

The Process to Women's Speech in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

Pascal Kouadio BROU

Assistant

Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire

pascalkouadio10@gmail.com

Abstract: Women in *The Color Purple* do not start speaking overtly about their life; they do not give an account of their days to people around them because speech is proscribed. Their silence amounts to a process of embezzlement of a disturbing truth about severe acts of marital and filial violence. Through incest, rapes and severe beatings as well as verbal commands, men compel women to avoid speech so that not to question male authority. The divine is the sole way out of speechlessness. Nevertheless, speechlessness does not stand for a lack of communication. For silence is a symbolic non-verbal form of female speech to send messages among members of their sexual category. Therefore, they succeed in setting up a speech network which help them reach verbal communication to question male supremacy and attain freedom of speech and self-fulfillment.

Keywords: women – violence – silence – togetherness – speech

Résumé: Dans *The Color Purple*, les femmes ne communiquent pas ouvertement sur leur vie; elles ne partagent pas leur expérience quotidienne avec leur entourage car la parole est proscrite. Le silence des femmes s'inscrit dans un processus de confiscation d'une réalité dérangeante à propos de graves cas de violence conjugale et filiale. A travers l'inceste, le viol et la violence physique ainsi que des assignations au silence, les hommes obligent les femmes à garder le silence afin de ne pas remettre en question leur autorité. L'unique canal d'expression qui est offert aux femmes est la prière adressée à Dieu. Néanmoins, le silence ne signifie pas une absence de parole car il est une forme symbolique de communication non verbale pour les femmes de transmettre des messages entre membres de leur catégorie sexuelle. Elles parviennent ainsi à construire un réseau de communication verbale pour contester la suprématie masculine, pour atteindre la liberté d'expression et l'auto-affirmation.

Mots-clés : Femmes – violence – silence – solidarité – parole

Introduction

In the context of the #MeToo movement and the other female freedom movements worldwide, women's ability to vow their bitterness, their frustration and to denounce gender-based abuses is unquestionable. Abused and frustrated women have been covertly or overtly drawing men's and their fellow women's attention on their suffering. Covert denunciation originates from the threats and dangers embedded in the act of speech, for women's speech is a

subversive enterprise for men's power and authority. Therefore, muting would be beneficial for men. Henceforth, there prevails a competition between men's power and women's freedom (Mills, 1978). It means that when trying to say the unpalatable, women may undergo coercion. It would utterly be condescending to believe that women in *The Color Purple* like other women activists would supinely or cowardly undergo hardships and abide by a compelling prescribed silence. Indeed, Alice Walker endowed her female characters with the ability to carry out good reasoning (Hofweber, 2018) that is to be logic enough to have an analytic approach of their life and adopt a suitable attitude to adapt it to the requirements of their femaleness.

Women's physical weakness compared to men's in general compels the choice of reasonable protest means to topple down men's power. Since male domination is deeply rooted in most human societies, uprooting it is only possible through the setting up of a female plan like the Marshall Plan for a sustainable social justice. A process that would put women in relation to themselves for building up a female voice then to men for fixing troubled gender relationship. This work aims at showing the limits to women's speech that is to say the dominant oppressive attitudes and ideologies as well as the set of speech patterns that could help affirm women's distinctiveness and similarity.

1-Prescribing Silence and Proscribing Speech

1-1. Turning to God and Staying Away from Humans

The novel *The Color Purple* (hereafter *TCP*) opens with a command issued to a character not to voice any word about a prevailing situation to anybody except God: "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'll kill your mammy"(*TCP*, 1). Therefore, at the very beginning of *TCP* speech is buoyed. Through the character named Pa, men are the masters of "the domain of speakable discourse" (Butler, 46). They set the context of free speech. They decide what is palatable and what is not. Pa prescribes only the interaction between the divine and the individual. No communication about what had just taken place should occur between the person to whom the order is issued and any other human being. Silence should prevail because "on the public agenda" (Saint Clair, 3) speech is not permitted. The social order and the communication system cannot put up with victims' confession. When Pa speaks in order to keep Celie quiet, he sets the atmosphere of *TCP*. He sets a relationship between speech and silence, between speech

and power. There seems to be a compliance to that original ordinance so that just after the ordinance the novel gets its epistolary dimension. Letters are sent to God at a regular and repetitive rhythm "Dear God". But what stands as the reason for carrying out the actual work is why it is better to denounce a perpetrator to God than before humans. What could stand as the rationale for choosing God as the judge of the ongoing situation? If Celie, the character to whom the prescription is given did not question it, it is because she did not know that there were two "god". There is the one who: "can give...a sign...let...know what is happening"(TCP, 1) and the other: "God was white; and a man" (TCP, 202). As she agrees to keep quiet before her aggressor (her stepfather), she shows submission to him and confidence in men's god. Actually, Celie was too young to make the right choice: "fourteen years old" (TCP, 1). She chooses the god that was white and male. Therefore, she faces a double jeopardy in her will to vow her innermost pain. She wants to denounce the rape she has undergone but she chooses the wrong canal for conveying her message. First, her god was white. What would a white care about the misfortune of a black in the 1910s? Do men listen to raped women? Not really sure that they have freed themselves from rape myths, two of which run: "women enjoy rape – women lie about being raped" (Katie, et al., 762). Further, the letters of an illiterate girl will not have much effect. However, having chosen her god, she started to write, failing to use her voice like Addie Beasley, another minor character of TCP: "She run off at the mouth so much no man would have her" (p.11). Celie decided to remain silent and procrastinated as ordered to her by Pa: "You better shut up and git used to it" (TCP, 2). Though she did not shut up totally, she embark on a writing process that could stand as a barrier to reaching other people. Since most of the black could not read, turning to letters to denounce a rape did not seem to be an efficient means. Beside Pa who committed incest on Celie, Mr.----- beat her repeatedly but she kept on writing letters to god so as to abide by the original prescription. She kept on doing that for "nearly thirty years" (TCP, 264). Thirty years passed by without any change, without anyone coming to rescue her because her letters have never been delivered at the right address: "He been keeping your letters, say Shug" (TCP, 124). In fact, Pa prescribes speech between Celie and God but denies it altogether since the letters that she wrote to God remained in his trunk. Embarking in a writing process comes to silencing oneself. It is a way of maintaining a rape crime secret by repelling speech. While the criminal speaks, the victim partly mutes her pain. As the process of denunciation takes place through writing, no voiced accusation is made in what bell hooks sees

as a confession: "The color purple: a narrative of sexual confession.... Sexuality is graphically and explicitly discussed.... The female is shown as potential victim of exploitative male sexual desire" (Gates Jr., 455). There is a covert denunciation since writing is quiet whereas speech is noisy and audible. Not everyone can write or read in the black community but most of them can listen and hear. Speech forces itself into people while writing is elitist. Spoken language is prior to writing (Breton, 2003) and easier to use because it is innate to all humans and permits individual and collective action. Pa forces Celie to disregard the steps towards speech. Not only does Celie jump the initial step of the speech process but also she accepts to be denied her freedom of speech. She is ignorant of the power embedded in verbal speech whereas Pa is aware of the fact that spoken language is central to female empowerment and decisive in toppling down male supremacy. Therefore, he suggests her to shut up to humans and speak to God, the male god whose voice should never be heard but who talks to people in a written message on Moses' tablets or in the Bible.

Socrates brought forth the vanity of writing since it is not flexible and cannot justify itself if the author is absent (Platon, 1997). The interpretation of the transcription of one's thoughts and feelings can be as diverse as there human beings on earth. Could Celie's letters defend themselves before any reply by Pa or Mr.-----? A written text cannot be explanatory enough to convey all the meaning and all the justification to make a trial possible in Celie and her offenders' absence. Since there are indeed many interpretations of the Bible, there could be as many interpretations of both offenders and victims' writings.

Writing is also a chance for Mr.----- and Pa to elude confrontation. No face-to-face between the offender and the victim can take place if writing is the accusation canal. Writing cannot express body expressions. Bruises, the amount of blood coming from the first rape, the terror Celie felt could not be faithfully expressed through words. Writing lacks intonation (Hagège, 1985) and this absence can make some discourse meaningless.

Celie's use of writing implies that she has received minimal education but her chances to keep up with education was definitely spoiled by her pregnancy, the consequence of her being raped by her stepfather. The young girl's excellent school results forced her teacher to beg her stepfather to let her attend school but the teacher's discovery of her pregnancy was an end to the

girl's education: "When Pa call me and she (Miss Beasley) see how tight my dress is, she stop talking and go" (*TCP*, 11). The effects of rapes on her body shut her future.

The use of violence in a marital situation stands as a way of denying self-expression in Celie's life. Mr.----- resorted to violence to keep Celie under his male power and assert his marital status as a husband. Through his advice to Harpo, his grown-up son, we are aware of the way he handles any relationship with his wife Celie: "Wives is like children. You have to let'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating." (*TCP*, 37). Men having the upper hand means women having the lower one and being the ones experiencing fear and pain that compel them to remain silent. Beatings raise some discomfort in women and make them remain sad and speechless like anybody who is beaten and has no force to retaliate even it is a man: "Harpo nearly big as his daddy...His eyes be sad and thoughtful. His face begin to look like a woman face...He was scared" (*TCP*, 29). Further reading of *TCP* reveals that confession of Celie to Shug Avery: "He beat me when you not here" (*TCP*, 78).

I-2. Embarrassment and Worship Communication Patterns

In addition, there prevails marital non-communication between Celie and Mr.----- . Through their union, the reader is aware of one of the four dimensions of silence as portrayed by Takie Lebra (2007) that is embarrassment. He is embarrassed by the fact that his wife is "spoiled" by multiple rapes, embarrassed by her ugliness: "black, bony, kinky hair". So only orders are issued to Celie. He hardly takes part in any family conversation. He keeps by his own and beside smoking he says nothing. Only the smell of his smoke testifies his being around. This sense of marital embarrassment is passed on from father to son so that Harpo is "embarrass" (*TCP*, 37). He wants his wife Sofia to follow the communication pattern set by his father and that is strictly followed by Celie. Like his father assimilates women to children, he claims to his wife: "Your place is here with the children" (*TCP*, 37). This conation to follow examples of elders and reproduce them is a descriptive characteristic of all members of a system like patriarchy (Bourdieu, 1994). Speech should never occur between men and women. Mr.----- perfectly follows the right attitude of an embarrassed husband before his wife. For it is a diminishing fact for a grown-up to be associated with a person whose intelligence and behavior is childish. Therefore, Mr.----- just issues orders : "when he tell you to do something, you do it" (*TCP*.

66) and listen quietly to children and Celie's speeches. At the beginning of *TCP*, Mr.-----'s behavior is summed up in these sentences: "Mr.----- don't say nothing....Mr.-----still don't say nothing....Mr.-----finally speak" (*TCP*, 9). His staying quiet makes the atmosphere of their union unbearable for Celie. She shares that with the reader by admitting it before her sister Nettie that being with Mr.----- is worse than being buried (*TCP*, 18). When marrying Celie, Mr.----- needed someone to take care of his children, not a wife. That is why he "hired" Celie. It seems that he got her from an auction so he acted accordingly: "He just brought her here, dropped her...Nobody to talk to, nobody to visit" (*TCP*, 21). She resembles a corpse whose main characteristics are that it is motionless and speechless. If the married woman is to take after something else than a dead body, she has to be as docile as a dog like Harpo wants his wife Sofia to be: "I'm getting tired of Harpo, she say. All he think about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife, he want a dog" (*TCP*, 68). The husband expects total submission from his wife. He expects her to shut up, take orders and do: "what he say" (*TCP*, 66). He also deprives his wife the ability to use spoken language that stands as a particular characteristic of humans. Wives are not men's friends in their marital life. They cannot call their husbands by their names. A striking aspect of *TCP* in connection with speech is that the names of prominent male characters are not mentioned. Just Mr.----- and Reverend Mr.----- are used. This recalls the Judeo-Christian attitude toward the God of Israel. There should be a form of awe that compels respect and deep reflection before an individual addresses him. Men have reached the level of gods and women never question their authority. Mainly old generations of female characters – Celie and Sofia's mother—worship their husbands as Sofia puts it to Celie: "To tell the truth, you remind me of my mama. She under my daddy thumb. Naw, she under my daddy foot. Anything he say, goes. She never say nothing back. She never stand up for herself" (*TCP*, p. 43). Fathers' words are like divine speech, never to be questioned. Mothers relinquish their right to self-determination in fathers' hands. As such, they lift men up to a divine position and consider their words as total and absolute truth, as orders issued by the divine authority. What is the right attitude for women is a faithful and humble listening.

That humility is also forced into women by the color of their clothes. Those women who live under the authority of a man like Celie wear purple. Instead of seeing that color with the mundane eyes, let us stick to the roman-catholic meaning. The color is linked to luxury and nobility in the eyes of the world whereas the Roman-Catholic church sees it as the color of

mourning, penance, and humility. It symbolizes sorrow and bitterness (THEO : L'encyclopédie Catholique Pour Tous). Therefore, Pa and Mr.----- want to make Celie feel downcast and bitter by making her wear no other color than purple. She needs to feel sorry for a crime she has not committed. Positions are reversed since the author of sexual crime is symbolically accusing the victim who remains silent. Since Celie is told to refer to God to tell him her sorrow, the religious meaning of the color purple fits better to interpret its use by Celie and its prescription by Pa and Mr.----- . She is meant to live a tasteless life in her clothing as well as in her sexual life.

1-3. Physical and Sexual Silencing

Rape stands as the rationale of the command to remain silent. While complying with that order, Celie is not aware of the fact that repetitive rapes would silence her body. The rapes she had endured has resulted in menstrual malfunctioning (*TCP* p. 6). Premature sex has caused premature menopause. The young woman's body is silenced by sexual abuses, by an undue exploitation. That is what her husband Mr.----- describes as being spoiled and which resulted in her barrenness throughout her marriage. Her womb cannot bear a men's semen until maturity. As she refuses to denounce her stepfather's crimes, she involuntarily accepts the side effects of the frequent rapes on her immature body. The man she gets married to later on could find out how affected she is by prior sex. Therefore, Celie's husband does not make love to her. Their intimacy is a moment for the husband to show bare selfishness. She never enjoys sex with her man. Her sexual satisfaction is not his concern. What matters is his own so that Celie gets used to it and she feels no attraction by her husband. Though she lives with a man, she cannot describe sexual attraction and sexual pleasure: "I don't like it at all. What is it like? He git up on you, heist your night gown round your waist, plunge in...Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (*TCP*, 81). She is sexually inactive and emotionally outcast by her husband. She is barred from intimacy, from enjoying marital life with her husband. He could not allow her any physical pleasure that would make her forget her maimed, violated body. She faces a sexual barrier that aims at maintaining her in the long-term violated, spoiled self. It would a redeeming act if she ever enjoys sex with her husband. Then, one can assert that her husband wants her to keep tracks of her humiliating past in her continuously humiliated body. His way of having sex with her, in the triviality and brutality of the act, does not differ from the way her stepfather did to her. Sex with her stepfather and sex with her husband amount to the unique and insane act of rape and violation of her intimacy. The similarity of the forms of these intercourses imply the similarity in

the post-sex requirements for silence. Here again, she does not seem to do otherwise than accept to adopt an individualistic attitude; being silent with the outside world and undertaking an inward movement. Reporting her misfortune to herself and turning to herself to fill in a gap. She has to masturbate herself whenever she has sexual envy. "All I can do is pull the quilt over my head and finger my little button and titties" (*TCP*, 83). She does not have verbal contact with her husband nor sexual one. All doors seem locked around her in her marital life.

2- Moving Towards Freedom

2-1- The Steering Forces

Even if from inside the female cannot open the oppressive doors around her, help can come from outside. Among the external steering forces, Celie receives this advice from an adult woman, Shug Avery: "A woman need a little fun, once in a while" (*TCP*, 85) and from her junior sister Nettie: "Don't let them run over you...You got to let them know who got the upper hand" (*TCP*, 18).

Shug Avery's action does not limit itself to advice but she implements it so as to show how Celie should act. She uses subtlety and persuasion to get Mr.-----'s trust: "Shug buddy-buddy again with Mr.----. They sit on the steps, go down Harpo's, walk to the mailbox. Shug laugh and laugh when he got anything to say. Show teef and tits aplenty" (*TCP*, 124). This soft attitude of Shug led to Celie's discovering the multiple letters her sister Nettie has been sending her from Africa. Shug's gentle approach succeeded in gaining Mr.-----'s trust. He finally let her enter his bedroom and she had the opportunity to find the truth about the vanity of the countless letters Celie and Nettie have been exchanging for many years. Males are physically stronger than women. Resorting to violence like the character Sofia did is not always the right way. Sofia Butler had harsh words for Mr.----- who abused her because she declared she was impregnated by his son. She retaliated to assert her dignity as a human being, she was not begging any shelter for herself and her baby (*TCP*, 33). She had a similar attitude toward the Mayor and his wife. She was said to be among the category of women that cannot be beaten because they are: "big and strong" (*TCP*, 43). She could: "sass the mayor's wife and knock the man down" (*TCP*, 89). But patriarchy is excellent at using force overtly or insidiously (Millett, p. 43). The police broke her body first: "They crack" (*TCP*, 91-92) then brought her very low. She lost her strong will in jail: "Every time they ast me to do something.....I jump right up and do just what they say"

(*TCP*, 93). She even obeyed a six-year-old child who issued her commands (*TCP*, 108-109). She spent her life trying to solve problems with violence, be it with her brothers, cousins and uncles (*TCP*, 42). When she was confronted to violent males, she retaliated with force. She became friendly when she left her friends and her husband to spend twelve years in prison. She learned that, in fact, force cannot make the system bend. Only persuasion and diplomacy can.

2-2. Exile as Emancipation

When reading *TCP*, we are aware that moving can help oppressed women find solution to the difficult family situation they are experiencing. Many characters undertake migration from Mr.-----'s family atmosphere. Nettie left with a missionary couple to Africa. She met people who needed her more than Mr.----- . He could not bear her presence in his house after she turned him down (*TCP*, 18). She succeeded in meeting truth when discovering that she was the aunt of the missionary couple's children. When going away from that man, she discovered that the man she and Celie used to call Pa was not their father. Her moving away from that Mr.--- ---- unveiled truth about her identity. She embarked on a revelatory movement that helped her to discover her real self and have a link between her past and her present.

The assertive movement starts with the will to go away from alienating family atmospheres in order to learn speech. The women in *TCP* make a move from the domain of the unspeakable to the domain of speech. The new speech is coupled with some melody. Musical gatherings take place to listen to Shug Avery and Mary Agnes in Mr.-----'s compound or in many other cities all over America. The women that had been kept silent for a long time are now holding gatherings attended by men. Women feeding men now with testimonies of their life by their side. Music plays a significant role in the emancipatory movement of women in *TCP*. The characters that enjoy freedom most are seminal musical figures. Both Shug Avery and Mary Agnes enjoy their womanhood and their human hood through their musical careers. They can make face-to-face speeches, talk directly to the offenders in front of an audience. With the help of instruments, any criticism of patriarchy is made bearable. Melodies make denunciation possible and less bitter though they do not fail to accuse the offenders. Music does not weaken the blaming of abuses and other forms of violence but the fact that it is soft and tender it forces itself into people's heart and mind in an insidious way. Its subtlety involves its convincing power.

Shug Avery's moving away from Mr.----- brought about notable changes in her ways. First, let us draw attention to her clothes: "wearing dresses all up her leg and headpieces" (*TCP*, 20), "tight red dress, her feet in a little sassy red shoes" (*TCP*, 77). Compared to her, Celie is poorly clothed and that filled her with shame: "I look at Shug and I feel my heart begin to cramp. It hurt me so, I hate the way I'm dress. Nothing but churchgoing clothes" (*TCP*, 77). Celie remains stuck to religion and God as Pa told her in the beginning of *TCP*. She could not experience that fun that Shug thought every woman should experience. She did not "fight" back her fear of disobeying God, her fear of getting rid of a heavy present. She could not apply that new call for freedom of Sofia: "You ought to bash Mr.----- head open...Think about heaven later" (*TCP*, 44). She was not courageous enough to let freedom ring in her life as long as she stays in Mr.----- family environment. Mary Agnes, the woman with "meowing" voice as if she is prevented from speaking so that she is nicknamed 'squeak' (*TCP*, 103), stood against mockery and left her husband Harpo to engage in a prolific artistic career. A remarkable fact in her transformation is that she went from mimicry to autonomy. She sang: "Shug's songs, then she begin to make up her own self" (*TCP*, 103). A woman learns from another woman how to walk away from oppression and reach freedom and enjoy it fully. Nearly halfway towards the end of the novel, all the women have freed themselves except Celie who still drags her feet. She suffered the most so reversing her life could not be so easy. Nevertheless, she embarked in the process.

2-3. Redefining God and Men

Those that have found their way out of Mr.-----'s tyranny have to "stick together" (*TCP*, 43) in order to convince Celie to undertake liberating action. Before their arrival, there was no possibility for Celie to find intimacy. She could not share neither her feelings nor her projects with anybody. They finally succeeded and Celie testifies the change that is occurring in her life: "I don't write to God no more" (*TCP*, 199). She has finally discovered that she has been serving the wrong god. She admits: "The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other men I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (*TCP*, 199). The god she has been taught to serve is unfair and alienating. He is macho and does not deserve to be confided in. She reinvents God by redefining his identity. She agrees with the idea that : "God ain't a he or a she, but a It" (*TCP*, 202). There should be neutrality in God if It has to be everyone's God. He should be fair enough for women in general and black women in particular for: "if he ever

listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place" (*TCP*, 200). Interpersonal relationship is valued over God-human communion. God is inside people therefore it is better to value relationships with people around. Writing uncountable letters to God amounts to nothing compared to moments of true love. She has moved from a champion of writing to a defender of free verbal speech: "-Hold on, say Harpo—Oh, hold on hell, I say" (*TCP*, 207). She does not allow anybody to silence her anymore. She even threatens and curses Mr.----- . His beatings do not fill her with fear anymore. She feels ready for a new birth, a new departure, a total change from her life under Mr.-----'s male power: "It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat" (*TCP*, 207).

From this statement, the reader is aware that Celie has been kept silent for a long time against her will to denounce her rape and all the beatings by Mr.----- . She has longed for testimony since the beginning and she still longs for it. Through rapes and beatings, she has seen herself and oppressed women as mules living with men (Hurston, 1995). Nevertheless, she has longed for speech. She only did not have the opportunity to speak her mind: "If a mule could tell folks how it's treated, it would" (*TCP*, 277). Telling men that women and men have humanness in common. Women are ordinary human beings endowed with "basic rights" (French, 3) of free speech, control of the body and one's sexuality, set one's own goals without being assigned roles determined by birth. Fortunately, her longings cannot stay mere longings. Change always takes place. The darkest night can give way to the sunniest day. There has come a time for mules to tell their oppressors that they are going through a dire-strait like Nettie observes it even in African tribes: "The world is changing. It is no longer a world just for boys and men" (*TCP*, 167). Celie's long-term silence is not "communicative" in the western meaning of communication (Ling, 143) since her stepfather and Mr.----- did not know what she was thinking about them. Nevertheless, the fact that she did not utter a single word does not testify that she is not telling herself and other people than her mother how she is pained. She lives in a social setting that does not use silence to communicate therefore even her body expressions could not mean anything to her aggressors. In the American culture, speech is golden instead of silence. Everything that is voiced, everything that is expressed through verbal communication is what has a meaning because speech has more value and meaning than silence (Clair). No deductive approach of communication is possible. Individuals must express their innermost feelings through words so that misinterpretation would not happen and messages clearly

understood. Speech should not bear any misleading veil for "what is not said remains in the background" (Ling, 3).

Nevertheless, before the assertive words of Celie to Harpo (*TCP*, 203), though denunciatory speech did not occur, it did not mean that silence existed in its total western form. Celie's children and her "spoiled body" were testimonies of the hidden deeds. They were answers to Corrine and Samuel's seeking the actual mother of Olivia and Adam – that they thought is Nettie. They were constant reproach on Pa's mind who perpetrated the rapes that damaged Celie's body and produced Olivia and Adam. No verbal communication of her suffering takes place. She keeps to herself all her pain in a meditative silence. She could be crying over her misfortune and make herself used to the ongoing situation, she could be thinking of a gentle and efficient way to solve the situation since she could not engage in a violent enterprise that would jeopardize her life entirely. There was a long meditation so that it fits in the observation made by Novarina about Silence. For that writer, there is no complete silence (Novarina, 1999). To him, the deepest silence is speech. There has been no complete muteness. Even Celie's presence, the days that she spends in the family atmosphere is a form of speech. Her presence lies in her silence and that silence testifies her presence (Le Breton, 1997: 25). Therefore, this long-kept secret has its charitable or humanistic aspect. Walker describes Celie's mother as sickly. Celie's abiding by the prescription to remain silent about the potentially deadly news can mean sacrificing the quest for the restoration of her dignity in order to keep her mother alive. Indeed, words could bury her mother, not silence (Kastner, 'Only Words can bury us, not silence').

After a deep and well-thought silence, Celie has reached speech level. Physical weakness and precocity could not make speech a reality. All through the whole process from childhood to adulthood, she has learned patience and endurance to learn from her adversaries weaknesses and react when they are the weakest. Her silence is the testimony of the existence of an absence. And this absence lies in the fact that she could not confide in nobody. There lacks "the addressable Other" (Kastner, 8). That speech community that triggers communication among women existed through the arrival of Shug Avery, Mary Agnes and Sofia. They started sharing their losses and grief. By telling their individual stories, they shared experience and proposed solution. It is not a sudden action but the fruit of a process, a secret plan, taking place in bedrooms, in kitchens, on

farms and in ballrooms. Speech has its starting point that we can pair with places related to women but it does not fail to reach male reserved places and challenge their authority. The reader of *TCP* can feel the dissociative movement that occurs in the novel. Purple loses its meaning; it becomes a distinction between red and blue to transmit joy and self-expression. The sad cocktail made by the merging of blue and red is reinvented. Now, Celie is aware of the fact that Purple is the result of mixing blue and red. Through Shug's clothes she gets the knowledge and gets rid of her mournful dresses: "me and Shug dress up in our new blue flower pants that match and big Easter hats that match too...roses redyellow" (*TCP*, 184). Freedom and happiness are at hand reach. What these women need is to be aware of the fact that they possess in their innermost the energy and strength to attain freedom. Only "stick together" (*TCP*, 43) to share experiences. The call for union to gain sexual freedom and control of their bodies is present in *TCP* by hints to lesbianism and use of vocabulary related to female sexual organs – titties, pussy lips, little button—(*TCP*, 82). Even the channels to communicate with God have changed completely. Writing has given way to speaking. And their eyes are no more blurred by smoke from the kitchen but they are made clear enough by drugs to see the true God and talk to him without any go-between: "smoke a lot of reefer....I smoke when I want to talk to God" (*TCP*, 226-227). Women talk to God and can hear his voice without fear of death.

Images also stand as parts of women's attainment of speech. Three symbolic animals are represented in Mr.-----'s compound, introduced by women. There are representations of elephants, seashells and birds. Elephants are renowned for their lasting memories, seashells represent resistance and birds are symbols of freedom "fly away" (*TCP*, 260). All those representations mean that victims will not forget men's misdeeds. The female victim will show resilience in front of hostility and at the same time, they will long for freedom.

Finally, women overtake the power of speech. Celie succeeds in finding the hiding place of the letters her sister Nettie sent her. She even receives a telegram that Mr.----- puts directly in her hands (*TCP*, 262). He has changed from speech holder into speech helper. She discovers that Pa was her stepfather and not her father. She reminds him the horror of his frequent rapes. She is able to set herself free from her abusive husband by claiming the end of their marital life (*TCP*, 261). On the other side, she teaches her husband life skills. He learns that women are meant to bring joy, life and happiness to those around whom they are. He declares: "Everybody learn

something in life" (*TCP*, 277). He learns that when women stick together, they have the strength to outdo any injustice and raise worry in men's mind and consciousness (*TCP*, 278). Finally, Mr.----- has a long and friendly conversation with Celie. It covers 18 pages and it concludes "Took me long enough to notice you such good company" (*TCP*, 283). Mr. ----- discovers that his "spoiled" wife is valuable when he takes time to talk to her, to have that healing intimacy.

Conclusion

Talking about a process to reach speech implies that speech is non-existent and some people are starving for the right to voice their innermost. In *The Color Purple*, speech is a verbal and gestural expression of psychological, emotional and physical realities in the men-women relationship. Before becoming a public action, speech is intimate. It relates the female characters to themselves. Experiences are shared in private female circles. Their reaching the public sphere means the maturity of the victims and the efficiency of the methods for denunciation.

Patience, resilience, togetherness and shared experience have helped women move from speechlessness to speech. Muteness that is forced on them by mischievous men is turned into speech through determination. Women have made the apparent silence appear like symbolic speech, a form of silence-speech, a silence that conveys messages from a woman to another in a codified way that only women can have access to.

Works Cited

- Bourdieu, Pierre. « Stratégies de reproduction et modes de domination ». In *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 1, décembre 1994
- Breton, Philippe. *Eloge de la parole*. Paris : La découverte, 2003.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge, 2013.
- Clair, Robert N. St. "The Social and Cultural Construction of Silence." *Festschrift for Masanori Higa*. San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University (2003).
- Edwards, Katie M., et al. "Rape Myths: History, Individual and Institutional-level Presence, and Implications for Change." *Sex Roles* 65.11-12 (2011): 761-773.
- French, Marilyn. *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World: Origins* Vol. 1. The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2008.

Hagège, Claude. *L'homme de paroles*. Paris: Fayard, 1985.

hooks, bell. 'Writing the Subject, Reading the Color Purple' in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed., Meridian, 1990.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings: *Mules and Men, Tell My House, Dust Tracks on a Road*, Selected Articles." *Library of America, New York* (1995).

Hofweber, Thomas, "Logic and Ontology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/logic-ontology/>.

Jones, Sally. "Speech is Silver, Silence is Golden: The Cultural Importance of Silence in Japan." *The ANU Undergraduate Research Journal* 3 (2011): 17-27.

Kastner, Sarah. "'Only Words Can Bury Us, not Silence': Reading Yvonne Vera's Difficult Silences." *Safundi* 17.2 (2016): 213-230.

Le Breton, David. *Le silence*. Paris : Métailié, 1997.

Lebra, Takie. "The Cultural Significance Of Silence In Japanese Communication." *Identity, Gender, and Status in Japan*. Global Oriental, 2007. 115-126.

Ling, Wong Ngan. "Communicative functions and meanings of silence: an analysis of cross-cultural views." *Multicultural studies* 3 (2003): 125-146.

Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978.

Novarina, Valère. *Devant la parole*. Paris: POL, 1999.

Platon. *Phèdre*. Paris : GF-Flammarion, 1997.

THEO : L'encyclopédie Catholique pour tous, Droguet-Ardant/ Fayard, Paris, 1992

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*, New York: Pocket Books, 1982.