

Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to give the main information about the life of Alice Walker and her popular novels, which relate to subduing and hiding black women, oppressing them, enslaving them, discriminating against them on the basis of sex, and how they differentiate themselves. She explores the issues of subjugation, sexual separation, self-awareness, awakening, and self-liberation of black women. African-American writer Alice Walker undoubtedly occupies a prominent place in the envy of African-American literature.

It reflects the struggles and journeys of African American men and women an effort to strengthen and liberate the entire black race. She is associated with the “survival” of his people, who has been discriminated against, humiliated and humiliated by the white American majority. Walker focuses on black women “s survival strategies in a racist white society and a patriarchal black society. Her personal experiences and observations as a black woman are repeated in her works and her characters. In her skills,



Walker deftly demonstrates that being a black woman is twice as difficult as just being a woman or a black man.

Keywords: Walker, womanism, symbols, black woman, African Literature

1.1 Introduction

William L. Andrews defines African American literature as "a body of literature written by Americans of African descent .The writing of African American literature began long before the American Civil War, but it wasn't until the 1960s, when the civil rights movements grew stronger, that they began to be recognized and given space in schools and universities. During that time, notable African American figures like Martin Luther King, Booker T .Washington, and Malcolm X—all civil rights activists—spoke out and demanded racial equality from society. It forced publishers and educators to make space for Black literature, and as a result, there are now many renowned and acclaimed African American writers.

However, in Brazil, most English language courses – notably in public schools– include few literature in their syllabus, and when it is included, hardly ever there are African American writers to be studied. Representative Literature is important to be studied and taught, though, only because Literature is a tool to give voice for the voiceless, and to expose the invisibility of those who should be seen. But in Brazil, the majority of English language courses—especially those in public schools—have a limited literature curriculum ,and the few that do almost never include any study of African American writers .Studying representative literature is crucial. taught, however ,only



because literature serves as a vehicle for exposing the invisible of those who ought to be seen and providing a voice to the voiceless. (Andrews, Foster, & Harris, 1997)

The corpus of writing created in the US by authors of African descent is known as African American literature. It starts with the writings of authors from the late eighteenth century, like Phillis Wheatley. Autobiographical spiritual narratives predominated African American literature prior to the heyday of narratives about enslaved people. Slave narratives were 19th-century narratives told by individuals who had generally escaped slavery, detailing their escapes, escape routes, and methods of taking their own lives. A tremendous period of literary and artistic flourishing, the 1920s Harlem Renaissance was influenced by writers who came North during the tremendous Migration as well as immigrants from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Notable African American authors include (Andrews, Foster, & Harris, 1997).

The Cambridge History of African American Literature, the first significant history of four hundred years of black writing in the twenty first century, provides a thorough survey of the oral and printed literary traditions of people of African descent in the United States. Famous authors from the United States and further, highlight each text's dual character as a individual's creation of art in response to what is happening events in the political, social, and cultural history of America. With its unparalleled breadth, depth, and ease of use, the volume compiles the most recent research in the subject. It also appears forward to recommend fresh methods, fresh fields of research, and as yet deserving authors and pieces. The African History of Cambridge



University American literature is a significant accomplishment in terms of. (Graham & Ward, 2011).

When Frederick Douglass published his autobiographical work, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, in 1845, African American literature gained a significant new contributor. The American publisher of the book released it in Boston . Anti-Slavery Society, which is probably the most not able illustration of the dynamic relationship between African American literary development and the campaign for abolition. Douglass was well-known at this point in circles opposed to slavery. After breaking free from slavery in 1838, he had been employed as a paid lecturer against slavery for the Massachusetts Anti-slavery.(1)

It's important to know exactly what the term "dark women's activist awareness" means before we talk about Walker's womanism. A women's activist is someone who is willing to end patriarchal rule in order to make women's life better. The adjective "black" alludes to the race. to make the world a better place for women and to get rid of bias.((Abdulimam,2014)

1.2 Alice Walker's Life

Alice Malsenior Walker, author and activist, was born on February 9, 1944, in Wards Chapel, Putnam County, Georgia, a small community outside of Eatonton. She has won numerous awards. She was the last of sharecropper Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Lou's (Tallulah) eight children(Bates



2). Walker's parents employed Miss Fannie, a midwife, in anticipation of her birth; this was the first time they had the funds to do so. But Walker was born before Miss Fannie came (white, 2004).

Walker began first grade a year ahead of schedule because her mother had no one to watch her young, inquisitive, and fiercely independent child while she is at work to support the Walker family. Walker's father had assisted in founding East Putnam Consolidated in 1948, and he is enrolled in Miss Reynolds' class there in the hopes that a good education would keep him young.

Walker from having to deal with having to work in the fields to support herself in the future. Miss Reynolds saw Walker's curiosity and intelligence in the classroom from the beginning.(White, 2004).

Walker sustains the eye injury that would alter her perspective, both literally and figuratively, towards the end of the 1952 summer at the tender age of eight. As she is engaging in cowboy and Curtis accidentally shot her in the right eye with a BB gun while they were among Indians with her brothers Bobby and Curtis. She was left blind in one eye by the injury.(Bates 2008). Walker's brothers pleaded with her to say she stepped on a wire, knowing full well that they would get into trouble with their parents. Later, the boys When they told their parents the truth, they were met with a mild reprimand. A white man driving down the highway noticed Walker's condition and was approached by her father Willie Lee and brother Jimmy .They begged him to assist them in getting Walker to a hospital .The Walkers were left to care for their daughter on their own using conventional natural remedies after the man refused to assist them. The Walkers eventually raise the \$2RM required to send their daughter to a white physician in Macon after



realizing their daughter needed contemporary medical care Georgia . The Walkers claim that the doctor did nothing more than hand Walker a bottle of eye drops and inform her that since eyes are sympathetic, she would probably lose her sight in her left eye as well. Walker's personality and worldview were permanently changed by the injury. Both her self-esteem and her academic performance suffered. She was a confident young girl before the injury, but she lost a lot of that confidence.(Bates, 2008)

Her family's relocation to Milledgeville, Georgia—the town where Flannery O'Connor once owned her farm, Andalusia—as well as her enrollment in a new school added to her confusion. Walker was eventually granted permission to go back to Ward's Chapel, where she resided with Henry Clay Walker, the father of her father, and his spouse Rachel, who served as Walker's model for Celie in *The Color Purple*. However, Walker's condition did not get better after returning home. She started writing and withdrew into the world of literature. Walker would eventually come to believe that the event had caused her to become estranged from the rest of her family. She started to understand that people could inflict great suffering on their loved ones when she felt that her parents and brothers had betrayed her. She also grew increasingly (White, 2004).

In 1961, Walker is the valedictorian of Butler-Baker High School. Despite considering Savannah State University, Walker enrolled at Atlanta, Georgia's Spelman College. She is awarded a "rehabilitation" scholarship, which has paid for her attendance. from Spelman in addition to the seventy-five dollars she gets from Eatonton residents. She traveled to Atlanta in August of 1961 with a typewriter, a sewing machine, and a suitcase.



The Walker family story that gives a rise to the 1982 novel “*The Color Purple*” begins with Walker's grandfather's long-lasting love for Estella "Shug" Perry, despite the fact that he is married to Rachel. The book was written in the epistolary form (a collection of ninety letters) and in black folk English. Despite the fact that her publisher Walker refused to give up on what she believed her ancestors have taught her, despite being cautioned against relying solely on the epistolary format. Even before it is formally released, the project attracts a lot of attention in the literary community, and Walker's friends most notably Gloria Steinem, who dedicated a cover story in *Ms.* to Walker who fights for her work . (White, 2004).

When the book is eventually published, it starts to get a lot of attention. A lot of people believed that *The Color Purple* is the best example of the themes Walker has thought about. Both technically and emotionally, the outcome is striking . People read the book and engaged in debate about it, regardless of their reactions to it. This focus reached its peak on April 18, 1983, when Walker was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Walker is the first African American woman to win the prize. Walker's book is also honored with a National Book Award that year. Walker seems only to care that the people who inspires her work are happy when she accepts the awards, which are received.

2.1 Symbols in Alice Walker's Works

Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* is a potent cultural touchstone of contemporary American literature that contains a multitude of deeply symbolic images. The study examines the complex meanings finds in the metaphors and symbolic images, and endeavors to fully comprehend and interpret the novel's themes and ideological implications. That's what an



interpretation of the symbolic images suggests. Black women's quest for independence in the face of adversity is how Alice Walker illustrates how black women can achieve "overall survival" through the symbolic images in her book .society and the family. The title of Alice Walker's book, *The Color Purple*, alludes to her goal of creating a peaceful world. The color purple, a blend of pink and blue, represents the unity of black men and women to indicate that peaceful coexistence is thought to be the only means for the black community to overcome racism and find happiness in a multiracial society. Pink represents females, and blue represents males. (Wu & Wei, 2022)

The work employs a great deal of feminine literary color and symbolic images with deep meaning, which gives the entire work a vibrant, thought-provoking philosophical feel. This study has a thorough understanding of the rich meanings present in the symbolic images in the novel by analyzing them. interpretation and in-depth comprehension of the novel's distinctive artistic idea and ideological implications.(Ibid)

The womanist's self-realization of her political independence from her own feminine activity is symbolized by the quilt. In the book, Celie creates a gorgeous pattern known as "Sister's Choice" and repairs the old dress and ripped curtains to make a brand-new quilt. which displays her inventiveness and imagination in full. Celie opens her eyes to the world and learns to value herself just through creative endeavors. "What the world got to do with anything, I think," she writes in her letter. Then I picture myself sitting there between Shug Avery and Mr., and for the first time in my life, I feel perfectly comfortable as I quilt." (Wu & Wei, 2022.P.65).



Another artistic representation of black women achieving familial independence is "coming back home." At the conclusion of the tale, Celie returns to her "new" home one that truly belongs to her instead of the "old" one where she spent her traumatic upbringing. Celie's "returning home" signifies that she is both letting go of the past and evolving into a new, independent person. In addition, Celie returns to a comfortable and serene home where she can experience freedom and happiness in addition to earning Mr.'s respect. She gets attached to her "new family." She goes so far as to address Mr. as "Albert." "Mr. seems to be the only person who understands how I'm feeling... he starts to seem like someone I can talk to," she says.(Ibid).

3.1 Symbols in Alice Walker's "Possessing the Secret of Joy"

The novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker, published in 1992, has generated a great deal of controversy. Alice Walker's African trilogy, which also includes *The Color Purple* (1982) and *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), concludes with this book. Walker takes a radically different stance toward his African heritage in this revolutionary novel, denouncing the practice of female genital mutilation and those who carry it out. Numerous earlier research projects have approached the novel from various angles. For example, Nontsasa Nako's "Possessing the Voice of the Other: African Women and the 'Crisis of Representation'," Alyson R. Buckman's "The Body as a Site of Colonization: Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (1995), and Angeletta KM Gouridine's "Postmodern ethnography and the womanist mission: Postcolonial sensibilities in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" (1996).(Walker, 2011).

Renewal of Self in “**Possessing the Secret of Joy**” Walker finds the strength to confront her childhood incident by overcoming the violent, blood-



filled darkness it brought on and realizing it wasn't an accident but rather a component of socially reinforced patterns of behavior. Startling, forbidden topics that people might avoid. Walker thinks that as a social commentary tool, her pen will be more powerful than the circumciser's knife. Her personal experience with inner pain has strengthened her ability to shed light on these shadowy areas of human endeavor and to articulate the completeness of identity, the potency of inner vision, whole sight, and the ultimate secret of joy. The wounded eye survivor grows into a skilled writer who challenges the false gods of evil customs and provides, by example, the means to perceive clearly the effectiveness (Vintage, 1993).

Or her essence that exists in both the individual and group unconscious as well as the conscious mind. According to Jung, the conscious is the core of the ego, and the unconscious is a store house of suppressed memories or complexes that need to be released. Be brought to consciousness; and the collective unconscious as a repository of inherited symbolic archetypes. These archetypes, which can manifest in one's fantasies, dreams, and behaviors, must also be brought into consciousness. To put it another way, these archetypal patterns must be incorporated into the ego's world, forcing the ego to admit that the ego-centered consciousness is actually guided by an external integrating factor rather than being self-sufficient.

As well as , Walker uses the cultural aspects of Olinkan community as a symbol . In Olinkan's culture the daughters are taught and prepared by their mothers as the transmitters of their cultural aspects. "They were always saying you mustn't cry!" As Tashi was told by other women not to mourn on the death of her sister as it will



bring bad luck to them.

These archetypes, according to Jung ,are the persona or mask ,or the false layers of society that an individual has acquired; the shadow, or the negative aspect of duality, such as the anima /animus, or maternal eros ,or feminine spirit, in the man and the woman; and the woman's paternal logos ,or masculine soul; and, lastly, the self, or the core of human wholeness, the ideal individual. The path to wholeness, or the process of individuation, can lead one to encounter these archetypal symbols. The self, the inner sacredness, and the singularity of the person who discovers the god within himself or herself are bestowed upon the person who goes through a great deal of struggle during this process (Jung, 1959/1968).

Conclusion

Walker's novels are about the journey of black women to integrity. Female characters grow as they move from positions of weakness to positions of relative strength. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker employs strong symbols to explore trauma, resistance, and healing—particularly surrounding the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). One of the main symbols is Tashi's scar, which indicates not only her physical and emotional pain, but also the deep cultural wounds imposed on women by patriarchal heritage. The mirror is another significant symbol, shows that Tashi's fragmented identity and her struggle to dominate her own truth. Dreams and visions serve as symbolic expressions of repressed memory and ancestral guidance, blurring the line between trauma and spiritual awakening. Finally, the novel's title itself becomes a symbolic statement: the "secret of joy" represents that reclaiming one's body, voice, and agency—despite tractional silence—is a revolutionary act of self-possession.

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