**Souders Log, Ch. 4, Esperanza Rising**

***Esperanza Rising,* by Pam Munoz Ryan**

Ryan’s story, *Esperanza Rising,* is a historical novel based partially on the life of her maternal grandmother. The novel’s opening line gives the reader a sense of how strongly Esperanza is attached to her position in society. “Our land is alive, Esperanza,” said Papa. When Esperanza’s Papa declares this to her we see how he, the owner of this later to be described ranch and vineyard, through the use of “our” makes her an owner of this kingdom.

Esperanza is full of expectation as to her role in life. This is further expressed when six years later in the story Papa handed Esperanza the knife for her to cut the first clusters of grapes indicating the grape harvest has officially started. It is revealed to the reader that in wealthy land owning families this is the job of the first born son. As there are no sons Esperanza becomes the heir apparent.

This role of future ownership and the position inherent in this role has been expressively given to Esperanza. She is a member of the elite class in the Country of Mexico. Her subsequent fall and her reaction to this fall gives us authenticity and creates in Esperanza an aesthetic heat that sizzles in her grief and future hardships created by the death of her papa. The discrimination against the daughter is evidently based on her gender. If there had been a son the theft of the property would probably not have happened.

Esperanza’s Uncle’s, deviously steal the ranch from her and her mama. In this theft we see her mama’s strength revealed as she chooses poverty and expulsion over an offer to marry one of the uncles and retain her social position.

Esperanza, her mama, and the house servants escape from El Rancho de las Rosas under the cover of night and head north to the U.S. On this journey Esperanza is confronted with the reality of being relegated to the lower status of field hand and a life of poverty.

Esperanza discovers self worth, friendship, and understanding of poverty. She becomes an excellent worker, and gives wonderful care to her mama. She decides to earn the money to have her maternal Grandmother come to the U.S. The surprise at the end when the young man she is enamored with returns to the immigrant camp with her grandmother in tow. The beautiful ending reveals her mama’s return to health. The knowledge that she was able, through her personal efforts, to overcome adversity and rise from the valley of sorrow to the peak of happiness gives reader joy.

***Out of the Dust,* by Karen Hesse**

The second novel that I am using in this assignment was one of the possible touchstone choices for chapters 6, 7, &8. It wasn’t one of the novels I chose for that assignment so I am using it here as I feel it is a wonderful example of culture and its effect on the protagonist.

Billie Jo’s life of tragedy, described poetically, has of sense of historical truthfulness of a life lived in the horrific dust bowl days of Oklahoma. Billy Jo, our protagonist and voice, describes the biting terror of a dust storm. The insidious encroachment of dirt is a metaphor describing how she grows to view her life. A pregnant mother who is hoping to have a son to complete her husband’s desire creates a sense of not being of value in Billie Jo.

Billie Jo burns her gifted piano playing hands attempting to rescue her mother from an exploding kerosene fire. Her mother, weakened by the injuries incurred in the fire, died giving birth to the hoped for son. The newborn son died also and Billie Jo’s Pa was in Guymon getting drunk.

Billie Jo’s dreams of escaping the dust and poverty through her gifted piano playing also died in the fire that burned her fingers and disabled her hands to the point she couldn’t play without pain. Billie Jo learns to play through the pain and awaits the arrival of her soon to be stepmother. This moving story reveals how passion for something, anything, can revive our heart and lift us out of the misery of poverty and grief.

Karen Hesse, in a biographical sketch, explains that she herself is both a poet and musician. She used the knowledge she found in old newspapers as a guide for constructing the events of the story. Her description of the culture and poverty in this novel gives the reader a realistic visit into the tragic dust bowl. She also shows us how difficult the life for women in these harsh times was so different than that for men. A man could just leave alone and on his own. A woman’s risk to venture out alone was just too dangerous to undertake and socially unacceptable.

***Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl,* by Harriet Jacobs**

This classic novel was one of the earliest ever published written by an African American Slave who escaped to freedom. This historical novel is written from the knowledge actual experience in the author’s life. The protagonist, Linda, was not aware that she was a slave during her early childhood as she was being raised by her grandmother who was a free black woman. When she realizes that she is a slave she soon experiences the degradation of that experience. She gives birth to two children by her master’s son and suffers at the hand of this master who desires her physically and attempts to force her to be his mistress.

We find Linda planning escape from this vile situation and see her strength as she hides for years in her Grandmother’s attic. Finally, making her way north, she escapes her bondage and undergoes many experiences, including a trip to England. She constantly is afraid of being apprehended and returned to her owner.

This book reveals the dangers of the Jim Crow Law and how this law itself kept the escaped slave in mental chains even though she was freed from the physical chains. Linda describes in the book how the male slaves were punished horribly for violating rules and laws established by the master. She explains that this punishment though severe was not equal to punishment of having to be intimate with a man you have no interest in and no choice of refusal of that intimacy.

She shows courage and a passionate mind set to die before she will be the used by the master as a sex slave. She eventually reunites with a brother and finds solace in marriage and children. She reveals in the concluding paragraph of the novel that she has found some peace in her life. “It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet, the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea.”

**Concluding explanation**

I struggled with the choosing of the two additional novels for this assignment. I started reading the novel you suggested, *The Ear, The Eye and the Arm,* I was captured by this book, but realized that I was reading it too lightly and was missing much.

I was captured by my memory of, *Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl,* while I was reading *Esperanza Rising.* I wanted to share a text to text comparison of all three novels I read for this assignment.

Each novel was based on a young woman having her life turned upside down. Esperanza falling from a high social status, Linda not realizing until later in her life that she was a slave, Billie Jo losing both her mother and her piano skills, reveals how the inner strength of these three girls carried them forward and into a better life. Though each book was written in entirely different tones they take the reader through the battles of their lives and their individual victories. Reading these three novels one after the other gives us an understanding of the feminine strengths that we do not get to see enough in literature. I was profoundly moved by each novel and more aware of the power of quality literature and how it can enlighten and serve us all.