

The Dream House at the Shoreline: Carmen Maria Machado through the Lens of Audre Lorde

Every woman I know is a victim of harassment or assault. However, rather than disclosing to me directly, my female peers often allude to their trauma in passing. It seldom surprises me to hear they have gone through such experiences, given that “1 in 3 women globally experience violence,” according to a study conducted by the World Health Organization. As supported by this data, it is nearly impossible to exist as a woman or femme-presenting individual in society without being stifled by the patriarchy, which prioritizes the lives of white, cisgender men above everyone else. Thankfully, there are women throughout history who have fought for the authentic expression of marginalized people. Specifically, Audre Lorde was a prominent author during the Black Arts Movement, an artistic initiative celebrating Black culture during the 1960s and 1970s. Lorde is remembered for her activism and poetry inspired by the prevents them from living as comfortably as their oppressors. Lorde’s poem was first published in 1978; however, its themes reverberate through the works of contemporary queer authors.

Namely, Carmen Maria Machado’s memoir, *In the Dream House*, published in 2019, chronicles her first serious relationship with a woman where she suffered various forms of abuse. Her book challenges heteronormative boundaries by asserting that lesbians can also experience violence in their relationships. Together, the works of Lorde and Machado encourage readers to understand the value of speaking up for yourself, claiming that advocating for your needs affects both you and your community drastically. “A Litany for Survival” emphasizes the necessity of breaking the silence, thus reinforcing Machado’s belief that candidly recounting your trauma allows you to reclaim power over it. Using Lorde’s poem as a lens in which we understand *In the*

of her poem to examine the mechanisms of silence. Specifically, minorities are taught that being passive grants them their best chances of surviving. It is better not to challenge the “heavy-footed,” otherwise known as those who have a prominent influence over others. The term extends to anyone possessing power, whether occupational, such as a government official, or relational, like an abusive significant other. These people have transformed silence into a weapon used to frighten the oppressed into stagnation. Their cumbersome force submerges us into shrouds of self-doubt where we question the validity of our struggles, as well as our ability to challenge the status quo. However, Lorde believes that identifying the cause behind one’s fear of disrupting the peace is integral to fostering stronger self-efficacy.

Finally, the author concludes her poem with insight into the complex dilemma she and her audience face. Lorde reveals that whether you decide to speak up or remain silent, fear accompanies both choices; therefore, “it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive” (Lorde, lines 42-44). Taking an existential approach, Lorde motivates us to break the silence. She concludes that, although we were never meant to survive, we are still here for the time being. Thus, the author urges us to consider how we might utilize our short time on Earth to express vulnerability. This method stresses the importance of validating emotions; however challenging it may be to do so, speaking your mind is a choice that affirms we are worthy of taking up space. Lorde does not downplay the anxiety associated with using your voice; instead, she honors the fact that speaking up is a painstaking process—one you should navigate at your own pace. Despite the author’s passing in 1992, her work continuously inspires future generations as they inspect their proximity to oppressive people and systems.

Likewise, Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* hon

mistreated, as well as the queer community at large. Machado organizes her work into a series of vignettes, creatively documenting the grueling details of her abuse using various genres, such as that of a pop song or mathematical equation. By applying the terms of Lorde's poem to *In the Dream House*, we begin to comprehend the significance of opening up about your trauma.

Notably, Machado confesses her reason for publishing a memoir concerning a sensitive subject in the chapter "*Dream House* as Prologue." Initially, the author discusses the origin of certain words, developing her argument on the importance of acknowledging your resilience in trying

logic discloses why Machado's decision to chronicle her abuse deems her the figurative ruler of her space.

Interpreting Machado's work through the lens of "A Litany for Survival" also articulates the necessity of queer representation in the media. The passage "*Dream House as Queer Villany*" argues that the surplus of queer-coded antagonists in animated films negatively impacts the LGBT community. Although she is not personally offended by these disingenuous portrayals, Machado wants realistic stories about queer people depicted on-screen. She expresses that "They don't have to be metaphors for wickedness ... They can be *what they are* ... queers—real-life ones—do not deserve representation, protection, and rights because they are morally upright as people" (Machado 47). After examining the media's skewed depictions of the LGBT community, Machado concludes that authentic representation is a human right, not something you must earn based on how well you assimilate into the majority. Her decision to archive her abuse is more apparent here. Despite the negative bias surrounding sapphic relationships, Machado does not sugarcoat her experience because she believes it is more valuable to give other lesbians an opportunity to seek validation through her honesty.

Additionally, Lorde's poem verifies that consequences exist because of the lack of queer representation in television, movies, and literature. According to the poet, those in power have made it more difficult for us to understand and express ourselves more freely by pressuring us into keeping our heads down, thus limiting the amount of accurate representation accessible to minority groups. Consequently, if you scarcely see your humanity reflected in the media you consume, you will find yourself among others who stand at the metaphorical shoreline, "crucial and alone." Therefore, "A Litany for Survival" helps us recognize that Machado wrote her

systems at some point in our lives. Therefore, we mustn't blame ourselves for the actions of our perpetrators, concentrating instead on the significance of exercising vulnerability in challenging situations. Although we were never meant to survive, reading the works of Lorde and Machado provides us with a better chance.

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