SURVIVAL THROUGH REDEMPTION OF SELF IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ALICE WALKER

Thesis submitted to the Bharathiar University, Coimbatore,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

N. R. CHARRUMATHI
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Velalar College of Engineering and Technology
Thindal
Erode 638012
Tamilnadu
India
narayanacharu@gmail.com

Under the Supervision of

Dr. SHOBHA RAMASWAMY, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

KONGUNADU ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGE

(AUTONOMOUS)

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. N. R. Charrumathi, hereby declare that the thesis entitled "**Survival through Redemption of Self in the Select Novels of Alice Walker"** submitted to the Bharathiar University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in **English**, is a record of original and independent research work done by me during the period **2007-2013 (Independent Registration)** under the supervision and guidance of **Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Kongunadu Arts and Science College, Coimbatore,** and the thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree/Diploma/ Associateship/ Fellowship or other similar title to any candidate of any University.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled "S**urvival through Redemption of Self in the Select Novels of AliceWalker"** submitted to the Bharathiar University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in **English** is a record of original research work done by **Ms. N. R. CHARRUMATHI** during the period **2007 to 2013 (Independent Registration)** of her research in the Department of **English** at **Kongunadu Arts and Science College, Coimbatore,** under my supervision and guidance and the thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree/ Diploma/ Associateship/ Fellowship or other similar title to any candidate of any University.

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Contents

Abstract

Alice Walker indubitably holds a place of covetable prominence in African American literature. She portrays the struggles and journeys of African American men and women in an effort to empower and emancipate the entire black race. She is concerned with the "survival whole" of her people who are discriminated, humiliated and dishonoured by the white American majority. Walker particularly focuses on the black women's strategies of survival in a racist white society and patriarchal black community. Her personal experiences and observations as a black woman are replicated in her works and her characters. Walker dexterously shows in her writings that being a black woman is twice harder than being just a woman or just a black man. The black woman faces the problems of defining selfhood and overcoming isolation which are caused by cultural taboos and by the gender barriers. Walker believes that with the strength of sisterhood, love, compassion, forgiveness and also creativity, black women could revive their world and also benefit the black community as a whole.

Behind Walker's philosophy of redemptive art is the will to liberate her race from an oppressive society and to save the entire race through a collective oneness. The theme of redemption, reconciliation and restoration of the status of black woman is recurrent in the works of Alice Walker. Among her works, it was decided to confine the study to four of Walker's novels namely, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *The Color Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart.* The novels share in common Walker's artistic strategy of survival to cover solutions to social problems such as racial and gender oppression.

The present study proposes to define the struggle undergone by Walker's female characters to achieve decisive independence and freedom from racism and sexism by preserving their ethnic heritage. The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate how Walker, in her works, attempts to create situations that reflect the plight of black women in the real world and tries to heal and redeem them, thus paving the way for their survival and fulfilment.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters. Chapter I, "Introduction," constitutes a brief outline of African American literary tradition and Walker's eminence in it. It is followed by an overview of Walker's life and works and a brief appraisal of her predominant themes, motifs and concept of "Womanism" a unique ideology regarding the liberation of women. In addition, the purpose of the study is stated and its scope defined.

The second chapter, "Redemptive Power of Love in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland"* discusses Walker's belief that the soul has the power to transform an individual from a life of hatred to a life of love. The novel, which follows three generations of a black Southern family of sharecroppers, shows through its depiction of the character of the protagonist, Grange Copeland, that love can redeem, restore and reunite shattered lives. Redemption is possible only when the black men are of an androgynous temperament and are magnanimous enough to include black women and their issues in their fight against the discrimination of the whites in America.

Chapter III, "Redemption through Self-expression and Sisterhood in *The Color Purple,"* demonstrates how sisterhood has the power to create and strengthen newly-woven bonds among black women, leading them to a sense of independence and autonomy. Sisterhood among the women provides them with the prospect of self-discovery and the power to define their own

lives. Walker empowers her female characters through the boon of female bonding, which leads them to the discovery of their talents. Walker's female characters achieve psychological wholeness when they are able to fight oppression, whereas her male characters achieve psychological health and wholeness only when they are able to acknowledge women's pain and admit their role in it.

Chapter IV, "Remembrance of the Past as the Key to Redemption in *The Temple of My Familiar,"* explores how Walker tries to heal her generation by instigating them to revise their past, respect their own ancestors, mothers, and their own female selves. Walker insists that the knowledge of their past, which consists of their ancestors' experiences, mistakes, failures, and struggle against injustice, as well as their infirmities, suffering and sustenance is vital to survival in the present context. When people refuse to acknowledge their past or feel ashamed to know about the lives of their ancestors or if they are too frightened to recall and refurbish it to their memory, they will not be able to acquire the fortitude and endurance required to live. Spiritual wholeness, for African Americans, consists of an understanding and embracing of the African American past.

The penultimate chapter, "Spiritual Redemption through Communion with Nature in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart,"* deals with a novel with autobiographical overtones, resonating Walker's personal experiences and their impact on her life. As a black woman, Walker discloses that she is no exception to the triple jeopardy of race, sex and class and that through writing she attempts to heal the hurt, pain and humiliation she had suffered. It is seen that personally and professionally, Walker has journeyed through various phases of growth towards enlightenment and spiritual development. Her wound or the hurt is healed through several measures which are

strategies of survival. Through her protagonist, she speaks of necessity of cleansing the polluted body by consuming "Grandmother medicine," known as Yagé. Walker stresses that the "continuous internal cleansing" would eventually lead to the purity of the soul—a necessary prerequisite to reach God and the other World.

The final chapter sums up the findings of the research which were elaborated in the preceding ones. Walker's writings portray the struggle of black people in general and the experiences of black women in a patriarchal community in particular. The focal theme of Walker's work is survival, the survival of the whole self. Walker writes of African American women's discovery of their inner selves from which they draw the strength necessary to live. Her central characters, like Walker herself, come to recognize and acknowledge the divine, both within themselves and in everything in the universe. She urged the black women to forge self-definition of self-reliance and independence. Walker, through her characters, instils the notion that since the black women suffers dual or even triple discrimination, their strength to obtain their rightful place in racist and sexist society has to be enormous. From the dehumanizing and degrading state, they have to elevate themselves with fortitude and their forte is the gift of sisterhood. After summing up, the researcher gives suggestions for further study in related areas.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the body of the thesis:

The Third Life of Grange Copeland has been abbreviated as *TLGC*

The Color Purple has been abbreviated as *CP*

The Temple of My Familiar has been abbreviated as *TMF*

Now is the Time to Open Your Heart has been abbreviated as *NTOH*

In Search of Our Mothers Gardens has been abbreviated as *ISOMG*

Chapter I

Introduction

> O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! awake! arise! no longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Showforth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties. O, ye daughters of Africa! What have done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generation? What foundation have ye laid for generations yet unborn?
>
> - Maria W. Stewart (1831)

Alice Walker is an internationally acclaimed African American woman novelist and a poet, a pre-eminent writer of fiction whose works have transformed, improved and inspired people around the world irrespective of race, sex and class. She is one of the world's most prolific writers, one who writes to support the economically, spiritually and politically oppressed. She is a pragmatic woman who empathizes with the revolutionaries and spiritual leaders who seek change and transformation of the world. She is a firm defender not only of human rights, but of the rights of all living beings. She has been in the forefront in many important and greatest movements in the annals of African American tradition. The black women's struggle for wholeness is the paraphernalia of Walker's genre of fiction. Walker specifies her task, "I am preoccupied with the spiritual, the survival whole of my people. But, beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppression, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black women" (O'Brien *Interviews* 192). She writes to make perceptible that which has been invisible as a result of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization.

Walker is acclaimed by *The Times* as "the brightest star in a galaxy of black women writers." She is the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the first woman professor to teach a course in African American Writing at Wellesley University. She recapitulates the past of the African American experiences and the history of the African American literary tradition. She restores the painful experiences of her ancestors because she considers it as a vital factor of a vivacious and affirming present which is a valuable sustaining force for surviving spiritually whole. Regardless of the disgust, contempt and hatred of others over the black people, Walker is committed to survival and development of the self—individually and communally, physically and spiritually, into a state of oneness and wholeness. As Gloria Wade Gayles observes:

> The distinctive voice in Walker's works is the voice of a woman deeply immersed in her blackness, her womaness, and her Southerness. It is a clear voice, neither muted nor strident, and always resonant with Walker's belief in redemption. Even when she writes passionately about problems that ravage the land and the lives of people, Alice Walker emphasis the healing power of love and the possibility of 'change: change personal, and change in society ("Black, Southern, Womanist" 302).

Walker is a legendary writer whose writings have healed and redeemed numerous women's heart and soul. Her writing is illustrative to finding a "way out of no way" and nurturing the inner artist or the spirit of creativity. Emma J. Waters Dawson appreciates Walker as

> a prolific and imaginative artist, Alice Walker has within a relatively short span of time become a touchstone in African American literature… By weaving taboo subjects and life styles, such as incest and lesbianism, into a

> creative literary pattern, Walker not only points out black women's physical and psychological abuse and black women torn by contrary instincts, she also affirms, like Hurston, her belief in personal, spiritual redemption that may evolve through the self. (77)

African American Literature

An overview of African American literature enhances the appreciation and understanding of Walker's place in the literary canon. African American Literature is a conglomeration of rich black heritage and distinctive American experience. Melvin Donaldson in *Cornerstones (1996)* broadly defines African American Literature as "a body of written and oral works created by writers who share both a black African Heritage and a unique American experience that defines and celebrates black history and culture" (xiii). African American literature resonates the centuries of slavery, ill-treatment, irremediable discrimination and the predomination of the whites which crippled their lives. Through their writing, African American writers shared their common experience of humiliation and oppression. They recorded the struggles, the achievements, and the movements that gained them liberation through the martyrdom of fellow African Americans. Freedom was a "dream" to the leaders who fought for the liberation of their race from the shackles of the white society. Freedom was as essential as breath to them and African American literature encompasses the "breadth of the struggles, achievements, and roles of blacks in shaping American society" (xiv). African American writers made literature a significant tool to help them express their loss of ownership and sense of belonging, their negation and dispossession, their servitude to the white race, and their loss of identity in the country in which they live.

Maryemma Graham in her Introduction to *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* says, "For an African American author, the act of writing is part of a larger process of cultural revisionism, of redefining history and historical memory, and of confronting the past in innovative and provocative ways that are intentionally self-reflexive" (v). African American literature achieves depth and universality by bringing out the impact of culture, gender, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity. It places emphasis on the incredible urge for survival and liberation in a community or country which tries to suppress them. It is about probing, challenging, changing and redirecting the accepted way of thinking to ensure the freedom of its community. After years of struggle, though the sense of belonging is felt within the narrower circles of the family and of the black community, survival in the white society as a whole remains a threat to the African Americans.

Survival has become the prerogative of the white racial society. The whites have become masters while the blacks are viewed as cursed slaves and are humiliated merely because of the skin they failed to be born with. Blacks ceased to exist as human beings in the white world. Blackness was seen as closely aligned to slavery and was the embodiment of evil to the white. Nevertheless, to all black writers in America, blackness was the spur, the barb of pain that made them achieve artistic distinction. Their works were fortified by the awareness of being black and their works prove to be powerful, potent, and aggressive and provide the impetus to sustain their survival and affirm their presence. Blackness, which is regarded as an infirmity, was converted into artistic strength by writers. Blackness operates as a creative element which proves their identity as artists and more importantly, as human beings with equal privileges in society.

The works written by writers of African descent demands a closer scrutiny as their novels are considered as historical and documentary evidences of black humanity. African

Americans' lack of freedom makes it essential for them to find a space in which they are able to move and express their ideas, emotions, thoughts and artistic ability; a space that allows a variety of characters to discover, define and develop themselves. African American literature and its pertinent themes have helped countless artists to define and transform themselves. The writers felt the importance of making society a better place to live in and hence they occupied a place of primary importance in the contemporary critical discourse. To them, art is beneficial only when it helps in liberating the black race. Their basic contention is that as long as the white man dominates the world, survival is a struggle to the black. To face the white ideology and all its accompanying strictures, black men and women have to come together in a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood and a new sense of humanism for the development and liberation of all the persecuted people throughout the world. Black writers feel that they should have their own concept of life and a separate political structure to determine their own destiny and that of their posterity.

As a part of the African American Literature, the contribution of African American women writers is as significant as that of black male writers. Black women writers have been pioneers in various fields, especially literature. They examine the complicated social issues from the perspective of being black and women. They express the unfathomable pain, injustice and the atrocity of slavery. In their works, they emanate the continuing oppression of the African Americans by the entire white community. As artists, they feel that it is the duty and responsibility of the writers to be committed in using their works to raise the social consciousness and to promote change in the society. The understanding that mankind as a species can survive and thrive should pervade the artists' mind. Deprivation stimulated black women to discover their self and prepare themselves to create the space denied to them.

Erlene Stetson, in the introduction to *Black Sister: Poetry by Black American Women,*

1746-1980 avows that "For black women, creativity has often been a survival tactic" (xvii). Since they have experienced many kinds of oppression either from white people or the black men, African American women writers give vent through their literary works to their feelings of oppression either from their white patriarchal society or from black men. African American women writers have been deliberately made invisible by both traditions—the women's literary tradition and the African American literary tradition. The women writers and black male writers perpetrated the same discrimination and exclusion which they experienced and vehemently crusaded against. Black women writers have fallen victim to erratic selection. The black women's writings have been "patronized, slighted and misunderstood by a cultural establishment operating according to male norms out of male perceptions" (Morgan 11).

"Both literary history's "sins of omissions" and literary criticism's inaccurate and partisan judgments of women writers have come under attack since the early 1970s by feminist critics . . . since its inception, its theorists and practitioners have agreed that serves as "correctives, unmasking the omissions and distortions of the past—the errors of a literary critical tradition that arise from and reflect a culture created, perpetuated and dominated by men" (Desmarais qtd. in Pratt 176). But these theorists and practitioners were "white females who, wittingly or not, perpetrated against the Black women writers the same exclusive practices they so vehemently decried in white male scholars" (McDowell 153). The white female scholars excluded the work of black women writers from literary anthologies and critical studies. Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination is* an illustration of the deliberate disregard for black women writers. Black women writers have been "disenfranchised" not only from critical works on the tradition of women writers by white female scholars but also frequently excised by black men writers from the African American

literary tradition. Therefore, black women writers are conspicuously absent from both the literary traditions. Toni Cade Bambara proclaimed,

> We are involved in a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative control of a corporate society, liberation from the constructive norm of mainstream culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation) (Mitchell and Taylor 3).

Black women writers are misunderstood, misinterpreted and summarily dismissed from the chronicles of literary history. Alice Walker says that men criticize the women writers by imposing on them their restrictive norms and concerns which are based on masculine-centered values and definitions. Black women writers, in Alice Walker's words, "were casually pilloried and consigned to a sneering oblivion" (Hemenway xiv).

Black feminist critics' focus should be diverted to black women writers who have not received proper attention. Elaine Showalter's celebrated discovery of the omitted white women writers from American literary tradition stirred the black women critics to think about the African American literary tradition pertaining to women writers. The scholarly revision of the American literary canon inspired them to review what had been perceived as vacuity in traditional works, and as a result those empty spaces began to yield a meaning. It helped in identifying the long ignored, suppressed and misinterpreted works in literature due to gender, race and class disparity. The works of exemplary writers as Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* (1972) , Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1982), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Olive Tilford Dargan's *Call Home the Heart* (1932) and Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (1929) intensify the awareness of the social change and

of the ways in which literary works mirror society and its oppressions. It reflects the product of the Civil Rights Movement and Conscious- Raising groups of the 1960s. But, the ideology served by sexism, racism and classicism are not traceable because of the oppressions that perpetuate their social order.

Consequently, to reevaluate the achievements of the authors who have struggled against the patriarchal world for recognition, black women especially formulated theories to resurrect the forgotten and omitted black women writers and also to revise the misinterpreted critical opinions of them. As black women face multi-faceted oppression, it becomes essential to define and express the particularity of their experiences. Since the black women are camouflaged behind the feminist objectives, their struggle leads to self-realization, self-actualization and widespread recognition. There were many writers who have been benefited from the recuperative work of black feminist critics. As the black women's problems are different from white women, the separation and distinction becomes inevitable. The black women writers therefore, whether in Africa or elsewhere in the world, who live a life of suffering and humiliation, had to fight for their right as 'womanists'.

Alice Walker regarded the concept of 'Womanism' as a more vital and accurate description of black American woman's ethos in contrast to feminism, which is a predominantly white middle-class perspective. Jacquelyn Grant observes, "Black feminism grows out of Black women's tri-dimensional reality of race or sex or class" (202). Walker defines "Womanist" in the introduction to her book of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), as one who "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . .women's strength" and is "committed to [the] survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (*ISOMG* xi). Riggs articulates the goals of Womanists in her book *Awake, Arise & Act: A Womanist Call to Black Liberation*,

> Womanists engage in at least four tasks: a) uncovering the roots of a womanist tradition through examination and reintegration of black women's experience into black history in particular and American history in general; b) debunking social myths so as to undermine the black woman's acceptance of sexist oppression, the black man's acceptance of patriarchal privilege and the white woman's acceptance of white racist privilege; c) constructing black womanist theology and religious ethics in light of the first two tasks and to broaden these disciplines to include nontraditional bases and sources for theological and ethical reflection; d) envisioning human liberation (not solely racial/ethnic group or gender-group liberation) under God; that is, black womanists are proposing a decidedly inclusive perspective that is acutely aware of the need for the simultaneous liberation from all oppression (2).

Madhu Dubey finds that "Walker's womanist ideology affirms a psychological wholeness that is communally oriented and is explicitly opposed to the self-sufficient individuality of bourgeois humanist ideology" (4). Katie Cannon uses Walker's definition of Womanist as "a critical, methodological framework for challenging inherited traditions for their collision with androcentric patriarchy as well as a catalyst in overcoming oppressive situations through revolutionary acts of rebellion" (23).

Art is Redemptive

Black women writers braved the ideological strictures and roles assigned to them in the writings of their male counterparts. They are optimistic that redemption is possible in spite of the double oppression of racism and sexism. In their works, they emanate the continuing oppression of the African Americans by the entire white community. As artists, it is the duty of these writers to be committed in using their works to raise the social

consciousness and promote change in the society. They have an understanding that mankind as a species can survive and thrive only when harmony exists between them.

The black women's writing demonstrates a deeper understanding of women and their rights in a white male-dominated culture. The writings reveal how survival amidst discrimination is possible; how strength and fortification can help women to overcome their struggles; how they can withstand social, cultural and spiritual pressures; and how through their connection with the ancestors, they can acquire a new strength to free themselves and teach their posterity the process of healing their wounds. Loving the self-regardless of the disgust, contempt and hatred of others needs self-determination, indomitable strength and high self-esteem. The politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of black women writers. Smith points out that "thematically, stylistically, aesthetically, and conceptually, black women writers manifest common approaches to the art of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social and economic experience they have been obliged to share" ("Toward" 64).

The black women writers in their fictional themes try to demolish the old images that black women have been caged with and seek to provide contrasting models of strength. A recurrent theme is the sexual abuse of black women and how they cope with racism and sexism in everyday life. Black women writers talk of the experiences of being in double jeopardy. Their writings involve the portrayal of the "double-consciousness" as described by W.E.B. Du Bois: "The[Black] ever feels his two-ness, --an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (12). Black women writers present their status for hundreds of years under the White men. Bell hooks expresses the status of the black women in her book *Ain't I A Woman*:

> Black women are one of the most devalued female groups in American society, and they have been the recipients of a male abuse and cruelty that has known no bounds or limits. Since the black woman has been stereotyped by both white and black men as the bad woman, she has not been able to ally herself with men from either group to get protection for the other. Neither groups feels that she deserves protection . . . most young black men see their female companions as objects to be exploited . . . referred to black female as "that bitch" or "that whore." Their perception of the black female as a degraded sexual object is similar to white male perceptions of the black female (108).

Literature of Slavery and Freedom

African American writers, throughout the centuries, have recognized their specific heritage and have considered their experiences as part of American life. In the budding stage, in the period of slavery and Reconstruction, women writers like Lucy Terry, Frederick Douglas, Frances Harper, Phillis Wheatley and Sojourner Truth created their works. Lucy Terry's ballad "Bar's Fight" helped to establish the beginnings of African American literature both as a poet and a historian because the ballad chronicles the events of the 1746 battle between settlers and Native Americans and portions of the poem have been included in the United States history books as the only extant account of the battle.

According to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature,* Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* published in 1773 is now considered "the first African American work of literature" (Gates 127) and the first book published by a woman of the African descent. People's skepticism about the authenticity of the work and their disbelief that the black people would ever excel in arts and their deep-

rooted conviction that the white only have the privilege to write is apparent in the preface to Wheatley's work, "Attestation" which says:

> We whose Names are under-written, do assure the world, that the POEMS specified in the following page, were written by PHILLIS, a young Negro girl, who was but a few years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa, and has ever since been, and now is under the Disadvantage of serving as a slave in a Family in their Town (xxxii).

In the antebellum period, Sojourner Truth, though an illiterate, was extraordinarily articulate and so she dictated her thoughts and experiences to Oliver Gilbert who published them as *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave* (1850). African American abolitionist William Still's *The Underground Railroad(1872)* is especially a rich source of dictated lives of antebellum African American women which constitutes dozens of personal narratives of fugitive slaves such as "Aunt Hannah Moore," Cordelia Lonely, and Euphemia Williams. Harriet A. Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), a fugitive slave narrative and Elizabeth Keckley's 1868 memoir, *Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868) focuses on the threats that slavery posed to black women.

Many antebellum African American women writers wrote to document her experiences to crusade against the forms of oppression. The slave woman's narrative functioned, then, as a space in which to record African American women's moral, mental, intellectual, and psychological strength, their capacity to endure the horrors of slavery as well as to develop and maintain a strong and abiding sense of self-respect and self-determination. At the same time, enslaved and ex-slave narrators insisted that, as Africans, they were not subhuman but human and female. Their ability to cope with the brutal aspects of slavery had

been used to validate the false claim that females of African descent are subhuman and therefore not to be afforded the same (proscribed) civil and human rights as white women. The slave women are "not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime for her to be virtuous" (Jacobs 28).

Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) is a momentous literary innovation and typical of black antebellum writing. Another manuscript recovered by Henry Louis Gates Jr., in 2002 is *The Bondwoman's Narrative* signed "By Hannah Crafts, a Fugitive Slave," gives evidences of the threats that slavery posed to a woman of African descent. Biographies as Susan Paul's *Memoir of James Jackson* (1835), Josephine Brown's *Biography of an American Bondman, by his Daughter* (1856) were used by black women writers as a striking genre to record history, to celebrate triumph over adversities, to offer exemplars of inspiration and encouragement.

In the nineteenth century, more women became professional writers and journalists. Discrimination never impeded women of African descent from participating in the emerging profession of literature. Maria Stewart's *Productions of Mrs. Maria Stewart* (1835) "urges African Americans to embrace a higher moral standard suggesting that reclaiming morality and eschewing from vulgarity would result in a stronger, more practical African American nation" (Mitchell and Taylor 21). During the antebellum period, Mary Shadd Cary, the female editor of *Provincial Freeman* was instrumental in the community debates over abolition and emigration.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper a multi-faceted writer, became the nineteenth century's most popular and prolific writer, recognized as the author of frequently anthologized poems such as "Bury Me in a Free Land" (1864) and "The Slave Mother" (1854). She used literature as a tool and a weapon for social and moral reform. She created *Iola Leroy* (1892),

one of the first African American historical novels and the first to publish a short story "The Two Offers." In Frances Smith Foster and Larose Davis' words, "Harper was an inveterate equal rights activist who championed such causes as suffrage, temperance, pacifism, education, morality, women's political organization, and Christian reformation, and equal rights for all" (Mitchell and Taylor 22). Dunbar-Nelson, a post bellum writer "expanded African American literary repertoire through her works" (23).

Redemption as the basis of the Emergence of Black Writers

African American women writers used their works as means to expose the ways in which they were subjugated on the basis of race and gender. To black women writers, racism is of a greater concern than sexism. As the black women writers are conscious of black impotence, they strive for the emancipation and empowerment of entire black race. For the black women, racism and sexism must be eradicated together. Black women collaborated not only with black men in their struggle but also all the people of the world who are executed and oppressed under sex and race. Alice Walker opines that the black women's struggle is not exclusively their own but there is an implied universality which connects them with others of the same plight. In narrating their personal histories and experiences, the characters of African American fiction bear witness to their survival. Black women are characterized as individuals, who have more barriers to confront than others and who suffer in recognizably traumatic and tragic circumstances.

The New Black Renaissance

During the 1920s, Black women writers of the Harlem Renaissance expressed their sense of a redefined racial identity and heralded the spiritual emancipation of black Americans. Jessie Fauset published four novels and the characters strive to realize their twin

dreams of becoming artists and advancing the struggle for racial equality. She was more unfalteringly committed to women artists than any other black woman writer who contributed to *The Crisis,* the official journal of the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* and venue for African American writers. She promoted works of black women artists and writers such as Georgia Douglas Johnson, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Anne Spencer and Nella Larsen. In a social hierarchy that declared that men should have power over women, whites over blacks, and rich over poor, it was courageous for a poor black woman to aspire to be an artist. Nella Larsen, through her novel *Quicksand* (1969), proved to be the most accomplished novelists of the Harlem Renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston's masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) partake the Renaissance spirit. It emphasizes the obstacles a woman faces in the struggle to gain a voice and an identity that depends on the ability to speak oneself into being. Through her works, "she represented their lives, theorized their culture, transcribed their language, and thus inspired, created a literary language of her own" (Mitchell and Taylor 44).

The Black Arts Movement

Women writers of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) ventured into every literary genre and constructed a language that reversed the power relation between black and white America. It was a period of literary and artistic growth among African Americans during the 1960s and into the early 1970s. Larry Neal refers, "Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power Concept. . . The Black Art and Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood" (xvii). It featured many black writers and artists who voiced the cultural and political values of African American identity. Women writers of the BAM entered every literary genre and constructed a special language. BAM is a movement characterized by rediscoveries such as the rediscovery

of anthropologist, dramatist, theorist, and novelist Zora Neale Hurston. Novelists like Toni Cade Bambara, Paul Marshall, and Gwendolyn Brooks had forecast the question of identity. Amiri Baraka is the foremost theorists of the BAM. The Black Panther Party autobiographers provide histories of the liberation struggle in the United States during the first decade of the BAM. *The Black Woman*: *An Anthology* (1970) brought to publication the works of twenty-eight activist writers—among them Bikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Alice Walker, and Sherley Anne Williams. Mari Evans's *I Am a Black Woman*, Louise Meriwether's *Daddy was a Number Runner*, Pauli Murray's *Dark Testament*, Audre Lorde's *The First Cities*, Sonia Sanchez's *We a BaddDD People*, Nikki Giovanni's *Re:Creation*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* were published in the 1970 by the dual influence of the Black Power and Women's Rights Movements. The revolutionary spirit of the Black Arts Movement is the genesis of curriculum revisionary studies –Black Women's Studies is an illustration of the revolution.

Contemporary African American Women Writers

Contemporary African American women writers offer full expression to the complexity of contemporary African American life and explore the self, its desires, its longing, aspirations, and possibilities, particularly in the post-Civil Rights United States. There were several literary debuts in the post 1970s and emergent writers "promoted cultural and racial self-discovery and self-awareness as well as the celebration of blackness, early 1970s literature by black women also stressed the necessity of loving oneself and one's culture" (Mitchell and Taylor 72). Sonia Sanchez's revolutionary collection *We a BaddDD People* and Nikki Giovanni's poem "Nikki-Rosa", for example, "celebrated the black woman, her versatility, her strength, and her culture" (72).

Contemporary women writers also critique the black communities' continuing belief in Western ideals and strive to create awareness that such beliefs stunted the growth and development of black people in general and black women in particular. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* are the best illustrations of the portrayal of the limitations which the community imposes on its women. As Christian intimates, one of the characteristics of early 1970s fiction by black women is its projection that the community is a "major threat to the survival and empowerment of women" ("Trajectories" 240). Maya Angelou, a progenitor of contemporary black "life writing" has published five autobiographies including I *Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* Throughout Ntozake Shange's major works, the theme of self-love and self-definition is prevalent. Her dramatic choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* (1976), Gayl Jones's *Eva's Man* (1975), Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Walker's *The Color Purple* continues the tradition of black women writers questioning how well black women can define themselves within the context of the community. By the mid-1970s, women to define themselves revolted against the community by standing outside it.

Though these women seem to be successful in their quest to assert themselves against unfair definitions, as bell hooks opines, "the struggle by black female characters for subjectivity, though forged in radical resistance to the *status quo*… usually takes the form of black women breaking free from boundaries imposed by others, only to practice their new found 'freedom' by setting limits and boundaries for themselves" ("Revolutionary" 56). While the longing for selfhood is one which has been consistently investigated in black women's literary tradition, by the later part of the 1970s, a corresponding desire for mental and spiritual healing had become a central trope in contemporary African American women's

literature. In addition to using the ancestral matriarchal past to help to heal the contemporary woman, the women writers have used "historical narratives to question both history and its relationship to the present" (Mitchell and Taylor 75).

African American women writers continue to use the legacy of slavery to interrogate the past and to investigate black womanhood. Throughout the 1990s and a number of 1980s, texts explored strategies for healing, focusing more on contemporary maternal figures imbued with ancestral spirits, as healers. Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Mama Day* (1988), Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Marshall's *Praise the Song for the Widow* (1983) are exemplary texts in this regard. Notably, in each of these texts, the 'laying on of hands' is central to the woman's healing.

Audre Lorde used literature to give voice to what was once a largely unrepresented group in the African American literary tradition—African American lesbianism. Lorde, who frequently describes herself as a "black lesbian feminist warrior poet," offers her writing as a guide for her vision of a better world. From *Cables to Rage* (1970) to *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), she published ten books of poetry and four of prose, all of which helped create a space for lesbian literature by African American women writers, among them Cheryl Clarke, Sharon Bridgforth, Jewelle Gomez, Cherry Muhanji, Pat Parker, Sapphire, and April Sinclair. Even in the midst of unwarranted social oppression, Lorde's work reminds the reader of the importance of love. Lorde's openness about her lesbianism undoubtedly helped facilitate the novels of the 1980s –from Walker's *Color Purple* to Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place* to Shange's *Sassafrass* to Lorde's *Zami* which depict openly the complexity of lesbian relationships and the varying ways to which communities respond to them.

E.Shelley Reid writes, "a generation of writers [Morrison and Walker's] focused intently on helping their black women characters learn to define themselves positively instead

of just reacting against others' stereotypes, and gave them the power to speak their own names and stories" (xxiv). In 1980, Barabara Christian's *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* was the first single-authored, critical study which explores the cultural and historical contexts of novel by African American women writers. In Dexter Fisher's *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers in the United States*, the critic proffered the goals of African American women writers, "authenticat[ing] the experience of black women, establish[ing] a context for understanding the traditions of the past, and creat[ing] a sense of place and community, giving the community back to itself by elevating the commonplace to the artistic" (140).

Writing that makes us think; writing that challenges us to be better; writing that "saves" us, as Toni Cade Bambara frequently suggests, must continue to be written, published and read. "The purpose of the journey, or the quest, according to contemporary African American women writers, is to probe, to scrutinize that which has made the journey or the quest necessary. The quest is seldom completed, and the result is often a impermanent wellness which may require further and further investigation" (Mitchell and Taylor 84). The black woman's works presents the realities of being black and female in a society in which she is doubly marginalized, all the while investigating the ways in which the protagonist's coming of age might best negotiate and accept her marginalized cultural past rather than adopt the culture of another. For the black women, writing is a useful means of protecting themselves from renewed harassment and persecution. They made the public aware of their predicament; they endeavour to amass potential support and also to undermine the ability of the state to retaliate against them in secrecy. Writing became the sword and shield for the black women writers. Their life experiences were inscribed in their writings to advance the cause of black liberation, to bear witness, to offer analysis, provide direction, to help create a

better world, and ultimately, to save their own lives. These women writers are the survivors amidst many who were lost along the way. The life-saving power of fiction emerges as a recurrent motif in African American women's novels published from the mid nineteenth to the early twenty-first century.

Black feminist theory aims to obtain gender equality for black women, as well as to inscribe black women and their cultural contributions into the historical narrative. It aims to expose sexism alongside racism within and outside the black community, and to eliminate all forms of oppression for everyone. As Beverly Guy-Sheftall explains, black feminism's goals are to "provide clarity about the impact and interface of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classicism on the lives of African American women" and to create "a world in which race, class, gender, and class hierarchies are no longer viable" (xvii). "For African American women writers of the 1970s, the genre of the novel offered a flexible and capacious vehicle for questioning the Black Arts agenda, especially its monolithic and exclusively centered models of identity and community" (Mitchell and Taylor 160).

The South as a Rich Heritage

In a wide range of novels, including Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977), Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980), Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) and *The Color Purple* (1982), Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress* and *Indigo* (1982), and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988), the South is represented as the site of cultural ancestry and memory. This emphasis on historical community becomes necessary at a time when past traditions and especially those associated with the racially oppressive history of the South, were being disavowed in the interests of political change.

Walker's intense preoccupation and obsession with the experiences of the South and Southern blacks makes her use them in her works extensively. Her works primarily depend on what black life is, has been and can be in a specified landscape. She has established a concrete means of portraying the people of her race, their lives, their issues and their silent sufferings. Her predominant themes of spiritual and individual identity are associated with the heritages of Southern Black writers. She feels that though her people are black and poor, their experiences as human beings are valuable and should be shared with the world. She considers it a privilege to belong to a rich history and heritage as it becomes instrumental in understanding her people and their problems and to depicting them in her works. "Among the generation of black women Southern writers, Walker is the only writer who persistently identifies herself and her concerns with her native region" (Davis 39). She celebrates the generation that preceded Walker's own, those men and women who opened doors through which they themselves would never pass and who were unafraid to attempt personal and social change in order to restructure subsequent generations.

Alice Walker: A Biographical Sketch

Alice Walker is an African American poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist, anthologist, teacher, editor, publisher, womanist and activist. Alice Malsenoir Walker was born in Eatonton on February 9, 1944, the eighth and youngest child of Minnie Tallulah Grant and Willie Lee Walker, who were sharecroppers. At the age of eight, her brother scarred and blinded her right eye with a BB gun in a game of Cowboys and Indians. After the injury, she felt inferior and desolated. She became shy and reclusive, nurturing a passion for reading and writing poetry in solitude. Out of her isolation grew her art:

> I believe. . . that it was from this period—from my solitary, lonely position, the position of an outcast—that I began really to see people and things, really

> to notice relationships. . . . I felt old, and because I felt I was unpleasant to look at, filled with shame. I retreated into solitude, and read stories and began to write poems (*ISOMG* 244-45).

The little girl who had felt ugly and disfigured and alone had finally emerged healthy and whole. Writing healed her.

She graduated from high school in 1961 as the school's valedictorian and entered Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia on a scholarship. She participated in Civil Rights demonstrations and also in "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" in 1963, where she was inspired by Martin LutherKing's "I Have a Dream." At Sarah Lawrence College in New York, she received a scholarship which was a privilege only a few black women enjoyed at that time. Her mentors Muriel Ruykeyser and Jane Cooper stimulated her interest and talent for writing. She published her first collection of poems *Once* in 1968.

Her extreme depression related to an unwanted pregnancy as a teenager made her consider committing suicide until she recovered after procuring a safe abortion. To explain her horrifying feelings of death, pain and fear, she wrote several volumes of poetry and a short story entitled "To Hell with Dying." Always an activist, she participated in the Civil Rights Movement of 1965 and encouraged voter registration. She returned to Mississippi in 1966 where she met a Jewish Civil Right activist and law student named Mel Leventhal, and married him soon afterwards. They were the first inter-racial couple in the city and they were under the constant murderous threats from the Ku Klux Klan. Her essay, "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" won the first prize in *The American Scholar* essay contest. Walker played a crucial role in the development of African American literary studies. She has excavated and rescued all of Hurston's works from obscurity and brought it to scholarly attention. She helped J. California Cooper publish her own novels and stories.

Walker's reputation as a black woman writer rests on her novels, though she has excelled in writing poetry, short fiction, essays and children's books. All her works in various genres has traces of Womanism. Her fiction focuses on the evolution of female wholeness, the development of female identity and black community. Her essays celebrate her connection with other African American women writers. She has helped to promote the work of African American women by co-founding the publishing outlet Wild Tree Press. Her writing explores multidimensional kinships among women and embraces the redemptive power of social and political revolution. Her work, along with that of such writers as Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor, is commonly associated with the post 1970s surge in African American women's literature.

Walker has created an oeuvre of more than 27 books, of poetry, novels, short stories, essays, memoirs and children's writing. The poems in Walker's first volume *Once* are based on her experiences during the Civil Rights Movement and her travels to Africa. Influenced by Japanese haiku and the philosophy of author Albert Camus, *Once* also contains meditations on love and suicide. Upon her return to college, after a visit to Africa during the summer of 1964, she struggled with an unwanted pregnancy. She writes about the mental and physical anguish she experienced before deciding to have an abortion. The poem *Once* (1968) grew not only from the sorrowful period in which Walker contemplated suicide but also from her triumphant decision to reclaim her life. In *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* (1973) she revisits her southern past, while in other verses she challenges superficial political militancy. *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning* (1979) contain tributes to black political leaders and creative writers. *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1984), *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems 1965-1990 Complete* (1991) and *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth: New Poems* (2003) and her recent volume,

A *Poem Traveled Down My Arm: Poems and Drawings* (2003) reflect her thoughts and perceptions on varied subjects. *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing: New Poems(2010)* as Shiloh McCloud describes in her foreword, "Alice Walker's journey revealed in this writing includes the death of loved ones and the birth of new ideas, the sorrow of rejection and the deliciousness of love, the sweetness of home, familial abandonment, and what it means to belong to the greater world family" (xi). *The World Will Follow Joy: Turning Madness into Flowers* (New Poems) (2013) offers over sixty new poems to incite and nurture contemporary activists. Walker writes about history, politics, and nature, as well as world figures such as Jimmy Carter, Gloria Steinem, and the Dalai Lama.

In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women (1973), a short story collection, has thirteen short stories which feature black women struggling to transcend society's narrow definitions of their intelligence and virtue. Her second collection, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories* (1982), continues her vivid portrayal of women's experiences by emphasizing sensitive issues as rape and abortion. The book delves even more emphatically into the "twin afflictions" of black women's lives. Her third collection of stories is *The Way Forward Is With a Broken Heart* (2000). She has also written four children's books including an illustrated version of *To Hell with Dying* (1988) , *Finding the Green stone* (1991), *Why War is Never a Good Idea* (2007) and *There is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me* (2006).

In her essay, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens,* Alice Walker discloses how the political, economic, and social restrictions of slavery and racism have historically stunted the creative lives of Black women. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* constitutes her most explicit attempt at Womanizing theory from a Womanist perspective. Walker draws upon the African American artists who preceded her, known and unknown; Phyllis Whitley, Bessie

Smith, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston and also the anonymous Southern women of African descent. Walker writes, "These grandmothers and mothers, were not Saints, but artists: driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release" (*ISOMG* 233). As Elaine Showalter's *Towards a Feminist Poetics* tries to hunt and bring out the ignored female writers of the past, Walker feels responsible to frame a special theory for an exclusive search as a black writer, because white female writers would not possibly include black female writers into the tradition of Women's literature. Her essay signifies her difference from dominant cultural theoreticians and theories which fail to focus on black women writers who are deprived of their rightful place in the history of English literary tradition**.** In the work, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens,* Walker hopes to fulfill a twofold purpose: to create a sense of literary continuity among black women by saving writers like Zora Neale Hurston from oblivion and as, Felipe Smith has written, to provide "the wisdom of the past both to ensure the continuity of the folk ethos and to serve as a blueprint for personal and communal survival for those who require artistic models" (438).

The essays' intricacies expounds the black women's creativity in singing hymns, quilting and growing flowers despite impediments that cut them off from the possibility of art on a grander scale. According to Walker, completion suggests her relationships with her literary foremothers. She engages herself in a holistic act of completion by seeking connections with her foremothers. Walker transforms Woolf's model of the white female tradition by inserting in brackets the black equivalents for exemplary writers and issues: instead of 'Emily Bronte', 'Zora Hurston'; instead of 'wise women', 'root workers' (121). Alice Walker's intention therefore, is not to exclude white women writers but to include previously unknown black women, to supply "the missing parts" of the canon so that it might

tell "the whole story" of women's artistic tradition. Whatever Woolf overlooks, Walker focuses on a complementary dimension of artistic influence.

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens emphasizes the point that black women must stop listening to men and start listening to each other if they are to realize and fulfill their artistic potential. The essay includes a tribute to what Marianne Hirseh calls "a revered, largely oral maternal past" (201). As Rudolp P Byrd has written, " Clearly , Walker believes that in the artist's search for forms and examples appropriate to her needs and goals it is imperative that she look beyond the boundaries of her own race , sex and culture" (126).

Other essay collections include *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (1996), in whichshe reexamines the controversies and condemnations generated by *The Color Purple*, the novel and the film and an account of her struggle with Lyme disease. *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (1997) featuring both essays and letters, is a record of Walker's activism in which she pays tribute to such figures as Fidel Castro, Salman Rushdie, Audre Lorde, and others. In *Living By the Word* (1988) a collection of essays, Walker revisits the writing of *The Color Purple* and addresses concerns such as the potentialities of certain forms of masculinity, our relation to the earth, and the meaning and value of folklore. In *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1993), Alice Walker and Prathiba Parmar expose the secret of female genital mutilation, a practice that affects one hundred million of the world's women. *Sent By Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit: After the Attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon* (2001). This is a searing and brilliant meditation on genocidal violence directed at women and children, among others. In this essay, Walker also establishes parallels between the events in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Gaza with the Holocaust and Trail of Tears.

Walker's collection of essays *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2006) contains essays and lectures that pays tribute to such figures as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fidel Castro, and also challenges us to find, in this dissolving world, a practice that will sustain and direct us. *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horrors in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel* (2010). This is a searing and brilliant meditation on genocidal violence directed at women and children, among others. In this essay, Walker also establishes parallels between the events in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Gaza with the Holocaust and Trail of Tears. *Chicken Chronicles: Sitting With the Angels Who Have Returned With My Memories, A Memoir* (2012), In *The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm's Way* (2013), she shares her open-hearted views on love; condemns torture and war; offers distinctive perspectives on Cuba, South Africa, and Gaza; pays homage to her heroes, from Howard Zinn to Aung San Suu Kyi, John Lennon, and Julian Assange.

Walker's seven novels place more emphasis on the inner workings of African American life. Walker sees writing as a way to heal the wounds of humiliation and mend the wrongs in the world. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), introduces many of the themes that would become prevalent in her works, particularly the domination of powerless women by equally powerless men. It displays Walker's interest in social conditions that affect family relationships. The novel describes the racism-ravaged life of an impoverished southern African American sharecropping family in which cycles of male violence affect three generations. Grange, the father, cannot withstand racist pressures and sadistically takes out his frustrations on his wife and children. He then abandons his abused wife and young son for a more prosperous life in the north, and returns years later to find his son similarly abusing his own family. Grange tries in vain to keep his son from making the

mistakes that he himself has made. Only his granddaughter, Ruth, receives his love, as he tries to make up for past sins.

Walker's second novel, *Meridian* (1976), recounts the personal evolution of a young African American woman against the backdrop of the politics of the Civil Rights Movement, extending her attacks on racial injustice to castigate the sexism she observed in some African American relationships. Like Walker, Meridian was born in the rural south, and uses education as a means of escape. Pregnant and married to a high school dropout, Meridian struggles with thoughts of suicide or killing her child, but eventually decides to give the child up and attend college. After graduating, she enters an organization of African American militants in Mississippi, but realizes that she is not willing to kill for the cause. With this knowledge she resolves to return to rural Mississippi to help its residents struggle against oppression.

In *The Color Purple* (1982), Walker brings together in one book many of the characters and themes of her previous works. She continues to expose the oppression of African American Women in sexual as well as political situations. She draws a searing picture of sexual abuse within a context of white racism, depicting the search for selfhood of the central figure, Celie, and her emergence as a strong creative individual through friendship with other women. The letters span thirty years in the life of Celie, a poor southern African American woman victimized physically and emotionally by men. First, it is her stepfather, who repeatedly rapes her and then takes her children away from her. Later, she is abused by a husband, an older widower, who sees her more as a beast of burden than as a wife. The letters are written to God and Celie's sister, Nettie, who has escaped a similar life by becoming a missionary in Africa. Celie eventually overcomes her oppression with the intervention of an unlikely ally, her husband's mistress, Shug Avery. Shug helps Celie find self-esteem and the courage to leave her marriage. The end of the novel reunites Celie with her children and her

sister.

The Temple of My Familiar (1989), Walker's fourth novel, is a complex spiritual work in which the protagonists Miss Lissie is presented as an ancient African goddess. As such, she has been incarnated hundreds of times, in periods ranging from a prehistoric world during which humans and animals lived harmoniously within a matriarchal society to the reign of slavery in the United States. She thus represents an African cultural heritage. She befriends Suwelo, a narcissistic university professor whose marriage is threatened by his need to dominate and sexually exploit his wife. Through a series of conversations with Miss Lissie and her friend Hal, Suwelo learns of Miss Lissie's innumerable lives and experiences and regains his capability to love, nurture, and respect himself and others.

Walker's fifth novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), exposes the horrors of female genital mutilation. Practiced mainly on the continents of Asia and Africa, particularly in the Middle East, genital mutilation is performed to ensure a girl's virginity or purity before marriage. In this novel, Walker brings back a character, Tashi, who has previously appeared in *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. After undergoing therapy, the young African woman comes to terms with the genital mutilation she endured while with her tribe in Africa and eventually questions such unchallenged but incredibly harmful traditions.

In *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998), Walker extends her exploration of female sexuality. The text is a life-affirming, sensuous, and unusually sexually explicit account of an African American family who travel to a remote part of Mexico to study the Mundo people. Their encounter with the Mundo belief system, with its gentleness and spirituality, changes their lives and challenges the sexual hypocrisy of their own culture. *By the Light of My Father's Smile* is, in Walker's own words, "a celebration of sexuality, its absolute usefulness in the accessing of one's mature spirituality, and the father's role in

assuring joy or sorrow in this arena for his female children." The main characters are the Robinsons, a husband-and-wife team of anthropologists. Unable to secure funding for research in Mexico in the 1950s, the husband poses as a minister to study the Mundo, a mixed black and Indian tribe. The couple brings along their daughters to this new life in the Sierra Madre. The father reacts violently upon discovering that one of his daughters has become involved with a Mundo boy. The daughter, however, ultimately overcomes the sexual repression forced on her by her anthropologist father.

In her seventh novel *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* (2004), Walker returns to a more conventional form. It is the story of a successful African American female novelist, Kate Talkingtree. As she is fearful of aging and uncertain about continuing her relationship with her boyfriend, Yolo, Kate decides to set off on a journey of spiritual discovery. After dreaming of a dry river, Kate makes voyages down the Colorado River and later down the Amazon. After the first voyage, an all women white-water rafting trip down the Colorado, Kate decides that it is time to give up her sexual life and "enter another: the life of the virgin." Soon off on another quest, this time into the Amazon rain forest, she hopes to heal herself through trances induced by yage, a South American medicinal herb, also known as Grandmother to the native peoples. Indeed, it turns out that Kate's Grandmother archetype – representing the Earth, the ancestors, and those violated by patriarchy and racism –has been calling out to her. Under the influence of yage, Kate is able to keep in touch with the elders and finally unburden her self of her past.

In *Now is the time to Open Your Heart* (2004) the main character, Kate, embarks on a literal and spiritual journey to find a way to accept the aging process. Walker says that Kate's search is necessary because the territory is largely "uncharted" and people seem to lose their imagination about what women's lives can be after, say, 55 or 60. She further says that "Her creative energy is nothing but a godsend, a sacramental vessel through which redemption of

women in general, and African American Women in particular, is and will be forever consummated" *(*Dieke 1).

Motifs of Alice Walker

Walker believes that human beings are prone to transformation and are capable of regenerating their self and sometimes the changes are a kind of rebirth or reincarnation. Ikenna Dieke in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* voices,

> One such motif is the regenerate self, the belief by Walker that it is possible for human beings to regenerate self. It is a belief rooted in the triune mythic drama of birth, death and rebirth. Walker's writing is graced with characters that undergo inner development and maturation, and in the process abandon their old attitudes and assumptions (4).

Her characters transform from their former self of cruelty, meanness and brutality to a new mellowed stated of changed being. Protagonists such as Grange Copeland in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* Truman Held in *Meridian*, Albert and Celie in *The Color Purple*, and Suwelo in *The Temple of My Familiar* redeem and start living exemplary life.

Another familiar motif of Walker is the questioning self. Walker's writing replicates the idea that human life is a journey, a continuing process of growth and discovery. Commonly, the journey as in portrayed in literature is one that is hard and difficult alluded to by J.R.R.Tolkein in *The Fellowship of the Ring.* Tolkein writes: "At least none can foretell what will come to pass, if we take this road or that road. But it seems to me now clear which is the road that we must take. Now at this last we must take a hard road, a road unforeseen. There lies our hope, if hope it be. To walk into peril" (qtd. in Schechter and Semeiks 320). Every human being who lives a virtuous life have to tread the dangerous road. Most of

Walker's character and personae walk into peril to reach their own path of fulfilment. To travel on such a road the characters should possess special attributes. Diekke remarks:

> Walker singularly imagines each one of them enacting her or his own monomyth as an authentic heroic self, without for a moment pretending that the path to each character's fulfillment or self-actualization/ redemption could be anything less arduous. In fact, for some of the, self-redemption is trooped in the cradles of personal suffering, and distilled peculiarly in the form of gaining mature wisdom, achieving a permanent sense of atonement , and returning "home" with a unique gift for one's loved ones (4).

A third familiar motif in Alice Walker's writing has to do with what Barbara Christian identifies as "a sense in which the 'forbidden' in the society is consistently approached by Walker as a possible route to truth" ("Alice Walker" 40). Walker tries to revive the outmoded social and cultural beliefs and rethink it to encounter in her own encounters and circumstances.

The fourth motif of Walker is the "ubiquity of pain" in Walker's writing. Pain is the result of the "sundered, stunted black feminist self . . . by the systematic stifling of the creative impulse of black people, especially black women artists" (5). According to Mary Helen Washington, this concern has led Walker to attempt to construct the black woman's history—"the woman suspended, artists thwarted and hindered in her desire to create, living through two centuries when her main role was to be a cheap source of cheap labor in the American society" ("An Essay" 139). Black poet June Jordan has called these black women "black-eyed Susans—flowers of the blood-soaked American soil" (qtd. in Washington "An Essay" 138).

Diekke avows, "A fifth motif in Walker's writing concerns the narratology of the subliminal ego in creative process. In this regard, Walker assumes the role of the avant-garde artist willing to experiment, to flirt with the domain of the objective psyche far below the threshold of conscious awareness" (6). Walker is concerned about the inner lives of the characters, their spirituality, and the inner mind that is uncorrupted and immortal. Washington has said that "though Walker does not neglect to deal with the external realities of poverty, exploitation, and discrimination, her stories, novels, and poems most often focus on the intimate reaches of the inner lives of her characters; the landscapes of her stories is the spiritual realm where the soul yearns for what it does not have" ("An Essay" 135).

The sixth and final motif in Walker's is the emphasis on the unity and interconnectedness of all life –human, vegetable, animal – 'the survival wholeness' of all the living organisms on this earth. Walker insists on the harmonious, holistic human community which values the past and tries to have a continuum between the past and the present. Robert Farris Thompson in *African Art in Motion* defines Ancestorism as "the belief that the closest harmony with the ancient way is the highest of experiences, the force that enables a man to rise to his destiny"; the belief in rebirth and reincarnation, "which unites living vitality with orientation toward the ancestral" (qtd. in Witt 462); animism, the belief in the spiritual vitality of the natural world; eco-feminism, the belief in the nurturing balance or interdependent relations between humans, animals, and the ecosystem; and finally, female bonding, or what has been stylized as the "sistern mystique"—black sisterhood to rescue with security, affability, and protection. According to Cheryl B. Butler, "Sistern" is the Black English vernacular version of the term sisterhood (69).

Accolades

Alice Walker won a slew of awards and honours for her extensive publications. *The Color Purple* won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983 as well as the American Book Award. Walker also won the 1986 O. Henry Award for her short story "Kindred Spirits" published in *Esquire* magazine in August of 1985. She has received several awards for her stark portrayal of racism in her novels. She has also received a number of other awards for her body of work, including: The Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters, The Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, the Ingram Merrill Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, The Front Page Award for Best Magazine Criticism from the Newswoman's Club of New York.

Alice Walker as an Activist

Walker has involved herself in various activities and in organizations that had a goal to serve society. She says, "Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet" (www.thinkexist.com.). She has partaken in many demonstrations, campaigns, rallies, fundraising events, and other political movements. When she was a student at Spelman College in the early 1960s, Walker joined the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and marched in the August 1963 March on Washington inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. She canvassed for voter-registration in her native Georgia. She involved herself in the Women's Rights Movements of 1970s and the Black Feminist Movement in the 1980s and coined the term 'Womanism'. In 1969, as an academic in Wellesley College, she designed a course in black women's writing which included authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Ann Petry and Paule Marshall.

Walker participated in a fundraising event organized by the International Indian Treaty Council, in 1984. She participated in the Barbara Lee rally against military retaliation for the September 11 terrorist attacks. "She has been actively involved in the Human and Civil Rights movement, the Hands Off Cuba Movement, the Women's Movement, the Native American and Indigenous Rights Movement, the Free South Africa Movement, the Environmental and Animal Rights Movement and the Peace Movement" (Simcikova 148). She participated in a human rights awareness workshop in Bolgatanga, North Ghana, entitled "Working Together for Change—Stop FGM," where she, together with Prathiba Parmar, promoted their film *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* on December 12, 1996.

Walker with other activists associated with the organizations Code Pink and Women for Peace. She, along with other activists was arrested for crossing a police line during an anti-war protest rally outside the White House on March 8 2003. In March 2009, Walker travelled to Gaza along with a group of 60 other female activists from the anti-war group Code Pink, in response to the Gaza War. In May 2013 Alice Walker indicated her appreciation for the works of conspiracy theorist David Icke. In June 2013, Walker has written a letter to Major General Jeffrey S. Buchanan requesting him to reduce Bradley Manning's punishment. In her letter, she praises him for valuing human life and the courage he had to voice out against US military's devaluing human life in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Walker financially supports The Color Purple Education Fund Foundation of Eatonton, Georgia, a non-profitable organization for charitable and educational purposes. She served Ms. Foundation for Women of New York as a contributing editor, where she brought a lot of women's voice to the world. She is a member of Madre, an organization that provides

help to women and children in beleaguered countries around the world and co-founded the Wild Tree Press .In 2007, Walker gave her papers, 122 boxes of manuscripts and archive material, to Emory University's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. The collection also contains a scrapbook of poetry compiled when Walker was 15, entitled "Poems of a Childhood Poetess" ("Alice Walker" *www.wikipedia.org.*)

Walker has taught African American Women's Studies to college students at Wellesley, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Yale, Brandels, and the University of California at Berkeley. She supports antinuclear and environmental cause, and her protests against the oppressive rituals of female circumcision in Africa and the Middle East make her a vocal advocate for international women's rights. Her endeavour was particularly instrumental in bringing Hurston's work back into print. In addition to her deep admiration for Hurston, Walker's literary influences include Harlem Renaissance writer Jean Toomer, black Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks, South African novelist Bessie Head and white Georgia writer Flannery O'Connor.

Review of Literature

Alice Walker is the subject of much critical comment and analysis. Articles on her works can be found in critical journals such as, *African American Review, MELUS, Modern Fiction Studies, Callaloo, Southern Quarterly, Critique, Black American Literature Forum, Southern Literary Journal, Griot, College Language Association Journal,* etc. There are a number of strong book studies of Walker's work, of which Donna Haisty Winchell's *Alice Walker* (1992) is one of the first books devoted entirely to Alice Walker that explores her life and work. Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. Anthony Appiah, is an excellent collection of scholarly articles and

reviews of Walker's novels. Barbara Christian's Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976 (1980) is a comparative study that begins by tracing the history of African American novelists of the contemporary period. Elliot Butler Evans' Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker (1989) is another excellent book in which he has devoted a chapter exclusively to Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple*. Ikenna Dieke's *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* (1999) has a majority of the essays on *The Color purple* and on her poetry. Maria Lauret's *Alice Walker* (1999), Harold Bloom's *Alice Walker*(2002), Caroline Lazo's *Alice Walker: Freedom Fighter* (2000) , Mary Donnelly's *Alice Walker : The Color Purple and other work* (2009), Gerri Bates *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion* (2005) , Simcikova, Karla's *To Live fully Here and Now: The Healing Vision in the works of Alice Walker* (2007), Evelyn C. White's *Alice Walker : A Life* (2005), Louis H. Pratt's *Alice Malsenior Walker: An Annotated Bibliography,1968-1986* (1988), Erma Davis Banks and Keith Byerman's *Alice Walker: An Annotated Bibliography,1968-1986* (1989), Yolanda Wiliams Page's *Icons of Afircan American Literature: the Black Literary Study* (2011), Tony Gentry's *Alice Walker* are useful examples from the range of studies on Walker. *The New York Times* Book Review proclaimed Alice Walker as a "lavishly gifted writer" *(www.nytimes.com).*

To date, approximately 250 dissertations have been written about Walker's novels, short fiction, essays, and political activism. Alice Walker is one of the several authors studied by research scholars. She is compared to other African American authors, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Naylor, Harriet Jacobs, or Gayl Jones, while many others compare her to other women authors of the same genre. Since Walker emerged

on the literary scene, more than 200 scholarly articles have been written on her works. *Calloloo* in particular devoted a special section to Walker: Issue 39, Spring 1989.

The movie *The Color Purple* (1985) directed by Stephen Spielberg, earned 11 Academy Award nominations. Alice Walker has attracted film audiences all over the world. Walker's story had reached people in remote parts of the world.

Beauty in Truth, is a documentary film about Walker's life directed by Pratibha Parmar, premièred in March 2013.

> *Beauty in Truth* seeks not to document Walker's many achievements but to restore her to her rightful place in history—not only as a key literary figure of the 20th century, but as a profoundly influential activist whose inspiring journey reflects the national story of our country and people during a time of great historical changes (www.alicewalkerfilm.com).

The Creative Spark of the Ancestors

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens, she wrote, "To be an artist and a black woman, even today, lowers our status in many respects, rather than raises it; and yet, artists we will be" (237). She questions with respect how her female ancestors kept alive their creativity during a time when even teaching a black man or woman how to read or write was illegal. She writes of mothers and grandmothers who were "driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. . . . Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane" (233). These women expressed their creativity through whatever meager materials society allowed them and "waited for a day when the unknown thing that was in them would be made known, but

guessed, somehow in their darkness, that on the day of their revelation they would be long dead" (233). The gifts and the talents that were stifled within the artists of the past had found expression through a sculpture, painting, gardening, quilt or a poem and Walker celebrates it a legacy passed down from the ancestors. She celebrates it as a creative spark, the seed of the flower the grandmothers themselves hoped to see.

Walker records her discovery of her mother's art —the imagery from the impressive garden that was her mother's particular means of keeping the creative seed alive wherever the Walkers went. Alice Walker sees her mother as an example of how one can create art out of pain. Minnie Lou's art manifested itself not only in quilting and in the flower gardens she planted, but in the stories she and Alice's aunts told, in their sense of self and independence, and in the assurance with which they approached life. In spite of the encouragement from the women in their lives, however, Alice and the other women writers did not find growing easy or without trauma. In Alice Walker's novels the characters are in search of such a creative spark which gives them the identity and independence.

The Saving Power of Art

Walker illustrates the saving power of art in her personal life. She was able to cope with the ugliness and loneliness which was forced upon her by the accident at the age of eight and the injury in her eye made her see the world and made her 'create art out of pain.' The loss of 'eye' made her see the "I" within her. Even after her injury in one eye, significantly, Walker was able to integrate the negative aspects of herself, her injured "I" and experience wholeness. Wholeness necessitates the integration of characteristics that are often deemed opposite. Wholeness is achieved through acceptance of all aspects of being. Alice Walker framed a doctrine that is based on a concept of wholeness, which implies balance and integrity of the spirit.

According to Walker, art is redemptive. Alice Walker felt estranged from her father and often from her sisters and brothers: "I used to think I had just dropped into my family, and I didn't know by whom or what. I think I started writing just to keep from being so lonely, from being so much the outsider" (qtd. in De Veaux 58). Such estrangement is compensated by her art.

At Sarah Lawrence, an unexpected pregnancy turned her thoughts to suicide. Instead of killing herself, however, she discovered the staying power, the power to sustain, and heal her through her writing. She wrote "To Hell with Dying," overcoming the suicidal thoughts that the unwanted pregnancy caused her. In her essay, "The Old Artist: Notes on Mr. Sweet," she writes about the old guitarist who shared his troubles through his songs. Likewise, Walker redeemed and saved her. The writer is saved through her writing and it saves the reader as it has saved Walker from her depression by reading Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935). Felipe Smith says that for Walker, the end of art is salvation and redemption. "The "saving" of lives is central to Alice Walker's art . . . the key feature of Walker's redemptive art… is the feeling that Walker gets from participating in the spiritual continuity of her people." A writer should be aware of the saving potential of art and it is the writers' duty to "keep alive the connection between ancestral spirits and living descendants" (Felipe Smith 438).

While portraying the troubles of black women, she offers Womanism as the solution to all the problems possible to arise because of the racism in the country and sexism in black community by giving voice to all black women who have been "silenced", since slavery. 'Womanism' is concerned with entire communities, the entire population of the human race, including and not excluding both male and female, reconciling the fragmentation and displacement. Walker is "preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my

people. Beyond that I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of women" (qtd. in O'Brein 331).

Walker examines the problems and help people see what needs to be changed or what changes can possibly made to the race. Walker does not negate the impact of a deleterious past. She sees white characters as perpetrators of crimes against the blacks. She illuminates some aspects of brutality which might have been obscured or overlooked by other writers of her contemporary. Her fiction expresses the outrage of the injustices in society. The brutal depictions of the injustices suffered by blacks throughout their history in the United States makes her novels poignant. The personal outrage and anger stemming from social and historical forces becomes warped and distorted. Her work articulates her deflection of rage and her reconciliation with it. To overcome her rage she took to writing –'writing to survive'. Writing has saved her from the sin of violence. Writings absorbed her emotional violence. Walker's retaliation to the injustices is apparent in her works and she makes the characters the mouthpiece of her emotional outburst to voice her rage.

Alice Walker's novels speak about the neglected and ignored rural black women. The lives of these women are so unique in their tragedy, in their culture, their courage and their humor that grip us. Walker particularly focuses on the black women's strategies of survival in a racist white society and patriarchal black community. Being woman is twice harder than being just a woman or just a black man. The minority woman faces the problems of selfhood and isolation which are caused by cultural taboos and gender barriers.

Walker demonstrates that love and sisterhood have the redemptive power which helps them realize their self and enables them to raise themselves above the heinous odds of subjugation and domination both by the black men and the white society. She talks about the vortex of restrictions imposed on black women both by their community and white society,

caught between dominance and hierarchical distinctions. With the strength of sisterhood, Walker believes that black women could revive their world and also benefit the black community as a whole. She believes that love has the redemptive power to change society, to resolve the predicament of black lives. As Martin Luther King Jr. says:

> Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, "Love your enemies." It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. . . . And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies *(www.goodreads.com).*

The Objectives of the Study

Black women endeavour to discover their identity by overthrowing the unjust stereotypes of African Americans as the morally, socially and culturally inferior and strive to define their self by establishing for themselves a new stratagem for survival. They achieve a new identity by discovering an ingrained bond connecting women and providing them the will-power to participate in their collective struggle to liberate their race. Walker tries to redeem them from their suffering, heal the wounds inflicted in their hearts and souls and help them survive amidst their life in the white society.

The present study of Alice Walker's novels is undertaken to delineate the struggle the that black women endure to achieve decisive independence and freedom from racism and sexism through conservation of their ethnic heritage that has been discriminatorily criticized by Americans. The researcher has long been interested in Alice Walker's fiction and did her

M.Phil. dissertation on "*The Color Purple* as a Study of Black Feminist Consciousness." It is decided to confine the study to four novels of Alice Walker: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland, The Color Purple, The Temple of My Familiar* and *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* as redemption forms the central theme of these novels.

It is hoped that a progressive pattern of redemption would emerge from the study of the novels—from redemption through the power of love to spiritual redemption through communion with Mother Earth. Each of the books marks a milestone in the emotional development of the characters and also that of the authors. She seeks to express her pain through telling stories; and the process of writing saves, redeems and paves the way to the attainment of 'wholeness'.

Redemption in relation to African American literature is the emancipation and liberation of the black race. Marriam-Webstar Online defines redemption as "the act of making something better or more acceptable*" (www.merriam-webster.com).* Redemption encompasses regaining possession of the identity lost by black women, reclamation of their rights, recovery of their freedom, restoration of their culture, heritage and tradition, retrieval of the estranged women writers from the 'historical amnesia' of the American literary tradition, reparation of the status and stereotypes of black womanhood, atonement from guilt, rescuing from slavery, rebirth into a free country, restoration of their communion and attainment of harmony with nature through spiritual enlightenment. Aung San Suu Kyi expounds on redemption in her work, *Freedom from Fear*: "It is his capacity for self-improvement and self-redemption which most distinguishes man from the mere brute" (180). Bob Marley's lyrics of the '*Redemption Song'* expresses his concern for the emancipation of the black men from slavery: "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery/ None but ourselves can free our minds" *(www.metrolyrics.com).*Tennesse Williams declares, "Hell is

yourself and the only redemption is when a person puts himself aside to feel deeply for another person" *(www.thinkexist.com).* Towards this end, an attempt to include the opinion of prominent critics and biographers of Alice Walker has been made.

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate how Walker, in her works, attempts to create situations that reflect the plight of black women in the real world and tries to heal and redeem them from their enslavement , paving the way for their survival and fulfillment. It is hoped that the present study would be relevant in the Indian context where social and gender marginalization continues to be part of the scenario. The guidelines set forth in the MLA Handbook (Seventh Edition) are adhered to with regard to documentation.

Chapter II

Redemptive Power of Love in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*

Love cures people, the ones who receive love and the ones who give it, too.

-Karl A. Menninger.

Walker in her debut novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* introduces many of the themes that would become prevalent in her work, particularly the domination of powerless women by equally powerless men. She emphasizes that redemption or 'survival whole' is possible only when the black men are empathetic and androgynously magnanimous to include the black women in liberating the entire race. The black men in their fight against the discrimination of the whites in America should without disparity include women and their issues. Only then the liberation of the race will be absolute and whole. Black men cannot acquire the reverence they expect from the whites if they fail to respect and revere their women. They would not be able to attain the deserving place if they fail to allow their women their due place. Their oppression and distortion would end only when they impede the brutal treatment they levy on their women. Walker's ideal "new man" is "the quiet man" and such a new, nurturing man is essential for the survival of the planet. Walker affirms, "When the men stop using that behavior, when the men become gentle, when men become people you can talk to, when they are good grandparents, when they are gentle people, they are no longer considered men and there is an inability even to see them" (qtd. in Winfrey).

The novel follows three generations of a black southern family of sharecroppers and its patriarch, Grange Copeland, as they struggle with racism and poverty. In Grange's "first life", he tortures his wife until she commits suicide. His son Brownfield inherits his sense of helplessness and hatred, and eventually murders his own wife. In Grange's "second life", he

attempts to escape to the industrial North. Walker does not present industrial labor as a viable solution to the poverty of the South, however, and in his "third life" Grange returns to his southern home. At the end of the novel, Grange has become a compassionate man who longs to recompense for the legacy of hate he has left his family, attempting to help his granddaughter Ruth escape from her father, Brownfield and the South as a gesture of his remorse. This novel, as does Walker's other works of fiction, deals with the way in which the black woman's attempt to be whole relates to the health of her community. The attempt at wholeness comes from remaining true to herself and fighting against the constraints of society. As Robbie J. Walker observes,

> Life in the title of the novel is a synecdochial figure representing a period of time in Grange Copeland's life during which his world view and value system undergo a demonstrable transformation that manifests itself in an increased acceptance of personal responsibility and a greater concern for the welfare of others . . . he sought to make amends for his mistakes and to affect, in a positive way, the lives of those he loves—develops a close relationship with his granddaughter, Ruth, and establishes for survival as the controlling motivation of his life (403).

In an interview with John O' Brein, Walker discusses the motive behind the writing of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland:*

> . . . all along I wanted to explore the relationship between parents and children: specifically between daughters and their fathers . . . and I wanted to learn, myself, how it happens that the hatred a child can have for a parent becomes inflexible. And I wanted to explore the relationships between men and women, and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as

> an expression of their masculinity. Why are women so easily "tramps" and "traitors" when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? Why do women stand for this? (197).

In Walker's novels, the men redeem themselves and grow. They turn inward to analyze the personal values in their lives. Though they were subservient and powerless, after redemption they grow powerful and shed their slavery to gain their identity and individuality. Men especially mellow and save their internal morality and dignity, autonomy and balance, integrity and honour. Walker's conviction that emancipation of women is possible only when men mellow and transform themselves is exemplified in her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.* Men undergo a metamorphosis. Men transform and mellow as they gain experience and ageing give the grounding to consider the iniquities they have committed to their women. After realization, Grange Copeland feels better about himself in the third life. He comes back from his "second life" in New York, as a new responsible man and a loving grandfather. Brutality of men is due to their incapability. The subservience, subjugation and powerlessness they suffer under the whites make them stretch themselves to the furthest point of male dominance and brutality. The victimizer is himself the victim of the white. "For the most part, the Black men in Walker's world are in need of redemption from the racism, oppression, and sexism still rampant in our society. They are in need of liberation from the near-zero images of themselves which has been propagated through the literature and the culture" (Bloom 17).

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* the title character, Grange Copeland, is a sharecropper who is married to Margaret but has an extramarital affair with a prostitute named Josie. His son, Brownfield Copeland, is a child who is abandoned by his father and his mother commits suicide. At fifteen, Brownfield begins a search for his father that leads him

into a world of lust and forbidden sex. At the Dew Drop Inn, he finds the company of both Josie and her daughter, Lorene. The affair is broken, however, when Brownfield falls in love Josie's niece, Mem and eventually marries her. Unfortunately, Brownfield follows his father's footsteps into the mire of the white man's sharecropping system. Feeling defeated and trapped, he turns his rage against his wife and children. Mem grows tired of Brownfield's abuse and the unhealthy conditions in which they live. She forces Brownfield, at gun point, to get a factory job and returns to her profession as a schoolteacher. Mem succeeds in raising the family's standard of living until her health fails and Brownfield drags her back to the rat-infested shacks she despises. She takes a second step toward change but is defeated when Brownfield, jealous of her and fearful of any future she might be able to create, kills her.

Meanwhile, Grange returns from the North, marries Josie, and buys a farm. Together they raise Ruth, Mem's youngest daughter. Unlike his son, Grange has realized his mistake and has discovered that a cycle of hopelessness can only be broken if regrettable mistakes are faced with courage and sacrifices for others are made. Based upon this belief, a bond of love develops between Grange and Ruth. Josie distances from Grange and finds refuge with Brownfield. Later, Brownfield gains legal custody of Ruth. Knowing that Brownfield's only objective is to destroy the possibility of wholeness within the child, Grange stops him. As the novel ends, Grange is killed for the murder of his only son.

The novel represents a semi autobiography of Walker in the character of Ruth, just as both Meridian and Celie in her later works manifest elements of Walker's life as a black womanist. Walker is sympathetic towards her black male characters as they grow older. Her images of young black male brutality toward women are not surprising; violence was a fact of life in Eatonton in general and in her own family in particular. In an interview with David Bradley, Walker recalls,

> I knew both my grandfathers, and they were just doting, indulgent, sweet old men. I just loved them both and they were crazy about me. However, as young men, middle-aged men, they were… brutal. One grandfather knocked my grandmother out of a window. He beat one of his children so severely that the child had epilepsy. Just a horrible, horrible man. But when I knew him, he was a sensitive, wonderful man" (www.nytimes.com).

Though, Walker never saw him [father] mellow into the benevolent old man each of her grandfathers had become

Her critics charged her with presenting a grossly negative image of Black men, who were portrayed as mean, cruel, or violent, entirely without redeeming qualities. Walker refutes that her criticism of black men is not a sign of enmity but a love for the wellbeing of the common humanity. Her futuristic outlook is seen in her desire to bring harmony between men and women by improving human character. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Grange is another positive portrayal of Walker's men who is old. Grange is described as a brutal young man who unwittingly leads his neglected wife to commit suicide, who raises a son, Brownfield, who in turn brutalizes others over the course of the novel, and who ultimately sacrifices himself at the end. Yet, the relationship between Grange and his granddaughter, Ruth, is whole. It is a tender, respectful and mutual relationship, one of give and take. While Ruth learns from Grange the spiritual and practical tools necessary for survival, he learns from her to love. Grange has to go through changes in order to be able to allow himself to grow and reach his third stage of life which is productive, progressive, positive and exemplary consigned to posterity. And these changes had literally taken a lifetime for Copeland.

Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, signifies that Grange Copeland, the protagonist, has three lives and it covers not only the three generations of the Copeland family and but a period of American history from the 1920s to the 1960s. Grange's first life is dominated by his response to an oppressive, dehumanizing social structure which deprives him of his personhood and causes him to abuse his wife Margaret and to deny parental love and care to his son, Brownfield. The novel opens , in Grange's "first life" with his wife Margaret and their only child, Brownfield, in a run-down shack owned by the white man for whom he works "planting, chopping, poisoning, and picking in the cotton field" (*TLGC* 7). In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, the family is permanently indebted to the white owner of the cotton fields. Grange in his frustration of his servitude to the White finds vent to his subservience in drinking, in battering, ignoring his wife, his son, and is caught in a mesh of guilt and shame.

During the dreary cycle of the Copeland's weekly life together, Grange takes on animalistic traits. He spends the early part of each week recovering from the weekend's drunken splurge. By Thursday, however, the gloom of his situation has overtaken him once more and, animal-like, he stalks the house and swings from the rafters of the porch. By Friday, he is in a stupor from the work and the sun. On Saturday, Grange cleans up and escapes down the road into town and into the arms of his lover, the prostitute Josie, staggering home later Saturday night "lurching drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling and shooting off his shot gun" (*TLGC* 12), While his wife, Margaret, and his son terrorized, hide in the woods, "Then Grange would roll out the door and into the yard, crying like a child in wrenching sobs and rubbing his whole head in the dirt. He would lie there until Sunday morning, when the chicken pecked around him and the dog sniffed at him and neither his wife nor Brownfield went near him" (12).

On Sunday morning, he goes to church and raises "his voice above all the others… in song and in prayer" (13) and by nightfall both Grange and Margaret fight again. Monday morning he wakes up to start the cycle again. During the week, whenever Grange happens to meet Shipley, the white man in whose field he labors, he sheds off his human traits. Walker tries to depict them through the images of masks and stones. When Shipley arrives in his truck at the end of the workday to collect the picked cotton, Brownfield had witnessed his father's face freeze and becomes a man of silence: "For when the truck came his father's face froze into an unnaturally bland mask, curious and unsettling to see. It was as if his father became a stone or a robot. A grim stillness settled over his eyes and he became an object, a cipher, something that moved in tense jerks if it moved at all" (8).

In the ascertained definition of manhood in African American faction as anywhere in the world, the yardstick to prove the worth and value of a man, is to take care of his self and his family and take up the responsibility of his wife and his children. But Copeland has to live in cowardice and fear of a system: he has to identify himself by the definition of self by others. The black men are trapped in an unending cycle of debt to the white and consider responsibility as a burden. The aspect of 'taking care' of oneself becomes traumatic while the black men feel it a burden to take care of their wives and children. Grange gives the "fatal shrug" of resignation that shows he acknowledges his inability to take care for his family. The shrug meant that Grange would not be able to change or repair anything in the house. He gives the same shrug when he gives up hope of sending his son to school and when he gives up hope of buying Margaret the new dress she needed. In the same fashion, when Brownfield is fifteen, his father shrugs off the responsibility of being the breadwinner of the family and "shrugs" off the burden of responsibility, the burden of taking care of his family and deserts

his wife and child. He finds refuge for his predicament with Josie, mindless of the poor helpless creatures at home.

Grange Copeland breaches the definition of manhood in abandoning his family. He feels relieved about shedding his duties as a father, as a husband and as a breadwinner and finally fails to fit into the expected definition of manhood. He fails to complete the duties and responsibilities of a man in a family and he fails to be a man in the society. He does not fulfill the requirements of a complete man because he fails to shoulder the responsibility expected of him. Resigned to his inability to control his own life or that of his wife and son, Grange contemptibly walks away, abandoning them. Grange's first life ends with this desertion for which he gets his just deserts. "Grange's first life ends when he abandons his wife and child after she gives birth to a white man's baby; Margaret ends her own misery by poisoning herself and her infant, leaving seventeen-year-old Brownfield to fend for himself" (Walker, Melissa 113).

For many months, Grange leaves his wife every Saturday to go off down the road to the juke joint and to Josie, the only place where he can still feel like a man. Margaret in order to forget Grange's disregarding her at first cleans herself up and sits waiting for guests who never came; eventually she starts to follow Grange down the same vicious road to immorality. She starts arriving home the next morning in the same truck that carries the man who turns Grange to stone—Shipley. Despite her resolve not to "sell herself", Margaret now chooses to give herself freely to Shipley or to anyone else. The "comforting odours of cooking and soap and milk" Brownfield once associated with his mother "when he had loved her" have been replaced now by her "new painted good looks and new fragrances of beds, of store-bought perfume and of gin" (*TLGC* 16). Her new life produces a new vicious baby as Brownfield surmises "from its odd coloration its father might have been every one of its

mother's many lovers (19). When Grange had gone away for three weeks, Margaret knows he has left forever. Unable to envision a life without him, she poisons herself and her oddly-coloured baby.

Margaret is one of the women whom Walker describes as "suspended in a time in history when the options for Black women were severely limited…either kill themselves or … are used up by the man, or by the children, or by . . . whatever the pressures against them" (Washington "An Essay" 138). Walker describes about women who are exploited and become victims of both racial and sexual oppression. She calls these women "suspended" women and they are caught in a situation or an environment which destroys their identity. Margaret is a kind of suspended women who helplessly kills herself unable to find solutions to her problems. As Klauss Ensslen observes: "Margaret drastically exemplifies this state of suspension without creative outlet, devoid of real options, when we see her driven into the radical moral resignation of suicide . . . . Margaret thus embodies a kind of germinal unconscious attempt at feminine self-realization" (199-200).

Margaret's attempt to attain self-realization is ineffective as she fails to understand that she can live independently without her husband. Margaret is one of those black women who are submissive and loyal because they have such limited control over their own lives. Dependent on their husbands, such women expect love and respect for them and expect reciprocation from their husbands. Grange's desertion makes her give up all hopes of survival. She is incapable of killing the dragon "sexism" and instead lets herself a victim of it. The courage she had to indulge in infidelity in equal measure as that of Grange cannot be found in her attempt at self-actualization. The misgivings and disillusionments she encounters in a world of multiple jeopardy, thwart her from the confidence and independence

indispensable for a woman. As Donna Haisty Winchell writes, "The seed of self-actualization that Margaret keeps alive will come to fruition only later, in her granddaughter Ruth" (47).

As a child, Brownfield watches the transformation taking place in his mother and blames Grange for it. In the beginning, he loves his mother yet sees her "like a dog in some ways. She didn't have a thing to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father" (*TLGC* 5). The one thing Margaret will not do is to prostitute her, even to free her family from years of debt. Brownfield's city cousins tell him that Grange tried to convince her "to sell herself" for that purpose. Brownfield wonders," Maybe his mother was scared of Grange as he [Brownfield] was, terrified by Grange's tense composure. Perhaps she was afraid he would sell her anyway, whether she wanted to be sold or not. That could be why she jumped to please him" (11).

Destiny repeats itself and leads Brownfield to the same desperate plight. As Donna Haisty Winchell observes, "…Brownfield returns from Margaret's funeral wearing the same stony mask his father wore, turns his back on his father's house, and starts both literally and figuratively down the same road" (47). When the novel opens, Brownfield is shown as a suffering child covered in sores, sitting in desolation of the sharecropping cabin: "Tetter sores covered his head, eating out his hair in patches the size of quarters. Tomato sores covered his legs up to the knee—when the tomatoes in his tomatoes all day long—and pus ran from boils that burst under his armpits" (*TLGC* 7). That Brownfield undergoes physical suffering in addition to spiritual or material suffering is reflected not only in the squalor and poverty of his cabin but also in his solitude. Even before, when his mother was alive Brownfield's childhood is spent in tension between his mother and his father. His mother supports him when he is harried by his father's depression and violence. Whenever Grange inflicted suffering, Margaret's love healed it. Brownfield's childhood is ruled by fear. He fears his

father, fears the white men who frighten his father, fears never getting out of the South. That fear is toughened by his growing bitterness and proclivities to violence. His resentment made him lose faith that any other place would be better in this world. "For fun he poured oil into streams to kill the fish and tickled his vanity by drowning cats" (83). Finally, he allows his rage to become diffuse into his habit of following his father's routine.

Brownfield replicates his experiences of childhood and exactly goes to the same juke point earlier frequented by his father, first to Josie's bed and soon into her daughter Lorene's bed. Suddenly, after his acquaintance with Mem, he realizes that there is much to accomplish to attain manhood and he falls in love with her. In the wake of Mem's love, he presumes an adult's responsibility for the first time in his life and finds a job that will give him the financial independence to support a wife and a family. Regrettably, he commits himself to sharecropping which he knows has shackled his own father and affected him so dreadfully that he lived a life of a waif losing both the parents and their precious love. When the newly married couple, Brownfield and Mem, ride off to start their new life, Brownfield unable to foresee his future tells her hopefully, "We ain't always going to be stuck down here, honey Don't you worry" (*TLGC* 49). Mem is hopeful too and believes in Brownfield's optimistic attitude.

Brownfield's life has a renewal of hope when he meets and marries Mem who is educated and life-giving. Brownfield's life is a repetition of his father's and Mem becomes victimized. His crushed pride and his battered ego made him drag Mem away from school-teaching. He feels that her knowledge reflects badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write. It was his ignorance that sends her into the white homes as a domestic to satisfy his desire to bring down her to his level. His rage and his inferiority complex made him blame her for everything though she is flawless, passive and enduring. Even after

witnessing his father's "fatal shrugging" off of the responsibility of taking care of a family, Brownfield is never able to truly assume responsibility for himself and his family and puts his family exactly in the same cycle of despair in which his father had put him. He too shrugs off the burden of responsibility and leaves the children in the same traumatic plight as his. Mem bears more children and Brownfield's burden of responsibility of rearing them holds him faster to the land. By marrying Mem, he weds himself to the sharecropping system, though her sweetness is reminiscent of his mother and therefore comforting: "As the water, cooling, life-giving, ran down his chin and neck, so did her love run down, bathing him in cool fire and oblivion, bathing him in forgetfulness, as another link in the chain that held him to the land and to a responsibility for her and her children, was forged" (73).

A new awakening dawns in Brownfield the year he has to teach his five-year old daughter, Daphne, how to mop the cotton plants with arsenic to kill the boll weevils. All his hopes of seeing her as a fine young lady carrying "parasols and wear light silks" vanish. That year is the year he sees his life as a repetition of his father's. To see his daughter work in the fields simultaneously reminds him of his own plight as a youth and makes clear to him that he is trapped in his father's life. He knows thoroughly that he cannot save his children from slavery and that they do not even belong to him. He started unjustly naming Mem as an adulterous exploited by white men. As aftermath, the family became transients moving from one white sharecropper to another until he realizes that he has lost control over his life but he did not want to escape as his father did to escape from this lethal trap. His powerlessness and his subservience to white men makes Brownfield sate his helplessness and frustration by abusing Mem. He "takes it out" on the black woman because he is scared "to take it" out on the white men.

Zora Neale Hurston familiarized the image of the black woman of an earlier time as the "mule of the world" because black women are burdened more than the black men in a white world. Brownfield abuses Mem not only because she is a woman but also because her education which is a source of power—a power of which he is deprived. Mem's knowledge of reading and writing, and her career as a school teacher "battered his ego." He associates her with the powerful white community because her great knowledge is a privilege which generally whites alone enjoy. So he wants to bring her down to his level. His inferiority and contemptuousness drive him mad and he beats her, falsely accusing her of adultery and of alluring men. He sends her to white homes for domestic work to bring her as low as his level. His rage does not appease him because he is unhappy with himself and about his life of endless servitude which finds vent only in Mem or the children. But Mem bears the entire burden and forgives him with magnanimity. His anger turned towards her greater knowledge makes her superior and powerful than him: "He did not begrudge her the greater heart, but he could not forgive her the greater knowledge. It put her closer, in power, to *them,* than he could ever be" (*TLGC* 55).

Brownfield disgraced her and humiliated her and gradually all the grace of an educated woman fades in her and her schoolbooks are used for kindling fire in the shack, she condemns them eternally. Mem becomes fatigued, weak and ugly by his constant battering: "Everything about her he changed… not to suit him… He changed her to something he did not want, could not want, and that made it easier for him to treat her in the way he felt she deserved. A fellow with an ugly wife can ignore her, he reasoned. It helped when he had to beat her too" (57).

Brownfield exploits her to the core to recompense his frustrations, helplessness, powerlessness, and his servitude to the white men. Whatever contempt and bitter treatment he

received from the white, he unreasonably and faithfully inflicts upon his own race, and his own wife. Mem loves Brownfield and patiently accepts all the sufferings: the humiliation of his battering and the subduing of her knowledge, her education, her profession as a teacher. She gives up all her comforts and became completely disfigured. Mem goes on living with Brownfield in what Walker terms "a harmony of despair" (59) until she strikes back –just once—for the sake of their children.

Mem finally takes the initiative and signs a lease on a house in town. This reminds that Brownfield never learned to read and write well enough to sign a lease, together with knowing that Mem has assumed the responsibility of caring for the family, is a blow to his ego. She gets a job and announces that she will take the children to live in town whether he goes or not. His typical response is to laugh at her attempt to better herself and once more to beat her into submission. When talking fails to convince him that she is serious, he wakes up, hung over, one morning to find a shotgun pointed at his testicles and Mem finally mad enough to pull the trigger if pushed to it. She has sent the children off to church, and Brownfield realizes that she has little to lose. She threatens him to quit from the white man who he serves. Now that he understands his wife who has had enough, he pleadingly shifts the burden of guilt for all the wrong he had done onto the white man: "Mem, …you know how hard it is to be a black man down here,…Mem, baby, the white folks just don't let nobody *feel* like doing right….What can a man *do?"* (95).

Mem triumphs over the husband, she does not sympathize him, instead she hit him with the gun and when he dashes groveling to the floor, Mem delivers her own rules of conduct for the new home she is going to run. Her ultimatum gives hope that a new start is possible: "If you intend to come along I done made out me some rules for you … consideration" (95). She lays ten rules. She says,

> Eight, you going to take the blame for every wrong thing you do and stop blaming it on me and Captain Davis and Daphne and Ornette and Ruth and everybody else for fifty miles round (which makes it clear that Brownfied had been battering and blaming Mem for all his ineptitude in handling his problems). Ninth, you going to respect my house by never coming drunk. And tenth, you ain't never going to call me ugly or black or nigger or bitch again, 'cause you done seen just what this black ugly nigger bitch can do when she gits mad! (96).

Most crucial revival of hope occurs when Mem asserts herself against Brownfield. She tries and succeeds in fulfilling her dreams "her big dream" to buy a house and to escape from sharecroppers. But her every move upward is checked by Brownfield. She succeeds in finding a house in spite of his intervention, interference, hindrance and contrivance to shatter her dreams. She is delighted about her success. She is determined to oppose Brownfield's resistance to her plans. Brownfield only thinks about immediate revenge. He gloats when they lose house and are forced to move to a dilapidated cabin.

Mem is one of the strongest and most confident women Walker has portrayed. She goes to the extent of retrieving her lost dignity and honour. She wishes to provide the best comfortable life to her children. She insists that if Brownfield cannot provide it, he is not supposed to distract the scheme of Mem. She cautions him through her rules and shows her determination to take the responsibility of taking care of the family something which Brownfield fails to do as a husband. Though he silently affirms to her plan outwardly, he waits for a moment where he can cause ruin. He secretly sketches ways to 'bring down' his wife and his family back to the shack. He places his pride and ego before the welfare of his family and his own welfare. He stealthily exploits the infirmity of Mem, her "great heart" and

she is readily led into the trap he sets. He forces two pregnancies upon her which takes away her health, employment and the entire scheme she had meticulously planned. He resists all the comforts which Mem initiates to provide just because of the bitterness against his wife "who had proved herself smarter, more resourceful than he" (103).

Mem becomes physically too ill and weak but her determination to get back to work and to leave her husband is still burning in her. Mem's determination persists: "I'm going to get well again, and get work again and when I do I'm going to leave you", she says. Brownfield turns full rage at the avowal. Now he knows for sure that once Mem gets well, she would definitely fair well and progress. She is educated and knowledgeable and so once she goes out, she would survive better than he would. Moreover, she is determined to fulfill her dreams and desires and would succeed without Brownfield. This thought of Mem becoming stronger, a woman becoming stronger, a wife becoming stronger than the husband touches the patriarchal egoism and makes him weak, his superciliousness and condescension allows not such a supersedence from Mem.

As resolved, she gets a job as a domestic with a Jewish man who pays her well and is kind enough to drop her home occasionally after dark. Depite the fact that Mem has never been guilty of the infidelity, Brownfield accused her. The sight of her getting out the white man's car on Christmas Eve brings back memories of his mother climbing out of a white man's truck many years ago and it triggers him to fire his shotgun into her face. Thereby Brownfield becomes the cause of the destruction of Mem's hope of reviving her family status.

Brownfield feels unworthy of Mem and so their relationship becomes complex. Since Brownfield feels inferior to Mem by her education, he felt guilt and shame and feels that he does not deserve her. So he sets himself to fail. He sentences himself to continued feelings of

oppression and to increased feelings of rage, maintaining the defective paradigm by which he views himself. Brownfield curses his situation by raging at those around him. Brownfield sets himself as a victim of white oppression. With the feelings of guilt and shame regarding Mem, Brownfield gathers ammunition for his own feelings of persecution and worthlessness by reconciling himself to his own children's misery. He feels incapable of rescuing his children from the plight from which he suffered as a child. Since he cannot remedy or prevent them from becoming slaves or from losing his possessions, he copies his father or repeats what his father had done to him in a similar situation. He reacts as his father reacted. In hurting Mem, he feeds his own pride. He becomes more and more a creature of hate.

Brownfield's diffused rage is defined by the conflicting feelings of pride, hatred, jealousy, guilt, shame, fear and loneliness. Brownfield is jealous that his father had successfully escaped to the North, of his new found wealth and of any kindness Grange shows anyone, including Brownfield's own children. He wishes to be a child again, not to get the good fortune through Grange but rather to be a beneficent father figure himself. He is a person who has been physically and emotionally withered by the nearly pathological environment which surrounds him. His external appearance is linked to his spiritual sickness. He feels at home and loves his environment. He feels that he is able to understand and recognize himself in the South because at the Southerners share both the crime and the guilt of abuse.

Brownfield also feels that the South's injustice somehow vindicates his own unjust acts. He decides that the South's bitterness is both the cause and the effect of his misery. Brownfield recognizes that he is not in control of his own life. He lives in another man's house, farms, and another man's lands and watches his children being turned into field hands just as he was. His murder of Mem, then is his one chance at regaining control. By his efforts

to "blot her out", he perversely reenacts another part of his father's life. Both Grange and Brownfield are the cause for the destruction of their family. They shatter the harmony in the family, cause death to their partners, and abandon their children.

As victims of the sharecropping system, Grange and his son Brownfield take out their frustrations by dehumanizing their women, by becoming the brutes the white men who own their labour perceive them to be. In this regard, W.H. Lawrence Hogue summarizes his view on the historical fact:

> The American social structure turns the Black man into a beast—suppressing his human qualities and accenting his animal tendencies. The Black man, in turn, reflects his violent relation with his white landowner in his relations with his wife and son. He takes his anger and frustration out, not on the social system or the people who excise its power on his children and on the Black woman, who, as he does in the master-servant relation, remains loyal and submissive (49).

Transformation of the Self: A path to Redemption

Walker exemplifies her own vision of the nature of the soul in transformation, throughout *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Walker instills that the belief in the possibility of transformation makes the individual wholly responsible for his own revelation, redemption and salvation. As Robert Butler writes, "She conceives human personality in a dynamic way; that is, she believes that a person is not simply the static product of the environment but has the possibility of converting to different 'lives' generated by transformation of self " (353). *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* offers a vivid illustration of a man who goes on to transform his life until he becomes a "reborn man", one who has

achieved "a total triumph over life's misfortunes" (*TLGC*136). His first life reduces him to the level of a "stone or a robot (8), he is a flaccid and unreceptive man of the environment because he loses his dignity gradually by the treatment he receives from his white master. Since he has lost his self-respect, he is not able to consider himself neither as a responsible husband or a father.

Eventually, he abandons his family and goes to the North. His experiences in the North, make him, "alive and liberated for the first time in his life (153). Even though he indulges himself in vicious activities, for the first time, he does something on his own accord, not dictated by a white system. Grange experiences "a new life" when he feels that he has played a role in the death of the white woman who drowned in Central Park Lake. As Robert Butler opines, "He [Grange] acquires the strong conviction that such an act of murder has helped him to recover his manhood and self-respect because it is an act of rebellion against an environment intent on morally paralyzing him" (354).

In New York City, he enters a second stage of rage and rebellion. He reflects on the incident that propels him away from misery and fear towards hate. He watches a young pregnant white woman drown in a pond in a park. He watches the woman being rebuffed by her soldier lover and feels sympathy for her. Witnessing her leave the soldier's money and ring on the ground and made bold by her pitiable state, he decides to help by restoring her ring and part of the money. But when he tries to rescue her from drowning and when the woman rejects him, Grange understands the power of rage. By allowing her to drown, Grange is liberated from his fear of whites, which is enforced by the misery of his life. As she curses and insults him, he realizes the profundity of his own hatred towards the white. He hated the entire white race. When she refuses his hand, and gets drowned, he feels that his unfortunate life is repaid. He felt that he wants to live again.

After this incident, Grange makes his hatred of whites "his new religion" (*TLGC* 153) and he strongly feels that the "hatred for the whites will someday unite us" (154). But this hatred gives only a false notion about liberation. He forgets the truth that he is the one who is responsible for his wife's suicide, he blames the white for all his problems. He gets rid of the guilt of abandoning his son Brownfield. So he fails to redeem him from the hatred which poisoned his life in the South. He once again becomes "a demon of hate and destruction" (136). After leaving the park, he runs through the streets of New York, yelling, "Teach them to hate, if you want them to survive" (219). He is inflamed by his new-found hatred and wants to inspire his fellow oppressed neighbors to hate as well, so that they all may live again. He tries to physically fight each white man he meets and to continue to encourage other African Americans to fight back as well. But he soon realizes that this sort of liberation is not possible because one man alone cannot swerve a community of oppressed people.

Grange determines to retreat, move back to Baker County and live as far away from white influence as he can: "Each man should free himself, he thought, and the best way he could. For the time being, he would withdraw completely from them and be always prepared, with his life, to defend it, to protect it, to keep it from Whites, inviolate" (211). Grange's rage isolates him from his community. Grange's return to Baker County acts as overture to his eventual move toward compassion but his insistence upon self-segregation and his periods of depression and drinking depicts the remnants of his rage. Grange's second life concerns his sojourn to New York where he undergoes transformation in preparation for his third life. In the rest of the novel, Grange seems to battle between a creeping sense of compassion, signified in his teachings to Ruth, and his rage. "Grange's third life concerns his return to South, his attempt to exorcise past iniquities, to break the desolate social structure, to interrupt a set of relations, in which he and his son have fallen victim. It shows Grange's

uncompromising attempt to create a new social structure, a new set of relations, where his granddaughter Ruth can have more options and opportunities in her life than he or his son" (Hogue 47). He recovers his humanity only in the third life. Butler observes, "Grange undergoes a true conversion which genuinely transforms him, because it is only after he returns to Georgia that he recovers his place in a real community, which regenerates his ability to love and allows him to take full moral responsibility for the "sins" which have marred his first two lives" (355).

After this transformation he tries to make amends for his mistake. He realizes how his desertion of his family has resulted in the suicide of his wife Margaret and tries to help Brownfield's wife Mem. He realizes that racism has impoverished his life and made him guilty of the violence he inflicted on his own family and his child. He perceives that wounds would be healed and redemption is possible only when he admits his sins. He tells his son, "We guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it" (*TLGC* 209). When he admits that he allowed his wife to die and his family to fall apart, he truly takes human responsibility for his past actions. In this way he redeems himself to a radically new life. With all he made in the North and with Josie's money, he buys some land and this allows him the livelihood and independence from the white world. He recovers the social roles he had earlier rejected. He marries Josie and the marriage "brings to an end Grange's debilitating isolation in the North and begins to connect him microcosmically to the 'sense of community' which Walker has extolled as the most positive feature of Southern black life" (Butler, Robert 356).

His survival becomes more meaningful when he tries to help Brownfield's family by giving food and money. While Brownfield loses his humanity in the same manner that Grange lost it in his first life, Grange recovers a human self by assuming familial roles which

Brownfield discards. He treats Mem with kindness and helps her deliver Ruth on Christmas Day. From the moment, Grange dedicates himself to rescuing her and providing her with a viable family life. Love for Ruth is the fundamental factor responsible for converting Grange to a blossoming new life. Whereas in his first life he was "smothered" (*TLGC* 9) by dehumanizing society and in his second life he was "frozen" (145) by his demonic hatred of whites, he now becomes a "reborn man" (157), redeemed by "love" (157). Through the magic of Ruth's miraculous hugs and kisses, he gradually overcomes his suicidal depression. He redeems himself from the numbness which had incapacitated Grange in his two lives through Ruth's redemptive power of love. He nurtures her, protects her, provides her education and educates her with the wisdom of his life's experiences, re-educating himself.

An absolute transformation from a life of hatred to a life of love comes over him. Previously in Harlem, he had tried to teach people hatred of whites, but now he teaches more constructive and affirmative lessons to Ruth. Grange's uncompromising attempt to create a new social structure and a new set of relations, where his grand-daughter Ruth can have more options and opportunities in her life than he or his son ever had, is portrayed with care and concern. Though she is a female, a grand-daughter than a grandson, Grange Copeland tries to secure the woman from the clutches of his own son who belong to the black patriarchy. Walker's conviction that women have to be protected to raise the entire race from oppression is apparent.

Walker's Grange returns with a transformation in his disposition, attitude and outlook. He returns as a man who sees the errors of his ways and eventually learns that a man's definition of self comes from within, not from others. He also longs to make his grand-daughter battle against brutality and injustice to eventually, 'survive whole'. Grange moves towards compassion by trying to make peace with Brownfield, by teaching Ruth, and

by realizing his own lack of control. Grange's attempt to reconcile with Brownfield and the fact he tries to convert Brownfield to the compassion which he is beginning to feel and this is redemptive for Grange. He starts to learn compassion by teaching it to Ruth. Throughout Grange's teaching, he is determined to protect Ruth, to help her "survive whole." He focuses his protection on maintaining her innocence and ability to forgive. He believes in the divinity of forgiveness and it breeds love in the heart of a human, purges the soul and paves its way to redemption. He is committed on Ruth's ability to survive in a world he feels sure would destroy her, as it did him and Brownfield: "He had lost his innocence, his naiveté, and all the better qualities of himself. He had discovered, as Ruth must, that innocence and naiveté are worthless assets in a wilderness, as strong teeth and claws are not" (205). But his unconditional love for Ruth makes it impossible for him to teach her to hate. Instead, he wants to shield her from the knowledge of his own spiritual deterioration and her own eventual, perhaps unavoidable anguish.

Grange's fear and rage have left him immune to forgiveness. He admits that Ruth has partially "thawed" the numbness of his soul, but he is sure that it is too late. His soul has been destroyed by rage and fear and thus he is unable to forgive Whites: "I look in my heart for forgiveness and it just ain't there. The close I can come to it is a kind of numbness where they are concerned… I don't want to set here bow numb to half the peoples in the world. I feel like something soft an' warm an' delicate an' sort of shy had just been burned right out of me" (292-93). Rage helps in building the Self necessary for community. Grange's soul is maimed and Brownfield's soul is utterly destroyed by rage. While Grange says, "It's the spoilage of the soul that make forgiveness impossible. It just ain't in us no more" (294), he manifests that his soul has been burned off the softness which is prerequisite for compassion and forgiveness.

He shares his extensive knowledge of Southern folklore and history and sings blues songs, "a vital musical tradition arising out of the South which transforms pain and suffering into a spiritual affirmation of life" (Butler, Robert 358).

As Ralph Ellison has pointed out in *Shadow and Act,* the blues are essentially an affirmative art tradition because they "at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of Spirit" (104). James C. Hall cone in his book *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* illuminates the power of the song in the struggle of black women and that the blues tell us about a people who refused to accept the absurdity of white society. Cone sees the blues as the vehicle by which black people sought to deliver through song from the oppressiveness.

Grange's teachings and the safe environment provides her the scope for future spiritual transcendence. Grange believes that he is initiating Ruth in the ways of keeping her life separate from her fellow humans, black and white—from black men and white men and women. But he is in fact showing the ways in which she can connect with humanity. In fact, Grange's teachings prepare Ruth for her ensuing role in the Civil Rights Movement. In telling her the old trickster folktales, Grange teaches Ruth the power of the wily individual, wielding words rather than weapons. By stealing library books for her, Grange reinforces her understanding of the importance of learning and literacy.

By often quoting Exodus, Grange shows Ruth the power inspired by one man. In teaching Ruth to dance, Grange models self-love both racial and personal: "Grange taught her untaught history through his dance… Through her grandfather's old and beautifully supple limbs she learned how marvelous the grace with which she moved was" (*TLGC* 190). These lessons arm her and she is able to realize the most important lesson Grange teaches her, and the one that Brownfield most actively opposes—appreciating the inevitability of change.

Grange firmly believes that both human and social conditions can change. Grange begins to believe in change as a result of living with Ruth's hopefulness for the future: "What I know and reckon the most I know is that people change… there have always been black folks fighting for better. May be their ranks will swell till they include everybody" (274).

Ruth is thus able to hope for change (against the hopelessness for the future) for blacks and whites alike; she puts away the legacy of racial hatred espoused by Brownfield and Grange. Ruth learns "that an extreme negative emotion held against other human beings for reasons they do not control can be blinding" (*ISOMG* 19). Equipped with this knowledge, Ruth is inspired to fight for civil rights, despite her father's best efforts to the contrary.

Grange's stories from black history makes Ruth look upon the black people with reverence for their triumphs in a culture intent on enslaving them. His stories and the reminiscences from history makes Ruth understand that her people were living amidst a white culture which oppresses them and a black culture which provides them a spiritually potent world required for human development. He insists her to read the Bible and the Biblical stories prepare Ruth for her final flight from the South to spiritually free herself from an alienated land.

Grange's life becomes whole and complete when he ensures Ruth spiritual freedom. Grange feels that Brownfield's revenge would not be quenched by murdering Mem alone and that he would soon turn upon Ruth. So, Grange rescues her from her father Brownfield. The relentless conversion of hope into hopelessness ends when Grange shoots Brownfield to protect Ruth. The sanctity of family bonds is rescued from the threat of degradation. And Grange's transformation is perfect and complete. Men are capable of change and they can possibly transform themselves progressively. But if there are men who intend to destroy the harmony they have to be destroyed as is the case with Brownfield. He protects her from

Brownfield, who wants to crush her by taking her back into his home. Grange shoots Brownfield to prevent him from regaining Ruth and was killed by police. Not only has Grange transformed himself but also becomes a person who presides over Ruth's conversion. Ruth is interested to involve herself in the Civil Rights Movement which promises to transform American society and give blacks the possibility of emancipation. As Robert Butler says, "She thus is able to experience a secular equivalent of grace, redemptive human love leading to the expansion of consciousness and the renewal of self" (360).

By sacrificing his life, Grange brings a justification to all his cruelties and humiliation to his woman, Margaret. His profligate life gains significance by his martyred death. He tries to make up all his cruelties and injustices to his wife and to his son, Brownfield. As Brownfield makes a forceful claim to regain his daughter, he says, "But you was no daddy to me! and I ain't going to let you keep my child to make up for it!" (*TLGC* 206). Brownfield is angry that Grange is trying to make up or compensate his wrong of ignoring his son and for having evaded the most responsible duty of a father to his son. His guilt and shame is substituted with his martyrdom. Ruth's freedom to "survive whole" is an atonement of his sinful life. His death is a redemption to the sins he had committed in his life and a reparation for the loss he has incurred to his family –to his wife, Margaret and his son, Brownfield.

To Grange, change comes due to his acceptance of responsibility. Whatever his faults were, Grange does not want to blame anybody. As Grange puts it, "I know the danger of putting all the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of life. I fell into the trap myself" (*TLGC* 207). In a way, Grange's ignoring of Brownfield is an unforgivable act which had affected all those who rely on him. Since Brownfield in his childhood was deprived of love from his parents, he was unable to reciprocate love to his wife and his children. Mem suffers indirectly because of Grange since Brownfield wants to give vent to

his frustration and wanted to avenge Mem for his incapability and inferiority. Perhaps, Brownfield learnt it from Grange. Grange gives the image of a father who has been defeated by his life as a sharecropper and whose anger and incapability to counter the white, has turned inward against his own family. His rage of despair has turned to his own Self, his own family, his own loved ones, his own race as it has no vent anywhere else.

Grange believes that the reformation of America is impossible, and the only way blacks can feel "free and easy and at home" is to leave the country. Ruth, the representative of the future, believes in the feasibility of change:

> 'May be it would be better if something happened to change everything; made everything equal; made us feel *at home,'* said Ruth.
>
> 'They can't undo what they have done and we can't forget it or forgive.'
>
> 'Is it so hard to forgive 'em if they don't do bad things no more?'
>
> 'I honestly don't believe they can stop,' said Grange, 'not as a group anyhow.'
>
> He lounged back in his chair and stuck a hand in his pocket, 'Even if they could.' he said slowly, ' it'd be too late. I look in my heart for forgiveness and it just ain't there.' (*TLGC* 210)

Brownfield's self-justification rests in the knowledge that nothing will ever change. He yearns, perversely, to teach Ruth that she is doomed to the kind of abject despair that has ruled his life. His urge to prove the changelessness of the world to Ruth is what ultimately impels him to sue for custody. He had to make her see that there was nothing that can change their plight, no matter what Grange has promised her. "He had seen the nothingness himself. And if she hated him more than ever, what did it matter? That was what the real world was all

about" (*TLGC* 315). Just as Brownfield's earlier misery inspires his violence, so now does his rage inspire the ruination of Ruth's sense of hope.

In contrast to Grange, Brownfield never attempts to see his errors of his ways. He is a man who could not learn the important lesson that definition of self is from within; a man who never accepts the blame for his failures; a man who fails to provide his family; a man who fails to show the characteristics of a human being. Consequently, Ruth does not want to hear about the change Brownfield is undergoing. She does not believe that any change would ever come over to Brownfield or to his rock-hard heart. She does not want any of his changes, after all these years, now.

Ruth is presented as the most self-aware one, who fully appreciates her role in the human cosmogony of brutality, with a disposition bad and good, pitiful and righteous. She manifests compassion both to herself as well as to humanity and this is the ultimate lesson she learns in life's journey. Ruth acquires valuable and connective lessons about "change" and "unforgiveness". There is Ruth's one instance of "unforgiveness" because it could be a flaw to forgive Brownfield. Ruth liked herself for this lack of charity of unforgiving the father who claims of change. This "unforgiveness" will not be an obstacle for the survival of her soul. Winchell notes, "That toughness, that willingness to be unforgiving when necessary, combined with the compassion that makes forgiveness possible once it has been earned, is Ruth's defense against the future. The combination will enable her to survive whole rather than merely survive" (55). On the contrary, Mem's tragic flaw is that she was too willing to forgive, she is too humane in her forgiveness. If she had been able to maintain her dominance over him, her life would have been whole and would not have been ruined. Mem was killed by Brownfield because of the readiness and 'great heart' she had to forgive Brownfield. Walker says, "Her weakness was forgiveness, a stupid belief that kindness can convert the

enemy" (*TLGC* 162). Ruth therefore never forgives Brownfield and this is why she is able to survive whole. As Winchell in *The Burden of Responsibility, the Flaw of Unforgiveness* sums it:

> Margaret died because she could never forgive herself; Mem, because she was too willing to forgive. Ruth, however, refuses to be the martyr Mem was. She chooses to live with the flaw of unforgiveness rather than to believe that Brownfield is capable of change. That toughness, that willingness to be unforgiving when necessary, combined with the compassion that makes forgiveness possible once it has been earned, is Ruth's defense against the future. The combination is what will enable her to survive whole rather than merely survive (55).

Grange acts as God takes on the role of God, protecting Ruth and Brownfield as Satan, fighting for control over Ruth's life and her soul. She starts her life in the clutches of Brownfield but is rescued by Grange before Brownfield's bitterness can truly infect her soul. Brownfield's bitterness changes the atmosphere of Ruth's childhood, but her early rescue precludes her own bitterness. Eventually, Ruth's appreciation of the inevitability of change allows her to change and hope for change. As Grange's rage and bitterness towards the white slowly spread to Brownfield and the eventual abandonment destroys his soul beyond redemption and purgation, Ruth's perceives Brownfield as devilish: " [Ruth] saw him only as a human devil and felt wherever he placed them would naturally be hell" (*TLGC* 158).

Grange's abandonment of Brownfield foreshadows Brownfield's abandonment of his own children. The sense of abandonment scars them and teaches them to abandon in return. His ineptitude to retaliate to his father's ill-treatment is compensated illogically by abandoning his own children. Brownfield simply endures the abandonment. Brownfield

relinquishes the hope that Grange would return and reconcile his relationship with his son. He is furious and resentful at his plight. This resentment towards his father and himself looms large and is revealed in the conduct of the child. Brownfield is punished for his unfairness to his father when Ruth chooses to banish her own father, adopting a new one in Grange. Brownfield lives in utter loneliness, deprived of parental love in his childhood. He deliberately spurns the profound love of his wife Mem, destroys her by both physical and mental abuse and the repercussions of his depraved living. This act leaves him in absolute desolation. He becomes a creature of hate and refuses to accept the re-clamations. When Grange returns home and tries to offer him apologies and assistance, he is so completely degraded that the self-awareness necessary to conceive his apologies is shattered.

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker demonstrates the relationship between the racist sharecropping system and the violence that the men, women and children of the family inflict on each other. She portrays the survival struggle of a black family. The impact of racism is felt primarily through the characters' mistaken definitions or identities of themselves as men and women. Grange first hates himself because he is powerless as opposed to powerful, which is the very definition of maleness for him. His reaction is to prove his power by inflicting violence on the women around him. His brief sojourn in the North where he feels invisible is a step below powerlessness and causes him to hate white as his oppressors. To Walker, these transformations does not precipitate meaningful struggle. It is only when he learns to love himself that he starts loving his grand-daughter and eventually loves life. Thereafter he is able to confront the white racist system.

Alice Walker believes in the redemptive power of love. In *The Color Purple*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland, Meridian*, and *The Temple of My Familiar* redeemed men earn the right to articulate Walker's philosophy. The love of the grandfather for the

granddaughter is strongly redemptive. They save each other mutually. Grange nurtures Ruth and in the end, defends her independence at the cost of his life. The sense of redemption is qualified by the price which has to be paid for it. The end of the novel gives the reader a mixed feeling of joy about Ruth's future and the way it has been secured and assured by the sacrifices of which she is not aware. The end is a part of Grange's reconciliation of his regretful past, restoration of his family, and the reunion with his granddaughter. Grange makes a quick recapitulation of the three stages of his life: "The white folks hated me and I hated myself until I started hating them in return and loving myself. Then I tried just loving me, and then you, and ignoring them much as I could" (196).

There is a paradigm shift from destructive family relationships to constructive relationships, from hatred to love and from hopelessness to hope, from desperate futile dream to reality. After a series of tantalizing anecdotes and a gradual growth of relationships, the novel ends on a note of affirmation, a hope of revival and an emphasis that every individual has to struggle and liberate himself.

Walker feels that the liberation of women or equality is achievable only when men start understanding the sufferings of women as their own; when "New man", puts love in front as Christ. She explains in a poem "The Abduction of Saints" from her *Collected Poems: Her Blue Body Everything We Know*: *Earthling Poems 1965-1990:* "You mock them who divide and keep score of what each man gave. They gave us rebellion as pure love: a beginning of the new man" (288). When men change or reform or are responsible for the liberation of the entire race without excluding women from their fight for liberation from the whites, they can truly be liberated. In her interview with Winfrey, she told, "There is no heaven. This is it. We're already in heaven, you know, and so in order… for the earth to survive, we have to acknowledge each other as part of the family, the same family, and also

reaffirm those things in ourselves and in other people that we've been brought up to fear or to hate" (qtd. in Winfrey).

Chapter III

Redemption through Self-expression and Sisterhood

in *The Color Purple*

> There can be no freedom for black men as long as they advocate subjugation of black women.
>
> -bell hooks

Sisterhood has created and strengthened newly woven bonds among black women and has led them to a sense of independence and autonomy. It has paved the way for the discovery of the self and the power to define their lives rather let them being defined by others. In their vulnerability to racist or sexist attack, the black women find themselves in support of one another. When faced with situations of isolation and alienation, black women find themselves drawn together toward collective survival and belief in the connectedness of the whole universe. Through mutual sharing of their experiences, sufferings and exploitative situations, black women learn how to cope in these situations, how to handle them independently, how to fight oppression and how to define their self themselves as individuals. It has led women to self-awareness and has helped in their transformation.

Sisterhood has created a new sense of solidarity and bonding among black women. The black woman's ability to define herself comes from a belief that no human ever has the right to define another however superior they may be. Sisterhood values the advancement of an entire group of women in the race and not merely the individual. For Alice Walker, it is the emancipation of the entire race—the 'survival whole.' As Ursula King says, "Sisterhood can be both a powerful experience and an equally powerful symbol of the togetherness, the

relatedness of all women—their relatedness in suffering and oppression, in giving birth and life, in nurturing and caring, in joy and ecstasy" (19).

In *The Color Purple*, "the emphasis are the oppression Black women experience in their relationship with Black men(fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers) and the sisterhood they must share with each other to liberate themselves" (Christian "The Black Woman" 469). Despite the fact that Walker's female protagonists' potential for creativity is stifled and thwarted by sex, race, or class, these women manage to retain and preserve their artistic potential, often encouraged by the sharing of their experiences within a network of womanly nurturance. Parker-Smith says, "The women in *The Color Purple* build a wall of camaraderie around themselves. They share each other's pain, sorrow, laughter, and dreams. They applaud each other's achievements and come to each other's rescue. They are sisters in body as well as in spirit and the spirit cannot be broken" (485). Regardless of the circumstances that oppress the women characters, they survive through recreation of the self. The black female protagonists gain strength and knowledge through their experiences, pain and suffering "…that suffering seems the maternal legacy of the African-American woman, and that survival is effective revenge for the pain . . . black women suffer stressful situations, loveless, dull marriages, stifled creativity, jealous or cruel spouses, sexual and racial victimization, capitulation to ignorance and tradition, and myriad other problems" (Dawson 70). Walker's works are an indictment of the racism and sexism that victimized African-American women in the rural American South. Bettye J. Parker-Smith observes that in *The Color Purple*:

> Walker elevates Black women to the height of sovereignty. They wear the royal robe of purple. In her early works, women used their fragile strength to love everybody and anybody except themselves. Now robed in purple, they receive and accept the right to love themselves and each other. Love of self

> energizes them to the point that they break their chains of enslavement, change their own worlds, time and Black men. They are prepared to fight—eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. And they remain women—cry when they need, laugh when they want to, straighten their hair if they take a notion. They change their economic, political and moral status, with love (483).

For their own empowerment and control of their own destiny, women must commit themselves to each other and to create their own identity. The failure "to define ourselves", writes Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider*, means "we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment" (45). The novel is a suggestion or a yearning hope of how a non-sexist or non-racist community would be or ought to be because Walker asserts that the American society is a "racist, sexist and colorist capitalist society" (Tate 183).

In *The Color Purple*, Walker expresses the plight of black women through Celie—her economic and sexual enslavement in a male dominated and racist society. The novel is a sort of *bildungsroman* that displays the spectacular growth and the development of Celie, the female protagonist from an ignorant, abused teenager to an accomplished woman who has learned to stand up for herself and cope with her hostile surroundings. Mae G Henderson describes Walker's art as life-saving:

> For Walker, art is liberational and life-saving; it is an act for reconstruction and reclamation of self, of past, of women, and of community… Walker suggests that her purpose of writing has been not only to create and control literary images of women, and black women in particular, but to give voice and representation to the women who have been silenced and confined both in life and literature (67).

Most of the women in The Color Purple are illustrations of these three types of women. Sofia, Celie's daughter-in-law is imprisoned for "sassing" the mayor's wife; Shug is ostracized because she does not fit the conventional mode of behavior for a woman of her time. She smokes, drinks, curses, has given birth to three children out of wedlock, and wanders over the country singing blues. However, through these characters Walker affirms the conviction that the private and the public world can be transformed. In her essay In Search of Mother's Gardens, Walker speaks about three types of black women: the physically and psychologically abused, the women torn by contrary instincts and the new black woman who recreates herself out of the creative legacy of her maternal ancestors. Gates and Appiah observes:

> Walker described the three types of black women characters she felt were missing from much of the literature of the United States. . . The third type of black woman character, represented most effectively by Celie and Shug in *The Color Purple*, are those African American women who, despite the oppressions they suffer, achieve some wholeness and create spaces for other oppressed communities (242).

In *The Color Purple*, when Celie's mother becomes too ill and too worn out from childbearing, the step-father, to satisfy his sexual appetite, rapes Celie repeatedly and gives away the two children born of his sin, for adoption. After the mother dies, Celie is defenseless against the man's brutality. Celie bears the brunt of sexual and emotional abuse to spare her sister Nettie from her promiscuous lustful Pa. Celie has to take on the role of an 'elder' or 'mother' to her sister, and she manages to protect Nettie from the advances of Pa; ironically, it is Celie's acceptance of sexual abuse which allows Nettie to remain unscathed. Celie's sacrifice and her bitter experiences save Nettie from the same fate. Harris Trudier

describes the step-father thus: "That unscrupulous violator sells her children, destroys her reputation while keeping his own untarnished, and barters her off to an older man who uses her as a surrogate mother for his four horrible children and as a receptacle for his passion" ("From Victimization" 1). When Alphonso, the step-father, tires of Celie, he marries her off to Mr. ____, an older widower. Celie's status is suggested as her step-father negotiates her marriage to Albert: " 'She ugly.' He say. 'But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it… she can take the cow she raise down there back of the crib'" (*CP* 10).

Walker uses the word 'transaction' as if marriage is a trade and the girl a commodity. The widower marries her in desperation because he needs someone to cook and clean for him and take care of his four children. Thus Celie is passed like a piece of property from one cruel and domineering black male into the hands of another. Saddled with farm work as well as the care of four "rotten" kids and domestic chores, she is overworked, beaten, and reduced to virtual bondage by her husband. Her step-children bully her and her husband beats her up like beating a mule. Being unaware of the inherent creative power of women, she is made to act as a stereotyped female. Gloria Wade Gayles describes the servitude Celie undergoes thus: "First owned by the man she believes to be her father, Celie is now owned by Mr. _____. Her status is similar to that of a slave. In the institution of slavery, black people, regardless of sex or age, were slaves. In the institution of patriarchy, black women, regardless of age, are slaves" (13).

Hernton expresses the thought that women are slaves from birth to death to a man. The enslaved Celie is no exception; she is penniless, provides many services and the reward is regular beatings. Calvin C. Hernton in his essay, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf: Color Purple as Slave Narrative" writes, "Albert treats her any way he chooses, because the

overriding morality of patriarchy toward women is that women have no rights that men are bound to respect. In the process, women are infantilized and rendered completely dependent on male paternalism for any kindness they might be accorded" (13).

Walker believes that the women characters would learn to make room for themselves that they would carve out, "a new place to move" (qtd. in Washington "Teaching Black-eyed" 22). Her novel initially pictures the black woman as the one human being in society to who almost anything can be done and usually is. In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Nanny Crawford describes the black woman as the mule of the world: "So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his woman folks. De nigger woman is de mule of the world so fur as Ah can see" (29). Celie is the mule of the family. Celie is a woman 'muted and silenced' by patriarchal society. Celie is suppressed by both physical brutality and admonition. After being warned by the step-father: "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (*CP* 3), Celie keeps her silence in the face of those who oppress her until emboldened by her relationship with Shug Avery. However, she is not totally muted. Though she does not disclose the secret to human beings, she communicates her agony to God through the medium of letters.

The Epistolary Mode as a Process of Self-definition

Celie's letters to God reveal a process of self-examination, self-realization and self-discovery. They are letters of self-exploration, enabling her to become connected to her thoughts and feelings. In her isolated state, Celie is ashamed to tell anyone about her life of brutality and exploitation at the hands of men. The story unfolds through many letters that the lonely and despairing Celie writes to God and later to her sister Nettie, who is a missionary in Africa. She has no one to talk to and share her problems, so she writes about all her problems

in the form of letters to God. Her entire life's happenings are shared and revealed to God and this sharing makes her comfortable.

Walker's ideology that creative art comes out of pain is perceptible from Celie's letters. Through letters to God, Celie expresses her life's tribulations, Mr. _____'s oppressive presence and of her friendship with Shug Avery, a blues singer (whom Mr. _____ loves all through his life and brought into the house for recuperation when she suffers from a disease). Celie reveals her emotional and psychological distress at her sexual relations with the man she assumes to be her father. Celie's experiences are so horrifying even to herself that she can only write it to God. Her letters take us through her awful pregnancies, separation from her children and the abuses of a loveless marriage of convenience. Celie has to survive against all odds, in spite of all the sufferings and oppression. She endures a series of trials that threaten psychic extinction, a death-in-life situation. She is moved by another person's love that acts as a catalyst to begin to love and value her self. Walker's ultimate aim in making her write these letters either to God or Nettie is that Celie must tell someone the truth and confirm her existence. These letters have no hidden secrets since they are addressed to God and so Celie has no inhibitions in revealing the events of her life. And the character's speech is black folk English that allows room for Celie to express her feelings completely.

Walker does not restrict her grammar or spelling. She makes Celie write her heart out, her words pouring out from her emotions. Celie gives vent to her sufferings and her suppressed feelings through these letters and thereby affirms her survival. Her letters are evidences of her existence. A woman loves to be complimented for her beauty, but her husband criticizes her: "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman . . . you nothing at all" (187) which is a mortification she suffers as a wife and the intense humiliation as a woman.

In seeking help from God, Celie is actually seeking counsel within herself. In writing to God, she gets the ability to locate God within. Walker always believes that there is a divinity in every human being, and one should develop the ability to seek it. So Celie's letters to God, "which have been directed toward the task of creating self, have been appropriately addressed. Her letters connect her to this interior being" (Wall 89). God being innate in all human beings, Celie finds the twin self within. The unreciprocated letters written to God eventually gives her the strength she needs to fight back. As Winchell writes, "In writing to God she is writing to the part of her personality growing progressively stronger until she is able to acknowledge the God within herself and demand the respect due her" (89).

It is significant to note that none of the letters addressed to God is signed. In their anonymity, their namelessness, the letters underscore Celie's lack of individuality and courage to reveal her identity. Celie's thoughts are fused with her feelings, actions and words, causing the letters to assume a quality of force and authority. Through them, Celie expresses the impact of oppression on her spirit, body and soul as well as her growing strength against it and her final triumph over atrocity. She pours out the physical and psychological abuse she suffers in her letters. The letters reveal the apparent hopelessness of her life as well as a situation that is contrary to her instincts. Celie is uneducated and psychologically abused. Yet, Walker tries to explore the possibility of redemption for Celie. As Emma J. Waters Dawson observes, "Consequently, by exploring intra-family relationships, Walker achieves redemption of a character like Celie, who represents the utter extreme of a hard-working, spiritless, and physically unattractive woman" (78).

Celie's letters momentously replicates the progression of her personality and the transformation which she undergoes. Celie may be the "mule," but she's not entirely timid and emaciated or not completely quiet or silent. Even when she is warned not to 'talk' or to

disclose about the clandestine abuse, she still tries to record it in the form of letters. She is warned to conceal it from human beings, so she writes to God, because she has to tell it to somebody. If not, the catastrophe that had happened to her will remain unarticulated. Though Celie tries to obey the interdiction against speech, it is clearly a violation of the command. Spoken words are transient, while writing lasts forever. By putting down her thoughts, it is possible for Celie to discover the pain and victimization that she is undergoing. By writing about her humiliation, she proclaims to humanity that she is not a mere cipher. Whatever identity the patriarchal order denies her, she is trying to find. She finds an inner life and a concrete history and an identity other than one which is stamped on her. Her letters subvert oppression in the process of affirming it. The letters addressed to Nettie are alternately signed "Your Sister, Celie" and "Amen," as expressions of ratification, of approval, of assertion and of validation. The suggestion is explicit: Celie is now ratifying, asserting and validating her own words, her own worth, and the authority of her own experience.

Names are closely tied to identity in the novel, and the claiming or conferring of a name is an indication of selfhood. Celie's letters to God are unsigned; during the period before she begins writing to Nettie, she feels she is no one, has no particular identity and the significance of signing a letter is not felt by her. Her own name becomes effectual only when Shug names a song for her. Celie only then hears her name because "somebody made something and named it after me" (*CP* 75). Eventually, late in the novel, having achieved a measure of emotional and economic independence, Celie signs a letter to Nettie in a manner that shows she has both a name and an address. After she finds the letters of Nettie, she feels that she is somebody, a sister and so she writes:

> Your sister, Celie
>
> Folkspants Unlimited.

Sugar Avery Drive

Memphis, Tennessee (*CP* 192).

Celie, after redeeming and restoring her identity, instructs Mary Agnes that she should not allow people to call her "Squeak." Agnes also attempts and finally succeeds in emerging from her subservient nickname. She realizes that her name is a badge of her personhood and dignity. When she refuses to be demeaned by her nickname, she wins her own name and identity. Albert's new understanding of love and her sense of confidence allows her to grant him an identity**.** It is only after the transformation does even Mr.____ gain his name, Albert.

Denying the Language of the Oppressors

By her adoption of the epistolary form, Walker allows Celie the freedom to shape her existence. The changes in Celies's style during the course of the novel reflect her growing sense of worth. As Elizabeth Fifer puts it, "By using dialect, the only language she knows, when all public communication is forbidden, she discovers and exploits a powerful tool in her development of awareness through self-expression" (158). Walker explains that she had made Celie express her thoughts and experiences in her own language. She feels that to make her speak in the language of the oppressors would be to murder her and to attack all those ancestors who spoke her language. Her language expresses the intensity of the brutal sexual violence Celie as an illiterate black woman has suffered. Celie has written down her experiences as she has perceived it and in her point of view. They are part of the self that Celie that eventually accept.

Walker writes, "For it is language more than anything else that reveals and validates one's existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied us, then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of caricature, reflecting someone else's literary or social fantasy" (*Living By the Word* 58). By denying her the expression or

the language, she is denied the validity of her existence and those of her ancestors. Allowing the usage of the dialect of the oppressed helps counter racial stereotypes. Walker reiterates, "To permit our language to be heard, and especially the words and speech of our old ones, is to expose the depth of the conflict between us and our oppressors and the centuries it has not at all silently raged" (*CP* 63). Celie's speech and written words reveal her sense of her world and her plight she suffers due to the racist and sexist system. It is through the usage of the words that she defined her self. Walker writes about Celie, "She has not accepted an alien description of who she is; neither has she accepted completely an alien tongue to tell us about it. Her being is affirmed by the language in which she is revealed and like everything about her it is characteristic, hardwon and authentic" (64).

From Self-negation to Self-actualization

Throughout the novel, Celie goes through a hard but inspiring process of metamorphosis from self-negation to self-actualization, from a life without joy and hope to a life full of love and hope. While men deny women's existence as equal beings, Celie gradually learns to appreciate her selfhood under the wholesome influence of strong female characters like Nettie, her sister; Sofia, her daughter-in-law and Shug Avery, Mr. ____'s mistress. Her liberation begins with the help of these three strong women of the community. Around Celie is formed a solid bond of sisterly love. Each of these women endeavours to give whatever the other is deprived. With their mutual love, empathy and shared oppression, the black women give strength to each other , stand up for each other and succeed collectively in asserting their own identity in the male-dominated society.

Phillipa Kafka describes Celie as an ideal fairy-tale heroine, pitilessly victimized, simple, passive, defenseless, good, patient, enduring and is desperately in need of a fairy godmother. "Shug is Celie's fairy godmother" (199)—who rescues her by the miracle of

love and transforms the contemptible ugly self-effacing woman into a woman of self-esteem and self-sufficiency; who transforms Celie from a woman of servitude into a woman who lives with honour and respect. Celie's process of rehabilitation begins with the arrival of Shug Avery.

Sisterhood Redeems

Shug Avery is a gutsy blues singer, mistress to Mr. ____ and mother of his illegitimate children. She is a woman of questionable morals who the local preacher describes as a "strumpet in short skirts" (*CP* 40). She is a woman whose experience has given her an identity. As Celie notes: "When you look in Shug's eyes you know she been where she been, seen what she seen, did what she did. And now she know" (228). For all that Shug has been through, she still has the capacity to love herself, and in turn, someone else. In spite of Shug's external behaviour, she is warm and compassionate and of the "mothering" kind. Celie gets a revelation of self-hood after she gets acquainted with Shug Avery a worldly, strong, sensuous and fiercely independent woman. Shug teaches and preaches her like a fairy god mother or guardian angel to realize her self and release her from the barbaric life she had been living with Mr. ____. Shug's love makes Celie whole and totally liberated. When Celie is deprived of love, Shug fulfils her need by being compatible, gentle and cordial. Their love is a fulfiling experience and is a gush of fresh air let into Celie life. Walker describes of the sincere reciprocal love that exists among African American women through Shug's effect on Celie.

When Celie sees Shug for the first time, she is enamoured with the vision of a woman who is "bout ten thousand time more prettier than me" (8). Even before the two women meet, Celie feels such a strong current of attraction to the singer that she yearns to simply "lay eyes on her" (25). Mr.____ does not allow her to attend Shug's performance, but later he brings the ailing singer home. At first, Celie acts as Shug's primary caretaker when she comes to

Mr.____'s to recuperate. She cares for Shug out of duty, performing the task of nurse. Shug is vulnerable and has also felt like a "motherless child" (167). When she was a young girl, she was often denied displays of affection from her mother. The attention that Celie lavishes on Shug while she attempts to nurse her back to health is not only appreciated, but reciprocated and thus the attachment begins. Celie's affection finds an outlet in the tender care she gives Shug. With Shug around the house, Celie has her first opportunity to discuss sex openly, and when she admits that she has never felt pleasure in the act, Shug educates her to feel comfortable about her body. She helps her break through the accumulated pain of her previous sexual experiences and offers the unconditional love which she has been so far deprived. "Shug is the agent by which Celie's dreams are realized. She awakens Celie to her own sexuality, finds the letters from Nettie that Albert has hidden, and makes possible the pants-making business that gives Celie economic independence" (Walker, Nancy 64).

The sisterly communication begins to call Celie up from her inactivity. She cast off her old self and is prepared for the regeneration required to define her Self. Celie realizes how powerless and subservient she is. While she is with Shug Avery, she recognizes the precious value of self. Shug's recuperation helps Celie too, to recover. Celie allows herself to luxuriate in the nourishing influence of Shug. Shug prompts her to know about her anatomy and her ability to appreciate her own body is an initiation to the acknowledgement of her own identity. With the new-found identity, as E. Ellen Barker remarks, "Celie is able to break free from male domination and join a community of women for support, and she begins to establish identification through a network of female relationships with Shug" (61).

Celie, who has seen herself only through the eyes of men, has no respect for her body since it appears to her as "ugly," an object of abuse. Through their lovemaking, Shug, as a spiritual mother, teaches Celie to appreciate and love her own body and self. Celie has been

the subject of repeated rapes and beatings and so she has no desire to get to know her body. To protect herself, she has had to annihilate her body as well as her soul. It is only after Shug's arrival that she develops an interest. By discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate a desire for selfhood. The mirror reflection of her own body opens the door for possibilities in her self, and with her new-found identity, Celie is able to break free from male domination and to turn to a community of women for support and she begins to establish identification through a network of female relationship after Shug's advent. Even though Celie has come to terms with her body, she is still a "virgin" (69), Shug exclaims, because she has never had a satisfying love relationship. Self-awareness of her body and exposure to Shug's love has stimulated sexual desire in Celie. "Shug teaches Celie what she never learned from her own mother—how to find pleasure in one's body and how to give pleasure in return" (Wilentz 71). Celie has no concept of her own body. Shug helps her in the reclamation of her body. The importance of reclaiming one's own body for the purpose of self-actualization is outlined by Daniel W Ross as follows:

> One of the primary projects of modern feminism has been to resolve women's bodies. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, women have learned to fear or even hate their bodies. Consequently, women often think of their bodies as torn or fragmented, a pattern evident in Walker's Celie. To confront the body is to confront not only an individual's abuse but also the abuse of women's bodies throughout history, as the external symbol of women's enslavement, this abuse represents for women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status (70).

When Shug returns to Mr.____'s house with her new husband Grady, Shug and Celie develop a more stabilizing, intimate bond. The lesbian relationship that develops between Celie and Shug again reinforces the richness of female bonding. For Celie, such a relationship with a man would have been a brutal one since Celie has never been loved by any man, only tormented and abused. Celie relives her life and it is like a rebirth into a world of love and her life begins anew at this focal point.

Shug and Celie's bond becomes stronger and their love and respect as friends begins to deepen, gradually transforming Celie's oppression into self-authorization. Validating Shug's "unconditional" approval of Celie as friend and confidant, Shug dedicates a song to her: "Miss Celie's song." This is not only the first time "somebody make something and name it after me [Celie]" (*CP* 65), but it's the first time anybody has done anything for Celie. Shug's gracious act enables Celie to appreciate her worth. Celie is overwhelmingly emotional about this song which elevates her in front of Mr. _____ and others who underestimated her. After Nettie, somebody loves her, values her and venerates her by dedicating a song. Celie reorganizes her life, achieves economic liberty gathers the knowledge of meaningful things and relationships to create a new self.

Shug also acts to "regulate" Celie's environment, intercepting the world to protect her. When Celie confides that Mr. ____ beats her because to him, she is inadequate, Shug promises not to leave until he reforms. When Shug discover the cache of letters Mr. ____has hidden as a cruel method of subduing Celie, and while reading these letters, it is discovered that "Pa" was not Celie's biological father, proving that her children were not the product of incest, Shug's immediate reaction is to take Celie away to a purifying environment where she would be safe and productive. Shug successfully guides Celie into a stage of her development as a fully actualized, autonomous individual by helping her to discover her own body, by

giving her the ability to love and see the creation in herself, and finally by giving Celie the capacity for speech. She encourages her to talk about the abuse she suffered in the hands of "Pa" and Mr. ____. Walker always believes that telling the stories of wound would heal it.

After she discovers that Mr. ____ has been hiding Nettie's letters; she makes up her mind to go back to Memphis with Shug, and announces the decision to the gathering around the dinner table. In Celie's jubilant celebration of self, she affirms her selfhood and announces her rebirth. Mr.____ threatens that if she leaves it will be "over [his] dead body" (180). All the resentment dammed up in Celie, comes flowing out in a stream of words of the blues conversion brought about by Shug: "You a lowdown dog . . . .It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (180). As they are about to depart, Mr. ____tries to stop Celie again by undermining her self-confidence, telling her, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman, Goddamn…you nothing at all" (187).

When she decides to travel to Memphis with Shug, She delivers a curse on Mr._____: "Until you do right by me, I say, everything you dream about will fall" (187). Celie gestures as a 'conjure' woman and curses him. Walker describes Celie as a woman who has gone into a trance to align herself with the powers of nature, which take the form of a "dust devil" (187) arising suddenly on the porch to prevent Mr.____from striking her" (Thadious 46). Shug completely sentient that Celie is possessed with an extraordinary force warns Mr._____ against provoking her. She helps Celie to compose herself. When Mr._____ defies her, she maintains her affirmative stance that she has the power to be her own black self: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, but I'm here" (*CP* 187).

When Celie leaves Albert to move to Memphis with Shug, She soon finds that Celie can make a living by practising the traditionally feminine art of sewing. While carefully ensconced in Memphis, Shug encourages Celie to pursue her creativity. Shug conceives of

the idea of making pants and is a major investor in the business, seeing to it that Celie becomes a success. Shug not only invests her time and her money in Celie's business, she invests her love: "I brought you here[Memphis] to love you and help you get on your feet" (191). Shug encourages her to make some pants. Shug supports Celie in more than personal terms. With Shug's aid Celie becomes economically independent, something that puts her on equal footing with her husband, Albert. It is noteworthy that the pants that she quickly becomes famous for are equally appropriate for men and women. Thereby, Shug Avery helps her remove the terrible "nothing" from Celie's life. Through their love, both Celie and Shug come to redefine and rearticulate their values in more holistic, familial, and community terms.

Walker called upon the influence of her maternal ancestor, her mother, and her literary ancestor, Zora Neale Hurston, as the collective models for Shug Avery, the woman who would inspire the possibility of revival. The ability to nurture another, to inspire, to create possibility has been termed "mothering the mind" by Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley in their book, *Mothering the Mind (1984,)* Shug Avery is at first a friend of Celie, and eventually a lover, but always a subtly guiding "mothering influence" who, like the mothers of Walker's generations, enables Celie to evolve into an independent, self-actualized woman, no longer accepting the emotionally crippling conditions that have enslaved her. Correspondingly, "While Shug does not give literal birth to Celie, she does give her spiritual birth, freeing her to finally enter into the creation…" Celie becomes, then the "new Black woman" who "recreates herself out of the creative legacy of her maternal ancestors" (Christian "Alice Walker" 470) more enriched and more empowered than before.

According to the pattern of "mothering," Shug wants to nurture Celie, help her define herself through love and profession and then let her go, sending her off to garner her outside

experiences. As Celie sits on Shug's dining room floor, visualizing patterns and sewing together fabrics of her own choosing, Celie begins to trust on her own creativity and her own existence as a vital, contributing member of society. Like a mother surveying her own handiwork, the successful cultivation of a child, Shug squeals, "Girl, you on your way" (*CP* 181).

Celie's desertion and curse of Mr._____ has its effect as shown in his decline, both physical and mental, during her absence. Only when he takes steps to 'right the wrongs' he has done her, he redeems. Significantly, his major wrong has been the withholding of letters between Celie and Nettie. Only when he accepts their right to expression, is the curse lifted. As Walker writes in her essay "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse," when Albert regrets and realizes his sin, it stops the curse. This justice is not only justice and empowerment for Celie, but for Mister as well. Mae G Henderson points out : " As conjure woman, Celie not only has the power to free herself from unjust oppression, but also the potential to release Albert from the burden of his own oppressiveness" (75). The curse is an ultimately "generative" magic, for both Celie and Albert. Walker's recurrent idea is to transform both the man and the wife in such a way that they can live in perfect harmony and compatibility.

Part of the identification process to self-actualization begins in establishing roots, knowledge about ancestors, knowing the past, knowing family and place. When Celie's mother dies, her roots vanish; Shug helps her to recover them. When Celie discovers that she has inherited her parents' property, she has a desire to view her past as a means of securing her future and wants to confront her step-father. As further affirmation of self, Celie wants to return to the graves of her parents. She finds that her step-father has placed the bodies in unmarked graves, burying Celie's past and identification with her biological parents. The

only family Celie has left is Shug, and the latter gladly assumes that responsibility, comforting Celie with a kiss, acknowledging that "[u]s each other's people now" (*CP* 165).

At the beginning of the novel, Celie's creative capacity and power to sustain life in any vital way had withered, but through her observance of Shug and their interaction, Celie gets all that she needs to restructure her self. Ultimately, Shug teaches Celie to believe in herself and to see herself as an object of creation, free and equal to anyone or anything. With Shug's instruction on religion, Celie takes her final liberating step. Celie has always sought solace from God, but when she comes to realize that God has not helped her, it raises a doubt: "What God do for me?" (173). Shug expounds to make her understand that

> God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking or don't know what you looking for I believe God is everything. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it. (176)

When Celie discovers that she is a part of "the creation," then she fits into the natural order of the world, actual redemption occurs. "To enter into the flow of God's creativity is to know love and through love to know the meaning of selfhood, family and community—in short to know true wisdom" (Hiers 3). Once Celie learns to love herself, she loves other, even Mr. ____, the man who is partially responsible for her deterioration. She inspires in him enough redemptive spirit to salvage what is left of his manhood, and like Celie, emanate love to others. While standing on the porch with Celie, he admits that "this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience" (*CP* 236). The characters in the novel are exemplars that have survived and have made a new life for themselves and for the generations to come; they symbolize a larger hope for their community and for their race.

When Shug wants the freedom to pursue her last fling with a boy half her age, Celie understands that Shug has done all that she could to provide an environment of love and security so Celie can stand on her own. Celie has learned that with or without Shug, she is now enough of a woman to survive on her own. Shug has helped Celie in all the important transactions of life and completes the process of metamorphosis by withdrawing her love. As Thomas F. Marvin observes, "Celie survives the ensuing battle with the blues and emerges on the other side as a strong, self-reliant woman" (418).

Celie's life has come full circle, from spiritual annihilation to rebirth, and this has been accomplished through the mothering influence of Shug Avery and has been and will continue to be accomplished by all mothers, all women, joined in the common cause of unifying families, communities, "peoples" when Celie concludes with an affirmative "Amen" (*CP* 261). Celie is blessing the power of the human spirit to overcome the horrors of oppression in the past and is rejoicing in the utter possibility of life.

Shug has a similar effect on Mary Agnes, a quiet, submissive woman as Celie. Harpo, after his failure to make Sofia "mind," calls her "Squeak" and orders her about as if she were his slave. After Shug's arrival and her performance in Harpo's juke joint, Shug encourages Agnes to sing in public and make money. "Squeak" begins by singing Shug's songs and eventually sings her own songs and she now insists that Harpo call her real name. Mary Agnes has reclaimed the right to define her own identity and make use of the talent that Shug discovered for her.

Walker's Emerging Women

Parallel to the main story, Walker introduces the gender conflict between Mr. _____'s son, Harpo, and his wife Sofia, an indomitable, Amazon- like woman who dramatizes the

plight of the female in rebellion. Harpo brings home a bride, Sofia and they live happily for a time in a small cottage on the property. Sofia is a strong and brave woman. Celie describes her as "a big strong girl. Arms got muscle, legs, too . . . solid. Like if she sit down on something, it be mash" (*CP 33-34*). Though she comes from circumstances similar to Celie's, Sofia reasons how she grew strong enough to fight. She says, "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house…I loves Harpo, she says. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me (39)."

She "used to hunt game with a bow and arrow" and makes her own shingles and does her own roofing. Sofia is a loving wife and mother and a good housekeeper, and though she is not mean or vengeful, she obviously can defend herself. She loves Harpo, but is broken as he attempts to reduce her to his state and to draw her under the spell that enchants him. Harpo is desirous of proving his masculinity to his own male peers, especially to his father and he does not desire to make Sofia happy; rather he tries to treat her as his slave. Celie later charges him with Sofia's undoing: "If you hadn't tried to rule over Sofia the white folks never would have caught her" (*CP*181).

Harpo, who is "strong in body but weak in will" (35), has learned all he knows about women from his father, who practices on Celie what he preaches: "All women good for is beating", says Mr. ____ who beats Celie with a strap. After checking with his father, Harpo resists helping Celie because housework is "women work. I'm a man'(29). Mr. ____ instructs Harpo what to do to make Sofia mind. "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." (42). The first time Harpo attacks Sofia he has to pretend a mule kicked him to explain his cuts and bruises. But Harpo does not learn from the experience, and he is determined to have a subservient

wife. Unlike other women characters, Sofia differs in her response: "I'm getting tired of Harpo. . . He don't want a wife, he want a dog. . . used to be when he touch me I'd go all out of my head. Now . . . I just don't want to be bothered. . ." (68). But in truth, Celie thinks that Harpo secretly admires his wife's independent streak and Sofia tells Celie that he likes washing dishes. "To tell the truth, he love that part of housekeeping a heap more 'en me. I rather be out in the fields or fooling with the animals. Even chopping wood. But he love cooking and cleaning and doing little things around the house" (63).

Celie on the contrary does not know how to fight and believes the world's attitude that women are not supposed to fight. At first, fighting back does not even seem an option; survival seems the best she can hope for, in this world at least. When Nettie comes and lives with Celie in Mr. ____ house, Nettie advises her sister not to let Mr. ____ and his children exploit her. Nettie insists that Celie should fight and should show them "who got the upper hand." But Celie says that she doesn't know how to fight,"All I know how to do is stay alive" (18). Even Kate, Mr. ____'s sister advises her to fight them back. But Celie says fighting doesn't do any good because Nettie fought and she was thrown away. She says, "I don't fight. I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (22). She stands silent, like a tree, as Mr. _____ beats her, thinking, "That's how come I know trees fear man" (23). Death seems the only way out of a miserable existence, as Celie tells her daughter-in-law Sofia: "Well, sometime Mr____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last always" (40). Sofia's response provides Celie with a rare moment of humour: "You ought to bash Mr. _____ head open, she say. Think about heaven later." (40). Life for Celie is about "staying alive"—means accepting absolute powerlessness and extreme brutality, living with a "terrible nothing" (47). Celie

construes that fighting or retaliating against men would only worsen her present state of survival. Celie thinks that the life that she leads would be at stake if she fights.

Reversal of gender roles is initially most obvious in the character Harpo. Even as Harpo grows into manhood, Celie, his stepmother, notices that his face begins to look like a woman's face. As soon as Harpo marries the big, strong and ruddy-looking Sofia, who has already borne him a child, Mr.____ predicts that she will soon switch the traces on him, and she does. Sofia is at home in a man's pants, splitting shingles and working on the roof. She prefers field work and even chopping wood to keeping house. Nettie writes to Celie that the women in Africa are responsible for the crops. Celie is reminded of Nettie's letter in which she reports that in the Olinka village of Africa, the job of thatching roofs belongs to the women. The irony is that Harpo truly enjoys "woman's work" without anybody imposing it on him. The two could have been quite content with him cooking and washing dishes and her doing traditional men's work but Mr.____ had raised Harpo to feel less of a man if he was not in control. Harpo cannot simply accept that he and Sofia are happy in their reversed roles—and that love is a far more important element in marriage than obedience. He wants to prove his manhood by beating her, as Mister beats Celie, to make her "mind." Sofia and Harpo fight "like two mens," with Harpo constantly getting the worst of the beating. In order to grow as big and strong as Sofia, Harpo gorges on food but in vain. Sofia finally leaves Harpo with their five children in two wagons. She eventually goes to jail for striking the white mayor. At the end of the novel, Harpo and Sofia are together again, they revert to the roles that they are most comfortable with even if society is not with Sofia clerking at the store that Celie has inherited from her real father and Harpo staying at home. "The politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race… its unrelenting, severe attacks on male

hegemony, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men, is offered as a revolutionary leap forward into a new social order based on sexual egalitarianism" (Bell 263).

Transformation and Regeneration

Walker parallelizes the transformation of Celie and Albert in the novel. For Albert as for Celie, learning to love oneself is a requisite to becoming whole. Mr.____ sinks into such a state of self-pity and drunkenness that Harpo takes over the traditionally feminine duties of cooking and cleaning for him and even bathes him. Albert has become such a helpless creature because all through his life he had been exploiting Celie. His desolation incredibly changes his attitude towards the entire conception of love, relationships, women and humanity. Albert's acceptance of his self comes with his ability to accept and love that part of his self which his own partially white father hates about him. His grandfather was a white man and a slave owner. Old Mister had learned all the ways of treating women and children from his father and he is contemptuous about black women. He finds happiness in dominating anybody who is more black than himself. But Albert's genuine love for Shug, Walker says, "is a major sign of mother love, the possibility of health; and, since she in her blackness reflects him, an indication that he is at least capable of loving himself. No small feat." (*Living By the Word* 81). Winchell observes, "Walker views Albert's love of Shug, in spite of her color and his father's protestations, as a sign of psychic health and, more specifically, a sign of self-love" (98).

Walker's Albert has the potential for growth, development and change within him. The growth and the transformation that both Celie and Albert undergo in juxtaposition are explicitly rendered in the novel. They become whole and at peace only when they achieve an androgynous blend of traditionally male and female characteristics. Gender sharing and gender crossover eventually allow Celie and Albert grow toward wholeness by growing more

like each other. "In the Closest of the Soul," Walker writes, "They proceed to grow, to change, to become whole, i. e. well, by becoming more like each other, but stopping short of taking on each other's illness. Celie becomes more self-interested and aggressive; Albert becomes more thoughtful and considerate of others" (*Living by the Word* 80).

Walker's concept is that it is not enough if women are transformed or liberated. Women, men and the children and the whole race have to transform and liberate themselves. The black masculinity must be contained, controlled and ultimately transformed. Mr. ____ moves from male oppressor to enlightened being, willingly surrendering his attachment on the phallo-centric social order reinforced by the sexual oppression of women. After breaking Celie's curse by returning her sister's letters, Mr.____ begins a transformation. Celie writes that "look like he trying to make something out of himself. I don't mean just that he work an he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen" (*CP* 267). Walker means that men do not have the habit of listening to what women speak because they think that women are not intelligible enough to talk about things that are interesting.

When Celie comes back to their community from Memphis, she is no longer submissive to her husband. Albert says that what he loves about Shug is that she is "manly—she bound to live her life and be herself no matter what" (236). So, Celie understands that a man does not respect blind submission but an ability to be economically self-sufficient and to have physical and personal strength. Shug, apart from being personally strong passes her ability to be financially independent to Celie. Leaving everything old behind—old notions, old self and old life, she enters a world of creation. She has gains full control of her existence. Pant-making signifies that Celie's spiritual rebirth is secured by economic independence. As

Priscilla L. Walton puts it, "Celie literally sews her life back together when she begins to design pants" (193).

Barbara Christian notes ,"Walker challenges[white]society's definition[of women as dependent on men] by presenting women's communities that are sexually and economically independent of men, though not separate from them" (*Black Feminist* 199). Celie's clothes-making gives expression to her creativity which was buried during the years of abuse by Albert and her step-father. Trudier Harris states,

> After twenty years of enduring abuse after marriage, Celie finds the strength to engage in a lesbian relationship with her husband's former lover, to leave the church and her home, and to start a pant-making business. This brief scenario of the novel traces a remarkable transformation from victimization to entrepreneurship, and it all seems wonderfully affirming. ("From Victimization" 1).

When Mr. _____learns to wonder and begins to change, he learns the art of tolerance and at that point, actually becomes an authentic friend with a name--Albert. Learning this art has become a *sine qua non* for the cultivation of positive characters; they learn to respect and care for each other. Such care can be expressed when men take on nurturing work. As soon as Albert starts to see Celie as a human being rather than his personal property, he is able to stop hating her and even takes her view of his genitals as being frog like humorously.

When the step-father dies, a long hidden will appears which shows that the land, house and store he had possessed for years in fact were left to Celie and Nettie. And the long-lost sister escapes from Africa and turns up at the farm with Celie's children, Olivia and Adam. Thus all the characters are reunited in a feminized space with female traits and free of

the hostility, oppression, guilt and cruelty of the male and white worlds. "Walker seeks to resolve the dialectic by making all males female or androgynous, all destroyers' creators, and all difference sameness" (Byerman 66). The novel ends with the restoration of women to a sense of wholeness, completeness and independence.

In this poignant novel, *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker creates incredibly lovable woman. Love has a redemptive power as the love between Nettie and Celie and the love between Celie and Shug are restorative which restores whatever Celie had lost and had been deprived of while she lived with her step-father and with his husband Mr. ____. The estrangement and violence that mark the relationship between black men and women gets revived and the rights restored and result in reconciliation and reunion. After her bond with Shug Avery, Celie grows in experience, her observations become sharper and more informed and her letters assumes a lyrical cadence. Shug Avery is a woman of pride and independence and her urge to survive acts a catalyst and a source of inspiration to Celie. Sofia has a rebellious spirit which not only makes her desert the overbearing husband but also to change the social order of the racist community she lives.

Animism

Animism is "a belief that makes it possible to view all creation as living as being inhabited by spirit" (qtd. in O'Brien 193). As S. P. Swain and Sarbajit Das observes, "This belief is evoked in various ways in the novel, from the Olinka's primitive worship of the roof leaf to the loud hum which Celie, Sofia and Harpo hear when they smoke marijuana and which Celie grows in strength and self-confidence" (87).

Celie feels that she has been constantly betrayed by God, whom she visualizes as a "big and old and tall and graybearded," who never reciprocates her bootless cries. What God has given her is only pains upon pains: a lynched father, a crazy mother, a lowly step-father, and a sister whom she probably could not see again. At the height of detestation, addressing God, she says, "You must be sleep" (183). She abruptly stops writing to God, "giving up on Him as but another trifling, low-down man." Hence she alienates herself from god and starts addressing her letters to her sister Nettie.

Shug denies that "God ain't he or she, but a It" (176). Shug's words make Celie accept a genderless God. But Shug makes her understand that "God is everything… Everything that is or ever was or ever will be" (*CP* 176) and to discover God, one must look inward. Only misery in life prompts one to introspect and transcend beyond. Shug tries to change Celie's concept of God from a stern white man who demands sacrifice and devotion to an all-encompassing "It" who strives to please people by creating beauty for them to enjoy. It gives an awakening that God basically wants people to appreciate the good things of the world, including sexual pleasure, music and dancing, the wonders of nature, and color purple in a field. Walker's conceptualization about God is that God is in everything. Shug tells Celie, "God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it" (176).

Shug makes her believe that God cannot change her world, but only Celie can. Celie, as she grows, comes to feel that God is both in nature and in the self, and that divinity is within each individual and is found by developing the self and celebrating everything that exists as an integrated whole. Celie's last letter: " Dear God, Dear Stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear people. Dear Everything. Dear God" (*CP* 259). This revelation has come to Celie with the realization of the self in her journey from self-negation to self-assertion, from diffidence

to confidence, from self-alienation to self-identification, from degradation and isolation to a life of fulfillment and integration.

Regret, Reconciliation, Redemption, Restoration and Reunion

"Celie is one of Walker's "emergent" women because in her life there is a reconciliation with both her cultural heritage and the man she lives with—two of criteria for the emergent woman" (Wilentz 173). Through the devotion of her sister Nettie, her lover Shug, and the family of women around her, she survives. The novel ends on a note of reconciliation, restoration and reunion. The reconciliation between Celie and Albert is of great import because it not only reflects the possibility of growth in Albert but it also emphasizes the necessity of male-female bonding and ultimately the bonding of the entire black community.

To Walker, the character of Mr.____ is "a character that I deeply love—not, obviously for his meanness, oppression of women, and general early boorishness, but because he went deeply enough into himself to find the courage to change. To grow" (*Living By the Word* 80). The courage to change makes him manly and humane. At the end of the novel, Albert is working in his fields once again and keeping house for himself, even cooking. He appears late in the novel sewing with Celie on the porch of the house they once shared and actually designing shirts to go with Celie's pants. He recalls that as a child he liked to sew along with his mother until others ridiculed him. Celie tells him that in Africa, after all, men quilt and wear dresses. Nobody will laugh at Albert now because the characters now live in a world governed by Womanist values rather than patriarchal ones. Such a reversal is significant. George Stade writes sarcastically: "Celie , in short, redeems these men by giving them the courage to be women, by releasing the woman already in them. But masculinity is unredeemable; masculinity is radical evil, irreducible, the causeless cause of all that's wrong

in the world" (*CP* 266). When Albert reveals that he has always enjoyed sewing, the lingering hostility and resentment fade away and they plan to live in compatibility not as man and wife but as simple companions.

As Gay Alden Wilentz states, "Through Celie's predicament, Walker pays homage to the Womanists by portraying a woman who struggles through adversity to asset herself against all impossible odds. She tributes to the lesbians by portraying a relationship between two women. Celie's friendship with Sofia makes Celie learn, how to stand up for herself" (70).

Quilting as a Healer and a Symbolic Representation of Sisterhood and Self-expression

Quilting is a symbolic structure that makes their position better through the unifying bond between black women. Quilting functions as a way of creating female community in a world that represses female expression. Sofia's boldness in challenging Mr. ____'s refusal of her marriage with Harpo and her insistence on doing things in her own way instead of placing herself at Harpo's command arouse Celie's jealousy to such an extent that Celie without hesitation suggests Harpo beat Sofia when he does not know how to make her 'mind.' Celie accepts the male definition of women without the knowledge about the concept of independent woman and therefore, advises Harpo to beat Sofia to submission. But soon she regrets for the sin and the guilt does not allow her to sleep. Later, she confesses Sofia that she said that because she was jealous of her that Sofia does what she cannot do.

Celie's helplessness and weakness remind Sofia of her mother who never says anything back to her father. Sofia feels pathetic over Celie and reconciles herself with her and even encourages her to punch Mr. ____'s head open before she thinks about heaven. Realizing her mistake, she tries to establish rapport with Sofia through quilt-making which

has a healing influence. The ritual of quilt-making creates an equality and intimacy between them. On these quilt making occasions, they discuss various problems.

In Africa, Nettie uses a quilt to force Celie's daughter's adoptive mother, Corrine, to confess her jealousy. Corrine through the recollection of a quilt absolves Nettie of accusations against her and that allows Corrine to die in peace. It is quilting an expression of black heritage that patches and mends the severed relationships among black women. Quilting strengthens the bondage of sisterhood and brings redemption to the black women in *The Color Purple*. Celie becomes empowered, strong and understands the redemptive power of love through Shug and her sister Nettie. Christian discusses about the strength of sisterhood that helped Celie transform and attain freedom. She writes,

> *Meridian* begins that journey of transformation. But it is Celie, even more than her predecessor, who completes Walker's cycle. For Celie is a "Mem," who survives and liberates herself through her sister's strength and wisdom, qualities which are, like color purple, derived from nature. To be free is the natural state of the living. And Celie's attainment of freedom affects not only others of her sisters, but her brothers as well. ("Alice Walker" 470)

The movement is from imbalance to balance and harmony in relationships between Celie and Albert, reconciliation between Harpo and Sofia with their reversal of roles, happy union of Samuel and Nettie; from separation to unification of Celie and her children ; from Mr.___ to Albert: from namelessness to a name: from a slave to an independent woman; from a rude man to a man who mellow man; from "nothingness" to selfhood; from grudge to forgiveness; from misunderstanding to sisterhood; from wound to healing.

Self-expression helps black women gain their lost identity, confidence, self-esteem, dignity and honour. It provides them the economic independence to live their life with honour and dignity free from bondage to the men. It gives them the boldness to fight against injustice and retaliate suppression. They are no more 'trees' or silent sufferers or victims of battering men. They are no more powerless and subservient. They are no more fitting them to men defined gender roles and stereotypes. They redeem their self, which makes their male counterparts revere them.

The novel is pregnant with the description of human suffering and despair but it ends with a hope for mankind. In *Finding Celie's Voice,* Walker explains her responsibility as an artist and predicts her hopeful vision for the future, insisting that Celie's redemption is concomitant with her own sense of healing. Celie is the best illustration for victimization. Celie transcends a chaotic and turbulent world and asserts her self in an otherwise meaningless existence.

Walker's argument is that there should be some masculinity in women and femininity in men, so that they will be able to understand each other and empathize each other's problems so that the whole world will live in peace and harmony, instead of sticking on the gender roles and stereotypes. After years of struggle with the overwhelmingly powerful patriarchal culture, both black men and women bring themselves to a redefinition of self in the family and in the society. They discover in themselves the ability to love and to be loved and learn to embrace the selfhood, sisterhood and brotherhood. As the Pulitzer fiction jury judges:

> The narrative's exceptional strength derives from its guarded optimism about the possibility of becoming fully human under the most appalling circumstances. Writing with pathos, but without a hint of sentimentality,

> Walker shows a young woman gaining control of her life… Love redeems, meanness kills—that is this novel's principal theme, as it has been the theme of most of the world's great fiction (qtd. in White 338).

As E. Ellen Barker states, "It is Walker's contention that by presenting unrelenting portraits of human weakness, despair, and abuse; she could repair the damage done to the black community in the past, and through *The Color Purple* 'right [to rewrite] the wrongs' (Sadoff 4) of social and literary history" (55) Walker writes in order to make the world a better place to live. She, as a writer, feels the responsibility to make the society a better place to live for everybody without any discrimination. *The Color Purple* is created with the intention to make the world a better place to live in for the future generations and make the present generation see how far they have to struggle towards that future. Walker's belief in change and commitment for a better world enables better men and women of all colours to emerge. As she firmly stated in a 1972 address to Sawrah Lawrence graduates, "[T]he world is not good enough; we must make it better" (*ISOMG* 37).

Alice Walker believes that she has been redeemed through writing. She says that writing has rescued her from her loneliness, suicidal urges and violent thoughts to kill. In her novel *The Color Purple,* Walker illustrates that women characters have liberated through sisterhood and self-expression. The protagonist narrates her horrid experiences in her letters as writing has a healing influence on her wounds. Redemption of the black woman, Walker insists, is possible only through sisterhood. Women who have struggled to emancipate them should help the other women to gain the potential to survive independently, help them to claim their rightful place denied to them by the society and support them to find their creativity. They can rise from the servitude and oppressed conditions only when they mutually respect and empathize each other.

Chapter IV

Remembrance of the Past as the Key to Redemption in *The Temple of My Familiar*

> To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves, that the line stretches all the way back, perhaps to God; or to Gods. We remember them because it is an easy thing to forget: that we not the first to suffer, rebel, fight, love and die. The grace with which we embrace life, in spite of the pain, the sorrow, is always a measure of what has gone before.
>
> -Alice Walker

Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* becomes contributory to the healing of her generation by instigating them to revise their past, venerate their own ancestors, mothers, grandmothers and their own women. She asserts in her novel, *The Temple of My Familiar* "that only by looking towards their ancestors as role models as well as remembering their kinship to all creation, can they become whole" (Martikke 175).

Walker insists that the knowledge of their past, their ancestors' experience, their mistakes, their failures, their striving against the injustices, their infirmities, their suffering, and their sustenance is vital to maintain, sustain and survive in the present context. When people refuse to know their past, if they ignore their past, if they feel ashamed to learn about the life of their ancestors or if they are too frightened to recall and refurbish it to their memory or if they fail to acknowledge their parents or grandparents, they will not be able to acquire the fortitude and endurance required to live their present life. Spiritual wholeness for African Americans consists of understanding and embracing of the African American past.

Walker "enables her readers to become whole through recalling their individual, racial and phylogenetic pasts. Only through recollection can African-Americans continue to claim their version of the past, rather than accepting a definition of themselves by White male historians" (175).

The aim of African American women writers is to pass on their cultural traditions to future generations and to reflect and reform their culture. Contemporary African American women writers have different ways of envisioning the past in their work. They insist on the importance of "rememory" as a vibrant source for creative writing that contains the potential for spiritual redemption. The origin of the concept of re-memory is Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved (1987) :*

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone. But the place –the picture of it –stays , and not in just my rememory, but out there in the world. Someday you may be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you (35-36).

Rememory leads to the recreation of the untold lives of the black people and unreveal the past lives of their ancestors. Divya Praful Tolia-Kelly writes, "Re-memory is a resource for the sustenance of a sense of self that temporally connects to social heritage, genealogy, and acts

as a resource for identification with place" (87). They have to deliberately include the origin of African American culture during the dark period of colonization and slavery. Their rich tradition has been kept alive for nearly four hundred years of struggle with the Whites. Through art, the black woman writer is able to explore her sense of spirituality because she is committed to rewriting history, and art becomes the medium for the characters to find a voice and achieve resilience.

African American women writers, aware of the displacement and fragmentation that afflict African American individuals, turn to re-elaborate and reconstitute the influence of their African cultures using the imagination to reconstruct the omitted past. For African American artists, the past and the present are interdependent. Their works has the potential of healing any individual or collective identity through remembrance of the ancestors. History should be reconstructed in such a way as to be a resource for the present. The works of African American women writers function as bridges between history and myth because they join present experiences with those of the past, affirming cultural continuity and instructing new generations in survival techniques which are required for spiritual and moral growth and for the achievement of wholeness. Ancestors are a collective repository of wisdom that provides guidance and inspiration to establish moral and ethical standards as precedents of the race.

Literature is truly the noblest and most dignified form of resistance. The writer as a spiritual healer, a Shaman resurrects the dead from their lifelessness; she redeems them from the "sin of omissions", reinvigorate their existence and helps them 'survive whole' through the concept of memory. In her interview with Claudia Dreifus, Walker explains the New Age quality in her writing and her ideas:

> What I'm doing is literarily trying to reconnect us to our ancestors. All of us. I'm really trying to do that because I see that ancient past as the future, that the connection that was original is a connection: if we can affirm it in the present, it will make a different future. Because it's really fatal to see yourself as separate. You have to feel. I think, more or less equal and valid in order for the whole organism to feel healthy. (31)

In "Saving the Life That Is Our Own," Walker argues that "What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immerse diversity" (*ISOMG* 5). One of the valuable gifts Walker gained in discovering her literary ancestors was a sense of continuity with the past, a thread that bound her to a community of black artisans.

Walker's fiction functions as a spiritual conversion as it unearths hidden histories and continuities in African and Black cultural production without limiting itself to notions of gender. Her fiction is about recovery of women, family, community, spirituality, stressing balance and aiming for collective and personal transformation. As a writer, activist and womanist, Walker has directed her energies to the exposure the richness in the Black community, particularly in relation to its women; moreover, she has emphasized the necessity of understanding one's past so as to be able to pass it on to future generations. All her belief about memory and one's relationship to the past seem to converge in *The Temple of My Familiar*. Memory is a means which allows every individual to turn towards his or her own past in order to reevaluate it. As Susanne Martikke states:

> *Temple* postulates a comprehensive concept of memory which sets out to alter the audience's world and society's concept of history. It warns us against

> giving in to the desire of forgetting historical or personal catastrophes. In real life, as in the protagonists' lives, the decision between wanting to forget and the duty to remember should always favour the latter in order to guarantee that all versions of historical experience can become parts of the discourse. (183)

The Temple of My Familiar cuts across race, gender, religion and nation because "becoming whole through recollection" is as inevitable as breath for men and women of all ethnicities throughout the world. Walker emphasizes the importance of the collective past for the individual. The plots are characterized "by a transcendence of time and space and place" (Bates 175). The characters' severance from their individual pasts prevents them from becoming whole. Their dissociation deprives them from becoming whole because they have forgotten their kinship with the entire creation of animals, plants and humans. The protagonists of the novel are victims of amnesia, an infirmity that prevents them from a meaningful existence—"a survival whole."

Walker once in 1983 bought a Guatemalan shawl of many colours, which was an old piece of red and blue hand woven cotton cloth, very faded and with a number of holes but supple and strong. There were Spanish words printed over and over on this cloth--*Recuerda* which meant "Remember." Walker started wondering about what she was to remember and soon realized that she had to remember the condition and fate of the people, women especially, who made the cloth. Then she began to learn Spanish to more accurately remember the women who produced the cloth. Similarly, Walker tries to convey in *The Temple of My Familiar* that every individual should remember our ancestors who made their history. However old and faded the past may be, the knowledge and acknowledgement of the past adds strength to the present life.

As Silvia del Pilar Borrego says, "Remembrance is a textual acknowledgement of the spiritual history that African American women writers attempt to recover and reintegrate from what has been lost in the African American collective historical past" (11). Walker believes that one's personality is so much a product of the collective past that it combines diverse and contradicting elements. As heirs of our ancestors, we are connected to the collective plane of history. No part of the past should be excluded so that the complete knowledge should heal them completely. Barbara Christian points out, "Walker's poetry, fiction and essays always focus to some extent on the major characters' perceptions of their past as crucial to their personal transformation in the present and the possibility of change in the future" (72).

Walker discovered Zora Neale Hurston's literary works and her efforts to preserve the cultural heritage that the two shared provided the model Walker had been searching for. Walker's anger at being deprived of appropriate models during the years she was growing into her art made her discover the works of Hurston. She was largely denied the aid of black literary models. Through excavation of Hurston's works, the link between the past and the present was accomplished which became the means of achieving continuity of time. In Hurston, Walker found a kindred spirit with whom she shared a concern for the survival of black people and their culture. Though her genius was not recognized during her lifetime, it nurtured the "racial health: a sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished human beings" (*ISOMG* 85).

The Temple of My Familiar revolves around the overlapping histories and conversations of three couples. Walker depicts three main relationships: Carlotta, a Latin American woman who had to flee her country, and Arveyda, a rock star; Lissie, a goddess who has lived hundreds of lives and Hal, her life-long companion; and Fanny, the free-

spirited African woman and Suwelo, a man who teaches American history. Throughout the narrative, these characters touch one another lives, directly or indirectly. As David Nicholson's summarizes:

> There are several couples: Carlotta (daughter of a widowed Latin American refugee) and Arveyda (a musician reminiscent of the rock star Prince); Hal and Lissie, two older people originally from the South Carolina Sea Islands and now living in Baltimore; and Suwelo (a professor of American history who has adopted an African name) and Fanny, his former wife, a woman in search of herself. (3)

Walker's characters in *The Temple of My Familiar* have lost important parts of their past and they struggle to restore the past in order to become whole. Walker emphasizes that the past should not be past but it must be passed from generation to generation because it is the key to transformation and the key that unlocks the mystery and the source of being whole. The experiences of their kinship in the past are the key to the metamorphosis which makes the individual realize his or her own self. It is the key to existence. "Remembrance is the key to redemption," (*TMF* 334), the novel's epigraph, is an inscription on a World War II memorial and is the key note around which the characters are wound. The past is enormously important for only by knowing the past one can have a meaningful present. Lillie P. Howard states, "To achieve wholeness, they each must journey back through the past to pick up (i.e., retrieve) those pieces of themselves that they have lost" (142).

The themes of racism, sexism and most importantly the history of black race are effectively conveyed through Miss Lissie's centuries of reincarnation in *The Temple of My Familiar.* The novel is divided into six parts with animal imagery as peacock, serpent, owl, turtle and the lion. It has at least one hundred embedded stories, most of them retold from the

past. It moves from America, Europe, Africa and the primal worlds. The events are set around the globe and throughout human history –from Africa, both ancient and modern, to Latin America and the recent American past. The novel covers a 500,000 year period, transcending time, and space and place. Walker describes it as "a romance of the last 500,000 years" (*TMF* Jacket Cover). Along the way, there are visits with whites, blacks, men, women and animals, retelling the stories of mankind. The characters achieve a potential for growth through their experiences of listening to others' stories that further on will reconnect them with other human beings and with their environment.

Walker creates the numerous-times incarnated Lissie, primary protagonist and resident of the African continent, who traces the history of oppression: the time she was raped and mutilated as a slave; the time she pleasured old men as a harem resident; and the time she was burned at the stake as a witch. Miss Lissie's subsequent past lives include a pygmy, a lion and a white male exiled because of his white skin. "Conversations between characters focus on spiritual connections past and present and a plea for people of African heritage to rediscover a lost spirituality and recognize its value" (Bates 103).

The novel opens with a description of how the white patriarchal urban world encroaches on the rural, matriarchal, native South American community where Carlotta's mother Zedé grew up. It also reveals how the community's culture had to withstand the dominant culture of the whites. Zedé's mother makes a living sewing feather capes and headdresses that are worn by participants in "traditional village festivals" (*TMF* 3). When these festivals are forbidden, the elder Zedé makes the garments for a "cold, little gringa blonde" (4). Later, after the younger Zedé escapes to San Francisco, she continues to make the headdresses and capes, now for gays and artists of the 60's.

Arveyda is named after " a bar of soap from India." Arveyda is an ancient Indian system of health that is concerned with the type of spiritual balance pursued by the characters in the novel. Arveyda also seems to have a head start over the other characters in his quest for enlightenment. His mother Katherine Degos, is a forceful, active woman, although she neglects him. Later, he receives guidance from a Jewish immigrant who helps nurture his love of music. Arveyda's power as a musician is undeniable: "Arveyda and his music were medicine, and seeing or hearing him, people knew it" (24).Although music has brought him physical comfort and personal fulfillment, Arveyda seems to be thrown off his path when he finds himself attracted to Carlotta's mother, Zedé. Arveyda is a sort of Shaman, whose music is "medicine." People "flock to him as once they might have to priests" (24). To heal others, and help them for their communion, he should be whole himself and should be knowledgeable and acclimatized to his past. Consequently, Arveyda meets his aunt to know about his mother. Arveyda reflects that though the aunt gives such deleterious remarks about his mother that "each of her words against my mother struck me as a blow; as if I myself were still a child. But, oddly enough, as she raved, I felt closer and closer to my mother" (392).

Carlotta is a young and self-conscious woman, married to Arveyda, the singer. She finds that her husband has betrayed her. When Arveyda admits his affair with Zedé, Carlotta feels "emptied [. . .] of knowledge. Once again, as when she was a small child, she felt she knew nothing" (*TMF* 27). She takes up teaching women's literature to support herself and her two children. She suffers disillusionment and hates men, but her anger does not nourish her. Through Arveyda, she eventually learns about her mother's past—the identity of her father, the culture she is born into and the events that led them to be brought to America. Like the other characters in *The Temple of My Familiar*, Carlotta needs to know about her past—her mother and father's past, to counter the imbalance in her life. Before this, she has to

forgive both Arveyda and her mother. As long as she thinks they were disloyal to her, forgiveness is impossible. Only after forgiving Arveyda, and indeed all of mankind, could she begin to be at peace with herself.

Arveyda and Zedé, Carlotta's mother and Arveyda journey to South America to find Zedé's past. Eventually, Zedé stays on and becomes a priestess, but Arveyda knows he must return—not to help raise his children but to help bridge the gap between mother and daughter. He does this by singing about Carlotta's birthplace, her childhood and eventually, her mother's feelings of love and guilt. He realizes that "artists […] were merely messengers. On them fell the responsibility for uniting the world" (*TMF* 124). Walker tries to emphasise that interdependency, growth and the realization of the self of the individual are possible when the bond between the mother and daughter is healthy. Walker clearly points out that her own ambitions and responsibility as a writer is "fostering stronger positive bonds between all mothers and daughters and between members of the larger community of women" (Worsham 118).

Meanwhile, Carlotta to subdue and compose herself, has an affair with Suwelo, Fanny's husband. She appears too feminine, wears "three-inch heels . . . and "sweaters that followed every curve of her luscious body…short skirts. Make up. Earrings. False eyelashes sometimes" (*TMF* 246). For him, she "just a body" (249). Carlotta feels too humiliated to share her pain of betrayal. But Suwelo drops Carlotta when Fanny, his wife comes back from Africa. Carlotta's wound caused by Arveyda is lacerated more by Suwelo. She feels, "He was an episode in my life . . .and he did drop me—I was so destroyed, I was angry enough to kill" (381).

After hearing Arveyda's song, Carlotta wears a necklace made from the red parrot feather earring her mother had given her, the red parrot feather which her father had in his ears which was passed on to Zedé for Carlotta along with the three pigeon- egg-size stones

her father protected. “It was after she began wearing the new necklace that she started, for the first time in years, to dream” (200). Carlotta has rediscovered her creative roots. Through Arveyda, Carlotta comes to know about her father who an Indian slave was called as “Jesus.” He protected three stones sacred to the village which he believed should be “kept” (72*)*. “He fully believed that if the stones were not kept, his people, the Krapokechuan or ‘human beings’ would remain dispersed forever, and never again find a home. Because where the stones were was their home” (72).The guards murdered him in a ghastly manner when they found him making love with Zedé and shut her in a hut along with the body of Jesus. She spent countless days and nights in the hut with the body of the man whom she slept with, screaming for help. One night the tribesmen of Jesus rescued her and she eventually fled to a school run by “gringos”. She escaped later to the United States with Carlotta with the help of a rich girl, Mary Ann Haverstock.

Arveyda fulfills his function as a Shaman by restoring the love between the mother and the daughter, reconciling and reconnecting them and making Carlotta whole. Through his influence, she swathes herself with her past rather than ignoring it. Forgiveness redeems and the past makes her revival whole. When she hears the story of her grandmother’s pipe and chimes, she decides to become a bell chime player. In Arveyda’s studio, she shows Suwelo her instruments—wind chimes of all shapes, sizes, colors and descriptions from all over the world, which she plays with a hardwood stick. She lives in Arveyda’s guest house, down a path and across a ravine from the main house, and she is as happy as she has ever been.

Carlotta and Arveyda have to return to the way of life of their ancestors, a way of life in which neither sex seeks domination over the other and one in which neither sex must surrender its spirituality to the other. The couple chooses to live apart—and free—in order to live in harmony. At the end of the novel, Carlotta and Arveyda are still married, yet maintaining separate residences.

Remembrance and Rememory of the Past

Miss Lissie is willing to remember and "remembers everything." Re-memory brings the stories of her past. She is able to dream, imagine, remember or construct the past. For Walker, these memories and dream memory are implements to voice the world about history as remembered and lived in African American experiences. Her incarnations in different bodies and times have helped her to understand the existence of past, present and future, as she herself declares connectedness "to all three planes – past, present, future – of life" (*TMF* 196). **"**Miss Lissie's memory allows her to recount the multiple stories of her successive pasts as white or black women or men that extend in a revisionary fashion through the whole history of mankind. Miss Lissie's ever-present ancestor's voice and memory extend to a distant past, where humans and animals lived in harmony as familiars" (qtd. in Gallo and Durán 118).

Miss Lissie, the ancestral storyteller emphasizes the importance of the past to the reconstruction of repressed cultural identity. Miss Lissie suffers from her own brand of racism. She boasts of the fact that in every one of her incarnations, she has been fortunate enough to have been a black woman. Winchell remarks:

> Miss Lissie's memory of past lives provides a convenient means of encapsulating in a single character centuries of the history of black womanhood. Miss Lissie's soul in one incarnation survived the horrors of slaveship only to die on a Virginia plantation after losing a leg to a bear trap while trying to escape. In another, she was a mooress burned to the stake as a witch during the Spanish inquisition. In a another, she was fortunate enough to marry a man of her own choosing, but she was born without a hymen and there were no blood stained sheets to show the villagers after the marriage was

consummated, she was denounced publicly, forced into prostitution, and died of infection and exposure at the age of eighteen. (116)

Looking back over her collective past, Miss Lissie realizes that she can recall a few times when she was at peace. One such time was when she was a pygmy in Africa's ancient past. As a pygmy, she viewed the apes in the jungle as her cousins. The peace-loving and gentle apes are superior to their rather loud and contentious human counterparts. Family unity was an important element of simian life, while men and women were grouped and segregated in the human community. Miss Lissie remembers, "In those days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighbourhood, after all. You used the same water, You ate the same food, You sometimes found yourself peering out of the same cave waiting for a downpour to stop" (*TMF* 361). Santosh Kumari expounds upon Miss Lissie's ancient society: "Human society along with the animals, their familiars, constituted a sense of mutual trust. Fraternity and earnestness permeated all through their life, and harmony prevailed in the common coexistence. All were amicable and enjoyed solidarity and rejuvenation" (18). Miss Lissie is disillusioned with the change that comes over the present society with its sexual and racial discrimination and the avaricious men with their patriarchal system.

Miss Lissie remembers and recalls breaking with her tribe and taking up permanent residence among the apes because she and her mate chose to live together and as a couple, raise their children, a sort of cohabitation unheard of among human beings during this era, but one that gradually came into vogue for a time, as Miss Lissie explains to Suwelo: "It was this way of living that gradually took hold in all the groups of people living in the forest, at least for a very long time, until the idea of ownership. . . came into human arrangements" (*TMF* 86).

The pattern of freedom which Walker recommends is a system of living separately and not living together. When a man and woman live together, the man always wishes to own women and children. Men were stronger and women were weak from childbearing. Consequently, men wishes to dominate women and children and always have an urge to prove their control over them. Walker's history of the world as traced through both African and South American characters of the novel records this pattern of living with freedom. She distinguishes the times when men and women could and did live together in harmony and the times when they lived apart to maintain harmony. When men and women live together man needs to dominate woman and this recurs periodically in history whereas the two sexes enter a period of uneasy cohabitation.

Walker believes that the loss of ownership was the consequence of an early period when men and women had tried to live together. Walker holds the view that men and women should only visit each other and not live together. In her novel, *The Color Purple*, at the end she makes Albert and Celie live as friends and not as man and wife tied by the bond of marriage. Similarly, in this novel, Walker wants the couple Fanny and Suwelo to return to the old way of visiting and not living together. Men will not have the urge to prove their control when women live separately.

Miss Lissie is an embodiment of wisdom and knowledge of human history. Miss Lissie is probably the most memorable character possessing the unique power to incarnate successively, lifetime after lifetime . In Miss Lissie's memory most of the past events are quite vivid but some belonged to times so long past that she calls them "dream memories." In such a dream memory, she was not a woman, but a lion, a woman's familiar. Then man's jealousy and his need for dominion changes the pattern of freedom. The animals shared their warmth of the nightly fire with the women. They grew up together and shared the favourite spots in the forest. But this way of life was rapidly ending when she grew into a fully grown

big lion and when the men's camp and women's had merged. Then they both lost their freedom. Then women were told what should and what should not be done and became emotionally dependent on the individual man "by whom man's law now decreed they must have all their children, lost their wildness, that quality of homey ease on the earth that they shared with the rest of the animals. . . .In the merger, the men asserted themselves, alone, as the familiars of women" (*TMF* 367).

Miss Lissie regrets the loss of the friendship that she, as a lion, had with women, pitying the poor women left alone with no fellow creatures but men. Still, she admits that she was relieved to escape the "eternity of strife" that men and women merged were fated to undergo. "In consorting with man, as he had become, woman was bound to lose her dignity, her integrity. It was a tragedy. But it was a fate lions were not prepared to share" (*TMF* 368).

Miss Lissie has kept this part of her past a secret from her husband Hal, because he has an irrational but debilitating fear of cats. Her many past lives were captured on film by a photographer. She appeared to be a different woman in every picture that he took, even to her height and skin colour. She destroyed a photograph which would reveal the truth she was trying to hide from Hal. In contrast, Miss Lissie never had to hide any part of her self or herselves from Suwelo's uncle Rafe. She says, "He loved the total me. None of my selves was hidden from him, and he feared none of them." She concludes, "So, loving Rafe and being loved by Rafe was the experience of many a lifetime and very… loved me whole heartedly , as a goddess which I was" (*TMF* 372).

Rafe precedes Hal in death, and at her own death Miss Lissie leaves for Hal a clue to her hidden feline past in the form of five pictures of lions that she has painted. It remains for Suwelo to reveal to Hal the entirety of the woman who was Miss Lissie. Hal weeps to learn that Miss Lissie never felt she could be her whole self with him. He is almost blind by that time. The marriage between Miss Lissie and Hal, in all of its unorthodoxy, is presented as the

closest to a fulfilling marriage that exists in the novel. What sustains their love is Hal's unwillingness to destroy in Miss Lissie the wildness of the lioness that he never knew, his understanding that she can never be emotionally dependent on any one man. As he watches the suffering she endures bearing their daughter, Lulu, he knows that never again would he cause her such pain. He is there to deliver each of her other children, but he does not father them. After Lulu's birth he never again makes love to Miss Lissie. Theirs is a union of spirit, however, so complete that bodily union becomes insignificant. When each gives Suwelo a self-portrait, the artists' signatures reveal that Hal has painted Miss Lissie's self-portrait and she, his. Such is the closeness of their souls. Walker expounds androgyny through the self-portraits.As Buncombe observes,

> Walker uses androgyny as a metaphor for the 'wholeness,' the totality of the black experience as she sees it. These wholeness calls for a new look at traditional definitions of such terms as 'masculine,' 'feminine,' and "lesbian' . . . . Thus, by first examining traditional stereotypes that predetermine one's destiny and predict one's actions, by challenging old values which inhibit change; and finally, by proposing new definitions and new terminology which, hopefully, will lead to liberation and reconciliation, Alice Walker, attempts . . . to get at the truth and the total spectrum of the black experience in America.(421)

Suwelo: From spiritually void to valid

Suwelo is a professor of American history who has never read a book by a woman; and although the first words from him are an admission that "[h]is generation of men had failed women" (*TMF* 28), he seems unable and uninterested in doing anything to rectify that situation. "He is also cut off from his personal history, even to the extent that he is

uncomfortable bringing a cart to the grocery store because it reminds him of his mother and grandmother" (165).

Suwelo goes to Baltimore to sell off the house his great uncle left him. During his stay, he meets his uncle's friends Hal and Lissie. His lessons come from Hal, but even more so from Miss Lissie. "As an academic, a skeptic and a financially stable but spiritually vacant man, Suwelo is a sort of stand-in for the critical reader." (Sol 396). Gradually, as he hears the stories that revise his personal history, as well as that of the world, Suwelo comes to a new understanding. First, interested in learning more about his Uncle Rafe, Suwelo quickly finds himself listening to stories from Lissie and her husband Hal about their own collective pasts and then to stories from Lissie about history back to the beginning of human history and about the domination of women by men and of Africans by Europeans. Miss Lissie's posthumous letter to Suwelo tries to make him realize that he is one of the "terribly damaged human beings" (*TMF* 354). Miss Lissie awakes him to open the door which he has closed against memory, against the pain. She regrets for not having encouraged him to speak to her about his parents. She asks him to recognize whatever he remembers about the father and mother, 'Marcia and Louis', how they lived and died, about the accident that orphaned him, the car, the style of the car etc. Miss Lissie writes, "For really, Suwelo, if our parents are not present in us, consciously present, there is much, very much about ourselves we can never know . . . . And more important, the doors into the ancient past, the ancient self, the preancient current of life, remain closed" (355). Miss Lissie is a spiritual mother who is concerned about the growth of Suwelo and is keen to make him understand that such empathy for the fellow woman and the other woman is essential for his own personal growth.

In his affair with Carlotta, Suwelo is in all likelihood, shallow. Carlotta describes him as a mere figment of her imagination and Suwelo describes her as a being of 'no substance.' But for Fanny, Carlotta's very substance is pain. Fanny tells Suwelo, "I don't know what had

happened in her life. I sometimes wondered whether you knew anything about her life at all. But each time I worked on her, I was amazed to feel the pain, like waves of ice meeting my hands, the pain of a body recently and repeatedly struck. A body cringing" (*TMF* 321). Fanny tells Suwelo that men should have mercy on women and that they should not exploit them as objects. It is his declaration of the power of words, "talking is the very afro-disiac of love" (322), that brings him to a partial reconciliation with Fanny.

Miss Lissie, however, makes him realize that he must ask Carlotta's forgiveness, for "it is a sin to behave as if a person whose body you use is a being without substance. 'Sin' being denial of another's reality of who and what she or she actually is. You can still go to her, as you must, for your own growth, and ask her forgiveness" (355). Walker believes that forgiveness redeems. Miss Lessie traces much of Suwelo's own pain to the fact that he is a fragmented being, in spite of the fact that his name is the same as the "rune for wholeness". Suwelo has tried to close doors to his past, close them against memory and pain. In his case, his parents wait behind that closed door. Miss Lissie tells him that it is the memory of his mother's "abandoned and suffering face" (355) that has made him scared of knowing too much of women's pain. She further tells that "blocking off what hurts us" (355) does not wall ourselves from pain. Instead the wall prevents growth, which "hurts us more than the pain . . . Walls remain. They grow moss. They are difficult barriers to cross, to get to others, to get to closed-down parts of ourselves" (355).

Pain deprives Suwelo of words, and he is unable to tell his own stories until the end of the novel. Finally, only with constant support and pressure from Lissie and Hal, Suwelo begins talking about his affair with Carlotta, the breaking of his marriage, and finally the terrible relationship of his parents and the horror of their death in a car accident. By coming to terms at last with whom his parents were and by ultimately forgiving their faults, as well as by understanding his own mistakes and misconceptions, Suwelo realizes "one of his

functions in assisting Creation in this life" (413) and finally returns some of the help he has received from Hal and Lissie. He even leaves his teaching job to take up carpentry. He is spiritually void and so he needs to hear the stories from the entire past. Miss Lissie's stories prepare him to accept his imperfections and realize his personal history, that of his parents, his ancestors, that of Uncle Rafe. His redemption is gradual. When Suwelo goes in search of Carlotta for forgiveness, he finds that the female impersonator is most definitely gone. Carlotta knows about her past, forgives her mother and husband, knows her self and hence redeemed as well. Her hair is now that of a concentration camp survivor. Gone are her sexy clothes and even her voluptuous curves. Suwelo tells her that she doesn't even look like a woman any more. "Obviously," she retorts, "that is how a woman looks" (398).

At the end of the novel, Suwelo and Carlotta rejoin with an intimacy they never experienced when they approached each other merely as "blind flesh." Theirs is now an intimacy of the spirit, and Suwelo undergoes a symbolic spiritual rebirth. As Carlotta, her disguises gone, discusses her mother Zedé, he feels that the doors that had barred his own mother from his memory opening a crack. When he is able to talk to Carlotta about his parents, his mother finally walks through that door. Suddenly, he recalls the incident he has shut out of his memory, the incident that has made him long to use woman's bodies without having to confront the reality of women's pain. He remembers looking down at the bodies of his parents as they lay in the funeral home after being killed in a car wreck, or as Suwelo calls it, a "people wreck" (401). Suwelo recalls being in the car time after time, with his drunken father speeding down the road and his mother begging him to let her and her son out. He recalls hating his mother for not trying to get out of their miserable marriage, but as he looks at her lifeless hands with their bloodied and broken nails, he realizes that this last time she at least tried to get out of the car and that his father crashed the car into a tree while trying to stop her.

The image of his father that has always loomed large in Suwelo's memory is of a man who had been a World War II soldier and had returned having lost "half of one arm and all of his mind" (403). But after Suwelo tries to think about his parents, the image that is trying to get in to the doorway is that a younger man, one who is not old or drunk, but a handsome young man with two arms. He tells his son, "My name was once Suwelo, too" (404). Seeing his father young and whole once again allows Suwelo to collect some of the fragments of his own reality and let the door of his past swing open. In consequence, he steps towards 'surviving whole.'

Where Suwelo's affair with Carlotta is flawed by their tendency to view one another as "blind flesh," his relationship with his wife, Fanny, is disrupted by her disturbing habit of falling in love with spirits. Her spirit lover of the moment could be an Indian chef dead for a century or a spirit that does not even know why or what it is. When Suwelo tries to explain his problem to an impassive Jewish psychiatrist, he stops short of adding that Fanny's lover does not even have to be a human: "He thought he'd save Fanny's attachment to trees and whales until he could see further" (184). When Fanny and Suwelo make love, he is never quite sure who is there. "I'm certainly not, as far as she's concerned, though she claims otherwise" (185). Fanny's distractedness helps him to justify himself when he is unfaithful. When Suwelo compares Fanny with Miss Lissie, he tells Miss Lissie, "You are a spirit that has had many bodies, and you travel through time and space that way . . . Fanny is a body with many spirits shooting off to different realms everyday" (243). Like Suwelo, Fanny needs to open the locked doors inside of herself.

Fanny and Arveyda

At the beginning of the novel, Fanny is trapped in an unsatisfying marriage but has access to spiritual nourishment through women in her life. Fanny has access to the spirit world and she describes her meeting with the spirits that "open doors inside me […] I begin

to feel the stirring in myself, the humming of the room and my heart starts to expand with the absolute feeling of bravery, or love, or audacity or commitment.[…] I radiate this expanded light, Happiness." (185-186).

Fanny is the character who struggles most with racism. She suffers from nightmares where she tries to kill white people and seeks a therapist's help to find a solution. "It had become like a scale or a web over her eyes. Everywhere she looked, she saw it. Racism turned her thoughts to violence. Violence made her sick" (294). She tells her therapist about the shining, gold-handled sword that is constantly not in her hand but in her look and about her visions of blond heads rolling into the gutter. Out of fear of the murderer who exists within her, Fanny withdraws as far as possible from human contact, preferring the safer company of her spirit lovers. When Fanny gives a massage to Carlotta, Fanny explains that she left academia to become a masseuse because she needed to touch the bodies of other people, people she might not like, in order to force herself to confront their bodily reality and also their pain. "Otherwise", she says, "I am afraid I might start murdering them" (283). Fanny's anger is not individualized, nor is it directed toward people of colour. Just like Fanny, many characters go through the stage in life when they are traumatized by racism and later try to exclude white people from their lives or suppress the memories. Through a line from "The Gospel According to Shug," a booklet that gives answers to all the characters, the author says: "HELPED are those who strive to give up their anger; their reward will be that in any confrontation their first thoughts will never be of violence or of war" (288).

Knowledge of the Past Appeases Fanny's Agitation

When Fanny's mother, Olivia, thinks that Fanny's anger goes beyond control, she takes the agitated Fanny to Africa to meet the father that she has never known. The father, Ola, knows what it is to take white lives—he has done so in the name of revolution. So he knows firsthand that killing the oppressors does not free one psychologically. His advice to

his daughter is, rather, to harmonize her own heart. He knows that she alone can find the means of doing that, and she does so when she is able no longer to deny the body but rather to let spirit and flesh come together in a mutually nourishing way. As Sol argues, "[Fanny's] experiences and conversations with her father and also with her half-sister Nzinga connect Fanny to her personal history and culture and allows her to return home with a renewed sense of herself and her spiritual center" (397). Her anger against the whites is subdued and the stories harmonize her relationship with Suwelo. An inner peace pervades her and she chooses to be a masseuse. She attains her wholeness when Arveyda comes face to face with her and her own self.

Early in the novel, Suwelo plans to take Fanny to one of Arveyda's concerts, because she listens to his music endlessly, moved by it to a state of ecstasy. At the last moment, Fanny finds herself suddenly paralyzed with fear at the prospect of meeting in the flesh a man, "who created the beauty that was so much what her soul hungered for it made her weep…. 'Isn't Arveyda old?' She asked hopefully. 'I'll wait until he dies or until I do, and then…. I will see him" (*TMF* 129). Only at the end, when she finally meets Arveyda, Fanny understands her habit of falling in love with people whom she will never meet. She is giving him one of her famous massages when she looks down at his naked back and thinks, " Is this how people create gods,… she thinks she has always been walking just behind,a hundred to a thousand years behind, the people she has found to love and that she has been very careful that their backs were turned. "What would she do if one of them turned around?" (406)

When Arveyda does turn around, aroused by the motion of her hands on his body, their union with one another is a perfect blend of flesh and spirit. Fanny has learned not to deny flesh out of fear of what her anger might lead her to do, but rather to harmonize her own heart and thus to achieve through the union of body and soul psychological wholeness that her thoughts of killing her oppressors would never bring. Arveyda is a fitting partner for her

in that he, like the born-again Suwelo, is one of those rare men capable of understanding women's pains. Thus, Fanny is cured and redeemed from her fear and anger against her oppressors.

Fanny and Suwelo, are divorced, yet living together an hour's drive away. They are building a house modelled on the prehistoric ceremonial house of the Ababa tribe,

> a house designed by the ancient matriarchal mind and the first heterosexual household ever created. It has two wings, each complete with its own bedroom, bath, study and kitchen; and in the center there is a 'body'—the ceremonial or common space. . . After thousands and thousands of years of women and men living apart, the Ababa had with great trepidation, experimented with the two tribes living, a couple to a household together. Each person must remain free, they said. That is the main thing. And so they had designed a dwelling shaped like a bird. (395)

Walker expounds that in the beginning of the world, all tribes were organized as matriarchies, where men and women lived separately. Zedé the elder says that women were the producers of the earth, goddesses, and therefore women were priests with great supernatural powers. To men, producing remained a mystery and whatever is mysterious and unfathomable is feared and worshipped. Zedé says, "What the mind doesn't understand, it worships or fears. I am speaking here of man's mind. The men both worshipped and feared the women" (49). Lissie also confirms that her mother was the "queen" of the tribe. Miss Lissie says, "I suppose she was what queens were originally, though: a wise woman, a healer, a woman of experience and vision, a woman superbly trained by her mother. A really good person, whose words were always heard by the clan" (360). Walker creates a similar pattern of freedom in *The Temple of My Familiar* where men and women live separately to harmonize their relationship.

Women enjoyed close friendship with animals, including lions and apes, and lived a balanced peaceful life until men started to claim ownership over them and separated them from animals, their beloved familiars. In the same way, Fanny moves out of their bedroom and eventually out of their house like their distant African ancestors. However, Fanny and Suwelo find that separate spaces increase their harmony rather than disrupt it. When they visit each other as though meeting for the first time, their love-making has a freshness in it.

The minor characters reveal mysteries and practical survival techniques to the central figures: Ola, Fanny's father and a Mandela-like African playwright and activist; Fanny's half-sister Nzinga; Shug, the mother character (author of a series of anecdotes, ' The Gospel according to Shug'); Mary Jane Briden, the wealthy white woman who abandons her inheritance, saves Zedé from her imprisonment, and refuses her part in the hegemony to pursue a more fulfilling life. Each of the characters fills in the familial, cultural and historical backgrounds of the central characters and helps to guide them on their way.

The scene that gives the novel its title is Walker's warning against betrayal of one's own wild, untamed spirit. Miss Lissie tells Suwelo of a dream in which she shows him her temple. Rushing about underfoot is her *familiar*—part bird, part fish, part reptile. So distracting is it's slithering and skidding about that she entraps it under a clear glass bowl, which it breaks through to escape. When the glass bowl fails to contain the creature, she tries a heavier white one and finally, as a last resort, a metal wash tub. But with the power of a volcano, the familiar breaks the tub and rushes out into the open air. "It looked at me with pity as it passed. Then, using wings it had never used before, it flew away" (120). Miss Lissie realizes that out of pride and distraction she has betrayed the beautiful little familiar that had always been so loyal to her. She has betrayed her own spirit by trying to deny it the freedom of the cosmos.

The Temple of My Familiar is didactic to the entire human race in that it conveys the message that the individual should not perceive oneself as independent human being but as part of a whole. All the characters in the novel suffer because they have lost important parts of their past, a loss typically represented by disrespect toward one's mother or mother earth "Africa" or the female part of creation. The female characters degrade themselves by disregarding their own mothers and their ancestral mothers. Men have been taught to consider women evil and vitiate the worth of women. In Lissie's words: "He has let himself be taught that his own mother is evil and has joined religions in which her only role, after nurturing and rearing him . . . is to shut up" (*TMF* 203). The exploitation and the misuse of Africa's resources become only possible when humans have forgotten or disremembered their roots.

Walker insists that the characters should remember the oppressive pasts of their foremothers, for instance, how they were raped and made prostitutes by their slave-holding father or lover. She suggests that by remembering history and the legacy of slavery, connections must be made between the past and the contemporary moment but only those usable elements of the past must be retained and remembered to ensure the wellness of the present and also the future. And it suffices not if the characters acknowledge their past, but they have to retell their stories to make their redemption complete. The exploring of the past, of their families, of their tribes, of their culture is important for the individual. The revelation of the past brings the characters to a new understanding of the world and their place in it. Each character has to go through reconciliation with the past, be it painful childhood memories or their own regrettable mistakes of the past; the betrayal of the loved ones, or the discrimination they faced. Adam Sol observes,

> Fanny, Carlotta, Suwelo and Arveyda all need to come to terms with the stories of their parents; they seem to be adrift until they learn where their roots are. But more

important, they need to retell those stories: "Fanny to Suwelo in letters from Africa as well as to her therapist, Suwelo to Hal and Lissie, Carlotta to Fanny and Arveyda, and Arveyda in his music. (396)

Creating Art out of Pain

The Temple of My Familiar is a novel that is concerned about how pain is relieved and healed by the remembrance of the past. Through creative work, the mood of violence and vengeance is diverted. By creating something divine and beautiful, the characters heal their pain and redeem themselves. Creativity cures the sickness of the heart, of the soul and henceforth art is redemptive. Creativity helps to overcome the humiliation, mortification and the degradation suffered by the body, mind and the soul. To Walker, writing is the creative work that saves her life. Walker, in her interview with Claudia Dreifus answers the question whether she has written the *The Temple of My Familiar* out of depression. Walker says that the act of creation itself heals:

> . . .like in the Native American cultures, when you feel sick at heart, sick in soul, you do sand paintings…The thing is that you are focused on creating something. And while you're doing that, there's a kind of alchemy that happens and you turn that bad feeling into something that becomes a golden light . . . by the time you've finished the sand painting, you're well. The point is to heal yourself. (n. pag.)

Walker considers writers as priestesses and healers. She told David Bradley in 1984, "I think writing really help you heal yourself I think if you write long enough, you will be a healthy person. That is, if you write what you need to write, as opposed to what will make money, or what will make fame" (Bradley 96). Literature serves as a healing force by steeping the writer into a past time and situation which can renew the creative process and

rejuvenate the whole aspect of survival. The writer steeps the reader into the phylogenetic past (race history) and helps them transform through their gift of memory as their characters do.

Walker's characters that are able to recall their past not only help the other characters heal and redeem, but also the readers. The characters are emotionally and spiritually healed because they understand better the relationship between the past and the present. The characters in *The Temple of My Familiar* are artists in some way and this is an important means for spiritual development. She the elder is a bell chemist and a sewing magician. Zedé sews feather capes and goods. Arveyda is a Shaman musician and Hal a painter. Miss Lissie is a painter and story-teller, Ola is a playwright, Nzinga's mother makes murals in the hut, while Fanny is a masseuse, Suwelo a carpenter, Carlotta like Zedé, a bell chemist. The creative artists not only develop themselves spiritually but also inspire others. Martikke states:

> Zedé and Lissie are artist mediums, in Walker's sense, who enable people to look at the past as a model for a better future. These women are priestesses, healers and even goddesses in personal union. As such, they directly and indirectly guide the protagonists' search for their individual pasts as well as tying them to a collective frame work. (175)

Zedé, Carlotta's mother, creates art out of pain. In America, she makes and sells intricate traditional feathered capes and jewellry to the bohemians of San Francisco. Carlotta meets her future husband, the rock star Arveyda, through the purchase of one of these capes. When he later has an affair with Zedé, Carlotta turns her pain and passion to music made of chimes and bells. One of the art forms comes from culture, and the other from pain.

Hal is a painter. When he was a child, his father prevented him from creating anything artistic from fear of his son being thought of as a homosexual. He starts painting constantly after his father's decease, perhaps from his past pain. Miss Lissie is photographed in almost every period of her life and the most striking images are those of her with an expression of suffering in her eyes. Finally, Fanny falls in love with Arveyda's music, having never heard him. But, when Suwelo wished to take to her to the concert, she refuses to go because she fears to meet people instead thinks about waiting for Arveyda to die and become a spirit. His art gives her a complex feeling of both pain and pleasure.

Zedé remembers her experiences in a South American Indian village and redeems her youth, family and the stories which inspire her son-in-law and lover, Arveyda, to create music. Carlotta, remembers the tribal stones and sacred red parrot feathers which redeem her from her University post and enables her to assume her grandmother's occupation of crafting the bells and music which speaks her story.

Davenport calls *The Temple of My Familiar* "one of the most important books of the late eighties because of Walker's "messages," her possibility of "saving" a large number of us—or of enabling us to see and save ourselves, through an Afracentric vision" (13). Debra Walker King says, "*The Temple of My Familiar* is a collection of loosely related stories, a political platform, a sermon, and a stream of dreams and memories bound together by definition of (and explanation for) the present state of human affairs" (qtd. in Davidson 718). The six central characters coincide in modern time North Carolina, yet their stories span through thousands of years in human history. Each of the characters is searching for his or her true identity. Borrego observes, "Walker's *The Temple* challenges hegemonic history and memory in the very structure of the narrative as it confronts the importance of memory to personal and cultural identity" (12). Their past serves as both an obstacle and the key to

knowing their real place in history, society, and the world. Though each character derives a distinct feature, the state of oppression is the same. Either oppressed by race or sex, they all have to face the disdain, ignorance and violence from those around them.

The novel has an optimistic stance in that Suwelo manages to face the violent death of his parents and the abusive way his father treated his mother and Carlotta overcomes her anger at her mother and Arveyda's betrayal. Meanwhile, Suwelo, Carlotta and Hal can only achieve fulfillment through their understanding of the prodigies' powers and by coming to terms with their own painful pasts. As the critic Ikenna Dieke puts it: "Behind the insistent particularity of each individual story is a serious quest, albeit unconscious, for the demonstrable values of oneness, wholeness and unity as opposed to dialectical tension, exclusively and separateness" (508). Madelyn Jablon reviews that *The Temple of My Familiar*, "shouts about the importance of recognizing one's past and listening to one's ancestors" (138). Alice Walker's characters become resilient, healthy and whole once they acknowledge their ancestors' voice. Recognizing one's past is recurrent in Walker's works. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens,* Walker illustrates the prominence of ancestry and heritage to her work and life. She excavated the deliberately omitted works of Zora Neale Hurston and recognizes her as her literary foremother. Revealing a very personal account of her exciting view of ancestral presence, Walker depicts:

> I gathered up the historical and psychological threads of the life my ancestors lived, and in the writing of it I felt joy and strength and my own continuity . . . that wonderful feeling writers get sometimes, not very often, of being with a great many people, ancient spirits, all very happy to see me consulting and acknowledging them and eager to let me know, through the joy of their presence, that indeed, I am not alone. (*ISOMG* 453)

Bonnie Braedlin remarks that *The Temple of My Familiar* was applauded for its development of ideas and themes which were introduced in her fiction and essays—"its castigation of white and male oppression, its valorization of African American and female identity, and its emphasis on the importance of community and female friendship" (47). He further remarks:

> Her retelling of the past exposes the dark underbelly of white colonial history—the privileged and privileging narrative that scapegoats Others. Through horrific recollections of slavery in Zedé's tales of her youth in South America and through Miss Lissie's stories of the African slave trade and the diaspora, Temple offers eyewitness accounts of the deliberate and relentless enslavement and extermination of peoples of Color. (54)

The Temple of My Familiar establishes that recovery of the past, remembrance of the ancestors, reminisces of one's predecessors, reconstructing the neglected matriarchal values, recovering origins, making connections to the past and present, knowing their ways of survival, and excavating the repressed history and tradition are ways to redemption that help the black people to learn about their origin and establish a new community of renewed freedom.

Chapter V

Spiritual Redemption through Communion with Nature in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*

> The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.
>
> -Chief Seattle

Alice Walker's *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* is a novel with autobiographical overtones, which resonates her personal experiences and their impact on her life. As a black woman, Walker discloses that she is no exception to the triple jeopardy of race, sex and class and through her writing, she attempts to heal the hurt, pain and humiliation she had suffered. The wound or the hurt is healed through several redemptive measures which are strategies for survival. Her novels invariably and recurrently expound the various ways of redemptions. Personally and professionally, she journeys through various phases of growth towards enlightenment and spiritual development. As a writer, she has grown in confidence by practising some sort of retreat, over the years.

Knowing one's roots, remembrance of the past, worshipping ancestors, sisterhood, love, forgiveness and nihilism are ways of redemption which her works of art elucidate elaborately. Her novels deal with the remedies to the multiple-oppression faced by black women in the white society. Gradually, in the course of life, as she evolves as a middle-aged woman writer, she understands that spiritual redemption culminates in communion with God. She swears on the necessity of cleansing the polluted body before consuming the Grandmother medicine, Yagé and believes that the "continuous internal cleansing" will

eventually lead to the purity of the soul—a prerequisite to reach God. She takes the medicine not only to cure herself but for the "highest good of all" (*NTOH* 64) humans of the planet, for the coming generations and for the animals and plants and rocks—for the "survival whole." Once the medicine is taken, she gets the feeling that she would not turn back from any issues that would recur in her life, however hard it might be.

In her novel, Now *is the Time to Open Your Heart,* Walker acknowledges and expresses her gratitude to all "devas, angels and bodhisattvas who accompany, watch over, and protect explorers, pioneers and artists" (*NTOH* "Acknowledgements"). Walker introduces two epigraphs to substantiate the concept of the novel. Firstly, she quotes from Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under,* which is about an American woman's four-month-long journey through the Outback with the Australian nomadic aboriginals that leads to the discovery that the world can be saved from destruction if the people live in natural harmony with the plants and animals and human lives can be filled with a great sense of purpose. Morgan says, "These people believe everything exists on the planet for a reason. Everything has a purpose. There are no freaks, misfits, or accidents. There are only misunderstandings and mysteries not yet revealed to mortal man . . . . Everything in oneness has a purpose" (51). And secondly, Walker quotes Winnie Mandela's, "So far, there's no law against dreaming" (*NTOH*).

In her prefatory note, Walker pays her tribute to the paternal grandmother whose maiden name was Kate Nelson. Afterwards, she married Walker's grandfather Henry Clay Walker and was murdered when Walker's father was a boy of eleven. Walker says in her note, "This novel is a memorial to the psychic explorer she [her grandmother] might have become" (*NTOH*).

Walker in her interview with Patricia Gras, expounded that "

> Her grandmother was obviously someone whom I never met and then . . . realized, I missed her terribly . . . I missed the woman that I was myself becoming . . . the elder feminine voice is suppressed in Western cultures, we are missing grandmother and added to that was the fact that the medicine that I was taking has as its primary spirit that of the grandmother. That spirit is the spirit that says, 'Stop, don't drop bombs. Stop, feed all the children. Stop do what's really good for all' … is clear grandmother voice. *(www.youtube.com).*

But Walker feels that these voices of the grandmothers' were suppressed and killed by the Western society for over 500 years. She regrets that these voices which were ignored might be the voices of healers, wives and visionaries. Since they were suppressed, they were afraid to speak, to act and to be and to lead the posterity.

Walker elucidates that the title, *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* , is a *icaros* healing song which is sung by the shaman who is trying to help those who go on the spiritual journey. When the experience of having the ancient indigenous medicine Ayahuasca scares the protagonist Kate, perhaps, she would feel vulnerable and would hold on to her closed heart. So the shaman sings "*Ya es el tiempo para abrir tu corazon," (NTOH 68)* to soothe her and persuade her to open her closed heart.

The main character Kate, in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* is a renowned fifty-seven-year-old writer who has a fear of growing old. Though she thinks that she had escaped the apprehension for old age, she still has the fear of senescence, retirement and leisure. She is not happy about indulging in hobbies rather she wants to be "essential" in old age (*NTOH* 210). She feels that her life is changing and the creaking noise from her knees makes her unhappy because it trumpets the arrival of senescence. It is only during her spiritual sojourn, in her desperate search for Grandmother, she startlingly finds that she *was* the Grandmother. Then the realization dawns in her that, "Grandmothers. We must acknowledge and reclaim

our true size. Dignity is important. Self-respect. We cannot lead by pretending to be powerless. We're not. Age is power. Or it can be if it isn't distracted by shopping and cooking and trying to look nineteen or tripped up by Alzheimer's or buried in nursing homes" (*NTOH* 211).

Kate is the kind of woman who wants to resolve the present issues that hinder the growth of her own race and the entire world. Kate keeps on her home altar photographs of her deceased parents, as well as friends and strangers whom Kate believes are worthy of honour. In her home altar, she has deities from Virgen de Guadalupe to Che, from Jesus to her friend Sarah Jane, a poster of the goddess Quan Yin, and a Buddha. When she feels that her life was beginning to change, she dismantles her altar including the photographs of her parents. Kate is no longer concerned about the condition of her house. She does not care about the leak in the bathroom, the peeling paint or a door that remains ajar. For a reason unknown to her, she loses the inspiration to write and resorts to burning some of her work. She devalues money, burning several hundred-dollar bills "to demonstrate to her self that these items were not the God/Goddess of her life" (14). "Deeply inside, she feels psychologically prepared for coming spiritual renewal" (Lobodziec 39). She has a "dissolution she felt growing inside" (*NTOH 11).* Agnieszka Lobodziec describes Kate thus:

> Fittingly, the main character in Alice Walker's novel undergoes self-discovery before discerning the paradoxes and dilemmas in the lives of others . . . the character Kate needs a change in her life although she is a widely published writer. She maintains an over orderly house, being particularly fastidious about its upkeep. She has gone through several unsuccessful marriages. Discomfort and pain draw Kate's attention to her self. She notices the aging of her body. . . . Aging initiates a need for transformation . . . . In addition, her

worldly, physical surroundings appear to be distant, unfamiliar, and uninspiring. (39)

Kate's search for meaning begins when she is haunted by a dream of a dry river. Kate recurrently dreams about dry rivers: "She began to dream each and every night that there was a river. But it was dry. There she'd be in the middle of an ancient forest searching for her life, i.e. the river, and she would find it after a long journey, and it would be sand" (*NTOH* 12). To dream about dry rivers persistently, is symbolic. As Agnieszka Lobodziec opines, "The dry river presumably signifies the decaying essence of life" (39).

In her interview with Patricia Gras, Walker says, "[Kate] she understands that she has to change her life so that she has flowing river in herself and she is a river and she is in the big river. She is herself a river." In the novel, Walker writes, "The savage rushing of the river seemed to be inside her head, inside her body" (*NTOH* 22). She is advised by friends in her inner psyche to find a real river in the world in order to forget the dry one in her dreams. They suggested one of the deepest, swiftest, and most challenging of all: the Colorado. So she decides to go to the Colorado River to find her Self and her destination. She joins an all-women's group rafting the Colorado. Her journey is with nine other women and only women. Walker believes that the women should go on spiritual journey alone or with people of their own sex, especially in the middle of life because that allows them the freedom to explore the world and their own inner self in order to find inner peace.

On her first day, she journeys with an African Eurasian friend, Avoa. She is on the river for nearly three weeks not knowing what she would be at the end of the journey. After experiencing her first rapids, she becomes ill and begins retching; it seemed to her that all the words she had said or imagined saying or had swallowed unsaid to her father, mother, husband, children and lovers which spread its virus of mental confusion were thrown up.

Agnieszka Lobodziec observes, "This act of regurgitation is a precondition for her spiritual advancement, allowing an investigation of her inner self. She realizes that painful words have latently resided within her" (40). She feels,

> an internal roar as the sound of a massive accumulation of words, spoken all at once, but collected over a lifetime, now trying to leave her body. . . . All the words from decades of her life filled her throat. Words she had said or had imagined saying or had swallowed before saying to her father, dead these many years. All the words to her mother. To her husbands, children, lovers. The words shouted back at the television set, spreading its virus of mental confusion. (*NTOH* 23)

Regurgitation Purges the Body

On this voyage, Kate regurgitates all the words from her life and all her memories of past marriages. Enlightenment requires regurgitation. She regurgitates the humiliation, sadness, anger and disillusionment that she has come across in life and the disappointment she had stuffed inside her when she received "a serving dish" as a gift for Valentine's Day from her first husband and her daughter. Agnieszka Lobodziec perceives that, "the ritual promotes contemplation of her first marriage" (41). Kate remembers the moment that she decided to get out of the marriage. After she expressed her wish to be independent, Kate's husband left her "alone" more than a hundred miles from home, without a car. When she returned home, he sexually assaulted and abandoned her.

Kate has passed many years with her husband and children and had seen her life become futile. Kate is reminded how she had been exploited under the institution—marriage. She realizes with regret how she had lived with the first husband for nine years carrying in her body two children of his, cooked thousands and thousands of breakfasts, lunches and

dinners, taken care when they were sick, shared her body whenever he wanted (not mindful of her likes), and have done all these things for the sake of the husband. But when she said she needed more of her own life, he was angry enough to want to kill her.

Walker tries to depict that the same plight is shared by almost all the wives throughout the world. Kate felt her kinship with the divorcees of the world when she wants to divorce herself from her first husband. She felt she had failed to live her life for herself. In the effort to satisfy the family's needs, she had failed to comprehend the needs of her inner self. She had almost forgotten that she has an identity of her own. Hence, through the separation, freedom is ensured. Kate felt as if she has come back into life from death. She felt proud as a queen when she thought about "how diligently she'd worked to free herself" (*NTOH* 29). This was the freedom she longed for because she felt "Without changing I will be doomed to stay my present self and I'm so weary of that!" (*NTOH* 30)

Kate had been suffering under the domineering husband with absolutely no recognition for the contribution she rendered to the family. She quickly reviews her life with her husband: "And to think how she had lain under him, night after night, dreaming of getting away; of being high on a hillside in the sun . . . that welcomed space, nothingness, in place of the domesticated, bourgeois life of a way that no longer fit" (*NTOH* 28). She regretfully thinks that her life had been a long drudgery and her husband had never honoured her and she certainly had never been offered a space she deserves.

Fortunately, Kate's recollection of her endurance of the tantrums of her husband gives her the impetus to sustain the hardships of the journey at Colorado rapids. The sustenance of the long years of the first marriage makes it easier "to remain seated the long hours necessary in the boat" (*NTOH* 36).

Kate had been married as many times as Elizabeth Taylor. Some marriages lasted for about a year. Other marriages in which she had borne children lasted longer. She recalled her "marriage" with Lolly, a woman who resembled her cousin. For a few months, Kate felt that there was a feeling of liberation in their married life. Lolly had a slight learning disability. She had the habit of getting whatever she wanted by cajoling and wheedling Kate. Lolly managed to get Kate's golden earrings and diamond necklace given to her by a great-aunt in the same way. She had the habit of not rising until noon and she wanted freshly squeezed orange juice the moment she opened her eyes. Kate prepared it for her. When Lolly wanted Kate to sign over half of her house, Kate felt that she could not share half of her house with someone who didn't work and didn't rise until noon. Kate's "marriages" only cripple her freedom and peace. Her disappointments open her mind to spirituality.

'Virginity' to attain Spirituality

She returns home to her blue house and male lover, African-American artist Yolo, determined to live "as a virgin" (i.e. to abstain from sex) so that she can continue her spiritual explorations. Kate chooses to be a virgin while she undergoes the journey to the river Amazon. Walker feels that it is important to step back from sexuality and focus on other aspects and possibilities for survival, as a species. Armando Juarez is a shaman that supervises Kate's journey on the Amazon. His first words to the group of seven Medicine Seekers (five women, ages forty to sixty-five; and two men, a New Yorker and an older man, of forty-five, from Utah) were: no sex.

Kate thought that if "fucking" is used as a curse, the act is itself self-destructive to its participants. Though Kate believed that sexuality is healthy and succulent, she feels that she has to live as a virgin in order to attain spiritual redemption. Walker, in her interview with Gras, says, ". . . Sex like so many things is wonderful. It is a spiritual path in itself . . . but it

is over-emphasized. This overemphasis on sex keeps us from looking at the things that are really a lot more important like survival as a species . . . and now is a different time that it is rich with other possibilities . . . focus on youth. . .” (Gras). Walker emphasizes that the concentration of ‘human beings’ should be on other areas which are important for the growth of the human race.

Shamanic journey to the Amazon

The trip to Colorado does not complete Kate’s spiritual journey. She wishes to continue her exploration for personal evolution. Her quest and the search for the inner self draws her into a further exploration to the Amazon. So, she travels to South America on another spiritual retreat of sorts. The Amazon rain forest is a greater challenge, requiring the need for even more regurgitation, and it is also the place where Kate comes into complete understanding of internal and external life. As Nicole Moses writes in his review, “Kate encounters celibates and lovers, shamans and snakes, memories of family disaster and marital discord, and emerges at a place where nothing remains but love . . . From the very beginning of the trip, Kate undergoes a literal purging as hidden memories and repressed emotions surface, forcing her to confront them and neutralize their negativity” *(www.januarymagazine.com).*

The shaman Armando guides Kate to enlightenment through the careful dispensing of Grandmother Yagé, “a frothy medicinal herb beverage that the ancient indigenous South American people used to cleanse the physical body so that contact with the spirit of origins and endings could not be impeded” (Bates 164). The participants drink “a frothy liquid that tastes like soapsuds,” (*NTOH* 51-52) as preparation before swallowing the sacred Yagé. The herb is believed to inspire spiritual transformation and healing.

Armando has expertise in transcendental spirituality which, Walker stresses, should be taught to the African American young men who are prone to become drug addicts. Armando assists Kate and the other journeyers. Reading many books about the rainforest, Kate had a longing to see it. She had thought it to be silent, but it was the loudest place she had been in. Every sound she heard was made by creatures of the forests. Armando sang *icaros,* healing songs which had come to him through countless generations. At the beginning of the journey, whenever Kate was distracted or apprehensive the song "*Ya es el tiempo para abrir tu corazón"* especially soothed and healed her. Anunu asks Kate and the journeyers about the purpose of the journey. Each journeyer has a wound to be healed with the shaman's guidance.

In the Amazon, Kate has to take harsh purgatives until the shaman Armando determines whether she's ready to encounter the universal Grandmother spirit, who is the plant-life embodiment of Mother Earth. Grandmother medicine tastes so ghastly that Kate's throat muscles contract at the very thought of it. She is nauseated by the very sight of it in the shaman's bottle. To Kate, the flavour of Grandmother Medicine was worse than any kind of excrement. Every time she takes the medicine she prays that she should be guided to knowledge of how to act in the world for the highest good of all and that the medicine should accept her and do no harm to her. She calls for the Grandmother Spirit to protect her. But still, people had taken the repugnant medicine for thousands of years. The continuous internal cleansing made them weak --nevertheless it purged them. Gerri Bates says, "Through consistent regurgitation, Kate's body begins to cleanse itself, each emptying of her innards representing the casting off of past burdens, such as domestic abuse in her first marriage and the accidental death of her mother" (164).

They have been asked to drink half a gallon of the frothy liquid that tasted like soapsuds to provoke the vomiting and diarrohea. A sacred medicine cannot be put into a polluted body and to cleanse the body, the process was adapted. Kate felt that she has learned to throw up well and elegantly. Kate also felt that all these discomforts of gut-wrenching nausea and diarrohea would be over and that it was a passing phase. Kate thought that she got the sense of belonging only in the Amazon forest, and only with the Grandmother: "Nowhere else could I, this so-called Black person—African. European, Indio—exists. Only here. In Africa, there would have been no Europeans, no Native Americans. In Europe, no Africans and no Indians. Only here; only here" (*NTOH* 54).

Lalika, her co-journeyer to the Amazon, a black woman from Mississippi is a murderer. She is uncertain whether 'Yagé' would help her cure herself. Lalika wants to be her own true self again because she feels she has missed herself. They were told that pain should be felt to the core. Her sobs turned to wailing and it penetrated and reverberated through the jungle and roused the vegetation, the trees and bushes of the forest. Kate then felt that they weren't alone but that they were in communion with the creators of the forests—in communion with Nature. Lalika, in her mid-thirties was an common, ordinary woman but she looked incredibly beautiful.

The medicine had ceased to work on Kate and it had left her unmoved. She is now in a state to help others and also help Armando. "She had become someone to whom the others turned, which surprised her" (*NTOH* 88). When they were discussing the past, Armando says that if a shaman treats a sick person based on his history and nationality, then he cannot become a *curandero.* Armando and his apprentice shaman Cosmi were busy with their songs and rattles and fans and *agua florida.* They handled everyone with tenderness. Each journeyer has their own life experiences, their own tragic tales to share—impactful incidents,

bitter truths, horrific tales, crimes, rape, abuse, addiction, imprisonment, haunting dreams, victimization etc. Some journeyers consider themselves hard sinners beyond forgiveness and redemption. They earnestly wish to encounter the Grandmother and drink her healing medicine while sailing down the Amazon. The Grandmother medicine helps the journeyer to have an experience of the soul that is undistracted by desire.

When Yagé no longer worked on Kate, and she remembers how it had no effect on 'Baba'of India. If one has his mind fixed on God and is strongly spiritual, the herbs has no effect. Baba says, "Cleanse the mirror of your heart and you will see God" *(www.maharajji.com).* Walker refers to the Hindu Guru, Neem Karoli Baba, also known as Maharaj-ji who is known outside India for being the guru of a number of Americans who travelled to India in the 1960s and 1970s, the most well-known being the spiritual teachers Ram Dass and Bhagavan Das. Ram Dass is an American contemporary spiritual teacher and the author of the seminal book *Be Here Now (*1971). In his memoir of Baba, Ram Dass recalls the anecdote of how even 1200 µg of yogi medicine had no effect on Baba and he subsequently said, "These medicines were used in Kulu Valley long ago. But yogis have lost that knowledge. They were used with fasting. Nobody knows now. To take them with no effect, your mind must be firmly fixed on God. Others would be afraid to take. Many saints would not take this." (qtd. in *www.ramdass.org)*

Remembrance of the Past and ancestors

During her journey into the Amazon rain forests, through her dreams, she contacts the spirit of her mother. Her mother is completely healed from the condition that she suffered in the process of dying. As an ancestor, her mother helps her to overcome the issues that burden her, allowing Kate to continue to exist in the physical world without obstacles in her path.

Kate is released from the horrendous memories of her mother's death and her disfigurement. Kate dreams about the crash which proved fatal to her father. Though she shudders to remember the crash, she felt she must remember it, linger over her response to it and how she caressed his lifeless toes. Only when she recalls and brings back the memory of the crash is Kate able to complete her journey. So she begins to write the story about a mother and a daughter. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, Suwelo refused to bring back memories of his parents and the accident because he is scared to bring it back, but only when he retrieves them and retells the story to Carlotta is he redeemed. Likewise, Kate begins to narrate the entire accident in Post-its. Only then is Kate able to attain redemption. Kate uses writing as therapy and creates art out of pain.

Walker continues to stress the concept of remembering the past, the ancestors and the parents in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*. Bates states,

> Ancestor worship involves respect and reverence for deceased relatives, who are not only members of the spiritual world but also mediators into the lives of the living. Ancestors are influential in charting the correct course of action for their living relatives, often communicating with the living through dreams and visions. In the living relatives' dreams the ancestors appear healed from the afflictions that caused their demise from the physical world; these improved conditions enable them to be of assistance to the living. They are the connection between the past and the present, the material and the immaterial. Those who are alive make contact with the ancestors through contemplation, prayer, propitiation and supplication. (174)

Rectifying Ancestors' Wrongs: Redemption of Kate

Armando says it is worthwhile to remain in contact with the ancestors and stay loyal to the dead. These ancestors will guide them to right the wrongs and to heal by settling scores, just like the dead trees which after death decompose and become the soil for the other young trees coming up to grow. But if the trees are hauled off to a lumberyard, then that would be disastrous. Kate recalls how the clear-cuts (clear-cutting is a practice in which all trees in an area are uniformly cut down, which destroys natural habitats and contributes to climate change) along the Klamath River in northern California. She remembers how the once lush landscape is bare and desolate with no shade left to protect the younger trees from the blistering sun. The grandeur and the true nature of their parents and grandparents are not known to these young trees because they had been hauled off to the timberyard.

Kate is still disturbed by her ancestors who had both lived and died miserably. Her ancestors wanted Kate to rectify their wrongs. Among her ancestors was a man with no teeth and with a bloody mouth, who appeared in her dreams and in her wakeful visions. Though she feels that it is ghastly, she has to look and listen to his dreadful story because he chooses to tell it to her, though she did not want to relay messages from *L'otrolado,* the Other World or Ancestor territory. But he wanted her to know about how handsome he had been. He had been a slave not knowing his parentage, but he was pleased about his looks and he admired himself in the mirror of his mistress. The master who had enslaved him was ugly and had horrible rotten teeth that most Europeans had because of their bad food and poor dental hygiene. Armando says that though the physique is enslaved, the inner spirit remains the same way as it is born-free.

But Kate's ancestor, though an African slave had perfect teeth. The mistress praised his teeth and so the old master being both toothless and impotent, pulled out his white teeth one by one with the pliers they used for horses, without anesthesia. As she [Kate] said this,

"she felt physically sick, her whole body went into shock, like a plant being pulled by the roots" (*NTOH* 95). Armando began to sing to heal Kate by holding her hand. Everyone in the camp listened to the song. They were able to intuitively feel that the soul of the song is "to ask mercy of the ancestors" (95). The song pleaded for forgiveness from the ancestors because the living is already burdened with enough miseries. Kate was weeping "as if Armando's song pierced the heavy, water-logged region of her heart" (96). She was completely relieved of the congestion. Cosmi accompanied Armando a rattle and flute.

When Kate saw the flute, she was reminded of the poet Jane Stembridge, a white woman (involved in the Black Freedom Movement in Mississippi) who was expelled by black activists from the Black Freedom Movement because some of them perceived her as a "mistress who'd caused them pain" (*NTOH* 93). Some black people perhaps, could not digest the fact that a white woman could be their supporter. The black people were so affected and tormented by their memories of the past that they were not able to forgive whites on the whole. When they looked at Jane, they saw their white mistresses. "Their memory of the unforgivable atrocities of slavery triggered their aversion to a white woman, because they associated with racist and merciless plantation mistress" (Lobodziec 41). Kate believes that these activists should have recognized that the poet's "very Being, white and female and descended from slave owners though it was, might be a note of freedom" (*NTOH* 93). Kate felt exhausted and felt sleepy. Armando gave her a special medicine, Bobinsana, a pitcher full of an earth-coloured liquid which was a cure for her dreams of the ancestors. With the help of the medicine, she would be able to talk to her ancestor and express her love for him and the need to be free of the horror-filled dreams. Armando assures her that subsequently she would not have fear or guilt.

Kate, in her dream, was with her ancestor in the countryside and had a long talk with him. He said that his name is Remus, a common name for slaves. Remus called her 'Mistress Kate' as she was wearing shoes like the white mistresses of the slaves. He recalled about how he was shot through the heart and died instantly. But it was customary for the Night Riders, the 'white fiends' to chase the black man, torture and then kill him. Their ineptness in creating entertainment for themselves made them indulge in the sport of chasing the nigger who runs for life. In 1865, after the Civil War, some white people in the South decided to form a group to protect themselves and to terrorize black people. Black people, who had been slaves before and during the war, became free. Some white people, who previously had all the power and wealth, resented their losses and feared retaliation by the newly freed blacks. The people who organized this group called it the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). It lasted only a few years, disbanding in 1869. Later, in her dream, Kate persuades Uncle Remus to eat corn, even though he is toothless and has bleeding gums. Miraculously, the seeds of corn transform themselves into beautiful teeth.

Lalika's wound

Kate's spiritual redemption allows her to experience inner peace. This inner peace radiates from her and appeals to others. She helps the other journeyers to find their Self and their inner peace. Kate shares Lalika's grief. Lalika says that she would tonsure, if she survives this journey and wear the crocheted cap in which she has woven with many tears that she believes will be dried up by the sun. Kate as a mark of Sisterhood pressed her tear into Lalika's crochet design and said, "There will be the tears of the two of us, then" (113).

Armando sings the song of forgiveness over and over again to heal Lalika's wound. Forgiveness would redeem Lalika from her wounds and her sins. Armando explains that *icaros* means that it is the Self that feels much pain, which needs forgiving; it is the Self

which is flying far away, which is running for its life into the arms of death, which could not return freely and gently as the rain, and the song assures them that they are the sweet little friends of the self, who would hold on to the Self and plead it to come back to Lalika:

> Who is it that most needs forgiving?
>
> Who is it that feels so much pain?
>
> Who is it that would really like to fly
>
> Far far away?
>
> Who is it that can return
>
> Free and gentle
>
> Like the rain?
>
> It is the Self, my love…
>
> And we are holding
>
> On to nothing
>
> But the Self
>
> And we are saying
>
> Beloved
>
> Come back(111).

Lalika had killed a man who raped her and was trying to rape her friend, Gloria. They had tried to escape, but the patrolmen captured and threw them, into small, windowless country jail cells. In the jail, the patrolmen battered them and they were raped repeatedly over several months, both by the jailers and inmates. They had been watched night and day through a surveillance camera in their cells. The brutal battering and the sexual assault were preserved on film and marketed by the jailers. Until some aid had come to them, they had not been allowed one moment of privacy.

During their ordeal, Lalika and Gloria were let out of the cell into the yard for only fifteen minutes a day. They came across a *Jet* magazine issue in which there was the story of Saartjie Bartmann. After reading about Saartjie Bartman, both Lalika and Gloria began dreaming about Saartjie. They felt that her look of love was the love of a mother. From that time on, touched by the love of Saartjie they disappeared from the captors, they did not fight them, curse them. They designated her as a saint and were hopeful that they have found their saviour—a someone to pray to. They had a faith only through the saint some organization rescued them. They started calling each other 'Saartjie', "as if we were two expressions of that one loving and constant being, all of us with one name" (*NTOH* 123).

Saartjie Bartman was born in 1789 into the Griqua tribe of the eastern Cape, a subgroup of the Khoisan people Her family moved to a shack near Cape Town and, while working as a twenty-year-old servant to a local farmer, she attracted the attention of a visiting English ship's surgeon, William Dunlop. Curious about her extraordinary genital, a peculiarity of Khoisan women of the time, Dunlop took her to England, promising to make her rich. She was put under anatomical scrutiny by scientists, who named her genital condition the 'Hottentot apron'. Contemporary descriptions of her shows at 225 Piccadilly, Bartholomew Fair and Haymarket in London, is an evidence that Baartman was made to parade unclothed along a stage like a wild beast. Even after her death she suffered indignity. Less than 24 hours after her death she was carved up by Baron Cuvier. He had her body cast in wax, dissected and her skeleton articulated. Her genitalia and brain were preserved and displayed at the Musee de l'Homme (Museum of Mankind). Nelson Mandela made a request to France in 1994 for her remains to be handed back and after years of negotiations, her return was allowed on March 6 2002 allowing for her return. Almost 200 years after she suffered indignity and hardship in Europe, a box containing Baartman's remains, draped in a

South African flag was wheeled into Cape Town airport in May 2002. Her burial ceremony was on August 9 2002, Women's Day.

Walker tries to express how the 'puny Europeans' would have felt inferior seeing her 'big' everything. Walker brings in the allusion of Saarjtie Bartman to highlight the atrocities inflicted upon a black woman. Lalika says that she feels dead if she cannot be at one with herself or 'whole'. Those who rescued Lalika and her friend from jail wanted them to narrate their story to raise money for their legal expenses. Lalika and Gloria had to narrate their story to television and the newspapers of how the policeman tried to raped them, beat them and locked them up. They had to tell them about how they were raped by the jailers and inmates alike, how they filmed everything and sold the film all over the world. Lalika recollects how her grandmother, though old and sick, gave her "a real strong hit of *being thereness* (*NTOH* 158).

Walker exposes the resilience of African American rape survivors despite racial, sexual and class discriminations. Lalika's experiences are representations of the conditions of the black women in the white community and the sexual victimization of black women. Literary representations of the exploitation are found in Harriet Jacob's *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* Walker created the space to expose the sexual exploitation of the black women in her novel and attempted to eradicate the literary conspiracy of silence about rape.

Hugh Brentforth's Guilt as a Rancher

Each journeyer had a treasured experience to share. Hugh Brentforth V from Utah is impressed by an old man's devotion to his ancestors. During the Reservation Period of 1871-1887, the United States removed tribes from their aboriginal lands onto reserved sections of

land called reservations. The westerners became ranchers, clearing the Indians who inhabited the land generation after generation with the help of the U.S. Cavalry. Hugh is one such rancher whose ancestors homesteaded the Native Americans' lands.

Hugh says that in summer when the rivers appear to get dry, they go underground. So, the rivers are not really dry. Whereas whites would die of dehydration, thinking that there was no water, Indians would poke a reed into the ground and drink water from the underground of dry rivers. It is their land and so they know it completely. Kate is convinced that there are no dry rivers as she dreams. Hugh says, "They knew every river, every stream, every rock, every tree. And they could eat off the land too. Slugs and bugs and plants—even cactus. It must have been challenging starving them out" (*NTOH* 132). He also described about how the Australian aboriginals go on 'Walkabout'. Wherever they are, they go off for a while, whenever the land itself calls them. They hear the call and they drop everything and go on the Walkabout. Women might have gone in disguise to the Walkabout because rape of the aboriginal women was common. Merriam-Webster Online dictionary and Thesaurus identifies the noun "Walkabout" as a 1908 coinage referring to "a short period of wandering bush life engaged in by an Australian Aborigines as an occasional interruption of regular work" *(www.merriam-webster.com).*

An old man, an Indian, is taken by Hugh to a place where there are a few cottonwood trees and a clump or two of white sage. The old man has a plastic jug of water that keeps bubbling and never gets dried up. As years go by, the old man comes with his son, a sullen, middle-aged Indian, who looks like Dennis Banks to Hugh and both of them go to the spring. The next time, the old man brings his grandson and Hugh tells him about the energy development company's intention to dig the area that summer. When the old man and his grandson come the next year, they find that instead of the spring there is a lake. And the

subsequent year, neither of them come but Hugh wished them to come because when the lake was dug by the energy development people, they discovered bones. Hugh said, "The bones of the old man's people from thousands of years ago. Resting there forever with a huge body of water separating them from any disturbance, and with only a tiny, trickling spring to connect them with the living" (*NTOH* 138). The old man's devotion to his ancestors, his faith in the belief that the ancestors connect them with him and his responsibility to pass his conviction to his successors brought a change in Hugh. It surprises Kate how such a precious thing as the bones of the ancestors could "be kept in that way across ten or thirty thousand years" (138). Kate textures the old man's profundity of love, his gratefulness to his ancestors, his reverence of and his pride in acknowledging his oneness with his ancestors. "The old man has felt so grateful, said Kate. To be who he was, to have had those people before him, shaping him into who he was" (138).

After listening to Hugh's story, Kate dreams about two burial grounds on Hugh's property—an ancient one and a much less ancient one. The old man in Kate's dream walked the perimeter of Hugh's land, holding the jug of water in his hand ". . . he stood in the center of what had been the graveyard of his tribe and of people he and his more recent ancestors had known. He knelt to pray. After praying, he rose and sprinkled the water over the ground and over himself. He was trembling with exhaustion and sadness, but he was weeping with love" (*NTOH* 140).

"Hugh denounces the dishonouring of Native American sacred grounds by scientists in their endeavour to understand Native Americans (Lobodziec 43)." Hugh is touched. Even in his old age, when he is almost blind, the oldman wants his son and then his grandson to carry on the ritual of paying homage to the ancestors after his death. He teaches his grandson the procedure he has been adapting for years as an expression of homage to his ancestors. As

Gerri Bates observes, "Hugh Brentforth V needs to learn the kind of devotion that he witnesses in the annual pilgrimage of the indigenous American who trespasses on his land to pay respect to the deceased at an Indian burial" (171).

Rick's Confession of the Exploitation of Blacks

Walker's interview with Patricia Gras shows her concern for young men all over the world. She is anxious that so many youngsters die because of the drug abuse. She expresses that it is the responsibility of the elders and the government authorities to stop drugs from coming into the communities. Walker says that there were many levels of inspiration in writing the novel. She is interested in how the young are losing their way and how drug use devastated her own community—the African Americans. She wants to explore the traditional way indigenous cultures to guide and teach the youth through a spiritual transcendental experience to redeem them from the demoralizing addiction.

Rick, an Italian immigrant, has a ragged, feral look, glossy uneven teeth, wispy moustache with glints of gray. A youthful-appearing man, appeared tense and driven even in repose. He played a *charango* made of armadillo hide. Rick is afraid to make the journey but he cannot be excluded from the circle because "casting anyone out, no matter how bizarre their behavior, drained the energy of the circle" (*NTOH* 155). Rick confesses that his family's wealth came from the sale of narcotics to black people. Since the black people always liked the immigrants, it was easy to sell dope to them. "Selling drugs to the oppressed people was our family business, for generations" (*NTOH* 159). But now they own hotels and restaurants, office buildings and elected officials. Rick is rich enough to build hospitals and schools and to feed and educate generations of children who ended up in prison. The Italians hooked the blacks to drugs but they did not get hooked up because then they would not be able to "move up in American society" (*NTOH* 154). Kate ponders over questions such as,

why it is necessary to be medicated on drugs, heroin or cocaine; what appeal it has on youngsters and whether do such drugs help them to fly away from troubles. Rick explains that consumption of drugs makes these youngsters feel normal and gives them a sense of belonging, "a sense of home within" (*NTOH* 154) and every time they consume the drug they get back to that home they find within. Walker expresses the concern that the overdose of the drugs causes death to young men. Drug consumption causes heart attack from crack cocaine and crack causes forgetfulness. Lalika says that "selling dope to blacks didn't matter because blacks are animals" (*NTOH* 157). She tries to say that the white do not consider the black people as human beings, they are seen as animals.

Rick describes how his parents were shocked to know that he started dating a 'woman of color.' They started telling disheartening things about black people, about the drugs they use and the crimes they commit. His parents warned him about black neighbourhoods. Rick recounts that his parents, especially his father, were urging him to take more of everything: food, clothes, money. His father sounded imperial, "he looked just like those Roman emperors in the movies, setting off to conquer, to eat up, the earth. Devouring everything seems to be in our genes" (168).

The immigrants who have come to America, the ethnics, have dropped as much as they could of whatever heart, soul, or rhythm made them unique and they do not want ethnic studies to be taught in school. They want to imitate the Americans and be identified as Americans. Armando says that when a foreigner from a poor country visits America, he feels he is moving among shadows with teeth. Armando observes that in the olden days the powerful merged with the divine but now the powerful have merged with the shadow and become invisible so that it is difficult for even a shaman to see them. The Americans are

spreading this invisibility among others. The tears are the only medicine that cures this invisibility among the powerful.

Remedying Missy's Fear and Guilt

Missy is an incest victim from birth, the perpetrator being her mother's father, Timmy Wimmins, who played the role of father and husband to Missy. Missy's father went off to the army and never came back and so her mother and herself lived with her grandfather. Her grandfather, a tiny man was a clown professionally. When her mother worked, the grandfather took care Missy, "his little Squiggly Wiggly" (*NTOH* 162). He took advantage of her when she was an infant. Until she was ten, she tried to stop playing with Timmy Wimmins and then only the mother found out what her father had done to Missy. She was not able to express this to anyone. They left her grandfather's house but "couldn't leave off feeling love for him" (162). Missy loved him and loved being with him, excluding his behaviour, "he was the greatest guy" (162). She missed him terribly though not the 'tingle.' When she started to feel it wrong, she observed none of her friends ever talked about such an experience. Consequently, she was so much afraid of sex that she suffers from an inability to establish healthy relationships with men. She took to marijuana, and then to every other drug trying to heal her "wound" caused by her grandfather: "After struggling to cope through pharmaceuticals and illegal drugs, she comes on the retreat to learn to achieve peace" (Bates 171).

Each one has their own hurt to be healed. To Kate, it is the dream of the ancestor Uncle Remus; to Hugh, it is the guilt of evacuating and swindling the land of the Native Americans; to Missy, it is the fear of being exploited; to Rick, it is the guilt of passing on the sin of exploiting young black men; and to Lalika, it is the guilt of murdering the rapist and

the fear of being sexually exploited. The purpose of the journey is to heal, redeem them from their sins, and fear or guilt, to help them find inner peace and discover their Self.

Interpretation of Dreams

Gerri Bates says, "The interpretation of dreams is significant. In Walker's novel, dreams always have meaning; there is no recreational dreaming. The characters' dreams must be justified and the relevance to their lives examined and explicated" (170). Kate dreamt that she was back in the Grand Canyon, the place from where it is believed that the Hopi have come up into the fourth world. Kate sees the little finger print, the Hopi petroglyph which represents the *sipapu*, *a*nd the place where the Hopi emerged from the earth. The Hopi legend tells that the current earth is the Fourth World to be inhabited by the Almighty's creations. The story essentially states that in each previous world, the people, though originally happy, became disobedient and lived contrary to God's plan; they engaged in sexual promiscuity, fought one another and would not live in harmony. Thus, the most obedient and virtuous were led to the next higher world, with physical changes occurring both in the people in the course of their journey, and in the environment of the next world. In some stories, these former worlds were then destroyed along with their wicked inhabitants, whereas in others the good people were simply led away from the chaos which had been created by the actions of the wicked.

The Hopi man with a piece of rag around his head asks Kate if she is puzzled about how the Hopi could live and sustain themselves underground for so long and how they grew crops without the sun. He explains that the men and women never separate or leave each other. They never go anywhere without the seeds and carry them in a pot. When they came into the world, they chose to live on top of mesas and had their fields below. He says, "While underground we climbed up to plant, above ground we climb down" (*NTOH* 201). Kate is

herself the tiny seed inside the pot and grows into an astonishingly tall cornstalk with heavy ears of corn hanging. It means that every individual is a seed which is the source of an infinite number of seeds that would grow in this world for the cycle of life to continue.

When all the explorers finally let go the fear or the guilt from which they suffer, they see a dragon like the one in Michael Harner's *Way of the Shaman,* a classic resource and reference on Shamanism. Hugh sees humungous dragons that breathe fire. In his dream, Rick sees a dragon that breathed fire for a while and then water for a while and then streams of people poured out of its mouth—"our species, out of the depths of our own unconscious" (*NTOH 165*). He feels as if all of humanity was aimed at his head and that he died. Rick says that to be dead is profoundly peaceful. Missy sees two big snakes wrapped around each other. But Kate sees the huge side of a building with a beaded or jewelled window. After a full experience with Grandmother, these snakes or dragons will not be fearful, but will appear as cartoon figures.

Anunu, Armando's assistant is sixty-five but to Kate she looks like a woman of thirty-five with smooth vibrant skin, clear twinkling eyes and strong lithe body. She says to Kate that in every woman's life, there is a time when she realizes the Grandmother's absence. To some women, it will be expressed through dream of horses, or a dream of big black bulls. Some dream of water, vast expanses of water, while some will find themselves entering a unknown dance or a music impossible to follow. Some dream of rivers that are dry. Kate's "journey seemed to be more about emptying myself of the past . . . my past lives came up, literally, in vomiting, there in the depths of the canyon . . ." (*NTOH* 108).

Kate's dream of the last night of the retreat about the old woman who transformed the dull abode into a bouquet of flowers, brings her the revelation that "The old age is the ability to visit what is ugly and to transform into beauty anything you touch" (*NTOH* 175). It

reveals that old age has the privilege of transforming the ugly into the beautiful, and there is beauty in truth.

Socio-political Status: Theology, Womanism, Racism and Humanism

Walker describes how the black people have continued to be excluded and discriminated against both socially and economically. She knows that Black people are marginalized from majority American society. She thinks: "We are considered second and third class citizens of a country whose government never wanted us. Except as slaves. We understand by now the world will be blown to bits, doubtless by the same government, before people of color get their fair share" (*NTOH* 59). In spite of the fact that black people cannot afford any of the privileges the white relish, they want to be Black. The black are stubborn and never wanted to do anything the way the whites do, in order to be acknowledged by them. They like being brown, with hair such as nobody on the entire planet has. They take pride in their blackness, and their braided cornrow hair which Walker feels gives them the identity. They do not want to destroy it or camouflage it and lose their identity.

Walker uses the snake image to compare the outcast status of the black women .When Kate was in the Amazon, she noticed a little serpent in her hut. As she contemplated the snake, a revelation comes to her that like the snake, the black people has been cast outside the circle of goodwill for hundreds of years. Women "lived in cultures that despised and willfully obliterated the feminine, would never experience the connection to earth and to humanity that was their birthright. Pain had driven them to separate from their very selves" (*NTOH* 214). Religious indoctrination and mythological allusions have made everyone fear and loath the serpent. Walker expounds that banning of the serpent from the circle of goodwill was the beginning of discrimination, separation, humiliation, and the synonyms for hatred. It was the

model for all other banishments and resentments throughout the universe. It was the reason for outcast of black people outside the circle of goodwill into a world of ill will. The hostility and danger the snake is succumb to, makes them hide from human. Women, who are in the same plight, befriended the serpent such as Cleopatra who has "asps as pets" (214) and the priestesses who danced with snake in ancient times.

Walker's notion is that anything humans do cannot cause destruction to Mother Earth. And that there is no potion or poison a human being can create to destroy the Earth. It will only rearrange the pattern. Even destruction is the part of the overall design by the Mother. It is impossible to kill one's mother who has given birth. The 'saving' of the planet or the fate of the world rests on human beings. All they have to do is "everyone becomes as one mind" (*NTOH* 80). The diverse language which people have only forms divisions instead of unity. Walker feels, "There is no need to talk" (*NTOH* 80). Language has destroyed the human capability to read one another mind, feel one another and to know one another. The various peace talks that occur on a daily basis in every part of the world do not unite people but instead create more drift. The more these talks are held, the farther everyone is from peace. After these peace talks, these men return to the military bastion and give directions to blow up the enemies. Walker's idea is that the killing of a human being would not occur if they "really see them" (81). Unfortunately, humans never wanted to "see" or smell anybody. They smell of fear and suffering –the smell of the enemy which only makes them so angry and so covetous to kill more people. Consequently, before the fear in the eyes of the enemy is felt deeply within himself, he blows the enemy. Walker felt that bombing is not a good idea and she felt it important to instill the idea in children and so she wrote a children's book, *Why War is Never a Good Idea (2007).*

Armando and shamans of South America, from various jungles and mountains and plains of the countries comes there to the United States to object to the idea of patenting yagé. A pharmaceutical company is trying to patent their traditional medicine. They come to talk to the leaders of the United States and make them understand that Yagé is a sacred substance. Yagé is inseperable from spirit and inseparable from them who have lived and interacted with it for thousands of years. Kate feels that to patent yagé would be like patenting human being or life itself. They feel that these companies have stolen everything else that the indigenous people have developed for healing. The Shamans have come hoping to get a reference letter from Kate stating that she knew Armando and also the value of yagé. She feels privileged to write the letter.

Communion with Nature

Walker believes that the company of Nature gives joy to the human heart and it exercises a healing influence on grief-stricken souls. Nature helps man to enter into communication with the life within. Whenever man has to live in a conflicting environment, his communion with nature helps him to draw the energy required to sustain life in this world. Nature is the last resort where he can heal and nurture. In the afterword, Walker gives a reference to the existence of plants as Grandmother Medicine, Yagé. She substantiates how there are plants which liberate the soul in *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing and Hallucinogenic Powers*

> The soul, thus untrammeled, liberates its owner for the realities of everyday life and introduces him to wondrous realms of what he considers reality and permits him to communicate with his ancestors. The Kechua term for this

> inebriating drink—Ayahuasca ('vine of the soul')—refers to this freeing of the spirit. The plants involved are truly plants of the gods, for their power is laid to supernatural forces residing in their tissues, and they were divine gifts to the earliest Indians on earth. (*NTOH 224)*

In *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, Alice Walker as a womanist reflects on how people view and worship God. She states: "All people deserve to worship a God who also worships them. A God that made them, and likes them. That is why Nature, Mother Earth, is such a good choice" (25). The author also cites the "magical intimacy [black people] felt with Creation" (17). They see Nature as beautiful, inspiring, and reassuring. Black people maintain a connectedness with Mother Earth.

Kate tells Yolo (Kate's lover) about the amazing plant, Bobinsana that grows beside the river and whose roots, dissolved in water, she had drunk morning and night, and how she had begun to have dreams that diagnosed the illness of others. Through the guidance of the Shamans, his assistants, the hallucinogenic drinks as Ayahuasca, Bobinsana and Yagé she is redeemed of the various impacts the incidents in her life had caused and the ancestors' images that haunted her through dreams.The cleansing of the body and the mind allows her to live in harmony with nature. Gerri Bates writes,

> Under their wise protection and didactic guidance Kate advances in theory and practice in the spiritual and medicinal methodologies of the ancients. The result is acuity in observation, listening , and interpretation; oneness with Mother Nature in her earthy, vegetative, and animalistic variants; and a sensitized consciousness in communion with the Grandmother spirit, so that the student Kate ascends to the level of becoming shaman like, a *curandera*

capable of intermediary action on behalf of others in search of enlightenment. (167)

Walker illustrates the ways to communion with nature and the means to find the plants that heals the hurt. Armando explains to Kate how the shamans knew the plants that would heal people. The plant themselves tell either in dreams or in meditations or by accident. Sometimes it might be serendipity where people will chew a leaf or a stem that might ease them. Armando gives Kate a pitcher of green water to pour over herself, from head to toe. The bits of leaves crushed should be left on her skin to dry and this would cleanse the skin so deeply that all the pores of the body would start breathing with the forest, with the environment. When Kate was suffering from diarrohea, it was through serendipity that she found a yellow flower which cured her. Kate called it 'friend' because she could not recall its name. Later Sue who knew the names of plants and their medicinal purpose said that the yellow flower was called desert thistleweed. Thistleweed is a friend and likewise every other plant in nature favour, nurture and redeem the self. Walker tries to express that for every ailment, nature has extraordinary miraculous remedies.

As Armando had promised Bobinsana, the medicine probably gave Kate clarity about the mystery of her birth. Bobinsana makes her see things in her life in a different way. It makes her see through the plots of life. It gives her the clarity that she was not her father's biological child and that her birth was a result of her mother's affair. When the mystery of her life was unveiled , "she thought of the half-European children hundreds of thousands of black women had delivered into world, children forced on them through rape; children deliberately conceived in the bodies of the black women so they could be sold" (*NTOH*190).

Walker is concerned about the issues of deforestation. She predicts the devastation deforestation would bring to nature, to the world and eventually to the entire race. In Hawaii,

the beauty of the island is destroyed by the disastrous forces. Alma tells Yolo of how the island was covered with sandalwood which they can smell far out to sea. The forests were exploited and the wood was taken to Asia, Europe, America and were made into incense, matchboxes and doodads.

Kate never seems to find her spiritual journey difficult or frustrating because she is virtuous. She had wise thoughts "she had an instinctive understanding, perhaps from birth, that people and plants were relatives" (*NTOH 71*). Ethnobotanists are people who study the human being's relationship with the plants that grow around them. Kate from childhood was an ethnobotanist who spent hours talking to, caressing, sitting in, kissing and otherwise trying to communicate with trees which reflects New Age thought. She was convinced that trees had mouths and that she would find a mouth on a tree when she grew tall enough and searched. She changed her last name from Kate Nelson to Kate Talkingtree which shows her love for trees and nature.

Music as a Healer purges the soul

Kate listens to music which heals her. The music of Haydn, Beethoven, the Beatles, Robbie Robertson, Sade and Al Green cleanses her soul, heals her and prepares her towards the spiritual journey. She listens to their music always and for endless hours "because they know how to love" (*NTOH* 16). Kate's body, mind and the soul were prepared towards this journey because it is believed that, "you can never put a sacred medicine in a polluted body" (*NTOH* 53). The love for music prepares her towards the shamanic songs which help in healing and purging the soul towards spiritual enlightenment. The *icaros*, healing songs of Armando and Cosmi's reed flute were so lovely that they made Kate weep and these 'healing songs' purge the soul.

Spiritual Emptiness

People are lost into a world which is technically advanced but devoid of the qualities of being humane. For the quest for power, they willingly give up the values of humanity. Armando distinguishes between existence and living. He thinks that consumerism and materialism has led people to a spiritual emptiness—an emptiness where people merely exist, but do not truly live. He states: " When you are caught up in the world that you did not design as support for your life and the life of earth and people, it is like being caught in someone else's dream or nightmare. Many people exist in their lives in this way. I say exist because it is not really living" (*NTOH* 142-43).

Yolo's Voyage of Self-discovery

The novel is about the interpersonal conflict the characters Kate and Yolo Day suffer, They also interact with other characters who have also suffered their own interpersonal disharmony. With parallel quests, the two major characters decide to resolve their conflicts through their parallel journeys to the Amazon and Hawaii, one a River and another island and receive lessons from their respective parallel circles.

Yolo Day is an artist, whom Kate admires for his lively paintings. He was trim and cute, had Frederick Douglass kind of hair, wiry and energetic and looked a bit like him, because his ancestry was the same. He is the kind of person who thinks about himself. "His mind was like this. Running on a lot of the time about himself. He tried to hide this from Kate but she only laughed. Most people are like that, she said. We are our most interesting subject" (*NTOH* 58). He makes his trip to Hawaii because he thinks that making a parallel journey to that of Kate's would not make him lose her. Gerri Bates describes Yolo:

> Kate's live-in younger lover, Yolo, is a complex character but not the antagonist; he is more like a parallel protagonist. Changing his name from Henry to Yolo a Poewin Indian name meaning 'a place in the river where wild rushes grow,' he feels his name is more suitable to his personality; he thus has in common with Kate the changing of names. . . A charismatic, handsome, monogamous, sincere individual who embraces feminism, Yolo is an independent, self-sufficient successful artist. He enjoys the middle-class lifestyle of freedom, mobility, options, and choice. His flaws are unworthy of serious attention, but Walker's creative impulse makes him a little less than perfect (165).

Kate had admired Yolo's paintings, especially the one of the desert. Yolo's first meeting with Kate ensues when she calls him in the middle of the night to discuss about his painting which impressed her. She was some years older than him but she made no pretense of being younger. As an artist would be enchanted only by the real, "however odd or singular it might be" (*NTOH* 18), Yolo loved the reality of her being. She was odd, her hair graying, with her adequate cushion of estrogen fat on tummy and hips, her full breasts, and sparkling eyes. She felt humiliated to dye her hair as that would eradicate some part of 'hard-won existence' and felt that by trying to look younger she would 'miss part of her life' (*NTOH* 18). When she later elaborated one of his paintings that her bird nature became so activated the she felt she could fly, Yolo was so moved and he thought how he had not known that there were women who talked as Kate. He shuddered at the thought that she is a woman of New Age. Kate's absence conspicuously distracts his inner peace, causing him to contemplate change. Yolo's quest for search of life begins, for in Kate's absence he realizes the importance of her presence in his life. Yolo wondered about Kate's skill of housekeeping.

In contrast to Kate, Yolo is the kind of person who keeps things forever and his house is filled with clutter. Each year for Kwanza, Kate gifts him a book *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui.* Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration, observed from December 26 to January 1, held in the United States and also celebrated by the Western African Diaspora in other nations of the Americas. It was established as a means to honour and help African Americans reconnect with their African cultural and historical heritage by uniting in meditation and study of African traditions, culminating in a feast and gift-giving. Inspired by the book, reading all the ill effects of clutter, he would want to have his house clutter-free but the thought of letting things go made him sad because he felt that this clutter represented times in his life. The exercise bike reminds him of his affair. Back issues of *Prevention* and *Utne Reader,* chipped dishes, several clocks represent stories from his life. The clutter also included a twelve-year-tall stack of *Ms.* Magazine. A bluish painting of *Shakti* in the first issue made him realize that he had never known a thing about women his whole life. Yolo is a contrasting character to Suwelo, a man who says he had never read a book written by woman in *The Temple of My Familiar*.

Bates compares the dilemma Yolo suffers from, which is similar to that of Kate. Bates observes, "He, too, has physical and spiritual life issues that require resolution, such as his addiction to tobacco and his disintegrating relationship with Kate. In Kate's empty house, Yolo finds himself wandering about like a winding, twisting river" (*NTOH*165). After Kate leaves, Yolo feels lonely and misses her. In despair and disappointment, he falls asleep and dreams of a green hobbit-like creature and wakes realizing that their relationship "isn't over"; and he suddenly understands water. He dreams as she had dreamed, and upon waking he has a spiritual awakening, realizing that he is now part of her journey and will be part of her forever. Also in her absence, Yolo thinks about death—whether people would die of viruses,

infections, fratricide, genocide or hatred intensified over decades, centuries until the entire peoples, races and continents get devastated. He enquires to himself if passion and joy would be expressed in acts of hate, as how sex is expressed in acts of violence instead of treating 'sex as a path by itself to spirituality' (Gras). Yolo intuitively empathizes with Kate's compassionate yearnings and adopts a tone of self-analysis to preserve their relationship. Since Yolo is very considerate to her about her journey and is prepared to accept her with the change that might hopefully come over her after the journey, Kate felt free and happy to return home. Walker uses bird imagery to signify Kate's freedom to return home and return to Yolo, "She saw herself flying home, swooping in through a window, a large black bird" (*NTOH* 30).

Parallel to Kate's journey, Yolo is undergoing his own spiritual metamorphosis though his was not an intended spiritual journey as Kate's. His trip to Hawaii, originally expected to be a regular vacation, unexpectedly instill a higher and more valuable lesson than Yolo expected. Yolo had gathered all details about the island—about surfing, volcanoes, etc. While he was relaxing on the beach, a Hawaiian, named Jerry asked for a favour. He wants Yolo to stay with a dead body which needed to be protected on the deserted beach meant for the locals. Yolo was wondering whether the dead man was shot, strangled or drowned. Later he describes him with anguish to Kate, "He'd died of an overdose of a drug they call ice...he was so beautiful" (195). He felt that the knowledge he had about Hawaii was different from what he really experienced. His vacation in Hawaii, in which he had hoped to do the beach routine and read voraciously, was distracted. Yolo's mind drifted and he could not forget the face of the dead young man besides whose body he had sat. He drove his red car to a small, breezy village and he continued to drive when he found himself at a small green church in which there was a funeral procession. He recognized Jerry among the crowd and stopped the

car. Yolo surmised that it was the funeral of the young man Marshall, Alma son, whose body he had sat protected. Alma is a Hawaiian woman, an old lover of Yolo. She is now overweighed and grieved on the loss of her son, died due to overdose of crystal methamphetamine, a drug that swamped the island. Walker accentuates the importance of remembrance and reverence of the ancestors through Alma. Alma was wearing her father's jacket and explains the reason: "It's my ceremonial gear, she said, Like a tuxedo . . . I wear it for all special occasions where it is important that my father's influence is acknowledged" (*NTOH 116*).

Jerry draws him into the circle of friends and relatives, and this becomes Yolo's initiation into ancient Hawaiian practices. The brother of the deceased, Poi is part of the circle. Yolo's absorbs the history of the Hawaiian island and its rule thousands of years ago by Hawaiian Queen Lili'uokalani. Alma describes how the Americans made it illegal for the Hawaiians to speak their own language. They placed the Queen under house arrest and threatened war if she did not resign. Hawaii is halfway between the US and Japan, and these countries were fighting over the island though not for its people. American sabotaged, arrested and dislodged Queen Lili'uokalani. The Queen knew that the Hawaiians would fight for her but she did not want them to be killed in war. The Hawaiians were 'annexed' to the Americans like a small room to a big room.

Aunty Pearlua, a cross-dressing Mahu, is the keeper of knowledge of the traditional ways. "Like an African griot, Aunty Pearlua articulates the knowledge of the old to the younger generations" (Bates 171). Mahus were found among Polynesian cultures from New Zealand to Hawaii. They wore women's clothing and were feminized men. Mahus believe that they have been given a very special charge of living out their lives as women though they were born as males. Aunty Pearlua taught the traditional hula dance to all the young women.

Aunty says that there was a time when only women ruled. Mother rule was the dominant way of life, not only in Hawaii but everywhere. To the Mahus, the overthrow of women from their throne of power, the enslavement of woman and the ruination of all the women and children was so distressing that the Mahus decided to live "her" (women's life) until women were restored to their rightful place. For this to happen, they felt they had to take care of the children who form the future generation. The Mahus have made a sacred vow to take care of the children.

Aunty Pearlua is of the opinion that it was right time for men to take another hard-to-keep vow in favour of children. She wants men to resign from participation in any sort of addiction, even from drinking coffee and black tea. "No drugs, no alcohol, no 'recreational' sex, no caffeine, and no tobacco. She asked the men in the gathering to make this vow" (*NTOH* 179). Every man had a question of how it was possible for them to keep the vow and how they could refrain from consuming the things to which they are addicted to. When Aunty Pearlua observes that the men were depressed about taking an oath to forego their addictions, she motivates them to give up or to make a 'not going to have it' vow. She explains that Mahus conduct their lives as women to know about the humiliation and enslavement woman and children undergo in their community. She expounds that this vowing is a strategy for survival. She insists that we should have control over our bodies and be exemplary in showing the young people the importance of health and well-being.

> Do you think it's been easy for Mahus to conduct their lives as women, all this time? She asked. Don't you think from time to time we've wanted to cut off our hair and let our toenails grow long? She laughed. Ah, anyone can be a man, that is the problem. It takes much more to be a woman. But we have managed it. And why? Because we could see the plan men were laying out for

> woman and her children, a plan that enslaved and humiliated them before eradicating the divine in them entirely. (*NTOH* 180)

The energy of 'if only' the Queen Lili'uokalani had made her people to eat poi and taro leaves instead of white bread, mayonnaise , beer, pig and pasta salad ; if only Hawaiian people had known about addiction; such devastation to the entire community would not have occurred. Aunty Alma says that Aunty Pearlua has taught generations of Hawaiian women the true hula dance of the traditions and of the soul. Aunty Alma taught the cleanliness of the earth temple, the human body. She says that it is the time to clean up as in John Lennon's song 'Cleanup Time'. Now is the time to clean up not only for the people on the islands but all over the world. Since health is the culture of the Hawaiians, they should not eat the slops the whites have brought and left and they "must learn to let go." Eating bad food will lead to bad feelings and bad food "is the easiest slippery slope to an early grave" (*NTOH* 183).

Two young Australian aborigines are also among the members of the circle to reaffirm their declining sense of identity. They both were addicted to petrol sniffing. They represent comeback from drug addiction. And they are worried about the young men of this world, of their country, of their own community. The shorter of the two aborigines spoke to people in a circle, "In our country too, for many generations now, we have watched our young men die of despair. Not to knowing how to stop them from hurting themselves, not knowing why they can't pull themselves out of the depression they're in; not knowing what to do exhibit an example of life" (*NTOH* 142). They also cite instances of young men found dead on the beach. The youngsters sniff petrol to avoid the anxiety of the loss of intimacy with one's own motherland; to forget that they were one with the land and the sea. A blond Aborigine had hair like James Brown, one of the founding fathers of funk music. He said that all measures have been tried to make the young see the truth that they have lost their future.

The young who sniffed petrol feel that "That they are, poor, discarded by the society that has slaughtered their people and taken their land" (*NTOH* 144). Thus, addiction only rescues them from their barren environment.

Sessions with Grandmother: A Revelation

Grandmother says that mankind must live in space for at least two years. "Space is where we have always lived." Grandmother says, "You are born into space, out of space, space is your home forever. Earth is like a dust mote in the cosmos. An interesting, even fascinating, dust mote. But a dust mote. It is like a raft on a river and the river is space" (*NTOH* 172). But to reach space, it is not necessary to travel through air.

Happy Reunion

After Yolo and Kate return from their relevant journeys, they share their experiences. Some experiences, especially the one's which she had with Grandmother is put into writing by Kate. She writes whatever she could remember of what Grandmother Yagé taught her in those seven hours. Since she is a writer, she wants to manifest the experience and wish to see those experiences as art. She feels that she had learnt then more than what she had in her whole life. It was both a different way of learning and a different way of teaching. Kate describes the Grandmother to Yolo, "She was so loving… patient, brisk. No nonsense about her… It really was like sitting in the lap of a gigantic tree, breathing together, and accessing a knowing that would never happen…" (*NTOH* 209).

Yolo tells Kate that he had taken a vow with a few other brothers of the world in Hawaii under the guidance of Aunt Pearlua, to stop smoking. But when Yolo vulnerably fails to keep up his vow, Kate consoles him by quoting Oscar Wilde's view on temptation: "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it. . . I can resist everything but temptation"

(www.goodreads.com). She convinces him that while smoking symbolized oneness 'Being of one mind'. The material and spiritual mingle together as air and smoke bringing in peace.

Yolo thinks that Kate is very brave, but she is not an exception to feeling apprehensive about old age. He expounds that it is quite natural because she lives in a culture where people are afraid of old age and are very particular to hide the symptoms of ageing.

The first time when Yolo and Kate discussed about living together, she made it clear that she is not interested in marriage because of the bitterness and trauma she had undergone through her previous marriages. In fact, she loved Yolo more than she loved any of her other partners. But she does not want to get into marriage and defile the space and the peaceful privacy of her life. Nonetheless, now both Kate and Yolo felt mutually safe with each other. All the insecurity, emptiness and sadness he experienced during Kate's departure to shamanic journey have vanished. Kate also felt that their different journeys and their different experiences of their journey would bring them to mutual understanding of each other. The necessary compatibility to live with harmony and peace is attained by both Kate and Yolo. They accept each other's infirmities and find solace in each other's compassionate words. The solo journeys of Kate and Yolo congeal their bond. Therefore, they decide to continue their life's journeying together and they decided to wed, but not by conventional style since they have outgrown actual marriage. The long gowns and veil reminded Kate of woman's captivity. For the marriage feast, both Yolo and Kate think of inviting their respective acquaintances during their journey.

The venue for the wedding would be near a river. When Kate invites her co-journeyers to the wedding, Lalika promises to bring her boyfriend and her mother. Alma with her namesake, Aunty Pearlua, Jerry and Poi were coming too. Kate also invites Armando for their wedding. Armando promises to send a 'spirit to take his place' for the wedding.

Now is the Time to Open Your Heart is a confluence of the themes recurrent in Walker's works and the prevalent issues of the contemporary world .Walker broadens her concern about the young men not only in America or in her own community but throughout the world who are addicted to drugs. She insists that it is the responsibility of the elders to rescue them from the fatal habit and guide them through transcendental spirituality. She asserts that the culture of the different regions of the world should be treasured and preserved for the young men to perceive their significance. As an activist, she has contributed much in bettering her community and society. The social concern "if art doesn't make us better, then what on earth is it for?" is very explicit in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart.* Predominantly, she has focused on the necessity of living in harmony with nature, living in oneness with Nature—the communion with Nature as a necessary prerequisite for redemption. The novel illustrates and exhibits her rich worldly experience and her maturity of mind. Her vast exposure to worldly affairs is illustrated in the allusions to the Hopi, Saartjie Baartman, evacuation of Native Americans in the US, Australian aborigines, Shamanism, hallucinogenic herbs, doping by drugs and the Mahus of Hawaii.

A pattern of progressive steps in the path of redemption can be traced in Walker's novels. Various streams of redemption described in the previous novels have their confluence in the life-giving river of spirituality as evinced in *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart.* The novel can be viewed as the product of a calm and mature mind that subsides after a turbulent stormy agitation against the oppressors of both white and black patriarchy . The novel can be viewed as the acme of Walker's redemption of Self and her attainment of survival wholeness.

Chapter VI

Summing Up

> All sacrifice and suffering is redemptive. It is used to either teach the individual or to help others. Nothing is by chance.
>
> -Arthur J. Russell

African American women writers have produced a residue of shared experiences and memories that have recorded the African American women's moral, intellectual and psychological strength; their capacity to endure the horrors of slavery and to develop and maintain a strong sense of self-respect and self-determination; and their extra-ordinary survival skills, and their assertion of black women's humanity. Black women are disadvantaged in several ways—as black, they, with their men are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimized by black men; and as black women they are also victimized on racial, sexual and class grounds by white men. They are victims of both black patriarchy and white patriarchy. So, black women writers cannot limit themselves to issues of femaleness but must extend their vision to issues raised by their humanity.

Walker, as an African American woman writer, produces works that contribute to the transformation of society and address the cultural and spiritual needs of her community. Her works reconcile and reinstate the black women's identity in a society where they are estranged and alienated. She as a writer commits herself to the expression of the black women's strife in order to revive them from their marginalized state. As an intellectual, refuses to accept unquestioningly the violence and oppression inflicted upon a particular sect of people; as a believer, she is of the opinion that every woman's responsibility towards her life is to live through contradictions; as a Womanist, venerates the philosophy that the search

for freedom is beneficial to the entire race and the entire humanity; as an activist, she supports people throughout the world during moments of crisis. Walker scrutinizes and deconstructs American literary traditions in an attempt to visualize a harmonious and interdependent community.

Her women characters progress toward wholeness through redemption of self. Walker has discussed her writing as both a means of survival and as a way of healing herself. So her characters are also in search of healing and wholeness. Walker's female characters "achieve psychological wholeness when they are able to fight oppression," whereas her male characters "achieve psychological health and wholeness only when they are able to acknowledge women's pain and their role in it" (Winchell x).

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* the protagonist suffers under the sharecropping system and is in need of redemption from the oppressive state. His enslavement makes him vulnerable and his powerlessness gives him the notion that in order to prove his power as a man in the patriarchal culture, he should dominate his women and children in the family. Barbara Christian writes in *Black Women Writers:* "Grange Copeland hates himself because he is powerless, as opposed to powerful, the definition of maleness for him. His reaction is to prove his power by inflicting violence on the women around him." (qtd. in Washington, J. Charles).

The cyclical nature of this phenomenon is seen in the life of Grange's son Brownfield, perhaps the most disreputable character, who brutalizes his children and his wife and then murders her. But, this loveless act does not help them to appease their anger and the culpability makes them more helpless. Their resentment towards the oppressor spreads to the women and children of the family. It leads to self-hatred which culminates in causing death to the women through either a suicide or a murder. Copeland, forlorn, abandons his family and

goes to the North, unable to 'right the wrong' of customarily making the women the scapegoat of their subservience and powerlessness.

Margaret fails in her attempt to attain self-realization because she fails to forgive Grange and opts to avenge him by reiterating the practices of her husband. She exemplifies the state of suspended woman –the kind of passive and submissive woman who cannot continue to fight life after the husband deserts her. Mem, on the other hand, is a self-possessed woman, who, in spite of the various obstacles Brownfield lays on her path moves steadfastly towards her goal of establishing a secure future for her and her children. Ruth is the woman in whom Walker invests all her hope to 'survive whole' rather than merely existing. Grange as a changed being --a "reborn man," helps her to live by sacrificing his own life.

The brutal emotional outlet Grange and eventually Brownfield exercise in their respective families sustain them through the brokenness of their lives in the sharecropping system. In a despairingly fruitless state of enslavement, the men are stony- heartedly mete out undeserved punishments to their wives and show themselves incapable of offering an explanation. They react to their sufferings by readdressing whatever abuse they received undeservingly from white men. By battering their wives, they disgrace themselves.

Brownfield unlike Grange Copeland never understands the power of love. His male ego and the inferiority he develops from his childhood experiences shatter his attempts to wrest control over his life from his circumstances, whereas Grange Copeland can fathom the profundity of love and so he can groom and tailors Ruth towards the possibility of 'surviving whole'. A surge of love helps him regain his self and help Ruth. Grange Copeland is redeemed when he understands that hatred should be converted to love. When he loves her grand-daughter, love redeems her, allows her to grow and helps her escape from the suppressing Brownfield, she redeems.

Grange learns another important lesson that forgiveness is essential to move on toward redemption of the self. Forgiving instead of fearing the white people helps in the healing process. The emancipation of women is complete when Grange nurtures Ruth and defends her independence at the cost of his life. Grange is redeemed when he accepts his culpability and regrets for the wrong he had done to his wife and his son, Brownfield. Grange's life is an atonement of his redeemable sins.

Brownfield is deprived and incapable of determining the meaning and purpose of life. Brownfield is more aggressive and abusive than his father because he is marginalized and deprived by his own father. He feels equally powerless and inept to determine his future. Grange Copeland's constrained life has influence over his family. It limits the possibility of a meaningful existence for Margaret and Brownfield. Like Grange, he commits dreadful sins against the people he is supposed to love and also commits a violent and despicable murder. He justifies his behaviour towards his family by thinking that his father has reacted in the same pattern under the sharecropping system. Cochran observes, "Walker intimates that both Grange and Brownfield abuse their wives in order to feel less subjugated themselves" (83).

Grange Copeland's three lives signify the transitional stages where he realizes, repents, changes and grows. Grange feels responsible for the horrific life his family lead and he shares the culpability. More than the pain and humiliation that he personally suffers, he is wounded by the contemptible and pathetic life his family leads. When Grange has no hope of revival from this enslaved state, all his guilt is passed on to his wife and son. His life in the first phase is under a domineering and dehumanizing socio-economic sharecropping system. His desperation about the persistent enslavement to the whites and his failure to fight against such a system drives him to torment and desertion of his family. His legacy of struggle and failure, hate and violence is passed onto his son.

Walker believes that a journey leads to self-discovery and hence Copeland's journey to the North aggravates his hatred for white men. His accidental meeting of a pregnant woman deserted by a soldier gives him the feeling of empathy for the white people for the first time ever. The incident makes him recognize the deeper part of himself and he feels a sense of freedom from his life of subservience. He is rid of the fear for the whites and he begins to prove his fearlessness by fighting and shouting slogans against the whites. He gets the feeling that no force can control him or his race unless he believes in the possibility. He frees himself from the thought that the white men control his life.

When again he moves back to the South, he begins reclaiming his life. He mellows and tries to atone for his past sins. Love moves him towards redemption and inward peace pervades him when he accepts his unjust treatment to his family. He regains his selfhood and manhood when he acknowledges his guilt and decides to direct his life towards constructive purpose. His repentance for the brutality to which he subjected his wife and his denial of protection to Margaret and Brownfield is compensated by his efforts to create a peaceful and protected life to Ruth, his granddaughter. From a man of violence, he transforms into a man of composed nature. Through Grange Copeland, Walker explicates the possibility of change in an individual in an oppressive society.

Walker's men are capable of changing from their negative images. Though the men indulge in vicious activities to compensate for the losses, there is absolute transformation which gives them the new identity with positive qualities. Copeland's transformation from his "first life" to the "third life" is phenomenal and it occurs through the process of realization and repentance of his acts.

The Color Purple focuses on movement of Celie's and Albert towards such wholeness. As Marc-A Christophe opines, "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a song of joy

and triumph: triumph of one woman's struggle against racism, sexism and social determinism to ultimately blossom into the wholeness of her being" (66). When Celie has achieved her own identity, she is in harmony with the natural world, and her last letter is addressed not merely to God, but to the entire "Creation." Celie emerges from silence into language which claims her autonomy; she emerges whole. "Celie , in *The Color Purple*, leads a life so restricted as to preclude empowering visions of an alternate reality until Shug Avery becomes a presence in her life" (Walker, Nancy 127).

Celie's redemption of self becomes possible only through her connection with the other women characters that have gone through the process of self-reclamation. Her life is quilted by the various women as Shug, Sofia and her own sister Nettie. Sisterhood connects her with other women as she herself is like a "messed up curtain" which needs to be sewn in layers. The quilt which she makes with Sofia is a metaphor of Celie's redemption. She battles against sexism and racism and regenerates from complete dissoluteness and unwholesomeness to wholeness. Walker expresses the opinion that the women should realize that the entire black community's outlook towards women needs to be revised. The camaraderie of sisterhood helps the women to help each other and re-define black womanhood. Shug, the woman who has already realized her identity through her career as a blues singer, helps Celie and Mary Agnes to find their individual sparks of creativity and expose it to the world.

Celie's empowerment would not be complete if Albert has not transformed to such an extent as to accept Celie as his equal, as his wife, as a woman with whom he could share his thoughts and emotions. Shug's sisterly love transforms Celie, makes her understand her body, mind and soul and prepares her to retaliate, get angry, and to rebel against brutality instead of submitting passively which is a step towards reclamation. Such an anger expressed makes

Albert realize that though Celie may be ugly, she may be pore, but she is not a "nothing." (186). She is a woman, a black woman and a human being who deserves respect and self-esteem. And when she leaves him, it is a revolutionary step since it leads both to the self-realization of Celie and to his regret for the shameful way he has treated her. He regrets and gets redeemed from guilt only when he 'rights' the wrong he has done to his wife. He wishes to marry her again and treat her right. He listens to her and they both "make idle conversation" (*CP* 258) and he treats her as his equal.

Celie's self-expression gives her economic independence. Shug helps her to discover her creativity and eventually this gives her the courage not to seek Albert's help and be in servitude to him. Sofia's boldness and her love makes Harpo change traditional gender roles the way he feels comfortable. This reversal makes them live harmony and love.

Walker insists on the possibility of black woman's empowerment through a community of sisters. She liberates herself, she comes to value herself through the sensuous bond she shares with her husband's mistress, her appreciation of her sister-in-law Sophie's resistant spirit and the letters from her sister Nettie which the husband had hidden from her many years. In Walker's novels, women emancipate themselves through literature –mental, physical and spiritual emancipation happens through letters in *The Color Purple*. Celie experiences a spiritual coming of age, a freedom from oppression, through sisterly bonding. The intimate friendship between Celie and Shug and the sisterly ties between Celie and Nettie sustains her through the period of transition from her husband. Both the sisters preserved their love though the long period of rift which Mr.____ creates to destroy the closeness between them. The blues singer Shug reveals sensualities that play a vital role in awakening Celie and moving her towards a greater understanding of self. She opens the door to the spiritual world and provides opportunities for the social and psychological growth of the

individual. She initiates Celie in to the process of learning to live and finding her own identity.

Among the Black women writers who are reluctant to expose black males' need for transformation, Walker reveals the major role that black men play in the oppression of black women. She feels that this deficiency has to be rectified in order to emancipate women. She insists on the need for recuperation to stop the victimization of women for the dehumanization men suffer under the white men.

It is important that men treat their women with dignity and allow them the freedom for which they as black men crusade against the white men. She wishes that the precarious situation would end and men would stop inflicting the same pain on their women. The situation should not be exacerbated because only when black men and women live in harmony and peace, would they be able to reclaim their rights in the white society. The men should empathize with black women's suffering due to sexism and should acknowledge women's struggle. Walker emphasizes that as long as the black men levy the same oppression on the women of their race and as long as women remain passive without retaliating the wrong done to them, the 'dream' of liberation will not come true.

Celie's growth from passivity to self-actualization is possible because the courage and the impetus to grow are within her. These qualities eventually become the means of her revitalization and re-humanization. Celie learns to love people and the world around her only after she learns to live and respect herself. Walker expresses the belief that one can achieve 'wholeness' when reconciling with one's past. Once Celie finds her rightful place in her community, she helps others like Albert and Mary Agnes to redeem the self. Love is completely absent in Celie's life until Shug comes. On her arrival, a surge of love fills her life and redeems her. Her sisterly bonding with the women around her empowers her and allows

her to survive "whole". Nettie has gifted Celie the ability to read and write apart from the unconditional love. These women offer her the strength to redeem her selfhood. Walker explores the development of the black female self through the protagonist Celie as she grows toward sisterhood. "Walker, however, sees the possibility of empowerment for black women if they create a community of sisters which can alter the present-day unnatural definitions of woman and man" (Pryse and Spillers 243).

In *The Temple of My Familiar*, Walker tries to connect herself to the past through storytelling. She believes that the individual has to discover and know about his past, remember it and tell reveal it to others. Only in telling the stories do they attain redeemption. Lissie is able to remember "everything" and is able to resist the gender and the racial oppression through storytelling. She tries to liberate herself through remembering and retelling the stories but not through violence. Walker's characters get liberated through the magical redemptive power of narration.

Lissie's contentment in living her life proves her existence and resistance to white patriarchy. She is successful at living a satisfactory life not trapping herself in thoughts of being superior or inferior to others. Walker proposes that even though the struggle for liberation may not be over, the pleasure of living can be found within oneself and within one's relationships with the environment and fellow beings and in the satisfaction of participating in the march of existence. Her own acknowledgement at the end of the novel supports this idea: "I thank the Universe for my participation in Existence. It is a pleasure to have always been present" (*TMF*).

Lissie's stories impact Suwelo enough for him to understand Fanny's discovery of self. He decides that "we must, all of us, turn toward whatever it is that we do want, in our lives, in our loves, on the planet, and whatever we don't want, just have sense enough to

leave alone" (*TMF* 279). Storytelling heals the wounds and redeems. As an artist, Walker is dedicated to trying to transforming the minds and hearts of people and tells magical stories that promote social change. Each character in the novel either remembers past lives or learns the significance of remembering their past lives. Fanny and Arveyda are prodigies of the spirit. Fanny remembers past lives so clearly that she often does not realize when she is in the real world, and she frequently "falls in love with spirits" (*TMF* 182). Among the characters, Lissie, Arveyda and Fanny achieve an awareness of their place in existence.

Lissie is one who remembers everything. She recalls her incarnations at the beginning of human history. Miss Lissie manages to change Suwelo's perspective of life and women when she tells him about her lives in the pre-historic times. As David Nicholson opines, "Walker's theme appears to be the difficulty of love, the pain men and women must pass through to find themselves and each other, for each of these couples must confront and overcome some internal crisis" (3). Carlotta goes through pain when she has endured the hurt of learning that her husband, Arveyda is in love with her mother, Zede. Through Zede's revelation, she realizes that she shares Miss Lissie's matriarchal roots and also the history of pain produced by man's jealousy of woman and his resulting need to dethrone her. Carlotta gets massages from Fanny when she wanted to relieve herself from her broken marriage. When Suwelo reveals to Carlotta his family's past, Carlotta reveals to him her family's present. Past or remembrance of the ancestors in the case of Suwelo and Carlotta help them to realize their self and prepare them toward living in harmony with their partners. Knowing their past and telling the stories heals their wounded self and redeems them.

Walker is alarmed about the way the world is strolling toward destruction. She is concerned about the planet and about the redemption of the earth. She creates cognizance among people on the inevitability to live in communion with nature. Her anxiety to save the earth from destructive forces makes her to write about her encounter with the Universal

Grandmother, a large tree. The Grandmother advises against interplanetary travel, tells her about the life-forms from outer space that fled to earth and "hid in everything" (*NTOH* 213). She preaches about integrity and oneness of life. Interplanetary travel will cause the loss of integrity. Yolo undergoes a parallel journey to Hawaii and returns home with important lessons from the natives on how to honour the indigenous culture and the ancestral food which were uncontaminated by white pollutants as sugar, tobacco and coffee. Both Kate and Yolo, with their respective experiences finally plans to live together making resolutions for the future, purged of the earlier misconceptions.

Kate, the main protagonist, is fearful of aging and is unhappy about the religious preaching that she hears. She dreams of rivers until she is on explorative journeys to real rivers—the Colorado and the Amazon. On this voyage, Kate regurgitates all the words from her life, all her memories of past marriages, then returns home to her blue house and male lover, African-American artist Yolo, determined to live as a virgin so that she can continue her spiritual explorations. Then she navigates down the Amazon with a group of seekers who share all have their experiences to share about rape, abuse, addiction as they seek to encounter the Grandmother and drink her healing medicine. Kate has to take harsh purgatives until the guide determines that she is ready to encounter the Universal Grandmother.

Kate acknowledges the existence of Mother Earth and her healing power. Cleansing the body through intake of Grandmother Medicine becomes essential for the journeyer. Regurgitation symbolically denotes the throwing-up of the bitter words, hurt and experiences through her marriage with her first husband and her other marriages. Kate finds that the herb allows her to reveal her innermost secrets and puts her in touch with the elders. Her fear about senile decay and aging is healed by nature when she understands the necessity of living in harmony with nature. Yolo's idea to travel makes him feel that the parting from Kate can

be made up he goes on a parallel journey. So Yolo spends a vacation in Hawaii, and there his encounter with the Hawaiian transsexual Polynesian shaman or Mahu charges him with the mission of giving up addictive substances which to him is smoking. Yolo promises to give it up smoking.

Kate's journey to the Colorado ends her search for enlightenment. It resolves the perplexities of her life and also makes her understand that she is the 'Grandmother' she has been searching for. She accepts the truth that ageing process is an integral part of the progression of human life. She understands that aging and death are as inevitable as breath. Kate finds growing intimacy among a group of disparate souls who unburden themselves of their pasts under the influence of Yagé, a South American medicinal herb. Kate in her restlessness in finding a new sense of meaning in her life, leaves Yolo and goes on a journey advised by a Shaman. It gives her a transformative experience. She undergoes a difficult process of purging which consists of continuous retching and intense diarrhoea. Walker expresses her reverence towards for healing plants, serpents, moths and bats. Kate spends her time with people who have experienced pain or injustice of some kind: rape, imprisonment, incest, bulimia, drug addiction. Walker asserts in a firm black and female perspective that the time is ripe to reassess and realign the self and redeem the world which is steeped in trouble.

As Yolo describes her, Kate is a New Age woman who embarks on a journey on the Colorado. Her journey with strangers helps her to distance herself from the knowledge she already has and concentrate more on her own thoughts. It provides her the opportunity to make connections with Mother Earth which is an important step towards spiritual transcendence and enlightenment. Kate helps the other journeyers to transform themselves into newer human beings who are purged off their sins and are finally redeemed. Yolo also undergoes his spiritual transformation through his valuable experiences with the Mahu of

Hawaii. He learns about the importance and reverence placed upon land and nature by the Hawaiian people.

Walker's novels are about the journey of black women toward wholeness. The female characters grow as they progress from positions of vulnerability to positions of relative strength. That the characters' perception of their past which is crucial to their personal transformation in the present and the possibility of change in the future, is very much stressed by Walker and considered for attaining wholeness. Walker's male characters achieve psychological health and wholeness only when they are able to acknowledge women's pains and their role in it.

Her works comprise of individuals who are in search of self-expression leading to self-empowerment. Walker, in her personal life, moved towards wholeness from an eight-year-old girl with a scar in her right eye to an young teenager faced with an early abortion, beset with suicidal thoughts, and then to life as an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement and marriage to a white Jew, search for identity in her mother's gardens, her broadening vision, her womanistic attitudes and her personal growth as a poet and as a writer who speaks of the emergent woman in her.

The researcher traces a pattern of redemption in Walker's works starting from the redemption through forgiveness and love in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* to redemption through sisterhood and self-expression in *The Color Purple*, redemption through remembrance of the past in *The Temple of My Familiar* and finally redemption through spiritually in *Now is the Time to Open Our Heart*. The female characters in the novels have evolved from intimidated and passive women to rebellious emancipated women and then to self-realized spiritual women at peace with themselves and the world.

In the novels under study, the author is seen to progress from the social, intellectual and emotional planes towards spirituality, her works reflecting her life-stages from youth to middle age. As seen earlier, writing, a form of self-expression and self-exploration has cleansing and healing properties for the author, and, in consequence, for the reader. Walker finds ways of redemption gradually; she believes that forgiveness, love, sisterhood and remembrance of the past have the power to redeem women from oppression. The mothers and grandmothers of black women have kept the spark of creativity alive, and the women of today have to carry on the tradition. To Walker, who feels that it is only through self-expression that artists are redeemed, "Writing is the art or craft of survival." Her exemplary works displays the phenomenal growth and success she has achieved as a black women writer.

Walker's conviction is that if women are to be emancipated, it is important that men should undergo transformation. Walker's men mellow and transform from violent and cruel individuals to mature human beings who understand that women should be given their rightful place. Suwelo grows along with Carlotta-- he takes the initiative to discover his past which Miss Lissie thinks a prerequisite for his transformation. Arveyda helps his female counterpart to discover her past and to redeem her self. Fanny and Arveyda make themselves fit for a life together. Like Albert proves himself capable of living with Celie through a process of inner transformation.

Walker's novels culminate in the redemption of protagonists. Each major character achieves redemption in his or her own way, given differences in circumstances and social environments. Ruth is saved by the redemptive power of her grandfather's love. Celie regains her identity and dignity through the redemptive power of sisterhood. Suwelo and Fanny, and Arveyda and Carlotta transform into compatible couples whose lives are harmonized by their

'rememory', retelling and remembrance of their past. Kate and Yolo through their parallel journeys, discover their selfhood and attain spiritual redemption. Walker recapitulates the tormenting effects of slavery, violence and discrimination confronted by the black women in the history of African Americans, but always ends her novels with a note of affirmation and hope for the future of the black woman community. Walker's world-view is profoundly optimistic; she believes in the possibility of a progressive, healthy change in self and in society. Her novels end on a note of unprecedented hope despite the undercurrents of deep and abiding racism and discrimination prevalent in the setting. Their reflection of repression and strong message of redemption have a universal appeal and assures their relevance to the victims of oppression throughout the world.

Scope for Future Study

Alice Walker's literary works guarantees scope for extensive research as she is a living author writing actively. Marginalization and Victimization is a perpetual field of research as people throughout the world are marginalized and discriminated on the basis of race, religion, sex, class and caste. There are writers who are equally concerned and serious about the issues of the people of their region, religion, race, gender and social status as Alice Walker. Their works reflect the plight of their people with the motif of relieving them from the oppressed state. A comparative study of Dalit literature and African American literature can be made by comparing Alice Walker with distinguished Dalit women novelists as Sivakami, Bama, Baby Kamble and other. Alice Walker's works can be compared to any literary work that depicts the persecution of ethnic minorities and the prejudices pervading a social system.

A study of Walker's use of narrative techniques such as the epistolary form and magic realism can be the subject for research. An analysis, from an womanist perspective, of her other works such as non-fiction prose, poetry, short stories and other novels can be made.

An eco-womanist analysis of Walker's vision of environmental issues as a resolution for 'survival wholeness' can be made. A comparative study of black heritage and folk tradition with the Indian heritage and folk tradition can be made. Research on the theme of redemption may also be may also be extended to all the entire novels of Walker.

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