

Behind the scenes of black labor: elizabeth keckley and the scandal of publicity ...

[Literature](#)



Behind the Scenes of Black Labor: Elizabeth Keckley and the Scandal of Publicity by Santamarina Santamarina depicts that Elizabeth Keckley's concept of success revolved around the personal relationships rather than material achievement. She values those contacts which she developed during her dressmaking career with the white community. The white dignitaries liked her "work ethics" and helped her establish herself after winning her freedom from a slavery of thirty years. The motive behind writing that article was not only to vindicate herself but her employer—the first lady Mary Lincoln who was under the line of media fire due to her alleged involvement in a scandal. But her work invited so much controversy among critics who could not come to terms with the idea that a past slave could have any right to speak on behalf of her employer. The writing according to Santamarina bears many similarities to other works related to slave narrative. Behind the scenes (2) Behind the scene "evades the generic designations of slave narrative and autobiography" and encompasses many external events (Berthold 105). Keckley makes it an account of not of personal 'self' but of a 'self' that has a public identity. Unlike previous slave narratives written after emancipation, the author makes the writing an expression of "free storytelling" (Berthold 106). The aesthetic element precedes the thematic output of the story. The writer attempted it to be something that may exist in the domain of realism in order to receive the tag of authenticity. Fidelity to truth remained the aim of the writer throughout the narrative. The writer has tried to render the text an aura of objectivity by supplementing the self narrative with some letters and newspaper articles. The 'self' depicted in the text precedes the text. The writer is also able to maintain her authorial authority even in the

description of other's perspectives. Her role as the dress designer of the famous ladies not only gives her social status but becomes the most proud part of her narrative. By keeping her body out of the narrative the writer has made her text an embodiment of impersonality. Keckley through her forbearance and resistance during whipping succeeds in defying the "tormentors" and making them resort to penance for their brutality. The textual details about these incidents involve the refusal to "undressing" which alludes to her profession as a dress-makers and justifies her resistance in a psychological way. The writer's sense of gender is strengthened through a comparison with others, in that case with Lady Lincoln. Keckley captures herself from dehumanized picture of a slave to a self-sufficient image of a collector who has some importance in a white society and by donating her relics she assumes the role of a social self who has made some niche in history. Incidents in my Life(1) Harriet Jacob's work is another instance of genre of slave narrative written by a freed slave who chose to publicize painful details of her 'years of slavery' and her struggle to win her freedom. Through this story a black women with the help of a white woman defied all restrictions of class and gender and tried to bring about 'social change' by demolishing "institution of chattel slavery" and all ideologies that support oppression and racial attitudes. Though her account was dubbed as false but her letters written to Amy post dispelled that impression and proved the authenticity of her memoirs. The story apart from narrating the struggle for freedom of a black individual in the face of sexual exploitation and suppression reflects the urge for expression from an individual who was deprived of voice during slavery. Incidents in my Life(2) Jacobs' narrative is

celebrated as a unique piece in genre of slave narrative that exposes the sexual exploitation of the slave girls and brings this to the public knowledge. To her, adolescence was the most painful period of her life when her body was exploited from a property to a vulnerable sex object. The pseudonym Linda gave her the power to narrate what she could not have spoken being a slave-girl. The writer in an attempt to show detachment from the characters has kept his narrative past aloof from her narrative present. She has depicted the incident of the garret not as pathological illness rather she has presented it as reaction to an unhealthy society. Jacobs fiction transcends Victorian narrative which was unable to depict the harsh facts about the slave girls' lives. Through a slave master relationship, Jacobs exposes that madness of the society which according to Freud has its roots in repressed sexuality of Victorian society where slave girls' bodies became such objects for their masters on which they could vent their hysterical madness. Her consciousness about racial hybridity and her beauty are the two things which according to Freud are the off springs of narcissism and lend attractive women self-empowerment. Dr. Flint's allurements to Jacobs regarding life of concubinage are actually a fight between two narcissists engaged in clash to defeat each other's attempts. Flint as an embodiment of obsessive neuroticism reflects his ailment in the form foul talk and threats of murder and erotic letters which Jacobs resists by posing to be illiterate. Her affairs with Sands turns into a love triad where two white men in order to subdue each other crave for the love of a slave girl. In wake of such neurosis the motherly feelings of Jacobs become an expression of a self that contains some sort of sanity even after different psychological oppressions. Raising in

the Sun (1) The play revolves round the theme of personal development in the face of opposing economic forces and family background. Youngers family is tired of their struggle for survival but their hopes are embedded in the notions of sustainability of the family name through growth and birth. As the parents have lost their child so they feel dejected at Ruth's decision of abortion. The family decides to move and build up roots in the new neighborhood. The writer's allusive references to Book of Ruth suggest the importance of family and home in a person's life. Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law and giving birth of child—who will be restorer of life strengthen the link of story with religious themes. Written in the background of biblical themes of birth and growth the play shows how a family achieves confirmation thorough their humanity, and family bonds. Rasin in the Sun(2) The play reflects Hansberry's belief that social idealism springs from the collective moral obligations of the individual and a dream of a better society is achieved only when the individuals like Beneatha pursue the ideal of making the sick " whole again". But when the individual fails to bring social ideal and personal ambition close together, he/she falls a victim to cynicism. Cooper declares play a struggle between idealism and fatalism, hope and despair. Youngers decision to move according to white liberals stand for a liberal ideals of the time which voted for the empowerment of black Americans. Works Cited Ardolino, Frank. " Hansberry's A Raisin In the Sun." Explicator 63. 3 (2005): 181-183. Web. 6 Apr. 2012. Berthold, Michael. " Not `Altogether' The `History Of Myself': Autobiographical Impersonality In Elizabeth Keckley's Behind The Scenes. Or, Thirty Years A Slave And Four Years In The White House." Atq 13. 2 (1999): 105. Web. 6 Apr. 2012. Cooper,

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