Color Purple Essay, Research Paper

Celie s character highlights the detrimental effect of silence on black women.

Individuals are silenced when they are denied agency in shaping their own experiences.

Agency is the concept that individuals make choices that shape their own lives and that

they are solely the product of their environment. The character of Celie emphasizes the

silencing of African American woman as experienced through male family members, in

particularly fathers and husbands. Surprisingly enough, woman within the African

American community also serve as vehicles that perpetuate silencing. Celie s stepfather

is able to silence Celie through abuse and isolation. The beginning of the novel offers the

reader an intimate view of Celie s oppression by her stepfather. The many obstacles that

Celie must overcome in her life are, the abuse and silencing from her stepfather, the

further abuse and silencing from her husband, and Celie s breaking of silence.

The reader quickly discovers that Celie s stepfather has impregnated her

twice. First he put his thing up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grap

hold my titties. Then he push his thing up inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He

start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. (Walker 1) Rape, as a

form of abuse, has conquered Celie s desires under her stepfather s authority, thereby

psychologically training her mind to accept submission and silence. Celie s stepfather

continues to silence her by exploiting the notion of love. By denying Celie the love that a

father and daughter should share, the stepfather trains her mind to accept herself as an

expandable being. An instance of such deprivation occurred when Albert came to ask

permission to marry Nettie but convinces him to take Celie. She ugly. He say. But she

ain t no stanger to hard work. And she clean. (9) He say s this as if the two daughters

could be interchangeable. Albert accepts the offer and is seen riding a horse with Celie

walking behind him. This is symbolic because it appears that an analogy can be drawn

between Celie and a mule. The symbol of black woman as mules not only means that

they were beasts of burden; but also that they were given as little thought and

consideration as dumb animals. This transaction between Albert and the stepfather is

similar to men trading cows, thereby dehumanizing Celie.

The stepfather also assumed that if Celie believed herself to be unloved then she

would naturally deem her own desires unimportant because others did not care about her.

Similarly, if Celie had people to love, such as her children, then her kids would most

likely respond to this love. By denying Celie any form of love, the stepfather isolates

Celie and increases her dependence on him. Walker s use of Celie s letters to God

highlights Celie s feelings of isolation. She ast me bout the first one Whose it is? I say

God s. I don t know no other man or what else to say. (3) The very idea that Celie is

talking to God signifies that perhaps she does not have many people to confide in.

In Celie s relationship with Albert, her husband, domination is also perpetuated.

One external sign of this authority is how she addresses Albert. Celie calls him Mr.\_\_\_

as seen many times in the novel. The term Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ indicates emotional distance and

is similar to how slaves addressed their owners as Master . Furthermore, if Celie is

given the opportunity to express her own opinions, Albert sees it as a direct challenge to

his authority. For instance, when Albert demands that Celie quiets his daughter while

brushing her hair, she immediately responds that she is unable to do so. As a result,

Albert slaps her as a warning that disobedience to his orders is unacceptable.

Albert along with her stepfather isolates her from those she loves. One example

that demonstrate this statement is Albert s deliberate act of separating Nettie from Celie.

Nettie was a source of comfort and love for Celie. Nettie is the one who teaches Celie

how to spell and read. Nettie is aware that literacy empowers individuals to move

upwards in stratified society. I know I m not as pretty or as smart as Nettie, but she say

I ain t dumb. (10) Thus, Alberts removal of Nettie from Celie s life is strategically

intelligent because he has removed the source of Celie s strength and ability to validate

herself. The only piece of mail Mr.\_\_\_\_\_\_ ever put directly in my hand is a telegram

that comes from the United States Department of Defense. (262) The letter read that

Nettie and the family had been sunk on the boat to Africa by German subs.

The novel not only depicts the silence of woman, but the breaking of silence.

Shug, Albert s mistress, actually becomes Celie s voice in protesting the injustices

committed against her. He beat me when you not here, I say. I wont leave, Shug say,

until I know Albert won t even think about beating you. (78-79) Shug acknowledges

Celie s struggles through many avenues, the first being music. One caption of the novel

highlights Shug s explicit support of Celie is at Harpo s juke joint. Shug s song, Miss

Celie s Blues emphasizes and gives voice to Celie. Shug also advocates Celie s

independence by announcing that she will take Celie with her when returning to

Tennessee. Thus, she becomes Celie s voice until Celie finds her own, near the end of

the novel.

Another significant event that strengthens Celie s ability to demand independence

from Albert is the discovery of Nettie s letters. Nettie s letters are the method that reveal

Celie s children to their mother. These letters encourage Celie that she may one day see

her family again. This hope empowers Celie to break away from Albert, as read in the

dinner scene near the end of the novel. Celie is able to reverse her silence to such an

extent that she has authority over Albert. In Albert s effort to show that Celie can do

nothing without him, he insinuates that she has no talent and or worth through his

comment, You black, you poor, you ugly, you a woman. (213) Yet, Celie is unable to

be silenced as seen through her remark, Until you do right by me, I say, everything you

even dream about will fail. (213)

The Color Purple concludes with the effects of Albert s decision to help Celie s

family immigrate to the United States. This conscious choice reflects the strong

influence of Celie s last remark on Albert, which is an indication that Celie has not only

broken out of submission and silence, but found her own voice. The final scene is

compelling since Celie, now independent, has joined with the very person, whom from

childhood, has encouraged the growth of a confident and vocal Celie. Celie has

overcome obstacles in her life such as abuse, rape, and silence as an African American

woman in a society that condones all blacks, especially women. The Color Purple

reveals the inner strength of it s main character, celie.

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