

**Male protagonists in Alice Walker's  
*The Color Purple*;  
a Voyage from Oppression to Maturity and  
Reconciliation**

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Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* 1983, whose events take place in the rural Georgia and addresses the most important issues in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; like male dominant society and women submission to men, weaves a mosaic picture of male-female relationships. Black men like Alphonso, Albert and Harpo are portrayed as oppressors, cruel and they exercise power and violence over their wives and daughters. Through the negative portrayal of black male characters, Walker is accused to be a men hating writer because she "Views oppression as an essentially masculine activity which springs from the male's aggressive need to dominate. In the novel, man is the *premium mobile*, the one by whom and through whom evil enters the world."<sup>1</sup> A close look at the novel shows the opposite of this vision. Male characters are the victims of their societal wrongful and oppressive values. There are certain psychological and social agents which affect those men passively turning them into bad persons who abuse the women from their same racial decent.

This paper examines and traces the acts of the male protagonists and the way in which major male characters appear as oppressors and bring pain and destruction to the female characters. Then after the rebel of the female characters and the change in society's values, male characters are changed physically and mentally from oppressors into mature and supporting persons. They accept equality and exercise a reversal of roles with those women and all around them. The paper intends to prove that those men are capable of good and evil like any other normal human beings. They change themselves and become good men who match the modern spirit of equality between men and women. <sup>2</sup>

The novel opens with the bad aggression of Alphonso to Celie, the uneducated black Georgian girl, who writes a letter to God confiding him that her grief is caused by being raped by her father, Alphonso (later he is discovered to be her step-father). Alphonso threatens her of more severity if she is to tell her sick mother or any other one specially her closest sister Nettie. " You better not ever tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy." <sup>3</sup>

She resorts to God as a replacement for the friend or for the father who has brought her hopes down. Resorting to God shows the disintegration in this family and the absence of the father image in their life. Alphonso dominates his wife and her daughters by doing all kinds of severity against them specially Celie. We see him as a child molester and a wife beater and a totally bad husband. Celie says, " He never had a kine wurd to say to me. Just you gonna do what your mammy wouldn't." (TCP, 3) This quotation asserts that this man is cruel with her and uses this young girl as a replacement for her mother. He rapes her while her mother is sick. He shows his wife's daughters no affection or consideration.

Alphonso continues raping Celie, especially after her mother's death, and uses her as a servant. Part of his evil nature, is shown when he sells his children from Celie to a missionary neighbor named Rev., Samuel convincing Celie that they are all dead. A father who abuses his step-daughter, betrays his wife then deceives her with honesty, and then sells his own flesh must be a devil-like man. The only pretext for him is that he thinks of decreasing the number of his big family out of poverty but it is clear that he intends to cover his incestuous act and its clues. Each act and behavior in this novel shows him as a bad man. <sup>4</sup>

But Celie feels happy when she discovers that Alphonso has sold her babies. Her happiness is ironic because it shows that he is such an evil person that Celie is happy to afford her children's absence than letting them live the nightmarish life with him.

Alphonso does not stop his physical and sexual abuse of Celie and her brothers, but he continues beating them from time to time. His lust is turned to Nettie because she is more beautiful than Celie and is still innocent. What saves them from him is his marriage to a girl of 16 years.

Finally, Alphonso decides to get rid of Celie. He accuses her of flirting with strange men in the street while going to the church. Celie denies this action stating that she hates all the kinds of men, specially her father, because the image of man in her mind is symbolized by evil and brutality, so, she fears them all. " I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women ... cause I'm not scared of them." (TCP, 4)

Alphonso is a vicious character in all his acts, but the most vicious act appears when he sells Celie, with the name of marriage, to a widower with four children who wants a woman to serve him, manage his housework and breed his children. This man, who is named Albert, comes to engage Nettie not Celie, but Alphonso seizes the opportunity to get rid of Celie. He says, " I got to git rid of her... she a bad influence on my other girls." (TCP, 7)

Albert, is the most important male protagonist in the novel, he will exercise long years of severity and oppression against Celie and other people before changing into a kind person. Albert resembles Alphonso in many of his traits. Celie expects him to inflict suffering and pain on her life like her father. Till now, she has not met any man who is able to improve the distorted image of men in her mind. Men represent only pain and destruction in her life. She has no choice but to accept Albert because her father decided so. Celie says, " Pa call me. Celie, he say. Like it was nothing. Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ want another look at you." (TCP, 11). He negotiates marriage with Albert as if it did not matter to him or to the girl and she does not even know the name of the man who wants to marry her. Alphonso has no mercy or respect for people's emotions. When he wants to say a word of praise about Celie, he insults her saying to Albert that," she ugly... but she'll do the better wife ... she can work like a man." (TCP, 9)

He assures Albert that he can own a good servant and he offers him a cow with her as a gift. It is clear that the cow and servant are what make the deal precious for Albert. Alphonso does not act like a real father and there is no speech about marriage dowry or ceremonies. This scene of checking the bride is used intentionally by Walker to criticize the male dominated society and the superiority of men in the Georgian society. Albert doesn't act as a respectable man towards the woman he wants to marry but he looks at her from his horse's back to assert his superiority and dominance as a man. He considers her as a farm animal that is evaluated by the land owner." Walker criticizes the kind of male dominant society that reduces women to mules" that are used for hard works. <sup>5</sup>

The narration moves to Albert's house where the new wife arrives. Celie's first day at Albert's house foreshadows the coming of misery and agony. She says, " I spend my wedding day running from the oldest boy. He pick up a rock and laid my head open ... his daddy say don't do that! But that's all he say ... so after I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner." (TCP, 12) She means Albert's son Harpo, who receives her with a shoot of stone against her head. Albert's severity and indifference towards Celie are clear. He does not punish his son or calm Celie. He leaves her to bandage her wound and start her function of cooking and cleaning. Albert deals with Celie as badly as her father does. That is why she cannot even pronounce his name but keeps on calling him Mr. \_\_\_ out of fear and hate.

When Albert's sisters come to see his new wife, they notice that Albert is dealing with Celie in a very bad way. He does not even buy her new clothes for their marriage. Albert does not respect Celie's feelings as a woman and always leaves the house to meet his beloved the singer Shug Avery. His sisters discover so and notice also that Celie is doing all the work even the field work and no one helps her. They speak with Harpo to help Celie and share the house chores with her, "Harpo ... don't let Celie be the one bring in all the water. You a big boy now. Time for you to help out some women work." (TCP, 22)

But Harpo wants to imitate his father in leaving all the work upon women even if it was a male work. He answers astonished from their request, " What ... I'm a man," (TCP, 22) thinking that hard works are women's job. He considers helping his step mother not only as a kind of equality but a lowering of a man's status.

Nettie comes to live with Celie and help her with the house work. Albert finds this a suitable situation because he originally desires Nettie instead of Celie. He tries to seduce the girl and rape her. He tries many times to attack her but she prevents him. Celie says that he always flirts Nettie in front of her,

That's real pretty dress you got on, he say  
to Nettie ... your skin. Your hair; your teefs.  
Soon he stop. He say one night in bed, well,  
us done help Nettie all we can, now she got  
to go. (TCP, 7)

So, after he gets nothing from Nettie he kicks her out of the house and swears that Celie will never hear from her again. Albert does not have any intention to respect Celie's feelings. He deprives her of the nearest person to her heart. The novel stresses here on the male-female relationship in the 1930s. Men are the bread-winners and the sovereigns of their families while women stay at home to take care of the children and manage the house work, even the hard tasks. Violence was something widespread against women; even law and society ignore such facts.

Five years have passed but Albert's character does not change. He is still severe and continues beating Celie with one reason or another, if any one asks him why, he says tyrannically that she is stubborn. He believes that women are good only for obedience and beating.<sup>6</sup> He teaches Harpo that " Wives is like children. You have to let'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating." (TCP, 37)

Harpo as a teenager will unconsciously acquire his father's habits and his way of dealing with women exactly as Albert has acquired his bad habits from his father. Black men at that time consider women as their property and according to this idea, women become the target for any chance of abuse with or without reason, but they have to be the object where men empty their rage and extinguish their every day misery with.

If one has a close look at Albert's, Harpo's or any black man's character at that time, it will be clear that their passive way of dealing with women comes from ignorance; it is not intended but comes unconsciously after a long history of oppression and psychological pressure from the white society in America. Albert and Harpo work in a plantation for a white owner. They toil in the land and suffer humiliation in return of a very low price. Thus, the black man faces people who make him feel that he is a man of little value. This makes him in a constant search for an outlet where he can empty his rage and find self assertion. His house is the only place where he can domain and order. Wives and children are the only persons to obey and give this man the feeling of self assertion and superiority he desires. Barbara T. Christian says that men are "thwarted by society in their drive for control of their lives the American definition of manhood (and) vent their frustrations by inflicting violence on their wives." <sup>7</sup>

Harpo, who is a young man now, thinks that he is ready to marry though he is ignorant about love and courtship or how to build a real family. No one cared to teach him how a man should love and choose his bride then establish a loving family or how to live with a woman and respect her then love his children. He does not know what the love of true minds is but he knows the servant-master relationship he has learnt from his father. Harpo insists on marrying Sofia, a young girl whom he has seen once but never talked to. He says " Us ain't never spoke ... I see her in church ... she see me outdoors" (TCP, 23) He wants to be a strong husband who exercises control over his wife exactly like his father. This shows that Harpo will be another copy of Albert to continue the cycle of severity and oppression.

When Harpo goes to ask for Sofia's hand, her father refuses to agree on their marriage because both Harpo and Sofia are still young. He tells Harpo that his mother's reputation makes him unfit as a suitor for his daughter. This hurts Harpo a lot and makes him confused more. Celie explains,

Harpo girl daddy say Harpo not good enough  
for her ... why I'm not good enough? Harpo  
ast Mr.\_\_\_\_. Mr.\_\_\_\_say, your mammy ... Harpo  
be trouble with nightmares. (TCP, 26)

Actually, Albert always reminds Harpo that the bad reputation of his unfaithful mother, Anne Julia, who had run away with her boy friend then was killed by him, will still be hanging over their heads making Harpo unfit as a suitor or husband. Again, the miserable circumstances that affected Albert's character, are affecting Harpo. He sleeps with Sofia and is happy to make her pregnant thinking that this is the best way to make his and her family yield to their desires.

Harpo brings Sofia to see his father expecting that he will welcome her. Albert receives Sofia coldly and shows his rejection for this marriage. Celie narrates,

Mr.\_\_\_\_ say he want to have a look at her  
... He just look at her up and down ... young  
womens no good these days ... no need to  
think I'm gon let my boy marry you ... He  
young and limited. (TCP, 27)

Albert wants to control his son and decide his future as his father did with him before. He thinks that this girl is bad only because he does not like her. He does not listen to Harpo or respect his emotions. Albert is unconscious that dealing with his son in the same tyrannical and oppressive way his father had treated him, will inflict pain and destruction on his son's life.

The rejection that Harpo faces pushes him to be obstinate and marry Sofia. After they have already married, they start to have many problems. His father's intrusion to any kind behavior Harpo acts with Sofia or his child is an important one. He reproaches Harpo when he cooks or helps Sofia with the house works. Sofia complains to Celie saying that Harpo,

Love that part of housekeeping a heap more'en  
me ... he love cooking and cleaning and doing  
little things round the house. He sure is a good  
cook ... But Mr. \_\_\_ you know how he is. (TCP,50)

Albert prompts Harpo to be harsh with Sofia. When Harpo tries to act in a harsh way with Sofia, he is shocked to find her tough like a mule. This strong personality Sofia has, creates a problem with Harpo because she does not fear him and each one of them wants to control the other. Harpo has tried for a long time to tame her and beat her many times thinking it the best way to control his wife the way as his father has done before. But he is the loser of each quarrel with her for her strength. Celie advises him to beat Sofia to control her because she is not used to see a strong woman who fights men. But Sofia refuses to obey and continues fighting. Harpo who is unhappy with his Sofia, not because she does not work or because she is a bad woman, but because he wants her to submit to him as Celie is submitting to his father. He complains to Celie saying,

Sofia ... she my wife ... I want her to do what I  
say, like you do for Pa ... when Pa tell you to do  
something, you do it ... you don't do what he say,  
he beat you. (TCP, 48)

Thus, Harpo considers his father his raw model and wants to act like him by beating and controlling his wife even if she did not deserve this. But because Sofia is strong and refuses to be controlled by a man and wants equality with him, he feels himself a failure. This makes him angrier than before especially that he loses any quarrel with her. He starts to eat madly to empty his rage on food.



He tries to be huge and powerful by getting himself fat to frighten Sofia, but she keeps on being strong and does all the hard works while he becomes the subject of all jokes for his big belly and small head. Walker wants to show the irony of the useless big body and belly of Harpo, while his head is small and empty of reason.<sup>8</sup>

Harpo deserves pity because he is not evil or bad in essence, he can live a typical life because he has married the woman he loved. He is luckier than his father who does not marry his beloved Shug. He can even live happier than his father if he accepts Sofia's way of living and changes his way of thinking with her. Harpo loves many house works but cannot do them fearing his father who reproaches him when he helps Sofia or even holds his child. But the idea which controls Harpo's head is to be an oppressive man like his father by imitating all his acts in life. Celie tries to convince him that as long as love is there man can be happy with his wife. She assures him that his father is bad with her but is totally different with Shug because he loves her.

Celie: Harpo, I say giving him a shake, Sofia love you.  
You love Sofia ... Mr.\_\_\_\_ marry me to take  
care of his children ... I don't love Mr.\_\_\_\_ and  
he don't love me.

Harpo: ... the wife suppose to mind.

Celie: do Shug Avery mind Mr.\_\_\_\_ I ast ... she call  
him Albert ... she can sit on him if he try to  
bother her. (TCP, 53)

But Harpo does not notice that his father is a wrong model for him. He lives a miserable life because of his fear and blind imitation of his father. He cannot act as a real man and wants to control Sofia just by violence not by love and reason. Harpo continues his severity towards Sofia with one reason or another, so, she decides to leave the house. But what is surprising is the reaction of Harpo which asserts his kindness and sensitivity. He sits on the stairs and keeps on crying over her like a baby telling Celie that he loves his wife and does not want her to leave. He wants to be strong like his father but he does not know how to do so.

Actually, it is not only Harpo to be blamed for his severity. Sofia here appears as a female character who is headstrong and harsh with every one specially Harpo. She uses physical violence against him and beats him with rough tools when they quarrel. Harpo says, " Oh, me and that mule. She went crazy... Hit my eye and scratch my chin." (TCP, 37) Sofia justifies her harshness to Celie saying that life has taught her to fight. " All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy ... brothers ... cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men." (TCP, 40). Sofia has faced the tyranny and supremacy of male characters in her family and is facing the same things with Harpo. She gets fed up and decides to leave him saying, " I'm gitting tired of Harpo ... all he think about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife, he want a dog."(TCP, 55) This severity and harshness in male or female characters is acquired from life's hard circumstances but it does not indicate that the person is originally evil. Harpo or Sofia's bad characters are affected by their society and by their families' oppression adding to this their misery which comes from their misunderstanding of each other.

After leaving Harpo, Sofia makes a love relationship with a boxer named Henry Buster Broadax. This man gains Sofia's admiration while he is fighting in one of his rings. She finds that this strong man is hard only during matches but in real he is, quiet, and does not use his hands only to do good or in sports. He behaves gently with her and with others. He becomes a typical lover. This man respects the woman who loves him and shows all love to her though she is married and has children from her husband. Sofia wants to tease Harpo and make him notice that when man loves and respects his wife, rapport prevails.

After Sofia has taken a boyfriend, Harpo makes a new relation with a woman named Squeak to apply the concepts of strength and control upon. Months later, Harpo hears that Squeak is raped by a white man. He tries to act angry and threatens to set fire in the man's house but in fact he does nothing to avoid conflict. In reality, he is a weak and lazy person who destroys his marriage by the dream of being a mighty man.

Albert orders his family to prepare the house for the coming of his mistress Shug Avery because she is so sick. Shug is a famous singer whom Albert loves, has children from, but is forbidden to marry because his family cares for their reputation that such a loose woman may ruin. Celie hears about the beauty of this woman. She used to prepare Albert when he meets Shug but never seen her. For his severity, Albert always asks Celie to prepare his clothes to look nice in order to meet his beloved neglecting her emotions as a wife or even as a human being. Now he brings Shug because she is sick and orders Celie to take care of her till she recovers. This behavior shows that Albert is a sensitive man who has emotions and cares for his beloved Shug. Celie is surprised to see Albert's attention for this woman. She says, "Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ be in the room with her all time ... don't smoke. Don't drink. Don't even hardly eat. He just got there in that little room, watching every breath." (TCP, 43) Albert even lessens his severity towards Celie to make her take more care of Shug and never tells his family about her staying at his house. He starts to behave as a good man and shows some concern for her feelings. Celie herself confesses this fact says that, "This is the closest us ever felt." (TCP, 46)

Though Albert used to be severe and showed no emotions to Celie because he did not marry her out of love, but his concern for Shug denotes that he is a man who has a heart and emotions towards the woman whom he loves. He cares a lot about her and does not treat her like the way he treats Celie or his dead wife. He orders Harpo to respect her and consider her as his mother while he does not tell him any good word about his mother Anna Julia or about Celie, his step mother.

Shug's presence uncovers an important side in Albert's personality. He is not fully evil nor intends to be so. It is clear that the narrow minded society Albert lives in is another cause behind his confused personality and sick mentality. When Albert's father and Tobias, his brother, suspect Shug's being in his house, they come to prevent him from drifting behind Shug. Albert tells his father regretful, "I love Shug Avery. Always have, always will. I should have married her when I had the chance." (TCP, 46)

But his father insists on dismissing Shug from the house. It is obvious to the reader that Albert is not fully free in his will as a man, but he is still chained by his father's conventions and his society's morals. Those societal chains are important reasons behind his marriage to women whom he does not love and his being an oppressive husband with them. He tells Celie once,

All I ever wanted in life was Shug Avery ... us  
couldn't have each other ... I got Annie Julia.  
Then you. All them rotten children. (TCP, 287)

Albert has married Anne Julia whom he does not love but this marriage happens only because his father agrees on her. The lack of love and attention in this marriage, leads Anne Julia to betray Albert, so, their marriage ends with a scandal which distorts Albert's character more. Then he wants to marry Nettie but Alphonso convinces him to marry Celie, not for love but to look after his kids. He deals with her hatefully and badly. He is unconscious again about his brutality and wrong marital life that hurts him, his children and poor Celie.

Celie takes care of Shug as if she were her nurse. She feeds her, cleans her clothes and bathes her. They develop a strong friendship because Shug likes Celie and starts to sympathize with her. She objects to Albert's severity against poor Celie and promises that she will not let him beat her again. Celie, who is convinced by Albert that Nettie is dead, discovers with Shug's help that Albert has been hiding Nettie's letter in his trunk all those years. It seems that Albert intends to split Celie from her closest sister to have a full control over her and cut her from any outside contact. And because Nettie traveled to the outside world and gained liberty, Albert fears that she may tell Celie how women are free and teach her how to rebel against him. Celie becomes so angry and desires to kill Albert who appears completely evil after this act. But Shug calms her and assures her that Albert is not evil to this extent. As she has been living with him all those years, she says that he has been a very good man to her. He has danced, laughed and respected her feelings that is why she loves him.

Shug: no body dance like Albert when he was young  
... And funny. Albert was so funny. He kept me  
laughing ... I was so surprise when I heard he  
was going to marry Annie Julia ... us had the kind  
of love couldn't be improve ... but he weak ... his  
daddy told him I'm trash ... his brother say the  
same. Albert try to stand up for us, git knock down.  
(TCP, 127)

She tells Celie that what changes him into a passive person is his hard life and the insistence of his family to marry Annie Julia. Those things affect him so much and make him be oppressive with all the people around him. He wants everyone to submit to him as he has submitted to his family and society. But Celie gets fed up with Albert's cruelty because she does not see any good from him. She faces him with Nettie's letters during a family gathering and asks him to stop fooling her. She blames Albert for his severity and for lying to her all those years. She admonishes his sons for treating her with hate and disrespect while she has given them her best and wasted her life time to breed them.

Celie: you a lowdown dog ... It's time to leave you and  
enter into the creation. And your dead body just  
the welcome mat I need ... you took my sister  
Nettie away from me... You was all rotten children  
... made my life a hell on earth. (TCP, 207)

Albert is shocked by Celie's impudence and tries to beat her while Harpo keeps on defending his father. Shug defends Celie and stops them. She tells Albert that she will take Celie with her and leave him alone. This is a crucial moment in Albert's life as no one has ever faced him with his bad character or evil acts. He is shocked silent while they continue to speak against him. Shug leaves Albert after a long time of love relationship to make him feel the pain of his wrong deeds.

Celie goes with Shug to her house and starts a new job of sewing and designing under-wear. She is so happy with her life. Shug finds a new lover named Grady.

They get married because Shug wants to establish a real family and be a respectable wife. She wants to show Albert that there is a man who loves her and is free willed to marry her while Albert is incapable to do so. Celie mentions the appearance of motor cars instead of wagons and this denotes the progress in time and the coming of a modern age. This change will take place also in the characters' life and affect male characters in special. Their behaviors and personality that is chained by old tradition will witness a great development.<sup>9</sup>

After being faced with his evilness, Albert stays alone in his house. Shug and Celie's absence hurts him and the news of Shug's marriage is tormenting him more. He starts to change his way of life and his bad character. Albert's whole look to life is changed because not only the society is changed but Albert now is no more the powerful man he used to be. Celie says,

After I left, Mr.\_\_\_\_ live like a pig. Shut up hi  
the house ... wouldn't let nobody in ... Mr.\_\_\_\_  
too weak to fightback ... he couldn't sleep .  
(TCP, 229)

Mr.\_\_\_\_ realizes that meanness is killing him. He suffers from negligence and only Harpo cares for him. He is no more the strong and mighty man people used to fear.

Harpo is also changed after his wife leaves him because this gives him a chance to reform himself. Celie narrates,

Sofia gone six months, Harpo act like a different man.  
Used to be a homebody, now all the time in the road.  
... He say... I done learned a few things. One thing  
he learned is that he cute. Another that he smart.  
Plus, he can make money. (TCP, 58)

He is a mature man now to the extent that he is taking care of Albert as if he were his father and not his son. He cooks for him, bathes him and manages the house.

Harpo force his way in. clean the house, got food.  
Give his daddy a bath ... holding his daddy in his  
arms ... made him send you the rest of ... letters.  
(TCP, 230)

Harpo convinces his father to give Celie the rest of Nettie's letters he is hiding and Albert accepts to do so. Albert tastes the pain of abandonment and loneliness he has made Celie suffer from before. He thinks for long hours about the reason why Celie abandoned him, his beloved leaves him and why others are afraid of him. He realizes that because he is an oppressive man, all the people abandon him.<sup>10</sup>

Those male characters who have been trying all their lives to assume power over their wives and children are redeemed by time and by the revolt of their wives. They are changed to know the importance of kindness and equality with other people. Experience and maturity teach them that power and tyranny over others bring no good.

Harpo's character witnesses a clear change because he reconciles with Sofia and gives up a lot of his bad behavior. Leaving him for a long time and making a relation with Henry, Sofia intends to redeem Harpo's personality." Sofia serves as a catalyst to his realization that a man need not lord his over his wife. As he realizes this, he changes from a man constantly battling women's rebellion to a man who appreciates and seeks to love them"<sup>11</sup> He tried before to imitate his father and dominate her but now he accepts the reversal of sexual roles with her. He lets her go to work while he stays at home to take care of the children. When she works in the house, he helps with the house work and feels so happy.<sup>12</sup>

Through the rest of Nettie's letters, Celie discovers that Alphonso is not her real father but her step father. She feels happy because her boy and girl from him are not her brother and sister. The narration shows that time has not changed and he is still severe and unjust till his death. He is the only unredeemed male character in the novel. His death carries a poetic justice as he is killed while having sex, the only thing he has cared for all his life.

Though he is an old man, he marries again a fifteen year old girl because his second wife is sick. Celie discovers also that Alphonso does not own the house they were living in with their mother but it is her real father's house yet Alphonso has kept this as a secret. Only after his death that his wife calls Celie to tell her the truth. Alphonso's image as a bad man does not change throughout the novel even after his death, no one cares about him. Celie is happy to get her father's house back. Now Celie is not only free but also rich. Only now that she thinks to visit Sofia after she returns to Harpo, ignoring what time has done to Albert. Sofia welcomes her and assures that Albert has lived a very hard time alone. But now the man is different. He loves life and all the people around him. His character is changed and he is trying to live as a new person, rather a religious one. Sofia and Harpo tell to Celie that Albert,

Act like he trying to git religion ... he work real  
hard too ... he out there in the field from sunup to  
sundown. And clean that house just like a woman.  
... Even cook ... and what more wash the dishes  
when he finish. (TCP, 228)

Celie feels curious to see how Albert looks like. When she meets Albert, she finds him a different person from the one she used to know. He is calm, clean and he welcomes her in a handsome way. Even his house is tidy, clean and filled with flowers and seas hells. He holds a shell and shows it to Celie. The shell symbolizes Albert's new way of treating women with courtesy and decorum. Celie says that what makes her enters his house again is that he is really different and has improved his personality. She feels that she hates Albert no more. They start to understand and respect each other. Celie says,

Mr.\_\_\_\_ seem to be the only one understand my  
feeling ... I don't hate him ... after all the evil he  
done ... why I don't hate him ... look like he trying  
to make something out of himself. I don't mean just  
that he work and clean up ... appreciate some of the  
things ... he rally listen ... it feel like a new experience.  
(TCP, 268)



Albert starts to care for Celie's feelings and is deeply concerned for her sewing work. He starts to appreciate the things she loves and listen to her thoughts. Celie feels that this is really a new Albert, not the Mr.\_\_\_\_ she used to hate. He tells her that he is still her husband after all and wants her to live with him again. Celie refuses to live with him as a wife but as a friend and he respects her decision. Albert justifies his cruelty and evil character, he blames his father, society and the miserable circumstances for shaping his wrong mentality. The oppression of the whites and the tyranny of his father add to his misery. When his father refuses to let him marry Shug, the only woman he loves, he becomes a severe man with everyone near him. He tells Celie, " I wanted Shug. But my daddy was the boss. He give me the wife he wanted me to have."(TCP, 277)

Mr.\_\_\_\_ has been a puppet of his father's patriarchal ideas and he wants to act in the same way with others. Albert always has loved Shug and respected her strength and independence but he never let Celie be strong; he beats her because she accepts to be submissive and weak. But confession of guilt shows the great divert in his character. He now loves Celie because she is strong and independent. He is ready now to reverse the traditional sex roles with her. He visits her in her house and encourages her to work. He offers her help and starts to sew with her. <sup>13</sup>

Walker intends to show that once women acquire independence and rebel against injustice they can change the male characters. Through Celie's suffering, rebellion and abundance, she contributes to Albert's character reform and emotional sensitivity. At the beginning, he considers her a burden but when she is changed and becomes independent; he looks differently at her. He starts to evaluate her as a human being who has feelings and emotions. He confesses to himself that her change is a major cause behind his change of character and betterment of his old views. Albert and Harpo's character change and their acceptance of reversing traditional roles is also part of the change in male-female relations that has taken place in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>.century. <sup>14</sup>

Albert's transformation from an oppressor to a normal man is clear now. After he confesses his faults he goes to help Celie and does not hesitate to share her work of stitching. He tells her that he has loved stitching since he was a boy but when he did any work like that people laughed at him because they considered this a female work. " When I was growing up, he said, I use to try to sew along with mama ... but every body laughed at me." (TCP, 278). But now he is able to express his feelings to Celie without shame. Pauline kael says,

Walker allows some of the lazy, lecherous oppressors to redeem themselves by accepting their inferiority to their wives and developing their aptitudes for cooking and sewing.<sup>15</sup>

Men can now communicate on an equal level with women. Actually, Albert becomes a mature and modern man by letting Celie be a free woman and deciding to help her with her business. Celie says," Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes." (TCP, 278)

There have been some narrative hints or keys to understand the reasons behind the bizarre and bad behaviors of the male characters. The psychological pressure black male faces from the white society during that period is an important reason. Whites tried to control blacks' life especially black men snapping them their dignity, and leaving no place for them to exercise power or control. The only outlet for the repressed anger seething inside the black men is their practice of oppression at their homes and over their wives and children. Richard Wesley says that the presentation of Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ or and other men is for all black men's privilege because many black men are wrong in their imitation of the whites' power that crushes them. Since women accept oppression, the oppressor will continue his act in all the black homes in America. <sup>16</sup>

Another reason which affects the males' character is the lack of knowledge about themselves and the value of their human relations with others.

Albert, Harpo and even Alphonso's bad behaviors at the beginning of the novel come from not knowing themselves as important fathers and husbands who can heal their wounds and heal those around them if only they give love and support. Only at the end of the novel that Albert says, "I start to wonder why us need love. Why us suffer. Why us black. Why us men and women ... it didn't take long to realize I didn't hardly know nothing" (TCP, 129). That is why, the gradual knowledge of the male characters about those relations especially with their wives and sons turns them into loving and mature persons.

An important aspect in Albert's character is that his father has oppressed him and has reared him to be weak and submissive for his will. As a result, he unconsciously imitates his father's severe way of dealing with people. When Albert becomes a father, he oppresses Harpo and forces him to submit to his will ignoring that he is retaining the cycle of oppression he has suffered from before.

What is true of Albert's character is true of Harpo. Harpo's image is changed throughout the novel. In the beginning, he submits to his father but imitates him as an oppressor with others. Harpo faces the problem of communicating with Sofia because he beats her and forces her to obey him. That is why, their marriage turns into chaos. After Sofia abandons him, he starts meditating his faults and changes himself. He starts to get rid of his father's control and be a mature free man. When he decides to be different, Sofia returns to him and they live a normal life again full with respect and love. Celie feels so happy when she notices Harpo's change and his understanding for Sofia's need to work.

Celie: I ast Harpo do he mind if Sofia work  
Harpo: what I'm mind for? He say. It seem to  
mate her happy. And I can take care of  
anything come up at home. (TCP, 286)

Each human being is a blend of two traits; good and evil. Sometimes the evil trait prevails over the good one deforming the person's personality and bringing pain to those around him. Black men in this novel, when let their evil side prevail; they bring pain and destruction to their sons and wives. Only after they witness a noticeable change towards the good side, they are able to live a calm life full of happiness and equality. The change that the oppressive male characters have witnessed is shown through their goodness, maturity, confessing faults, reconciliation, sharing women's work and domestic activities.

Walker shows that there is a strong relationship between the blacks' own cycle of violence and the racially motivated hatred of Negroes in the South. The whites' racist hate and the wrong teachings of the blacks' societies make the black men to be cruel and self defeated. The black male Southerners form a tight-knit community; however, they destroy themselves from within by abusing and belittling their women mentally, physically, and sexually to assert their broken self esteem. Black women, such as Celie and Sofia, are truly doubly oppressed; they are discriminated against by racism, which makes them second-class citizens in the larger society, and they are oppressed by their fathers and husbands, which makes them second-class citizens in their home. In neither places can the black women enjoy the basic human rights of self-determination, freedom from violence, or ownership of their own bodies.<sup>17</sup>

The novel is composed of not only bad or good male or female image, but of human reality. Richard Wesley in *Mrs. Magazine* says, "As an African male, I found little that was offensive as far as the images of black men ...Walker... is reminding many of us men of our own failings. She is reminding women of their failings as well. A lot of people do not want to hear that."<sup>18</sup> Walker intends through *The Color Purple* to awaken men and women who are in abusive relationships. To explore the paralyzed effects of black on black oppression where after 400 years of slavery, blacks are still treating each other like slaves and are the oppressed oppressors.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Marc A. Christophe, "The Color Purple: An Existential Novel," *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* ed., Ikenna Dieke (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 101.
- <sup>2</sup> Henry O. Dixon, "Oppression and Development: men in the Color Purple," *Male Protagonists in Four Novels of Alice Walker: Destruction and Development in Interpersonal Relationships* (Portland, OR: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 66-70.
- <sup>3</sup> Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, (London: The Women's Press, 1986), 1. (All subsequent references are to the same edition and will be referred to by page number and the abbreviation TCP)
- <sup>4</sup> Lauren Berlant, "Race, Gender, and Nation in The Color Purple," *Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, ed., Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000), 7-8.
- <sup>5</sup> Melven Dixon, "keep me from sinking down: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Gayl Jones," *Ride out the wilderness* eds., Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1987), 97.
- <sup>6</sup> Gloria Rose, *Cliffs Notes on The Color Purple*. < URL:<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/The-Color-Purple-Summaries-and-Commentaries-Letter-22-27.id-56, pageNum-22.html>> [November 5, 2008]
- <sup>7</sup> "The Color Purple." < URL:[www.homepage.ntlworld.com/matt\\_kane/characters.htm](http://www.homepage.ntlworld.com/matt_kane/characters.htm)>[March 5, 2009].
- <sup>8</sup> Gloria Rose, *Cliffs Notes on The Color Purple*. < URL:<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/The-Color-Purple-Summaries-and-Commentaries-Letter-22-27.id-56, pageNum-22.html>> [November 5, 2008]

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Rose, *Cliffs Notes on The Color Purple*. < URL:<http://www.cliffsnotes.com/WileyCDA/LitNote/The-Color-Purple-Summaries-and-Commentaries-Letter-22-27.id-56>, pageNum-22.html> [November 5, 2008]

<sup>10</sup> Melven Dixon, "Keep Me from Sinking Down: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Gayl Jones," *Ride out the wilderness* eds., Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1987), 82.

<sup>11</sup> Khara House, "Go Tell It Miss Celie: Alice Walker's Challenge to Negative Female Character Types in The Color Purple, An Examination of the Representation of Feminine in African American Literature," published on October 9,2006.<URL:<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/68402/go-tell-it-miss-celie-alice-walkers.html>> [June 4, 2009]

<sup>12</sup> Keith Byerman, "Walker's Blues," *Modern Critical Views, Alice Walker* ed., with an introduction by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 59.

<sup>13</sup> Ikenna Dieke, "Introduction: Alice Walker, A Woman Walking into Peril," *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed., Ikenna Dieke Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Khara House, "Go Tell It Miss Celie: Alice Walker's Challenge to Negative Female Character Types in The Color Purple, An Examination of the Representation of Feminine in African American Literature," published on October 9,2006.<URL:<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/68402/go-tell-it-miss-celie-alice-walkers.html>> [June 4, 2009]

- <sup>15</sup> "The return of the father in Spielberg's *The Color Purple*." <URL:<http://www.echeat.com/essay.php?t=27074>>[May15, 2009]
- <sup>16</sup> *Monkey Notes: Free Online Study Guide, The Color Purple by Alice Walker.* <URL:<http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/monkeynotes/pmColorPurple01.asp>> [June 15, 2009]
- <sup>17</sup> "An Interview with Alice Walker on March 2003 Interviewed by Monikka Stallworth.<URL:<http://www.blackfilm.com/20030321/features/alicewalker.shtml>> [March 9, 2009]
- <sup>18</sup> "*The Color Purple*, Critical Overview." <URL:<http://www.answers.com/topic/the-color-purple-novel-6>> [April 15, 2009]
- <sup>19</sup> William L. Andrews, *The Concise Oxford Companion to African America Literature* (OUP:NY Trudier Harris 2001), 414.

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## الخلاصة

تركز رواية ( اللون الأرجواني ) 1983 للكاتبة ألس والكر والتي تدور أحداثها في ريف جورجيا على أهم المواضيع في مطلع القرن العشرين كذكورية المجتمع الأسود وأضطهاد المرأة ماجعل البعض يعتقد أن الكاتبة توجه خطابها ضد الرجال عامة وتعتبرهم سبب أساس للشر في العالم. ولكن بنظرة فاحصة لمحتوى الرواية يظهر أن العكس هو الصحيح حيث الرجال السود هم ضحية لعادات وتقاليد مجتمعية خاطئة فضلا عن عوامل نفسية و إجتماعية أخرى تؤثر عليهم بشكل سلبي .

هذا البحث يهدف الى تفحص أفعال وتصرفات أبطال الرواية ال ذكور وكشف إسائتهم لمن حولهم وخصوصا النساء وماينتج عن ذلك من ألم وشتات، لكن في المقابل ثمة ثورة نسوية على الاذى كفلت بأحداث التغيير وحولت ال ذكور المسيئين الى عناصر دعم ايجابية مساندة للمرأة ويحدث الوفاق المنتظر بعد طول عناء.

يناقش البحث محورا مهما ايضا مفاده أن الرجال لا يختلفون عن سواهم في الخلق فهم يحملون صفتي الخير والشر معا وتصطرع الصفتان وهذا شأن الحياة بشكل عام ، وفي النهاية ويتداخل عوامل عدة من ضمنها القرن العشرون في ردم الهوة بين أساسى الحياة الرجل والمرأة ويأتي بالمساواة بينهما.

ألفصول الأولى للرواية تظهر أن رجالا مثل ألفونسو وألبرت وهاربو يمثلون صنف الطغاة القاسين الذين يظطهدون نساءهم وبناتهم ويعيثون في الأرض فسادا. فالفونسو يغتصب إبنة زوجته والتي هي بمقام إبنته ويحاول إعادة الكرة مع اختها الصغرى نيتي ، ويستحوذ على بيت والدهما بعد وفاة والدتهم ويظل شريرا لايرحم حتى موته. أما ألبرت ال ذي تزوج سيلبي لترعى اطفاله من ارملته التي ضاقت ذرعا من جبروته وبطشه وكان الموت رحمة لها من حياتها معه ، فكان يتعامل مع سيلبي بوحشية وقسوة تفوق تلك التي عاملها بها الفونسو وحرماها من ابسط حقوقها ليس كأمرأة فحسب بل كأنسان. عزلها ألبرت عن العالم لتبقى خادمة له ولعياله ويبدو في هذه الرواية ان القسوة والعنف تتوارث، فمثلا ورثَ ألبرت اخطائه وقسوته عن ابيه، ورثَ الشيء نفسه لأبنة هاربو ال ذي سار على خطى ابيه متجبرا ناشرا الاذى والشر وضحيتاه زوجته صوفيا وسيلبي .فكان نتاج الظلم أن تركت الأنتنان المنزل بحثا عن الحرية والاستقلال في مكان اخر . وحين فقد ألبرت زوجته سيلبي و حبيبته شك وفقد هاربو زوجته صوفيا، أحسا بأخطائهما وحجم الألم الذي سبباه لاقرب الناس اليهما وكل من حولهما، فكان الفراق مدعاة لمراجعة النفس والتأمل واتخاذ قرار التغيير الذي بان جليا في تحولهما لشخصيتين ناضجتين ايجابيتين تجاه الجميع . فكان التغيير سببا في عودة صوفيا لهاربو وكذلك التصالح والوفاق بين سيلبي وألبرت.

وفي النهاية تخرج الرواية بتصور أساس مفاده ان الأنسان يختزل الخير والشر في نفسه في صراع لانهاية له ، وحيث ماترجح إحدى الصفتين على الاخرى يكون الصفء او الكدر . فعندما طغى جانب الشر على الخير في شخصيات الذكور اشاعوا العنف والاذى على من

حولهم ، وما إن أحسوا بتطرفهم ونتاج قسوتهم تغيروا وسمحوا للخير ان يطغى على نفوسهم فعاشوا حياة هادئة ملؤها السعادة والتفاهم وذلك متجلا في نضجهم وتغيرهم واعترافهم بأخطائهم.

تظهر الكاتبة في الرواية علاقة وثيقة بين العنف الذي مارسه الرجال السود في بداية الرواية وبين التمييز العنصري الذي مارسه البيض في امريكا وخاصة جنوب البلاد ، الامر الذي دفع السود الى إعادة توجيه العنف وسحق المستضعفين بين اناسهم للتنفيس عن الظلم ومحاولة الشعور بالقوة ورد الاعتبار، ولم يجدوا أضعف من نساءهم وأبنائهم، فكان الظلم مزدوجا ومضاعفا مرة من البيض واخرى من اقرانهم سود البشرية. الرواية بشكل عام لا تتظمن صورا نهائية لاستحسان او تقبيح جنس معين من البشر بقدر تركيزها على واقع مرعاشه ذوو البشرية السوداء حيناً من الزمن ، وحتى لا تعاد الكرة ثمة أمنية وهي أن لا يعود الشر والظلم الذي مارسه الرجال السود متأثرين ومؤثرين بظلم وقع عليهم بدوافع شتى فباتوا ظالمين مظلومين في ان واحد .