

Female oppression in the color purple novel

Literature



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The depiction of women in “ Color Purple” is one that demonstrates the nullification of women’s agency within a patriarchal society. Alice Walker shows that the voice of the woman was diminished by the manner in which men treated most women and also that some women simply lived for breath. Although some of the women in the text gain some form of agency, it is clear that patriarchal power still sought to maintain the silencing of women. This essay serves to expose the silencing of women in Alice Walker’s “ Color Purple”.

The text opens with two phrases that are about Celie who is the main character but the third sentence immediately loses the independent signature that the first two phrases have. “ I am” is lost in the third sentence and instead of the main character being the one voicing out what is happening to her she says “ Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me”. In the initial introduction of Fonso, Celie’s step-father is that of being forceful towards Celie’s mother. An act of choking Celie and the first words he says in the text are “ You better shut up...” The man is already portrayed as violent and forcefully subduing to the female figure (Farahbakhsh & Khanmirzaie: 2014). Celie’s inability to speak proper English can also be linked with being silenced because it is through language that people can reason.

Fonso abuses Celie sexually and she gives birth to two children who are sold by Fonso without the consent of Celie or her mother. Celie says that God took away her first child but the use of God being the cruel being in this part of reading just shows that Celie could not do anything about what Fonso did. This reference of God can also be juxtaposed with the words “ God gives and

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God takes away”, written in the book of Job chapter one verse 21. The biblical statement is one that nullifies the agency of anyone else except God’s. Since Fonso is a man and God is also known as a man, Celie’s words direct the reader to the subjugation of women by the man (Krauszer: 2014).

The negotiations between Albert and Fonso regarding the marriage of Celie to Albert (whom she only refers to with the title Mr.), only occur between the two men and also without the consent of Celie. Celie’s mother had died at this time and not even Celie had anything to say concerning her own marriage negotiations. She is treated as an object of exchange since she is taken into marriage even with her cow (Ghafoor: 2012). In the marriage negotiations, we learn that Albert was initially interested in marrying Nettie, Celie’s younger sister. Fonso stated though that he wanted Nettie to become a schoolteacher. Fonso as a man had already decided on the type of future Nettie should have, leaving her voiceless on what she might have aspired to become. Fonso also uses the words “ You can do everything just like you want to and she aren’t going to make you feed it or clothe it” when he suggests that Albert can rather marry Celie instead of her younger sister. Such words immediately show that Celie could only play the role of submission but not influence any decision that Albert intended with her.

We also learn about the beautiful Shug Avery who is admired by Celie and is intimately involved with Albert even when he is married to Celie. Shug comes to town and Albert is not home for the weekend so that they may spend time together. Celie’s concern as a wife to Albert is not even considered by Albert since he goes away for the whole weekend and comes back on Monday. Wives as partners have to know the whereabouts of their
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husbands but Celie's voice as a wife was kept shut. Questions of admiration about Shug race in Celie's mind but as evidence of her voice being shut, she prays for strength and even bites the inside of her jaws to maintain her silence. Celie is an example of the most silenced woman in the text since there is evidence of her having internalized being a silenced individual (Farahbakhsh & Khanmirzaie: 2014).

Shug and Kate (Albert's sister) advice Celie to not depend on a man and also to fight for herself but she says " I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm still alive". Such words make the reader aware that Celie had actually made peace with her oppressed situation and that all she was grateful of merely breathing, even at the price of patriarchal cruelty. Celie is psychologically destroyed and her experiences can be compared with those of a female character Pecola who experienced abuse in the form of violence and rape in Tony Morrison's novel " The Bluest Eye" (Aydemir & Tanritanir 2012).

Pecola was also abused by her father as compared to Celie's abuse by her step-father. I can sum up this comparison by saying both Celie and Pecola experienced different forms of abuse through father figures. Celie's psychological destruction can also be similiarized with that of Sethe in another one of Tony Morrison's novel titled " Beloved". While Celie had no emotional connection in comforting Harpo (Albert's son) when he was crying and said that patting him was similar to patting a dog, Sethe kills her own daughter. Sethe was also a victim of similar forms of abuse that were experienced by Celie, through men (Aydemir & Tanritanir 2012). The mother's voice is also silenced in this case and it is impossible to deny that mothers are expected to be more emotionally connected to children. One <https://assignbuster.com/female-oppression-in-the-color-purple-novel/>

may say women are to take up the role of motherhood even with children that are not biologically hers. Celie was stripped off the very role of motherhood when her children were sold by Fonso. The effect of such is the most probable cause of her saying the words “ Patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It’s more like patting another piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table, a chifferobe”. Harpo was as good as dead to Celie but this would not have been so if Celie had been fairly treated, heard and loved by the male figures in her life.

For a number of times the author also lets the man say certain things and ask questions that women do not even respond to. I am moved to believe that this lays more emphasis on the depiction of the women’s position in the society. Celie hardly answers any of Albert’s questions more especially because they are normally demeaning of her and he always commands Celie to do something. We learn that Celie was not able to get the purple dress that she wanted at the time she was out to shop with Albert’s sisters. The purple colour is normally associated with royalty and sovereignty, it is clear that a sense of ruler-ship over her own life was denied from Celie.

In conclusion, the clarity of female oppression in “ The Color Purple” is undeniably perpetuated by men and it drives the silencing of women as well as constructs the roles they are expected to fulfil. The abusive treatment enforced by patriarchy in the name of female submission does not only give males the sceptre of injustice but also prevents women from becoming mothers and wives as the patriarchal system expects. It also destroys the emotional connection between families at large. Injustice is the sceptre of unrighteousness and a spear that pierces the souls of life carriers.

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