

# The themes of abuse in "purple hibiscus" and "goodnight mr. tom"

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Purple Hibiscus and Goodnight Mr. Tom are two novels that openly explore the themes of abuse, specifically abuse that is both physical and emotional however it must be noted that these novels are not from the same genre. Purple Hibiscus is classified as a bildungsroman while Goodnight Mr. Tom falls into both historical fiction and children's literature. The theme of abuse linked with religious intolerance and beliefs will be the central focus of this analysis.

Purple Hibiscus is set in Nigeria in the city Enugu, Nsukka and their home village. Enugu is where Kambili lives with Jaja, mama and papa. Enugu despite being a city is only described in particular areas that being Kambili's school, their home and church. It affectively showed the contrast of living in a big city but being confined to a restricted to a lifestyle. It is only in Nsukka at aunty Ifeoma home and their home village they are they able to venture out their home and experience freedom as they were no longer in an environment papa had full control over. Kambili's home is described as being large and a structure of wealth but the grand spaces in the home left Kambili feeling empty as their house was only filled with silence. Whereas Aunty Ifeoma's home despite being in a poorer condition it's small size and togetherness gave her a feeling sanctuary unlike home did.

In Goodnight Mr. Tom Willie lives in a slum like party of the city in London and there he faces the excessive abuse at home from his mother and bullying at school and a rubbish filled area. The book is set during World War 2 when children where evacuating London and went to the countryside due to the bomb raids. London became a darkened damp city full of hikers and

death linked to that setting is Willoies abuse. Little weir wood the countryside is a utopia away from London where colour is first introduced in the book where the meadows and the blueberries are described vividly.

Purple Hibiscus is written in the first person narrator and is told from Kambili's point of view. The novel is written in two parts where part one of the books is set in the past but starts off from present day but then part 2 continues from present day there are also no chapter numbers which is effective because the book as buildings roman and is structurally representative of growth and growth is not chronologically happens at different parts of the novel so there are no chapter numbers and new parts starts next to the image of leaves. The writing is extremely descriptive because of the nature of Kambili's personality being soft spoken and she as the narrator experiences much of the world visually and aurally. Whereas in Goodnight Mr. Tom if I s written in third person and allows the reader to understand the events from the perspective of multiple characters throughout the story. Due a nature of it being intended to be a part of children's literature it's most probable that the book is written in this format as if the story is being told by someone else as you would narrate a story to a child but with very mature themes.

Purple hibiscuses are symbolic in the novel and the title refers to the flowers created by Aunty Ifeoma's botanist friend, as hibiscuses aren't usually purple. Jaja is struck by the appearance of the flower, and through them he discovers his love of gardening.

which become a crucial part of his opening up and independence in Nsukka. He takes some stalks of purple hibiscus back to Enugu and plants them there because of its role in Jaja and Kambili's mental awakening, the purple hibiscus symbolizes freedom and individuality - things they lack under Papa's rule, but find in Nsukka with Aunty Ifeoma. The title of Goodnight Mr. Tom is symbolic because of the terror Willie faced at home due to the wrath of his mother but the fact that towards the end of the novel Willie said 'goodnight' to Tom signals his transition from the boy who dreaded waking up in the morning to a keen and bright young boy who genuinely couldn't wait for the next day.

In Goodnight Mr. Tom several characters help shape theme of abuse in the novel: Willie who is the protagonist, Mr. Tom Oakley, Zach and the antagonist his mother. Willie can be described as being fragile, vulnerable, neglected, fearful and socially awkward. The very first description of him is "The boy was thin and sickly-looking, pale with limp sandy hair and dull grey eyes." Mr. Tom notices the bruises on Willie's shin and thighs and questions him about how he got those bruises but Willie lifts his socks and hides it away. Mr Tom then goes through Willie's belongings and finds a note left by his mother attached to the belongings. The note explained that he was a sinful boy who promised to be good but she packed a belt just in case it was needed to flog him. Mr. Tom was enraged by this and said to Willie " While you're in my house," he said in a choked voice, " you'll live by my rules. I don't ever hit a child and if I ever do it'll be with the skin of me hand. You got

that?"". Willie then silently cries tears of Joy as Mr Tom had walked out of the room.

Willie meets a fellow evacuee named Zach who becomes his best friend in the novel Zach is a flamboyant, carefree and artistic boy who throughout the novel uplifts Willie. Willie who was used to being forgotten about was overwhelmed by Zach's generosity. It was Zach who discovered Willie's talent of drawing and praises him for it by suggesting he paint the scenery for the school play on Christmas. Willie was always told that he could never do art because it was reserved for the smarter children but Zach awakens Willie's self-confidence, imagination and intelligence which was hidden inside Willie's battered body all along. When Willie is called back home and his mother sees him at the train station it was stated that " Here stood an upright, well-fleshed boy in sturdy ankle boots, thick woolen socks, a green rolled-top jersey, and a navy blue coat and balaclava. His hair stuck out in a shiny mass above his forehead and his cheeks were round and pink" a vast contrast as to how he first appeared in the beginning.

Willie's mother is excessively abusive, oppressive, and authoritative and uses religion as basis of justifying her abuse towards Willie. Neighbors often describe her as a " Bible thumper". Her authoritative nature is evident when she sees Willie at the station " It was a great shock to her. She had expected him to be more subservient but even his voice sounded louder". He returns home and he finds that he has a baby sister waiting for him. He speaks to his mother about his time in Little weir wood and she fears that weir wood had made him a sinner. She beats him and knocks him down unconscious and

locks him in a room underneath the stairs where he is tied to a pole with his baby sister is in his arms. Mr. Tom manages to rescue him but his baby sister had already died in his arms. His mother is found dead of a suicide a month later. Mr. Tom is a nurturing and loving paternal figure for Willie. He takes Willie to the doctor upon seeing all his bruises and he teaches Willie how to read and write as he adores him as a son.

In Purple Hibiscus Kambili is a heavily indoctrinated, silenced, feeble and lonesome fifteen year old girl who lives in a patriarchal, religiously conservative, and oppressive household run by her father. Her father (who is referred to as Papa or his first name Eugene in the novel) gives off the impression of a god loving and giving Christian businessman adored in their city of Enug where they live but truly operates in a tyrannical manner at home. Kambili and her brother Jaja are given schedules which Papa created for them and they are to follow these schedules throughout each week majority of their time was to be devoted to studying and the rest of their time to prayer even going to the extent of scheduling when they should eat and be given free time. Papa would use violence as a form of punishment but would say he did it in the name of love or god. His abuse and her fear of her father causes her to become very drawn back and mute in many environments away from home. At school and at Aunty Ifeomea's home (her father's sitster) she's picked on for being a snob because of her wealth and her refusal to speak to others as she's only responds when she is directly spoken to. After many of these scenes she describes her desire for the words to come out so she can express how she feels. Father Amadi a young pastor

who Kambili develops a crush on is the first character to see that behind her salience was a story and he embraces Kambili and it is in their relationship that Kambili is free of the constraints her father had put on her mentally and physically.

The most crucial scene of abuse is when Papa discovers Kambili with a painting of their late grandfather papa Nnuku who he considered a heathen because he was a traditionalist and not a Christian. He tears the picture and severely kicks Kambili but she remains defiant and lies on the floor and continues to be beaten and at this point she understands the unjust ways of her father after having being with Aunty Ifeoma and Father Amadi. Papa cried as she had to be taken to hospital as and Kambili's body pained all over. Jaja and Mama are severely abused as well but it is Mama who chooses to poison Papa resulting in his death. Jaja decides to act as if he committed the offence and he ends up going to jail as he feels that has he failed protect his mother during her marriage to Papa. Kambili is able to reclaim her voice after the death of her father and when she speaks to her mother on her way to visit Jaja in jail as he is soon to be released she says " We will take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we'll go to America to visit Aunty Ifeoma,' I said. ' We'll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus, too, and I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers.' I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans toward me and smiles.

Both novel both affectively showed how abuse can hinder and stunt the growth of individuals and it particularly important that it was down in the

viewpoint of children as those are seen as the years in which we grow most and develop character. Both Purple Hibiscus and Goodnight Mr. Tom were able to emphasize the importance of independence and freedom in one's mentality, physically and spiritual being and that one can only be able to grow without the chains of oppressions.