The Poisonwood Bible: Development Of Adah

Exile is a central idea present in the Poisonwood Bible and is displayed through the character, Adah Price. Adah Price is plagued by Hemiplegia, a genetic disorder that causes one whole side of her body to be limp. Due to her disorder, she has only ever been labeled as the crooked or broken twin. This ultimately changes the way she views herself and others, such as her family. She believes that because of her disorder, she is limited and overall feels alienated throughout her time in the Congo. Adah identifies with her disease to the point that she experiences a rift within herself causing her to become cut off from her “home” or her true self. Not only does she experience a rift within herself, but a rift between her family and religion.

Throughout the novel, Adah constantly feels isolated. Despite having three sisters, she does not have a strong bond with them or her mother and father. She displays resentment towards her family members as they do not view her equally. However Adah does not cease to realize that in some means her exile was self inflicted. Knowing she was always considered disadvantaged, she created a distorted version of herself- a version that was defined by the opinions of others.

To compensate for being different Adah expresses herself through her use of diction and palindromes, since she refuses to speak otherwise and only does when feels the need to. She believes that “‘silence has many advantages. When you do not speak other people presume you to be deaf or feeble-minded and promptly make a show of their own limitations’” (Kingslover 34). Adah allowed her cynical mindset and disability get the best of her and this contributed to her self inflicted exile. Up until the invasion of the ants, Adah did not value her life. She thought her life was defective and that she brought nothing but a burden to her family. After her near death experience occurred, she finally felt a sense of purpose as she states, “‘if they chanced to look down and see me struggling underneath them they saw that even the crooked girl believed her own life was precious. This is what it means to be a beast in the kingdom’” (Kingslover 306). Her revelation of self purpose soon leads her to understand how she should appreciate the life she was given, which serves to enrich her later when she becomes a scientific researcher that studies the life of other organisms.

Although Adah is very intelligent and capable of higher level reading and thinking, her family does not understand her at a deeper level and merely views her as the “broken” twin. Ruth May, being the youngest, describes Adah in comparison to Leah as “bad on one whole side and doesn’t talk because she is brain-damaged and also hates us all. She reads books upside down. You are only supposed to hate the Devil, and love everybody else” (Kingslover 21). Even Leah does not attempt to share a sisterly bond with Adah as their disconnect stems from their opposing beliefs in religion. Leah finds fate within their father whereas Adah doubts God and her father’s teachings. By the tone Adah uses when speaking of Leah, it is evident she envies her when she emphasizes how “‘We have the same dark eyes and chestnut hair. But I am a lame gallimaufry and she remains perfect...She grew weak as I grew strong’” (Kingslover 34). Adah is even more surprised when Leah takes up hunting and becomes “direly unfeminine” and “‘if anything, I [Adah] am now considered the more normal one. I am the benduka, the single word that describes me [Adah] precisely: someone who is bent sideways and walks slowly’” (Kingslover 278).

Consequently Adah's rift between her family also creates a rift between her and religion. Adah does not look up to her father, as she does not believe in God or Christianity ever since she was told according to her "Baptist Sunday-school teacher, a child is denied entrance to heaven merely for being born in the Congo" (Kingslover 171). She however discovers "'in organic chemistry, invertebrate zoology, and the inspired symmetry of Mendelian genetics, I [Adah] have found a religion that serves. I recite the Periodic Table of Elements like a prayer, I take examinations as holy communion'" (Kingsolver 408).

When Adah eventually "loses her slant" (Kingslover 439) she fears "'to accept that my [her] whole sense of Adah was founded on a misunderstanding between my [her] body and my [her] brain" (Kingslover 439). All her life Adah felt exiled, but to be able to walk without a limp, was conflicting for her. She wonders how she can "explain that my [her] two unmatched halves used to add up to more than one whole? In Congo, I was one-half benduka the crooked walker, and one-half benduka, the sleek bird that dipped in and out of the banks with a crazy ungrace that took your breath'" (Kingslover 493). It is clear that Adah is unsure on whether to be relieved or remorseful that a critical part of her identity will finally be gone. Adah eventually realizes that although she is losing a part of who she was, her experiences alienated and enriched her to be seen in a new light. She is no longer the person she once was but is now