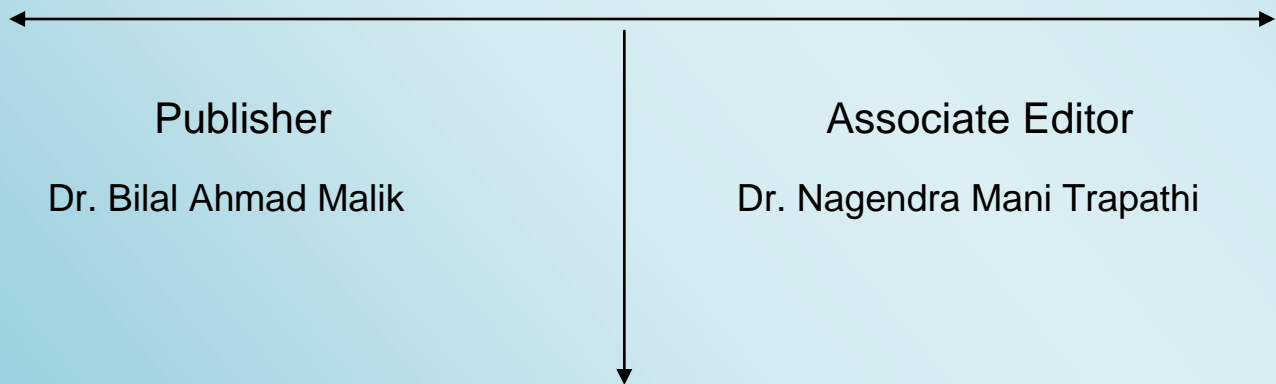


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FEMINIST PARADIGMS AND DISRUPTION OF GENDER IN THE COLOUR PURPLE BY ALICE WALKER

DR. SHIKHA AGARWAL

Skit Engineering College Jaipur

The Color Purple, by Alice Walker illustrates how over the years women have been making remarkable strides towards achieving success, recognition and equality. Each woman is paradigm it her own way. From the protagonist Celie; to other important female characters began their closeness to each other, bringing unity in which they never quite used to get in progress of their high quality goal. Their particular goal was against greatest freedom of the man's rights. They were fighting for freedom because in the male dominated society they were treated as slaves and were not able to pint out non-equality. However, it was simple to complete with victory. Throughout the story, several women were extremely mistreated by men. Their experiences were considered trivial because they were always subordinated to them. Through the collection of letters that Celie wrote, the reader could see the development of a frightened young woman who had little regard for herself and of another, Shug, who struggled to become a successful woman. In fact, Celie nearly struggled for her happiness. When she was only a little girl, her stepfather sexually abused her. He then sold her to a man named Mr. ____ who had no intention of loving her, "No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I feel. It just him" (Walker 69). Mr. ____ verbally and physically abused her. He expected her to manage all the housework and demanded that she took care of his kids, "They look at me there struggling with Mr.____ children" (Walker 45). If Celie refused, she was punished. Through all these traumatizing events, Celie lost respect for herself and forgot how to love. Her life was full of darkness without a single trace of light. However, Celie met a woman named Shug who gave her the courage to fight for what she believed in. Shug taught her how to laugh and play and showed Celie a whole new perspective of life. The novel is not a story of a single woman but it is a legend of the mutual co-operation and motivation of the so called weaker gender

So, we see that at the very outset Celie is underestimated, powerless, extremely exploited character and The Colour Purple is a story of setting paradigms, transformations and showing the world what material a woman is made off; so strong that surprises everyone. In the beginning when Celie got married to Mr. _____'s ; his sister Kate feels sorry for Celie, and tells her to fight back against Mr. _____ rather than submit to his abuses. Here, we see how a woman makes other woman powerful by guiding her.

Harpo, Mr. _____'s son, falls in love with a large, spunky girl named Sofia. Shug Avery comes to town to sing at a local bar, but Celie is not allowed to go see her. Sofia becomes pregnant and marries Harpo. Sofia also helps a lot in transforming Celie. Celie is amazed by Sofia's defiance in the face of Harpo's and Mr. _____'s attempts to treat Sofia as an inferior being. Harpo's attempts to beat Sofia into submission consistently fail, as Sofia is by far the physically stronger of the two. Shug falls ill and Mr. _____ takes her into his house. Shug is initially rude to Celie, but the two women become friends as Celie takes charge of nursing Shug. Celie finds herself infatuated with Shug and attracted to her sexually. Here disruption of gender is also very obvious. Frustrated with Harpo's consistent attempts to subordinate her, Sofia moves out, taking her children. Several months later, Harpo opens a juke joint where Shug sings nightly. Celie grows confused over her feelings toward Shug. Shug decides to stay when she learns that Mr. _____ beats Celie when Shug is away. Shug and Celie's relationship grows intimate, and Shug begins to ask Celie questions about sex. Sofia returns for a visit and promptly gets in a fight with Harpo's new girlfriend, Squeak. In town one day, the mayor's wife, Miss Millie, asks Sofia to work as her maid. Sofia answers with a sassy "Hell no." When the mayor slaps Sofia for her insubordination, she returns the blow, knocking the mayor down. Sofia is sent to jail. Squeak's attempts to get Sofia freed are futile. Sofia is sentenced to work for twelve years as the mayor's maid. Here also disruption of gender takes place because hitting someone and going to jail is generally associated with males but here a female does this.

Shug returns with a new husband, Grady. Despite her marriage, Shug instigates a sexual relationship with Celie, and the two frequently share the same bed. One night Shug asks Celie about her sister. Celie assumes Nettie is dead because she had promised to write to Celie but never did. Shug says she has seen Mr. _____ hideaway numerous mysterious letters that have arrived in the mail. Shug manages to get her hands on one of these letters, and they find it is from Nettie. Searching through Mr. _____'s trunk, Celie and Shug find dozens of letters that Nettie has sent to Celie over the years. Overcome with emotion, Celie reads the letters in order, wondering how to keep herself from killing Mr. _____. The letters indicate that Nettie befriended a missionary couple, Samuel and Corrine, and traveled with them to Africa to do ministry work. Samuel and Corrine have two adopted children, Olivia and Adam. Nettie and Corrine become close friends, but Corrine, noticing that her adopted children resemble Nettie, wonders if Nettie and Samuel have a secret past. Increasingly suspicious, Corrine tries to limit Nettie's role within her family. Nettie becomes disillusioned with her missionary experience, as she finds the Africans self-centred and obstinate. Corrine becomes ill with a fever. Nettie asks Samuel to tell her how he adopted Olivia and Adam. Based on Samuel's story, Nettie realizes that the two children are actually Celie's biological children, alive after all. Nettie also learns that Alphonso is really only Nettie and Celie's step-father, not their real father. Their real father was a storeowner whom white men lynched because they resented his

success.

At dinner one night, Celie finally releases her pent-up rage, angrily cursing Mr. _____ for his years of abuse. Shug announces that she and Celie are moving to Tennessee, and Squeak decides to go with them. In Tennessee, Celie spends her time designing and sewing individually tailored pairs of pants, eventually turning her hobby into a business. Celie returns to Georgia for a visit, and finds that Mr. _____ has reformed his ways and that Alphonso has died. Alphonso's house and land are now hers, so she moves there. Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel marry and prepare to return to America. Before they leave, Samuel's son, Adam, marries Tashi, a native African girl. Following African tradition, Tashi undergoes the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring. In solidarity, Adam undergoes the same facial scarring ritual. Celie and Mr. _____ reconcile and begin to genuinely enjoy each other's company. Now independent financially, spiritually, and emotionally, Celie is no longer bothered by Shug's passing flings with younger men. Sofia remarries Harpo and now works in Celie's clothing store. Nettie finally returns to America with Samuel and their children. Emotionally drained but exhilarated by the reunion with her sister, Celie notes that though she and Nettie are now old, she has never in her life felt younger. It is not only about the examples set by women but also a story where there is overlapping of gender roles.

Many characters in the novel break the boundaries of traditional male or female gender roles. Sofia's strength and sass, Shug's sexual assertiveness, and Harpo's insecurity are major examples of such disparity between a character's gender and the traits he or she displays. This blurring of gender traits and roles sometimes involves sexual ambiguity, as we see in the sexual relationship that develops between Celie and Shug. Disruption of gender roles sometimes causes problems. Harpo's insecurity about his masculinity leads to marital problems and his attempts to beat Sofia. Likewise, Shug's confident sexuality and resistance to male domination cause her to be labelled a tramp. Throughout the novel, Walker wishes to emphasize that gender and sexuality are not as simple as we may believe. Her novel subverts and defies the traditional ways in which we understand women to be women and men to be men. The abusers in Walker's novel are stereotypical, one-dimensional monsters whom we can dismiss as purely evil. Those who perpetuate violence are themselves victims, often of sexism, racism, or paternalism. Harpo, for example, beats Sofia only after his father implies that Sofia's resistance makes Harpo less of a man. Mr. _____ is violent and mistreats his family much like his own tyrant like father treated him. Celie advises Harpo to beat Sofia because she is jealous of Sofia's strength and assertiveness. The characters are largely aware of the cyclical nature of harmful behaviour. For instance, Sofia tells Eleanor Jane that societal influence makes it almost inevitable that her baby boy will grow up to be a racist. Only by forcefully talking back to the

men who abuse them and showing them a new way of doing things do the women of the novel break these cycles of sexism and violence, causing the men who abused them to stop and re-examine their ways. From a broader perspective, Celie's intimate relationship with a woman subverts the myths of virginity and romantic (heterosexual) love and moves Celie's Bildung beyond the constraints of conventional marriage. To accomplish this goal, Walker situates Celie and Shug's sexual relationship within the context of her womanist ideology—"Womanist . . . A woman who loves women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture" (In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens xi)—casting the relationship as the ultimate expression of sisterhood; as Celie records in her letters to God, she and Shug eventually interact "like sisters" (146). By privileging sororal love as the primary emotional bond in the novel, Walker subverts marriage as the telos of the female protagonist's quest and facilitates the success of Celie's journey to heroic selfhood Celie proceeds through her Bildung, she creates not only a communal context, but a historical/cross-cultural context for her developing heroic self. The vehicle for this aspect of her transformation is Nettie's letters. Some scholars and critics have criticized Nettie's letters as "really extraneous to the central concerns of the novel" (Harris 157), contending that "Netti's [sic] letters [. . .] appearing as they do, after Celie's intensely subjective voice has been established [. . .] seem lackluster and intrusive" (Watkins, Some Letters). Walker's novel subverts and defies the traditional ways in which we understand women to be women and men to be men. Throughout the novel, the assertion of what the African-American femininity is compared to is the exploration of African-American male struggle with masculinity. The idea of femininity among African-American women is focused around the abilities of the husband to care for the wife and family. Men's normative roles are viewed as the source of oppressive male behavior. Therefore, if the African-American male is not fulfilling his role, it is unlikely that the African-American woman will fulfill hers, as it is predicated on his abilities. Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she is being abused and raped by her father and attempting to protect her sister from the same fate, and continuing over the course of her marriage to " she finds forgiveness in him for mistreating her for so many years. Celie is able to forgive Albert after she realizes that she no longer hates him because of the love they both share for Shug. Celie comes from being beaten and used by others to establishing her own business and living life independently (Harris).The mayor releases Sofia from her servitude six months early. At dinner one night, Celie finally releases her pent-up rage, angrily cursing Mr. _____ for his years of abuse. Shug announces that she and Celie are moving to Tennessee, and Squeak decides to go with them. In Tennessee, Celie spends her time designing and sewing individually tailored pairs of pants, eventually turning her hobby into a business. Celie returns to Georgia for a visit, and finds that Mr. _____ has reformed his ways and that Alphonso has died. Alphonso's house and land are now hers, so she moves there.

Meanwhile, Nettie and Samuel marry and prepare to return to America. Before they leave, Samuel's son, Adam, marries Tashi, a native African girl. Following African tradition, Tashi undergoes the painful rituals of female circumcision and facial scarring. In solidarity, Adam undergoes the same facial scarring ritual. Celie and Mr. _____ reconcile and begin to genuinely enjoy each other's company. Now independent financially, spiritually, and emotionally, Celie is no longer bothered by Shug's passing flings with younger men. Sofia remarries Harpo and now works in Celie's clothing store. Nettie finally returns to America with Samuel and the children. Emotionally drained but exhilarated by the reunion with her sister, Celie notes that though she and Nettie are now old, she has never in her life felt younger. Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she is being abused and raped by her father and attempting to protect her sister from the same fate, and continuing over the course of her marriage to "Mister," a brutal man who terrorizes her. Celie eventually learns that her abusive husband has been keeping her sister's letters from her and the rage she feels, combined with an example of love and independence provided by her close friend Shug, pushes her finally toward an awakening of her creative and loving self...ses all the power Mr. ___ had over her for so many years, she is finally able to call him by his real name which is Albert. Although Celie has been "owned, beaten, and degraded by her husband's" (Sadoff 133), she finds forgiveness in him for mistreating her for so many years. Celie is able to forgive Albert after she realizes that she no longer hates him because of the love they both share for Shug. Celie comes from being beaten and used by others to establishing her own business and living life independently (Harris). It also shows Celie she has an identity and that she doesn't have to live with men and do what they tell her. This gives her financial freedom as well. The business brought her into success in which she inherits the house she grew up in and feels even better because now she is living by herself and Nettie, her sister who lives in Africa can come with her children and her husband and stay with Celie. At this time happiness is about to go away since a message comes from the Ministry of Defence saying that Nettie's ship sunk. This brought Celie losing all her hope and feels like there is nothing to live for when she states: "Being alive begin to seem like a awful strain." (Page. 262). However, then Cellie receives more letters from Nettie stating: "But one of these days I expect to see your face." In conclusion, this shows that major success is happening and things are getting better. Nettie does end up coming to America and living with Cellie and therefore, this is a major success. A key role in the book seems to be a sense of recognition to Celie. She gains proper and fine respect from others due to her courage and standing up for herself. As Celie states: " I don't know nothing about it, I say to Shug. I don't know much she say." (page.118). This stating shows that Celie is beginning to experience a real relationship with someone she cared about. For the first time in her life she truly loved someone besides her sister. Celie gained self-confidence from being with Shug, and with this she finally learned how to stand up to Mr. Albert. We

are shown this for one of the first times in the discussion at dinner. At that dinner we really get to see how much Celie has grown and how independent she is becoming. The idea of her re-birth is also one of the most important points in the book, Celie comes to grip that she is an adult and has the right to do whatever she wants, and this time it happens to be leave her old life and go and live with her loved ones in Tennessee. In conclusion, this is very important because it symbolizes her growth as a human being and shows us how herself respect has increased. Next, the two reflect on their errors in life. How they both mistreated their wives, and suppressed them. Then they gain the bravery to apologize to the people they realized that they really do love, and be forgiven (Walker 231). Albert and Harpo learn a valuable lesson throughout the years; one they will surely never forget. Alice Walker proficiently shows the development of two new people, through redemption using love, reflection, and responsibility.

At the end of the book it seemed like Celie had received equality with Mr. Albert. Mr. Albert realized what he had done was wrong and accepted it as a mistake. Once he realized what was wrong he began to work on it and then came to know his true self. He became calm, relaxed and came to peace at mind. After he had changed himself, Celie learned stop just being a tree blowing in the wind, but to feel and respond on her feelings. She learned that she too deserved all the things others did. Celie and Mr. Albert might not realized it at the time but in the end they knew they were different people with different views in life now which brought a true equal opportunity relationship between each other. In conclusion, it seemed like throughout all the trouble Celie had to go through, a proving success came. She had started the pants business, which brought her into upright and stand up for herself. She had the courage to fight back. This even brought a key success into recognition, which symbolized her growth as a human being. This showed us how her self-respect had increased. Finally, towards her recognition and success she had a key to equality with her husband. It was an equal opportunity. Mr. Albert had changed and realized what he had done was wrong and had accepted it as a mistake. Therefore, though all these major events in which Celie strived for brought her to a finally success, recognition and equality. An important juncture in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is reached when Celie first recovers the missing letters from her long-lost sister Nettie. This discovery not only signals the introduction of a new narrator to this epistolary novel but also begins the transformation of Celie from writer to reader. Indeed, the passage in which Celie struggles to puzzle out the markings on her first envelope from Nettie provides a concrete illustration of both Celie's particular horizon of interpretation and Walker's chosen approach to the epistolary form: Saturday morning Shug put Nettie letter in my lap. Little fat queen of England stamps on it, plus stamps that got peanuts, coconuts, rubber trees sayica. don't know where..The most important aspect of *The Color Purple* is the growth and maturity of each individual. There is a huge transition of many of the characters from the beginning to the end

of the novel. This evolution of the characters is a recurring theme that runs throughout the novel and can be tracked by Celie's letters. The women struggle for freedom in a society where they are inferior to men. Towards the end of the novel one can sense the slow evolution towards the increasing empowerment of women. The strongest example of women's empowerment is Celie's character. She's a victim of racism, men, sexual roles, and social injustices. Celie begins the novel completely powerless, repeatedly raped and beaten. The only person she can turn to is God. She is extremely disempowered by sex. Celie describes sex as something that is done to her, but never as something that she enjoys. Thus, sex with Mr. _____ reduces her status to that of an object that lies there and waits for it to be over.

After being raped by the mayor, Squeak declares to everyone, "My name Mary Agnes." She is able to recuperate and bounce back from her uncle raping her rather than be defeated. She asserts herself as an individual and stipulates respect by insisting she be called by her real name. Despite the odds women can overcome all obstacles. In the past, women have desperately struggled because they were belittled by men. They were thought of as ignorant beings that only knew how to manage housework. Shug constantly reminded Celie to speak out if something was bothering her and to not do anything that she did not feel like doing, "...say whatever come to mind, forget about polite" (Walker 75). Celie was no longer afraid of Mr. _____. She stopped doing housework and left the dwelling to start her own business, "You a lowdown dog is what's wrong. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (Walker 207). She realized that women do not need men to survive because they can manage on their own. Celie was a brand new woman. Moreover, Shug was a successful and powerful woman. She was a desirable blues singer who was creative and smart. However, her strong figure often deceived the reader's mind into assuming that she was always an efficient person. In fact, Shug struggled tremendously to get where she was. She was once in love with Mr. _____. However, due to complications Mr. _____ never confronted his father about their love. This was because, Mr. _____'s father preferred him to marry Annie Julia. Shug should have forgotten their brief love but she did not. She tried to ruin their marriage in hope that he would come back to her but she was not successful. Nonetheless, after Annie Julia died, Mr. _____ was ready to rekindle their passion even though he was currently married to Celie. Along the way, Shug became seriously ill. Therefore, Mr. _____ arranged it so that Shug would move in with him and Celie. At first, Shug was filled with anger and jealousy towards Celie, "She look me over from head to foot. Then she crackle. Sound like a death rattle. You sure is ugly, she say, like she ain't believed it" (Walker 48). She was prepared to detest her but Celie's warm and gentle heart allowed them to be friends. During their companionship, Celie nurtured and protected her. Through love and deep affection towards each other, Shug was able to let go of the past. She no longer yearned for Mr. _____'s tenderness and the pain of losing him disappeared.

She realized that he was a terrible man who could never fully love another, “Anyhow, once you told me he beat you, and won’t work, I felt different about him” (Walker 114-115). Her illness vanquished and she became a healthy and blissful woman.

In the past, women had dreams of feeling free or being successful. Yet they never fulfilled their fantasies due to their inferiority to men. However, by helping one another and teaching them to feel alive, women could overcome all obstacles no matter what the given situation is. Women have conquered their subordinate status. They no longer need to feel degraded or mirthless because of men. Whether it be physical or emotional labor, woman could defeat their laborious dilemmas. In conclusion, despite the odds women can overcome

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