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A Rhetorical Study of the Construction of
Subjectivity in Slave Narratives: Frederick
Douglass and Linda Brent

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ABSTRACT

This project addresses the subjectivity analysis and comparison of two characters from slave narratives: Frederick Douglass and Linda Brent. In order to carry out the analysis, the subjectivity has been based on the art of rhetoric of Aristotle since slave characters tend to master this art. Therefore, the research was conducted 1) to analyze how the characters constructed their subjectivities within the novels and 2) to spot whether the characters mastered the art of rhetoric or not or if they used other rhetorical techniques. The results suggest that the subjectivity construction of both characters was marked by the acquisition of literacy. Once the characters learned how to read and write a desire to be free awakened them in order to escape from their bondage. Consequently, this desire from Douglass and Brent led to feelings of liberation among millions of slaves across the country. Moreover, both characters mastered the art of rhetoric and convinced their audiences, so that is the reason for their popularity among slave narratives. In addition, Brent has successfully reached a larger audience by using other techniques, such as decorum.

Keywords: Literature, Slave Narratives, Subjectivity Analysis, The art of rhetoric.

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1. Introduction

The idea of writing a slave narrative stems from the slave's desire to show the white population the cruelties during slavery. The aim of slave narratives was to show the reason why slavery should be abolished: slavery did not provide equal rights for blacks and instead they were treated as if blacks were properties. Regrettably, this cruel institution lasted for almost 300 years and this fact caused a need for slaves to account for their experiences during this period. Slave narratives played an important role during the 19th C and become the main form within the field of literature. Former slaves and ex-slaves did not only show what they had to face; they also proved that they were as capable as whites to write a novel. For these reasons and for the fact that the authors of slave narratives mastered the rhetoric, slave narratives became popular during the 19th C. Despite the popularity of slave narratives in the United States and in England, this kind of narrative is not well-known in other parts of the world. Therefore, the greatest motivation that led me to do this research was that I could give visibility to slave narratives as most of the people around me were unaware of the author's existence. Moreover, with this research, I wanted to analyze the different strategies that were used to achieve this extraordinary way of using the rhetoric. Thus, this project consists of the analysis and comparison of two main characters from slave narratives. The analysis of Frederick Douglass from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*; written by Frederick Douglass, and the analysis of Linda Brent from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written by Harriet Jacobs. The main aim of this project is to analyze how these characters articulated their subjectivities within the novels. Since one of the aims of slave narratives is to convince the audience about slave experiences I started from the hypothesis that almost every slave character mastered the art of rhetoric. Therefore, the

second main aim of this project is to analyze how the characters used the art of rhetoric of Aristotle.

1.1 Introduction to slave narratives

“From a literary standpoint, the autobiographical narratives of former slaves comprise one of the most extensive and influential traditions in African American literature and culture” (Andrews, n.d) The consequences of slavery are still present in the United States because this institution lasted for more than 200 years. Although slavery was finally abolished in 1865, many slaves that escaped from the South and even former slaves wrote books about their experiences. All these narratives were characterized by having the same themes and by showing the reader how severe and cruel this institution was. “Slave narratives showed that slaves suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually under slavery;” (Morgan, 1994, p.74). The characters that appear in these narratives explain their own experiences but also their desire for being free.

Slave narratives became a literary tradition that was based on the subjectivity of the slaves as they were all describing what they had to face during this period. “In the narratives, fugitives and ex-slaves appealed to the humanity they shared with their readers”. (Morgan, 1994, p.74) All the narratives had common traits as the purpose of ex-slaves and even former slaves were to portray the cruelty of slavery and also to convey that blacks could also read and write. Slaves were forbidden to acquire literacy because if they received an education slaves might reveal against their masters. If slaves received an education, the “peculiar institution” might shiver.

Therefore, the characters' subjectivity in slave narratives was mainly shaped by their common yearning for a desire to be free, their yearning to show the reader how slaves lived during slavery, and their yearning of achieving freedom through school

education. In other words, through slave narratives, slaves could form their identity as they were deprived of it, and they could be built themselves again. Most of the slave protagonists share a characteristic that differs them from the others: the acquisition of literacy. Knowing how to read and write marked ‘a before and after’ in the life of the slave characters and this reason why it is a central topic within slave narratives.

2. Methodology

In my research, I accomplished a subjectivity analysis of two different characters from slave narratives. I would like to focus on the fact that I based the analysis on the two main characters that appear in both books, not the authors. Despite that these books are autobiographies written by ex-slaves, I decided to separate the author from the character to spot the different narrative strategies that the characters used. The main aim of my research is to spot how subjectivity is articulated by the protagonists. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze the character Frederick Douglass, who is the protagonist in the novel *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* written by Frederick Douglass; and also the protagonist Linda Brent who is the protagonist in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written by Harriet Jacobs. I would like to point out that Linda Brent is the pseudonym that the author, Harriet Jacobs, used when writing the book.

Moreover, I decided to base my analysis on the art of rhetoric of Aristotle. One of the main aims of slave characters is to try to convince the audience about their experiences as slaves during this period. Also, another main aim was to persuade the white population about the fact that slavery should be abolished as it went against human rights. In addition, slave narratives aimed to encourage other slaves to rebel against their masters and to rebel against the institution of slavery. To perform this persuasion, the characters resorted to diverse rhetorical abilities.

The starting hypothesis was that all slave characters who appeared in slave narratives mastered the art of the rhetoric of Aristotle. Thus, I based the text analysis on the theory of the art of rhetoric to observe if the characters mastered this art or not. I also based the text analysis on Aristotle's theory to observe how the protagonists tried to persuade the reader. In addition, I also analyzed another rhetorical technique, the use of decorum, which I spotted that Brent was using in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. I decided to analyze Brent's use of decorum to prove the fact that characters did not only master the art of rhetoric but also resorted to other rhetorical techniques.

Before carrying out the analysis I made a brief introduction about slave narratives and their characteristics. Within this section, I develop the aims of slave narratives and the reason why slave narratives became one of the most influential genres in the 19th C. The activities that I carried out for the analysis are the following: Firstly, I analyzed the character subjectivity of Douglass and Brent; Secondly, I analyzed how Douglass and Brent used the art of rhetoric; Thirdly, I analyzed how Brent used the rhetorical technique of the decorum. Then, regarding the discussion, I compared both characters' subjectivities and also their ways of using their rhetorical abilities. Finally, I stated the conclusions that I draw from my research.

3. Analysis

3.1 Frederick Douglass character subjectivity

The subjectivity of Frederick Douglass has been severely criticized since *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was published in 1845 by the Boston Anti-Slavery Society. Douglass's subjectivity is constructed from the point of view of a pro-abolitionist; an ex-slave who escaped from his bondage to achieve a state of freedom. This state of freedom was achieved through the acquisition of literacy after he knew how to read and write on

his own. Literacy played an important role in the life of the character because from that moment on he used literacy to convey his experiences during his bondage. “There is an inextricable link in the Afro-American tradition between literacy and freedom” (Gates, 2002, p.1). Literacy worked as a trigger for the desire that slaves had for escaping and reaching freedom: most of the slaves that succeeded in escaping knew how to read and write. Douglass had a notorious potential for making descriptions and conveying experiences in a very persuasive and detailed way.

A significant characteristic of Douglass’s argumentation was its simplicity and readability. His way of expressing was a technique of appealing to the reader’s emotions. For that specific reason, Douglass was accused of exaggerating his experiences and even of inventing some facts. However, McDowell (1999) notes that some lectures from Timothy Dwight Weld and Charles Dickens established that Douglass’s story was not overblown. Douglass did not invent his story as many believed; Douglass was a master in rhetoric.

Therefore, his extraordinary capacity for explaining facts made Frederick Douglass one of the most popular figures in slave narratives. One remarkable topic that Douglass treated which characterized his subjectivity was the topic of motherhood and family. Douglass resorts to this topic to remark on the cruelty of this peculiar institution as slave families were separated from each other. “Douglass opens his narrative strategically with a description of his broken genealogy and fragile family ties” (McDowell, 1999, xvii). As it has been previously mentioned, Douglass's aim is to appeal to the reader’s emotions so the reader can realize the cruelties of slavery. If the readers put themselves in the place of Douglass, they could understand what the protagonist had to face during slavery. The reader could realize the cruelties and realities of slavery and in turn, the reader would be

in favor of the abolitionist movement. Moreover, the topic of motherhood was very popular during the 19th C and it was used in many other slave narratives to strike a chord among the readers:

My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result. (Douglass, 1845, p. 16)

The fact that Douglass decided to open the story with the topic of family and motherhood shows how the protagonist wanted to get closer to the reader to evoke emotions in them.

From the very beginning, Douglass also records the importance of identity and how slavery deprived slaves of it. He explains that he does not know his age and that he was not really sure about his father's identity. Nowadays, the fact of knowing your age is something completely normal for everyone, but during slavery, it was common that slaves did not know when they were born. When Douglass mentions that he does not know his age he compares himself to a horse. "By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (Douglass, 1845, p. 15). Douglass compares himself to an animal to show the reader how dehumanizing was slavery and

how slaves did not know something as essential as knowing when they were born. Gates (1987) notes that Douglass used this comparison multiple times in the novel:

Douglass's narrative strategy seems to be this: he brings together two terms in special relationships suggested by some quality that they share; then, by opposing two seemingly unrelated elements, such as the sheep, cattle, or horses on the plantation and the specimen of life known as a slave, Douglass's language is made to signify the presence and absence of some quality—in this case, humanity. Douglass uses this device to explicate the slave's understanding of himself and of his relation to the world. (Gates, 2002, p.7)

Douglass' concept of identity is crucial for the construction of his subjectivity. Apart from not knowing his age or who was his father, Douglass's identity becomes even more dehumanized throughout the novel. The moment when Douglass is sent to live with Mr. Covey marks the peak of his life as a slave. In 1833, Douglass left Master Thomas to go to work for his new Master Mr. Covey. Slaves were in constant motion throughout the country because they did not always work for the same slaveholders. During slavery, slaves were sold each year to their new masters on the 1st day of January. Therefore, during his enslavement, Douglass never had the sense of having a stable home with a house and a family. Instead, his masters treated him as if he was a chattel. Masters treated Douglass as if he was some property that could be moved around the country and can be conjoined by different people. Once Douglass started working for Mr. Covey, Douglass realized that his new master was the worst master that he ever had. Originally, Mr. Covey was a poor man. He decided to buy one slave so he could have more children and as a result, he could have more slaves. Mr. Covey was mean and cynical: he used to spy on his slaves while they were working and surprised them to whip them. Mr. Covey whipped

Douglass many times a week and he also tormented Douglass psychologically. One day Mr. Covey succeeded in completely breaking Douglass's identity. One day Douglass fell while he was working in the woods due to the treatment he was receiving from his master. Douglass's strength vanished because of his master's constant torture: he could not stand up. Mr. Covey shouted to his slave to stand up but instead, Douglass fled as best as he could given the conditions in which he found himself. Douglass's identity was broken to the point that he wanted to commit suicide: "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit" (Douglass, 1845, p. 61). Throughout the story, this moment in Douglass's story is vital to understanding his suffering and how slavery undermined his identity.

In addition, Frederick Douglass built his subjectivity from the point of view of himself being a hero. Douglass suit into a powerful character within abolitionism as he became a symbol and a representation for all the black slaves. In the novel, Douglass is portrayed as the most important figure within the novel. This fact was achieved due to his striking way of using language and his way of conveying his experience to the reader. "Douglass carefully crafted and recrafted his life story, making it his greatest creation, his most supreme fiction" (McDowell, 1999, p. xii). The character that Douglass portrayed in the novel is so well constructed that he became a national hero during the nineteenth century. Douglass's acquisition of literacy aroused his character and untied him from his bondage and this superb literacy achieved great success for the character. "The more Frederick learned, the more resentful he became of his enslavement" (Martin, 1984, p. 8). Furthermore, the acquisition of literacy was not only a way of approaching freedom but also a way of proving to the white society that Douglass was not a slave anymore. Masters did not want slaves to acquire literacy because otherwise, slaves will

gain their own autonomy which would lead them to freedom. Once Douglass learned to read and write, he demonstrated that he had the same rights as whites. A decisive moment for Douglass's freedom was the fight that he had with Mr. Covey. "By overpowering his overseer, he regains the condition of symbolic freedom upon which his physical and geographical liberation are predicated". (Smith, 1990, p. xxix). As it has been previously mentioned, Mr. Covey, was probably the worst master that Douglass had. Due to Covey's cruelty, Douglass could not stand the situation any longer and decided to rebel against the overseer:

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. [...] I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, for the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. (Douglass, 1845, p. 68)

After his escape, Douglass is portrayed as a self-made man who is no longer subjected to a master and who is no longer treated as property. According to Martin (1984):

For Douglass and most nineteenth-century Americans, the saga of the self-made man was unquestionably heroic. Self-made men personified uncommon greatness; they represented the apotheosis of individual achievement. Their story excited and inspired others. (Martin, 1984, p.263)

Douglass identified himself as a self-made man to show his autonomy which proved that he was no longer a slave. Douglass also had to portray himself as a hero who had escaped from his bondage to encourage other slaves to follow the same path as him.

If Douglass wanted to inspire and motivate millions of slaves he had to show his image as a free man with a certain autonomy. An autonomy that he gained thanks to rebelling against his masters and thanks the acquisition of literacy.

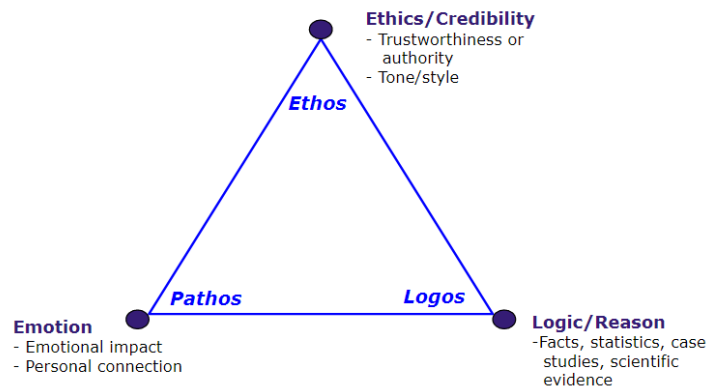
Many of his portrayals as a hero were extracted from the Bible as Douglass read it on numerous occasions. Due to these several readings, the character is influenced by the Bible as it can be spotted in the novel on many occasions. In 1984, McDowell stated that:

He pictured himself, at once, as Moses, the chosen one, masterminding his escape ‘out of Egypt’, and Joseph, the son sold into slavery by his brothers. The most significant events of his life are given striking biblical resonance, especially the escape attempt at Easter-time folded by a Judas figure. In his famous fight with Covey, the overseer, he is the suffering Christ; the outcome of the fight—which transports him from bondage to freedom—is linked to the resurrection from the ‘tomb’ of slavery (McDowell, 1984, p. xiii)

3.1.1 The use of the art of rhetoric in Frederick Douglass

As has been previously mentioned, Frederick Douglass’s capacity for conveying his experiences engaged the readers due to his rhetorical abilities. He did not only engage the white population; Douglass also had to persuade the slaves across the country so slaves could rebel against their masters. Douglass uses simple vocabulary but it catches the reader’s attention as his descriptions were very detailed and moved the audience. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, the art of rhetoric is an art that anyone can possess. “Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (Aristotle, 4thC)

Figure 1. The Rhetorical Triangle: Ethos, Pathos and Logos



From The Rhetorical Triangle: Ethos, Pathos and Logos. [Photograph], by Arley Cruthers, The Kwantlen Polytechnic University

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In the case of Frederick Douglass, he is considered a master of rhetoric because he succeeded in persuading his audience. In addition, Douglass is considered a master in rhetoric because his readers were moved by his writing. Every argument that is conveyed needs three essential elements in order to try to persuade an audience: Ethos; which appeals to the writer's credibility; Pathos, which appeals to the reader's emotions, and Logos, which appeals to reason. The balance between these three elements is necessary to achieve the art of rhetoric and to keep the writer's credibility. Here we have an analysis to prove how these three rhetorical elements are perfectly used by the character Frederick Douglass:

- **Ethos:** Ethos is the element that serves to prove that the character shows credibility in the topic he or she is conveying. Douglass needs to ensure that his audience trusts him because he is a qualified character and a credible person to

talk about slavery. Frederick Douglass is undoubtedly a qualified character to talk about slave experiences as he was an ex-slave by the time the novel was published. Therefore, the character is totally linked to the main topic on which slave narratives were based. Ethos is mainly achieved by the use of vocabulary that Douglass uses to convince the readers. He uses a huge variety of rhetorical devices such as metaphors, synecdoches, personifications, and irony. The extensive vocabulary and rhetorical devices that he used made Douglass a master rhetorician as many researchers have stated. Prior to expressing his arguments, the protagonist pays special attention to selecting the vocabulary he will use. The character also uses a remarkable tone as this one is very straightforward and very ironic as the main aim is to convince the audience that slavery must be abolished to ensure equal rights for the black people. A clear example could be in chapter number VII when Douglass explains the consequences of having learned to read and write on its own. "The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal freedom. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing" (Douglass, 1999, p.45) With this personification of freedom, Douglass explains how the acquisition of literacy changed his way of seeing things. Instead of explaining this new stage of his life in a straightforward way he makes constant usage of rhetorical figures.

- **Logos:** Logos is the element that the character will use to provide logic to his arguments. In order to convince someone, it is important that we appeal to their emotions but we also need to prove a certain logic in our arguments to provide solidity. Throughout the novel, Douglass argues his abolitionist point of view in

a logical way. Douglass provides the reader with thousands of examples of his experiences as a slave. He shows the reader that slavery was the cruelest institution that had been implemented in the United States. This peculiar institution castigated slaves physically and psychologically. It deprived slaves of being autonomous, it deprived humans of receiving an education, and it separated families and broke their identities. These and many more are the strong reasons that support Douglass's writing. Moreover, to explain where he is being relocated, Douglass gives specific geographical references at all times. He explains his story by giving very detailed names of the different masters that he had, of the different children that helped him learn to write, and even he gives names of other fellow slaves.

Due to this constant reference to the names and the geographical places we can prove that Douglass was a trustworthy character and that he applied logic to explain his story. Also, the story is easy to follow and it is supported by credible evidence at every moment. The protagonist explains his life as a slave according to a logical and chronological order within the novel. Douglass begins the novel by explaining his origins and by emphasizing his broken genealogy. From that moment on he explains his experiences as a slave and all the experiences that he had with all the masters with whom he has been. Douglass explains his experiences in detail: in chapter IV he explains some murders of slaves; in chapter V he explains the duties that he had with Colonel Lloyd, etc. The fact of being with different masters is something that Douglass focuses on to a great extent. He always compares the different treatments that he received with the different masters; he compares if a master whipped him more or less than another master,

etc. Thus, we say that Douglass recounts his Logos in an organized manner and with strong reasons that add to the abolitionist movement. He presents numerous examples and experiences that provide solid arguments.

- **Pathos:** Pathos is the element that the character uses to evoke emotions in his audience. Douglas masters this element by inspiring the reader to put themselves in Douglass's position. Douglass convinces the audience by appealing to their emotions; he evokes feelings of anger towards slavery. He achieves that through the correct use of vocabulary: through the usage of powerful words, vivid examples, and detailed explanations. Some of the detailed explanations about his experiences are so tough and detailed that can be imagined by the reader.

Throughout the novel, Douglass puts emphasis on the whipping description that he received from his masters but also on the description of other cruel scenes that his fellow slaves suffered. With this constant explanation of the whippings, the reader can feel some empathy for the protagonist. Douglass also appeals to the beliefs and values of the reader. His main purpose is to convince the reader that slavery should be abolished as it is a cruel institution that goes against human rights. And also to convince the reader about the cruelties that slaves had to face. In order to explain that, Douglass expressed his beliefs and experiences through the explanations of fellow-slave stories and individual stories of the character, which touched the audience; through a selected word choice, which helped to persuade the audience; and through rhetorical sentences which helped to prove the character's acquisition of literacy.

3.2 Linda Brent's character subjectivity

The subjectivity of the character Linda Brent is constructed from a point of view different from those of men. To understand how Brent's subjectivity was constructed we need to make clear the different positions of men and women during slavery. Both male and female slaves suffered the consequences of slavery: they were forced to work for long hours, they were separated from their families and they were treated as property. As a result, male and female slaves suffered physically and psychologically. However, male and female slaves were separated in terms of work. As slave men had more strength they were forced to do the hard work; normally working in the plantations. Contrary, female slaves had to do the housework as they were usually servants. These differences between male and female slaves are essential to understanding how Linda Brent constructed her subjectivity. Brent had a different life from that of Douglass as he worked as a servant for her master. Despite that they had different lives both characters had the same aim: to escape from their bondage thanks to the acquisition of literacy. Linda Brent was a slave from North Carolina; her childhood was "normal" until she was 6 years old and realized she was a slave. Throughout the novel, Brent is not represented as a common slave but as a unique person and also as a powerful woman whose purpose is to escape from her bondage; just like the character of Frederick Douglass. Brent's special personality is influenced by the members of her family. Her father was an important carpenter who had an incredible desire to be free in order to buy his own children. Linda's father had a rebellious personality which influenced William: Linda's brother. "My father, by his nature, as well as by the habit of transacting business as a skillful mechanic, had more of the feelings of a freeman than is common among slaves". (Brent, 1861, p.17) For instance, when Linda's father and their mistress called William at the same time, William

decided to go with her mistress rather than with his own father, and his father reproached William for it. William also had a rebellious personality due to his father's influence. When William was little he showed to be more mature than other children and he even realized the cruelties of slavery. For instance, during William's childhood in chapter X, William realizes that slavery is not likely to disappear anytime soon. "We shall have to stay here all our days; we shall never be free" (Brent, 1861, p.19)

So, as we have seen, Linda's personality is really influenced by her family; and so it is her subjectivity. The subjectivity of the character is shown as a rebel against Dr. Flint, her master. As she was a female slave, she worked mainly doing tasks at home working as a servant. Since slave women spent most of their time working at home as servants most of them were sexually harassed by their masters. As well as being treated as property, female slaves were treated as sexual objects by their masters; and most of the time they could not escape from the harassment because they were threatened with death. Gates (1987) notes that Brent's subjectivity was shaped by her experiences during her stay at Dr. Flint's house:

In the character of the unrelentingly evil Dr. Flint, and in the hard choices that his vulgar pursuit forces Jacobs to make, Jacobs graphically renders the sexual aspect of economic exploitation in a manner unimaginable before. Whereas the black male slave narrator's accounts of sexual brutality remain suggestive, if gruesome, Jacobs's—enlarging upon the precedent created by Mary Price—charts vivid detail by vivid detail precisely how the shape of her life and the choices she makes are defined by her reduction to a sexual object, an object to be raped, bred or abused. (Gates, 1987, 12)

Brent could not explain the horrible situation that she was living in. No one could help her; not even other servants who realized the new way in which Dr. Flint was treating Linda. Not even the mistress could help her because if the mistress discovered what was going on between Linda and her husband, the mistress would also kill her. In the following paragraph, Brent explains to what extent slavery degraded slaves as many readers might not know the whole truth behind this institution. Brent also suggests that not even the mistress who was a woman just like Brent should have helped her:

The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe. (Brent, 1861, p.45)

Therefore, Linda's subjectivity is marked by her life of suffering which was just one of the thousands of cases, in which each female slave suffered. We could say that her subjectivity differed from the other female slaves because she came from a very activist family. Linda's grandmother was a respected matriarch in the neighborhood and even the master of the house feared Linda's grandmother. Brent's father also had an enormous desire to be a free man and influenced Brent's brother who showed an incredible maturity for being a little child.

Linda's subjectivity is also marked by her acquisition of literacy as her first mistress taught her to read and write when Linda was little. As in many other slave characters, her desire to be free is awakened through this acquisition of literacy because it provided slaves with a huge amount of knowledge. In other words, knowing how to read and write empowered slaves. Contrary, the slaves that did not receive a complete

education, and did not know how to read and write, did not tend to escape in order to achieve freedom. And in turn, these slaves did not have the hope of abolishing slavery.

3.2.1 The use of the art of rhetoric in Linda Brent

As well as many characters from slave narratives, Linda Brent shows to have an incredible ability in the art of rhetoric. Her rhetorical abilities made Brent one of the most popular female characters in the Black Literary Tradition. Brent catches the reader's attention by explaining her story: the story of a slave woman who was constantly abused by her master. Brent's rhetorical abilities engaged the reader to keep on reading in order to know how the protagonist escaped from the abuse of her master. Brent could not have persuaded the reader without the correct application of the three basic elements: ethos, pathos, and logos. Here we have an analysis of how Brent developed the three elements:

- **Ethos:** Regarding the element that appeals to the writer's credibility, Brent shows that she lived her experiences firsthand. Brent shows the reader her credibility as a narrator thanks to the fact that she accounts her story from her origins and in an ordered way. The reader trusts the protagonist because Brent shows to be an honest narrator whom the audience can trust. Brent starts her story with the chapter named "Childhood", in this chapter, she does not explain her childhood as a normal one. Instead, she begins her story with the following sentence: "I was born a slave., but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away (Brent, 1861, p. 11). With this clear statement that opens the book, the audience observes that Brent is linked totally to the topic as she provides examples of her experiences during slavery all the time. Brent shows her credibility by explaining multiple anecdotes, naming the places that appear throughout the novel, and by naming the names of the people who surround her. Thanks to the

data that she is providing the reader can conclude that the protagonist is not inventing her story.

- **Logos:** Regarding the element that appeals to logic, Brent focuses her arguments about the abolition of slavery from a rational point of view. In the novel, Brent provides the reader with enough evidence that supports her abolitionist arguments. Brent provides numerous scenes where the reader can observe the suffering of slaves; most of these scenes are tough and evoke a feeling of anger in the reader. Brent follows the story in a logical and well-structured way: she begins the novel of her story by explaining her childhood. Then, she continues explaining how the protagonist grows up. In addition, the protagonist focuses the attention on explaining and developing the slave women's role within slavery to get closer to the women audience. Brent shows the reader the constant abuse that slave women received from their masters. Therefore, the protagonist provides enough information that supports her arguments about the abolition of slavery. As a result, the audience believes Brent's story because she is also providing examples from her own experiences and also from other fellow slave women:

No pen can give an adequate description of the all-pervading corruption produced by slavery. The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are dear

to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is hopeless. (Brent, 1861, p.79)

- **Pathos:** Regarding the element that appeals to the emotions, Brent and almost every character from slave narratives mastered this element because it was essential to appeal to the reader's emotions. Her constant use of a powerful vocabulary and rhetorical figures exposes the reader to slave women's suffering: slave women were continually abused. Brent uses different rhetorical figures to create an appealing way to convey her arguments. Brent, as well as Douglass, opens the novel with the topic of her childhood as she realized that she was a slave when she was just a little girl. The fact that both characters opened their stories with the same topic does not only show that they were following a chronological order; it also showed that they wanted to appeal to the reader's emotions. The topic of childhood in slave narratives was really used because it showed to what extent slavery was cruel by separating children from their families. Brent also appeals specifically to the emotions of white women when she mentions that she is worried about her children being raised during slavery. Brent even explains that she would prefer her children to die before having them during slavery. The white women of that time could feel empathy with the protagonist as most of them were mothers too and in turn, they could understand Brent's suffering. Moreover, Brent evoked the emotions of his readers by describing the enslavement of women and by emphasizing the suffering and abuse of the women.

3.2.2 Brent's use of decorum

In addition to Brent's rhetorical skills, the protagonist also employs a fundamental technique in order to achieve this impactful use of rhetoric. Brent accounts her story as a

slave and how the character achieved freedom but she disguised the whole story as a sentimental story. As the main aim of the character is to increase the visibility of the slave women's experiences, the protagonist needed to explain a story that had to be appealing to the audience of that time. Written for whites and aimed at describing the experiences of slaves during this period, slave narratives provide an account of the lives of the slaves during the 19thC. With regard to the novel, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, it was mainly addressed to white women. Brent accounted for her experiences and justifies the actions that she took to escape from slavery but disguised them as common actions that might appear in sentimental novels. Brent resorted to this technique because apart from the fact that it turned the story into a more appealing one, it ensured to the character that white women were more likely to identify themselves with the protagonist. If the readers identified themselves with the main character, they would also comprehend the suffering of Brent and in turn the suffering of almost every slave woman. To carry out this technique, the character disguised some themes such as family and marriage because there were not considered appropriate to the decorum of that time. In order to create a sense of being a sentimental novel, the character explained her story following the rules of a certain decorum. The concept of decorum was also approached by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. According to Aristotle (4thC), the concept of decorum consists of adjusting the text in accordance with the type of audience that you are addressing to. One of the aims of resorting to this technique is that with the use of decorum the character is more likely to convince the audience. In the 19thC, white women were considered the only ones that were gentle and pure. The fact that a black female character accounted for some issues such as sexual abuse was inconceivable for the social decorum of that period. For that reason, Brent showed an incredible capacity for converting her story into a virtuous story.

The usage of this technique is normally used to address an audience from a high social status. Brent wanted to prove that despite that Black American women were not considered pure, she yearned to acquire the same qualities. A clear example that illustrates the story adaptation of Brent would be when the protagonist takes Mr. Sands as her new partner to escape from the abuse of her master. Brent takes him to feel safe and so her children would feel safe too. Instead, in the novel, the appearance of this new character is seen as a love triangle; characteristic of the sentimental novel. Also, the character does not describe facts in a straightforward manner. Instead, Brent makes descriptions according to the rules of decorum and avoids direct explanations, as in the scene when she explains to the reader that she is pregnant: "I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another" (Brent, 1861, p.85)

4. Discussion

4.1 Comparison between Douglass and Brent's subjectivity

The subjectivities of both characters have been constructed from the point of view of ex-slaves who explained their experiences during their enslavement. Douglass and Brent had the same aim: they both described their stories with detailed explanations, with the usage of powerful verbs, and with the presence of an enormous desire to be free. In both cases, the characters addressed the white population so they would realize the cruelty of slavery. Douglass and Brent were just two examples that showed whites what slaves had to face during the institution of slavery. Despite the fact that Douglass and Brent had the same aim, they had different matters that triggered their turning points in their lives. Regarding the character of Douglass, his subjectivity was marked by the acquisition of literacy, which unchained the character from his bondage and awaken in him a desire to escape to the North. Contrary, Brent's subjectivity was marked by the constant harassment that she

was suffering from his master. Her turning point in the novel was the moment when she escaped to her grandmother's cabin and stayed there for seven years. Brent took this decision because she could not stand the situation anymore as she was treated like a sexual object. While Douglass was forced to carry out hard work that caused him an emotional breakdown, and also he was constantly whipped; Brent was abused physically and psychologically, as happened to most slave women.

Moreover, the subject of the family played an important role while constructing both subjectivities. Douglass resorted to the breaking of his genealogy because the sense of having a family is essential for every human being; and the separation of Douglass from his mother showed once again the cruelties of slavery. In addition, Brent also resorted to the subject of the family especially by explaining the importance of her grandmother. Her grandmother was a central figure for Linda. Due to the absence of her parents, Brent finds in her grandmother the guidance that she needs. Brent mentions the importance of her grandmother in the first chapter by claiming that she was a respected person in her neighborhood. Apart from the importance of Linda's grandmother, Linda's father and brother played an important role in the protagonist's life. We as the reader do not know how were Douglass's parents, but in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Brent highlights the importance of her father and her brother in her life. Despite the fact that Linda's father died when she was little, Brent's father unleashed into his children a rebel and activist personality. This rebel personality that can be noticed in Brent plus her acquisition of literacy helped in shaping the character and in turn the character's subjectivity. Regarding Douglass's subjectivity, his family does not play an important role as in Brent's case because Douglass indicates clearly from the first chapter that her family is broken as a result of slavery.

The role of women within the novel is a notorious difference between Douglass and Brent's subjectivity. The main aim of Brent is to create visibility in the role of slave women but also to create visibility for their sexual vulnerability. Contrary, in slave narratives where the protagonist was a male slave, as in the character of Frederick Douglass, the men were always portrayed as heroes and they were portrayed as the central figures of the story. The male protagonist explained their own experiences and their path from slavery to freedom. The plot of the novel revolves only around the male protagonist. And even some white female characters are removed from the dialogues and take a secondary plane. In these stories, there are also mentioned female slaves but they are given a minor role within the whole story. McDowell (1999) noted that:

Douglass is according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr, the 'clearest example of the will to power as the will to write'. It is, however, a power and a will reserved for men. Women, especially slave women remain trapped in the physical, in the body, excluded from language and symbolic activity. (McDowell, 1999, p. 24)

Contrary, in slave narratives where the protagonist was a female slave, as in the character of Linda Brent, slave women played an essential role as they were the primary focus of the novel. In Brent's case, this character presents the cruel reality that slave women had to face during the institution of slavery: masters treated slave women like property and they were abused and raped whenever the master wanted.

To sum up, male and female slaves played distinct roles within the institution of slavery depending on the work they could perform. And in turn, the subjectivities of male and female slaves were marked by their experiences depending on the master that they were working for. Male slaves worked at the plantation or did hard tasks and they were whipped most of the time. They did not receive a great quantity of food and they did not

have an appropriate place to rest. Normally, female slaves spend most of their time working at the master's home working as servants but they were treated like the master's property and, in consequence, they suffered psychologically and physically as they were abused by their masters. Smith (1988) notes that:

The slaves codes drew no distinction between the slave's sexual autonomy and the master's property rights; slave women were thus subject to rape and to forced liaisons that both satisfied their masters' sexual desires and increased their capital accumulation. (Smith, 1988, xxxi)

4.2 Comparison between Douglass and Brent's use of the art of rhetoric

Both characters, Frederick Douglass and Linda Brent make excellent use of the art of rhetoric. The aim of the rhetoric is trying to persuade someone and to carry out this technique the character needs to be a master in this skill to sound credible. Douglass and Brent applied this skill perfectly and they succeeded in achieving the correct use of the rhetoric. Despite that, each character applied the rhetoric differently. This difference is, not only because of the purpose of each character but also because because it depends on the gender of each protagonist. As female and male slaves had different tasks depending on their gender, they both suffered different consequences from slavery. For instance, as female slaves worked as servants they spend more time at the house, and in turn, they were more exposed to the constant abuse of their masters. While Douglass tried to convince his audience by applying the art of rhetoric in a more extensive way, Brent did use this art of rhetoric but she convinced her audience by resorting to the use of the decorum.

Regarding Douglass's use of rhetoric, he is probably the most expert character ever found in a slave narrative. All characters that appeared in this type of narrative mastered this art as they had to convince the white population about the realities of slavery, but Douglass surpassed the way of using the art of rhetoric. Douglass convinced the reader by using the three basic elements that are needed to persuade an audience: ethos, pathos, and logos. Douglass knew which rhetoric strategies he had to use in order to convince the white population and how he had to explain his own story. This successful explanation of his story is mainly achieved by the great knowledge that he possessed. With his arguments, Douglass shows that he is just as capable as the white man to write and that blacks should also receive school education. During slavery, black people had prohibited to learn how to read and write because slaveholders wanted slaves to remain ignorant. Also, blacks were treated as property and so they were deprived of their human rights. With Douglass's use of the art of rhetoric, he does not only show that whites and blacks were equal but also that blacks were as capable of reading and writing just like whites.

According to Brent's use of the art of rhetoric, she does also apply this technique to try to convince the audience about the cruelties of slavery. A clear difference between Douglass and Brent's use of the rhetoric is that they wanted to persuade different audiences. Brent's main focus was addressing her story to the white female women of that time. She does that to awaken white women and make them aware of the paper of slave women within this institution, and the abuse that female slaves had to face during this period.

5. Conclusion

The character's analysis of Douglass and Brent has proved the hypothesis that slave characters mastered the art of rhetoric. Their use of this ability is achieved properly

because it convinced the reader about each of their experiences during slavery. And in turn, this character's extraordinary use of rhetoric gave rise to its popularity in the 19th C. Douglass and Brent made an accurate use of the three basic elements that are needed to persuade an audience: ethos, pathos, and logos. Both characters did not only use these abilities and succeed in convincing the reader but they also proved that blacks were capable of writing. Douglass and Brent's literacy acquisition proved the main idea of the abolitionist movement: blacks deserved to have the same rights as whites because the African American population was as equal to the white one.

Moreover, it has been spotted the difference in terms of narrative approach depending on the character's gender. In reference to Douglass, his subjectivity is constructed from his own experience and his persona is the only central figure in the novel. Instead, in Brent's subjectivity, she focuses her approach by explaining her own story during this period but at the same time by giving visibility to other slave women. In other words, Brent wanted to give visibility to the role of women and more specifically the role of slave women. For that reason, Brent resorts to the rhetorical abilities of decorum. Brent uses this technique to adequate her story to a certain feminist audience: the white women of that period. Brent's use of decorum acted as a disguise for her story. What was presented as a romantic novel was in fact a story about a slave woman who was constantly abused by her master. Brent resorted to the topic of the romantic novel because it was a popular genre during the 19th C, so in turn, it would be a more appealing story for white women. Due to their mastery of rhetoric and the impact of their powerful message, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs became one of the most influential authors in slave narratives. Regarding the future work that could be done, it would be interesting to analyze the different rhetorical devices that are used by the protagonist since

in the novel there are thousands of examples of alliteration, anaphora, etc. Moreover, it could be interesting to analyze how Douglass's subjectivity has evolved in his other novels as he re-write his story in other books.

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