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Rape, murder and revenge in 'slavery's pleasant homes': Lydia Maria child's antislavery fiction and the limits of genre

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Abstract

As a genre created to arouse sympathy for slaves among readers who refused to purchase abolitionist tracts, antislavery fiction was fraught with contradictions. Writers who sought to dispel romantic illusions about slavery were hampered by romantic conventions and a code of gentility that barred 'vulgar' language, sordid details, and frank treatment of sexuality. Lydia Maria Child wrestled with these contradictions in her masterpiece, 'Slavery's Pleasant Homes' which depicted the plantation as a harem. Dramatizing a female slave's rape and murder and defending a male slave's retaliation against his master, the story proved too radical to publish outside of antislavery circles.



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