

## 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.