



The Oppression Faced By Female Characters In Ann Petry's Novel "The Street"

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ABSTRACT

Ann Lane Petry was a profuse African American writer. The Street was her debut novel that was published in 1946 and was an outstanding achievement by Ann Lane Petry in African American Literature. Issues related to the female protagonist are considerable in her writing. This story examines the struggle of African American women to find a place in society. It also delves into other facets of urban living. This novel takes place in Harlem during the 1940s. This paper focuses on the struggle of African-American women, subjugation, Triple Oppression, and Separation under which African's live. This study examines Racial Discrimination, gender inequality, African American Feminism and Supremacy as demonstrate by both white people and members of their society. It investigates the restricted lives of Black women in society from several perspectives. The purpose of this study is to break down African's hardships and their persecuted lives. It explored the problems of being a single mother and a single lady. In her works, Ann Lane Petry beautifully captured the black and white American experience. In the 1940s, The Street was a powerful social satire on the disappointments of black urban life. Ann Lane Petry's novel was well-received and commercial success. The main purpose was to represent this struggle from a feminist perspective.

KEYWORDS: African American Feminism, Subjugation, African-American Women, Racial Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Ann Lane Petry was a renowned writer. She was born and brought up in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, on 12 October, 1908. Ann was the youngest of three daughters born to Peter Clark Lane and Bertha James Lane. They were from the black middle class of a tiny town. Her father was a pharmacist who owned and operated a neighborhood drugstore. Her mother was a licensed chiroprapist. Petry began writing short stories and plays while still in high school. She earned her bachelor's degree in pharmacy from Connecticut College. She worked as a journalist for two Harlem Newspapers as a sort of apprenticeship. Furthermore, she came up with the slogan of perfume advertisement, while she was in a high school.

In 1938, she married George D. Petry, a mystery writer from New York, and relocated to the city. After her marriage, her life took a turn for the better. In New York, she worked as a reporter for The Amsterdam News and The People's Voice, two Harlem

newspapers. Marie of the Cabin Club, her debut short story, was published in 1939. Petry was awarded the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship in 1945 for the opening chapters of her first novel, *The Street*. Petry was a role model for a new generation of black women writers, including Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor, who had followed in the footsteps of Zora Neale Hurston. Petry's historical works for young readers include *The Drugstore Cat* (1949), *Harriot Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (1955), *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964), and *Legends of the Saints* (1970) are among Ann Petry's historical books for young readers. *Miss Muriel and Other Stories* (1971), a collection of short stories, illustrates her extraordinary flexibility.

She also worked on a sociological study on the effects of segregation on ghetto children in addition to her writing career. She was a recreational specialist at a Harlem elementary school while also teaching a course at the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. Ann Petry's work was significantly impacted by her experiences as a reporter, social worker, and active community member in the inner city. After a brief illness, she died on April 28, 1997, near her home in Old Saybrook. Her characters were average, law abiding African-American from the working class. They were dedicated to hard work and aspired to be a middle-class aspirant who believed in the American Dream.

Ann Lane Petry's novel *The Street* was a masterpiece of African American Literature. Lutie Johnson, a young black mother, and her struggle to raise her son in Harlem was the subject of the film. Harlem was in the midst of a racial and economic crisis in the late 1940s. Ann Petry's novel was her debut. *The Street* (1946) was the first book written by a black woman to sell over a million copies. A newspaper article about an apartment home administrator teaching a young child how to collect letters from mailboxes inspired *The Street*. Petry claims that, the goal of the picture was to "highlight how cheaply and readily the environment can affect the path of a person's life". *The Street* concentrates on a young woman's frustrated and natural efforts as a spectacle, as a body to be begun with and exploited by male sexual desire. The accomplishment of *The Street* must be viewed in the context of the objectification of women; rape and dismemberment of women are preconditions for Bigger's ascension into manhood.

OPPRESSION FACED BY FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE STREET

The Street was generally praised as the first female novel written by a Black American Woman. It was translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, Japanese, among other languages. The novel is set in Harlem in the 1940s. It premieres in November 1944 in New York City. In the 16th Century, black women were depicted as "icons of evil". Western culture further degraded the image by portraying Black Women as a sexual excess in the minds of White men. As a result, black males were enslaved, while women were relegated to the role of "sexual receptacles for men." Afro-American women brought to America were forced to work as breeding animals. They were designed to be used as a "body toy" or a "sexpot." Slavery existed in the United States even after it was abolished.

Lutie Johnson, the main protagonist of the novel. She was a Black Woman. She was looking for a place to live that was available for rent. Ann Petry explained how women's prior experiences and current situations made them strong enough to fight for what they wanted. Lutie and Bub were living with her father and Lil, his girlfriend. Lil was a terrible woman. Lutie wished to separate Bub from Lil. Bub was a tiny baby. Lil had him light her cigarettes for her and give him sips of gin when he was just eight years old. Lutie was concerned that Bub might develop a liking for smokes and gin. That was really detrimental to his future. Lutie was also concerned about Lil's intentions toward Bub, and Lil's potential to teach the small kid anything. Petry eloquently depicted in this story how the breakdown of the family leads to a generation of lost children.

Lutie Johnson is trapped on all sides by the great "three isms" of American White and Black societies, namely Capitalism, Racism, and Sexism, unleashed on her by the Chandlers, Junto, Mr. Croose, Jones, Boots Smith, Mrs. Hedges, and Jim. The Chandlers, for whom Lutie works as a "domestic," represent and personify capitalism at the top of the story. The Chandlers are also racist and sexist towards Lutie (both men and women). Lutie Johnson was challenged and made aware of the threefold oppression perpetrated by members of society (American citizens). Lutie Johnson was a young, self-assured white black lady who confronted triple oppression from her estranged husband and white Americans.

Lutie, a single mother living in Harlem and with her eight-year-old son Bub, was subjected to three forms of discrimination. It emphasizes race and gender as persisting hurdles to achieving the American dream. Lutie Johnson is a very ambitious and native black lady, filled with all of the necessary concepts and ideals for success, as well as the drive to carry out her goals as a single black mom, but she was unfairly denied entrance to the world of Benjamin Franklin's philosophy Lutie couldn't overcome her sense of self, and she firmly believed that even if Ben Franklin could survive on a small sum of money and thrive, so could she. Following her divorce from her marriage, she relocated to Harlem, New York. Harlem is a black neighborhood in New York City. She is still there, repressed and silenced as a result of triple oppression.

As more than just a young mother and a Black African woman, Lutie Johnson suffers prejudice in all aspects of her life, both personal and professional. Because they are believed to be of a lesser race, Lutie and the other African Americans in the story are wrongly denied various rights and opportunities that are accessible to Anglo-neighboring Americans. Housing in New York City was separated by race at the time Petry wrote her novel, and only certain buildings would rent flats to black tenants—a kind of institutional racism that severely limited African Americans' options. Lutie, like many other black New Yorkers, wishes to leave crowded Harlem but is unable to do so because she has the financial means to do so. Due to the extreme severe poverty and gender inequality that existed before to the 1960s civil rights struggle, the novel's Black American protagonists are inextricably tied to Harlem.

As a conclusion, they feel angered and upset since they would not have the same rights and privileges as others. The notion that Blacks People should have fought alongside other Americans in World War II for liberties that predominantly favor white Americans magnifies these emotions. The representation of misogyny and communism in the 1940s in the U. S. is also significant in Petry's work. Those who do not value Lutie as a woman approach her as a commodity in her search of a good job. She feels compelled to conceal the fact that she has a son because possible employers, such as Boots, are only interested in her for her romantic potential. As the novel's sad climax illustrates, hard work alone is unable to overcome the barriers of race, gender, and class that exist in American culture. The heroine, Lutie Johnson, is introduced to the notion that achievement and economic independence are inevitable results of hard work and perseverance while working for the Chandlers, a white family of considerable wealth—the American ideal. Lutie adopts this mind-set and is always concerned with money, wanting to climb above her poor circumstances in Harlem.

Bub, her son, does not really comprehend why Lutie is so concerned about money, but he too tries to impress his mother, so he works hard to make money. William Jones is imprisoned after trying to take advantage of his desire to earn his mother's affection by luring him into stealing mail. However, as Petry's work vividly portrays, American in the 1940s was not really a place of equal rights for Black People or females. Lutie faces cultural and class prejudice while trying to generate money. Finally, she seems unable to achieve her dream of winning the street war.

CONCLUSION

Ann Lane Petry was one of the most illustrious authors of African American literature, and her novel *The Street* was profoundly moving. The notion of a woman's struggle and defeat played a significant role in this story. Petry's most well-known piece, *The Street*, was a picture of African Americans' economic suffering. Lutie was a novel's black female protagonist who was both distinct and significant. Petry was a well-known author in African American literature who focused on contemporary social concerns such as female struggle, single parenting, and sex politics. *The Street* addresses the African American woman's specific role in sustaining her position in a world of classism, sexism, and racism. Through the work, Ann Petry studied the black woman as the heart of the family and community. Lutie owed race a moral and ethical obligation.

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