

## THE COLOUR PURPLE – ANALYSIS OF BOOK

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### LETTERS 1 TO 10

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- She does not give her name until we learn it in letter 7 – perhaps this allows Walker to show the plight of Celie as being more universal and expanding to many women.
- Celie’s matter-of-fact style catches us off-guard. Clearly, this first letter to God is not a prayer, as one might expect.
- Despite the sexual violence described in the letter, there is nothing excessively melodramatic about the letter in terms of its style
- Mister’s wife was killed by her boyfriend. Celie seems to accept this violence as a natural, ever-present part of life.
- In letter 7, Pa “praises” Celie to Mister, but it must be noted how he does it; it is just appraising her to sell her.
- Celie constantly overhears all they say about her being ugly.
- Celie’s name is mentioned by chance when she mentions how Alphonso spoke of her. Her avoidance of it up to now suggest her low self-esteem.
- Her unwillingness to name men, saying only ‘he’ or ‘Mr\_\_’ suggests her negative feelings about them
- She names Nettie and Shug repeatedly and possessively.
  
- The significance of Letter 8 lies in its depiction of the especially close relationship that exists between Nettie and Celie.
- Nettie’s trying to persuade their father into letting Celie attend school is strong evidence of her deep, maternal compassion for her sister and her concern for her sister’s future.
- When she goes to Mister’s house, she seems to function automatically (such as just bandaging her head when it is bleeding), revealing that she accepts the fact that this chaos and violence will probably be a pattern throughout the rest of her life and she will just have to cope with it.
- The shopkeeper (when Celie goes in and sees her daughter with another woman) treats the woman and Celie badly reflecting his contradictory and self-defeating behaviour: he needs their business, but he clearly hates blacks, for his words to them are rude and pushy.
- Although little Olivia’s mother is a woman, the shopkeeper calls her a “girl” and he calls Celie a “gal”. His forcing the woman to purchase unneeded thread is linked to his treating her like a child. To him, the woman has no judgement.
  
- “You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Pg 3)
  - As a poor African-American woman in a rural Georgia in the 1930’s and a victim of domestic abuse, Celie is almost completely voiceless and disenfranchised (depriving someone of a right) in everyday society. However, her letters enable her to break privately the silence that is normally imposed upon her.

- Celie narrates her life story with complete candour and honesty because of the epistolary (letter-writing) style in which the novel is written
  - Celie abhors her father's rough, sexual brutality, but by submitting to it, she spares her mother.
- "Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (Pg 3)
    - Celie knows how to state the events plainly, but often does not know how to interpret them. Despite the abuses she endures, Celie has little consciousness of injustice and shows little or no anger
- "Whose is it? I say God's. I don't know no other man or what else to say." (Pg 4)
    - Celie's narrative is sometimes difficult to decipher because her ability to narrate her life story is highly limited.
    - When Celie's cursing mother asks who fathered Celie's baby, Celie, remembering Alphonso's command to keep quiet, says the baby is God's because she does not know what else to say.
- "He seen Nettie in church and now every Sunday evening here come Mister. I tell Nettie to keep at her books" (Pg 6)
    - Here, in Letter 4, the bond between Celie and Nettie is a bond of unusually deep love. Yet, except for the love that Celie and Nettie share and the love that God offers to the women, there is a painful lack of love; in its place there is a sense of paralysed doom in the household – The fates of the new stepmother, Nettie, and Celie all seem inescapable. They have to toil endlessly, and their only relief lies in going to church and believing in afterlife.
- "But I can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyways [...] I got a fresh one there myself and she sick all the time" (pg 9)
    - Alphonso's contempt for women appears in his references to "a fresh one".
    - He speaks of Celie and of his wife as if they are animals or slaves

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## LETTERS 11-20

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- Celie is met with scorn by the children as she is still a child herself (and is almost kept and treated as a child by Mister) and she is only a step-mum. She doesn't bond with the children much either. She is suffering to fulfil the role on step-mum that is placed on and expected of her. The children haven't been kept well as Mister had no woman in the house, Celie is now expected to help/deal with it. She could also be said to be a mother to Mister as she has to clean up for him, cook for him etc.

- 🌸 She is also there to fulfil the role of 'wife'. She is there to fulfil Mister's sexual needs. Her first and only sexual experiences are tainted with pain; she considers it a duty. She is full of confusion.
- 🌸 The sisters praise Celie on the role of being a housekeeper. They praise her on the things they think are expected of her – "good house keeper, good with children, good cook" – they don't acknowledge that she could be a good person with unique qualities outside of these roles. They cannot see beyond the roles imposed on her. The only compliment she's received so far is on how well she works and does what she's told.
- 🌸 The style with which letter 12 is delivered and the way Mister's sisters talk about the housework done by Celie suggests that the little importance that is placed to the role of women. Women are judging women on the roles expected – this suggests the roles have been absorbed and are accepted.
- 🌸 When Harpo is asked to help out he says "Women work. I'm a man". The cycle is difficult to break as the young generation are brought up in the same way.
- 🌸 When Mister is asked why he beats Celie he says "Cause she my wife"
- 🌸 Women are expected to accept marriage when a man wants to. This is shown when Celie says "He don't ast How come you his wife? Nobody ast that." And when Harpo reveals his plans to marry but states, when asked what the woman thinks, "Us ain't never spoke." Even when asked if she likes him, he replies "I don't know" – he is completely disregarding what the woman thinks.
- 🌸 Harpo is "no better at fighting his daddy back than me". He is constantly being bossed around by his dad and is expected to follow his father's orders. Celie comments that Harpo is nearly as big and strong as his daddy, yet, contradictorily "weak in will".
- 🌸 We Learn that Mister has told Harpo that the scandal of his mother's murder hangs over Harpo and that makes him "unfit" as a suitor for his girlfriend.
- 🌸 When Harpo asks why he is not good enough, Mister replies "Your mammy". Again, all a males' failing are attributed back to the female.
- 🌸 Sofia is a "big strong girl" "arms got muscle." This is contrasting to Celie and Sofia is challenging the constrictions placed on her by giving Harpo the baby and going to do what she wants to do.
- 🌸 Celie's word for Sofia is "solid". It is a quality that Celie is clearly unfamiliar with because, childlike Celie tells Harpo to beat her, she wants to see if Sofia will break.
- 🌸 Sofia does not succumb to Harpo's will and her spirit is not broken. Celie has never been broken either – except in Celie's case everyone assumes that her will has already been broken, if indeed it ever existed.
- 🌸 Celie may act submissively, however, but she has always reacted to beatings, without knowing it, in much the same what that Sofia does. No one suspects that when Celie is beaten she too is "solid"; she imagines that she is wood but she doesn't break or become bitter.
- 🌸 By standing up for herself and fighting for an injustice Sofia eventually ends up being punished for it. Like *The Yellow Wallpaper*, women who try to stand up against their oppressions will be silenced and punished.
- 🌸 Celie has no feeling towards the kids; a symptom of her situation.
- 🌸 She's clearly treated like a slave here as Mister issues demands for her to do.
- 🌸 The reason Harpo's mum was killed is she was shot.

- Nettie's arrival means she is now able to help Celie with her numerous roles, household chores and with her schooling.
  - Nettie is desperate to teach Celie (who is keen to learn) however, the labour of being a mother to Mister's 4 children has taken a bite out of Celie's will. Most days she tells god she is too tired even to think.
  - Celie is trying hard to reconcile her education, learning and progress with that of being a housekeeper and step-mother.
  - Learning is synonymous with strength and Nettie continually urges Celie to learn, to be strong, to fight and not to give in to the taken-for-granted burdens of the black woman's role.
  - Unfortunately even though Nettie promises to write, Celie ends the letter by stating that she never did.
  - Celie is a good mother, she does what she can for Mister's children, because it is her wifely duty. But the children simply hate her, perhaps because they feel she has replaced their mother.
  - Observing Corinne and Olivia is perhaps the only time in her life that she has been permitted to see other people going about their business.
  - Mister keeps Celie essentially as a maid in his house and as a nanny to his children.
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- Mister's two sisters inspect the new bride; similar to what happened between Mister and Alphonso.
  - The sisters are inflexibly ridged about a woman's role – to them women get married and are supposed to keep a decent house and a family.
  - Kate utters one of the central ideas of the novel – she tells Celie that she “deserves more than this”. Celie timidly agrees with her by saying “maybe so. I think”. Kate doesn't leave before she tells Celie the same thing that Nettie told her – that Celie must “fight them for yourself”. Celie of course is not ready to fight yet, she resigns to her situation by saying that at least she is alive, whereas she fears Nettie is dead.
  - Celie will hear this statement from other women (to fight for yourself) throughout the novel and slowly she'll begin to realise the truth of it.
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- Mister's answer to why he beats Celie is, in essence, because she is stubborn and a women and that all women are good for is beating.
  - She has no alternative than to accept her role as a black woman. She is merely a black man's property and an available target for all the abuse that her husband has boiling inside himself.
  - Mister suffered frustration and unhappiness from his late wife, Annie Julia, and now he suffers frustration because of Shug. At the same time he is a black man of little value in a white man's world.
  - Celie feels humiliated because she is treated worse than even his children.
  - Mister comments on a quality of Celie that will grow into full-fledged revolt one day; her stubbornness.
  - Celie reveals to God how she manipulates her emotions while being abused by her husband. She “make myself wood...Celie, you a tree”.

- Celie has a small amount of self-worth. To Celie, all worth lies in Shug Avery. She accepts the fact that her husband has a lot of sex with Shug.
- Celie has worked like a mule, and she's done so for one reason only; she knows that she's expected to.
- Celie accepts her sexist, racist, black woman's role almost willingly so long as she can dream of the glamorous Shug.

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### LETTER 21-30

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- Sofia confronts Celie as she feels terribly betrayed. It is one thing to have a man beat you but it is quite another to have a woman betray another woman.
  - Sofia trusted Celie as she seemed like a kind woman and she felt there was a special bond between them as women. Now Sofia has learned that a woman urged a man to do her harm. She feels a woman should know better.
  - They both have well-defined, vividly contrasting characters. Sofia is a fighter (loudly independent and sharply decisive) but Celie is a timid shadow (quietly anguished as she admits to having been a fool.)
  - Sofia cannot understand Celie's motivation; both women were reared in similar domestic situations but Sofia has always been filled with angry aggressiveness, unlike the passive, mother-like, spiritual Celie.
  - Sofia's advice to Celie is loud and clear: "you out to bash Misters head open. Think about heaven later." {pg 40}
  - The two women are reconciled at the end as there has been an honest exchange of viewpoints between them
  - Reconciliation is symbolised by the quilt that they make together. A quilt is a collection of many colours and fabrics sewn together by a single thread (the new union between them will be sewn with a new, strong thread of love and trust).
  - Women are working together – symbolises women's solidarity, past and present.
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- It is never clear what Shug's illness is, but regardless, the two states that Shug has "earned" her disease (possibly an STD) by living a lifestyle of freedom and independence.
  - Only Celie and Mister seem to care for her despite these accusations and rumours.
  - Mister demonstrates his generosity in this section of the novel (of course he has Celie take care of Shug) but he is shown to care genuinely about the fate of another human.
  - Celie then finally gets to see Shug in the flesh. The cruelty of Shug's first comment to Celie will be reversed by many years of kind treatment.
  - Shug's audience only love her when she sings and her lovers only enjoy her while they are in bed with her.

- In the bright day light, people gossip about her (“slut, hussy, heifer”) and they turn their back on and are repulsed by her reputation and her “nasty woman disease”.
  - ❖ Shug and Celie are both mothers without their children. The absence of their children and the absence of Mister when they are together allow them to care for one another. The close female relationships allow them to cope with the constrictions placed on them. They are using their mothering instinct on each other. Celie cares of Shug much like she would have taken care of the babies whom she never had a chance to rear.
  - ❖ Mister and Shug know each other’s secrets. Shug knows Mister’s first name, Albert, and calls him by it, which indicated that they are equals in their relationship. At times it even seems that Shug has the upper hand. It is an altogether different relationship than what Albert shares with Celie.
  - ❖ Shug brings out both emotion and sensitivity within Albert. However, Albert doesn’t realise that no one fights for Celie.
  - ❖ Shug is one of the few characters in the novel who is not afraid of exposing Mister’s flaws. Celie will develop this same sort of strength in the novel, mostly through Shug’s influence.
  - ❖ The bond between Celie and Albert is strengthened when Albert’s father arrives and expresses his disgust that Albert has taken the diseased and dark-skinned Shug into his home.
- The novel shows that certain patterns of suffering, anger, and violence crop up throughout generations, as though they were traditions passed down among families.
  - The sexual division is distinct. Women come to evaluate a wife and her work. Men come to question another man’s judgement, particularly when a “trifling” love relationship might socially and financially destroy a man.
  - The narrow sexist dimensions of the society Albert, his family and Celie stand in are in contrast to the brassy, liberated world of the recovering Shug.
- Harpo thinks that he himself is a failure – simply because he cannot beat Sofia like Albert beats Celie. Harpo doesn’t realize that his role-model is wrong. He says “I want her to do what I say, like you do for pa” (pg 60)
  - For that reason, Harpo tries unconsciously to be big – big, strong and powerful – like Sofia. But that fails; all he gets is fat. He gets such a pot belly that he looks pregnant, again seeming more feminine.

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### LETTERS 31-40

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- These letters are primarily concerned with Celie’s emotional, physical and geographically isolation and now – because of Shug – these letters focus of Celie’s “awakening” from her isolation.
- Shug is so grateful that Celie has nursed her back to health that she sings “Miss Celie’s Song” to her and Celie’s heart immediately begins to cramp

- In other words, Celie's heart begins to come to life. No one has ever done anything so special for her since years ago when she and Nettie were children.
  - In these letters we begin to see Celie's awaking to a sense of herself. Since Nettie left, this is the first time that Celie has felt "special" and loved (thanks to Shug). Shug is the source of Celie's happiness.
  - Shug waits until she is on stage to thank Celie. She wants everyone to know. She values Celie that much.
  - One reason for Celie's increased self-awareness is the sexual awakening that she experiences through Shug's education. Shug declares Celie a virgin (as she has never enjoyed sex) and renames her "Miss" Celie, giving her a new identity in both a figurative and a literal sense.
  - Shug's pronouncement of Celie as a virgin and the new name Shug gives her are critical to Celie's empowerment to tell her own story and to her sense of self.
  - Shug helps Celie realise that there are alternative to the mainstream ways of thinking, perceiving, interpreting and behaving that the dominant members of society impose upon her.
  - Recognising the existence of these alternative gives Celie a sense of control and is an important step in her move toward independence. (Yet Sofia's punishment makes it clear that challenging and reinterpreting mainstream perspectives often comes at a price".
  - We see in these letters, something emerging that is even stronger than physical might – the strength of bonding between black blood-sisters and black friend-sisters. Bonding joins these different black women together just as scraps of cloth are joined to form a new, strong whole creation – a quilt, a central metaphor in letter 40 and throughout the novel.
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- Sofia hits the white mayor, who is trying to patronise her.
  - Sofia is vastly different from the white society's stereotype of the subservient black woman. (she is robust and healthy and has a loving family and material existence)
  - In Sofia's case, her violence is encountered by an even stronger violence – that is, the violence of the white police.
  - It is clear though that although Walker views resistance as crucial, she does not want to romanticise it as an act that is free of pain or consequences. (e.g Squeak also resists by attempting to free Sofia from prison and as a result she is raped".
  - There is no way that Sofia can keep her dignity and not offend the mayor and so ultimately the whites give Sofia no choice. We realise there is no justice for blacks in the white system of "law and justice" and yet despite those odds, Squeak, Shug, Celie and Sofia's sister Odessa make plans to try and defy "the system".
  - Shug, Celie, Squeak and Odessa mean to defend Sofia. These women have witnessed and suffered great pain through years of degrading injustice, but they have been able, somehow, to cope with it, and now they realise that Sofia can no longer cope by herself.
  - Celie says "when I see Sofia, I don't know why she still alive". Sofia's spirit has been broken by the whites. It is almost miracle-like that she manages to stay alive.
  - Touchingly, and yet humorously, Sofia tells Celie that the only way she survives is by acting "like I'm you, I jump right up and do what they say". Sofia endures, but just barely. She has become a non-entity in order to survive.
  - Squeak's role demands unusual strength, but Celie recognises the fierce spirit that is alive and strong within the tiny-voiced, diminutive Squeak.
  - The power of racism is strong enough to unite (1) Squeak and Sofia (two women who were fighting between themselves) and (2) Celie and Shug and Odessa (who are all dramatically dissimilar).

- The women are trying to out-think the white man. They are hoping that he will be naïve enough to believe that a black woman is happier in prison than she would be in the kitchen of a white woman.

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### LETTERS 41-50

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- ✎ For Walker, the most basic indication of victory is the ability to tell one's story and neither Sofia nor Squeak loses her voice
- ✎ Sofia maintains her resistance even when pressed into service as Miss Millie's maid
- ✎ Likewise, when Harpo tries to tell the others the story of Squeak's rape, Squeak interrupts him, telling him to be quiet because she wants to tell her own story
- ✎ Additionally, in the same way Shug renames Celie a virgin, Squeak renames herself to Harpo, rejecting the diminutive nickname he has given her in favour of her real name, Mary Agnes
- ✎ Just as Celie's renaming is enabling her to reinterpret the world, Squeak's renaming opens up the gifts that have long been hidden inside her, and she starts to sing.
- ✎ After Squeak returns, she and Celie have something in common; they've both been raped by a relative.
- ✎ The white warden of course does not think that it was wrong to rape his niece as Squeak is black
- ✎ Celie's rape is worse because as far as she knows, she was raped by her father and he not only violated Celie but he violated the sacredness and unity of the family.
- ✎ Squeak's suffering makes her stronger and she demands that Harpo call her by her real name; she has earned the right to be called by Mary Agnes
- ✎ Harpo's anger over Squeak's rape is impotent as always. Harpo only *talks* about his anger but does not act on it. In contrast, the women act on their anger and frustration as we shall see later and they are successful in extricating Sofia from prison.
  
- ✎ These letters are structured with irony. It is ironic that Sofia leaves prison only to become the one thing that she absolutely refused and the thing that led her to be in prison; becoming a white woman's maid. The irony is compounded by the fact that she must watch over Miss Millie's children and not her own
- ✎ Prison may have been hard on Sofia but, ironically, being a "maid" is far harder on her psychologically. Isolation in prison gave her enough time to reflect on her situation; she has been a victim of both racism and sexism
- ✎ Her life is at present a kind of non-life. She has seen the absurdity of living, even though she does continue to live
- ✎ She knows that she and Miss Millie can never have the kind of relationship that two women should have; they can have a relationship based only on differences and protocol - the antitheses of Sofia's sisterhood with Celie, Squeak and Odessa.

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### LETTERS 51-61

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- Celie is reunited with Nettie, even though they are continents apart. The person who meant more to her than anyone in the world is alive.
  - Celie's constant love for Nettie has been a source of sustaining strength for her and now that Nettie is alive, Celie's self-confidence becomes stronger
  - Learning that Nettie is alive gives Celie the strength necessary for self-reliance, and she ceases to fear Mister or rely as heavily on Shug
  - Celie takes the strength of Sofia and the sass of Shug, and she draws on her own awakened, rightful sense of vengeance to emerge a solid, independent, courageous and admired woman.
  - An important element of Nettie's experience is her exposure to free blacks who are prospering in the North. The idea of economically successful and independent blacks was largely foreign to Southern black women like Nettie and Celie who are accustomed only to denigration, denial and subservience at the hands of both whites and black men.
  - Nettie's description of the Harlem men (where she was staying at) empowers Celie and they may be a factor in the economic independence Celie achieves later in the novel
  - The concept of black prosperity and independence is yet another suppressed narrative that is now emerging into the foreground of Celie's consciousness.
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- Celie is filled with a sense of righteous vengeance and she wants to act immediately and violently
  - Ironically, it is Shug, the "notorious" sinful woman who reminds Celie of the biblical commandment "thou shalt not kill" and it is Shug who tells Celie that she must rise above the black male code of rage and headstrong brutality.
  - Celie is "somebody" now and she is especially somebody to Nettie
  - Celie owes it to Nettie to act maturely with this new and certain knowledge of Albert's mean-spirited, long-lasting vindictiveness
  - Celie's new strength begins to articulate itself in more peaceful ways; she orders Shug to tell Albert to start sleeping alone. Shug complies and begins sleeping with a new, angry and proud black woman named Celie.

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### LETTERS 61-72

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- Shug makes Celie wear pants – she believes there is no reason for Celie to be confined in a dress (a symbol of female oppression).
- Making pants with shug is similar to Sofia and Celie's joint effort in making the "Sister's Choice" quilt.
- The Olinka look mistrustfully at unwed women. They hold marriage as the be-all and end-all purpose of a woman's life.
- To them, Nettie is a non-person. When they find she is not Samuel's second wife, they think of her as having little status.
- Olivia, understands that the Olinka's withholding education from females is a means of suppression similar to the white Americans keeping blacks from learning.
- The male Olinka treatment of women is similar to the way that Alphonso treated Nettie and Celie's mother.

- 🌈 Olinka husbands have "life and death power" over their wives; Southern men want this over their wives too.
- 🌈 Olivia and Tashi also seem to be significantly involved in a physical relationship. Significantly, Nettie does not think that it is morally wrong because she is sophisticated enough to realize that everyone needs intimacy, and when men are incapable of fulfilling a woman's emotional needs, there is nothing wrong in a woman turning to another woman for love and friendship.

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### LETTERS 72-82

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- 🌈 Celie confesses to both Shug and Nettie that she has stopped writing to God
- 🌈 Shug tries to get Celie to reimagine God, not as the archetypal old bearded white man, but as an "it" who exists in and delights in all creation.
- 🌈 Walker presents personal religious beliefs as an important component of a strong sense of self
- 🌈 Celie has always imagined God as a distant figure who likely does not listen to her concerns. She sees God as a white man who behaves like the other men she knows and who does not listen to "poor colored women"
- 🌈 This image of God held by Celie – and ironically by Nettie, Corrine and Samuel in their missionary work – is limiting. In thinking of God as an old, bearded white man who does not listen to her, Celie implicitly accepts white and masculine dominance and makes the assumption that her voice can never be heard.
- 🌈 However, Celie's newfound strength begins to crumble, why? – she asked God in the first letter she wrote to him, and now, she asks "why" again.
- 🌈 Celie has sufficient psychological distance now that she can look back on her childhood and on the numerous times that she was raped and beaten.
- 🌈 She tries to reconcile all that physical abuse with her unflagging love and belief in God. It is little wonder that Celie considers if God isn't, after all, "just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown"
- 🌈 Celie was strong when the situation called for strength; now that the crisis is past, she lets down and allows herself to feel the awful pain of injustice once again.
- 🌈 For the first time in the novel, Celie resents all of the unnecessary pain she has endured for decades
- 🌈 Significantly, Celie relates all this pain to the way that *men* have treated her
- 🌈 For the present, Celie thinks that God has betrayed her and ignored her; God seems to be only another callous, uncaring man.
- 🌈 Shug announces that she, Celie and Grady are moving to Memphis and Celie finally speaks her mind, cursing Mister
- 🌈 The others are shocked at Celie's defiance. Squeak announces that she will join them.
- 🌈 Celie's assertion of herself comes forcefully.
- 🌈 Her defining moment, the speech she gives to Mister, contrasts sharply with her former silence
- 🌈 Celie's assault on Mister releases years of pent-up emotion and hurt that had been silenced

- ✎ Mister tries to counter by stripping Celie of her sense of self, as he has throughout the novel – he tells her that as a poor, black, and ugly woman, she is “nothing at all”
- ✎ But Celie’s sense of self is strong enough that she is no longer a helpless object, so she resists Mister’s proclamation, reinterpreting his words in a defiant context (“im pore, im black, I may be ugle and can’t cook...but im here”)
- ✎ The fact that Celie’s speech inspires Mister to reassess and rebuild his life shows that Celie’s attainment of self-respect has truly broken a cycle, not only liberating Celie, but others as well.
- ✎ Shug urges Celie to start her own business, so Celie launches an enterprise called Folkspants Unlimited
- ✎ Why is this important in Celie’s continuing growth and empowerment?

#### CELIE’S INDEPENDENCE:

- ✎ Her economic independence gives Celie the opportunity to fend for herself and make her own decisions for the first time in her life. With her business, it equally gives her a sense of purpose
- ✎ Celie’s clothing design is a form of creative self-expression, but it is also a form of entrepreneurship and a means to self-sufficiency
- ✎ Celie has taken sewing, traditionally a domestic chore, and turned it into an instrument of independence. Walker implies that such economic independence is crucial for women to free themselves from oppressive situations
- ✎ When she inherits her family’s old property, Celie completes her independence, becoming a fully autonomous woman, with her own money, business, story and circle of friends.

#### WIVES AND MISTRESSES:

- The relationships between mistresses and wives in this novel seem rather unconventional
- In more novels, wives battle mistresses and vice versa
- It is possible, however, that Walker intentionally creates relationships based on the West African traditions of polygamy, a tradition in which the wives are bonded through work and friendships as though they were sisters.

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### LETTERS 83-90

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- Celie’s final letter shows the extent to which her character has developed through the course of the novel
- Celie’s first letters simply related events without really attempting to understand or interpret them
- In her final letters, Celie not only analyses her own feelings, but she has the confidence and insight to articulate the feelings and motives of others.
- By making the act of writing a key element in the process of Celie’s redemption, Walker underlines the importance of literacy and makes an implicit reference to African-American slaves, who, forbidden to learn to read or write, were oppressed by being kept illiterate.

- Celie and Nettie likewise use literacy to combat oppression, maintaining a remarkable commitment to writing over the course of many years because they know their letters are the only link they have to each other.
- Even though Celie is clearly less intellectual than her sister, she gains just as much, if not more, out of her writing
- In this way, Walker asserts that writing is crucial and redeeming for everyone and should not be viewed as a barrier dividing the educated from the uneducated.
- Celie's final letter also shows that, like Shug, she has formed an interpretation of God that encompasses the entire everyday world (she writes "dear God, dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples, dear everything, dear God" showing that she no longer at the end sees God as a distant figure which she feels she has no connection with.)
- Celie's acceptance of Shug's trivial fling with Germaine also emphasises Celie's growth
- Celie still loves Shug deeply, but her confidence in herself is now strong enough to survive a lapse in Shug's attentions.
- Celie no longer sees love as a game of possession and control. She loves Shug but does not feel the need to tie her down as she is confident that Shug will come back as she promised. We now get the sense that Celie is now strong enough that even if Shug had not come back, Celie would not be lost.
- Above all, *The Color Purple* is a story of successful transformation. Though some differences and conflicts remain unresolved at the novel's conclusion, we have seen the remarkable transformation of an impoverished, abused woman of colour into a successful, propertied entrepreneur who delights in her own sexuality and is enmeshed in a supportive, loving community.
  
- Finally, in Letter 90, two sisters who were not allowed to grow up together are reunited and for the rest of their lives, they will live together and they will die together
- Letter 87, Celie said "my heart must be young and fresh... it feels like it blooming blood"
- This same feeling is infused in her words here; "but I don't think us feel old at all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this is the youngest us ever felt"
- Celie's love for Nettie provides her with an inexhaustible source of youth.