

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Mentouri University, Constantine

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of English

Celie's Emancipation Process in Alice Walker's
The Color Purple

A dissertation submitted to the Department of English in partial fulfillment for the
Degree of Master in British and American studies

By

Miss BAGA Amira

Supervised by:

Mr. BOUGHENOUT Hamoudi

June 2010

Don't wait around for other people to be happy for you.

Any happiness you get you've got to make yourself.

ALICE WALKER

Acknowledgements

Above all, thanks to Almighty God who is my source of wisdom. All glory to Him for granting me the chance and the ability to successfully complete this study.

I would like to express my enduring gratitude to my supervisor Mr. BOUGHENOUT for his great help and precious advice.

I would like to thank also my dear parents who never doubted me and always provided me with unwavering moral and emotional support. Thanks to my brothers and sister, my nieces and nephews for their unconditional love.

Heartfelt thanks to all the teachers who trained me throughout my education.

I am thankful to my faithful friends and all those who supported me along my studies. Special recognition is due to my dearest friend Agsous Amina.

Sincere gratitude is hereby extended to the staff of CCF library: Hakim Bouchama, Fatiha Bekkar and Sonia Hamadouche who helped me in collecting many of the necessary documentation without which it would not be possible for me to complete this work.

Lastly, I would like to thank everybody who was important to the successful realization of this thesis, as well as expressing my apology that I could not mention them personally one by one.

Abstract

This study examines the protagonist's emancipation process in Alice Walker's epistolary novel The Color Purple. Walker does not limit herself in describing the sufferings of African American women but suggests to all women a path to follow in order to free themselves from the evils of patriarchy and sexism. Celie, the protagonist, is able to change her status of a sexually abused slave woman and free herself economically, physically and spiritually. Writing letters to her sister Nettie combined with a sisterhood relationship with her sister Nettie, stepdaughter Sofia and close friend Shug are the key elements in this emancipation process. Celie's relationship with these women as well as writing helps Celie to assert her female body, achieve spiritual freedom and gain economic freedom.

Résumé

Le présent travail vise à analyser le processus d'émancipation entrepris par l'héroïne du roman épistolaire d'Alice Walker The Color Purple. Walker ne se limite pas à décrire les souffrances de la femme afro-américaine mais suggère également une voie à suivre afin de se libérer des démons du patriarcat et du sexisme. Celie, l'héroïne du roman, est en mesure de changer son statut de femme esclave victime d'abus sexuels en une femme émancipée et totalement libérée. L'écriture, ainsi que la solidarité féminine apportée par Nettie, Shug et Sofia lui permettent d'assumer son corps de femme, de se libérer spirituellement et d'assurer par la suite son indépendance économique.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مسار التحرر الذي اتبعته بطلة الرواية الرسائلية للكاتبة الأفروأمريكية The Color Purple Alice Walker . لا تكتف Walker Alice بوصف معاناة المرأة الأفرو أمريكية بل تقترح أيضا منهاجا يمكن سلكه من أجل التخلص من النظام الأبوي و التحرش الجنسي . استطاعت سيلي بطلة الرواية من تغيير وضعيتها المزرية من امرأة عبيد متعدى عليها جنسيا إلى امرأة حرة و مستقلة. إن كتابة الرسائل إلى جانب التضامن النسوي المقدم من طرف Shug , Nettie , Sofia ساعدا Celie على تقبل جسدها الأنثوي ، من التحرر روحانيا و في الأخير تحقيق الاستقلال المادي.

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Introduction

Throughout the ages, women have always been part of literature. They have inspired many writers, whether dramatists, novelists, poets or essayists. Unfortunately, this representation often depicted women as the inferior gender, a passive object that could not survive on its own and that could do nothing for itself. Women, in literature, could only exist through the eyes, minds and lives of men but never for themselves. To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, in Le deuxième sexe, women are defined and differentiated in reference to man; he is the Subject, and the woman is the other.

Beautiful and obedient, they could never think on their own. They were obliged to occupy a secondary place in the males' world not because of their capacities but rather because of imposed cultural and social forces. This biased and false representation led to deny women their dignity and even worse their identity.

The history of patriarchy reveals a variety of injustices women suffered from. They represented, in a way, the oppressed class that had always been subject to men's domination through male self-interest and had been prevented from full development as human beings. Sexism, under patriarchy, was the norm that ruled gender relationships for men were in control of everything, they could work to keep women oppressed denying them equal power. Prevented from enjoying their basic rights, women thus were totally excluded from the social, political and economic life.

Fortunately, literature has a great power to transform and alter received ideas. Those who fought for the cause of women understood it. Writing with the purpose of changing people's pessimistic views about women, of achieving gender equalities and denouncing the injustices inflicted to women became the main goal for feminist

writers and activists. They aimed at creating a world, at least in literature, where women would be able to live as individuals.

Unfortunately in American history, this feminist contribution has been categorized, for quite a long time, as the struggle of white, middle-class, heterosexual and educated women. However, a look at the early years of American history reveals the enormous role that African American women writers played in the struggle for gender equality. They were strongly present in the Second Wave American women's movement and in the First One as well¹. Long before the 1960s and 1970s, African American women writers showed strong acts of resistance against structures of patriarchy and fought bravely for racial and class equality. Thus, it is not surprising that the early African American feminist writers were also abolitionists.

We have many black women writers who excelled in literature. Such authors are Maya Angelou, Deborah Gray-White, Harriet Jacobs, Maria Stewart, Melton McLaurin, Jaeda De Walt, Lyn Mikel Brown, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and many others. These black women writers often emphasize in their works the importance of regaining feminine entity, self-esteem, fulfilling self-realization and achieving sexual awareness. The concern of black women, the impact of racism and sexism as well as their impact on black women were the main themes of

¹ **First-wave feminism** refers to a period of [feminist](#) activity during the [nineteenth](#) and early twentieth century in the [United Kingdom](#) and the [United States](#). It focused on *de jure* (officially mandated) inequalities; primarily on gaining [women's suffrage](#) (the right to vote). The term *first-wave* was coined retroactively in the 1970s. The women's movement then, focusing as much on fighting *de facto* (unofficial) inequalities as *de jure* ones, acknowledged its predecessors by calling itself *second-wave feminism*. "First-wave feminism"

The second-wave feminism of the **Women's Movement**, **Feminist Movement**, or the **Women's Liberation Movement** in the United States refers to a period of [feminist](#) activity which began during the early 1960s and lasted throughout the late 1970s. It addressed a wide range of issues, unofficial (*de facto*) inequalities, official legal inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and, perhaps most controversially, [reproductive rights](#). It tried and failed to add [equal rights for women](#) to the [United States Constitution](#). Many feminists view the second-wave feminism era as ending with the intra-feminism disputes of the [Feminist Sex Wars](#), over issues such as sexuality and [pornography](#). "Second wave feminism"

these black writers. In their fiction, the female characters are able to change, to progress and excel in all aspects of life.

Alice Walker's epistolary novel, The Color Purple, is one of the best literary works that vividly depict the sufferings of African-American women from patriarchy, sexism and racism. The Color Purple does not only describe but even goes beyond that purpose. In fact, Alice Walker's true intention from writing this novel is not only to give voice to black women but also to provide them with a path to follow in order to emancipate and get their freedom. Walker shows us the evolution of her major character, Celie, from being a sexually abused child to a passive wife and finally to an emancipated woman.

In The Color Purple, the sense of hope even in despair is one of the most characteristics that impress the reader. Although Celie, the main character, suffers deeply from the effects of sexism and racism, she does not give up and even ends triumphant and victorious. Celie a black, poor and uneducated woman is able to free herself from the evils of patriarchy, so the question to be raised is how is that possible? What is the path that Celie follows in order to emancipate? In her life, Celie meets and interacts with women around her, a sisterhood relationship then develops between them. Can we say that this sisterhood is the key element in Celie's emancipation process? Moreover, Celie writes her thoughts and ideas, she expresses her emotions through letters; so what does the act of writing represent for Celie? Does writing play a role in her emancipation process? Celie, at the end of the novel, becomes a totally independent woman; she frees herself spiritually, physically and economically. So, how do sisterhood and writing help Celie in her emancipation process? The Color

Purple may be fiction, but it would be a very powerful and wonderful way to teach moral development as we see the main character Celie.

Since the novel is about a woman struggling to gain her independence, certain feminist theories such as the radical and socialist feminist theories² seem to be more appropriate to approach this novel as they can help to identify the reasons behind a female character's behaviour and development. Moreover, the protagonist of the novel expresses her thoughts, feelings and emotions through writing letters. She is an omniscient narrator; the reader is thus a keen direct observer of her mental development. In this case, a psychological approach seems to be necessary to understand the mental development of the main character, which is of utmost importance in her emancipation process. Therefore, by applying these approaches, answers shall be given to the basic questions raised previously.

The thesis underlying this paper assumes that Celie, the protagonist, is able to free herself through writing letters and with the help of women around. Thus, close attention is given to sisterhood, this magic and strong female relationship that gives Celie physical, spiritual and mental strength in order to get rid of males' oppression. Her sister Nettie, her stepdaughter Sofia and her close friend Shug are of great help and support in her emancipation. In addition, the central character, Celie, expresses herself through writing letters. Pouring her sufferings down into a paper is a therapy that enables her to survive and even to liberate herself. Therefore, in order to show that

² **Radical feminism** is a "current" within [feminism](#) that focuses on the theory of [patriarchy](#) as a [system of power](#) that organizes society into a complex of [relationships](#) based on an assumption of "male supremacy" used to oppress women. Radical feminism aims to challenge and to overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard [gender roles](#) and what they see as male oppression of women, and calls for a radical reordering of society. "Radical feminism"

Socialist feminism is a branch of [feminism](#) that focuses upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life and argues that [liberation](#) can only be achieved by working to end both the [economic](#) and [cultural](#) sources of women's [oppression](#) "Socialist feminism"

sisterhood and writing are key elements in Celie's emancipation process, the present work is divided into three main chapters.

Since Alice Walker is a black American woman who has experienced the evils of patriarchy, who used writing as an outlet to her traumatic experiences and who was able to emancipate and to become a well-known author; thus, the first chapter will be totally dedicated to her life, career, education and works. A detailed summary, then, has been deemed necessary for a better understanding of the events of the novel. Finally, the chapter will end with a compilation of the most interesting literary reviews of the novel.

The second chapter will be dedicated to sisterhood. A definition is first given then examples of women will be highlighted. After that, the importance of sisterhood in Celie's emancipation process will be shown by focusing the most important changes that happen to Celie due to female bonding. Sisterhood helps Celie to free herself physically, spiritually and to become economically independent.

The third chapter will consist in an analysis of the role of writing in Celie's emancipation process. After presenting a definition of the epistolary novel, Walker's choice of the form will be explained. Then, writing as therapy and its role in Celie's emancipation process will be analyzed.

What motivated this work is a personal interest in women's struggle for emancipation. As a female, I appreciate authors such as Alice Walker who are concerned with women's problems and sufferings. In this novel, a woman is able to free herself and change radically and that really fascinates me. Moreover, Alice

Walker's novel is an example of hope as it provides the reader with a sense of optimism that the reader can experience when reading the novel. More importantly, the novel offers a model of inspiration for women's emancipation.

Chapter I Alice Walker: The woman behind the novel

Introduction

Almost all of Walker's novels, short stories, essays, and poems focus on issues of civil rights, emphasizing especially the plight of black women, who suffer the dual oppression of racism and sexism. Walker's writings are motivated by her conviction that literature, while it may not effect swift political and social change, can announce the truths of human suffering and help set the world straight. An admirer of the work of black women authors of earlier generations, especially Zora Neale Hurston, Walker campaigned to bring Hurston's work, which was out of print and neglected by literary scholars, back to popular and critical recognition. She launched a Hurston revival with "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," an influential article in Ms., and the editing of a collection of Hurston's works.

Like Zora Neale Hurston, Walker has desired most of all in her writing to depict the inner strengths of black women, who— in spite of the great odds against them— manage to survive and blossom spiritually.

1.1 - Family background, Education and Career

Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth and youngest child of Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker and Willie Lee Walker. Her parents were poor sharecroppers. She grew up in an environment of violent racism that, along with her family's poverty, left a permanent impression on her writing.

In the summer of 1952, Alice Walker was blinded in her right eye by a BB gun pellet while playing "cowboys and Indians" with her brother. She suffered permanent

eye damage and slight facial disfigurement. When she was 14, her brother Bill had the cataract removed by a Boston doctor, but her vision in that eye never returned.

After graduating from high school in 1961, as the school's valedictorian and prom queen, Walker entered Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, on a scholarship. At Spelman, she participated in civil rights demonstrations. She was invited to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s home in 1962 at the end of her freshman year; in recognition of another invitation she had received to attend the Youth World Peace Festival in Helsinki, Finland. She attended the conference and then traveled throughout Europe over the summer. In August 1963 Walker participated in "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," where she heard King's "I Have A Dream" speech.

After two years at Spelman, Walker received a scholarship to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, which she accepted. She became one of very few young blacks to attend the prestigious school. Walker received mentoring from poet Muriel Ruykeyser and writer Jane Cooper. Her mentors helped stimulate her interest and talent in writing, inspiring her to write poems that eventually appeared in her first volume of poetry, Once (1968).

By her senior year, Walker was suffering from extreme depression, most likely related to her having become pregnant. She considered committing suicide and at times kept a razor blade under her pillow. She also wrote several volumes of poetry in efforts to explain her feelings. With a friend's help, she procured a safe abortion. While recovering, Walker wrote a short story aptly titled "To Hell With Dying." Ruykeyser sent the story to publishers as well as to poet Langston Hughes. The story was published, and Walker received a handwritten note of encouragement from Hughes.

Always an activist, she participated in the civil rights movement following her graduation in 1965. She first went door-to-door in Georgia and encouraged voter registration, but she soon moved to New York City and worked in the city's welfare department. While there, she won a coveted writing fellowship to the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference.

In the summer of 1966, she returned to Mississippi, where she met a Jewish civil rights law student named Mel Leventhal. They soon married and moved back to Mississippi. They were probably the first inter-racial couple in Mississippi and, as a result, had to deal with constant streams of violence and murderous threats from the Ku Klux Klan. Alice again got pregnant (which saved Leventhal from the Vietnam draft) but sadly lost the child.

Even while pursuing civil rights, Alice found time to write. Her essay "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" won first place in the annual essay contest of The American Scholar. Encouraged by this award, she applied for and won a writing fellowship to the prestigious MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

Walker subsequently accepted a teaching position at Jackson State University. While there she published *Once*. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, was published the same week that her daughter Rebecca Grant was born. The novel received great literary praise. It also received criticism from many African-American critics, who claimed that her book dealt too harshly with the black male characters. Walker disputed such claims, but her subsequent writing continued to dramatize the oppression of women.

Walker's career took off when she moved from Tougaloo College and accepted a fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute. In 1972, she accepted a teaching position at

Wellesley College, where she created one of the first women's studies courses in the nation, a women's literature course. In 1976 she published her second novel, *Meridian*, which chronicles a young woman's struggles during the civil rights movement.

Around the same time, she divorced Leventhal. Reflecting on the divorce in 2000, her daughter Rebecca published a frank memoir criticizing the self-absorption of both of her parents at that time.

Meridian received such acclaim that Walker accepted a Guggenheim Fellowship to concentrate full-time on her writing. She moved to San Francisco, and in California she fell in love with Robert Allen, the editor of *Black Scholar*. They moved to a home in Mendocino, where she wrote full-time and soon published her second book of short stories, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*.

In 1982 she completed *The Color Purple*, an epistolary novel about the life of a poor black woman named Celie in a rural Georgia community near the town of Eatonton, where Alice Walker, the author of the novel, was born. For this book, easily her most popular novel, Walker won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983 and the American Book Award. *The Color Purple* was soon made into a motion picture produced by Quincy Jones and directed by Steven Spielberg. When the film premiered in her hometown of Eatonton, Walker received a parade in her honor. Her sister Ruth even created The Color Purple Foundation to promote charitable work for education.

In 1984 Walker published her third volume of poetry, *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful*. In 1988, her second book of essays, *Living By the Word*, was published, and in 1989 she published her epic novel *The Temple of My Familiar*.

A later novel, The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult (1996), deals with her budding realization that she might be bisexual. Later, in a 2006 interview with The Guardian, Walker discussed her affair with Tracy Chapman in the mid-1990s, describing it as “delicious and lovely and wonderful...but [it was] not anybody’s business but ours.” (The Gardian)

Walker soon became more politically active in her writings. Her nonfiction book Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer’s Activism (1997) contains many essays inspired by her political activism. This includes activities in the civil rights movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the environmental movement, the women’s movement, and the movement to protect indigenous peoples.

In 1998, Walker published By the Light of My Father’s Smile, which examines the connections between sexuality and spirituality. The story is a multi-narrated account of several generations and explores the relationships of fathers and daughters. Her later work has been accused of being self-indulgent and vapid. In 2004, her novel Now Is The Time To Open Your Heart, received a negative review from New York Times critic Michiko Kakutani who declared: “If this novel did not boast the name of Alice Walker, who won acclaim some two decades ago with The Color Purple, it’s hard to imagine how it could have been published... [it is] a remarkably awful compendium of inanities.” Other critics maintain that while she probably will be remembered mainly for her earlier works, Walker’s writing is still pertinent and fresh. Her work still powerfully articulates many contemporary issues involving gender and race relations in the United States.

1.2 - Plot Summary

Celie is fourteen years old when she writes her first letter to God. While her sick mother goes to see the doctor, her father, Fonso, rapes her saying “You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't” (Walker 3) Soon after, Celie’s mother dies and Fonso rapes Celie more and more often. Her father impregnates her twice and takes away the children after they are born. Celie is convinced that he has taken the children into the woods and killed them, but in reality, he has sold them. Fonso eventually remarries, and to get rid of Celie, he marries her to a man described as Mr. _____.

For Celie, life with Mr._____ is not better than life with her father. Mr. _____ believes that the best way to keep a woman in her place is to beat her. Thus, he beats Celie very often and never loves her. He wants a wife simply because he needs someone to take care of him and of his wild children. Mr._____ is in love with a blues singer, Shug Avery, who refuses to marry him. Shug is a well-known singer who travels around the country singing in bars.

Celie's sister Nettie, the only person that Celie truly loves, escapes from home and comes to live with Celie and Mr. _____. Nettie is very beautiful, and Mr. _____ finds her very attractive. He seduces her many times, but she simply ignores him. Mr. _____ realizes that Nettie keeps rejecting him; he becomes very angry and kicks Nettie out of his house. Before leaving, Nettie and Celie take the oath to write to each other.

Nettie keeps her promise and writes to Celie, but Mr. _____ intercepts the letters before Celie can see them. Celie, ignorant of the letters, believes that Nettie must be dead since she has not written. Celie has absolutely no will to live anymore. She goes on, day to day, simply taking all of the abuse that Mr. _____ gives her and never says a word or protest.

Shug Avery, Mr. _____'s true love, becomes very ill. She has nowhere to go, so she comes to stay with Mr. _____. Celie feeds Shug and nurses her and finds herself falling in love with Shug. The two women become close to each other.

One day Shug goes to get the mail and finds a letter from Nettie to Celie before Mr. _____ has a chance to see it. She shows it to Celie, who is overjoyed to find that her sister is alive. Shug and Celie then search through Mr. _____'s bedroom and find a whole stack of letters that Nettie has written to Celie. Nettie writes that she has joined a Christian missionary group that has gone to Africa to Christianize the natives. The missionary group is led by a minister and his wife who have two adopted children. Nettie can tell by looking at them that they are Celie's. Nettie also writes that the man who they thought was their father actually was not. Their real father died at an early age and they moved in with another family. That means that Celie's two children were not born out of incest. Celie is incredibly happy to learn that her sister and her two children are still alive, but she is also fiercely angry with Mr. _____ for keeping this news from her. This anger finally gives her the courage to stand up to Mr. _____. When Mr. _____ attempts to beat Celie she threatens him with a knife. Then she decides to leave Mr. _____ and move with Shug to Memphis. Mr. _____ says that Celie will leave over his dead body, and Celie responds with surprising authority. "It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need."(Walker 207) After this statement Mr. _____ leaves Celie alone.

In Memphis, Celie starts a new business sewing pants. With the help of Shug she becomes very successful, and she also learns how to love. Men have beaten Celie throughout her life, and women are the only people that she is able to feel love for.

Even when Shug leaves her for a nineteen-year-old boy named Germaine, Celie does not stop loving her.

Fonso, the man who claimed to be Celie's father, dies and leaves Celie the house. Celie moves in and continues her pants-making business there. Celie eventually becomes friends with Mr. _____, who has changed a great deal since Celie's departure. He has learned a great deal about life and love since Celie left him, and he states what he has learned near the end of the novel: "I start to wonder why us need love. Why us suffer. Why us black. Why us men and women. Where do children really come from. It didn't take long to realize I didn't hardly know nothing...The more I wonder, he say, the more I love." (Walker 289)

Celie is developing a friendship with Mr. _____, but she can never love a man again and believes that love will never be back in her life. But then her sister Nettie returns from Africa with her two children. The family is reunited, and Celie feels a happiness and love that she has never before experienced. Celie's final letter to God states that, despite her old age, "I think this the youngest us ever felt." (Walker 295)

1.3 - Literary critics

When published, The Color Purple received great praise and censure from black and white, male and female reviewers, literary critics, and general readers.

Andrea Ford says in the Detroit Free Press, "Walker has succeeded in creating a jewel of a novel."(Ford 35) Peter S. Prescott joins Ford's opinion declaring in a *Newsweek* review "I want to say, that The Color Purple is an American novel of permanent importance, that rare sort of book which diversion in the fields of dread." (Prescott 676) He adds further that The Color Purple places its author amongst great American writers such as William Faulkner. Thadious M. Davis, in his Dictionary of

Literary Biography essay, comments: "Walker writes best of the social and personal drama in the lives of familiar people who struggle for survival of self in hostile environments. She has expressed a special concern with exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumph of black women." (Thadious 143)

David Guy's commentary on The Color Purple in the Washington Post Book World includes this evaluation: "Accepting themselves for what they are, the women [in the novel] are able to extricate themselves from oppression; they leave their men, find useful work to support themselves." (Guy 7)

However, many other critics reject the novel and feel that it should not be given all that importance. They criticize Walker for advancing a utopian story with an unreal plot. Others consider the novel a pure attack against black males who are given a wrong, negative and totally misleading image. Robert Towers censures Walker for the creation of an unrealistic plot (Towers 36). Philip Royster blames Walker for "[the] depiction of violent black men who physically and psychologically abuse their wives and children... [and for the] depiction of lesbianism." (Royster 374)

Charles Larson, in his Detroit News Review of The Color Purple, points out: "I wouldn't go as far as to say that all the male characters [in the novel] are villains, but the truth is fairly close to that." (Larson 35) Larson, however, notes that by the end of the novel, "several of [Walker's] masculine characters have reformed." (Larson 35)

Conclusion

Alice Walker is an American novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist and activist. A significant feature of Alice Walker's writing is her openness to exposing personal experiences. Many connections can be made between Walker's own life and her characters, and her emotional intimacy with her creations breathes life into her work for each new reader. Moreover, what is striking about Alice Walker is that writing was for her a refuge that helped her to overcome her traumatic experiences. After her eye accident, after her abortion, when she divorced, writing was her therapy. Alice Walker's creative vision is rooted in the economic hardship, racial terrorism, and folk wisdom of African American life and culture, particularly in the rural South.

Chapter II Sisterhood and its role in Celie's emancipation process

Introduction

In The Color Purple, women bonding and sisterhood play an important role in Celie's emancipation process. Ranging from her sister Nettie to her daughter in law Sofia and to her husband's mistress Shug, Celie is able to transform her life and free herself both physically and spiritually with the help of these women.

Female ties take many forms: some are motherly or sisterly, some are in the form of mentor and pupil, some are sexual, and some are simply friendships. Sofia claims that her ability to fight comes from her strong relationships with her sisters. Nettie's relationship with Celie anchors her through years of living in the unfamiliar culture of Africa. Samuel notes that the strong relationships among Olinka women are the only thing that makes polygamy bearable for them. Most important, Celie's ties to Shug bring about Celie's gradual redemption and her attainment of a sense of self.

In her writings, Walker always emphasizes the importance of sisterhood in black women's emancipation. She sees the possibility of empowerment for black women if they create a community of sisters that can alter the present-day unnatural definitions of woman and man.

Smith finds that the unifying bond between black women is through their friendships, their love, and their shared oppression that they collectively gain the strength to separate themselves from the bondage of their past and piece together a free and equal existence for themselves and for those they love (Smith 182).

Men tend to understand sisterhood as a form of rejection and retaliation by women against men. Actually, sisterhood has to do more with spiritual, physical and

material help that women provide to each other. It is a way to clear away the obstacles for the emancipation and empowering of women.

As far as the novel is concerned, this common help between women tends to be incomprehensible by men. Samuel, for instance, is confused “because to him, since the women [of Olinka] are friends and will do anything for one another ... Because the women share a husband but the husband does not share their friendship, it makes Samuel uneasy. It is confusing.” (Walker 141) Mr. _____ also confesses to Celie that he never understood how Celie and Shug got along so well together; this shows that sisterhood is something special to women that only women can understand and share.

2.1 - Sisterhood between Celie and Nettie

In the novel, we have many examples of sisterhood that link women with each other. The very first signs of sisterhood can be seen in Celie and Nettie. The two sisters live within a family where affection is totally absent. With a violent rapist father and a sick mother, Nettie is able to provide Celie with moral comfort. When Nettie notices that Celie is frequently beaten by her husband, she urges her to fight him. She also urges her to fight against Mr.____’s children by showing them a good lesson and letting them know “who is the upper hand.” (Walker 25)

Since Nettie has accepted formal education, she is deeply influenced by her teacher, Miss Beasley, who has her own independent ideas and rebellious consciousness, which helps Nettie to shape her own consciousness and ideas. To Celie, Nettie has always been like a teacher. She helps her sister with reading, spelling and everything she thinks Celie needs to know. No matter in what kind of situation, Nettie never gives up any opportunity to inform Celie what is going on in the world. In the short period of staying in Albert’s house with Celie, Nettie witnesses his benighted

brutality and knows clearly that Celie is hopeless if she keeps her submissiveness. So she tries hard to exert every possible way to teach and enlighten Celie. For example, she writes words on some cards and sticks the cards to the corresponding places in order to keep Celie from being an illiterate. This ability to read and write taught by Nettie enables Celie to pour out her bitterness to the absent God. Through writing, Celie feels a little consolatory in the desperate plight when Nettie is absent. That also enables Celie to read Nettie's letters from Africa, which broadens Celie's mind: as Nettie tells her sister that The Bible says God is not white, but a black, because Jesus Christ's hair is as curl as their black's. The first human in the world is not white, but a black. The Africans had, at one time, a more advanced civilization than the Europeans. Such knowledge gives a great shock to Celie's previous concept, forces her to be out of the moral value by the white people she has been educated from her childhood and awakes her ethical pride and self-consciousness. However, to Celie, the most important and exciting news from Nettie is about her two children. From Nettie's letter, Celie gets to know for the first time that her two children, who she has lost when they are just born, now stay with Nettie in Africa, and that they are living a happy life with Nettie and are receiving good education. The good news of the two children provides Celie, a poor mother, with a strong spiritual strength and sustains her to survive in the especially hard time. Moreover, Nettie is always the hope in Celie's life. Celie regards Nettie as the perfect model of a girl. She describes her to Shug: "Smart as anything. Read the newspapers when she was little more than talking. Did figures like they was nothing. Talked real well too. And sweet. There never was a sweeter girl. Eyes just brimming over with it." (Walker 101) With this excellent sister in heart, Celie senses a little comfort in this harsh world. Therefore, although Celie has not

heard from Nettie for years, she cherishes with the hope that Nettie is still alive and they can meet again someday.

Celie, in her turn, is of great help and support to Nettie. In absence of parental affection, Celie plays not only the role of a sister but also the role of a substitute mother. Celie offers herself to her stepfather preventing thus Nettie from being abused. When the two sisters are later separated from each other, this affectionate sisterhood continues to tie both sisters providing them a hope of survival during the harshest living moments of their existence.

2.2 -Sisterhood between Celie and Sofia

Sofia Butler, Celie's step-son's wife, is another woman who becomes a good model for Celie. She is a fat woman with big legs. She grows up in a family of men and learns that only by fighting can she survive. "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." (Walker 38) Unlike Sofia, Celie does not fight and keeps silent when she suffers from family violence. She even takes it for granted that men are superior to women. However, Sofia refuses to accept this unfair social rule. She, with her determination, will not be humbled by anyone in her life, whether they are black or white. She does not hesitate to say "hell no" to the mayor's wife's offer that Sofia goes to work as her maid, and knocks the mayor down after he slapped her. Sofia, with her rebellious spirit, exerts a critical effect on Celie's awakening.

Celie's first meeting with Sofia happens when Sofia comes to ask Albert's permission of her marriage to Harpo. At first sight, Celie is surprised by Sofia's strong and confident appearance: "She not quite as tall as Harpo but much bigger, and strong and ruddy looking, like her mama brought her up on pork." (Walker 30) When Albert

rejects their request and even insults Sofia about her pregnancy, to Celie's astonishment, Sofia does not submit to him. She says to Harpo: "Naw, Harpo stay here. When you free, me and the baby be waiting" (Walker 38) Sofia's bravery moves Celie greatly. Sofia is an alien who is absolutely contradictory to the woman image Celie is familiar with. Sofia gets married to Harpo regardless of their parents' objection. In the beginning, the couple lives a harmonious life. They share the housework and enjoy their familial happiness. "She making some sheets. He take the baby, give it a kiss, chuck it under the chin." (Walker 33) Sofia keeps her independent characteristics: "if she talking when Harpo and Mr._ come in the room, she keep right on. If they ast where something at. She say she don't know. Keep talking." (Walker 34) But this kind of relationship between wife and husband is not allowed in the male-dominated social system. Albert cannot tolerate Sofia's thinking too much of herself. He instigates Harpo to beat Sofia. Even Celie, who grows up in pain and maltreatment, being unconscious of her oppression, also suggests that he should beat Sofia when he consults her how to make Sofia become subservient to him. When Sofia learns that Celie has urged Harpo to beat her, she reveals how terribly betrayed she feels. When Sofia asks Celie why she treats her like this, Celie explains: "I say I'm a fool, I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't." (Walker 38) This reveals that Celie admires the rebellious spirit that Sofia has. After Sofia learns that Celie always keeps silent but to tell to God about her suffering, Sofia gives her a suggestion: "to bash Mr.___ head open, Think about heaven later." (Walker 39) So after an honest exchange of viewpoints between them, misapprehension is dispelled and the similar experiences from their families bring them closer. Since then, Celie and Sofia become friends who rely on and help each other throughout the rest of the novel. Sofia makes

Celie realize that women can be independent, strong and courageous, which saves Celie from her humiliating position and paves the way for a new free self.

2.3 - Sisterhood between Celie and Shug

Another woman who helps Celie in getting free is the blues singer Shug Avery. However, the female bonding that ties these two women is totally different from the one with Nettie or Sofia. In fact, if Nettie is considered as the hope that sustains Celie alive and Sofia the rebellious spirit that encourages Celie to fight, Shug is seen as the affectionate mother and sexual mentor for Celie.

Shug Avery is at first a friend to Celie, eventually a lover, but has always a subtly guiding "mothering" influence that, like the mothers of Walker's "generations" enables Celie to evolve into an independent, self-actualized woman, no longer accepting the conditions that have enslaved her.

Celie has always been deprived of maternal affection and Shug, like a mother, protects Celie from the beatings of her husband Albert. She stays at Albert's house and does not leave until she becomes sure that he will not even think about beating Celie again. Shug becomes the angel by Celie's side that helps her pave the first steps towards independence: "I won't leave, she says, until I know Albert won't even think about beating you."(Walker 79)

Celie first knows of Shug, the woman her husband truly loves, by a photograph. In her mind, Shug is the most beautiful woman she ever sees. She even says that Shug is prettier than "my mama". After years of hearing about, thinking about and dreaming about the fantastic Shug, Celie first sees her when Albert takes her home. Actually, at that time, Shug is nearly sick to death. Then Celie has devoted her attention to nursing Shug until she recovers. Shug is touched by her tenderness and care, hence creating a

“Miss Celie’s song” to express her gratitude to Celie. For the first time, Celie is aware of being respectable, “first time somebody made something and name it after me.” (Walker 65) This song also becomes a catalyst for the development of their lesbian relationship. In fact, the two women share a long embrace and end in a kiss, bonding their relationship. At the beginning of the novel, we can notice that Celie lacked in her life a female model who would help her to assert herself. However, through her observance of Shug and their interaction, Celie gets the strength she needs to restructure her "self."

2.4 -Fruits of sisterhood

2.4.1 -Physical and sexual freedom

Celie has been the subject of repeated rapes and beatings; therefore, she has no desire to get to know her body. The only concept that Celie has of her own body is that she is ugly. To protect herself, she has had to eradicate her body as well as her soul. However, in order to emancipate, a woman should know herself not only emotionally but also physically. The importance of regaining the control of one’s own body for asserting one’s self is outlined by Daniel Ross in these terms:

“One of the primary projects of modern feminism has been to restore 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.” (Ross 70)

With Shug’s encouragement, Celie views her own sexual organ in a mirror for the first time and shouts: “It mine” It was the first time that she develops an interest to her body and enjoys its beauty.

According to Jacques Lacan’s formulation of the "self," a subject first becomes aware of itself by identification with a person, usually the mother, "although the figure can be any constant nurturer” (Quoted in Ross 77) and the mirroring with Shug manifests itself with Celie's identification of another whom she wishes to be or be like.

Jacques Lacan sees that, at some point, early in a young girl's growth, she should identify with her mother's body “This identification foregrounds the child's acceptance or non acceptance of his sexual organs.” (Quoted in Ross 77) for Celie, seeing Shug's body begins the primary step toward this identification.

Celie gave birth to two children but in reality she has never experienced sexual orgasm. On the contrary, Shug has an active sexual life and totally asserts her body that enables her to live her life in the fast lane without any taboo. Shug initiates Celie to the pleasures of sex, and after lovemaking, Celie feels true love for the first time. Ross notes that "Celie's orgasm suggests a rebirth or perhaps an initial birth into a world of love, a reenactment of the primal pleasure of the child at the mother's breast.”(Ross 69) When Celie wakes up the next morning, she feels transformed; it is the first time that she is loved. She says “it feel like heaven is what it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr.___ at all.”(Walker 98) After this lesbian relationship with Shug, Celie becomes aware of her sexuality and her body.

This lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug appears not to be indecent but natural and affectionate. Celie has never been loved by any man. At best, she has been only tormented and abused and if we take into account her past, it would be illogical for her to choose to have sex with a man. Thus, lesbian relationship in this case can be seen as a preference rather than a biological or genetic orientation. Their homosexual union is a first experience for both of them, but it is natural and freeing and a culmination of their love for each other. For Shug, since Celie never experiences the real pleasures of sex, this relation is an ultimate gift of love from her. For Celie, lovemaking and being loved complete her spiritual journey to selfhood. When she wakes up with Shug the next morning, she declared that it feels like heaven. This is the first time Celie has ever awakened feeling secure and loved. At this stage, Shug's initiation of Celie to her body is one of the main steps that help her to emancipate. By discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate a desire for selfhood.

Seeing her own body in the mirror opens the door for possibilities to accept herself, and with her newfound identity, Celie is able to break free from male domination and join a community of women for support.

By listening to Celie's problems and stories, Shug enabled Celie to open up emotionally and release the pressure and pain that had muted her throughout both childhood and adulthood. As she writes in one of her letters, "My life stop when I left home, I think. But then I think again. It stop with Mr. _____ maybe, but start up again with Shug." (Walker 85) Her friendship with Shug becomes a lifetime union and accompanies Celie throughout her struggles with both Mr. _____ as well as with the remembrances of her childhood hardships.

When Shug returns to Mr. ___'s house with her new husband Grady, Shug and Celie develop a more stabilizing, intimate bond. Because she is cold sleeping alone in the absent Grady's bed, Shug sleeps with Celie, and like two school girls, they talk about their sexual experiences. Shug is shocked by Celie's history of sexual abuse. Like a mother, Shug envelops Celie in her arms, trying to comfort her, to make up for her past. For the first time in the novel, Celie is uninhibited enough to respond naturally through tears. As she tells her awful tale, she confides that no one ever loved her, but Shug reassures Celie that "I [Shug] love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth." (Walker 97)

2.4.2 -Spiritual freedom

In her novel, Alice Walker shows us that spiritual freedom is an important component of self-definition. In fact, throughout the novel, the naive and childlike Celie's faith is subjected to many changes and revisions as the novel progresses.

In the beginning, Celie has been conditioned to believe in God according to the white interpretations of the bible. For her, God is a white and old "like some white man work at the bank...big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear robes and go barefooted." (Walker 165) In addition, Celie is definitely obedient to Him. She accomplishes what God tells her to do but never what she wants to do. When she suffers from her stepfather's sexual abuse and physical violence, she is not able to tell anybody; because God says to "honor father and mother no matter what" (Walker 39) She has allowed herself to be a slave to this God, expecting him to help her through life proclaiming always "with God help".

Ironically, the fact of keeping silent and remaining always obedient are the two painful experiences that Celie suffered most from while living with her father and

husband. Unfortunately, for Celie, this white God in whom she has had so much faith seems to act with her the same way. He represents men and seems to be the soul of the patriarchal society that longer oppressed her. The fact that the Christian God is fashioned as a white male becomes completely unpleasant to Celie; she must get rid of this patriarchal God in her mind so as to achieve spiritual independence.

This happens gradually, with Nettie's letters first which show her that Jesus was more like her than a white man "with hair like lamb's wool", not "white" at all. Then her changing perceptions of God are completed by Shug Avery's interpretations of God and His purpose. Shug rejects the narrow Church and its false perceptions, preferring to have a personal religion in which God figures "Not as a she or a he but a It." She shares this revelation with Celie - the Gospel according to Shug - in order to worship, a person should "lay back and just admire stuff. Be happy." Shug (and later Celie) admires the natural world and its beauty, in all its richness and variety, including sexuality. Shug's concept of "God" makes Celie realize that the most important thing in life is love, admiration and enjoyment of the beauty and happiness in life. "Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool.....Still, it is like Shug say, you have to git man off your eyeball before you can see anything a' tall." (Walker 168) Thus Celie casts away the patriarchal God and turns her spirit to love nature and life. In her last letter, Celie begins with Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear everything. Dear God, this succession of addresses reveals that the notion of God in her mind has changed. Celie has new conception of God, He is everything and everything is God and this opens her eyes to the outside world, and thus revives her. She realizes that the new God exists in her, as a spiritual power and an inner support to her. When Celie discovers that she is a part of "the creation," that

she fits into the natural order of the world, actual redemption occurs. She finally has self-reckoning and importance. Since Celie can love herself, she can love others.

2.4.3 - Economic freedom

Virginia Woolf says in her essay A Room of One's Own that "*if a woman wants to write novels, she must have money and a room of her own.*" (Woolf 52) That is to say, economic freedom is the medium that enables a woman to do things according to her own will and thus is a crucial condition for her total emancipation.

In the novel, Celie's poverty is shocking. When she is a teenage girl, she is almost naked "He say why don't you look decent? Put on something. But what I'm sposed to put on? I don't have nothing" (Walker 5) Working day and night in the house and fields for several decades, Celie has nothing under her name. When she is married, it is Celie and her step-son Harpo who work in the fields, but the product belongs to the master of the family---Albert. When she announces her leaving, she is deprived of everything by her husband. Celie's poverty makes her stay in an inferior family position. She likes wearing her favorite color----the purple or a little red in it, but she is forbidden to do so, because her husband won't want to pay for her.

Fortunately, Celie, as a black woman without any formal education, has talent in making pants. With the help of Shug, Celie leaves for Memphis and begins to learn how to earn money by making pants. She accepts Shug's advice and opens her own clothing company--- Folkspants Unlimited Company. Sofia also does not hesitate to help Celie in her new business.

When women obtain economic independence, they gain freedom of thinking, because they do not depend on men any more. Celie manual labor becomes a creative artistic activity, in which she discovers her wisdom and artistic beauty, and realizes her

self-confidence. As she sits on Shug's dining room floor, visualizing herself made pants; she begins to trust in her own creativity and her own existence as a vital, contributing member of society.

Celie's economic freedom in The Color Purple indicates the turn-around point within her life. It strengthens her life's meaning and gives her a position within society. Moreover, her new business "Folkspants, Unlimited" provides her with the means to go out and discover the world on her own without waiting for others to interpret it to her.

Conclusion

It is thus quite evident that sisterhood is of great importance for Celie's emancipation. With the support of Nettie, Sofia and Shug, Celie is able to accept her body, free her self spiritually and economically and therefore gets her independence. However, Celie during this emancipation tells her experiences through writing letters which has certainly a role to play in her emancipation.

Chapter III The novel as an epistolary genre

Introduction

The Color Purple was written in the epistolary form, which was more common in the 18th and 19th centuries particularly with the Gothic novelists, and Walker has been credited for the resurrection of this type of novel. In using this form, Walker is free to establish various relationships with the reader, as the characters appear to be able to communicate freely, without the author getting in the way, and has autonomy to change the style and application in presenting the various agendas, motivations, locations and actions of the characters thus adding dimension to the novel. Walker is further able to formulate direct communication and multiple perspectives. Her use of anonymity is a traditional technique used in the epistolary novel and it demonstrates Walker's literary background and education, thus while appearing very simple, it is in actuality, a complex and effective writing technique.

3.1- Definition of the epistolary genre

The English epistolary novel is a form that uses letters as the primary mode of narration. A precursor of the modern novel, the epistolary novel first took shape within British and European American Literature as a vehicle of sentimental and sensational drama, it reaches its peak of popularity in the eighteenth century.

Among the famous examples of the epistolary novel are Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740) and Clarissa Harlowe (1747, 1748); Jean Jacques Rousseau's La nouvelle heloïse (1761) and Choderlos de Laclos's Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782). Less well known are Harriet Lee's Errors of innocence (1786), John Moore's

Mordaunt(1800) and A.C. Swineburne's Love's Cross Currents (1877). Such a technique has not been often favoured, but Mark Harris's Wake up, stupid (1959) and John Barth's Letters (1979) are interesting modern examples. It is not unusual for letters to make up some part of a novel (Cuddon 279).

Since women writers were often discouraged from expressing themselves openly. The epistolary form which is viewed as a feminized genre and a natural medium for women's literary voice appeared to be the most adequate to use in order to uncover women's inner selves, and establish female identity. However, in the African American literature, the form was less used and few women writers in the nineteenth century turned to the epistolary form as a way of writing. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, in her novel The Confessions of a Lazy Woman (1899) employed variation of the epistolary form. In her diary like novel, accepted for publication but never making it to print, Dunbar-Nelson's female narrator records the eccentricities of her neighbors. It was not until the renaissance of African American female authors of the late twentieth century that a renewed interest in the epistolary form developed. Writers such as Alice Walker and Sherley Anne Williams use the epistolary form or variations of it as foundations for their novels.

3.2- Why does Alice Walker choose the epistolary form ?

Alice Walker is the first African American writer who writes an epistolary novel. She inserts the voice of a poor African American woman in an established literary form and allows an uneducated black Southern woman to speak for herself. It is the process of Celie writing herself into being and consciousness.

The Color Purple subverts the traditional Eurocentric male code which dominates the literary conventions of the epistolary novel. As a genre, the English epistolary novel, a form invented by men writing about women, embodies male control of the literary images of women. By appropriating a form invented and traditionally controlled by men, but talking about the lives and experiences of women, Alice Walker asserts her authority, or right to authorship. Signing herself as “A.W., author and medium” Walker suggests that her purpose has been not only to create and control literary images of women, and black women in particular, but to give voice and representation to these same women who have been silenced and confined in life and literature.

By choosing this form, the reader feels that Celie and her sister Nettie are real people not characters in a book since the reader is reading intimate letters that are not supposed to be read. Most of the dialogue is idiomatic and colloquial, using direct speech without use of quotation marks or speech marks and that provides intimate view of the characters thoughts and feelings; and thus dramatic immediacy is ensured.

Since the novel traces the changes that occur in a woman’s life, the epistolary form seems to be more adequate. In fact, it allows the reader to see these changes in the character’s life and mind through the transformations that occur in the style of writing. It demonstrates differing points of view without recourse to omniscient narrator: ‘all-knowing narrator’ – written as third-person narrative. The omniscient narrator has a full knowledge of the story’s events and of the motives and unspoken thoughts of the various characters – this is not a capacity available to the first person narrative. The reader can see in the movie version this ability to get the perspective of

many more characters than just Celie and Nettie – Sofia, Albert, Shug stories are also developed.

Slave narrative is a written account by an escaped or freed slave of his or her experiences of slavery. The slave narrative is a rare collection of insights into the slave trade as experienced by the slaves themselves. Some people find that knowing facts about slavery is not enough. In order to uncover the ‘truth’ about the conditions, the lives and the punishment of slaves, it may be necessary to tap the emotions of those who lived *through* it and *in* the slave trade. It is a special American form of autobiography which appeared as an important kind of abolitionist literature in the period preceding the Civil War. The outstanding example is the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845) in which the author celebrates his selfhood. Throughout the nineteenth century and a large part of the twentieth, autobiographies of former slaves dominated the African American narrative tradition. The slave narratives may offer an explanation as to why Walker chose to convey Celie’s words in epistolary form.

3.3- Why does Celie choose to write?

3.3.1- An act of rebellion against her step father

Celie is essentially an object, an entirely passive woman who has no power to assert herself through actions or words. This inertia, Trudier Harris tends to find it weird and difficult to accept. In fact, Harris finds it unbelievable that a young black woman could be as passive as Celie. Her incapacity to fight back is firmly rejected by

Harris who insists that even slave women often ran away, harmed or fought off their owners, or poisoned or adulterated their master's food (Harris 157).

But if we go back to the history of slavery, Harris seems to neglect that fighting back or reacting against the abuses of a master was not a common practice among slaves. Simply because when the African slaves loaded on the slave ships in destination to America, they experienced various tortures, punishments and traumatic indoctrination process. This misfortune transformed them from African free human being into slaves. Men were made docile, women were dehumanized; in sum, they were forced to adopt a "slave identity" that is to say frightened, passive and totally inert persons. In her book, Ain't I A Woman black women and feminism, bell hooks explains that a slaver in order to make his product (a slave) saleable, he has to ensure that this male or female slave would not react. The prideful, arrogant, and independent spirit of the African people had to be broken so that they would conform to the white colonizer's notion of proper slave demeanor (Hooks 20).

Like her unfortunate ancestors, Celie is abused, brutalized and dehumanized by her male masters. She is thus obliged to keep silence in this barbarous, violent and patriarchal world. However, what is interesting is that Celie does not entirely give up since she decides to pour her sufferings down into a paper. This act of writing in itself is a kind of reaction and resistance.

Many critics would be sceptic about Celie's choice to write. Harris , for example, finds it nearly impossible that an uneducated young black woman would write : "I can imagine a black woman of Celie's background and education talking with God . . . but writing letters to God is altogether another matter."(Harris 156) We may

find it improbable that a black uneducated woman can write yet it is not totally impossible. It should be pointed out that even if Celie is not educated, since she was forced to abandon school, yet with the help of her sister, she has acquired basic knowledge which helped her later in writing.

Writing is for everybody, we are not obliged to be a genius to do it. The only tools that we need are a pen and a paper. Moreover, the letters of Celie are not written in advanced style. When reading them, the reader can see that they are full of mistakes and are written in her own vernacular. This shows that, what is more important for Celie is the act of writing and not the way it is done. There are many forms of writings; there are many styles and Celie simply chooses to write in her own style with her own words.

More importantly, Celie receives an injunction from her rapist-father never to tell anyone but God of the sexual abuses he has inflicted to her. What is so startling about this, is that Celie's Pa attempted to rob her of both her children and her words. Thus, it seems quite clearly that, Celie chooses to write in defiance to her step father. Writing in itself becomes an act of rebellion against her abuser who wanted to silence her.

As Deborah McDowell notices that the epistolary style not only emphasizes Celie's isolation and desperation, it also validates Celie's autonomous voice (McDowell 285) Celie's letters are a refuge from the patriarchal world which initially does not allow her to voice her problems. As a result, these letters rupture the silence imposed on her and symbolize her underlying wish to become free and unrestrained.

3.3.2 - Absence of confident

Another possible reason why Celie choses to write is that she has no confident to talk to about her sufferings. Her mother dies, her female schoolteacher cannot help her since she is withdrawn from school by her father; her sister leaves home to avoid sexual abuse; and the sister-in-law who urges Celie to fight against her husband and his children is thretened by her brother and abandou Celie. This marginalization left only one possible confidant God until Sofia (her daughter-in-law), and Shug (her husband's mistress) enter her life.

3.3.3- Writing as therapy for Celie

Therapeutic writing becomes a popular topic in the final decades of the twentieth century, not only among health care professionals, but also among self-improvement speakers without medical training. In the United States, one study on the effects of writing about stressful experiences found that after four months of writing therapy , depressed patients experienced relevant improvement.

Long before these scientific results about writing as therapy, many writers already praised the positive effects of writing. The importance of expressing oneself after a traumatic experience is something that Alice Walker knows very well, she once declared that writing saved her from the sin and inconvenience of violence.

In 1952, while playing “cowboys and Indians” with her brother , Alice Walker is accidentally blinded in her right eye by a BB gun pellet. As her family lived in an isolated region, her father and one of her brothers tried hardly to rush her into hospital but in vain. It is only a week later, and after horrible sufferings, that Alice Walker is

taken to a doctor. Alice lives for many years with a huge white scar in her eye. It is only when she is 14, that her brother Bill takes her to a doctor in Boston who removes her cataract. For many years, the wound set Alice apart, she lives in total isolation. This trauma pushes her to meditate, and teach her to become an observer of the world. Frightened by the external world, she finds refuge in literature, books and writing poems. She even credits the blindness in this eye for pushing her toward becoming a writer. This is what Boris Cyrulnik defines as “wonderful misfortune” For Boris ,this oxymoron is the main condition for resistance and endurance. A “wonderful misfortune” is the main characteristic of a wounded but a resistant person, one who suffers but is happy to hope, one who is harmed but is able to coexist with horror with poetry, despair with hope (Cyrulnik 56). These wounded people preserve a sense of happiness that allows them to overcome the atrocities of the moment.

Walker talks about her traumatic event in many of her works. In her fifth novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy Walker assimilates her blinding with women genital mutilation in Africa and tells the story of a victim who becomes a survivor. This resistance and endurance, Boris Cyrulnik illustrates it with the example of oyster. When a grain of sand gets into an oyster, the latter has to defend itself, it secretes a pearl and this defensive reaction gives birth to a brilliant and precious jewel.

Alice Walker's novels confirm this power that the defeated antiheroes have to resist oppression. As an African American woman, Walker is able to transform her alienation heritage of slavery into an ultimate victory , she survives against oppression through her powerful voice and writings . Resistance is read on every line of her novels and poems . Art becomes therapy to survival.

Like Walker, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” emphasizes the importance of expressing oneself through writing after a traumatic experience. Through depicting the effect of confinement on her narrator's mental health and her descent into psychosis, Gilman asserts that a mind that is kept in a state of forced inactivity is doomed to self-destruction. Her female narrator gives voice to her feelings of imprisonment and delusion by using images she perceives in the wallpaper in her room as metaphors of the repressed aspects of her life, which she is unable to express to her husband and confront herself with directly. Thus, this story describes the oppression that the narrator, and even the writer herself, feels as a woman when confined in gender- stereotypical roles and when unable to speak themselves freely. Her female narrator in “The Yellow Wall Paper” experiences repeated mental constraints and that drives her to depression and insanity. She is forced to play the role of a “happy” wife in order to save the façade of a happy marriage. From the beginning, the most unbearable aspect of her treatment is the imposed silence and idleness of the “resting cure.” She is forced to become completely passive, forbidden by her husband , John, to think , write or exercise her mind. Longing for an emotional and intellectual outlet, writing and keeping a journal become a therapy for both narrator and writer, a real source of relief and a wonderful outlet to anxiety.

When you write you meditate, you heal your mind. It is only between the paper and you. A purely honest act since there is no reason that you lie to yourself. As far as the novel is concerned, Celie, through writing, exorcises her demons, she is eased and

feels better “when I don’t write to you [Nettie] I feel as bad as I do when I don’t pray.” (Walker 110)

Even if writing does not erase all the bad memories from Celie’s mind, yet it gives her the power to control the painful moments that she experienced and thus detach herself from them. Letter writing as Wall observes, "act as a second memory, a projected body that precariously holds [a] hidden self.” (Wall 83)

Celie, through writing, is able to understand what is happening to her. For Valerie Babb, writing enables Celie to "fix the events of her life, thereby lending them coherence," Through writing, the protagonist is able to "review", think and reflect on those events (Babb 111) Wendy Wall suggests that writing has different functions for Celie-- it is a symbolic as well as a literal rewriting, Celie can "define herself against the patriarchy and thus . . . 'reinscribe' those traces and wounds upon her body inflicted and imprinted by others.”(Wall 86)

According to Morrison, in her Memory, Creation, and Writing essay, when a person writes, she/he recalls memories and events. It is important for this writer to examine the specific milieu in which the scene takes place, and what feelings and impressions it evokes. She defines the term memory as being "the deliberate act of remembering [which] is a form of willed creation.” (Quoted in McConkey 214)

Looking at creative writing from that perspective enables the writer "to dwell on the way it [the event] appeared and why it appeared in that particular way."

Since the letters are first addressed to God (an abstract addressee), then to Nettie (who never answered the letters) this shows that the letters function for the benefit of Celie rather than for the addressee. She writes out of desperation and in order to preserve her

life. In love and hope, she writes to ease herself, just as Walker has said of her own writing: "I have written to stay alive . . . I've written to survive"; "writing poetry is my way of celebrating with the world that I have not committed suicide the evening before." (Quoted in McConkey 214)

Devoid of any help, McDowell sees that , Celie still attempts to affirm herself in the act of writing "Everything we learn about Celie is filtered through her own consciousness and rendered in her own voice." (McDowell 285) Celie through her writing reflect her self. As she writes from the heart, her style grows stronger, more defined, more fluent, simultaneously her intensely private, unclear style develops into a personal, subjective style, one which includes much more of the lives surrounding her.

When Celie tells her experience, she creates, at the same time, a tangible element "Letter". This gives meaning to her sufferings since they are in front of her eyes, she can read them and try to understand them. This certainly helps her to preserve her mental state from going insane. Since Celie's husband intercepts Nettie's letters, Celie does not hear from her sister for years. But when Shug discovers the letters and read them with Celie, Celie felt as if she was born again. Even if Nettie is physically absent, but for Celie, she is morally present through her letters. The importance of the materiality of Nettie's letters is evident when Celie introduce the first recovered letters with her own sentences: "This the letter I been holding in my hand"(Walker 112); "the first letter say"(Walker 119); or "Next one, fat, dated two months later, say" (Walker 112).

In addition to their materialistic importance, the letters of Nettie provide Celie with important information about their past, about their real father who had been lynched. About “Pa” who, in reality, is only their stepfather. These valuable information has great impact on Celie’s psychic.

Toni Morrison explains the motivations and insights behind the creative process of writing, which she has explored over the course of forty years. The main point she explains is that within any piece of creative writing, the writer must rely on his/her memory to stimulate his/her imagination. Morrison states clearly that within this process of recalling an event, it is the subjective emotional identification of the writer that is important. In her opinion, it is necessary that the writer collects fragments of his/her memory about a given event, and states that “the process by which the recollections of these pieces coalesce into a part (and knowing the difference between a piece and a part) is creation” (Quoted in McConkey 214) Applying this to Celie, we can see that the act of creating sentences, putting words one with other enables her to acquire a sense of “creativity”. This sense of creativity goes beyond writing letters as Celie finds a new hobby in designing pants and sewing.

In her dedication of the novel The Color Purple Alice Walker writes "To the Spirit: Without whose assistance / neither this book / nor I / would have been / Written" which suggests that to create a book is to create a life. Actually, this power of rebirth Celie has experiences through writing her letters, she feels as if she is born again, writing enables Celie to rebirth, to come into life again to experience a new life.

Moreover, through her letters, Celie creates a beautiful symbolic and rich world which is different from the patriarchal world in which she actually lives. In her letter’s

world, Celie can do anything she wants, say any word she likes. This taste of freedom pushes her gradually into the repudiation of her real life with an eagerness for change. Writing plays a role in opening her mind, she becomes aware that she needs to change, she acquires a desire for a more expansive daily existence. The most important example is the rejection by Celie of the Christian God. Letter after letter, Celie realizes that the white Christian God does not hear her sufferings nor her prayers thus she replaces him, as addressee, by her sister Nettie.

Writing becomes, for Celie, a means of structuring her identity. And in fact, when we read the novel, we can notice that Celie has been transformed gradually she feels that she is brought to life again.

Conclusion

Transformation of the letters represents and parallels, to some extent, the growth and change in the lives of their writers. Celie's letters become longer and more sophisticated as she articulates a more reflective and complex sense of self. She feels happier in her life, and tends to express joy by writing more. Among the primary indicators and markers of personal development and emancipation within Walker's novel is Celie's style of writing. Not only do Celie's letters become more formal and didactic in style but they have also the power to change her.

A written work is said to reflect the writer's psychological state. As readers, we can see how Celie's gradual emancipation effects the style of her writing as well as her thinking and vice versa. Throughout the first half of Walker's novel, and throughout the first "half" of the protagonist's life, Celie's letters to God show only

simple thoughts and uncomplicated grammatical structures. Celie is unable to give her own interpretation to the events that happen to her or occur around her and thus is not able to judge her situation. This simplicity is reflected through her use of vernacular language and spelling mistakes within her letters. Celie has a simplistic and very naïve conception of life. However, gradually, Celie's style of writing changes, she expresses feelings and wishes within her letters and increasingly writes to her sister, Nettie, instead of God, which gives the reader a new perspective by which to view Celie. She not only learns to analyze her own feelings, but begins to make observations of the people around her. These developments thus play a large part in helping her recognize the desolate situation in which she is trapped.

General Conclusion

Alice Walker's The Color Purple is a novel that wonderfully portrays the gradual forming of a new black woman, Celie, who evolves from patriarchal oppression to awakening and independence.

Walker is a very committed writer who refuses the notion of "Art for Art's sake". This is quite evident in The Color Purple since not only does she describe the evils of racism and sexism that African American women suffered from, but she even goes further as she proposes an outlet, a solution to their situation, a path to follow in order to escape the evils of patriarchy and live a decent life.

Celie a black poor and uneducated African American girl is able to change her situation. She is a symbol of hope that impresses the readers by her strength, faith and courage. From exploring her process, it seems that female bonding is one of the main elements that women need in order to emancipate.

Nettie, Sofia and Shug help Celie a lot in her emancipation. Nettie, the sister, the teacher and the eternal hope helps Celie in writing her sufferings down on paper. Sofia, on the other hand, acts like a mentor for Celie. In fact, with her rebellious spirit, she exerts a critical effect on Celie's awakening. Sofia's bravery immensely moves Celie; she makes her realize that women can be independent, strong and courageous, and that saves Celie from a humiliating condition and paves the way for a new free self.

Shug's initiation of Celie's body is one of the main steps that enable Celie to emancipate. By discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate a

desire for selfhood. Seeing her own body in the mirror opens the door for possibilities in herself, and with her newfound identity, Celie is able to break free from male domination and begins to establish identification through a network of female relationships. Therefore, sisterhood helps Celie to emancipate and free herself spiritually, physically and economically. Celie's is able to open up emotionally and release the pressure and pain that had muted her throughout both childhood and adulthood. Her friendship with these women develops into a lifetime bond and accompanies Celie throughout her struggles with both Mr. ____ as well as with the remembrances of her childhood hardships. Shug's concept of "God" makes Celie realize that the most important thing in life is love, admiration and enjoyment of the beauty and happiness in life. Celie becomes more confident, realizes her submissive situation and decides to fight.

Referring to feminist theory, we notice that Walker, through Celie, is praising the concept of womanism. A term that first appeared in Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983), in which the author attributed the word's origin to the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish,' i.e. like a woman ... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one ... [A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture ... and women's strength ... committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist ... Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (Walker xi).

Therefore, we can see this womanist development in Celie. She has developed from being a young girl, forced to act in an adult way, into a woman who displays signs of all the criteria for having achieved a womanist development: she is grown up (not just acting as though she is), she is in charge of a business, a house and, in short, her life. She is serious, she has a universalist perspective, and most importantly, she loves.

We should not forget that Celie, after her sister left the house and before meeting Sofia and Shug, she had lived alone for a period of time. During this harsh times, she has no confident to talk to, no mentor to imitate, her sole friend was a paper and a pen. Writing helps her to pour her suffering down and thus to exorcise her demons; writing simply helps her to survive.

Celie's emancipation could not be possible without sisterhood and writing as well and both seem to complete each other. In fact, if Shug and Nettie help Celie to free herself spiritually and change her vision of God, writing had long before made her ask questions about this God who never answered her letters. Moreover, if Shug helps Celie to assert herself in real life, writing is of great help in asserting herself too. In fact, Celie begins to assert herself first in her letters as she becomes able to name her abuser in writing before facing him directly. It is true that Celie, with Shug's help, is able to work and become economically free but writing should not be neglected since it gives Celie a sense of creativity that helps her to excel in quilt making.

Writing plays the role of therapy for Celie. Letter after letter, Celie starts to understand what is happening to her. She starts to question herself and her situation. If the help of Shug , Nettie and Sofia is vital to her physical, spiritual and economic

freedom, writing is of equal importance. Expressing herself , through writing, after a traumatic experience gives Celie the power to control the painful moments she goes through. Letters are means of structuring her identity. They give meaning to her sufferings and enable her to detach herself from her trauma.

In her world of letters, Celie enjoys a sort of freedom never tasted before and that helps her to understand the humiliating condition she lives in and leads her to start thinking of the possibility of adopting this freedom into her real life.

Celie's experience ends in a real triumph. Her fight is a successful example for all women who are still under patriarchal domination. This shows that Alice Walker's true intention from writing this novel is to point out a bright way for the freedom and liberation of black women as well as all other oppressed women all over the world.

In The Color Purple, Walker builds a way where man and woman establish ideal relationships. Her message is that women must stand up against the unfair treatment they receive at the hands of men and that they must do this by helping one another. The women in the novel, even those who have interests in the same men, nevertheless band together to support and sustain one another throughout the novel. People who used to suffer in their struggling ultimately succeed and win their happiness they deserve. Thus The Color Purple does not only exhort black women but all other oppressed women in the world that they are able to live an independent life both physically and economically. In order to be free from patriarchal domination and establish harmonious relationship with men at last, women should learn how to be independent with their efforts and keep on fighting against the prejudice and the

patriarchal domination from men as it is commonly said: any revolution starts in mind.

So if a woman wants to change her life she has to fight as Celie did.

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