

The unsympathetic cheryl strayed



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Cheryl Strayed is an unsympathetic character but a lovable person; this is not a contradictory statement. In her memoir *Wild*, she stars as a grief-stricken yet naïve young woman, making her the main (and unsympathetic) character of this story. In her podcasts, on the other hand, it is easier to get a sense of who she is as an actual person, and in this context she is lovable, honest, and down-to-earth. It was at first odd that her depiction of herself in her memoir differed so greatly from how she presented herself in her *Dear Sugar* podcasts. However, after closer inspection, it made sense that the persona in *Wild* was indeed not the same as the one in *Dear Sugar*. Not only was Cheryl a static character in *Wild*, but she also constantly complained despite being in a much more privileged position than she thought. She made life difficult for herself, then proceeded to focus solely on the pains she inflicted on herself during the trip, leaving little time to think about the grievances that pushed her to take this hike in the first place. Despite these factors, the justifications and the admission of her mistakes on her podcast *Dear Sugar* allow for her to become a more relatable person.

It often seems as though Cheryl Strayed in *Wild* is a fictional character, a separate entity from her true self. One explanation for this feature is that she is completely static throughout the entire novel. While it is true that “something inside of [her] released” at the very end of the novel, up until that point there wasn’t really much emotional development (Strayed 306). She was still mostly focusing on her physical pain (her blisters) and being alone in nature, just as she was at the beginning of the memoir. Throughout the entire book, she brings up the same topics repetitively, with little to no progress and absolutely no development, or at least until the very end when

she feels wilder as a result of her experience. On the other hand, in *Dear Sugar*, she is much more multifaceted. Though the book and podcasts are different means through which she can express different ideas, there were definitely many opportunities in the book in which she could have discussed her infidelity or her drug-taking a little more in-depth, as she did on “The Infidelity Episodes” in the podcast.

On one of the “The Infidelity Episodes,” Strayed talks at length about how we expect to find a companion, a lover, a best friend, a supporter in our spouses, and how more often than not all these roles cannot be fulfilled by just one person. This is a reason some people go outside of the marriage seeking to satiate their desires that their partners cannot. If she had included this point at the end of her memoir, it would have added considerably to her character development as well as the readers’ relationship with her.

Additionally, while many have claimed that Strayed’s work is radical and helps make the case for promoting underprivileged people connect with nature, a lot of what Strayed writes about fails to mention the privilege that she does have. While she mentions how dangerous it is for a woman to be on the road by herself, it does seem that she benefits from being a white, able-bodied female on this type of trail, as many people are more than willing to help her out (which may not be the case for a person of color or a disabled person). More than that, she is privileged in that she does not have any responsibilities (like kids to take care of), so much so that she is able to give up three months of her life and cut herself off from her old life. So, while it is not necessarily accurate to call it “bourgeois travel pornography” as Strayed came from a poor background, it definitely does not represent all

underprivileged peoples and their experiences. Perhaps it is this assumption that she is underprivileged that makes her such an unsympathetic character.

Cheryl Strayed ultimately portrays herself in a very unsympathetic way that does not reflect how she is in her podcasts. She is unchanged throughout most of the book, making the narrative more focused on the superficial aspects around her rather than an emotional development. She also doesn't explicitly deal with the issue of privilege, which is problematic when she is venerated for having experienced this despite her "lack of privilege." While she is underprivileged in a sense, not acknowledging her privilege in other forms is simplifying this problem and allows her to falsely represent other underprivileged groups. The concept of her story is indeed inspiring, but the execution of it was unsatisfactory.