voice their general discontent with nonobjective records of history that are traditionally passed on from generation to generation.

Indeed, the discrepancies in the historical accounts written down by David Walker are not the isolated issues of misrepresentation of women in the texts by the African-American male writers. As has been mentioned, Williams also intentionally rewrites some issues and scenes from the popular narratives by Frederick Douglass. The fundamental narrative conventions of the slave narrative as a genre are employed, for example, when Dessa recalls Kaine's family lineage unable to state the specific date of his birth and the name of his father. In fact, the scene describing the broken family ties by these words, "Kaine mamma be sold when he little bit and he never know her face. And some time he think maybe his first masa or the driver or maybe just some white man passing through be his daddy,"[353] might be echoing Douglass's speculation about his father, "[m]y father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father."[354]

However, *Narrative* is not the only autobiography written by Douglass contextualized in *Dessa Rose*. For example, Burns informs us about other intertextualities between Douglass and Williams speaking on the subject of inferiority. In Burn's opinion, "one of the principle purposes in *My Bondage and My Freedom* [...] is to proclaim the intellectual capacity of blacks in the face of a racist tradition that refused to acknowledge black intelligence."[355] Unlike Douglass in the nineteenth century, Williams does not argue against the inferiority of the African-Americans in the same manner as her predecessor. Instead, the pseudo-scientific assertions of mental inadequacy become her target of ridicule. Racially conscious slaves make fun of the utterances about their nature, "'Lawd, won't these

[351] Williams 20.
[352] Walker 30.
[353] Williams 38.
[354] Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative* 15.
[355] Burns 123.

children learn?' Sara asked of the air. 'Can't learn a nigga nothing,' Petey said quickly and they laughed."[356]

While Douglass connected literacy with his freedom, Dessa's illiteracy does not prevent her from achieving her liberty. For her, the acquisition of freedom is linked with the decommodification of her motherhood, sexual liberation and, most importantly, with the assertion of her will that is, in Douglass's *Narrative*, closely associated with his personal characteristics thus almost seen as an aspect of masculinity. That is to say, Dessa's unintended act of rebellion, her revenge of Kaine, is a crucial moment in the long chain of events that result in her successful escape from slavery. The emphasized spontaneity of Dessa's actions might be even pointing to the existing contrast of her nature with the personality of Harriet Jacobs's Linda, who is, similarly to Douglass, characterized by her cultivated, and "determined will."[357]

It might be claimed that Williams rewrites or perhaps corrects Douglass's representation of female slaves as powerless victims by rehabilitating of their image. In fact, Dessa is not the only African-American woman who decides to take action in the slave uprising. Also, a minor character Matilda becomes crucially important for the success of the rebellion, because "Matilda wrote a pass for them stating that all of them were in charge of Toby, a big mulatto."[358] Further, in Rushdy's opinion, the coffle uprising is initiated by another spontaneous action of a woman, namely by Linda's murdering of a white man who attempts to rape her. As he maintains, "[t]he uprising, then, is a result of the actions of two women, Dessa and Linda."[359] Burns points out that the scene of Linda's rape "provide[s] a direct echo of Esther's 'shrieks and piteous cries'"[360] to Douglass's narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom*. However, Williams's revision of the scene transforms Esther, the victim of the act of violence, into a female character who is able to resist the sexual assault. As Burns states, "Linda's cries [...] take on a radically different meaning than Esther's. If Esther's cries indicate her reduction to an animal body, helplessly reacting to the physical stimuli of pain, Linda's cries signify

[356] Williams 33.
[357] Jacobs 80.
[358] Williams 62.
[359] Rushdy 162.
[360] Burns 134.

her capability of performing an existentially free action."[361] The asserted agency of Williams's heroines points to another fact. While the slave narratives portrayed representative figures that could illustrate the harsh conditions of living as slaves dehumanized by the institution to white readers, the neo-slave narrative *Dessa Rose* depicts rather exceptional character whose extraordinary life story cannot be transformed into any generalized guideline instructing farmers on how to effectively treat slaves. Even if we admit that Linda Brent might be characterized as a distinct individual blurring the line between general and exceptional, Dessa's character cannot be regarded as ordinary or representative. That is to say, her uniqueness is striking and unquestionable.

If male writers like Douglass depicted female slaves as defenseless victims of the institution characterized by its violence, as was discussed in the second chapter, the narratives written by female writers like Harriet Jacobs give us slightly different perceptions on female agency. According to Hazel V. Carby, "[women] are seen to take decisions over their own lives. They document their suffering and brutal treatment but in a context that is also the story of resistance to that brutality."[362] It might be claimed that the narratives written by women writers commenced a gradual process of redefining or rehabilitating black womanhood in literature in which Williams significantly participates with her rebellious heroine Dessa.

To conclude this chapter, in compliance with Carby who demands "a total revision of how we read, think about and interpret Afro-American cultural and literal history,"[363] the main subject of Williams's novel *Dessa Rose* is demythologization of the firmly established myth about objectivity of historical sources and literacy in general. Williams successfully challenges the perception of literacy as a means of preserving the historical truth conveyed in the slave narratives. As Sekora maintains, in the majority of the slave narratives, "the voice of the narratives is a white voice."[364] In the specific case of the genre, Williams points to the fact that literacy was used by the dominant culture to control the subordinated or enslaved human beings. If Andrews summarizes that the African-American writers

[361] Burns 134.
[362] Carby 36.
[363] Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives," *Signs* 14.4 (1989): 937, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/ /stable/3174695> 11 Jan 2015.
[364] Sekora 510.

of slave testimonies "demonstrate through a variety of rhetorical means that they regard the writing of autobiography as in some ways uniquely self-liberating,"[365] Williams does not see the act of writing slave narrative as a process of liberation, but her novel describes the tradition of testimonies as connected to subordination in terms of editorial interferences and, most importantly, as a means of perpetuating the stereotypes. If Olney claims that "memory creates the significance of events in discovering the pattern into which these events fall,"[366] the abolitionist editors created historical memory by outlining the conventional pattern into which the stories of the ex-slaves were shaped. This view might be even supported by Sekora, who argues that "not black recollection, but white interrogation brings order to the narration."[367] In fact, the figure of Nehemiah stands for subjectivization of the historical events, and misinterpretation of human deeds and natures in order to maintain the white power structures. In other words, Nehemiah's guideline written from the asserted position of cultural superiority preserves the established patriarchal social structures. However, Williams does not devalue the slave narratives entirely. She is rather cognizant of stereotypes conveyed in them. If the African-American female figures in literature were marginalized, "silenced,"[368] as Andrews and Foster jointly claim, or their agency was even "erased,"[369] as Burns asserts, Williams challenges these stereotypes. She redefines her black heroines, Dessa, Matilda and Linda, by giving them capacity to defend themselves. When Williams rejects the myth of a powerless heroine, the act of rebellion becomes an inevitable part of Dessa's nature resulting in a discovery of her previously denied humanity and consequent gradual redefinition of her self-understanding.

[365] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* xi.
[366] Olney 47.
[367] Sekora 510.
[368] Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* 109.
[369] Burns 122.

5. Conclusion

Literary surveys of the development of African-American literature should not be approached as complete, closed, or definite, because their subjects of study are limited. Many valuable sources are lost from our cultural memory or "unrecognized,"[370] as Andrew L. Williams notes. On the other hand, recently discovered texts such as *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (1853-1861) written by Hannah Bond and *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) written by Harriet E. Wilson, both rediscovered by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., or *The Curse of Caste, or the Slave Bride* (1865) written by Julia C. Collins suggest that African-American literary genealogies have to be constantly reconsidered in a view of the new discoveries that, as literary scholars hope, will follow. Therefore, prior to presenting the inferences of this study, it should be admitted that the conclusions were reached based on the cited primary sources that survived in print and the listed secondary sources available to study. In spite of the fact that a narrow view was followed focusing on the tradition of the texts in English leaving out the documented historical texts published in the United States in other languages such as Arabic,[371] French[372] or Spanish[373] of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century aside, the analysis contextualizing historical data and literary criticism gives some insight into the circumstances under which the early texts written by the African descendents (or dictated by them) published were prioritizing the slave narratives. As a genre, the slave narrative makes the male and female voices to be heard.

In spite of the fact that narratives written by men outnumber female testimonies, because, as Frances Smith Foster maintains, "only twelve percent of the known published narratives were by women,"[374] texts written by women writers should not be classified as a subclass. Therefore, a general perception expressed by Joanne M. Braxton that "black women autobiographers constitute a tradition within a tradition, operating within the dominant, familiar, and essentially masculinist modes of

[370] Andrews, "Introduction," *Six Women's Slave Narratives* xi.
[371] Ayuba Suleyman Diallo also known as Job ben Solomon, his dictated autobiography was published in 1731
[372] for example Victor Sejour
[373] for example Juan Bautista Witten
[374] Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* xxii.

autobiography,"[375] should be challenged based on the wider context of the development of African-American literature attempting to delineate the women's literary tradition in its entirety. As Braxton demands, black women should be "at the centre of critical discourse."[376] Indeed, without female slave narratives, the picture of slavery is only partial. From this point of view, a relevant claim is made by Henry Louis Gates Jr., who asserts that "the birth of the Afro-American literary tradition occurred in 1773, when Phillis Wheatley published a book of poetry."[377] Therefore, if we want to retrace the origins of the African-American literary tradition and if we want to describe it in terms of branches detaching from the stem that bears them, the stem would be a woman. It should be mentioned that Wheatley's literary achievements were not always widely recognized and her authorship was purposefully questioned and belittled. To be specific, Thomas Jefferson wrote, as Davis and Gates jointly point out, "the compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism."[378] According to Winthrop D. Jordan, Jefferson's dismissal of Wheatley was based on and reflected "the logic of environmentalism,"[379] a term related to doctrines of racial inequality in Jefferson's era. Jefferson, as Jordan describes his strategy, "disparage[d] the widely known Negroes"[380] in order to erase the significance of black writers. Especially achievements and historical significance of a black enslaved woman had to be shadowed. However, the attempt to erase Wheatley from the literary history failed, because writers of the African descent, for example Equiano or Jupiter Hammon,[381] read her poetry.

As Braxton advocates, the critical discourse to black female autobiographers should be re-organized and new insights on the subject should be incorporated. Scholars should acknowledge that the 'masculinist modes of autobiography' were imposed on the African-American literary tradition, that they are of secondary nature, because the whole tradition, the African-American literary tradition, was set by a female writer, by Phillis Wheatley. The wording of Gates is self-explanatory:

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[375] Joanne M. Braxton, "Autobiography and African American Women's Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, eds. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 128.
[376] Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 10.
[377] Gates, "Foreword," *Six Women's Slave Narratives* vii.
[378] Davis and Gates xxviii.
[379] Jordan 437.
[380] Jordan 437.
[381] Gates, "Foreword," *Six Women's Slave Narratives* x.

> That the progenitor of the black American literary tradition was a woman means, in the most strictly literal sense, that all subsequent black writers have evolved in a matrilinear line of descent, and that each, consciously or unconsciously, has extended and revised a canon whose foundation was the poetry of a black woman. Early black writers seem to have been keenly aware of Wheatley's founding role.[382]

Inevitably, the predominance of black masculine voices that outnumber female voices is a relevant argument for critics who characterize black women writers of autobiographies as a minor group. However, the latest conclusions drawn by literary genealogies contradict the opinions based on numbers without their context. First, it should be considered that a significantly lower number of female slaves escaped to freedom in comparison to male fugitive slaves. Second, the continual strife of Harriet Ann Jacobs for a publisher stretching to nine years is a proof that women writers, despite their qualities, did not have the same access to the printing business as their male counterparts who, like Jacobs's brother or Frederick Douglass, were sponsored by the abolitionists. In other words, the number of female voices was reduced by white publishers. When the situation on the printing market changed, plausibly with the success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and black women gained some access to the printing business, the female texts flourished and gradually gained on dominance at the end of the nineteenth century. According to investigations completed by Andrews, the period from 1890 to 1910 should be called: "The Black Woman's Era."[383]

Further, the tradition of written testimonies speaking on the subject of personal experience gained in slavery does not start with the female abolitionists Sojourner Truth or Harriet Jacobs, but the origin can be traced back to the eighteenth century when the slave narrative as a genre developed. It is Philip Gould who outlines its development saying that "between 1770s and 1830s, we see a genre arising not only from religious and popular contexts but also along with important kinds of political writing that directly took up the issue of race and slavery in terms of natural rights and humanitarian

[382] Gates, "Foreword," *Six Women's Slave Narratives* x.
[383] Andrews, *Six Women's Slave Narratives* xvi.

principles."[384] Among the political texts frequently discussed by critics is *The Petition by Belinda, an African*[385] printed in Boston in 1782, which is, as scholars generally agree, the earliest testimony of a female slave. For Douglass-Chin, Belinda's petition is an evidence that even the restricted access to printing business, which was in the power of the white men, could not stop some courageous women from voicing their claims: "Belinda [...] attests to the power of the doubly marginalized black female voice to find expression through whatever means are available."[386] The fact that some black women were able to voice their opinions and represent their unique identities publicly should be regarded as a considerable achievement in the wider historical perspective.

However, the black feminist critic Deborah E. McDowell who elaborates on William Morgan's thoughts is persuaded that "[w]omen writers have fallen victim to arbitrary selection. Their writings have been 'patronized, slighted, and misunderstood by a cultural establishment operating according to male norms out of male perceptions.'"[387] Not only does she reject the secondary status of the black female autobiographers, she acknowledges masculine normativity as the immediate cause of subordination. In fact, notions of masculine superiority, stereotypical marginalization of women and, in some cases, their purposeful erasure, can be traced in the earliest texts written by the black males who established the gender politics in African-American literature.

As the thesis argues, David Walker and Frederick Douglass are among the black male writers who purposely diminished black female agency in their works or completely erased the presence of strong female heroines prioritizing the image of a masculine hero. Certainly, David Walker as a controversial social activist did not write under supervision of an abolitionist editor who could outline images that should appear in his writing for a greater veracity of his text arguing for the abolition of slavery. Even if we admit that Walker uses masculine images based on power and dominance set by the white patriarchal culture, it does not justify or explain his conscious deviation

[384] Philip Gould, "The Rise of the Slave Narrative" 13.
[385] Belinda, "The Petition by Belinda, an African," *The American Museum or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces, Prose and Poetical January* (Philadelphia: Carey, Stewart, and Co., 1787) 463.
[386] Richard J. Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001) 19.
[387] Deborah E. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," *Black American Literature Forum*, 14.4 (1980):153, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2904407>, 7 Mar. 2015.

from facts. It is striking why he decided to publish a manipulative record of history speaking on the subject of the suppressed uprising of a coffle taking place in Kentucky in 1829, which became a part of his famous and influential pamphlet titled *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Not only does his analytical treatment of the revolt deliberately erase the positive black heroine Dinah, whose presence was, in a manner, resuscitated by the efforts of a critic Mary Kemp Davis, but his arrangement of the rebellion and the conclusions he arrives at give prominence to a black female betrayer. As William L. Andrews summarizes additional crucial points of Walker's pamphlet, "Walker promised a renewed sense of manhood, self-respect, and communal and spiritual identity."[388] Indeed, women are not embraced in Walker's concepts. He asserts his redefinition: "My dearly beloved Brethren and Fellow Citizens."[389] Women are overlooked in passages where Walker speaks of the communal identity and excluded when Walker promotes violence as a justifiable means for the acquisition of freedom describing the fight for liberty as, in Andrews's words, "masculine duty to his family."[390]

Douglass's motivation for the marginalization of black females in his texts seems to be clearer. Apart from the fact that he silences other slaves, thereby giving prominence to his heroic image of a masculine slave, Douglass prioritizes the scenes that illustrate the victimization of black females in compliance with the racial, gender, and cultural stereotypes. When images of white and black women are juxtaposed, it might be concluded that Douglass fortified the association of the black women with the status of *Otherness* initially imposed on them by the dominant white patriarchal culture. If Douglass's successful escape to freedom is presented as the supreme moment when he finally achieves his masculinity, the unspoken conditions of his escape, the fact he relied on a heroic act of a woman and on her financial aid, would inevitably destroy his thoroughly build up image of a strong self-made masculine character. In spite of the fact that Douglass publicly supported women's movements and emancipation, he never admitted the truth and purposefully diminished, or perhaps even erased, the heroic deeds of his wife Anna Murray from his records. Douglass's active participation in advocacy

[388] Andrews, Davis, and Evans, eds. *North Carolina Slave Narratives* 2.
[389] Walker 30.
[390] Andrews, Davis, and Evans, eds. *North Carolina Slave Narratives* 3.

for women's rights is expressed in his speech "I Am a Radical Woman Suffrage Man" or it might be manifested, for example, by the fact that his newspapers *The North Star*, as Kathryn T. Gines puts forward, "[advertised] the Seneca Falls Convention, and he interceded at the convention on the resolution on women's suffrage so that it would pass."[391]

Another historical female figure who was almost erased from historical memory is Harriet Ann Jacobs. As Yellin sheds light on the subject of her re-discovery, "the women's movement has created interest in the book,"[392] and the historical significance of *Incidents* was revealed. Jacobs redefines, at least partially, black womanhood stigmatized by slavery and stereotyped by male slave narratives. As Carby specifies abolitionist imagery, "Garrison's sexual metaphors for black women extended from passionate whore to helpless, cringing victim."[393] Jacobs establishes a distinct feminine voice. Thus a distinct heroine emerges representing, as some scholars specify, an archetypal slave heroine. While Douglass presents freedom, literacy and masculinity as interrelated issues, Jacobs's quest for freedom is associated with sexual liberation, requirements of motherhood, and a persistent but unresolved desire for home. Literacy, in her case, is not strictly connected with the quest, because Mr. Flint takes advantage of Linda's reading and writing skills. Thus, in connection to Mr. Flint's actions, literacy could be seen as a form of control of a subordinate female slave. However, it should be emphasized, as the thesis argues, that literacy, a conventional theme of the slave narratives, was of a high importance to slaves in general. For Jacobs, it is a way of preserving her history and her voice. Without her narrative, she would be, together with her community, lost from historical memory. However, her story does not convey a closed message. The ambiguous ending of her narrative gives, as Andrews insists, "that open-ended quality that forces *Incidents*, like the best nineteenth-century problem fiction, back into the hands of its reader for resolution."[394]

If Henry Louis Gates Jr. insists that "writers read other writers and ground their representations of experience in models of language provided largely by other writers to whom they

[391] Kathryn T. Gines, "Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy," *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, eds. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, Kathryn T. Gines, and Donna Dale L Marcano (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 37.
[392] Yellin xxvii.
[393] Carby 35.
[394] Andrews 262.

feel akin,"[395] it might be claimed that the mode of literary revision he describes is traceable in works of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Ann Jacobs and Sherley Anne Williams. All of them are aware of their literary predecessors and the existing stereotypes. However, their attempts to challenge the stereotypes are ruled by the conventions of the era and by the political agendas they seek to proclaim in their narratives. If Jacobs's integration into the canon might be used in support of those scholars who argue for a redefinition of the slave narrative that should embrace 'the archetype of the outraged mother,' Williams argues for a change of our ways of reading, for a close reading of the texts and, most importantly, for contextualization of these works with their historical and socio-cultural contexts. Indeed, Williams responds to discussion among critics of black feminism, particularizing their claims for plurality of voices and representations. While exceptional figures like Douglass, Jacobs and Williams's character Dessa Rose secured their place in the canon, ordinary characters remain underrepresented in African-American literature.

[395] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "In Her Own Write," *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) xviii.

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Abstract in English

The aim of this MA thesis is to bring new perspectives on the genre of the African-American slave narrative. Therefore, its wider historical, socio-political and gender contexts are considered and the circumstances surrounding its development and current criticism are briefly outlined. The point of departure is a discussion of definitions that vary among the scholars who select different criteria for the subject of definition. The existing diversity of the texts and voices is discussed in connection to Moses Grandy's *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America*. Grandy's narrative, an account of the maritime slave life, is analyzed. Its traditional, uniform narrative structures are juxtaposed with passages where some aspects of his masculine identity, problematized by the institution of slavery, can be traced. Ultimately, the thesis attempts to show that while the conventionalized framework pre-defining the narrative outline and themes is delineated by James Olney, any generally recognized definition of the genre does not exist. As a result of that conclusion, the genre is defined in the scope of this thesis.

After the major characteristics of the genre are discussed and the definition of the African-American slave narrative is put forward, more analytical chapters focusing on two well-known narratives follow. The second chapter, then, presents a thorough analysis of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*. Because of the extensive critical reading of Douglass, the focus of the chapter is narrowed to the issues of editorial control, marginalization of women, and the interrelated issues of freedom, literacy and masculinity. In the conclusion of the chapter, Douglass's image of a strong self-made masculine character is problematized and the truth of Anne Murray's active agency is revealed.

The third chapter explores Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself.* Starting with Jean Fagan Yellin's acknowledgement of Jacobs's authorship, the chapter argues that Jacobs questions the concept of true womanhood and reveals it to be a socially constructed perception that inherently excludes black women. Instead, Jacobs presents Linda as a heroic outraged

mother whose quest for freedom is associated with sexual liberation, decommodification of her motherhood, and a persistent desire for home.

The fourth chapter analyses Sherley Anne Williams's novel *Dessa Rose*. The main objective of her neo-slave narrative, as it is outlined in its preface, is an argument that literacy was used by the dominant culture to control the subordinated or enslaved human beings. Since Williams calls for a revised interpretation of written historical records, including the slave narratives, she rewrites particular scenes and issues addressed in the most renowned narratives by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs that are, in her view, strictly based on racial stereotypes. Also, Williams rejects the myth of a powerless heroine and replaces her with rebellious Dessa.

The conclusion, then, focuses on delineating the black women's literary tradition. The ambition of the chapter is to increase understanding of the fact that black women and their voices were silenced by both the dominant culture and the patriarchal social structures. In support of this argument, David Walker's erasure of Dinah from historical memory is mentioned as well as the case of Anna Murray.

Abstract in Czech

Cílem této práce je snaha odkrýt nové perspektivy v pohledu na žánr nazývaný vyprávění afroamerických otroků. Proto je žánr prezentován v širších historických, sociopolitických a genderových souvislostech a okolnosti vztahující se k jeho vývoji a k jeho současné literární kritice jsou stručně nastíněny. Výchozím bodem je stručné pojednání o definicích, které kritici, v závislosti na zvolených kritériích, stanovují různým způsobem. Různorodost textů a jejich hlasů je diskutována v souvislosti s Mosesem Grandym a jeho *Vyprávěním o životě Mosese Grandyho donedávna zotročeného ve Spojených státech amerických*. Grandyho vyprávění, popis života otroka na moři, je podrobeno rozboru. Tradiční, uniformní narativní struktury jsou porovnávány s úryvky díla, kde je možné nalézt některé aspekty jeho maskulinní identity problematizované institucionalizovaným otroctvím. Tato práce se zejména snaží ukázat, že zatímco konvenční struktura příběhů předem definující jejich osnovu a témata je popsána Jamesem Olneym, žádná obecně uznávaná definice žánru neexistuje. V důsledku dosaženého závěru je žánr definován pro účely této práce.

Poté, co jsou hlavní příznačné rysy žánru projednány a definice žánru vyprávění afroamerických otroků je ustanovena, následují kapitoly věnující se podrobnějšímu rozboru dvou všeobecně známých vyprávění. Druhá kapitola pak tedy představuje důkladný rozbor díla Frederika Douglasse *Vyprávění o životě Fredericka Douglasse, amerického otroka psané vlastní rukou*. Vzhledem k rozsáhlému kritickému zpracování Douglassova díla se kapitola soustředí na otázky editoriálních zásahů, marginalizace žen a také na vzájemně provázané otázky svobody, gramotnosti a maskulinity.V závěru této kapitoly je problematizána představa o silné a seberozvíjející se maskulinní osobnosti, rovněž jsou odhaleny skutečnosti o aktivním zapojení Anny Murrayové.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá Harrietou Annou Jacobsovou a jejími *Událostmi v životě mladé otrokyně psanými vlastní rukou*. Nejprve je zmíněno, že Jean Fagan Yellin prokázala autorství Jacobsové, aby následně kapitola přešla k diskuzi koncepce ideálu věrného ženství jakožto společenské konstrukce, která vyčleňovala ženy v závislosti na jejich rase. Místo této stereotypní představy Jacobsová prezentuje Lindu jako hrdinnou pobouřenou matku, která uspěje ve svém boji za

svobodu, jenž je asociovaná se sexuální svobodou, s dekomodifikací mateřství a s její neutuchající touhou po vlastním domově.

Čtvrtá kapitola pak analyzuje román Sherley Anny Williamsové *Dessa Rose*. Hlavním cílem jejího novodobého vyprávění otroků je upozornit na fakt, že gramotnost byla také zneužívána dominantní kulturou k ovládání podřízených nebo zotročených. Protože Williamsová vyzývá k přehodnocení písemných památek včetně žánru vyprávění otroků, přepracovává problematiku a konkrétní scény, které se objevují v nejznámějších vyprávěních Frederika Douglasse a Harriety Jacobsové a které jsou, podle jejího názoru, přímo založeny na rasových stereotypech. Williamsová rovněž zavrhuje mýtus bezbranné ženy.

Závěr se pak soustředí na vymezení literární tradice afro-amerických žen.Tato kapitola se snaží zvýšit povědomí a pochopení skutečnosti, že afro-američanky a jejich hlasy byly umlčeny jak dominantní kulturou, tak patriarchálními strukturami moci. Na podporu tohoto tvrzení je zmíněno jak to, že David Walker vymazal Dinah z historické paměti, tak i případ Anny Murrayové.