
Exploring Hidden Feelings And Character Growth Through Symbolism In Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

When raised in a country hindered by the hardships of domestic violence, voicing one's true thoughts can often carry savage consequences, Purple Hibiscus is no exception. When the voice of the Achike family is confined in an oppressive society and home under Eugene, an authoritarian male figure, their feelings, and character growth are expressed in objects and the nature around them. In this novel by Chimamanda Adichie, the use of figurines and hibiscuses act as ambivalent symbols whose meanings give insights into understanding hidden feelings and unforeseeable change in character beyond the superficial understanding of the novel.

The events that transpire during the story give light to the fact that Mama's (Beatrice) beloved, delicate figurines represent herself in a fragile fight against her husband, Eugene. Beatrice's emotional connection with the figurines is made obvious through her tears shed when Eugene shatters the sculptures with the commencement of the book. Right away, Kambili recognizes that 'things started to fall apart at home when her brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère...immediately I watched Mama as her eyes filled up with water as the shattered pieces of the figurines hit the floor'. The glass of the figurine is delicate, easily breakable. It is a sign of fragility in comparison to something stronger like the heavy missal which personifies Eugene himself. The use of symbolism is used to establish a link between the figurines and Mama's gentle attempts to cope with her husband's violence.

Interestingly, each time she is abused by Eugene, she spends time with the figurines as if she finds comfort in spending time with something that is equally as fragile and as accurate a representation as possible. In addition, Beatrice's inordinate attachment to the figurines is noticed when she dwells upon the shattered pieces of the figurines for a concerning amount of time. As Beatrice sits silently in the corner with the broken figurine in her hand, Kambili, 'meant to say, 'I'm sorry your figurines broke, Mama', but instead, the words that came out were, 'I'm sorry Papa broke your figurines'. She nodded quickly, then shook her head to show that the figurines did not matter. They did, though. Years ago, before I understood, I used to wonder why she polished them each time... I would go down to see her standing by the étagère with a kitchen towel soaked in soapy water. She spent at least a quarter of an hour on each ballet-dancing figurine'.

The unusual care Beatrice has for the figurines symbolizes her heart and the care she has for herself. When Eugene breaks the figurines, he, in turn, breaks Beatrice's heart from his violent

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and negligent actions in their constant fight. Moreover, Beatrice's change in character is first expressed through the wreckage of her figurines when she refuses to replace the broken sculptures, symbolizing that change is forthcoming. Following her refusal, Kambili begins to understand that 'maybe mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. Kambili was only now realizing it, things were about to change.

The damage the missal does to the figurines is irreversible and because they represent Beatrice, the destruction shows the extent to which Mama is hurt by the violent actions of Eugene. When she refuses to replace the sculptures, she also refuses to stick to her usual calm personality. The representation of the figurines proves that drastic actions lead to drastic changes as Beatrice embodies a new, vengeful persona as she later plans the murder of Eugene, showing that she is evolving into a new character with the shattering of the figurines. In summary, the symbolic use of figurines represents Beatrice's hidden feelings and change in character as she deals with the hardships of her savage husband.

The use of hibiscuses symbolizes the different phases of Jaja's life as he evolves from a life of violence and oppression into an independent figure on his fight for freedom. The vibrant colors of the hibiscuses found in Jaja's house represent his oppressive life under the reign of Eugene. Even after planting tranquil purple hibiscuses in their garden, Jaja recognizes that while "the purple plants had started to push out, most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, these red hibiscuses". In Jaja's house, it is unusual to grow purple hibiscuses, instead, red ones cover most of the garden. The vibrant color of red symbolizes the pain and anger that overwhelm Jaja's life and the rapid blooming of the red hibiscuses represent the dominance of Eugene. Furthermore, Jaja's newfound courage to act in defiance of his father can initially be traced back to his first interaction with the purple hibiscus, allowing him to strive towards autonomy.

Following Jaja's refusal to go to communion, Kambili realizes that, "Nsukka started it all...Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom that were about to blossom". Jaja's audacity shows his growing maturity as his rebelliousness shows his courage. His change in character is synonymous with the purple hibiscus as both are rare and emblematic of freedom. The purple hibiscus that is about to blossom symbolizes Jaja's emerging freedom as he begins to question the authority of Eugene and act out in defiant ways. Moreover, the correlation between Jaja's change in character and the blossoming of the purple hibiscuses is intensified as Jaja continues to disobey Eugene's commands, becoming a maverick in the novel.

As Jaja moves from simply refusing to go to communion to uncharacteristically slamming doors at Eugene and courageously refusing to attend his dinner invite, Kambili realizes that, "the

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purple hibiscuses are beginning to bloom and change color...I could see the sleepy, oval-shape buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze unencumbered by any constraints...just as we were too". Jaja's attempts at autonomy grow in the same rhythm as the purple hibiscus in their garden. The hibiscuses changing color to purple is a reflection of the changes in Jaja as he evolves into an audacious character who challenges the supremacy of Eugene. As the purple hibiscuses sway freely in their unrestricted environment, they symbolize Jaja, who is now fully blossomed, as an individualistic character unburdened by the tyranny of Eugene.

In Chimamanda Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, the use of symbolism through the representation of figurines and hibiscuses deepens the understanding of the family's feelings and unforeseeable character development which would otherwise remain hidden in the shadows of Eugene's reign. While remaining quiet on the outside, the figurines and the hibiscuses symbolize the autonomous evolution of the Achike family and their inexplicable feelings when faced with oppression. Though the novel is a fictional tale, its metaphorical use of Eugene as a despotic figure embodies a tyrannical government in their actions to oppress the lives of numerous impotent citizens, serving as an accurate representation of dictatorial nations. Adichie's clever use of symbolism illuminates the hidden feelings and autonomous character development as the Achike family stands emancipated of Eugene's oppression.

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