The Notion of Resistance in ( Meridian and The Color Purple )

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Abstract

Black men suffer from racial segregation, humiliation and exploitation. On the other side the black women face double marginalization due to racial segregation and sexual oppression. The black women and their own children may be considered as assets belonging to the white masters. The black women suffer from rape and abuse at the hands of men who treat them as sexual objects necessary for sustenance of the planting system in the Southern region before the Civil War. After liberation, the Jim Crow system separated whites and blacks in the South. The black women worked either as tenants on lands owned by white masters, or as domestics in white houses. They gained low dividends that left them in deprivation and poverty.

Keywords

rational segregation, humiliation, Civil War

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1. Introduction

In general, The woman suffers from various kinds of oppression and injustice, especially the black female who faces another thing which is the racism. Patricia Collins corroborates that in her book " Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination ". "portraying Black women solely as passive, unfortunate recipients of racial and sexual abuse stifles notion that Black women can actively work to change . . . [ their ] circumstances and bring about changes in . . . [ their ] lives " ( 11 ).

We can find out a good example to the positive woman in meridian as a protagonist in Alice Walker’s novel Meridian and also in The Color Purple represented by the main character Celie. Meridian’s personal goal is to get a social change. She was born in a southern black community, she is expected to accept the racial and sexual oppression in her society and even she can’t ask either sexist traditions or the racist politics that dominate the south. The black female conflicts against sexual and racial unfairness to reach her rights as a woman is highlighted through the novel’s narrative structure.

Alice walker’s novel ( Meridian ) concentrates on the protagonist’s personal history with the collective history of the south during the decade of the sexist and marked the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The development of the events of the novel represents the rebellious life of Meridian Hill the political activism a woman with dark complexion who fights to get two things, the first one is her past and the second thing is the obstructions of her community which determine her future life.

Meridian consists of thirty-four sections, each one has its own title, which are not construct in chronological arrangement. In spite of all the events of Meridian happen at the period of sixties century but it starts with a point of time in the next century ( seventieth ) when the Movements of Civil Rights are over and black activists begin a modern strategy of drastic resistance. However, Meridian persists to fulfill the non-violent norms of the movement in the South.

"The Last Return " is the title of the first chapter of Meridian that starts in the seventieth century while Truman Held ( an anterior Civil Right factor ) searches for Meridian in Chicokema ( Meridian’s homeland ) and then he found her with a set of black boys to see a preserved mummy in a circus cart where the blacks are prevent from watching that recital in that specific day. Prevailed by the stocks of white inhabitants, the city has an old legion battleship fetched in the period of sixties century to save the local white people in the town. Chronological events of Meridian are not proceeded in the plot of the novel, although it starts with the period of seventies but it moves back ten years to the sixties when the protagonist ( Meridian ) participated with the movements of Civil Rights in her town.

Christian, Barbara corroborates in her book " Novels for Everyday Use " that, "the sequence of events [ in Meridian ] is itself a visual representation of term revolution, the moving backward to move forward beyond the point at which you began " ( 74 ). Meridian tries in this scene to refuse white powers in the southern region and supervised by a flashback show which occurred before ten years in New York City when the black revolutionists questioned Meridian if she might perpetrate a crime to fulfill their aims. Meridian couldn’t answer the question and she kept silent. She remembers some events in her previous life in the southern region and she begins singing that ordinary black citizens used to enjoy through singing and appreciate the value of life.
Meridian remembered the devastation of the culture of Red Indian inhabitants by the whites for many years ago and she connected that with her father’s song about racial oppression.

In Meridian’s memory, she connects the old historical events of the Indians who live in the United States of America with something happens in her own life when she can’t insert Jesus in an embarrassment situation who was alienated from Meridian’s mother who was a moderate religious lady. From Meridian’s childhood, the first section takes the reader to the present time as Truman and Meridian have a discussion in her apartment in the southern region about the importance of practicing non-violent immovability in the community that no longer respect it. At the end of the first chapter Meridian refuses to trace the strategy of violent resistance adopted by Truman and most black revolutionaries at that time.

Then the events of the novel comes back to the previous life of Meridian to shed light on the divers sides of her personal life before her participation in the Civil Rights Movement that effect on her current function as a politician or as a feminist: there’s a similar concept between Meridian’s linkage with her mother’s life when she was a young girl, her precocious wedlock and her unsuccessful try as a youthful lady. Meridian’s conflict to face the racial and sexual oppression in her community at the period of the sixtieth century as well as her linkage with other persons in the movements due to make the text continuous to move backward and forward in time tracing Meridian’s aim as a member in civil rights movement to fight against the sexist and racist politics of her community in the period of sixties and also her relation with others as members in the movement; fundamentally Truman as a black male and Lynne as white female. The beginning of the novel is similar to its end because of all the events happen with Meridian at the period seventies in her home town Georgia, where Meridian tries to help the local black southern citizens and convince them to participate in the election.

Meridian rejects to embrace the mores of black motherhood that her mother treated holy and gives up the loads of wedlock to persist her teaching. In her community, she was valued by all the local citizens as a symbol for good motherhood who relinquishes on her education for sake of her new family as a good mother and wife. However, she had the same kind of static life that her mother suffered from it in the past:

[Meridian] had been in hard labor for a day and a half. Then, when she brought the baby home, it had suffered through a month of colic gasping and screaming and robbing her of sleep. So this, she mumbled, is what slavery is like. Rebelling, she began to dream each night, just before her baby sent out his cries, of ways to murder him. (Meridian 63).

Meridian doesn’t want to repeat her mother’s experiment with miserable circumstances in her life that suffered from them in the past. Meridian refuses the patriarchal subjugation of females, she resists the legendary concept of the black mother who victimizes her personal desire for the sake of her sons. Meridian, hence, relinquishes her first child and abort the second one (who comes from her relationship with her lover Truman Held). Then, she tries to avoid the idea of birth new sons in her life.

Meridian’s resistance to the sexual stereotyping of the woman with black complexion is set against Lynne’s subjection to her sexual utilization by the black members of the Civil Rights Movements. Lynne is the contradictory character of Meridian in the novel. She is a naive white lady who romanticizes the conflicts of black citizens and considers the black people as an aesthetic thing or a piece of art rather than a real human being: "To Lynne the black people of the South were art... The songs, the dances, the food, the speech. Oh! she was so romantic, so in love with the air she breathed, the honeysuckle that grew just beyond the door." (Meridian 128 0). Lynne’s feelings, however, deny the humanity of black people and contradict the goals of the movement. She feels guilty because she is a white woman, and, therefore, hardly resist Tommy Odds’ attempt at raping her:

There was a moment when she knew that she could force him from her. But it was a flash. She lay instead thinking of his feelings, his hardships, of the way he was black and belonged to people who lived without hope; she thought about the loss of his arm. She felt her own guilt. (Meridian 160)

Adrienne Rich’s concept about the development of the sexual love relationship between Shug and Celie in Alice Walker’s novel (The Color Purple) is so clear in his book "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" when he illustrates the "lesbian continuum" which Celie utilizes to describe the sisterhood links as an act of resistance to the patriarchal influence. Rich corroborates that:

I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman—identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman... [The lesbian continuum] embrace[s] many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support. (26)

In the second novel (The Color Purple), there is an intimate lesbian relationship between two characters (Celiac and Shug) which earns a maternal and also a sexual dimension that provides Celie with the maternal love of that she was forbade earlier in her miserable life. Their first meeting "involves both women in a reciprocal mother—infant exchange" (Abbandonato 303). Hence, Celie places the erotic and maternal affections she has for Shug in juxtaposition with both her unfulfilling relationship with her mother and her oppressive sexual relationship with mister:
Me and Shug sound asleep. Her back to me, my arms around her waist. What it like? Little like sleeping with mama, only I can’t hardly remember ever sleeping with her. . . It warm and cushiony . . . It feel like heaven is what it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr.______ at all. (CP 98)

The lesbian love relationship that Celie made with Shug doesn’t only restore Celie’s requirement for maternal emotion, it also grants her an opportunity to try the gladness of actual motherhood that she was denied when her sons were ousted from her. Although, Celie wish to nurse her children who were kidnapped by the hard hearted man (Albert) As she nurses Shug back to health when she was patient, Celie’s maternal sense, that stay inconclusive, because of the abduction of her sons, are awakened. She is allowed the nursing function that she could not accomplish either her own children or toward her patient mother. Celie expresses her maternal feelings for Shug throughout representing compassionate actions that denote care and adore, like combing her hair and washing her body:

I work on . . . [Shug] like she a doll or like she Olivia [Cелиe’s daughter]—or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat. First she say, hurry up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back against my knees. That feel just right, she say. That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. May be grandma. (CP 48)

Celie’s letters to God and then to her sister Nettie in The Color Purple is also describe her racial injustice and oppression as a black female in the southern region, constitute the main body of the text. All the letters that Celie sent them to God and Nettie depict and concentrate on her life in the South except one which depicts Celie’s short travel to Memphis with her lover (Shug). Celie’s letters are interrupted only in the second half of the novel with about twenty letters from Nettie that throw light on her life in Africa. However, the narrative which Nettie’s letters introduce is subordinate to the main narrative that explores Celie’s life in the South which covers more than eighty letters in the novel. Celie first narrates her own story in letters to God then she discovers Nettie’s letters that Mr.______ has hidden and arranges them in order by their postmarks. Hence, Nettie’s first letter is framed within a letter from Celie addressed to God. Celie describes in her letters to God the moment she holds Nettie’s letter in her hand to read it, then she cites Nettie’s letter presenting it as an embedded narrative within her letter to God:

Dear God, / This is the letter I been holding in my hand. / Dear Celie, / I know you think I am dead. But I am not. I been writing to you too, over the years, but Albert said you’d never hear from me again and since I never heard from you all this time, I guess he was right. (CP 100)

Celi’s quoting of Nettie’s full letter in her own letters to God is immediately followed, in the same letter, with a dialogue that took place between Celie and Shug about Nettie. Nettie’s letter ends as follows: “we are all coming home before the end of another year. / Your loving sister, / Nettie” (CP 100). On the same page, Celie presents her dialogue with Shug: “One night in bed Shug as me to tell her about Nettie. What she liked? Where she at? I tell her how Mr._____ try turn her head. How Nettie refuse him, and how he say Nettie have to go” (CP 100).

Celi’s manner to narrate her own story not only through her letters, but she also used to control her sister’s narrative by arranging Nettie’s letters and introducing them together within her own letters. The letters which are sent by her sister Nettie, therefore, function as a second narrative in The Color Purple. Y vonne corroborates that kind of narrative way by his article “Nettie’s letters are embedded discourse within The Color Purple. Celie arranges the letters and includes them in her narrative but presumably does not edit or revise them.” (107).

The difference of narrative levels that Nettie and Celie’s messages exemplify can be analyzed in the light of Genette’s narrative notion. In “Voice”, Genette identifies standards of narration in relation to the “diegesis” or the universe designated by the narrative. The first narrative standard, that Celie’s messages exemplify, is the “extradiegetic” level. The extradiegetic narrative is the primary narrative in which “intradiegetic” characters back, Celie, in Genette’s terminology, is an extradiegetic narrator as she is the first narrator in the novel who shows her tale in letters. If a character like Celie who is the protagonist of her messages, as a narrator she is “included …… in no diegesis but is on an exactly equal footing with the extradiegetic (real) public” (Genette 84). In other words, Celie functions as the narrator of, not as a narrator in, her letters. As a narrator, therefore, Celie is external to the “diegesis” or to the fictional world in which the narrated events occur.

According to Genetic, extradiegetic narrating can produce either a written text, like Nettie’s letters, or an oral narrative. However, Nettie’s letters also complete Celie’s narrative. According to Henry Louis Gates, the “initial caches of unreceived letters functions as a framed tale within Celie’s tale, as do Nettie’s subsequently received letters, Celie’s story” (252). For example, Celie is informed from Nettie’s letters that her two children from Alphonso, Adam and Olivia, are raised by the black missionaries Samuel and Corrine in Africa. While Nettie’s letters introduce a critical perspective on important public events like the British colonization in
Africa; Celie’s is the first voice the reader encounters and her quest for self—empowerment constitutes the primary focus of the novel.

To summarize, both novels (The Color Purple and Meridian) highlight the way black females need to resist sexual and racial oppression. Celie and Meridian have a chance to change their oppressive existence. Whereas Celie’s conflict is located primarily within the domestic field, Meridian’s immovability patriarchal oppression extends to the political realm. The main character in "The Color Purple" Celie, accomplishes growth throughout developing good links with female blacks within the domestic field. The lesbian connection between Celie and Shug Avery gives her (Celite) an important opportunity to appreciate the physical beauty and to get self-confidence. The love relationship between them (Shug and Celie) blends a maternal and sexual dimensions as it compensates for their need for motherly emotion. As Celie practices the craft of sewing and quilting with Shug and Sofia, Celie also accomplishes economic independence. The protagonist (Celite) opens a new small factory for making pants and earns her own money. She accomplishes full self-empowerment when she turns the home that she received as a legacy from her step-father, where she faced abuse and rape, into a warm and real house for her and her sister. Celie’s new society of females devastates patriarchal family sample which oppressed her as it maintains black females’ autonomy and allows black women and men to construct good links between them.

In the second novel (Meridian), the main character struggles two sides the personal aspect and the political one in order to get self-empowerment. She revolts to face the habits of a housewife, on the other hand as a devoted mother enforced on black women by her communion in the Civil Rights Movement. She confronts the sexist and racial ideologies of the movement’s male participants and their use of harshness as a strategy of community change, Meridian returns to the south to live among her citizens. Finally, the motif of resistance in Alice Walker’s novel is connected with the journey theme as her protagonists go through a journey from the south to the north and back to the south.

References:

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