

## ang070 S/Ü "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"

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

#### 1. Formal and media-specific analysis

- *extradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator* Linda Brent (narrates the diegetic narrative level)
- *ulterior* (e.g. "he peopled my mind") and *simultaneous narration* ("the degradation, the wrongs, ... are more than I can describe")
- the *perceptibility* in this passage is predominantly marked by
  - the contrast of Linda's *definition of the character of her master and herself*, e.g. "He tried his utmost to corrupt"; "he peopled my ... mind with unclean images" as opposed to "the pure principles my grandmother had instilled [in me]"; "I turned from him with disgust and hatred"; "My soul revolted"; etc.
  - Linda's *commentary* about the lack of protection for her or slave women in general, be it legal or from white women, e.g. "there is no shadow of law to protect her [the slave girl] from insult, from violence, or even from death ..."; "The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe."
- Linda's *reliability* is not compromised by personal involvement, limited knowledge, or a problematic value scheme. Rather, her and other black women's experiences expose the problematic value scheme of the society of nineteenth-century US-America.
- Linda is the *focalizer*; *focalized* are her master (from within), herself (from outside and from within); slave women in general (from outside); her mistress (from outside and from within); and the institution of slavery (from outside and from within). There is *internal focalization* of Linda's experience (e.g. "I turned from him in disgust"; "where could I turn for protection?") as well as external focalization as she narrates this experience ("the degradation, the wrongs ... are more than I can describe").

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

- discourses of *gender* and/or *sexuality*, in themselves constructed by the discourses of white middle-class ideology of *womanhood* (as domestic, pure, pious, and obedient), *moral reform* and/or *abolitionism*, all of which are intricately interrelated (see secondary texts by Nancy Woloch and Valerie Smith):
  - terms / vocabulary: "corrupt," "pure principles," "grandmother," "unclean images," "vile monster," "disgust," "hatred," "my master," "under the same roof," "a man forty years my senior," "violating," "sacred commandments of nature," "subject to his will in all things," "soul revolted," "mean tyranny," "protection," "slave girl," "mistress," "insult," "violence," "death," "inflicted," "fiends in the shape of men," "helpless victim," "jealousy," "rage," "degradation," "wrongs," "vices," "slavery."
  - settings / institutions & subject positions / roles: family home, domestic setting ("under the same roof") and national institution of "slavery" – Linda invokes black matriarchal family structures (grandmother and "I" as granddaughter) in opposition to white patriarchal home and the institution of slavery (master, mistress, and Linda/slave women in general)
- the discourses of *economy* and the *law* overlap and together reinforce Linda's/slave women's status as "helpless victim(s)":
  - terms / vocabulary: "violating," "property" (*economy*), "subject to his will in all things," "compelled," "tyranny," "protection," "no ... law," "protect from insult ... violence ... death," "helpless victim," "wrongs."

- settings / institutions & subject positions / roles: the home of the US-American slave owner and the institution of slavery, in both of which the (slave) master and mistress tyrannize Linda/slave women.
- the discourse of *race* is deconstructed as being a discourse of biology (skin color) or intellect; it is here constructed by the law as well as the rivalry among women (“jealousy and rage” of the white mistress) within a patriarchal structure:
  - terms / vocabulary: skin color – “black,” “ebony,” “fair” (for the law see above)
  - settings / institutions & subject positions / roles: slave master’s home and the national institution of slavery, involving the subject positions of Linda as well as slave women in general (“the helpless victim”), as well as masters (“fiends who bear the shape of men”) and jealous mistresses.

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

### Research problem:

- Example 1: *slave owner’s home/white middle-class domesticity* is deconstructed and revealed as a site of patriarchal oppression, immorality (sexual abuse/rape), and female competition, where the sexual abuse of the white master and the jealousy of the mistress violate Linda/slave women instead of protecting her/them;
- Example 2: the paternalistic rhetoric of the advocates of *slavery as an institution*, in which a protective, benevolent and humane “father” rules, is *deconstructed* and exposed as a tyrannical, inhumane, and unethical yet legally protected institution;
- Example 3: *construction of Linda’s/slave women’s identity* as virtuous yet sexually violated and lacking white female solidarity and legal protection.

Contexts for the institution of slavery, white and black womanhood, see Woloch and Smith; contexts for the law, slavery, and Jacobs’s slave narrative, see Accomando.

## 3. Comparison and/or contrast: Second passage

### 4. Lecture

E.g. the mediated representation of the experience of slavery (medium: genre of the slave narrative); or the discursive construction of the institution of slavery with which both its advocates and opponents, the abolitionists engaged; etc.