

Some Features of the Female Slave Narrative

Written for a female white, northern, abolitionist audience

Slave is "heroine" and main character

Strong maternal themes

Author is strongly identified with family; often has children

Narrator appeals directly to female readers

Slave is beset. by sexual predator(s)

Rhetoric of "slavery as it is" less pronounced than in male narratives / more mediated
by extended passages of pathos and emotion and direct appeal

Adoption of forms of sentimental fiction:

crucial setting: domestic spaces (bedrooms/parlors/kitchens/homes)

crucial plot motifs: family/love/romance/sex

crucial characters: false lover/lecherous master/evil mistress/helpful grandmother

crucial plot devices: marriage/death

Features climax based on intelligence, wits, and strength of character

Features reunion with family members separated by slavery

Conventions of the Sentimental Novel

(This is not a complete list. It includes the most common conventions)

Poetic epithets preceding the chapters

Lengthy chapter titles

Sympathetic narrative interjections

Predictable Plot Structure: Female Virtue under siege: "beautiful heroine in peril"

Ends in the reward of marriage and financial support

Female protagonist who embodies the characteristic virtues of the "Cult of True
Womanhood": *piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity*

Melodrama: strong, heart-wrenching scenes, emotional crisis

Plot coincidences

Secret identities

Endorsement of Christian values of charity, compassion, faith, patience

Combined rhetorical forms: narratives, letters, essays, news fragments, poetry

Stock characters: the seduced female, the glittering rake, the faithful confidante,
the cruel stepmother, the tragic mulatto (in antislavery fiction especially), the
noble soldier)

Didactic themes of moral uplift