

Women's Friendship in Alice Walker's The Color Purple

صداقة النساء في رواية اللون البنفسجي لآلس ووكر

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الملخص

تعد اليس ووكر روائية وشاعرة وقاصة وكاتبة مقالات وكاتبة سيرة وناشطة امريكية. تكتب ووكر مطولا في المواضيع الاجتماعية مثل العرق و الجنس وقد عرفت من خلال روايتها الشهيرة " اللون البنفسجي " والتي حصلت على جائزة بولتزر للآداب. هدف هذا البحث هو النظر في صداقة النساء وتتبع اثارها على شخصيات الرواية.

Abstract

Alice Malsenior Walker is an African-American novelist, poet, short story writer, essayist, biographer, and activist. She writes at length on the social issues of race and gender, and is most known for her famous novel The Color Purple, for which she wins the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The aim of this paper is to examine women friendship and to trace the effect of friendship among the characters in the novel.

Keywords: Friendship, women friendship, society, and family.

Women's Friendship in Alice Walker's The Color Purple

The Color Purple is celebrated by readers all over the world for giving African-American women a voice. Its description of the protagonist's rise from patriarchal oppression is interpreted as encouraging African-American women to challenge patriarchal social structures in the black community as well as society at large.

When Walker received the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for fiction in 1983 for her novel, she was completely speechless as she told a reporter: "I don't know what I feel yet. I don't know what it means".¹ **The Color Purple** remained on **The New York Bestseller List** for more than a year.²

The Color Purple is written in an epistolary form (written in the form of letters from the main characters which offers a direct insight into the characters' minds).³ The protagonist, Celie, writes letters to God, Nettie writes to her sister, Celie, and Celie writes to Nettie. The letters reveal the injustices that women suffer from men in the United States of America and in Africa. Through the use of the epistolary form, Walker is able to express the effect of oppression on the spirits of the major characters as well as the growing inner strength and final victory of Celie. The story chronicles Celie's growth from a defeated personality to an independent confident woman.

The novel begins in the early 1900 in rural Georgia.⁴ The reader first meets Celie, a fourteen years old African-American girl, who is sexually abused by her presumed father. Celie manages to save her younger sister Nettie from being abused like herself. Celie's experience is so horrifying that she cannot tell it to anyone, including her sick mother. She can only write her sad experiences in letters to God because she feels ashamed to tell people about her misfortunes. Celie conceives two children – out of her stepfather's constant rape – a girl and a boy, both presumed to be stolen and killed by her stepfather.

Celie's presumed father, (who would later turn to be her stepfather), Alphonso, takes advantage of her because of her mother's physical and mental illness. Her illness is the result of the murder of her first husband, Celie's father. Celie's mother dies and Alphonso soon remarries but his marriage does not end Celie's sexual abuse.

Alphonso marries Celie off to a cruel widower with four children, who initially wants to marry Celie's younger sister Nettie but Alphonso offers Celie instead. Celie calls her husband "Mr.-" which reflects her silenced condition and his brutality. Mr. ___ beats Celie all the time, she writes, in one of her letters to God, "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear men"⁵ Mr. ___ agrees to marry Celie in order to be his cook, field hand, and a stepmother for his young children. Celie's sister, Nettie escapes the desires of her stepfather and seeks refuge with Celie and her husband. When

Mr. ___ tries to rape Nettie, she runs away and is presumed to be dead since Celie never hears from her again.

As the novel unfolds, readers learn, through Celie's letters, that Mr. ___ has a passion for a singer named Shug Avery, who visits the town periodically. When Shug gets sick, Mr. ___ brings her to his house and Celie takes care of her. A friendship initiates between Celie and Shug which would later include other female characters in the novel.

Harpo, Mr. ___'s son falls in love and marries a girl named Sofia. Sofia is a strong young woman. Her independent personality surprises Celie and would later affect Celie's positive transformation. Sofia leaves Harpo because of his bad treatment. She suffers a lot and her spirit is almost crushed on the hands of the white racists. Sofia is sent to prison after she refuses to work as a maid for the white mayor's wife. Later she is sentenced twelve years of labour as a maid for the mayor's wife. After Sofia's departure, Harpo finds himself a girlfriend, Squeak.

At the time of the novel's setting (early to mid 1900s) women were supposed to do all the work around the house without any complaint, unless they wanted to be viewed as bad women. Louis Tyson, in his **Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide**, explains that women were offered only two identities in any patriarchal society: that of the 'good girl' or that of the 'bad girl'. Tyson explains that if a woman "[...] accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she's a 'good girl', if she doesn't, she is a 'bad girl' "⁶

According to Tyson, Celie fits the role of the 'good girl' who believes that being a woman means that she has to serve men and obey them whether they are right or wrong. She is, thus, a victim for the men in her life, first her stepfather and then her husband. Celie is treated like a mule all her life, she doesn't know any other way to live, therefore she is submissive and she accepts her fate silently. The second major character, in the novel, who would play an important role in Celie's later development, is ironically Mr. ___'s lover Shug Avery. Shug refuses to be submissive to men. She follows her career as a singer, therefore she fits the role of the 'bad girl' in her community.

Both Celie and Shug became what they were told they would be. Celie was always treated as an inferior human being. She was always told that she was ugly and worthless. Alphonso and Mr. ___ killed her self-esteem gradually. Therefore Celie believed that she was useless and worthless. Even Shug, when she met Celie for the first time, she said, "You sure is ugly..." (C.P., 50) Shug's mother told her that she would be a bad woman and a temptress. People think of Shug as a wicked and bad woman, Celie wrote: "[e]ven the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery [...] He don't call no name, but he don't have to. Everybody know who he mean". (C.P, 48). Shug became what people told her

she would be. However, neither Celie nor Shug necessarily wanted to take part in those roles and both of them felt restricted in them.⁷

The Friendship which initiates among women in the novel is viewed as a redemptive relationship which heals all the hardships of their lives. Celie's first friend and companion is her sister Nettie. Nettie tries to teach Celie reading and writing. Nettie urges Celie to fight back against her abusive husband but Celie accepts her condition and doesn't fight, she says "I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive". (C.P, 29). Nettie conveys to Celie her belief that Celie is valuable and deserves love. Nettie is unfortunately unable to continue her role as Celie's sister and friend because she is forced to run away and save herself. Sofia, Harpo's wife, provides a living example of the powerful woman figure in the novel. Amy Sickels, a critic, writes that "Sofia is the first woman Celie encounters who successfully resists male abuse; she is one of the women in the novel who will challenge Celie's passivity and influence her development into an independent woman"⁸ Sofia's active resistance of her abuse captures Celie's attention. She describes Sofia as a woman who possesses a physical presence as well as a strong inner resolve, Celie says, "[Sofia is] Solid. Like if she sit down on something, it be mash"(C.P, 41).

When Sofia confronts Celie about her recommendation to Harpo to beat Sofia in order to control her, Celie takes the first step toward getting herself out of silence. She feels ashamed and admits for the first time in her life that she feels jealous of Sofia's ability to do what she can never do, that is fighting back whoever dares to abuse her. Celie tells Sofia, "I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't [...] Fight" (C.P, 46). After Celie's confession of her guilt, Sofia feels sorry for her and immediately they become friends. Sofia suggests that she and Celie make quilt together and Celie agrees happily. Quilt making is one of the activities that Walker's women share together. When Sofia and Celie become friends the first thing they do is to make quilt pieces together. Rashmi Gaur, a critic, interprets that "[t]he image of stitching quilts together has been presented to illustrate kinship, and is repeatedly used with minor variations in later contexts too".⁹

Sofia tells Celie about her family, specially about her mother whose situation is very similar to Celie's: "My mamma [...] under my daddy foot. Anything he say, goes. She never say nothing back" (C.P, 46). Although Celie keeps silent about her abuse and laughs at Sofia's advice to "bash Mr. ___ head open," (C.P, 47), she shares, for the first time, a connection with someone other than Nettie and receives a new perspective on her situation. Brenda R. Smith, a famous literary critic, believes that "Sofia sows the seed of possibilities in Celie's consciousness; her voice is the first voice to penetrate the shell of Celie's repressed emotions".¹⁰

While Sofia's friendship puts Celie on the path of self-realization, Shug Avery is the one who leads Celie in her journey towards finding her long repressed selfhood. Celie's relationship with Shug provides her with the means through which to confront and challenge her abusers.

Celie hears about Shug and sees a picture of hers before her marriage to Mr. ___ and before she meets Shug. Shug's picture provides Celie with an image of womanhood that she has not seen before in her life; Celie writes, "Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw". (C.P, 16). Celie instinctively knows that Shug's world is completely different from hers. Shug's world is free while Celie's world is marked by chains and constraints. However, Celie also senses sadness in Shug's eyes which leads her to perceive that Shug has dealt with her own suffering: "Her eyes serious tho. Sad some". (C.P, 16) Celie's understanding of the common suffering between herself and Shug forges an immediate bond with Shug in Celie's growing consciousness.¹¹

Celie acts like a friend for Shug even before she knows enough about Shug to befriend her. When Shug falls sick and becomes the subject of people's gossip, there is no one to defend her although Celie wishes she can do so. Mr. ___ brings the sick Shug into his house. Shug's sickness and the temporary dependency it imposes on her creates a mutual bond between the two women. Celie nurses Shug back to health and takes care of her as if she is her dead mother or her lost babygirl, Olivia. Celie writes, describing the scene where she combs Shug's hair,

I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia_ or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat. First she say, hurry up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back gainst my knees. That feel just right, she say. That feel like mama used to do. (C.P, 57)

Celie treats Shug as if she is a doll, and the image of the doll is very important in Celie's psychological development. Daniel W. Ross, a critic and a psychologist, states that the doll is a symbol in this context,

The psychoanalytic school of object relations recognizes dolls as transitional devices, helping girls break out of the pattern of childhood dependence as they begin preparing for the nurturing role they will experience as mothers.

With this symbol, we see that Celie has begun to employ some typical mechanisms of female psychic growth and development.¹²

Celie's growth from childhood to maturity is interrupted by the abuse of her stepfather and later by her husband. Shug's presence and later her friendship enable the continuity of the process of maturity.

After Celie takes care of Shug, the latter gives up her initial hostility towards her lover's wife and the two of them are able to have a connection. When Mr. ___'s father refers to Shug as a "whore", Celie defends her, although secretly, by spitting in his glass of water (C.P, 58). With this done, Celie takes her first step towards creating an opinion of her own. Shug, in return to Celie's kindness, provides Celie with images from the outside world. She brings magazines, cigarettes, and the songs in the juke joint into Celie's closed-off world and broadens her horizons.

Celie and Sofia's friendship develops gradually and Shug is also included in this relationship. When Celie and Sofia work on quilts together, Shug donates one of her dresses to share it with them. Celie writes, "Me and Sofia work on the quilt [...] Shug Avery donate her old yellow dress for scrap [...] If the quilt turn out perfect, maybe I give it to her [Shug]." (C.P, 62)

Celie is changed with the positive effect of the two women on her life. This time when Harpo asks her for advice on how to control Sofia, Celie's response is more mature and wise than the first time:

Some womens can't be beat, I say. Sofia one of them.

Besides, Sofia loves you. She probably be happy to do most of what you say if you ast her right, she not mean, she not spiteful. She don't hold a grudge. (C.P, 66)

Sofia feels comfortable to talk to Celie and tells her that she is leaving Harpo because of his bad treatment for her. When Sofia leaves home with her children to stay with her sister, Celie decides to give her the quilt which they have made together. Celie writes,

At the last minute I decide to give Sofia the quilt. I don't know what her sister place be like, but we been having right smart cold weather long in now. For all I know. She and the children have to sleep on the floor. (C.P, 69)

Shug is now fully recovered from her illness and is grateful for Celie's kindness towards her. Therefore, she is determined to help Celie and show her gratitude.

This is evident when Celie wants to go to the juke joint to watch Shug's performance and Mr. ___ refuses to let her go. Shug has a strong effect on Mr. ___ and she forces him to permit Celie's attendance, or else she will leave him. By helping Celie to go to the juke joint, Shug boosts Celie's self-respect. Further, she names a song after Celie and dedicates it to her. Celie is overwhelmed and says, "First time somebody made something and name it after me". (C.P, 75)

The act of naming something after Celie awakens Celie's desire to have an identity of her own, it further assures her that she must be worthy to have a song named after herself.

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When Shug decides it's time for her to leave, Celie tells her that Mr. __ beats her "[f]or being me and not you". (C.P, 77) Shug promises Celie to stay until she makes sure that Mr. __ will no longer hurt Celie, Shug says "I won't leave, she say, until I know Albert [Mr__ 's name] won't even think about beating you" (C.P, 77) Shug protects Celie from Albert by threatening to leave if he continues to beat Celie. Both Celie and Shug spend their time talking to each other which indicates their mutual interests and their love for each other, Celie describes their time together, "Me and Shug cook, talk, clean the house, talk, fix up the tree, talk, wake up in the morning, talk". (C.P, 106)

Shug's friendship gives Celie a voice. She starts to help and guide other female friends like Sofia. While Sofia is in prison, Celie visits her and takes care of her. Sofia's strong spirit is crushed when she is tortured in prison, and she begins to act like Celie, Sofia tells Celie, "Everytime they ast me to do something, Miss Celie, I act like I'm you. I jump right up and do just what they say". (C.P, 88) Shug and Celie's friendship grows stronger when shug knows about Celie's past. One day, Celie tells Shug that her father (in the meantime, she thinks Alphonso is her real father) has raped her many times when she was a young girl. This is the first time that Celie speaks about her past. Both Celie and Shug start to cry and Shug treats Celie very kindly and tries to soothe her suffering. Celie describes Shug's reaction and her own sadness:

Oh, Miss Celie, she [Shug] say. And put her arms round me
[...] I start to cry too. I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all
come back to me, laying there in Shug arms. How it hurt and
how much I was surprise. [...] Don't cry, Celie, Shug say.
Don't cry. She start kissing the water as it come down side
my face. (C.P, 108-109).

Tracy L. Bealer, a critic, states that "Shug is the first person that Celie tells about Alphonso's rapes and therefore enables Celie's first active refusal of her stepfather's command to "shut up" and "git used to it".¹³ Celie tell about her past, and thus, experiences the comforting and responsive love of an attentive listener. This enables Celie to mourn her past life and receive a comprehension of her story.

One day Shug asks Celie about Nettie. Celie assumes that her sister is dead, since she has not received any letter from her. But Shug notices Albert hiding letters and she is able to get her hands on one, the letter is from Nettie, and they find dozens of other letters from her in Albert's trunk. Celie gets so mad at Albert who hides the letters.

When Celie finds her sister's letters, she is so angry that she cannot even think properly. She needs support and guidance and Shug appears as Celie's teacher and spiritual guide. First of all Shug prevents Celie from killing Albert by taking

the razor from Celie's hand and placing a needle in it instead. She does not encourage Celie to avenge herself, "Nobody feel better for killing nothing". (C.P, 134) Shug wants to relieve Celie from her anger and sadness therefore, she suggests, "Times like this, [...] us ought to do something different. [...] let's make you some pants". (C.P, 136) Celie agrees and with a needle in hand, she begins to create her life. Celie's sewing "like Shug singing [...] creates her self-determination and prevents her from being owned".¹⁴

Celie discovers from Nettie's letters that Nettie is still alive, that Alphonso is not her biological father; and that her children are still alive and they are not the product of incest as she thinks. After confirmation from Alphonso who tells Celie that he is her and Nettie's stepfather, Celie begins to lose faith in God. She is angry with God for leaving her alone to suffer. Celie asks: "what God for me?" (C.P, 175), Shug is surprised by Celie's thoughts and she tries to teach her about God, Shug says:

God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for [...Him] inside find [...Him]. [...] I believe God is everything, [...] Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found [...Him]. (C.P, 177-178)

Shug teaches Celie to leave the typical image of God as the white old man and encourages her to see God in nature, she says:

[...], My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. [...] God love everything you love [...] But more than anything else, God love admiration. [...] I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. (C.P, 178).

John T. Hiers states, in his "Creation theology in Alice Walker's **The Color Purple**", that when Celie discovers she is part of the creation and that she fits the natural order of the world, she experiences actual redemption. "To enter into the flow of God's creativity is to know love and through love to know the meaning of selfhood, family, and community-in short to know true wisdom".¹⁵

According to Amy Sickels, Shug's presence is important in Celie's life since,

Shug helps Celie to see that there are different ways of living and thinking, helping Celie move closer to her own

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liberation and independence. The conversation [about God] challenges Celie's spirituality, and she begins to be more aware of beauty around her: "Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool".¹⁶

In the past, Celie was unable to establish a meaningful relationship with God since she associated God with man. Her understanding of God was derived from a man, her stepfather who initially destroyed her relationship with God when he told her, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy". (C.P, 1) Thus, God turned into the keeper of secrets instead of being a friend and a protector.¹⁷

Shug's friendship guides Celie through the stage of her development as a fully grown up individual by giving her the ability to love and see God within herself. Now Celie no longer thinks of her husband as Mr. __, but as Albert, a fact that symbolizes a shift in her perception of herself as an equal to him.

Shug recommends that Celie "git man off [her] eyeball", (C.P, 179) in order to be happy, and when Celie does so, she is able to conjure up words that can free her soul. One evening Celie rises from a family dinner and determines to fight eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. She tells Albert that she is going to leave him and go with Shug to Memphis. When Albert tries to prevent her from going, Celie now has a voice and self –possession that enable her to confront him, she says:

You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. 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, [...] And she was the only person love me in the world. [...] But Nettie and my children coming home soon, [...] (C.P, 181)

When Albert tries to degrade her, by telling her that the only thing she can do in Memphis is to be Shug's maid, Celie maintains her affirmative stance "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, [...]. But I'm here". (C.P, 187) with this response, Celie gains back the "I am" she is forced to amend at the beginning of the narrative.

Shug takes Celie with her to Memphis, treats her as a friend and an equal, she says, "I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet". (C.P, 190) Shug gives Celie a big bedroom which "over look the backyard and the bushes down by the creek". (C.P, 188), because she knows that Celie is used to morning sun. It is the first time that someone thinks of Celie's comfort. Celie's comfortable life with Shug enables her to discover her own creativity in sewing pants. A literary critic, Maria Lauret points out that "... Shug's successful

singing career provides Celie with the material support and domestic shelter she needs when she finally breaks from Mr. __, "18

Shug encourages Celie to recover her creativity in designing pants. She invests her time, money and love to help her friend to define herself and be financially independent. The friendship between Celie and Shug changes them both to be better persons. Shug helps Celie to transform herself into an independent woman and during this transformation she herself is transformed. Shug relates to Celie her story with Albert and his dead wife. Shug loved Albert in the past, however their circumstances prevented them from getting married. Shug was mean to Albert's wife, Annie Julia. She tried to ruin their marriage in hope that Albert would come back to her. Nonetheless, when Annie Julia died, Albert married Celie instead of Shug. Shug was also mean to Celie at the beginning of their relationship. Celie's friendship enabled Shug to let go of the past. She regrets her past acts and realizes that Albert does not deserve her love, she tells Celie, "Anyhow, once you told me he beat you, and won't work, I felt different about him". (C.P, 106). Catherine A. Colton, a critic, states,

Shug is able to realize that her exclusive focus on her relationship with a man put a wedge between her and potential women friends. Women siding with men over women is one of the values of patriarchy. With the replacement of this value with womanist values, Shug is able to develop and maintain strong relationships with women and in the end, with Albert as well.¹⁹

Shug is also changed into a better mother. She visits her children whom she has left with her mother for many years. She decides to know her kids better. And finally, when Shug's own growth completes she decides to retire her career and live with Celie and her family. Shug's kindness is not exclusive to Celie, she also befriends Mary Agnes and encourages her to become a singer, Celie writes, "Shug like Squeak [Mary Agnes] too, try to help her sing. [...] Shug say to [...] Mary Agnes, You ought to sing to public". (C.P, 110-111)

Walker creates the character of Shug in a perfect way to fit her role as Celie's friend and companion. Shug fulfils many uncountable purposes and plays many roles to help Celie to recreate her shattered world. Shug protects Celie from Albert's beatings; she helps her to understand her relationship with God and teaches her that God is everywhere and is in everything; she helps Celie to find her sister's letters, and by doing this, Shug recreates Celie's personal history since Nettie's letters reveal the true history of their family; Shug helps Celie to see her own inner beauty as well as her external beauty; she helps her to realize her strength and worth; she awakens Celie's creativity and discovers her talent in designing pants, Shug teaches Celie how to love and receive love from others.

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Once Celie starts to love herself, she is able to come out of her shell and spread out her love to include everybody around her. Celie's survival is due greatly to Shug. Literary critic Thomas F. Marvin notes, "Shug sweeps through **The Color Purple** like a force of nature,"⁶² Shug is described as a force of nature due to her power to change people around her. According to Gerri Bates, a critic, Shug and Celie's relationship, "[...] crosses over into many levels- sister like, girlfriends, host and guest, teacher and student, caretaker and patient,"²⁰

Through her traumatizing experiences, Celie loses respect for herself and forgets how to love. However, when she meets Shug and becomes friends with her, Celie is transformed. Celie depends on Shug for love, security, and support. But later on she begins to depend on herself and starts to recreate her own place in life.

Celie's feelings were buried inside her, she couldn't love or hate. She wasn't even aware that she existed as a human being. Her friendship with Shug awakened all her feelings, and she is transformed into a full- grown woman. At the beginning of the novel Sofia participated in Celie's development when she served as a positive female model. Celie was able, later on, to help Sofia stand on her feet again after she lost twelve years of her life as a sentenced maid for a white family. Celie offered Sofia a job in her new store. Celie was also able to help Mary Agnes, alias (Squeak) to get Harpo's attention, Celie advises her to insist on Harpo to call her by her real name rather than allowing to be addressed by an inferior name, Squeak, which means mousy. Celie's circle of girlfriends is a safe haven for her where she can be active and escape man's world.

Mary Agnes is also transformed with the help of Celie and Shug. Clenora Hudson-Weems, a critic, states:

In naming oneself, one defines oneself as well. Later in the novel, Mary Agnes demonstrates the power of self-naming for self-respect, self-definition and public identification.

Thus she acknowledges, when I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public.²¹

Mary Agnes takes care of Sofia's children when she is in prison and she secures Sofia's release from prison. Celie writes, "6 months after Mary Agnes went to get Sofia out of prison, she begin to sing. First she sing Shug's songs, then she begin to make up songs her own self". (C.P, 96) Sofia and Mary Agnes become friends and Sofia promises to take care of Mary Agnes and Harpo's little daughter, Suzie Q, while Mary Agnes pursues her career as a singer in Memphis. Celie describes a scene which shows Sofia and Mary Agnes's friendship:

"Mary Agnes, darling, say Harpo, look how Suzie Q take to Sofia".

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"Yeah, say Squeak, children know good when they see it". She and Sofia smile at one another.

"Go on sing, say Sofia, I'll look after this one till you come back". "You will? Say Squeak".

"Yeah, say Sofia".

"And look after Harpo, too, say Squeak. Please ma'am". (C.P, 184-185).

Nettie cannot be excluded from the web of female friendship in this novel. She also plays an important role in Celie's development. Although Nettie spends nearly all her adulthood years away from her sister, she doesn't forget to write to Celie even when she receives no word from her for many years. Nettie writes in one of her letters to Celie: "when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart". (C.P, 122) When Nettie knows that the two children whom she helps to raise are her sister's lost children, she is overwhelmed with joy and happiness. Nettie treats her sister's children kindly as if they are hers and tells them how a good woman their mother is. Through Nettie's letters, Celie is able to know the truth about her real father and about her children. Brenda R. Smith, a critic, observes that "Nettie's letters are [...] important because they ultimately lead Celie to a new level of spiritual awareness".²² Ultimately Celie regains her identity and addresses her letters to Nettie with her name signed on them.

Dinitia Smith and Tuzyline Jita Allan indicate that Celie's new found sense of self, one that fights abuse and degradation, is encouraged by her relationship with Shug, Sofia, Mary Agnes, and eventually Nettie. This community of female friends helps Celie to realize that she is much more worthy than the degraded image which Albert constructs for her.²³

Each of these friendships in **The Color Purple** forms a part of a larger net of communal relationships in which female friendship is the dominant uniting link. According to literary critic Mae G. Henderson, these friendships challenge the hierarchal power relations exercised between men and women. Henderson observes,

[...] the relationships among the women based on cooperation and mutuality. Women share the children, the labor, [...] Ultimately it is the female bonding which restores the women to a sense of completeness and independence. The relationship between Celie and Shug, on the one hand, and between Celie and Nettie, on the other, exemplify the power and potential of this bonding.²⁴

The values expressed in women's friendships-like respect, and unconditional love – become guiding rules that shape the new community created by women in **The Color Purple**.

The women friends in **The Color Purple** form a sisterhood whereby they care for each other; help each other; love each other, and tend for each other's needs. They prove, through their bonding that their survival in life doesn't depend on being servants to men or by performing domestic duties. They are able to find their liberty by their support and integrity for each other. Walker creates a community of women friends which fits Aesop's famous saying: "United we stand, divided we fall".

Friendship works as a redemptive power that transforms not only women but also men in **The Color Purple**. When both Celie and Shug leave Albert alone in his house, neglected and unloved, they open the door for his transformation. When he is left alone, Albert creates a connection with his son Harpo. Harpo takes care of his father and they undergo a healing process which helps both of them to give up their previous acts and attain a connection with others. When Celie returns from Memphis, she notices that Albert is changed, she writes:

[...] when you talk to him [Albert] now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience. (C.P, 230)

Celie and Shug's friendship transforms Albert's entire definition of the meaning of manhood, and consequently he is transformed into a kind man with the power of love. Albert tells Celie, "The more I wonder, [...] the more I love" Celie replies, "And people start to love you back," (C.P, 274). Albert asks Celie to marry him again but Celie refuses and offers to be friends, "[...] let's us be friends," (C.P, 247) Celie says. Harpo is also transformed at the end and he and Sofia get back together as man and wife.

The Color Purple presents a new family structure instead of the traditional ones presented early in the narrative, Celie and Albert's marriage is one of master and slave; Harpo and Sofia's marriage starts as a good one, but falls apart because of Harpo's attempts to control Sofia with the use of violence; Celie comes from a family where her stepfather rapes her;²⁵ and finally there is Shug who feels motherless because of her mother's lack of kindness. Friendship among women, in the novel, and especially between Celie and Shug helps these traditional families and transforms them into one extended and healthy family. At the end all the characters live happily together, Nettie returns with her husband and Celie's children from Africa to live with Celie and Shug; Harpo and

Sofia live together with their children; Albert becomes a mutual friend of everybody, and Celie emerges after years of oppression to a whole human being.

The Color Purple celebrates love; it explores the friendship by which women can love each other whether they are sisters, friends, or even enemies. Walker presents, in **The Color Purple**, a world of oppression and against the backdrop of it, friendship manages to create opportunities for all her characters. Friendship opens the door for hope to enter the lives of Walker's characters and somehow manages to shine through.

Notes

¹ Bruce and Becky Durost Fish, "Biography of Alice Walker", in Bloom's Bio Critiques Alice Walker, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishes, 2002), 32-33.

² John Peck and Martin Coyle, Literary Terms and Criticism (New York: Palgrave macmillan, 2002), 120.

³ Evelyn C. White, Alice Walker: a life (New York: Norton and Company, 2004), 336.

⁴ Alice Walker, The Color Purple (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982), 30. All the subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and are cited in the text as (C.P) followed by page number.

⁵ Sofia Sundqvist, "The Emancipation of Celie: The Color Purple as a Womanist Bildungsroman" (master's thesis, University of Karlstads, 2006), 6.

⁶ "Shug and Celie in The Color Purple" Cited at:<<http://www.123Help.com/view.asp?id=8649>>.

⁷ Amy Sickels, African American Writers (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010), 76.

⁸ Rashmi Gaur, "Self-Realization and Search for Identity in Alice Walker's The Color Purple" in New Directions in American Literature, ed. K.S. Iyer (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2003), 129.

⁹ Brenda R. Smith, "We Need a Hero: African American Female Bildungsromane and Celie's Journey to Heroic Female Selfhood in Alice Walker's The Color Purple" in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, ed. Kheven LaGrone (New York: Radopi Books, 2009), 9.

¹⁰ Ibid, 9-10.

¹¹ Daniel W. Ross, "A Fairy-Tale Life: The Making of Celie in Alice Walker's The Color Purple" in Teaching American Ethnic Literature: Nineteen Essays, eds. John R. Maitino and David R. Peck (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 164-165.

¹² Tracy L. Bealer, "Making Hurston's Heroine Her Own: Love and Womanist Resistance in The Color Purple" in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, ed. Kheven LaGrone (New York: Radopi Books, 2009), 32.

¹³ Apryl Denny, "Alice Walker's Womanist Reading of Samuel Richardson's Pamela in The Color Purple" in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, ed. Kheven LaGrone (New York: Radopi Books, 2009), 268.

¹⁴ E. Ellen Barker, "Creating Generations: The Relationship Between Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's The Color Purple" in Critical Essays on Alice Walker, ed. Ikenna Dieke (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 56.

¹⁵ Amy Sickels, 78.

¹⁶ Patricia Andujo, "Rendering the African-American Woman's God through The Color Purple" in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, ed. Kheven LaGrone (New York: Radopi Books, 2009), 65.

¹⁷ Tracy L. Bealer, 34.

- ¹⁸ Catherine A. Colton, "Alice Walker's Womanist Magic: The Conjure Woman as Rhetor" in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, ed. Ikenna Dieke (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 38.
- ¹⁹ Brienne E. Menut, "Writing Home in the Mother Tongue: Poetic Language and the Feminine Identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" (M.A. Thesis, Eastern University, 2006), 16.
- ²⁰ Gerri Bates, *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Green Press, 2005), 96.
- ²¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, "The Tripartite Plight of African-American Women as Reflected in The Novels of Hurston and Walker". Cited at: <http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/20/2/192.refs.html>.
- ²² Brenda R. Smith, 12.
- ²³ Heather Alumbaugh, "In Search of Alice Walker: An Overview", in *Bloom's BioCritiques Alice Walker*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 58.
- ²⁴ Mae G. Henderson, "The Color Purple: Revisions and Redefinitions" in *Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 58.
- ²⁵ Helen Haugness, "Apparent Resistance: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as Supportive of Patriarchal American Society" (Bachelor's thesis, Halmstad University, 2008), 5.

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