

ang070 S/Ü "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"

Assignment 1: Identity, Discourse, Media – Print Media: Slave Narrative

This assignment is a mandatory part of your portfolio and needs to be uploaded on time on Stud.IP. It is ungraded but a sample solution will be published on the Institutswiki. Additionally, you can receive feedback on request from your respective instructors.

Please analyse the following passages by addressing the tasks below:

Mr. Covey was a poor man; he was just commencing in life; he was only able to buy one slave; and, shocking as is the fact, he bought her, as he said, for a *breeder*. This woman was named Caroline. Mr. Covey bought her from Mr. Thomas Lowe, about six miles from St. Michael's. She was a large, able-bodied woman, about twenty years old. She had already given birth to one child, which proved her to be just what he wanted. After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night! The result was, that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins. At this result Mr. Covey seemed to be highly pleased, both with the man and the wretched woman. Such was his joy, and that of his wife, that nothing they could do for Caroline during her confinement was too good, or too hard, to be done. The children were regarded as being quite an addition to his wealth. (Douglass 47)

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself*. Eds. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely. New York and London: Norton, 2017. Print.

1. Formal and media-specific analysis

1. Comment briefly on relevant formal aspects (narration, focalization, etc.):
 - Douglass as **extradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator with high perceptibility and reliability**: personally involved, provides additional perspective of the enslaved, which is not a "problematic" value scheme, and, in the context of the genre of the slave narrative, he is also reliable in the context of the "truth"-claim of slave narratives, which, however, requires the authentication by the abolitionist prefaces.
 - Douglass as **focalizer**: mostly internal focalization, but external focalization becomes obvious in comments such as "shocking as is the fact" (the more subtle comments such as "he said," his use of the exclamation mark, "the miserable woman," "Mr. Covey seemed to be highly pleased ... with the wretched woman" can also be read as indicators for external focalization); the focalized are Mr. Covey and his wife (from outside and from within); Caroline (from outside and from within); slavery as an institution (from the outside, i.e. the practices, and from within, i.e. as "evil," "accursed," e.g. the enforced "breeding" and its violence exerted on Caroline as opposed to the joy of Covey and his wife).

2. Identify various discourses in the given passages by considering terms / vocabulary; settings / institutions; subject positions / roles:

The dominant discourses are the **economy, gender/female sexuality, and violence/trauma** (as opposed to the joy/pride of the owner):

- **economy**: "poor," "buy," "slave," and "bought," "*breeder*," "large, abled-bodied woman, about twenty years old" – details the "economic value" of Caroline, "just what he wanted [as property]," "buying," "hired," "quite an addition to his wealth"; *settings / institutions*: small farm/household in the South/slave quarter owned by Covey; *subject positions / roles*: Covey as buyer/owner; Caroline as "*breeder*" / property, and her children as additional "property."

- **gender/female sexuality:** “a breeder,” “woman,” “Caroline,” “large, able-bodied,” “already given birth to one child,” “fasten up with her,” “the miserable woman gave birth to twins,” “wretched woman,” “his wife,” “confinement,” “children;” *settings / institutions:* instead of the normative white *family*, there is an enforced union, which involves the breaking up of an African American family (as opposed to the marriage of Covey and his wife); *subject positions / roles:* property/chattel forced to reproduce; Caroline the slave woman as forced prostitute to a married black man; slave mother without rights as a mother and to her children.
- **violence/trauma** (as opposed to the pleasure of the owner): “shocking,” “every night!,” “miserable,” “wretched” as opposed to Covey’s “joy”; *settings / institutions:* slavery (on Covey’s small farm in the South), family – black family is violently damaged whereas the white family remains intact; *subject positions / roles:* enslaved woman / slave owner, mother, married man, husband and wife, children vs. new property.

2. Functional analysis: Toward a problem-oriented sample analysis

Based on the data generated through your formal and media-specific analysis, provide a **coherently written** analysis with a clear research problem that addresses the following points:

1. the discursive constructedness and representations of identity:

- Research problems can be, e.g., **Douglass’s representation of women in slavery**, more specifically how Douglass deconstructs Caroline’s identity as “breeder” and property and instead constructs her identity as that of a woman and mother who is sexually exploited and, thus, violated; or the contrast that Douglass provides regarding the **positions and identity constructions of the enslaved and the slaveholders** in a system that violates slave women; or **the representation of slavery as a labor system** – authorized by the law – which produces women’s identities as those of “breeders” and “chattel” from the perspective of the slave owners as opposed to the identity of exploited and violated (even traumatized) women and mothers; or **representation of slavery as dehumanizing humans** – here Caroline – as opposed to the social and cultural practice of regarding slaves as nonhumans.

Please remember that these are only brief suggestions. In your assignments, write longer and coherent but focused arguments that include quotes and evidence from the texts.

2. the relevant **contexts** (historical, cultural, literary, generic, etc.): for the necessary historical contexts regarding slavery and the economy, the law, and the treatment of women, see **Foner’s chapter “The Peculiar Institution”**; see also **Douglass’s “Reception Speech,”** which provides additional contexts from the perspective of the enslaved regarding family and marriage, violence, and “slave-breeding”; literary contexts can be ideas taken from **Foner’s chapter “True Likenesses,”** but also **women’s slave narratives** if you do an extra search for sources; if you choose a research problem that emphasizes Douglass’s deconstruction of slavery as a “humane,” “paternal” system, showing the violence it exerts on female slaves, then genre conventions of **the slave narrative more generally** provide relevant contexts (e.g. the indictment of slavery as a regime of terror and violence).

3. Comparison and/or contrast: Second passage

Suggest one other passage from the text that contrasts and/or corresponds with the given passage in an aspect relevant to your research problem. Briefly discuss how both passages relate to your research problem by addressing differences in representation and/or contexts and their possible functions.

Please focus on your research problem when selecting your second passage and include contexts to join the scholarly debate and to substantiate your argument.