“You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy”: The Violence of Language in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*

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Abstract

Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* dramatizes African American women’s plight through the experience of a black girl, Celie, caught in the turmoil of the patriarchal system of her community. Leaning on the epistolary form and also choosing to address the black woman’s oppression first within the black community itself, the author detaches herself from the mainstream African American literary tradition to create a personal style. One of the characteristic traits of the novel is language as a communicative tool in the characters’ interrelation. In the narrative, this tool is mostly used to oppress the female protagonists, demonstrating thus its violent aspect. But sometimes, even though very rarely in the novel, it helps the oppressed subject to claim a voice. Finally, the epistolary form serves to create more emotion in the readers and consequently produces more reaction in them.

Keywords

Violence, Language, Communication, Subject, Male, Female, Oppression.

A means of linguistic exchange, language helps people to communicate. It creates interchangeable relationships among its users. In its multidimensional conception, language operates as a unifying tool for social cohesion. To speak means to make audible one’s inner thoughts, to communicate with others. However, language sometimes goes along with violence when it has some influences – good or bad – on the person to whom it is addressed. Here, violence must metaphorically be
understood as the expression of the bad consequences of language upon the addressee. When used under its bad consequences, violence transforms language into an oppressive and devastating tool. The victim, then, submits to it through a process of psychological and moral destruction. There is always a desire behind language use. In the male/female interaction in a context of language use – of communication then –, this manifests as a search for domination from the male sex over the female one. In Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, this situation is persistently and artistically interwoven in the narrative. This paper analyses the various articulations of violence through the use of language as a place of subjugation and victimization of the subject. The purpose is to inspect the progressive but sure confinement of the subject in a discursive pattern that leaves him/her no alternative but leads to his/her ultimate moral and psychological fragmentation. Additionally, this paper deals with violence in the linguistic discourse as a catharsis that helps the individual to become conscious of his/her status of a dominated subject and accordingly undertakes the necessary action for a change – what I abusively call positive violence. Violence then becomes no more a symbol of oppression but a means of conscious awareness.

At the beginning of *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker writes: “*You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy.*” (1) This sentence, which apparently appears as an advice, is in fact, a warning and a threat to Celie, the main protagonist. It contains the substance of what I term “the violence of language” which constitutes the core of my argumentation in this paper. Through the violence of language, I seek to scrutinize the different manifestations of language as it impacts on the life of the characters – particularly female ones – and victimizes them. By advising or warning Celie not to tell anybody but God about her experience, the unidentified speaker warns her of the potential consequence this could have on her: her mother may have a heart attack or a moral shock that can certainly cause her death. Indeed, though an inevitable and common destiny for human beings, death causes both fear and trauma in them. Thus, knowing that her mother’s death will affect her, Celie accepts her burden and silently suffers. The violence of language, therefore, evolves in the act which aims to smother the unspeakable of the physical and
verbal abuse she is made to experience.

In his article “Violence and Language” (1974) republished by Joseph Bien, Paul Ricœur argues the interrelation and intermediation between language and violence:

Violence has its meaning in its other: language. And the same is true reciprocally. Speech, discussion, and rationality also draw their unity of meaning from the fact that they are an attempt to reduce violence. A violence that speaks is already a violence trying to be right: it is a violence that places itself in the orbit of reason and that already is beginning to negate itself as violence. (33)

Applied to *The Color Purple*, the above citation helps comprehend that the reality in the characters’ interplay is one that puts most of the female characters in a position of dominated beings and demeans them. As such, it does not reduce violence *per se* but presents it, as Ricœur argues, as a desire to dominate, the attempt to deprive the other of freedom or of expression; it is racism and imperialism (32). Throughout the novel, there is more than the first level understanding of racism and imperialism. What is at stake is not that ideology of resentment some people develop against others or imperialism as that desire to conquer a territory and exert one’s authority on it. Still, it is not that situation in which the conquered territory or people is subdued and forced into political, economic, and cultural domination which often leads to alienation. Racism and imperialism, here, rather disclose the idea of categorization, victimization and the climate of omnipresent domination that overwhelms black women.

Even though male lust for domination can be read as the development of a cultural ideology when set in the context of gender relations, what can be examined in *The Color Purple* as racism and imperialism is the will to negate the other and prevent him/her from expressing himself/herself, denying his/her freedom of speech. It is at this point that my second reference to Ricœur’s assertion takes all its significance. Through male attitude, the black woman’s liberty and freedom of speech and expression are confiscated. As a result, she cannot think and act for herself but conform to what patriarchal culture
or patriarchal social order command her to do.

Significantly, the strategy of male domination is reflected in the conversation between the male characters and female ones. Celie’s experience, indeed, appears as a cross she must carry not only to save her mother from an unexpected or a premature death but also to avoid her own moral and psychological breakdown. Her victimization finds its first expression in her denunciation of Pa’s attitude toward her: “He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t.” (1) Also, Pa’s command to her during their sexual relation adds to her oppression: “You better shut up and git used to it.” (2) The semantics of Pa’s words here highlights violence as it is voiced to make the heroine suffer physically, psychologically and morally. Pa’s words even reveal his cynicism. For him, in fact, Celie is a sexual object he can use as he pleases. Like a slave, he forces her to accept his assaults even when they hurt her in her flesh and her soul. Thus, in the same way capitalist and patriarchal slavery system dehumanized slaves while making them constructed subjects, Pa reduces Celie to the status of nothingness and tries to shape her identity according to the patriarchal standards of his community. In such circumstances, as a subaltern and an “other,” Celie cannot construct her “self” as an independent subject. All her acts are framed by a male dominant culture of which Pa and the other male protagonists are key actors.

Metaphorically, the social organization in Walker’s text can be compared to a musical orchestra where male characters are the masters who give the tempo. In their privileged position, they constantly and urgently call upon the female characters to follow the tempo through their obedience and submissiveness if they want to avoid their being crushed down. This constant call for refocusing also helps avoid the disorganization of the group order. Undoubtedly, Walker’s arrangement is done on purpose. She wants to draw more attention on black women’s plight while defining black males as “wolves” for them. Celie’s ill-treatment, particularly in the hands of wicked and brutal men, calls for sympathy and this is indubitably one of the main purposes Walker wants her work to achieve. The male characters’ physical as well as verbal brutality is all meant to subdue the female ones so as to keep them under their yoke.
When Shug Avery asks Harpo to help Celie in the household, the latter’s reply illustrates the paradigm of cultural supremacy: men always seek to demonstrate and decipher violence as aftermaths of discourse, of uttered words. The conversation between both protagonists reads:

Time for you to help out some.  
Women work, he say.  
What? She say.  
Women work. I’m a man.  
You’re a trifling nigger, she say. (22)

This conversation does not simply put forward Harpo’s refusal to help Celie but a substantial manifestation of male chauvinism to define the woman as a domestic worker upon whose shoulders all the domestic tasks should rest. The repetition of the phrase “women work” (two times) adds to this male chauvinism. Harpo’s insistence that only women must perform domestic tasks demonstrates his attachment to phallic power. The violence in Harpo’s language is that which creates and widens the bridge between Celie and him and to a large extent, displays gender relations as ones of dominant/dominated. By stating that only women must perform domestic tasks, Harpo defines the dynamics and politics of the dominance within black community following a downward pattern: man occupies the upper position while the woman occupies the lower level in the paradigmatic scheme. For Harpo, it seems, this hierarchical pattern must not change because this would mean overturning the gender relations so that man would lose his privileged position.

Harpo’s reaction, on the other hand, testifies to discourse as an expression of power. The words he utters inform about his intention and his claim of a position. And when we know that any expression of power implicitly entails a struggle which itself contains violence not as a manifestation of uncontrolled and contradicting forces but as positioning, we clearly understand that Harpo seeks to position himself in the discursive system of his community. By opposing Shug’s injunction to help Celie, Harpo refuses what he considers as a reversal of the patriarchal norms. By the same token, he advocates the respect of the
traditional social order which defines the woman’s role in the private sphere.

From her part, Celie’s inaction, passivity, even her impossibility to express herself as an independent subject before Shug Avery encourages her to face her oppression, also aids to Harpo’s desire of power as black male’s strategy of (re)positioning within his community after his emasculation by white dominant culture. Indeed, unable to face the white racist world and its dehumanizing effects both on himself and on the black female as a race, the black male transposes racial struggle in the field of gender. In so doing, his incapability becomes a capability, his failure a success, given that the patriarchal system grants him a privilege over the black woman. Harpo reproduces such type of characters for whom the systematic refusal to perform domestic tasks constitutes a means to claim a lost masculinity and show that they still have the situation under their control within the family circle. The protesting and disgusting discourse aids to reject their emasculation and replace the domestic tasks at the core of traditional gender roles. The violence that ensues from this relates to the fight for the re-appropriation of the phallic discourse that Harpo strongly advocates.

Celie’s attitude translates what, in the context of gender theory, sociolinguist Alexandra Sîrghi terms in her article “Insécurité linguistique des femmes dans l’espace publique,” “the theory of the mute group.” (2011: 310, my translation) In this work, she shows how women lack, or put differently, how they are deprived of freedom of speech and expression in the public sphere. Generally, one is said to be in a state of insecurity when one is under the influence of forces that threaten to overwhelm one. In The Color Purple, this insecurity is not essentially physical though this form occurs in the plot. It is also emotional and psychological and manifests in the form of linguistic interaction where women are belittled and imposed lines of conduct. Black women’s linguistic insecurity, therefore, would mean that they cannot control the linguistic codes in their interaction with the male protagonists. Celie, one of the essential victims of this linguistic insecurity is caught in the trap of patriarchy and is conditioned to accept her victimization. Her language in most of her letters is not simply a pure complaint about her situation. It is part of this conditioning to fit the social norms which command her to
remain silent. By depicting men’s brutality and wickedness, Celie also confesses her incapability to control the linguistic codes of her community. If her letters serve to denounce her ill-treatment, the fact that they do not insist on her own actions to overcome it testifies to her incapability and characterizes her as a mute subject.

Indeed, according to the theory of the mute group, in many societies, two conflicting linguistic canons (male and female) are opposed. And as members of the dominant group, men’s linguistic canon is taken for the dominant canon while women belong to the group qualified as the dominated one, and constitute, thus, the “mute group.” The members of the mute group are deprived of freedom of expression or they evolve according to the linguistic norms of the dominant group. It ensues then that as a member of the mute group, Celie cannot speak as an independent subject. If she dares to speak, she must comply with the patriarchal norms of her community. This is why before Shug Avery helps her get out of her “muteness,” she suffers in the hands of men, particularly Pa and later Mr. ___.

Actually, Pa and Mr. ___’s discourse underscores violence as a tool of domination in the hands of black males. While Pa is described as an outrageous and sexual brute who assails Celie and threatens to have Nettie, Celie’s younger sister under his sexual power, Mr. ___ is also portrayed as a sexist character. Both protagonists prevent Celie and to a large extent, the female character from owning her “self.” Their language underpins Michel Foucault’s assumption in *The History of Sexuality* (referred to by bell hooks in her article “Reading and Resistance: The Color Purple”) that “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power” (Gates and Appiah, 1993: 284). Indeed, when Celie informs Mr. ___ that she is going North with Shug Avery, convinced that she will find better opportunities and living conditions there, the latter replies in a mocking way, that the North is not fit for people like her:

You’ll be back, he say. Nothing up North for nobody like you. Shug got talent, he say. She can sing. She got spunk, he say. She can talk to anybody. Shug got looks, he say. She can stand up and be notice. But what you got? You ugly. You skinny. You shape funny. You too scared to open your mouth to people. All you fit to do in Memphis is be Shug’s maid. Take out
her slop-jar and maybe cook her food. You not that good a cook either. And this house ain’t been clean good since my first wife died. And nobody crazy or backward enough to want to marry you, neither. What you gon do? Hire yourself out to farm? He laugh. Maybe somebody let you work on they railroad. (212-13)

If Mr. ___’s statement does not completely articulate Foucault’s idea, it instead sheds light on the use of language as a tool to negate the female being. The depreciating way in which he tries to persuade Celie to defer her desire to go North displays his language as an instrument of pressure.

Cели’s desire can be analyzed in light of the northward migration undertaken by thousands of Black after the Emancipation Proclamation. This was a period characterized by a great exodus of southern rural black people toward northern urban cities. But very soon, these newcomers were confronted to acute joblessness and other problems in so far as on arriving, they had only their agrarian skills that could not secure them any appropriate place in that highly competitive environment. As a consequence, many of them ended up in ghettoes and had to do menial jobs with meager revenues that could not help them meet their daily needs.

Obviously, it is in remembrance of that period that Mr. ___ invites Celie to abandon her idea of a journey North. He thinks that as a black and unskilled woman, she will know the same misfortune and live the same experience as these Blacks who migrated North in search of a promised land. He even finds it silly for Celie to imagine that she can find a way out in this environment. But the problem underlining his strategy of dissuasion is the tone in which he addresses the heroine. Instead of encouraging her, Mr. ___ rather tries to disappoint her and divert her from her dream. At this level, Walker’s suggestion to analyze the black problem first within the black community itself is significant and strategically innovative. As a black, she does acknowledge that her community’s problems and those of her gender are greatly caused by Whites. But she invites her people to admit that part of these difficulties are caused by black males. As such, it is important to explore this side of their common experience to thoroughly understand their history. Only
this posture, to her, is worth undertaking as it will prepare them for a real introspection that prepares the ignorant subject for self-discovery in order to make better choices. Unfortunately, Mr. ___ uses a discourse which, instead of convincing Celie, can rather push her to retract due to the devaluing and dehumanizing impact it can have on her.

Walker’s narrative process informs the style and violence as a characteristic trait of the language of many male protagonists. As mentioned earlier, *The Color Purple* has an epistolary form. Presumably, Walker uses this form to make the reader feel more implicated in her story and the discursive scheme. Celie’s letters can be classified in three main categories: the first ones are written by Celie to God. The second ones are exchanged between her and her sister Nattie to share their experience as young and black girls, and the last ones are addressed to everything in nature in which Celie hopes to find help for her suffering. But all combined, these letters relate the heroine’s and, to a larger scale, black women’s suffering in a sexist America. Silenced by the threat at the beginning of the novel, the only way for Celie to get voice is through her letters which finally happen to be a smoother way to tell her experience, to speak about what naturally appears unspeakable. Surely, talking about her experience directly to a human being would seem more dishonorable or shameful for the heroine. This is why she chooses the medium of letters. As such, she will not be face to face with her addressee. On the other hand, this process might be interpreted as an escape to face her fate or destiny. Also, this choice might reveal her search for someone who might help soothe her anxiety caused by her traumatic experience and reconstruct her fragmented soul.

The circular display of letters (to God, to everything in nature and back again to God) helps comprehend the pyramidal relation among the elements that organize the narrative structure. This display is well illustrated by the end of novel when Celie writes: “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God” (292). This pyramidal relation shows God as a central pillar to which all the other elements are first linked and second around which they evolve. In other words, God is the focal point from which everything goes and to which everything comes back.

The reference to God has a textual and stylistic importance. In the
harsh period of slavery and racial segregation, faced with the difficulties of all sorts, Blacks turned to God with the hope that He would save them. Religion then became a stepping stone and the cement of their spiritual life. Many African American writers incorporate it in their writings to emphasize the omnipresence of God as recourse. Walker is not an exception to the rule. By interweaving religion in her text, she perpetrates this importance of God among African Americans. She constructs her narrative first around God, the Supreme Being, to comply with the tradition that God is at the creation of everything. Then, the narrative moves from God to human beings when Celie writes to her sister. This shift shows the unsteady character of human beings’ faith when they think that God is hesitant to answer their call. Later, the narrative moves to everything when Celie thinks that she may find a solution to her suffering in any creation of the world. Finally, it moves back to God. Stylistically, God is used as a metaphor of redemption and hope in times of difficulties. The incorporation of spirituality in the text aids Walker to insist on the importance of spiritual belief in an America caught in the fraught of gender and racial intolerance and the destruction of social mores. To her, the return to the “sacred” through attachment to God helps recreate true brotherhood that goes beyond racial and gender boundaries and that African Americans seem to have let aside because of the hostilities they are faced with.

The reference to God also highlights the place of religion as a redemptive tool for African Americans to face their plight. In terms of violence, this reference stresses the impact of spiritual language on the individual. Here, it deals with the figurative violence of language. Violence, in this context, articulates the idea that victims must accept their victimization while hoping for a divine creator who would understand their cry and save them. In Celie’s case, she must turn to God as a savior and avoid telling her experience to a human being who could expand it to other people. The unidentified speaker at the beginning of the novel as well as Pa, actually know that God will never disclose the sexual assaults Celie is a victim of to anybody. This is why the unidentified speaker advises her, with a pinch of threat, not to tell anybody but God. In so doing, he forces her to keep her victimization as a secret. Celie then becomes, in postcolonial term, a subaltern, a subject
who has no voice and who is bound to behave according to his/her torturer’s will.

An interesting point in Celie’s letters is her language. The trial and error in her spelling at the beginning of the novel to find the correct grammar is very expressive: “I am fourteen years old. I am I have always been a good girl.” (1) The heroine’s age (fourteen years old) might be an excuse to her trial and error. Usually, not all the young people of her age correctly master the grammatical rules of their language, mainly when they have not been to school like Celie. In effect, Celie’s search for the appropriate grammar illustrates her difficulty to express herself and the silence in which she has so long been confined. Interestingly, her writing and then crossing of what she has written recalls slaves’ experience during slavery when they were forbidden to read and to write. Because slave masters knew that education forges the critical spirit of the individual and that it can raise protest and revolution in the educated subject, they forbade slaves to learn how to read and to write. This strategy led to severe illiteracy among slave masses and it was felt in their writing, of which young Celie’s trial and error is a good illustration. Many African American writers use this form of language (a mix of old and Standard English) in their work as a literary tradition. In so doing, they perpetuate the slave legacy and demonstrate that despite their handicap, slaves manage to talk about their experience and pass on their message.

Beside violence as a process to negate the individual, there is also what I call “positive violence,” that is to say violence which does not create physical, psychological or moral impact on the individual. In psychoanalytical terms, this type of violence helps the fragmented subject to negotiate existence and personality in a traumatic environment. It helps this subject to transcend his/her past and present condition by realizing that he/she possesses talents or skills that he/she can use to help out this personality. In The Color Purple, this violence occurs during the relationships between Shug Avery and Celie. When Shug and Celie meet for the first time, Celie is impressed by Shug’s self-dependence. In turn, Shug notices that the heroine greatly suffers from a lack of personality. In other words, her personality needs to be forged. As a result, she decides to behave as a stepmother to her. An essential step in her strategy to make Celie’s personality and individuality blossom
is when she tells her about man’s selfish desire to control everything around him:

Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself out on the other end of it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock. But this hard work, let me tell you. He been there so long, he don’t want to budge. He threaten lightening, floods and earthquakes. Us fight, I hardly pray at all. Every time I conjure up a rock. I throw it. (204)

Shug portrays man as a social brute, an egoistic and oppressing individual. He exerts such power on everything in his environment and is so attached to his privileged position that he does not want to see the female being blossomed: “He been there for so long, he don’t want to budge,” the narratives reads. Shug’s discourse is very sensitizing and purports to make Celie realize that she lives in a world which denies her the liberty to own her “self.” The consistency of her language as regards the positive aspect of violence aims to create the necessary impulse in the heroine so that she understands that her freedom is frustrated by patriarchal society. To get back her freedom, she must fight. Obviously, because Celie has been saddened and silenced for so long, such direct and revolutionary discourse can but instigate a sufficient moral and psychological strength in her to hope for a better future. She will thus change her opinion about the social norms of her community and accordingly work for a change.

Painstakingly, Shug’s influence on Celie first reproduces the ancestral figure in the works of many African American women writers, a role that Toni Morrison well points out:

[Ancestors] are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective and they provide certain kind of wisdom. How the Black writer responds to that presence interests me. (Evans, 1984: 343)

Really, Shug is neither one of Celie’s parents nor her relative.
However, her role by her side typifies this ancestor Morrison talks about. All along the narrative, she plays this benevolent, instructive, and protective role. When she meets with Celie and realizes that she is all socially and psychologically destroyed and distraught, Shug decides to take Celie under her protection without expecting anything in return. The only thing she wants from her is to become self-dependent so as to turn the page on her former condition. To this purpose, she explains her how man corrupts and dominates anything around him, including women, through the patriarchal system.

In a second analysis, Shug acts as a mother to Celie, embodying black mothers’ socialization of their daughters, which Wade-Gayles (1984) well articulates in these terms:

Black mothers do not socialize their daughters to be ‘passive’ or ‘irrational.’ Quite the contrary, they socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-dependent. Black mothers are suffocating, protective and domineering precisely because they are determined persons in society that devalues Black women (in Collins, 1991: 125-26).

The Color Purple echoes this type of characters. Shug, in fact, nurtures Celie in the same way as a mother socializes her daughter. Any action she undertakes to prepare Celie to be a respected person and face the outside world after being confined for many years is made out of personal knowledge. Like a mother, she tells Celie to beware man and his patriarchal culture because he always behaves as her “enemy.” In so doing, she embodies this sort of timeless people Morrison talks about as she watches over Celie everywhere since their first encounter. In addition, she embodies this suffocating, protective, and domineering mother Wade-Gayles describes. Here, she expects Celie to go beyond passivity and irrationality and become self-dependent and strong.

Shug’s assistance to Celie highlights Foucault’s other assertion that discourse is “also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” Through Shug’s words, Celie achieves a point of resistance, demonstrating that no one can be silenced forever. There is a point where the long silence turns out to be a strategy for resistance. And this strategy can be stimulated by an external
force. After being coached to face the hostile world, Celie attains self-assertion through resistance. Her silence turns now into voice, her fear into confidence, her invisibility into visibility. All this echoes in her last letters to her sister to tell her about her experience in Memphis with Shug with whom she learns how to manufacture pants. Thus, from a pure rural, wrecked and unskilled woman unable to do anything, Celie progressively and surely becomes a useful and self-assertive character. The narrative reveals:

I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain’t been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me. (218)

Celie’s different changes must not be read as her difficulty to make pants or a sign of her being unskilled. On the contrary, it demonstrates her desire for perfection. Because of her long invisibility, she does not want to miss the occasion she is offered to make proof of her personality and her talents. This is why she increasingly changes the parts of the pants she manufactures when she finds something she dislikes in order to give them a better design and attract more customers. Later, as their clientele enlarges over time, they decide to create a real company “Folkspants Unlimited,” and advertise it in the local magazine. Through their success, Celie becomes very happy and gets a personality and individuality, revealing Shug’s vow to make of her somebody by bringing her to Memphis: “I brought you here to […] help you get on your feet.”

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker deals with black women’s problem through the experience of Celie, her main protagonist. My concern in this essay has been twofold: first, to examine how language can produce violence as a process to subjugate and negate the individual. Second, I have tried to demonstrate how language can be a source of comfort for the fragmented subject. In both cases, the black woman, as a dominated and fragmented subject, is at the core of my argumentation. She evolves in a patriarchal environment where she is imposed silence and lines of conduct, all culminated in a sort of privation of freedom or of expression. If she dares
to claim her individuality and personality, she is automatically reminded that she is in a world wherein all the rules are set to the advantage of man. Violence, therefore, manifests in the form of psychological or moral threat that leads to the victim’s fragmentation. But sometimes, it occurs as a catalyst for the victim to blossom. In this case, the victim finds energy in her victimization and develops a sort of resistance to face his/her situation. Through Celie’s ill-treatment in the hands of Pa and Mr. ____, one discovers the negative impact of violence on the black woman. Their bitter and frustrating words against her illustrate language used as violence. Conversely, with Shug Avery, the narrative reveals the positive aspect of violence in language use. Her comforting words to Celie and her role by her side help her reconstruct her traumatic identity. The innovation with the novel is the author’s suggestion to address the black problem starting first within the black community itself.

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