

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE AND TRANSFORMATION WITHIN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Where do we see the relationship between love and transformation within contemporary literature?

Within Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, a 1982 epistolary novel, sisterly love enables the character Celie to be transformed from a patriarchally oppressed woman, into a strong woman who encapsulates feminist agency with the ability to transcend the confines of misogyny. Before Celie experiences sisterly love with Sofia, her language reflects how she understands women as inferior in society. For example, when Sofia defends herself against Harpo, Celie encourages him to physically assault Sofia more and then says 'they're fighting like two mens' when Sofia fights back. This demonstrates how foreign it is for Celie to see a woman defend themselves.

The novel opens with a threat from Alphonso, silencing Celie after she is raped, depriving her the right to speak to anyone about the attack except God, whom she communicates with in the form of letters. This instantly conveys how she adheres to the sexual hegemony, voiceless to her mother. Conversely, we see the dramatic transformation of Celie's silenced character when she experiences sisterly love with Sofia and romantic love with Shug.

Sofia tells Celie of the patriarchal abuse she suffered at home, and how sisterly love was a feminist tool to keep her and her sisters strong; 'all the girls stick together'. This rebellion begins to invigorate feminist strength onto Celie, transforming her character. Celie finds herself sharing her abuse story with Sofia too, which is disobedient to what Alphonso instructed. This exemplifies Celie's transformation from silenced, to attaining a voice through the aid of sisterly love.

Shug teaches Celie to be empowered by her sexuality and sexual identity; this is significant for Celie as the sexual abuse she suffered made her view herself as dirty. Making love to Shug is rebellious and contends with what men in her life have ever encouraged – it enables her to feel pleasure for herself rather than satisfying a man. The love she experiences with Shug transforms Celie from hating her body, to enjoying her body.

We also see the vehicles which are used to express love, undergoing transformation throughout the novel. Celie is forced out of her home into an abusive marriage with 'Mr-', where she cannot see her sister Nettie again. She is oblivious throughout the novel whether Nettie is even alive, yet later discovers Nettie is alive and has been raising her children. Celie makes this discovery through the letters Nettie had written to her.

Celie responds, expressing her love for her sister through the form of letter-writing. Despite the distance, their sisterly love is transformed from unattainable, to attainable through the epistolary aid of letter-writing to each other. Letters enabled the sisters to communicate their love for each other through the medium of written discourse. This brings me onto my next topic, love which is transformed from being 'face to face' and physically attainable, to love which suffers the challenges of distance, in an era of 'social distancing'.



Where do we see the relationship between love and transformation within relationships during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Much like Nettie and Celie who loved each other from a distance, due to the restrictions implemented worldwide intended to prevent the spread of this airborne virus, people all around the world who loved each other were forced to love from a distance. The expression of love was transformed from a physical, in person interaction, into a non-physical, online interaction for those who did not live with the people they loved.

We are informed that 'physical touch is a key aspect of intimacy, a fundamental human need, crucial in maintaining and developing intimacy within close relationships' whereas restrictions on social interactions 'severely restricted the number and range of people with whom physical affection was possible'. For those who did not live together amid the pandemic; platonic lovers, familial lovers, and romantic lovers – these people endured an immense transformation within their relationships. People were deprived of human touch and their relationships were starved of the expression of love through physical expression.

The Covid-19 pandemic transformed people's ability to express love through physical interaction such as hugging and kissing, to being completely unable with restrictions such as the 'two metre rule' in place and the lockdowns which urged people to stay at home, away from others.

This starvation for human touch and physical interaction thus resulted in loneliness, yet as Boris Johnson put it, 'the wizardry of technology' enabled people to make video calls, text messages, phone calls, play games and communicate with each other. Technology transformed lovers from feeling lonely and apart, to being able to express their love and experience togetherness in a non-physical way.

Within Walker's novel, we see the characters Nettie and Celie who utilise letter-writing which builds the communicative bridge, overcoming the physical, geographical obstacles which restrained their love. Their restrained love is transformed into a state of unrestraint through the medium of letters. Likewise, throughout the pandemic, lovers who had access to technology were able to transform their restrained love, into attainable love, through the medium of technology.