

Before I discuss the themes of race and gender in *Color Purple* and *Beloved*, let us take a quick look at the works.

TONI MORISSON'S BELOVED

The book is the story of Sethe and her daughter Denver after their escape from slavery. Their home in Cincinnati is haunted by a revenant, whom they believe to be the ghost of Sethe's daughter. Because of the haunting—which often involves objects being thrown around the room—Sethe's youngest daughter Denver is shy, friendless, and housebound, and her sons, Howard and Buglar, have run away from home by age 13. Baby Suggs, the mother of Sethe's husband Halle, dies in her bed soon afterward.

Paul D, one of the slaves from Sweet Home—the plantation where Baby Suggs, Sethe, Halle, and several other slaves once worked—arrives at Sethe's home and tries to bring a sense of reality into the house. In attempting to make the family forget the past, he forces out the spirit. He seems successful at first; he even brings housebound Denver out of the house for the first time in years. But on the way back, they encounter a young woman sitting in front of the house, calling herself *Beloved*. Paul D is suspicious and warns Sethe, but she is charmed by the young woman and ignores him. Gradually, Paul D is forced out of Sethe's home by a supernatural presence.

When made to sleep outside in a shed, Paul D is cornered by *Beloved*. While they have sex, his mind is filled with horrific memories from his past. Overwhelmed with guilt, Paul D tries to tell Sethe about it but cannot, and instead says he wants her pregnant. Sethe is elated, and Paul D resists *Beloved* and her influence over him. But when he tells friends at work about his plans to start a new family, they react fearfully. Stamp Paid reveals the reason for the community's rejection of Sethe.

When Paul D asks Sethe about it, she tells him what happened: After escaping from Sweet Home and reaching her waiting children at her mother-in-law's home, Sethe was found by her master, who attempted to reclaim her and her children. Sethe grabbed her children, ran into the tool shed, and tried to kill them all. She succeeded only in killing her youngest daughter by running a saw along her neck. Sethe claims that she was "trying to put my babies where they would be safe." The revelation is too much for Paul D and he leaves. Without him, sense of reality and time moving forward disappears.

Sethe comes to believe that Beloved is the two-year-old daughter she murdered, whose tombstone reads only "Beloved". Sethe begins to spend carelessly and spoil Beloved out of guilt. Beloved becomes angry and more demanding, throwing tantrums when she doesn't get her way. Beloved's presence consumes Sethe's life to the point where she becomes depleted and sacrifices her own need for eating, while Beloved grows bigger and bigger.

In the novel's climax, youngest daughter Denver reaches out and searches for help from the black community, and some of the village women arrive at the house to exorcise Beloved. At the same time, a white man comes into view, the same man that helped Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, by offering her the house as a place to stay after Halle bought her from their owner. He has come for Denver, who asked him for a job, but Denver has not shared this information with Sethe. Unaware of the situation, Sethe attacks the white man with an ice pick and is brought down by the village women. While Sethe is confused and has a "re-memory" of her master coming again, Beloved disappears. The novel resolves with Denver becoming a working member of the community and Paul D returning to Sethe and pledging his love.

ALICE WALKER'S THE COLOR PURPLE

Celie, the protagonist and narrator of *The Color Purple*, is a poor, uneducated, fourteen-year-old black girl living in rural Georgia. Celie starts writing letters to God because her father, Alphonso, beats and rapes her. Alphonso has already impregnated Celie once. Celie gave birth to a girl, whom her father stole and presumably killed in the woods. Celie has a second child, a boy, whom her father also steals. Celie's mother becomes seriously ill and dies. Alphonso brings home a new wife but continues to abuse Celie.

Celie and her bright, pretty younger sister, Nettie, learn that a man known only as Mr. _____ wants to marry Nettie. Mr. _____ has a lover named Shug Avery, a sultry lounge singer whose photograph fascinates Celie. Alphonso refuses to let Nettie marry, and instead offers Mr. _____ the "ugly" Celie as a bride. Mr. _____ eventually accepts the offer, and takes Celie into a difficult and joyless married life. Nettie runs away from Alphonso and takes refuge at Celie's house. Mr. _____ still desires Nettie, and when he advances on her she flees for her own safety. Never hearing from Nettie again, Celie assumes she is dead.

Mr. _____'s sister Kate feels sorry for Celie, and tells her to fight back against Mr. _____ rather than submit to his abuses. Harpo, Mr. _____'s son, falls in love with a large, spunky girl named Sofia. Shug Avery comes to town to sing at a local bar, but Celie is not allowed to go see her. Sofia becomes pregnant and marries Harpo. Celie is amazed by Sofia's defiance in the face of Harpo's and Mr. _____'s attempts to treat Sofia as an inferior. Harpo's attempts to beat Sofia into submission consistently fail, as Sofia is by far the physically stronger of the two.

Shug falls ill and Mr. _____ takes her into his house. Shug is initially rude to Celie, but the two women become friends as Celie takes charge of nursing Shug. Celie finds herself infatuated with Shug and attracted to her sexually. Frustrated with Harpo's consistent attempts to subordinate her, Sofia moves out, taking her children. Several months later, Harpo

opens a juke joint where Shug sings nightly. Celie grows confused over her feelings toward Shug.

Shug decides to stay when she learns that Mr. _____ beats Celie when Shug is away. Shug and Celie's relationship grows intimate, and Shug begins to ask Celie questions about sex. Sofia returns for a visit and promptly gets in a fight with Harpo's new girlfriend, Squeak. In town one day, the mayor's wife, Miss Millie, asks Sofia to work as her maid. Sofia answers with a sassy "Hell no." When the mayor slaps Sofia for her insubordination, she returns the blow, knocking the mayor down. Sofia is sent to jail. Squeak's attempts to get Sofia freed are futile. Sofia is sentenced to work for twelve years as the mayor's maid.

Shug returns with a new husband, Grady. Despite her marriage, Shug instigates a sexual relationship with Celie, and the two frequently share the same bed. One night Shug asks Celie about her sister. Celie assumes Nettie is dead because she had promised to write to Celie but never did. Shug says she has seen Mr. _____ hide away numerous mysterious letters that have arrived in the mail. Shug manages to get her hands on one of these letters, and they find it is from Nettie. Searching through Mr. _____'s trunk, Celie and Shug find dozens of letters that Nettie has sent to Celie over the years. Overcome with emotion, Celie reads the letters in order, wondering how to keep herself from killing Mr. _____.

The letters indicate that Nettie befriended a missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine, and traveled with them to Africa to do ministry work. Samuel and Corrine have two adopted children, Olivia and Adam. Nettie and Corrine become close friends, but Corrine, noticing that her adopted children resemble Nettie, wonders if Nettie and Samuel have a secret past. Increasingly suspicious, Corrine tries to limit Nettie's role within her family.

Nettie becomes disillusioned with her missionary experience, as she finds the Africans self-centered and obstinate. Corrine becomes ill with a fever. Nettie asks Samuel to tell her

how he adopted Olivia and Adam. Based on Samuel's story, Nettie realizes that the two children are actually Celie's biological children, alive after all. Nettie also learns that Alphonso is really only Nettie and Celie's step-father, not their real father. Their real father was a storeowner whom white men lynched because they resented his success. Alphonso told Celie and Nettie he was their real father because he wanted to inherit the house and property that was once their mother's.

Nettie confesses to Samuel and Corrine that she is in fact their children's biological aunt. The gravely ill Corrine refuses to believe Nettie. Corrine dies, but accepts Nettie's story and feels reconciled just before her death. Meanwhile, Celie visits Alphonso, who -confirms Nettie's story, admitting that he is only the women's stepfather. Celie begins to lose some of her faith in God, but Shug tries to get her to reimagine God in her own way, rather than in the traditional image of the old, bearded white man.

The mayor releases Sofia from her servitude six months early. At dinner one night, Celie finally releases her pent-up rage, angrily cursing Mr. _____ for his years of abuse. Shug announces that she and Celie are moving to Tennessee, and Squeak decides to go with them. In Tennessee, Celie spends her time designing and sewing individually tailored pairs of pants, eventually turning her hobby into a business. Celie returns to Georgia for a visit, and finds that Mr. _____ has reformed his ways and that Alphonso has died. Alphonso's house and land are now hers, so she moves there.

Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel marry and prepare to return to America. Before they leave, Samuel's son, Adam, marries Tashi, a native African girl. Following African tradition, Tashi undergoes the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring. In solidarity, Adam undergoes the same facial scarring ritual.

Celie and Mr. _____ reconcile and begin to genuinely enjoy each other's company. Now independent financially, spiritually, and emotionally, Celie is no longer bothered by Shug's passing flings with younger men. Sofia remarries Harpo and now works in Celie's clothing store. Nettie finally returns to America with Samuel and the children. Emotionally drained but exhilarated by the reunion with her sister, Celie notes that though she and Nettie are now old, she has never in her life felt younger.

Now let us discuss the themes of race and gender.

THEME OF RACE

COLOR PURPLE:

The Color Purple has a lot to say about race in America. At the beginning of the novel, Celie is extremely downtrodden—almost to the point of being defeated. As an African-American female living in the pre-Civil Rights South, she sees nothing in her race to be particularly proud of. Remember, these were the days of legal segregation and Jim Crow laws; African-Americans were frequently the targets of bitter discrimination. Black women in this book are far too often victims of violent crimes committed by white men. However, as Celie learns about the rich cultures and civilizations that existed in Africa and reimagines her own vision of God, she gains some pride in her ethnic heritage.

BELOVED:

The whole novel moves around the pathetic condition of race discrimination, which has resulted in the sense of alienation in the blacks.

The cruel situations of Kentucky plantations are one of the representative situations of other parts of the country. Sethe's position is one of the representative lives of slave women throughout the Africa. Their life was drowned in emotional as well as physical hardships. The

very alienated position of Sethe resembles the alienation of all slave women. Not only Sethe but also other characters has become the victim of alienation. All slave women who worked in the fields were separated from their small children who might be left in the case of older, physically weak women.

Morrison decorates her novel with the sense of alienation of blacks due the bitter race discrimination prevailed in the African society. It moves around the alienated position of all black slaves. Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, reveals clearly about the long rooted brutality of whites over the blacks. Sethe is physically and emotionally alienated from her husband Halle, from her children, from her mother and, from her society and most vitally from herself. Her husband is separated from her when they run away from the Sweet Home. She has to kill her eldest daughter and make her physically distant from her because of the brutality of slavery. Her two sons are afraid of her as she might kill them too. So, they live with Baby Suggs. Sites society thinks that she has committed the unforgivable crime by killing her child so she is boycotted from the society. In this sense, she is physically alienated. Her emotional alienation is more torturous. She is emotionally alienated from the love of a mother. She loves her children, but due to lack of knowledge and experience of the proper way to show love, she thinks that killing is better than to let her kids live in slavery. She misses her dead child, Beloved. When she appears in the novel, Sethe does everything to satisfy her emotional hunger of love. On the other hand, the ghost Beloved too is emotionally alienated. She feels the injustice of being killed by her mother instead of getting love and care. So, to be away from her emotional alienation she comes to be compensated from Sethe.

Her daughters, son and other characters also represent about how they were alienated from their families and became the victim of the racial discrimination of the African race. There is not any sense of personality, identity of blacks in any part of the novel because for blacks it was the matter of very far distance in Africa. Their concern was only about how to

be less victimized by their masters and to be a bit safer from them. So their whole life was grasped by the inhuman behavior of their white masters.

Thus Morrison's one of the major concerns in the novel *Beloved* is to depict the sense of alienated position of all African blacks by focusing on their position with information about how all the blacks in Africa are always forced to live in alienating position being always far from parents, family and their friends.

By the same token, Morrison also focuses on how African blacks are always drowned in the vast ocean of racial discrimination throughout their life being the extreme victim of their masters' inhuman behaviors sexually, physically, mentally and emotionally. On the one hand, their masters had sucked the blood of their black slaves by compelling them to work very strenuously and on the other hand, they had exploited them not only as workers but also as the potential breeder of new property. Those children who were born out of their slave were legally belonged to their slave-owner. In this sense too, black women slaves were sexually exploited by their owner. The slaves were treated as animals and labelled them as a commodity to be sold and bought. The nephews of schoolteacher sucked Sethe breast as if she was a milking machine or a milking cow.

So everywhere we can get the bitter experience of slavery in the novel. Neither blacks' economic condition is good nor is their social, political and practical situation is in their favor. It is all because of their color. Economically too they are in a very poor situation, they are always drowned in the vast ocean of debt and socially too they could not establish their own identity in African society. They are born in debt, grow in debt and die in debt. They can't get the actual vision of outer world due to their color and they are completely alienated from their society, family and other different aspects, which are essential for an individual.

THEME OF GENDER

COLOR PURPLE:

The novel is also an extended meditation on the nature of men, women, and their expected gender roles. In the beginning, Celie is expected to serve her abusive father, and, later, her husband Mr. _____, and Nettie, not wanting to do either, runs away. But Nettie sacrifices the job generally reserved for women—motherhood—in order to educate herself and work for Samuel and Corrine during their missionary labors in Africa. Celie, meanwhile, has two children, whom Nettie then raises in Africa, coincidentally—Celie only leaves behind the drudgery of housework when Shug comes to live with her and Mr. _____ and begins to teach Celie about her body and about other ways of living, outside the control of men. Celie and Squeak, Harpo's second wife, end up living with Shug in Memphis, and Celie is able to start her pants-making company.

The men in the novel, however, experience a different trajectory. It is expected that black men of this time, especially in the South, work in the fields, and that women obey them absolutely. But after Shug and then Celie leave him behind, Mr. _____ realizes just how much he took for granted and how much he, and his son Harpo, have relied on the work of women throughout their lives. Similarly, in Africa, Nettie manages both to achieve the gender role initially expected of her (by marrying the widower Samuel), and keeps working and forging her own path in life, eventually spending over twenty years as a missionary in Africa.

The end of the novel, then, celebrates both the continuity of family, populated both by strong female characters and repentant male ones, and the fact that "families," and the roles

within them, are fluid, often overlapping, and part of a long arc toward equality and greater understanding, even if that arc is often dotted with tragedy, abuse, and neglect.

BELLOVED:

While reading a book through the feminist lens, it is important to try to recognize gender roles and those that differentiate from males and females. This could be how relationships between men and women are portrayed in the text, or how power is described and who holds most of the power in the text. After this, the reader will be able to have a better understanding of the author's intentions and purpose for adding gender roles in the book.

There is a scene in the book where Paul D, an old friend that used to work at the same slave house as Sethe, was being forced by Beloved to have sex with her. Paul D describes this experience as "...he had come to be a rag doll - picked up and put back down anywhere anytime by a girl young enough to be his daughter." He also described it as "it was more than appetite that humiliated him and made him wonder if school teacher was right. It was being moved, placed where she wanted him, and there was nothing he was able to do about it" (148).

During this scene from *Beloved*, Paul D starts questioning his manhood and starts asking himself if he really is the person in charge in the house. Paul D uses the word "rag doll" to explain how he felt in the situation. A rag doll is basically a fragile and soft doll made from scraps of cloth and the author chose to use this word to describe how Paul D felt in the situation where he did not have any control because Beloved was controlling him and his actions. In this part of the text, the female holds more power than the male because she is forcing him to do something to her that he does not feel comfortable doing. He describes

himself as a “rag doll” being weak and unable to defend himself or stand up for himself against her. This experience reminded Paul D of when he was back in Sweet Home and the schoolteacher would always intimidate him and make his self esteem about his manhood lower. During that time period there was an ideal image that a man had to follow in order to be a “real man”. The impact that this experience had on Paul D was that after he felt the need to prove to himself, and everyone else, that he was still a “real man”. This text supports the idea that gender roles were really important for men in the 1800’s because men liked to keep their image as strong and powerful guys.

This proves that females hold more power in this text because Beloved made a guy insecure about himself and made him question his whole manhood, which requires a lot of power to be able to do that. Reading through the feminist lens, the reader can tell that the author uses irony to give out the message of who had the most power in the text. The author uses irony by instead of giving all the power to the man, which is usually what happens, she gave all the power to the woman since Beloved was the one controlling the man and abusing of him and not the other way around. When audiences hear stories about rape, they usually expect to hear that the woman was the victim. For this text the author manages to create a twist by using irony and switching the roles of who plays the victim this time. This creates a whole new set of gender roles in the book.