

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of study

The Color Purple is one of the literary novels written by Alice Walker. The novel itself tells about the rights discriminations occurring in the black American society. Celie, the main character of the story, was depicted as a strong woman who struggled her life in the middle of pressure done by both black (male) and white society. This book generally teaches us how to treat others equally without considering their differences.

The reason why the writer chooses this book is because *The Color Purple* is considered to be Alice Walker's best novel. The strong issue discussed in the story, the different use of narration, and many other aspects in the novel make it as one of the best-seller fiction books. There are also many moral values in the novels. So, the writer tries to review this book by analyzing its strengths and weaknesses, to improve his skill on literature project.

1.2. Objective of study

The main purpose of writing this project is to review *The Color Purple* novel written by Alice Walker. The writer wants to review the idea that becomes the main issue discussed in the novel. The writer also wants to give the summary of *The Color Purple* in the next chapter to make it easier

for the readers to comprehend this project. Furthermore, the writer explains the strengths and the weaknesses of the book.

1.3. Alice Walker and her works

Alice Walker is an American author, womanist, and activist who is best known for her novel *The Color Purple*. She was born on February 9, 1952 in Eatonton, Georgia. Her father, Willie Lee Walker, was a poor farmer. While her mother, Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant worked as a maid to supplement the family income. Alice Walker married Melvyn Rosenman Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer on March 17, 1967 in New York City. Later they moved to Jackson, Mississippi, becoming "the first legally married inter-racial couple in Mississippi". They were harassed and threatened by whites, including the Ku Klux Klan. The couple had a daughter named Rebecca in 1969. Alice Walker and her daughter became estranged. Walker and her husband divorced amicably in 1976.

Alice Walker's first book of poetry was written while she was a senior at Sarah Lawrence College. In addition, her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, was published in 1970. In 1976, her second novel, *Meridian*, was published. The novel dealt with activist workers in the South during the civil rights movement, and closely paralleled to some of Alice Walker's own experiences.

In 1982, Alice Walker published what has become her best-known work, the novel *The Color Purple*. It tells about a young troubled black woman fighting her way through not only racist white culture but also

patriarchal black culture and it was a resounding commercial success. The book became a bestseller and was subsequently adapted into a critically acclaimed 1985 movie as well as a 2005 Broadway music.

Alice Walker has also written several other novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (which featured several characters and descendants of characters from *The Color Purple*). She has published a number of collections of short stories, poetry, and other published works. She expresses the struggles of black people, particularly women, and their lives in a racist, sexist, and violent society. Her writings also focus on the role of women of color in culture and history. Walker is a respected figure in the liberal political community for her support of unconventional and unpopular views as a matter of principle. Her short stories include the 1973 *Everyday Use*, in which she discussed feminism, racism and the issues raised by young black people who left their home and lose respect for their parents' culture.

CHAPTER II

SUMMARY OF *THE COLOR PURPLE*

The Color Purple begins with Celie who tells about her past. She is a black woman living with her father; her sister is named Nettie, and her ill mother. Celie is raped by his own father. Upon knowing this event, Celie's mother's illness becomes worse, and later she dies. When Celie gives birth to her child, her father steals the baby and sells her to a married couple. One day, a young man named Albert (whom Celie calls him as "Mr._____" in the story) comes to propose Nettie. However, her father does not agree and gives him Celie as a replacement. Then, Celie and Albert gets married and lives together.

Albert treats Celie badly. He often hits her for disobeying him. He also asks Celie to do chores. Her own son named Harpo also does the same thing to her. She feels lonely because Nettie already moves abroad. Celie is told to fight Albert back, but she does not have the courage to do so. One day, Harpo tells Celie that he is fallen in love with a girl named Sofia. Sofia is a different woman. She is not afraid of men, while other girls are. She even goes too far to beat Harpo. Later, Harpo's and Sofia's marriage happen inevitably due to her pregnancy. Their relationship is more stable compared to Celie's. This is because Harpo cannot beat her (Sofia was physically stronger than Harpo). Celie confess to Sofia on how she is jealous of her. Celie is jealous of her because Sofia has the courage to fight back.

One day, a famous singer named Shug Avery comes to the village and stays with Celie and Albert. Albert has a feeling toward Shug Avery although she does not care about it. Celie and Shug Avery becomes good friends. They both admire each other. Shug Avery admires Celie for her tenderness, while Celie admires Shug Avery because she finds a different life's perspective through her. Shug Avery's existence does not make Celie feel lonely since Nettie does not send her back the letters. Celie also feels safe because Albert will not beat her when Shug Avery is around.

Celie hears bad news that Sofie is arrested in jail. She is arrested because she mocks and beats the white people. Sofie's friend named Mary Agnes, tries to free her by begging to the white warden. However, she is raped instead. Harpo then personally asks the warden himself. They agree that instead of being sentenced in prison, Sofie should be mayor's (who was a white people) maid. Sofie works there for years. She also gets horrible treatment done by the mayor's family.

One day, on a Christmas, Shug Avery comes again with her new husband. Albert is disappointed was it. That night, Celie sleeps with Shug Avery. Shug asks her about her sister, Nettie. Celie tells her that she is afraid that Nettie dies because she never sends any letters. With Shug's help, Celie finally finds out that Albert hides Nettie's letters for all this time. From the letters, Celie knows that Nettie is in Africa, becoming a babysitter for Adam and Olivia. In fact, it is revealed that they both are Celie's children who were sold by Celie's father. Celie

is angry to Albert because of hiding all of Nettie's letters. Celie wants to kill him, but she is prevented by Shug.

Shug decides to move to Tennessee and she asks Celie to join her. Celie agrees to go with Shug, leaving Albert. Before they go, they visit Celie's father's house. It is revealed that he is not her own father, but a step-father. Celie and Shug move to Memphis and work there. Meanwhile, Sofie is released after becoming a maid for eleven years. Sofie and Harpo decide to go with Celie. Albert becomes weak because he stays alone. Years later, Celie finds out that Albert has transformed into a different person. He becomes a person who works hard and treats people nicely. Celie decides to forgive him because Albert changes into a different person. They both then join and live together.

One day, Nettie returns to America. She comes to Celie's house along with Adam and Olivia. Celie is very happy because she is finally able to rejoin his sister and her own children. It is revealed that Adam, Celie's son, will soon marry a woman named Tashi. Celie said that it is the happiest moment she ever had.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW

3.1. Theme

Theme is the main idea which constructs a literary work. Kennedy, in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* states that theme is the main idea which becomes the basic foundation of the literary works (1976:103). The story of *The Color Purple* focuses on the racial and gender discrimination. The story is the representation of the history of black American society. In the story, the black women are oppressed by the black men and white society as well. It is because the black women are placed in the lowest social structure. The diagram below explains about the social structure in the story:

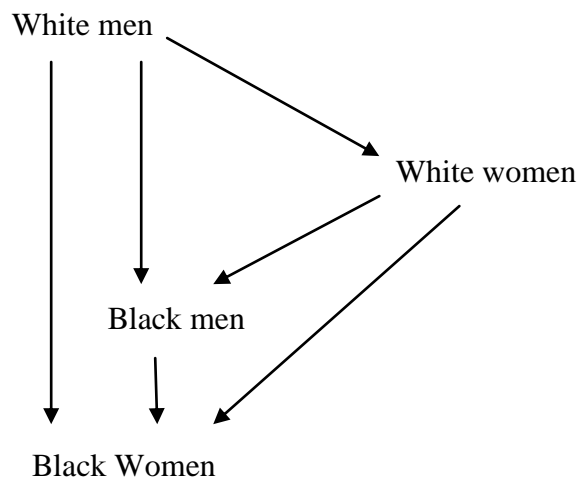


Diagram 3.1 The Social Structure of the Society

The diagram 3.1 above shows the social structure of the society which is depicted in the story. The arrows above indicate the oppression which is

done by the people. White men are placed in the top of the story, which means that they have the full authority in the society. They oppress the white women, black men, and black women. Meanwhile, the black women are placed in the bottom of the social structure. Their rights are discriminated by the others, even by the black men themselves.

The oppression in the story is mostly described in Celie's life. She was discriminated by the people around her for being a black woman,. At the young age, she was raped by her father, who later sold her child. When she was adult, she was also tortured by her own husband. She was also not allowed to work outside or study because of her status as a woman, whose duty was only to please her husband. Another oppressed character is Sophie, Celie's daughter in law. She was discriminated by the white people because of her status as a black woman. She was jailed for mocking the white people, a punishment which was considered improper.

The lessons that can be learned from the story is that we have to treat other people equally. Although they are different physically, racially, or in gender, they have rights to have the same treatment and opportunity. The book wants to tell us that every people has the same chance to attain freedom.

3.2. The Strengths of *The Color Purple*

3.2.1. Strong Issue of *The Color Purple*

One notable strength in *The Color Purple* lies in its issue. As it has been commented in the previous section, the issue of the story is the gender

and racial discrimination in the black American's society. Black women's freedoms are discriminated by the society. They are not allowed to obtain their rights in having education and participating in the market place. They are judged by the society to serve their men. Deborah L. Manson in her book *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*, has noted the oppression of black women as the following:

... the pressure upon women to leave school or college early, to marry young to produce families of five or six children, to nurture and to satisfy the every need of their husband and children, to conform to an image of sexual attractiveness promoted throughout the American media; in short, women were under pressure to believe that 'they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity' (2000:44).

Alice Walker presents this issue in a clear way. It is because the discrimination issue of the story is based on the factual events. The discrimination, which happened to the black people in America had long been regarded as one of the most important issues in human history. Therefore, the issue itself can make the book a prominent one.

The strong issue in *The Color Purple* is also influenced by the presence of the writer. It should be noted that Alice Walker herself is a black American woman. Her status, knowledge, and experiences as a black American woman allow her to be able to present the issue powerfully.

3.2.2. Plot

The plot also becomes another strength of *The Color Purple*. The plot of the story is described in a chronological order. While other books may apply this point of view, sometimes they include flashbacks. It is different

from *The Color Purple* as there is no flashback contained in the story. Every event in the story happens one after another which makes it easier for the readers to follow the plot.

3.2.3. Point of View

The Color Purple applies the first-person point of view, which means that every event is seen from the main character's perspective. It is important, because the point of view itself affects the readers' understanding. By using first-person point of view, Alice Walker manages to involve the readers in the story. The readers will feel every event just like what the main character (Celie) does. Not only that, the readers will also be able to feel that main characters' emotion for every event occurs to her.

3.2.4. Characters' Development

Character is the explanation about the figure of characters played in the story. The term 'character' here refers to the imaginative people created by the author who 'live' in a literary work. Brown and Sterling describes character as the following:

"There are not really any people in creative works; there only words. What we call 'character' is an imaginative construction based on the words and the form which the author has put together. However, there are semblance of people, and these semblance or virtual people are what we mean by character. We must be careful however, not to let 'characters take us in too completely."
(Wentworth K. Brown & Sterling Pitkin Olmstead, 1962 : 212).

Alice Walker presents the characters' development in a very good and detailed way. The characters' personality does not change suddenly, but

develops slowly after having experienced many events. Celie, for example, starts as a weak woman who is oppressed by the other people, especially her own husband. However, after experiencing many events and meeting Shug Avery, she slowly turned into a brave woman who manages to struggle from the oppressions. This is important, because the sudden change in characters' personality will confuse the readers.

3.3. The Weaknesses of *The Color Purple*

3.3.1. Writing Technique

One of the most prominent features of *The Color Purple* is the writing technique. Alice Walker uses a kind of writing technique which is called *Epistolary Method*. *Epistolary* is a kind of writing technique in which the narration and story-telling of the story takes in the form of a letter. Klarer in *An Introduction to Literary studies* states that epistolary is a technique which uses letters as a means of narration (2004:12). This means that every chapter in *The Color Purple* takes the form of a letter. The letters themselves, which describe the events that happen to her, are written by the main character (Celie).

Actually, this kind of method is very unique. *The Color Purple* is one of the few books which have this feature. Unfortunately, it becomes one of the book's weaknesses. For the readers who do not get used to this kind of method, they will find it difficult to understand the narration. This method is also rarely applied in any books, which make the readers feel bored to read it.

3.3.2. Language

Another weakness of *The Color Purple* is the use of the language. The book uses the improper English which is usually used by the black American society. The black American uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This language is was created as a product of cultural emergences by African Americans who moved from the rural South to large metropolitan areas of the North in the early and mid-twentieth century. *The Color Purple* uses this language because the story itself tells about the issue of the black American society. The improper language can be seen in every part of the book. For example: *Naw suh, she say. I ain't in no trouble* (1982:32). That sentence is improper. It should be *No sir, she say. I am not in trouble.*

Alice Walker purposely uses the language in order to give a real atmosphere when reading the book. It is because the language is used by the black people. However, it sometimes confuses the readers. Some of the readers may find the sentences difficult to understand.

3.4. Personal Opinion

The writer considers *The Color Purple* as one of the greatest books ever. This book is very interesting to read because of its high quality. The main point that makes this book great is the theme of the story. The theme concerns about historical events of human discrimination. Combined with the use of first person point of view, Alice Walker successfully brings

readers inside the story and feels the story as if they were the characters inside the book.

This book is worth reading because people can learn not only about the historical events happened in black American society, but also the moral values. The book wants to show to the readers that people have their own rights, whether they are white, black, male, or female. They have to struggle and fight in order to obtain freedom even if they are oppressed. The book also teaches us to respect and treat other people equally. Other aspects such as characters and plot are also well developed. They support and blend with the story well, which make a perfect combination.

However, readers must pay attention to the writing technique used in this book. Every chapter in this book is written in the form of a letter. At first, writer of this project finds it difficult to follow the story because of the unusual form of story-telling. However, after reading the chapters repeatedly, the writer gets used to it and finds it easier to follow. Readers may find the same problem when reading the books. However, if they are used to read this type of story-telling, they will not find any difficulties.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The writer considers *The Color Purple* as one of the greatest novels ever published. The book manages to show its transcendence as a literary work. Alice Walker as the author of this book successfully gives the readers a new experience in reading a novel. *The Color Purple* which represents the history of humanity manages to achieve the readers' attention. The readers will feel familiar when reading this book because of the factual issue represented in it.

The popularity of this book is also influenced by the strength points it has. The powerful issue which is depicted in the book becomes its main strength point. This is obvious, because Alice Walker herself is a black woman, who has decent knowledge and experiences to show the discrimination issue of the story. The first person point of view which is used in this book is also important to note. By using it, Alice Walker successfully invites the readers to feel the atmosphere of the novel. It is as if they have the same experience as the main character as the story. Meanwhile, other aspects such as plot and characters also support the book. They are very well developed, therefore, they do not confuse the readers.

However, the book also has its weakness point. One of the most prominent weakness points lies in the use of writing technique. The story-telling of the book is unusual, where every chapter is written in the form of a letter. This is actually something new because we do not find it in any other books. However, those who are not get used to this type of story-telling might find it difficult.

Another weakness point of this book is the use of improper language. The language used in this book is the same with the one used by black American. This improper language sometimes confuses the readers because they do not understand the meaning.

Overall, *The Color Purple* is a very good book. It introduces new elements in literature and gives much moral lessons.

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