

Abstract

This thesis focuses on three works of African-American female writers: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Sapphire's *Push*. The primary topic of my analysis is sexual violence, or more specifically, child sexual abuse and the trauma resulting from it. Each selected novel has a protagonist who is a victim of sexual abuse and/or rape. Their victimhood plays a significant role in their psychologies, relationships, development, and their (in)ability to live a "normal" life.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In the introduction, I explain why these aforementioned works are suitable for comparison. What follows is a brief introduction to the topic of child sexual abuse and the trauma which results from it. I also present the theoretical literature I use to support my claims in the upcoming chapters. In addition, I briefly define the terms "happy ending," "realistic ending," and "tragic ending."

The first analytic chapter studies the character of Celie in *The Color Purple*. It follows her development from a fourteen-year-old uneducated victim, to the fully formed independent survivor she becomes. Even though Celie is the only character that is serially victimized, by both her stepfather and her husband, Celie's story is one of hope. Through her abusive marriage to Albert, Celie meets and falls in love with Shug, who becomes her partner. Shug, in addition to Celie's sister Nettie, constitutes Celie's primary support. It is thanks to their unconditional love and encouragement that Celie can liberate herself from the life of abuse she has experienced. *The Color Purple* concludes in a happy ending.

The second chapter analyzes the character of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola's story is unique in the aspect of her voicelessness. Claudia, her friend, is the main narrator of Pecola's life story. As I examine in this thesis, Morrison made a deliberate choice to convey how Pecola is robbed of her perspective. Pecola's trauma is multiplied by the countless adversative events of her childhood. From her father's alcoholism and incarceration, her mother's role as Pecola's co-abuser, to Pecola's miscarriage and final disintegration of her psyche, *The Bluest Eye* presents Pecola with a tragic ending.

The third chapter discusses the evolution of Precious in *Push*. The story of Precious differs from its predecessors in various aspects. It is the most recent novel of the three, this gives it a very present and relevant feeling. Compared to Walker and Morrison, Sapphire chose the most brutal and vicious depiction of child sexual abuse. *Push* is also gifted with an overwhelming sense of realness of the story. Precious is abused from the age of two by both

her father and mother, at the age of sixteen she is pregnant for the second time and illiterate, yet, once she receives education and support from her teacher, and friends with similar life experiences, she embarks on a journey of recovery. Precious's bleak HIV diagnosis combined with her vigorous determination to heal makes the conclusion to her story a realistic ending.

The comparative chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of all three novels in relation to one another. This includes comparing the characters' individual journeys and integral psychological developments, as well as their communities and the individuals in their lives that have the power to influence their lives for better or for worse. This chapter also focuses on the literary choices of the authors and the effects they have on the evolution of the story itself.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I summarize the points I made in the previous chapters. With an emphasis on the effect and consequences these works have had on both the literary world and the survivorship community which often seeks refuge in the pages of these books.