

THE COLOR PURPLE, by Alice Walker

The Color Purple, by Alice Walker, is a very intense book to read. By intense, I mean it is a book touching very difficult and hard aspects of life of a poor, black oppressed woman in the early twentieth century. Walker does social criticism in her novel, mostly criticizing the way black women were treated in the early twentieth century. Walker uses the life experiences of Celie to illustrate her social criticism.

The Color Purple is not written in the style of most novels. The author does not tell us everything about the characters, the setting, and why the characters behave the way they do. The novel is written in a series of letters, not dated. There are large gaps between some letters, but this is not revealed by the author; we have to figure it out ourselves. The letters are written in what Walker calls black folk language, which also reduces the easiness of the reading.

When the novel opens, Celie is a young black girl living in Georgia in the early years of the twentieth century. She is an uneducated girl, and writes her letters in common language. Celie is entering her adolescence believing she was raped by her father and that he killed both of their children. She writes to God, because she has no one else to write to. She feels that what happened to her is so terrible that she can only talk about it to someone she feels loves her. She knows her sister Nettie loves her, but she is too young to understand. Celie believes only to God may she talk honestly and openly about her suffering. Celie is not, however, at this point, complaining to God, she is simply confiding in him.

Celie was born into a poor family; her mother was sick most of the time, mentally and physically; there were too many children in the family; and Celie was abused by the man she believed was her father. Celie feels used and abused, but does not understand why. So many bad things have happened to Celie that she lacks self esteem and confidence. Celie does not even feel she is worth enough to sign her name at the end of the letters.

Slowly, Celie evolves into a mature woman with great confidence, but not before her sister Nettie is taken away from her, and she marries a cruel man who really wanted to marry Nettie. For a long time, Celie is almost a slave to her husband, until her husband's mistress comes to live with them to recuperate from a sickness, and Celie becomes her nurse. Shug is a strong woman, and encourages Celie to grow stronger. At the same time, Sofia, Celie's daughter in law, shows Celie to stand up for herself and fight prejudice and injustice, and fight.

By the end of the novel, Celie's new strength pays off, because she is able to live happily with the people she loves. She reunites with Nettie and her two children, who have been raised by Nettie. Celie learned to fight, to stand up for herself, and she was rewarded. Celie was able to survive physically and spiritually, and is able to mature into a full, modern twentieth century woman.

In The Color Purple, Alice Walker is able to illustrate the abuse, neglect, and oppression a black woman had to go through in the early twentieth century, but she also illustrates how a woman must fight back to regain the self esteem and confidence lost way back in the early adolescent years. The Color Purple is a story about growth, endurance, and fight, all nurtured by love.

