

Characteristics of slave narratives (african american literature)

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Discussion of the slave narratives as gendered narratives William Wells Brown represents an important on the anti slavery circuit as well as being an early African American slave who turned into an author. Brown's early novel *Clotel* reflects the hardships faced by an African American female slave and her mulatto daughters. The novel develops itself from the very birth of the African American slave Currer's daughters. The novel depicts Currer as being in the service of Thomas Jefferson who fathers two daughters Clotel and Althesa with Currer. As long as Jefferson is alive himself, the triad maintains a comfortable life but all of this ends tragically with Jefferson's death. As soon as Jefferson dies, Currer and her daughters are sold off like animals. The family is broken up as Clotel is purchased by a white man, Horatio Green, and her mother and sister are sold off to a slave gang.

The novel clearly depicts that the triad is sold off time and again without respite depending on the circumstances. The more common reason for selling off Currer and her daughters has been depicted as the death of their social benefactors. The paths of each of these three women reflect the various ways in which women especially mulattoes and African American women depended on males for survival (Castronovo, 2004).

For example, Clotel who is purchased by Green has been shown as beautiful and charming. Clotel is used by Green as a common law wife and bears a daughter Mary with her. This run of joy is shown to be cut short until Green's ambition forces him to marry a white woman who sells Clotel and enslaves her daughter Mary. The novel clearly signifies that the white woman was far more emancipated and in position to control the lives of African Americans and mulattoes.

As the novel progresses, Clotel does her best to run away and to rescue Mary but the highly stacked odds only leave her in desperation. Caught and sold off time and again, Clotel is shown to commit suicide once she is cornered after running off. Clotel's life stands in contrast to her mother Curren's life who is bought by a preacher Peck. Peck's daughter plans on releasing Curren but she dies of yellow fever instead. It must be noticed that in relating Curren's end the author provides the reader with hope and then takes the hope away with Curren's death. Brown's narrative of Curren's life especially its end signifies the hope of emancipation in the life of millions of slaves and mulattoes. However, emancipation fails to come through for Curren as for millions of other enslaved people before the end of their lives (Cutter, 1999). Clotel's sister Althesa manages to marry a white northerner Henry Morton and spends a fulfilling life. She bears two daughters Jane and Ellen with Morton who are well cared and provided for. However, much like her own life, the lives of Jane and Ellen break into hell as soon as their parents die. The sisters are enslaved in a manner analogous to Clotel and Althesa. The novel further depicts that Ellen ends up committing suicide while her sister Jane dies due to grief. In narrating the lives of Althesa and her daughters, Brown is pointing to a continuous vicious cycle that is destroying the lives of African American slaves and mulattoes in enslavement. Brown's narration points to the fact that enslavement is a continuous process that will bring similar ends to people suffering from it.

Bibliography

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