Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl: Literary And Critical Analysis

Question 1:

In literature, the term pseudonym means a fictitious name used by an author to conceal his or her identity. Harriet Jacobs uses the pseudonym Linda Brent at a number of different points in the book Incidents in the Live of a Slave Girl. Harriet Jacobs uses this pseudonym to help tell her story as a slave woman who has dealt with a number of different issues to gain freedom from her time in slavery. It is incredibly rewarding to read about the experiences of Harriet Jacobs told through the pseudonym Linda Brent. She comes across as a powerful self-made black woman. She goes through a number of different experiences which would test even the strongest minded individual, this includes but is not limited to sexual oppression, and overwhelming mistreatment because of her skin color. What stands out to me the most is the fact that even though she is a black woman, she has able to connect with women from many diverse and dividing backgrounds. This is because a lot of women still currently face the problems Linda faced throughout her life before she was able to obtain her freedom. The actions of Linda Brent are something appreciate, not matter what gender who are or what race you associate yourself with.

Question 2:

A literary metaphor is essentially a figure of speech in which there is a hidden or implied similarity between two ideas which are completely unrelated but, in some instances, share some similar characteristics with one another. The best example of this is in Chapter V of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Linda Brent says “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. Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you concerning the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke.” (Incidents 34). It made me feel incredibly uncomfortable in that Dr. Flint’s wife knew about what was taking place as it relates to Linda’s sexual oppression. The relationship between Linda and Dr. Flint was not similar to the other sexual relationships he engaged in with his other female slaves. There was something different about Linda, and this caused Dr Flint’s wife to have an incredible amount of hate towards Linda in particular.

Question 3:

In literature, the term allusion essentially means a compacted reference to a place, person or idea of some sort that has cultural, literary or political relevance. There is essentially no explicit identification. The chapter in which she uses biblical allusion is chapter XX. She highlights a very impact example of this when she says, “even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than the white in that community called civilized.” (Incidents 145). What we are seeing from Linda is an incredibly sad chain of events. From what I can gather, she is so against being around her master along with the white civilization that she is more

inclined to spend her nights in a snake filled swamp. This has biblical relevance in that the snakes relate to temptation in the Garden of Eden. What I mean by this is the fact that both Adam and Eve were tempted to eat an apple from the forbidden tree by a snake, which later related to them being forced from the Garden of Eden. This is relatable to Linda's situation in that she was forced to abandon her loved ones in order to escape the sexual oppression and mistreatment from her master.

Question 4:

It is important to understand that Linda has the mindset that any other woman would have in not only her situation but of a female who was in a somewhat less oppressive situation than Linda Brent was at the time. When it comes to identifying the reasons for why she had two children with Mr. Sands and not with Dr. Flint it is clear to me that the reasons are as follows. First Mr. Sands was a gentleman whereas Dr. Flint was nothing of the sort. Secondly, Mr. Sands was someone who would wholeheartedly care for not only her children but Linda as well, and finally, Mr. Sands was an unmarried man, which therefore meant that there would not be an evil wife to deal with on a daily basis. She could go on living her life with her other half and her children with no one having a problem with it, and no chance of there being a negative outside dynamic. Mr. Sands bought her children with the eventual goal of setting them free but this promise to Linda was not kept, but one of the overshadowed benefits of these events taking place is the fact that it gave Linda Brent a better opportunity to escape from her oppressed life with Dr. Flint and the plantation.

Question 5:

The relations between African American slaves on the plantations and their non-slave owning white neighbors was a relation that can be best described as unrelatable, I say this because Linda states,

"It was a grand opportunity for the low whites, who had no negroes of their own to scourge. They exulted in such a chance to exercise a little brief authority, and show their subserviency to the slaveholders not reflecting that the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation." (Incidents 82).

The problem that came up far too often was the fact that these lower-class white neighbors did not own slaves of their own and in most cases, these white neighbors were living close to the conditions that the black slaves were living under. The only difference was that they had no master. Throughout Harriet Jacob's time as a slave, her living quarters along with other slave's place of residence were repeatedly raided by poor whites, of course with the absolute approval of their slaveholders. These lesser privileged white neighbors saw this as their opportunity to be on a somewhat similar level as the wealthier whites who had absolute control over their slaves. In the back of their mind, the lesser white neighbors saw themselves as inferior to a lot of these black slaves, due to the lives they were living under the condition of their wealthy slave masters.

Question 6:

So, we start off with the quote from Harriet Jacobs which states "My Master had power and law on his side, I had determined will. There is might in each." (Incidents 110). It is clear to me that

Linda is overwhelmingly presented with a perplexity, it is the offer from Dr. Flint who presents Linda the opportunity for her and her children to obtain almost complete freedom on the basis that she permanently lives as his mistress. What we can take from this is the sad fact that she does not want to have any association with Dr. Flint, even if this means that her and her children will have to live under slave rule for the rest of their lives.

It is Linda's absolute lack of trust in the civilization of white people which helps her to arrive at this decision. She ultimately knew that the promise being made to her would not be upheld and this is therefore what led to her making her escape from Dr. Flint. To her the white civilization was untrustworthy and Dr. Flint was no different, despite his overwhelming sexual desire for Linda. In the end, I can confidently say that the power displayed by Linda was far more impactful on the grand scale of everything related to the situation.

Question 7:

When discussing the texts from Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl and A True Tale of Slavery, the immediate point from which I am able to compare the two texts is the fact that the storyline in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl are presented from a woman's perspective in slavery and A True Tale of Slavery presents these experiences from a male's perspective in slavery. The most interesting and prevalent theme that immediately grabs your attention is the theme of freedom in both texts. Along with this common theme we are also given light to the act of family turmoil, and the complete domination and mistreatment towards the slaves from their masters.

The one difference that stood out in their experiences of slavery was the sexual oppression displayed throughout Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl. John did not experience these troubles but focused more so on the actual institution of slavery. In Chapter VII, John states, , "Since I cannot forget that I was a slave, I will not forget those that are slaves. What I would have done for my liberty I am willing to do for theirs, whenever I can see them ready to fill a freeman's grave, rather than wear a tyrant's chain." (Incidents 291). The reason for why I chose to highlight this quote is due to the fact that it immediately reminds me the viewpoint of Linda Brent. They both want to obtain their freedom in its most absolute form and are both willing to do whatever it takes to make this happen for themselves, their families, and future generations to come.

Works Cited

1. Jacobs, Harriet A., Jean Fagan. Yellin, and John S. Jacobs. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself, Now with A True Tale of Slavery by John S Jacobs. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009. Print.