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ALICE WALKER'S WOMANISM

Theory & Practice

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Samenvatting "Alice Walker's Womanism: Theory & Practice"

Deze paper behandelt zowel de theoretische als de praktische kant van de vorm van (zwart) feminisme die Alice Walker (°1944) de zwarte vrouw aanbiedt. Hoewel ze als zwarten bepaalde eigenschappen, situaties en gevoelens delen met de Afro-Amerikanen in het algemeen en ze zich als vrouwen ten dele kunnen vinden in het feminisme, kunnen zwarte vrouwen zich immers met geen van beide minderheidsgroepen volledig identificeren. Bijgevolg hebben ze een zwart feminisme in het leven geroepen dat uiting geeft aan het feit dat ze op een gelijkwaardige manier zijn getekend door beide aspecten van hun identiteit.

Alice Walker creëert haar eigen benadering van dit zwart feminisme en noemt het "Womanism". Ze voorziet het van een uitgewerkt theoretisch kader door een complexe definitie van de term op te stellen en het concept uit te werken in verschillende essays, die als "womanist prose" worden gebundeld in (onder andere) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Naast deze louter theoretische benadering, wordt het concept ondersteund, vertolkt en uitgediept in Walkers fictie. Met romans, kortverhalen en poëzie waarin de zwarte vrouw en haar specifieke situaties en emoties centraal staan, illustreert Walker telkens opnieuw de belangrijke aspecten van haar Womanism. In haar verhalen, die druk bevolkt worden door vrouwelijke hoofdrolspeelsters, biedt ze immers rolmodellen en voorbeeldsituaties aan waar de gewone zwarte vrouw zich in kan herkennen en aan kan optrekken. In deze paper wordt uitgebreid aangetoond op welke manieren haar roman *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) een vertolking is van het Womanism.

Door eerst in te zoomen op de theoretische kant van Walkers Womanism en daarna aan te tonen hoe dezelfde ideeën praktisch worden vertolkt in haar fictie, geeft deze paper daarenboven aan dat Womanism de opvallende en dominante link is tussen de verschillende aspecten van Walkers (omvang)rijke oeuvre. Door de centraliteit van de zwarte vrouw en haar ervaringen, die veelal getekend zijn door de comlexe mengeling van racisme en sexisme, in Walkers theoretisch en fictioneel werk, blijken deze beide kanten van haar oeuvre op een intrigerende wijze met elkaar verbonden. Haar theorievorming en fictie lijken elkaar te inspireren en te beïnvloeden en het is deze interactie die Walker sterkte verleent als theoretica en als literair auteur.

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Introduction

Throughout the years Western society, and the Western canon more specifically, have been challenged by different minority groups protesting their white, upper- and upper-middle-class, male bias. Groups such as the Afro-Americans, formerly colonized people, women, gays and lesbians, etc. have expressed their unhappiness with their status of second-class citizens. This paper focuses on one such group: black women. Being "doubly marginalized" (Ward & Herndl, 1997: 741) as both black and female, these women not only question mainstream society, but the challenges to this society by other minority groups (the Afro-Americans on the one hand, the feminists on the other) as well. Without trying to offer an exhaustive overview of the ways in which they have done (and still do) so, this paper will focus on one of the best-known approaches to the issue, Alice Walker's Womanism.

Alice Walker (°1944) profiles herself in her novels and poetry as well as in her essays and the classes she teaches "as apologist and chronicler for black women" (Washington, 1993: 39). With the lives of black women and sexism within society at large and within black society in particular at the core of her entire oeuvre, her literary and theoretical writings are obviously two sides of the same coin. Very passionate about her case, but unable to identify with mainstream (predominantly white) feminism, she has opted for an explicitly different black feminism, which she calls Womanism.

This paper explores both the theoretical and the practical side of Walker's Womanism. As an introduction to the theoretical part, first, some attention will be devoted to Walker's life and work as well as to her position in Afro-American literature. Secondly, I will turn to the theoretical side explicitly. After a concise section on black feminism in general, Walker's own definition of the concept Womanism will be analyzed in detail. To conclude the theoretical part, the essays she collected in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and which she labelled "womanist prose" will be looked at in the light of this definition. In the practical part then, her 1989 novel *The Temple of My Familiar* is analyzed, with specific attention to the ways in which the book could be called a womanist novel. To wrap up, a conclusion is offered.

I. ALICE WALKER'S WOMANISM: THEORY

1. Alice Walker

Before turning to Alice Walker's Womanism as the core issue of this paper, some introductory points will be made concerning her person, work and position in Black Literature. In the first section, a selection of bio- and bibliographical facts that are considered useful for the further course of the paper will be briefly summed up. In the second part, a concise overview of African-American literature by women will be given. This information, however elementary, should lead to a better understanding of Walker as a black writer and feminist scholar.

1.1. Overview of Alice Walker's life and work

Alice Malsenior Walker is born on February 9, 1944 as the eighth child of Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker. Growing up in a sharecropper family in Eatonton, Georgia, Walker experiences first-hand the southern atmosphere in which the "black vernacular [is] prominent and the stamp of slavery and oppression [are] still present"[1] and which will shape many of her future works.

When she is eight years old, Walker accidentally gets shot in the eye by one of her brothers playing with his BB gun. The incident leaves her blind in her right eye and turns the young Alice into a timid and reclusive child. Yet, this solitary attitude leads her "really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out" (Walker, 1984: 244). It brings her to "read stories and beg[i]n to write poems." (Walker, 1984: 245)

After graduating from high school as the valedictorian, Walker begins her higher education at Spelman College in Atlanta. The two years (1961-1963) she spends in the College are "marked by an awakening to intellectual and social issues"[2] as she gets more and more involved in the Civil Rights Movement. During these years she is also active in the

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[1] "Alice Walker." In *Contemporary Authors Online*.

[2] "Alice Walker." In *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 6: American Novelists Since World War II. Second Series.* A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book. Ed. James E. Kibler Jr. University of Georgie: The Gale Group, 1980. 350-358.

Georgia voter registration movement of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In 1963 she transfers to Sarah Lawrence College in New York where she finds herself to be one of the six black students there. In the summer of 1965, she travels to Africa and returns pregnant from the trip. Until a friend refers her to an abortionist, Walker struggles with suicidal tendencies, sleeping with a razor blade under her pillow for three nights (see: Walker, 1984: 246). It is during this confusing period before and just after the abortion that she writes the poems that will later be published in the 1968 volume *Once: Poems*.

During the 1960s Walker works at the New York City Welfare Department. On March 17, 1969 she marries Melvyn Rosenman Leventhal, a white civil rights lawyer and moves to Jackson, Mississippi with him. (This in spite of the fact that an interracial marriage is still against Mississippi State laws at that moment.) She starts working in the Head Start program there and becomes a writer-in-residence at Jackson State College (1968-1969) and Tougaloo College (1970-1971). After a miscarriage in 1968, on November 17, 1969 Walker gives birth to her daughter Rebecca.

During the seventies Walker's career both as a writer and as a teacher kicks off. She will prove to be a talented author, trying her hand at short stories, novels, poetry and essays. Yet, her work, however versatile, reveals some homogeneity as well. Themes like racism and sexism, the role of the artist, the relation between art and life, the process towards "spiritual health and self-definition"[3] of the characters and environmental issues run as threads through her oeuvre. Although she shows a special preference for "the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women" (Walker, 1984: 250), she says herself that she is "preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of [her] people." (Walker, 1984: 250) She also often incorporates autobiographical elements in her work and depicts the political, social and moral conditions of the South in it. In 1970, Walker publishes her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. With this novel, Walker becomes part of what critics call "The Second Black Renaissance" in which black women authors (like Maya Angelou, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison) play a leading role. In 1972-1973, she leaves Mississippi for an eighteen-month period in which she teaches at Wellesley College as well as the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Her course on black women writers is among the first of its kind and deals with previously neglected authors like Phillis Wheatley, Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Gwendolyn Brooks and Paule Marshall. Her commitment to the recovery of Zora Neale Hurston especially catches the eye. Walker for

[3] "Alice Walker." In Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 143: American Novelists Since World War II. Third Series. A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book. The Gale Group, 1994. 277-292.

example edits a collection of Hurston's work, *I Love Myself when I'm Laughing... and Then Again when I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (1979) in order to make it available again. In 1973, Walker publishes the collection of short stories *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* as well as a volume of poetry, *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*. In 1974 Walker becomes editor at *Ms*. magazine and in 1976 her novel *Meridian* is published. This book is exceptional because it describes the Civil Rights Movement from the perspective of a young black woman. Walker becomes associate professor at Yale University in 1977 and in 1978 she moves to San Francisco with Robert Allen after her divorce from Melvyn. In 1979 she publishes a new volume of poetry, *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You In The Morning*.

After the publication of another collection of short stories *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* in 1981, Walker moves to Mendocino County, California to concentrate on her next novel. That novel, *The Color Purple*, is published in 1982 and unites all the themes Walker treated in her previous works. The novel becomes a huge success and secures her reputation as a writer once and for all, winning her both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. Moreover, in 1985, the novel is turned into a movie by Steven Spielberg. In 1983 *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, a collection of essays Walker wrote the past decades, is published. With this collection of what Walker herself calls "womanist prose" she affirms her reputation as a black feminist on theoretical grounds, coining the term "Womanism" to refer to black feminism. In 1985 collected volumes of her poetry and fiction appear: *Alice Walker Boxed Set--Poetry: Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning; Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems; Once, Poems* and *Alice Walker Boxed Set--Fiction: The Third Life of Grange Copeland, You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down, and In Love and Trouble*. Throughout the years, Walker also shows a great concern for the planet and environmental problems, more universal issues that go beyond sexual or racial questions. In 1987 for example, she is arrested while blocking a gate of the Concord Naval Weapons Station in California. In 1989, *The Temple of My Familiar*, an ambitious novel of ideas, appears.

During the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, Walker continues along the same path, publishing many different works. In 1991 she publishes the children's story *Finding the Green Stone* and in 1992 she writes another novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. She also produces non fictional works like *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1993), which relates the making of the documentary under the same name that she produced with Pratibha Parmar about the genital mutilation of

women. Another book about the making of a movie is the 1996 *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult; A Meditation of Life, Spirit, Art, and the Making of the film "The Color Purple," Ten Years Later*. This work not only talks about Walker's feelings during the making of the film adaptation of *The Color Purple*, but also contains her screenplay Steven Spielberg refused to use. In 1997 she publishes *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism*, which deals with her personal social and political stance. Her 1998 novel, *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, treats female sexuality. In 2000 she publishes another collection of short stories: *The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart*, which again is full of autobiographical references. After more than a decade, Walker returns to poetry in 2003 with *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth*. In 2004 she publishes her seventh novel, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* about a black female novelist.

1.2. Alice Walker's position in (African-)American Literature

In this part a concise and highly generalised overview of African-American Literature will be given in order to elucidate Alice Walker's position as an author and a scholar. Focussing on black women writers exclusively, the section will try to relate Walker's current position to the cases of some important predecessors.

It goes without saying that, while often neglected, almost from the moment they set foot on American soil, black people have written. However diverse their situation and their time of writing, black people's experiences "of Africa, the transatlantic or Middle Passage, slavery, Southern plantation tradition, emancipation, Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, Northern migration, urbanization, and racism – have produced a residue of shared memories and frames of reference" (Bell, 1987: 5). Besides recognizing this specific heritage, throughout the centuries, black people have always considered themselves and their experiences as undeniably part of American life as well. In their writings, they have found different ways of portraying what W.E.B. Du Bois calls their "double consciousness", which he describes as follows:

> [A black person] ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, quoted in: Byerman, 1995)[4]

In what follows, some of these portrayals will be briefly looked at.

[4] No pagination.

1.2.1. African-American Literature from its beginnings until the First World War

It is Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* published in 1773 that is now considered "the first African American work of literature" (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 127). Yet, this did not come about without any discussion. At the time it was so inconceivable that a black person – let alone a black woman – would produce impressive verses that a group of "'the most respectable characters in Boston' (…) assembled to question closely the African adolescent on the slender sheaf of poems that she claimed to have written by herself." (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: xxxi) After having "examined" the volume and the poet, the men write a preface to Wheatley's book, "Attestation", which says:

> We whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the POEMS specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by PHILLIS, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. (quoted in: *The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: xxxii)

This anecdote illustrates the scepticism that existed about the question whether black people could ever excel in the arts. This doubt was firmly rooted in philosophical texts from the Enlightenment in which Kant and Hume among others argued that writing was a privilege for white Europeans as they were the most civilized and by nature most apt to write.

Yet, after Wheatley's publication, many others follow. As their texts deal with the striving for equality and the American ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", the first black authors represent themselves "as faithful adherents to the humanitarian ideals of Christianity and the American Revolution" (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 129). Up to the abolition of slavery in 1865, with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, such themes are treated in the so-called "narratives of fugitive slaves". These (often non-fictional) narratives seek to raise "righteous indignation towards the physical, psychological, and sexual brutalities commonplace under slavery." (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 4) In the stories a "rite of passage from slavery in the South to freedom in the North" (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 133) is described in which slavery is depicted as "a condition of extreme physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual deprivation" (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 133). Among these first writers, there are also some women authors who picture the life of female slaves and show that "because of sexual oppression, systematized rape, forced breeding, and responsibility for

domestic tasks, black women suffered in more ways than black men" (Smith, 1983)[5]. For example: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which states its goal as "to arouse the women of the North" (Baker, 1991: 21).

Other women novelists are (the white) Harriet Beecher Stowe, who publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 and Harriet Wilson, who publishes the autobiographical novel *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North* in 1859, which moreover is the first novel "published by [a] black [American] in the United States" (Bell, 2004: 95). As Bell argues, "the ideals [these autobiographies and slave narratives] represent – an indomitable will to be free, unshakable faith in the justice of their cause, extraordinary genius, and irrepressible bravery – are thematically important in the tradition of the Afro-American novel." (Bell, 1987: 29) Likewise, Gates considers the genre of slave narratives to have played a "central role not only in the birth and shape of Afro-American fictional narrative forms, but also in the subsequent developments of black autobiography" (Gates, 1990: xiv).

Female poets during this period are Lucy Terry (who writes only one ballad *Bars Fight*), Ada (Sarah L. Forten's pen name) and Frances E.W. Harper.

A first explicitly feminist voice among these early black women authors is the ardent civil rights activist Sojourner Truth. Although she cannot read or write, she is a talented deliverer of speeches, the most famous of which she gives on the 1851 women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio and becomes known later as "Ar'n't I a woman?".

Bell characterizes the period from 1865 to the turn of the century as "an age of short-lived political freedom and long-term peonage, repressive laws, convict labor, and lynchings" (Bell, 2004: 96) for black people. Yet, at the same time, "literacy among African Americans increase[es] (…) and the black middle class and even a small but wealthy social elite [grows] in number and influence." (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 466) During this (post-)Reconstruction Period the most outstanding woman certainly is Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a political voice and journalist among male allies as Booker T. Washington and William E.B. Du Bois who think, write and talk about "the direction and strategies of African American political, economic, and social progress" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 5). Wells-Barnett and Du Bois hereby especially stress activism and resistance to the "separate but equal" ideology, which is made legal by a 1896 Supreme Court decision.

[5] No pagination.

From 1894 onwards, the National Association of Colored Women begins publishing their magazine *Women's Era*. The period between 1890 and 1910 is often referred to with that same name, because of the high number of female authors publishing. Lucy Delaney publishes *From Darkness Cometh the Light; or, Struggles for Freedom* in 1891; Frances E.W. Harper *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted*, "the first Afro-American novel to treat the heroism of blacks during and after the Civil War" (Bell, 1987: 58), in 1892; and Anna Julia Cooper *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* in that same year.

In this "women's era", black women "were especially well situated to analyze and offer solutions to society's injustices because of their position as women in a sexist society and as black people in a racist society." (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 554) Anna Julia Cooper for example, in *Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race*, claims that "the education and elevation of black women is crucial to racial uplift" (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 554) as they are the ones in charge of the education of the next generation.

During the (post-)Reconstruction Period post-bellum slave narratives and autobiographical novels keep appearing as well. For example: Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868) and Susie King Taylor's *Reminiscences of My Life with the 33rd United States Colored Troops* (1902).

1.2.2. African-American Literature during the Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance, or New Negro Renaissance, is considered "one of the most prolific and artistically sound collections of literature by and about African Americans to date" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 6).

> In poetry, fiction, drama, and the essay, as in music, dance, painting, and sculpture, African Americans worked not only with a new sense of confidence and purpose but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many black artists in the long, troubled history of the peoples of African descent in North America. (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 929)

Several complicated and intertwined factors lie at the basis of this Renaissance. The blacks, who served along the side of the whites during the First World War, come home to find none of the recognition their white allies receive. Instead, racial tensions again explode during the "Red Summer" in 1919 in which many lynchings and riots "[attempt] to move African Americans back to their prewar status as second-class citizens." (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 6) In

addition, many blacks move to northern regions during what is called the Great Migration, looking for better "economic and cultural opportunities" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 6). So, all over America, but in the North especially, new urban cultures are created, shaped by the music, cultural customs and stories of the blacks. In these new black centres, the ideology of the "New Negro" comes into being, which is characterized by an optimistic belief in progress and which is captured also in the cultural productions of the age.

> Expressed in various ways, the creativity of black Americans undoubtedly came from a common source – the irresistible impulse of blacks to create boldly expressive art of a high quality as a primary response to their social conditions, as an affirmation of their dignity and humanity in the face of poverty and racism. (*Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 929)

The black artists receive the help from several new publishers (e.g. Alfred A. Knopf, Boni & Liveright, etc.) and journals (e.g. *The Crisis* (the journal edited by W.E.B. Du Bois for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), *Fire!!*, *Opportunity*, etc.).

Although the male writers of the Renaissance receive considerable attention both during the period and in the following decades, many of the women writers sink into oblivion at one time or another. Yet, as the subtitle of Roses' and Randolph's study *Harlem Renaissance and Beyond – Literary Biographies of 100 Black Women Writers 1900-1945* clearly indicates, these women were certainly present. I will focus on only three of them, whom Alice Walker herself also draws attention to in the classes she teaches.

It is not indisputably clear when exactly Zora Neale Hurston is born – due to a fire in the courthouse in which all the records are lost – but it should be around the turn of the century. Her hometown is Eatonville, Florida, where the black citizens "[govern] themselves and [elect] their own officials" (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 185), which is the reason some critics believe that Hurston does not criticize racial discrimination as vehemently. Although she receives a higher education at Howard University, Barnard College and Columbia University and is supported by many white people, Hurston keeps in touch with her roots. Black folklore plays an important role in her work and consequently she reminds "the [Harlem] Renaissance – especially its more bourgeois members – of the richness in the racial heritage" (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 182). She is friends with many of the central characters of the Renaissance (like Hughes and Countee Cullen) and publishes in the magazines *Opportunity* and *Fire!!* (which she cofounds with Langston Hughes). She remains rather successful until the 1940s, but then disappears from the literary stage. The reasons for this faltering are among others "her mismanagement of her personal finances, ill health, and a

tendency to make pronouncements that alienated fellow Afro-Americans." (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 181) During the last decades of her life, Hurston sees her work go out of print and has difficulties with finding new publishers. She dies in 1960 and is forgotten almost immediately thereafter. Although some individual critics draw attention to her the years after her death, it can be said that it is Alice Walker who brings Hurston "to the attention of a popular female audience and [who] disseminat[ed] the Zora legend." (Rose & Randolph, 1990: 188)

Nella Larsen is born of a Danish mother and a West Indian father in 1891 and dies in 1964. Although she is considered "one of the most promising writers" (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 213) during the Harlem Renaissance, she spends the last decades of her life working as a nurse and is forgotten as a literary phenomenon in the 1940s already. It is because of her position at the Countee Cullen Regional Branch of the New York Public Library that she comes into contact with key figures of the Harlem Renaissance. She begins her literary career by writing short stories, but later also publishes two novels. In her fiction "the subtle complexities of race and gender" (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 219) are central, which makes it full of "valid representations of both the black and female perspectives." (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 219) After an (unjust) accusation of plagiarism, she retreats from the literary scene in the late 1930s.

Jessie Redmon Fauset is born on April 26, 1882 in Fredericksville, New Jersey. In 1905, she graduates as the first black woman from Cornell University where she moreover is the first black woman member of the Phi Beta Kappa society. Starting from 1912 she publishes articles in *The Crisis*, of which W.E.B. Du Bois makes her literary editor in 1919. Besides publishing many articles herself, Fauset, being in charge of deciding which poetry and fiction appears in the journal, "offers young writers of the Harlem Renaissance a showcase for their work" (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 103). In addition to this, she also opens her own home as a literary salon where writers come together and discuss the works of others. Langston Hughes calls her "one of those who midwifed the so-called New Negro literature into being." (Roses & Randolph, 1990: 103) With her focus on women characters, the female consciousness and development, Fauset can be considered an early black feminist. In 1961 she dies of hypertensive heat disease. According to Bell, both Larsen and Fauset "reject the romantic extremes of nationalism and assimilation in favor of cultural dualism." (Bell, 1987: 112)

Although "earlier novels by Dunbar, Du Bois, and Johnson had dealt with the conflict between determinism and the human will" (Bell, 1987: 167), it is during the late 1930s and the early 1940s that naturalism flourishes in African American literature. Female authors like Ann Petry and Margaret Walker try their hand at the genre successfully.

Moreover, as Bell notes, during the forties, there is "an increase in the number of writers who [publish] novels in which the protagonists and the majority of the characters [are] white." (Bell, 1987: 187) For example: Petry's *Country Place* and Hurston's *Seraph on the Sewanee*.

1.2.3. African-American Literature during the 50s, 60s and 70s

As Dickson-Carr argues "African American art and politics often inspired each other." (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 12). This is especially true for the literature written during the 50s and 60s, when the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement come into being. In imitation of Gandhi's opposition to British colonialism in India, the Civil Rights Movement is characterized by "non-violence, civil disobedience, Christian love, and moral suasion" (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 1792). Besides this, there is the emergent Black Nationalism associated with the Black Muslims and their leader Malcolm X. These Muslims have a separatist agenda and want Afro-Americans to have "their own economic, moral, social, religious, and political regeneration as a 'nation within a nation' in America." (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 1793) However, because of non-resistant white violence against the blacks, the Civil Rights Movement turns into the Black Power Movement in the 60s. Especially with the assassination of many prosperous leaders (John F. Kennedy in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King in 1968), the climate changes.

> The adoption of the concept of Black Power is one of the most legitimate and healthy developments in American politics and race relations in our time. … It is a call for people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society. (Stokely Carmichael & Charles V. Hamilton, quoted in: Bell, 1987: 236)

The Black Arts Movement is the "aesthetic and spiritual sister" (Neal, quoted in: Bell, 2004: 133) of the Black Power Movement and "reject[s] the notion that black culture [is] forever inferior to or dependent on European-centered aesthetics" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 13).

An important Black Arts poet is Sonia Sanchez, who is also a member of the Nation of Islam for a while. Like many artists in the Black Arts Movement she expresses herself in poetry as the genre is “ideally suited to the felt immediacy of struggle characteristic of Black Arts and Black Power” (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 1797). This kind of poetry is characterized by a combination of “the African American vernacular resonances of sermons, popular music, and black mass ‘speech’” (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 1797) and the verse is “free, conversational, jazzy, and bluesy” (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 1797). Other successful women artists are June Jordan, Carolyn Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni, Jayne Cortez and Mari Evans and Gwendolyn Brooks.

In general, the literature during this period is characterized by “a movement away from naturalism and non-racial themes, and a movement toward the rediscovery and revitalization of myth, legend, and ritual as appropriate sign systems for expressing the double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision of the modern black experience.” (Bell, 1987: 189)

1.2.4. African-American Literature since 1970

As Dickson-Carr notes, “the three decades between 1970 and 2000 [constitute] the most productive and successful period in African American literary history.” (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 1) The number of successful black authors not only increases, they also sell more copies, begin winning several prestigious prizes (e.g. Toni Morrison wins the Nobel Prize in 1993) and are more than ever present in anthologies and literary courses at the academy. In 1968 the Black Studies Department is founded at San Francisco State College and in the following years many other universities follow this example.

Moreover, as Dickson-Carr argues, since 1970

> African American women authors have become dominant forces in creating and contributing to the larger tradition after many decades of being virtually silenced by outright neglect from publishers who considered them irrelevant. As with so much literature by and about women, that silence has been broken, giving voice to the infinite complexities of African American women’s lives, including women’s roles as leaders, creators of culture, mothers, lovers, among many other. (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 2)

The year 1970 especially is crucial for women authors. In that year, Maya Angelou publishes her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Birds Sings* and “its success signal[s] the existence

of a market for works by black women." (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 2016) Additionally, Toni Cade Bambara edits the anthology *The Black Women* in which she criticizes "the predominantly male cultural nationalist movement and the predominantly white women's movement" (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 2016). Moreover, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and June Jordan publish their first novel. These novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *The Bluest Eye* and *His Own Where* respectively, focus on relationships within black communities rather than those between blacks and whites.

After this starting shot many other successful black women authors appear, like Gloria Naylor, Audre Lorde, Gayl Jones and others. They introduce new themes into African American literature such as "motherhood, mother/daughter relationships, women's friendships, and the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in African American cosmologies." (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 2016) Moreover, many of these authors use the black language and display the influence of African American musical forms, such as the blues, jazz and later hip hop and rap music in their texts.

Besides the numerous "experiment[s] (…) with some form of neorealism" (Bell, 2004: 139), women writers excel in other genres as well. For example: Octavia Butler becomes a successful science fiction author and Lucille Clifton, Virginia Hamilton, Rosa Guy and June Jordan are popular writers of children's or young-adult fiction.

Other signals of this renewed interest in and success of black women writers are the fact that Rita Dove is made Poet Laureate of the United States twice and that it is Maya Angelou who reads poetry at the inauguration of Bill Clinton as president in 1993. All these factors have lead critics to speak of a New or Second Renaissance and a "New Black Aesthetic" in which female authors take up a special place. As Bell says:

> Based on their commercial and critical success on best-seller lists, in literary awards, in canon reformation in new anthologies, and in college classrooms across the nation, critical and poetic neorealism as well as modern fabulation in novels by primarily black women became the dominant African Americentric aesthetic of the late 1980s. (Bell, 2004: 256)

Besides writing fiction, this new generation of women writers "[has] also contributed to the body of critical texts produced by and about African American writers." (*The Norton Anthology. African American Literature*, 1997: 2019) Many of them, like Alice Walker and June Jordan, prove to be successful essayists on several subjects. In addition, as Dickson-Carr further argues, the time is characterized by the "rapid inroads that both African American

women and men [are] making into the academy" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 19). This has not only implied that attention is drawn to contemporary works by black authors, but also and possibly more importantly, that the work of previously ignored or denied authors is recovered "in order to create a stronger, more complex black identity" (Dickson-Carr, 2005: 20).

2. Alice Walker's Womanism: Theory

In this part of the paper a theoretical discussion of Alice Walker's Womanism will be offered. First, a broader framework will be sketched. After determining the unique position of the black woman, the relation between mainstream and black feminism will be looked at to conclude that the two are similar, though not the same thing. In the second part, I will turn to Walker's Womanism as one possible way of distinguishing between the two.

2.1. Black feminism

2.1.1. The women in no man's land

Being both black and female, one could argue, black women can identify with both Afro-Americans and women. Indeed, at first sight, their challenges to the prevalent social, political and cultural paradigms seem to be part of the problems those two minority groups have with them. Yet, as I will try to illustrate in this part, it is precisely because they belong to both groups and moreover belong to them to the same degree, that black women are undeniably different from their black *male* and *white* female "allies".

As Showalter points out, for both Afro-Americans and feminists, the black woman is "the Other Woman, the silenced partner" (Showalter, 1997: 214). This is not only true in general, but also more specifically for literary theory. Throughout the years, black women have protested against "the sexism of black literary history" as well as against "the racism of feminist literary history" (Showalter, 1997: 214), finding themselves and their works irrevocably "excluded from both modes of inquiry" (Smith, 1997: 315) and consequently situated in some kind of no man's land. Yet, instead of remaining silent in this no man's land, black women have claimed their own place, stating that they should be considered more than some sort of common denominator of Afro-Americanism and feminism. Instead, being both black and female, these women are "doubly marginalized" (Ward & Herndl, 1997: 741),

which makes their experience unique. As Smith argues, “the meaning of blackness in this country shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the experience of race.” (Smith, 1997: 317) Or, formulated differently: “black women experience a unique form of oppression in discursive and nondiscursive practices alike because they are victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism.” (Smith, 1997: 317) According to hooks, this puts black women in a privileged position to tackle questions of oppression of any sort.

> [I]t is essential that black women recognize the special vantage point [their] marginality gives [them] and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony. (hooks, quoted in: Evans, 1996)[6]

2.1.2. Feminism and black feminism: “as purple to lavender”

As has been illustrated, besides race, gender is an important aspect of a black woman’s identity. Many black female scholars have pointed out that although it is certainly true that black people are faced with racism as a community, black women are faced with sexism not only from outside, but also from within that same community.

> It is obvious that most Black men are not in positions that allow them to exert the kind of institutionalized patriarchal power and control over Black women’s lives that privileged white men do in this society. But it is undeniable that they do exert a lot of power over Black women and children in everyday life. (hooks, 1992: 124)

An example of this is the domestic violence that is not uncommon in black homes.

> Patriarchy, the institutionalized structure of male dominance, encourages males of all races and classes to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression and coercion toward others, women and children (hooks, 1994: 148)

With racial equality being fought for by several different organizations, sexism should be addressed by a specific Black Feminist Movement.

[6] No pagination.

> Every Black person concerned about our collective survival must acknowledge that sexism is a destructive force in Black life that cannot be effectively addressed without an organized political movement to change consciousness, behavior and institutions. What we need is a feminist revolution in Black life. But to have such a revolution, we must first have a feminist movement. Many Black folks do not know what the word feminism means. They may think of it only as something having to do with white women's desire to share equal rights with white men. In reality, feminism is a movement to end all sexism and sexist oppression. The strategies necessary to achieve that end are many. We need to find ways to address the specific forms that sexism takes in our diverse communities. (hooks, 1992: 124)

As this quote suggests, many black women cannot relate completely to the mainstream Anglo-American feminist movement, although it is self-evident that in some respects white and black feminism are related. Obviously, both criticise the Western culture generally, and the Western canon more particularly, for being patriarchal (see: Russ, 1973: 4 and Gilbert & Gubar, 1979: 45-46). Yet, many black women consider the mainstream feminist movement narrow and elitist, as it is "markedly white, middle-class, Western, and heterosexual, and (…) [consequently] ha[s] been participating in the marginalization of women of color, working-class women, Third World women and lesbians" (Ward & Herndl, 1997: 259). Black women explicitly refute the suggestion that there is something as "*the* female consciousness" or "*the* female experience". As Christian says:

> For we now confronted the revelations we always knew, that there is both a She and there are many she's. And that sometimes, in our work we seemed to reduce the *both-and* to *either-or*. That revelation made itself felt strongly in the exclusion that women of color protested when Woman was defined (…). The awareness that we too seek to homogenize the world of our Sisters, to fix ourselves in boxes and categories through jargon, theory, abstraction, is upon us. (Christian, 1997: 54)

Although there certainly is something white and black women have in common being women, it is something totally different to be black *and* female. So, even among women, universality does not exist. The double marginalization that is implied by being a black woman has called for a feminist theory that "seeks to explore representations of black women's lives through techniques of analysis which suspend the variables of race, class, and gender in mutually interrogative relation." (Smith, 1997: 318) Or, as hooks argues,

> We are in need of more feminist scholarship which addresses a wide variety of issues in Black life (mothering, Black masculinity, the relationship between gender and homicide, poverty, the crisis of Black womanhood, connections between health and our conceptions of the body, sexuality, media, etc.) – work that could have transformative impact on our future. (hooks, 1989: 56)

According to hooks, such a specific black feminist movement will not cause a division among blacks – as many black men fear – but will instead bring liberation of the race at large closer.

> A feminist movement that addresses the needs of Black women, men and children can strengthen our bonds with one another, deepen our sense of community and further Black liberation. (hooks, 1992: 124)

As has been illustrated, white and black feminism certainly have important features in common. In spite of the attempts of some white feminists to include them in their feminism, black women have however regarded themselves as incompatibly different and have called a black feminist movement into life. Therefore, it seems appropriate to conclude, as Alice Walker does, that black feminism stands to white feminism as “purple to lavender” (Walker, 1984: xii).

2.2. Alice Walker’s Womanism

Alice Walker’s Womanism is but one of the many concrete forms black feminism has taken throughout the years. Another well-known example is the Combahee River Collective, founded by Barbara Smith, and its *Black Feminist Statement*. Yet, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to go in to black feminism in general, these other approaches will not be elaborated on. Instead, the focus of our attention will be Alice Walker’s Womanism, which will be theoretically explored in this part. First of all, Walker’s own definition of the concept will be given and analyzed in detail. Secondly, some themes that return regularly in her theoretical writing will be considered in the light of this definition.

2.2.1. What is Womanism?

Alice Walker coined the term Womanism in her collection of essays entitled *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, published in 1983. At the beginning of the collection she gives a definition of this “feminist, Afrocentric, healing, embodied, and spiritual” (Razak, 2006: 100) concept:

> **Womanist 1.** From *womanish.* (Opp. of "girlish", i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in great depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious.*
> **2.** *Also:* A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
> **3.** Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless.*
> **4.** Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (Walker, 1984: xi-xii)

This chaotic enumeration suggests that Womanism denotes very different things, which makes it difficult to fully grasp what Walker is saying. I will try however to analyse each of the four entries in the definition as completely as possible.

In the first entry Walker defines "womanist" in reference to the origin and the original use and meaning of the term. The only phrase that does not go into these more etymological issues is the one in which she indicates that "womanist" is a synonym for a black feminist[7], or by extension, a feminist of color. By adding the generalization "of color", Walker makes sure she is not guilty of the discrimination white feminists are. But, as I already indicated, the major part of this first entry deals with the origin of the term "womanist". This noun is derived from the black folk adjective "womanish", which is primarily used in the black folk expression "You acting womanish." mothers say to their daughters and which means the same as another folk expression: "You trying to be grown." As Collins argues, by "[t]aking the term from the Southern black folk expression of mothers to female children (…), Walker suggests that black women's concrete history fosters a womanist worldview accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women." (Collins, 1996: 10)

[7] Whereas "Walker herself uses the two terms as being virtually interchangeable" (Collins, 1996: 10), not all critics agree on considering womanism and black feminism as synonyms (see: Collins, 1996). Either way, it is a fact that both "are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty". (Omolade, quoted in: Collins, 1996: 10)

The two folk expressions imply three internally connected meanings. First of all, the expressions indicate "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *wilfull* behavior." (Walker, 1984: xi) These four adjectives all refer to doing/saying something that is not self-evident or easy, yet doing/saying it with strong determination and a lot of motivation. As Saunders argues, "[t]he emphasis is on 'wilfull' because for so long, so many black women have not been considered to be in possession of their own free wills, and no small part of the problem has resided in the psyche of black men." (Saunders, 1988)[8] Secondly, both expressions refer to an attitude that is characterized by "[w]anting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one." (Walker, 1984: xi) This again implies the non-self-evident side of Womanism. Thirdly, the expressions indicate a mature, grown attitude. As Walker says in the beginning of the entry, "womanish" is the opposite of "girlish", which means "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious." (Walker, 1984: xi) In opposition, "womanish" (as do the expressions) means not only acting, but also being grown up. It is associated with being responsible, in charge and serious. This emphasis on the mature side of womanists may indicate that the zeal for the black woman's case does not derive from a childish passion or a naïve whim. Instead, it is rooted in a feeling of responsibility, of being in charge of the fate of black women.

In the second entry, Walker defines "womanist" by referring to the different types of relationships that can occur between women. Most importantly, womanists love other women, especially for those things that make them female, like their specific female culture, their emotional life, their strength. Besides just loving these female characteristics, Walker adds that womanists should even *prefer* them (implying: to those of a man). It seems that Walker not only means that women should love other women, but that, more importantly, they should also adore what is specifically female about themselves.

Although Walker refers to lesbian relationships in the first sentence of this entry already, she clearly does not despise of heterosexual relationships. This is probably the feature that constitutes the most striking difference between Womanism and white feminism. Although Walker overtly pleads with her audience to love themselves solely because of the fact that they are female, she is not at all hostile towards men. In fact, "lov[ing] individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually" (Walker, 1984: xi) is even considered a characteristic of a womanist in her list. According to Collins, "Womanism seemingly supplies a way for black

[8] No pagination.

women to address gender oppression without attacking black men." (Collins, 1996: 11) Walker explicitly expresses this non-separatist attitude three times in the entry. First of all, according to her, a womanist is "[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female." (Walker, 1984: xi) With this statement Walker makes clear that black feminism is not opposing race liberation, but will, instead, bring it closer. Secondly, she states literally that womanists are not separatists. The third way in which she gives vent to her non-separatist attitude is by saying that womanists are "[t]raditionally universalist" (Walker, 1984: xi). She illustrates this by means of the metaphor of the garden in which "the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity." (Collins, 1996: 11) In other words, Walker indicates that a tolerant attitude is not only needed among sexes, but also among races. In that way, she offers a philosophy here that is useful not only for black women, but for the whole of mankind. Her definition thus clearly has both a concrete dimension (cf. the rooting of the term in black (female) folk expressions) and a more universal one (cf. the mythical, worldwide image of the garden). As Davis says, Walker's definition illustrates that "individuals are not separate from the survival of the earth, but instead act as extensions of the universe itself." (Davis, 2003: 33)

Walker further refers to one specific relationship between women: the relationship between a mother and her child. The fact that her two examples in this entry involve a mother-child (presumably a daughter) situation suggests that she considers motherhood essential in the experience of being a woman. As Razak claims, Walker focuses on the "sharing and mentorship that are a traditional part of idealized Black mother-daughter relationships." (Razak, 2006: 99)

Lastly, Walker uses a mild form of humor in this entry, for example when Walker says that womanists are sometimes separatist "for health" (Walker, 1984: xi), or in the last dialogue between mother and child. Probably this is to create a positive atmosphere.

In the third entry, Walker defines "womanist" associatively. In an enumeration which lists things a womanist loves, she mainly considers the irrational side women are traditionally said to have (cf. the moon as a symbol of femininity). In her list, Walker includes music and dance, love, food and roundness as symbols for the worldly, bodily pleasures in life as well as the moon and the Spirit as symbols for the spiritual dimension of our being. Furthermore, she says womanists love struggle, which probably means that they do not give up to easily in their striving. And besides loving their people ("folk") in general, womanists also love themselves.

(cf. entry 2) It is not clear whether the italicized "*regardless*" at the end of the list solely modifies the penultimate phrase, or whether it applies to the whole list.

Moreover, it should be noted that, throughout the whole definition, but in this entry in the most straightforward manner, Walker uses essentialist sentences. She seems to believe there are at least some aspects that all (black) women share.

The fourth and last entry consists solely of the phrase "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (Walker, 1984: xii), which has become famous by now. With this statement, Walker indicates that both have things in common, but in the end are undeniably different. By ending on this sentence, she moreover closes the circle her definition is, as she began with a similar observation in the first entry, namely that a womanist is a black feminist. Why she chose purple and lavender as the colors of reference (and not, say, blue and violet), is not clear. It certainly makes one think of *The Color Purple*. Whether this was intended by Walker, we do not know.

In her definition of Womanism, Walker indicates several different things that are not easily summed up. Most importantly, she sketches (black) women as beautiful and strong beings without denouncing men or white people in the process. As Davis puts it:

> Through her four-part definition, [Walker] draws her reader's attention to the importance of women's intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness, and she stresses the need to create a global community where all members of society are encouraged to survive and survive whole. Madhu Dubey argues that Walker's womanist project seeks to "integrate the past and present, individual and community, personal and political change, into a unified whole." (Davis, 2004: 33)

In my opinion, it is this "universalist" stance that gives Walker more strength as a feminist. Talking about women "an sich", without vehemently criticizing others (men, white people,…) for whatever reason, she easily and very effectively proves what all feminists aim to prove, namely that women are worthwhile *because they are women*.

2.2.2. Womanism in Alice Walker's theoretical writings

To conclude the theoretical section on Alice Walker's Womanism, I will briefly look at how she uses, elaborates on and illustrates the concept in her theoretical writing.[9] Without attempting to give an exhaustive overview, I will focus on four topics that are especially relevant for this paper.

To begin with, it should be noted that Alice Walker herself divided the collection of essays in four parts, presumably on thematic grounds. Although such a division is never clear-cut and many themes run over the different sections, each of the four parts seems to have one overall theme. The first part deals primarily with the black artist and the black female artist by extension. The essays mention some of Walker's personal examples and influences and elaborate on the role and meaning of black artists in general. The second section deals with the race issue. It goes into the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King. Yet, it also refers back to the black artist and flashes forward to the topic of black women and black feminism. This latter topic is then treated extensively in the third part, which opens with the title essay of the collection. The last section contains essays that are not easily placed under one theme. It includes essays on some more universal themes as well as on themes already treated and ends with a series of more personal essays. I will only partly follow this subdivision, as, like I already indicated, most recurrent themes go beyond the section boundaries.

2.2.2.1. The race issue

A first recurrent theme in Walker's essays is the race issue. Talking about the black artist in general and many black artists in particular (*The Black Writer and the Southern Experience*; *The Divided Life of Jean Toomer*; *Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View*; *Making the Moves and the Movies We Want*), the South (*Lulls*), the Civil Rights Movement (*The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was it?*), Martin Luther King (*Choice: A Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*), black women and black lesbians (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, *Breaking Chains and Encouraging Life*), etc., Walker touches upon several different aspects of black life. Because it is impossible to go into all of them, I will

[9] I only considered the essays collected in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. Womanist Prose by Alice Walker* as its subtitle suggests Womanism and, more generally, the topic of being a black woman are central in these essays.

elaborate on only two issues that recur regularly in the collection and that I consider most vital.

Firstly, and probably most importantly, throughout the collection of essays, Walker refers to black people as a community, and thus consisting of men *and* women, both equally important (e.g. page 17). Although she does not hesitate to state that she is primarily concerned with the black woman's case, Walker again proves that she certainly cannot be called a separatist. As she puts it herself, she is preoccupied with "the survival *whole* of [her] people." (Walker, 1984: 250) Formulating it less seriously, she says: "Personally, I'm not giving up Stevie Wonder and John Lennon, no matter what" (Walker, 1984: 279). Such statements remind the reader of her definition of Womanism in which she says a womanist is "[c]omitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female." (Walker, 1984: xi)

Secondly, Walker is obviously greatly indebted to and influenced by both the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King. She seems to value both for similar reasons that are moreover also connected to the first point I made about her view on black people as a community. About the Civil Rights Movement she says:

> If the Civil Rights Movement is "dead," and if it gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever. It gave some of us bread, some of us shelter, some of us knowledge and pride, all of us comfort. It gave us our children, our husbands, our brothers, our fathers, as men reborn and with a purpose for living. It broke the pattern of black servitude in this country. It shattered the phony "promise" of white soap operas that sucked away so many pitiful lives. It gave us history and men far greater than Presidents. It gave us heroes, selfless men of courage and strength, for our little boys and girls to follow. It gave us hope for tomorrow. It called us to life. Because we life, it can never die. (Walker, 1984: 128-129)

The Movement created the sense of community among black people that Walker thinks is so essential. About Dr. King she says:

> He gave us back our heritage. He gave us back our homeland; the bones and dust of our ancestors, who may now sleep within our caring *and* our hearing. He gave us the blueness of the Georgia sky in autumn as in summer; the colors of the Southern winter as well as glimpses of the green of vacation-time spring. Those of our relatives we used to invite for a visit we now can ask to stay… He gave us full-time use of our own woods, and restored our memories to those of us who were forced to run away, as realities we might each day enjoy and leave for our children. He gave us continuity of place, without which community is ephemeral. He gave us home. (Walker, 1984: 145)

Dr. King not only gave the black people "home", which according to Walker is the cornerstone of a community, he also learned them to cherish their background, their traditions, and those things that make them black people. He "did not say [black people] had

to become carbon copies of the white American middle class; but he did say [they] had the right to become whatever [they] wanted to become." (Walker, 1984:124-125)

2.2.2.2.The gender issue

Calling herself "a rather ardent feminist" (Walker, 1984: 152) and stating that, for her, "black women are the most fascinating creations in the world" (Walker, 1984: 251), Walker secondly writes innumerable passages about the situation of black *women* in particular.

First of all, Walker clearly recognizes the bipartite identity of black women. As she says, "it is the black woman's words that have the most meaning for us, her daughters, because she, like us, has experienced life not only as a black person, but as a woman" (Walker, 1984: 275).

Secondly, Walker makes clear that because of their double identity, black women are the victims of both racism and sexism. This leads her to say that the black woman is "oppressed almost beyond recognition – oppressed by *everyone*." (Walker, 1984: 149) Expressing it with a folkloristic image, she says:

> Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the *mule* of the world," because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else – *everyone* else – refused to carry. (Walker, 1984: 237)

Walker discerns the double discrimination black women suffer even within black society itself.

> It was not until I became a student of women's liberation ideology that I could understand and forgive my father. I needed an ideology that would define his behavior in context. The black movement had given me an ideology that helped explain his colorism (he *did* fall in love with my mother because she was so light; he never denied it). Feminism helped explain his sexism. I was relieved to know his sexist behavior was not something uniquely his own, but, rather, an imitation of the behavior of the society around us. (Walker, 1984: 330)

But, Walker goes into both the sexism (within black culture) and the racism (within feminist circles) separately as well. About the sexism among blacks she writes:

> I tell [Coretta King] how important I feel this is: that black men not take out their anger and frustration on their wives and children. A temptation that is all too obvious. Coretta's face is thoughtful as she says, "Maybe I shouldn't say this, because I don't *know* it, it's just a feeling I have… but few black men seem to feel secure enough as men that they can make women feel like women. (Walker, 1984: 151-152)

Yet, Walker not only points the finger at black men. She also says: "It was at the Radcliffe symposium that I saw that black women are more loyal to black men than they are to themselves, a dangerous state of affairs that has its logical end in self-destructive behavior." (Walker, 1984: 318) The racism black women face Walker mainly connects to the mainstream, white feminists, who "[reveal] themselves as incapable as white and black men of comprehending blackness and feminism in the same body, not to mention in the same imagination." (Walker, 1984: 374) As she further on says:

> It is, apparently, inconvenient, if not downright mind straining, for white women scholars to think of black women *as women*, perhaps because "woman" (like "man" among white males) is a name they are claiming for themselves, and themselves alone. Racism decrees that if *they* are now women (years ago they were ladies, but fashions change) then black women must, perforce, be something else. (While they were "ladies," black women could be "women," and so on.) (Walker, 1984: 376)

Thirdly, Walker thinks of the black woman as playing a leading role in constructing a better future. She explains this view using Coretta King's words, which she feels are "particularly true" (Walker, 1984: 153):

> "The black woman," [Coretta King] says, "has a special role to play. Our heritage of suffering and our experience in having to struggle against all odds to raise our children gives us a greater capacity for understanding both suffering and the need and meaning of compassion. (…) Women, in general, are not a part of the corruption of the past, so they can give a new kind of leadership, a new image for mankind. (…)" (Walker, 1984: 152-153)

The kind of future Coretta King is referring to is probably similar to the one Walker has in mind when she talks about the "survival and wholeness of entire people" (Walker, 1984: xi) in her definition. So, again, she illustrates her universalist stance. Even in her description of lesbian women, Walker shows herself to be explicitly non-separatist.

> Or as "round" women [her term for lesbians] – women who love other women, yes, but women who also have concern, in a culture that oppresses all black people (and this would go back very far) for their fathers, brothers, and sons, no matter how they feel about them as males. My own term for such women would be "womanist." At any rate, the word they chose would have to be both spiritual and concrete and it would have to be organic, characteristic, not simply applied. A word that said more than that they choose women over men. More than that they choose to live separate from men. In fact, to be consistent with black cultural values (which, whatever their shortcomings, still have considerable worth) it would have to be a word that affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation, *regardless* of who worked and slept with whom. (Walker, 1984: 81)

2.2.2.3. The black (female) artist

Thirdly, Walker talks extensively about the black artist, especially the black writer.

> (…) Southern black writers, like most writers, have a heritage of love and hate, but (…) they also have enormous richness and beauty to draw from. (…) No one could wish for a more advantageous heritage than that bequeathed to the black writer in the South: a compassion for the earth, a trust in humanity beyond our knowledge of evil, and an abiding love of justice. We inherit a great responsibility as well, for we must give voice to centuries not only of silent bitterness and hate, but also of neighbourly kindness and sustaining love. (Walker, 1984: 21)

As is illustrated in this quote, for Walker, black artists have a clear social function. Their task is to represent "the consciousness of [their] people" as this "cannot be photographed", but only "to some extent (…) written." (Walker, 1984: 228). As she states: "The artist then is the voice of the people, but [he/]she is also The People." (Walker, 1984: 138) Again, these statements illustrate the importance of community in Walker's philosophy. She also makes this more explicit, saying: "What the black Southern writer inherits as a natural right is a sense of *community*." (Walker, 1984: 17)

Walker also devotes a lot of attention to the female artist in particular. Looking back on a tradition in which many women artists have been present, but have never been acknowledged, Walker says: "I found that, indeed the majority of black women who tried to express themselves by writing and who tried to make a living doing so, died in obscurity and poverty, usually before their time." (Walker, 1984: 34-35) Consequently, the black woman artist needs to be "her own model as well as the artist attending, creating, learning from, realizing the model, which is to say, herself" (Walker, 1984: 8), because "as a black person, one cannot completely identify with a Jane Eyre, or with her creator, no matter how much one admires them" (Walker, 1984: 8). In illustration of this, Walker relates the situation in which "someone asked Toni Morrison why she writes the kind of books she writes, and that she replied: Because they are the kind of books I want to read." (Walker, 1984: 7) Walker herself adds to this that she writes the things "*[she] should have been able to read.*" (Walker, 1984: 13)

However absent they might seem, black female artists, according to Walker, have always existed. Walker says that in the previous generations already many women with great creative minds have lived. Unfortunately, they were never allowed to develop nor express this creativity. Being "Creators, (…) rich in spirituality – which is the basis of Arts –" (Walker, 1984: 233), these women were

> exquisite butterflies, trapped in an evil honey, toiling away their lives in an era, a century, that did not acknowledge them, except as "the *mule* of the world." They dreamed dreams that no one knew – not even themselves, in any coherent fashion – and saw visions no one could understand. (…) Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited. (Walker, 1984: 232)

All day long, the women were occupied with several tasks, such as keeping house, taking care of their children, working the fields, etc., which is why people have for so long considered them as not taking part in any creative process. Yet, according to Walker, it was precisely in their quilt making, the weaving they did, the flowers they grew, the songs they sang and the stories they told, that these women were creative.

> But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or care about feeding the creative spirit? The answer is so simple that many of us have spent years discovering it. We have constantly looked high, when we should have looked high – and low. (Walker, 1984: 239)

Walker sees it as the duty of the present-day artists to recover their forgotten forerunners. As she says: "*We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away.* And if they are thrown away, it is our duty *as artists and as witnesses for the future* to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone." (Walker, 1984: 92)

2.2.2.4. Motherhood & matrilineage

Lastly, and in connection to what was just said about the female artist, Walker talks a lot as well about heritage and matrilineage. Throughout the collection of essays, she blends two senses of motherhood. First of all, there is some reference to motherhood in the biological sense. Walker writes about being a mother herself as well as about her own mother, whom she associates with flowers.

> Like Mem, a character in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in. (…) Whatever she planted grew as if by magic, and her fame as grower of flowers spread over three counties. Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms – sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena… and on and on. (Walker, 1984: 241)

This image of a garden full of flowers lies at the basis of the title essay *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and has become very important in Walker's Womanism as the symbol for her universalist attitude. She also talks about biological foremothers on a larger temporal scale. About black women in the twenties, she writes:

> [their] spirituality was so intense, so deep, so *unconscious*, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held. They stumbled blindly through their lives: creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, that they considered themselves unworthy even of hope. In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to the men who used them, they became more than "sexual objects," more even than mere women: they became "Saints." (…) Who were these Saints? These crazy, loony, pitiful women? Some of them, without a doubt, were our mothers and grandmothers. (Walker, 1984: 232)

Secondly, Walker also refers to motherhood in a more symbolical and spiritual way, when she talks about models. Her own relationship to the Harlem Renaissance author Zora Neale Hurston, of whose book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Walker says "[t]*here is no book more important to [her] than this one*" (Walker, 1984: 86), is a nice illustration of this. As Bell argues, "Hurston is the literary precursor, foremother, and spirit-guide that inspires the audacious autonomy that [Walker] expresses in her womanist vision." (Bell, 1987: 260) Walker discovers Hurston and her work when she is looking for information on voodoo for a story she is writing. Just when she becomes irritated by the racist tinge of the works on black folklore by white scholars, she finds Hurston's *Mules and Men*. As she says, she immediately appreciates in Hurston her "racial health; a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings" (Walker, 1984: 85) Yet, when she starts looking at what critics have said about Hurston, she finds mostly negative things. This is when she decides to do something about it and starts "looking for Zora" (Walker, 1984: 93). Walker will do all she can to recover Hurston and her literary production and it is because of these motivated (and successful) attempts that Hurston is now considered an important Afro-American author and one of the first black feminists. Walker's personal involvement in Hurston's case goes quite far. Pretending to be Hurston's niece, she goes to Eatonville, Hurston's hometown, to visit her grave. After having found the grave (or thinking she has) in a field full of weeds, Walker even buys a headstone for it, saying:

> Zora Neale Hurston
"A Genius of the South"
Novelist Folklorist
Anthropologist
1901 1960 (Walker, 1984: 107)

Besides these specific references to Hurston as an influential (symbolical) foremother, Walker talks about spiritual matrilineage in more general terms as well.

> But it is a great time to be a woman. A wonderful time to be a black woman, for the world, I have found, is not simply rich because from day to day our lives are touched with new possibilities, but because the past is studded with sisters who, in their time, shone like gold. They give us hope, they have proved the splendor of our past, which should free us to lay just claims to the fullness of the future. (Walker, 1984: 37)

The essays in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* are rightfully labelled "womanist prose", as they are indeed an illustration and elaboration of the concept "Womanism" and the definition Walker provides of it. First and foremost, black feminism, the black woman and her specific situations and emotions are as central in the collection as they are in the definition. Secondly, the universalist stance that is so crucial in Walker's Womanism is also illustrated in several ways in the essays. The essays in addition reveal that this non-separatist attitude determines Walker's view on the race in general, which she stresses to be a community in the first place, as well as on the artist, to whom she attributes a social function. Lastly, the essays elaborate on the mother-child relationship Walker touches on in her definition, considering the relationship both in a literal (i.e. biological) and in a more symbolical sense.

II. ALICE WALKER'S WOMANISM: PRACTICE – *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989)

1. Introduction

Compared to the huge success of *The Color Purple* in 1983, the reactions to Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) are not so unanimously positive. Whereas some critics applaud her "multivocal experiment with postmodern romance and magical realism" (Bell, 2004: 154), others deride her narrative technique and style, which they claim is "rife with clichés and sentimentality." (Sol, 2002: 400) What they all seem to agree upon, though, is that Walker's project, which she herself describes as "a romance of the last 500,000 years" (Alice Walker, quoted in: Sol, 2002: 393), is ambitious.

In this practical part of my paper, I will analyse Alice Walker's 1989 novel *The Temple of My Familiar* and concentrate mainly on the ways in which it could be labelled a "womanist" book. Because of this central research topic, the analysis will focus on the content, themes and motifs of the novel rather than on issues of style, narrative technique or evaluation. After a very concise comment on the form of the novel, an analysis will be offered that will recapitulate the main storylines and reveal some general themes of the story. Only then will I turn to the specific ways in which the novel indeed is the practical realization of Walker's womanist theory.

2. Form of the novel

As Wall argues, "[i]t is difficult to talk about Alice Walker's work without invoking the metaphor of the quilt, since it is her primary means of describing her art, and her characters' means of artistic expression." (Wall, 1993: 264) I believe this is also true for *The Temple of My Familiar*.

Formally, the novel consists of 61 chapters that are grouped in six parts in a seemingly arbitrary way. Each of the chapters is focalized through one of the main characters. This formal fragmentation is supported by the content, as the novel tells the stories of several characters in a non-linear manner and in bits and pieces. Together the stories constitute a new version of the history of human kind, talking about different times and places and about man, animal and nature. All these factors seem to fragment the novel and yet, while reading, all the

pieces fit together and form a successful whole. The same is true of a quilt, which essentially is "[a whole] that show[s] the process of [its] construction." (Wall, 1993: 264)

3. General analysis

The novel mainly revolves around three couples and it is through the specific situation of each of these six characters that Walker gets her message across. Because the characters gradually become acquainted with one another and because their situations are similar in several respects, this message is intensified.

Generally speaking, at the beginning of the novel each of the main characters (except Lissie, cf. infra) is "spiritually fragmented" (Sol, 2002: 393), as they all struggle with a fundamental and "destructive" (Sol, 2002: 393) fear, frustration or conflict in their lives. The book relates the process of their striving "for the demonstrable values of oneness, wholeness, and unity as opposed to dialectical tension, exclusivity, and separateness." (Dieke, 1992: 508) The best way to achieve such values is through "communion" (Dieke, 1992: 508), as opposed to the "gribbled, self-destructive narcissism" (Dieke, 1992: 512) of "[m]an as separate from woman, humans as separate from animals, one race as separate from another, the old as separate from the young" (Dieke, 1992: 512). The novel preaches communion between all the different aspects of one's own personality, between people of different races, sexes, cultures and times and between different species or creations. As Dieke argues: "Walker (…) creates a salutary vision, which points toward a monistic idealism in which humans, animals, and the whole ecological order coexist in a unique dynamic of pancosmic symbiosis." (Dieke, 1992: 507) This emphasis on communion reminds the reader of the importance Walker attaches to community in her theoretical writings (cf. supra).

There are three important aspects in the process each of the characters has to go through in order to become spiritually whole. First of all, in the book, being an artist is closely connected to being whole as a person (cf. infra). Secondly, "for Alice Walker, as for the post-Romantic French novelist Marcel Proust, recollective art is a rhetorical strategy of relocating the lost self, of seeking and uncovering an inner tape try of identity" (Dieke, 1992: 509). In other words, the characters all have to reconnect with their past, which, as they find, helps shape their present and future. Or, as is quoted in the novel, "[r]emembrance is the key to redemption." (336) Thirdly, communication plays an important role. As Dieke argues:

> Every movement is an expose of one character's sharing his or her intimate thoughts, feelings, memories, and recollections with other characters, partly as a way of communicating ideas, but more importantly as a means of establishing an atmosphere of sociability and rapport, of strengthening a sense of the unified whole and sympathetic relatedness. (Dieke, 1992: 512)

In *The Temple of My Familiar* different sorts of communication are present: dialogues, letters, tape recordings, fragments of a diary, paintings, music, stories, etc. By communicating, the characters, all being at a different stage in their development towards wholeness as a person, help each other in the process. They share their insights, but also reach new ones talking and listening to each other. At the end of the novel, "they all vaguely realize they have a purpose in each other's lives. They are a collective means by which each of them will grow. They don't discuss this, but it is felt strongly by all. There is palpable trust." (398)

Yet, there is a subtle difference in the level the characters' development reaches. Each couple seems to consist of a spiritually "weaker" person, who can only strive for wholeness up to a certain point (namely Carlotta, Suwelo, Hal), and a stronger spiritual personality, able to achieve the highest level of wholeness (namely Arveyda, Fanny, Lissie). As Sol argues:

> Lissie, Arveyda, and Fanny achieve an awareness of their place in existence with a sublimity scarcely paralleled in contemporary literature. By the novel's end, Lissie recalls her incarnations at the beginning of human history, and Arveyda and Fanny unite as incarnations of (a very different) Adam and Eve. Meanwhile, Suwelo, Carlotta, and Hal can only achieve fulfillment through their understanding of the prodigies' [i.e. Lissie's, Arveyda's and Fanny's] powers and by coming to terms with their own painful pasts. (Sol, 2002: 398)

3.1. Arveyda & Carlotta

Arveyda is the son of a partly Indian, partly African/Scot mother and a partly Mexican, partly Filipino/Chinese father. His mother named him after a bar of soap from India she got from his father, "Aryuveda", which means health (396). He never knew his father and feels his mother never truly cared for him.

> His mother. Any remembrance of her pained him. So he never thought of her. Reading the *Gospel* was the first time since his long-ago meeting with Zedé that he'd seen anything that made him feel curious about her, or that he missed something of her spirit in the world. Why had his mother loved a photograph? Whose was it? 'Your father,' she'd always said; but now that he was a father himself he knew how much more there was. Why had she removed it from beside his bed? Why had she become a 'whirling dervish'? Why had she never been able to affirm all that he was? (297)

Arveyda is a famous musician and his music is praised for having spiritual powers, giving him the status of a healer in the eyes of his fans.

> Arveyda and his music were medicine, and, seeing or hearing him, people knew it. They flocked to him as once they might have to priests. He did not disappoint them. Each time he played, he did so with his heart and soul. Always, though he might be very tired, he played earnestly and prayerfully. (24)

This is also what Carlotta notices when she first sees him: “She saw it in the way he really looked at her, really saw her. With the calm, detached concentration of a shaman.” (7) They fall in love, marry and have two children, Cedrico and Angelita. Although he truly loves Carlotta, after a while Arveyda gives in to the love he has felt for her mother, Zedé, from the very first moment he saw her. This love is rooted partly in the fact that she is an artist (26) and partly in the fact that “[i]t was of his mother that Arveyda thought the first time he met Zedé.” (17) Zedé herself also recognizes someone very dear to her in Arveyda:

> ‘It is as if you went out,’ Carlotta’s mother sobbed after that first meeting, ‘and brought your father home. Ai, ai,’ she cried striking her head with her palm in a gesture of pain Carlotta had never seen before (…). (19)

The two confess their love for each other to Carlotta and take off on a trip to South America to find out about Zedé’s past. Although Zedé eventually stays there (after having found her mother and having married a shaman), Arveyda comes back, “not to help raise his children but to help bridge the gap between mother and daughter.” (Sol, 2002: 398) He feels he, not only as her husband, but as an artist especially, has the task to help Carlotta to come to terms with the past. Thinking of artists as “messengers” (125), he sings her a song in which he relates everything Zedé has told him on their trip about her past and her feelings for Carlotta.

> He sang of the confusion and the terror of the mother: the scars she could never reveal to the child because they still hurt her so. (…) Arveyda sang softly of how much the mother, far away still, loved and missed the child. How grieved she was that she had hurt her. How she prayed the child would forgive her and one day consent to see her again. (…) He sang until Zedé, small and tentative, was visible, a wisp, before her daughter. (126)

Arveyda really fulfils his function as a shaman by reconnecting mother and daughter. He helps Carlotta become whole, which she can only do by embracing her past rather than burying it.

Yet, although the origin of his name and his shaman-like status as an artist suggest that Arveyda is one of the characters that is whole himself from the beginning of the novel, he also

has to face up to the past. Therefore, one day, Carlotta and he go to his aunt to find out about his mother. The aunt speaks very negatively of her.

> The trip back to Terre Haute had been possible for me largely because of Carlotta's support, and as we endured the envy and spite, the repressed hatred of over fifty years, that aunt Frudier spewed over us, I was glad she was there to help prop me up. Even though I am a grown man, with children of my own, each of her words against my mother struck me as a blow; as if I myself were still a child. But, oddly enough, as she raved, I felt closer and closer to my mother. (395)

It is when finding out both his parents were "[a]dventurers and risk takers, lovers" (397) that Arveyda realizes he does love them deeply. As he himself acknowledges, he has both Carlotta and the pamphlet of Shug's religion (cf. infra) to thank.

> 'These are the very things' he says, with the fullness of a grateful heart in his voice, 'that I love about my mother. And… about my father.' (…) And he suddenly realizes that it was Fanny's pamphlet, *The Gospel According to Shug*, and Carlotta's sharing of it with him that he has to thank. (397)

Carlotta, like Arveyda, never knew her father. On their trip, Zedé tells Arveyda he was an Indian slave, Jésus, who was killed when it was discovered he and Zedé had made love to each other. Zedé herself was rescued by his tribesmen and succeeded in fleeing to a school run by "gringos". There she was helped to escape to the United States with Carlotta by a rich girl, Mary Ann Haverstock.

Carlotta works as a women's literature professor. When she is told that her mother and her husband love each other, she is scarred permanently and starts to hate men profoundly, an emotion she expresses by referring to what she knows best:

> Carlotta felt she hated men; their disappearances and their absences and their smugness on return. She thought of the foolish Angel Clare and saw herself as Tess. She thought of Tea Cake and saw herself as Janie. She was convinced Helga Crane was a fool. She decided the only man in all of life and literature worth her admiration was Leonard Woolf. (123)

While Arveyda and Zedé are off to South-America, Carlotta has an affair with Suwelo. As a way of dealing with her trauma, she becomes a "female impersonator" (386):

> [Carlotta] was so superfeminine, in the old style, that it was as if she'd never noticed there was any other way a woman could be. She wore these three-inch heels every day. (…) Three-inch heels are designed to make a man feel like all he needs to do is push gently and a woman is on her ass. Three-inch heels say "Fuck me." (…) She wore sweaters that followed every curve of her luscious body. Sweaters that dipped. Skirts that clung. Short skirts. Makeup. Earrings. False eyelashes sometimes. (246)

As a consequence, the "relationship" she has with Suwelo is very unbalanced. For him, she "[is] just a body" (249) he can have sex with and he can project all his fantasies on. She stays "pretty impassive" (248) and closes herself off to him.

> "Tell me about your people?" I [Suwelo] asked her once as we lay naked after sex I'd literally dragged her into bed to have. "I have no people," she said. Tears were, however, running down the sides of her nose. (…) "Tell me about your father, then," I said. In truth, it was hard to say what nationality she was. Maybe she *didn't* have "a people." "I have no father." (…) "Tell me about your mother. Even God," I teased, "is rumoured to have had one of those." "I have no mother," was her reply. "Tell me about your children's father," I coaxed. "They have no father," she said. (249)

Obviously, Carlotta's pain is so big that she does not feel she can share it with anyone. She would only tell Suwelo about her past if he would marry her. Carlotta herself looks back on the episode, saying:

> I know I wanted to marry [Suwelo]; that would have blotted out the marriage I had. But what I did was, I just dressed myself up like a tart and trundled my tits out there. I thought every man that ever lived – except, possibly, Leonard Woolf – was a fool, but I wanted them to look at me. (388)

But when Fanny returns from Africa, Suwelo drops Carlotta, leaving even deeper scars. She says in hindsight: "I almost have no memory of the way [Suwelo] treated me. He was an episode in my life. But it is true, when he dropped me – and he did drop me – I was so destroyed, I was angry enough to kill." (381)

Only after having heard about her mother's past and feelings from Arveyda, Carlotta can start to heal and to find happiness again. She changes shockingly. First of all, she stops teaching and becomes an artist. Just like Zedé's mother, Zedé the elder, she becomes a bell chimist. In addition, she also loses her feminine look. She cuts her hair "nearly to [her] skull (…) like a concentration-camp [victim]" (378) and wears a "tight black running suit and teal Reeboks" (378).

Carlotta and Arveyda start living together again, even though Carlotta lives in a separate house behind Arveyda's. They enjoy each other's company, behave very cordially towards each other and make music together. It is during this last stage that the couple befriends Suwelo and Fanny. Arveyda develops a close bond with Fanny, who admires him as an artist for years already. One night, after Fanny has given him one of her famous massages, they make love to each other. During the massage, Arveyda thinks:

> He has given himself up to Fanny, as if all of himself is resting in her arms. He feels there is something about her, something in her essence, that automatically heals and reconnects him with himself. (…) He thinks that if he were to join himself with her in lovemaking he would feel literally re-membered. (408)

After their (simultaneous) orgasm, "Arveyda feels as if he has rushed to meet all the ancestors and they have welcomed him with joy. (…) 'My… *flesh*,' says Arveyda, his lips against her hair." (409)

In the same way, Carlotta and Suwelo reconnect to each other. They tell each other about their parents and Suwelo observes how Carlotta is happy for the first time:

> But she is happy. This is the biggest surprise of all. Where is that wailing he remembered? the insecurity? the wringing of hands? the prayer? the gnashing of teeth? (383)

It seems both Carlotta and Arveyda have found peace.

3.2.Suwelo & Fanny

When his great-uncle Rafe leaves him his house, Suwelo moves into the house and intends to stay just until he has found someone to buy it. During his stay he meets his late uncle's best friends, Hal and Lissie. The three of them spend their days talking about their lives to each other. Through these stories it becomes clear that there are two concrete problems in Suwelo's life: firstly, the complicated relationship and painful break-up with his wife Fanny and secondly, the affair he had with Carlotta.

Although they obviously share a very special bond, Fanny's and Suwelo's relationship is problematic. Whereas Fanny is a very spiritual woman, Suwelo seems the embodiment of all that Fanny loathes in patriarchal society. Every time Fanny tries to help Suwelo to see things a little bit more from her perspective, he bluntly refuses.

> [Fanny] was always trying to get [Suwelo] to read books that, to his way of thinking, had nothing to do with his own life. He was a teacher; he taught American history; he was good at it. He read enough. Besides, he had never read a book by a woman. (…) But he didn't want to change the way he though of Africa. Besides, when he wanted insight into Africa, he'd read a man. (177)

Suwelo himself also tries to get Fanny to fit his view on women. He says for example: "But this particular struggle, which I lost – the struggle to get her to wear sexy lingerie, and to enjoy it as I did – went on for a number of years. I was being influenced in my private life with Fanny by the hidden sexual life I lived elsewhere." (281) As a consequence of their

differences and their incapability to understand each other's viewpoints, Fanny often seems absent, even during very intimate moments. As Suwelo says:

> This was bound to give me a certain feeling of insecurity. There were times when, if *she* wasn't there, and I could see she was not, though her body was sitting quietly beside me in a chair, I wasn't sure *I* was. I always seemed to be chasing Fanny even when she was literally locked up tight in my arms. (283)

Their troubles with each other as well as Fanny's inner struggles (cf. infra) lead her to want to put an end to their marriage. Even in this issue their different personalities show. For Suwelo marriage is the confirmation of what they both know: that they belong together. He says: "When we were married, I considered it a natural *joining*, a legal verification of what was already fact. We were one, in my opinion. And being legally married seconded that opinion." (140-141) As Suwelo says, Fanny however thinks "[m]arriage simply hadn't fit [them]. It probably didn't fit anybody. She thought it unnatural. I wasn't so sure, being a man within a patriarchal system." (284) Moreover, Fanny thinks of the ring symbolizing marriage as "a remnant of a chain". (240)

It is Fanny as well as Hal and Lissie who point out to Suwelo that his affair with Carlotta has been a mistake. He observes: "Now he realized he'd probably understood nothing, and it also occurred to him what a superficial, ultimately fraudulent act it was to sleep with a person you did not really know." (131) When Fanny is on a trip to Africa to find inner peace, Suwelo, being "lonely" (244), immerses himself in the world of pornography. He says:

> But I was hooked on girlie magazines, naked women in quarter-to-peek glass cages, bondage films, and "live" sex acts on stage. When I thought of what Fanny's six months in Africa gave me, it was the enjoyment, without guilt, of pornography. (245)

To Suwelo, his affair with Carlotta is just a part of this. He thinks of her as "superfeminine" (246) and considers her a willing body rather than a person. This is what enrages Fanny, who is Carlotta's masseuse, when she hears about it.

> '(…) However, I did feel betrayed as a woman.' 'Betrayed as a woman? But I told you,' said Suwelo, 'Carlotta meant very little to me. She…' 'I know,' said Fanny. 'What you said was, she meant nothing *whatever* to you; and, furthermore, she had no substance. It was when you said that, that I hated you. I hated you as a man. (…) I tried to uncramp her legs, untangle her knee joints, flatten out the knots in her back, unclench her jaw, straighten out the curve in her neck, restore free movement to her toes. Clear up a migraine that lasted for a year. (…) Carlotta's very substance was pain. And that you didn't know this, or, if you knew it, did not care, that is what made me despise you.' (323)

It is Lissie who advises Suwelo to ask Carlotta for forgiveness, which he eventually does.

> You are right to understand, as I know you now do, that it is a sin to behave as if a person whose body you use is a being without substance. (…) You can still go to her, as you must, for your own growth, and ask her forgiveness. Express to her something of your own trauma, which may have its origin in your mother's abandoned and suffering face, and the fear this caused you about knowing too much of women's pain, and tell her something of what you have learned. (358)

With the help mainly of Hal and Lissie, towards the end of the novel Suwelo succeeds in solving both problems. Fanny and he put aside their ambitions at a marriage in the traditional sense and live together in harmony in a house that symbolizes their new view instead.

> [The house] is modelled on the prehistoric ceremonial household of M'Sukta's people, the Ababa – a house designed by the ancient matriarchal mind and the first heterosexual household ever created. It has two wings, each complete with its own bedroom, bath, study, and kitchen; and in the center there is a 'body' – the 'ceremonial' or common space (…). After thousands and thousands of years of women and men living apart, the Ababa had, with great trepidation, experimented with the two tribes living, a couple to a household, together. Each person must remain free, they said. That is the main thing. And so they had designed a dwelling shaped like a bird. (399)

Moreover, Suwelo asks Carlotta for forgiveness and creates a spiritual bond with her.

But as Lissie and Hal rightly point out to him, Suwelo's problems with both women find their origin in a bigger problem, deeper down: the fact that he consciously blocks the memories of his parents, who were killed in a car accident. Although Suwelo never thinks of them, it is obvious he yearns for parental care and wisdom. Living in his uncle's house in the company of Lissie and Hal, Suwelo thinks "his life, for the first time since he was a child, seemed angel-protected, materially solid, spiritually secure. He was almost happy." (32-33) This is because "[d]eep in his heart he was probably pretending [Lissie and Hal] were his parents" (239). Again it is Lissie who makes Suwelo aware of his problem, saying: "if our parents are not present in us, consciously present, there is much, very much about ourselves we can never know." (357) Feeling Suwelo is "asleep" (357), Lissie says:

> Hal and I are sorry we did not encourage you to speak to us about your parents (…). I know you are caught up now in this knottedness with Fanny, and both Hal and I agree that the work with her is what has to be done. But part of your work with Fanny is the work you must do with your parents. They must be consciously called up, called *upon*, re-called. (…) Hal and I felt you have closed a door, a very important door, against memory, against the pain. (357)

At the end of the novel, when he sits in the hot tub with Carlotta, Suwelo "is suddenly too tired to keep watch over the door of his heart." (405) After she has told him about her mother and grandmother, it is his turn to let the memories come back and tell the story of his parents' death.

> 'My mother *is* dead,' Suwelo says to Carlotta. It sounds as if he's finally admitting it to himself. He sees Marcia once again timidly approach the door. She stops, her fist upraised to knock, and listens. She is so surprised to hear he is speaking of her! "Come in, Ma," he says. (403)
> [The door of his heart] swings open on its own, and this father, whom Suwelo has never seen and whom he realizes he resembles very much, walks in. (405)

This catharsis is accompanied by a baptism, which suggests the beginning of a new life.

> Suwelo is touched. He feels himself slipping into an intimacy with Carlotta he's never, even with Fanny, known. He is speechless, as he plunges himself once again into the tub – only this time it feels like a baptism (…). (402)

With all the problems in his life more or less sorted out, Suwelo can finally be whole. As is the case for the other characters, for Suwelo as well this status is connected to being an artist, as he has taken up carpentry. Finally he lives up to his own name since Suwelo was the name of the rune for wholeness. (293)

Fanny is the daughter of Olivia and the granddaughter of Celie, the protagonist in Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). It is in the matriarchy established at the end of that novel that Fanny grows up. She is raised by her mother and her two grandmothers, Celie and Shug, who live together as "Special Friend[s]" (301), which of course is very exceptional in the South at that time. Tanya, Fanny's childhood (white) friend, says about their house:

> (…) there was always something lively going on. Music or parties or sun worship or something. Lots of sweet-natured people coming by from time to time. Even real interesting crazy people, so often with amazing creative skills. The best food in the world. And folks at your house were always kissing. (330)

As Fanny herself says, often there were "poets and funnymen, what you would now call 'comedians,' and, really, all kinds of people: magicians, jugglers, good horseshoe throwers, the occasional man who quilted or did needlepoint." (169) Given the meaning of being an artist in the book, this suggests that Fanny is surrounded by "whole" persons in her home. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Shug founds her own religion. The pamphlet[10] in which she states its 26 "rules of thumb", formally inspired on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5, 3-

[10] For the full text of *The Gospel According to Shug*, see: Appendix 1.

12), could just as well be read as a guideline for becoming a whole person, or, to put it in the words of the pamphlet, for becoming one of "those who *know*" (291). Shug opposes discrimination of any kind (1, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25) as well as war and anger (14, 15), she talks about having respect and admiration for the *entire* creation (4, 8, 11, 12, 17, 23, 24) and pleads for love and reverence among human beings (5, 6, 13, 16, 18). Further, she talks about heritage (2), about being strong, even in the most difficult of times (3), about the necessity of self love (7) and about being creators (10).[11] All this suggests that, as is implied at the end of *The Color Purple* as well, both Celie and Shug are at an advanced point in their development towards becoming whole.

As I have already indicated, Fanny and Suwelo have a very intense bond. As Carlotta says: "I was attracted by their closeness. (…) Together they represented home, a family, warmth, a place to belong." (294) Yet, their relationship is far from perfect and it is Fanny especially who struggles with the differences they have. Whereas Suwelo is the representative of the patriarchal system, she is a more spiritual woman. As Suwelo puts it: "she was the possessor of this dubious gift of – what shall I call it? – 'second sight,' 'two-headedness' (…)". (277) Anything Fanny wishes for happens (278) and, as Suwelo tells his therapist, she "periodically [falls] in love with spirits. (…) 'But it doesn't have to be men,' he said quickly. It didn't even have to be people, but he thought he'd save Fanny's attachment to trees and whales until he could see further." (184) Even in the way she describes her love for Suwelo, Fanny displays her spiritual side: "'I love you for your breath.' Typically, the least substantial think about me! 'Also the least colonized,' she'd say sweetly. Something unseen, indeed, invisible." (285) Yet, because of their non-resisting problems, Fanny suggests to Suwelo to end their marriage, but continue to live together. As she says: "I'll stay, (…). Most of the time. But unmarried. And on a separate floor." (139)

Besides her problems with Suwelo, Fanny also struggles with more general issues as racism and sexism, which she sees everywhere around her.

> (…) she was seeing a therapist, but (…) essentially she was one of those victims of racism who is extremely sensitive and who grows too conscious of it. It had become like a scale or a web over her eyes. Everywhere she looked, she saw it. Racism turned her thoughts to violence. Violence made her sick. She was working on it. (296)

[11] The numbers in this enumeration do not refer to pages in the book, but to (my own) numbering of the different sentences in the appendix.

Her all consuming anger towards white people is symbolized by the "fantasy" she has in which she murders white people, especially blonds who "represent white people, really white people, to [her], and therefore white oppression" (298), by means of a sword in her eye. As she says:

> Underneath, there's this raving maniac. Sometimes I see myself in the faces of the weeping screaming, completely mad women shown every day on TV. (…) I hate white people (…). I visualize them sliding off the planet, and the planet saying, "Ah, I can breathe again!" (303)

Robin, her therapist, relates this ardent racism against whites (whom Fanny admits to be afraid of (317) when she is under hypnosis) to a childhood friendship between Fanny and the white Tanya, whose grandmother disapproved of their friendship.

> 'You became alienated from you own body, you own self,' said Robin. 'You became two beings in your relationship with Tanya. The cheerfully playing little girl that others saw and the hurt child who was bewildered by her first encounter with irrational rejection.' (331)

Being afraid she might murder someone as well as because it is "a very uptight place" (247), Fanny quits her teaching job and eventually even her administrative function at the college and opens a massage parlor. As she explains to her therapist: "I took it up so that I would be forced to touch people, even those I might not like, in gentleness, and be forced to acknowledge both their bodily reality as people and also their pain. Otherwise, (…) I am afraid I might start murdering them."(295)

When Olivia fears it is getting too much, she takes her daughter to Africa to meet her biological father. As Sol argues, "[Fanny's] experiences and conversations with her father and also with her half-sister Nzinga connect Fanny to her personal history and culture and allow her to return home with a renewed sense of herself and her spiritual center." (Sol, 2002: 397) Her father, called Abajeralasezeola and nicknamed Ola, is a native Olinka and a famous playwright and the minister of culture. His art is a form of protest against abuses of all kinds. He has a great influence on Fanny. It is he who tells her "shortly before he died to harmonize [her] relations with [Suwelo]." (321) About the race issue he says:

> 'This *frustration* with the whites,' Ola said, thoughtfully, and not responding to [Fanny's] smile, 'is a natural reaction to what they have, collectively, done to you, not simply as an individual, but as a people, a culture, a race. (…) I have been responsible for the deaths of whites,' said Ola. 'It did not "liberate" me psychologically, as Fanon suggested it might. It did not oppress me further, either. (…) You must harmonize with your own heart,' said Ola. 'Only you will know how you can do that; for each of us it is different. Then harmonize, as much as this is ever possible, your surroundings.' (319)

Also her sister, Nzingha, and her father's (white) wife Mary Jane – who actually is Mary Ann Haverstock, who liberated Zedé and Carlotta – touch upon her life very obviously.

By going to Africa, Fanny makes a literal as well as a symbolic journey which enables her to come to terms with her destructive anger and to harmonize all the aspects of herself. In her case as well this new-found inner peace is associated with being an artist. Fanny becomes a masseuse and in the end even decides to write a play with her sister about her father. In addition, it could be argued that after she herself is healed, Fanny tries to help other people by her massages and by distributing Shug's pamphlet.

Her wholeness reaches its climax when she has sex with Arveyda and in that way finds her "*spirit*" (409).

> Fanny thinks of her lifelong habit of falling in love with people she'll never have to meet. Is this how people create gods, she wonders. She thinks she has always been walking just behind (oh, a hundred to a thousand years behind) the people she has found to love, and that she has been very careful that their back were turned. What would she do if one of the turned around? Fanny feels a slight quiver in her stomach. She is frightened, for a moment, as if she is about to come face to face with her own self. (408)

So, just like Carlotta and Arveyda, Fanny and Suwelo reach the status of wholeness at the end.

3.3.Hal & Lissie

Hal and Lissie are the couple that lives close to the house Suwelo inherits from his uncle Rafe. Talking about their own experiences as well as giving Suwelo the opportunity to talk about his, they fulfil a guiding function in his life. Moreover, in general, they seem the perfect embodiment of the way of life the book preaches.

Hal and Lissie are not a couple in the traditional sense of the word and their relationship seems to be the one Fanny strives for with Suwelo. Most importantly, they love each other more than anything and always have ever since they were young. Hal says:

> And although I can't remember us as babies, I can almost remember it – Lissie remembers it perfectly, she says – and I like tot think of us two fat Brown babies with our asafoetida bags round our necks looking at the sunset together with the animals and slobbering all over one another's face. (…) It wasn't even love as such. It was more like what these young people today have when they go off to fight against nuclear war together; more like affinity. We just gravitated toward each other, 'cause that's where life felt safest and best. Lissie felt this, I felt this. (42)

Eventually, they get married and seem to have the perfect marriage. They are crazily fond of each other and have a passionate sexual relationship. Yet, when Suwelo meets them, they are kindred spirits or soul mates rather than lovers. The turning point in their relationship has been the moment when Hal had to deliver their one and only child, Lulu, and observed in how much pain his dearly beloved was.

> But she came to, but just looked destroyed, and I could see in her eyes the hundreds of times she had suffered in giving birth, and I swore it would never happen again, and my desire for her, for sex with her or with any woman, died, and I became a eunuch myself. I just knew I would never be able to deal with making love to a woman ever again. (108)

Lissie is an extraordinary woman. As she says herself, her name means "the one who remembers everything" (52). Hal formulates it differently, saying "Lissie is a lot of women." (38) There is more truth to this than Suwelo could have ever imagined. Lissie is capable of remembering "her many past lives that have taken place from prehistory to recent centuries and in which her race, gender, and even species are not fixed. (…) These past lives can be seen as Walker's rewritings of the stories and creation-myths, particularly the book of Genesis, through which Judeo-Christian culture came to understand its own origins." (McKay, 2001: 255-256) Walker herself says: "[w]hat I'm doing is literarily trying to reconnect us to our ancestors. All of us. I'm really trying to do that because I see that ancient past as the future, that the connection that was original is a connection; if we can affirm it in the present, it will make a different future." (Walker, quoted in: Braendlin, 1996: 54) Lissie comes to realize that her different lives are not just distant memories, but still play an important role in who she is today, when she discovers that she never appears as the same woman twice in a picture.

> He had never, in all his work as a photographer, photographed anyone like me, who could never present the same self more than once, and I had never in my life before found anyone who could recognize how many different women I was. (…) But finally it dawned on me that my memory and the photographs corroborated each other exactly. I had been those people, and they were still somewhere inside of me. (…) It was such a kick. The selves I had thought gone forever, existing only in my memory, were still there! Photographable. (91-92)

She describes her love for Hal in terms of this, saying he was "familiar, comfortable; and what's more, emotionally recognizable. And he felt the same way. I don't have many memories of this life that don't have Hal somewhere in the middle of them." (59)

In her stories she informs Suwelo about some of her past lives, telling him for example how she has lived as a pygmy, as a member of a harem, as a woman without hymen and as a

Moor woman. She adds that many of these lives have been shaped by some form of oppression, "from parents, siblings, relatives, governments, countries, continents. As well as from [her] own body and mind." (83) Most importantly, Lissie's stories teach Suwelo things that he himself would not have learned otherwise.

> It is important to remember that Lissie's past lives are explicitly contrasted to official history, always appearing in the form of the narratives she tells to Suwelo, himself (significantly) a professor of American history. These force him to recognize, for instance, that the authoritative discourse of history, and hence the written facts on which his knowledge is based, often ignores the stories of women, Native Americans, other people of color and animals – groups of individuals who do not fit the authoritative description of the past. (McKay, 2001: 265)

As Lissie informs Suwelo, Hal, however, is not completely whole yet. Lissie has pretended "[she has] always been a black woman" (53), which she considers an advantage since others struggle "trying to discover who they are and what they should be doing and finding it difficult to know because of all the different and differing voices they are required to listen to." (53) Yet, she has been lying. She admits to Suwelo: "Of course I was from time to time a white woman, or as white as about half of them are. I won't bore you with tales of the centuries I spent sitting around wondering which colored woman could do my floors." (359) She tells Suwelo about a lifetime in which she was a white man in a tribe of black people. Everyday his mother used to rub him with a mixture to make his skin look as black as hers. After he has mated with a girl from the tribe, she does the same thing to him.

> And then, when I looked down at myself, I saw that while I was sleeping she had rubbed me all over with the mixture of dark berries and nut fat my mother always used, which I realized had been hidden beneath the plum tree. And for the first time I could ask someone other than my mother what it was for. My mother had said it was to make my skin strong and protect it from the sun. And so, I asked my friend. And *she* said it was to make me look more like everyone else. (364)

Lissie has another confession to make. She says: "Suwelo, in addition to being a man, and white, which I was many times after the time of which I just told you, I was also, at least once, myself a lion." (369) Lissie also explains why she never informed Hal about this:

> 'Now,' said Miss Lissie, whose voice was again becoming tired, 'there were but two things on earth Hal truly feared. He feared white people, especially white men, and he feared cats. The fear of the white man was less irrational than the fear of cats, but they were both very real fears to Hal. (…) So how could I tell him all of who I was? By now Hal is like my son to me, and I couldn't bear it if he hated me. For such fear as Hal's *is* hatred. (372)

Lissie proceeds telling Suwelo that his uncle Rafe could understand everything she ever was. Because he "affirm[ed] even that hateful part of [her]" (373), Lissie really loved Rafe, who took her to Canada to see white people and to the zoo to meet other lions. As she says:

> Hal loved me like a sister/mystic/warrior/woman/mother. Which was nice. But that was only part of who I was.Rafe, on the other hand, knowing me to contain everybody and everything, loved me wholeheartedly, as a goddess. Which I was. (376)

It seems that Hal has something to learn after all. And it will be Suwelo (and Lissie's voice on the tape she recorded for Suwelo and on which she confesses everything) who helps him with it. Lissie had made some paintings during the last days of her life in which she had painted herself as a white man and a lion, but Hal did not get them. He writes to Suwelo: "Her last paintings are incredible, and unlike anything she's ever done before; I mean, the subject matter itself is strange. I am enclosing some slides of them so you can see for yourself. I don't know what to make of them." (337) After having learned the truth about Lissie on the tapes she recorded for him, Suwelo goes to the nursing home where Hal spends his days after Lissie's death and makes him listen to the tapes as well.

> At that moment, Suwelo realizes one of the reasons he was born; one of his functions in assisting Creation in this life. He also realizes he will need a higher authority than his own to convince Mr Hal of anything to do with Miss Lissie. Mr Hal's heart is hurt, and his mind, consequently, is closed. (413)

Lissie herself however, in every possible way, is the perfect example of wholeness. She tellingly is the only character in the book that does not evolve in the present lifetime. Remembering all her past lives, she has had the experience not only of being different races, different sexes and different species, but more importantly also of suffering as these. So, she has had been "both male and female, black and white, human and animal, and dominant and submissive."[12] All these experiences have left traces in her which make her the wise and whole woman she is. Moreover, she also embodies the two important methods that the book suggests one should use to reach the status of wholeness. Firstly, she is an artist, a painter. Secondly, her character illustrates the importance of one's personal past. For the other characters in the book, who still have a long road to travel, this applies mainly to the small scale of their present life time, for Lissie this means the larger scale version of reconnecting with all her lifetimes. She herself explicitly recognizes the importance of this, saying to Suwelo:

[12] "The Temple of My Familiar." In *Literature Resource Center*, Gale Research, 1999.

> It is against blockage between ourselves and others – those who are alive and those who are dead – that we must work. In blocking off what hurts us, we think we are walling ourselves off from pain. But in the long run the wall, which prevents growth, hurts us more than the pain, which, if we will only bear it, soon passes over us. Washes over us and is gone. Long will we remember pain, but the pain itself, as it was at that point of intensity that made us feel as if we must die of it, eventually vanishes. Our memory of it becomes its only trace. Walls remain. They grow moss. They are difficult barriers to cross, to get to others, to get to closed-down parts of ourselves. (358)

4. Womanist features in *The Temple of My Familiar*

In this section, *The Temple of My Familiar* will be analyzed more concretely with reference to the ways in which the novel seconds, illustrates or maybe elaborates on Walker's theoretical writings on Womanism. If we take Walker's own definition of the concept as the starting point of the analysis, it should not surprise that most of the aspects she touches on in her four-part definition cannot be retrieved in the novel very literally. Yet, in my opinion the book does confirm the most eye-catching and possibly most important feature of Walker's Womanism: her universalist stance. It is this attitude that constitutes the most crucial difference with both mainstream feminism and Afro-Americanism. To be able to provide a more thorough analysis though, I opted to base the analysis mainly on the most essential themes in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, which, as was illustrated above, reveal important aspects about Womanism as well (cf. supra).

4.1. Universalism in *The Temple of My Familiar*

As Walker indicates in her definition of the concept, a womanist is "[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female" (Walker, 1984: xi) In the same manner, she pleads for a universalist attitude between the races, saying "'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?' Ans.: 'Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.'" (Walker, 1984: xi) Walker communicates a similar message in her theoretical writings by putting a lot of emphasis on community.

This non-separatism as well as the stress on community is clearly present in *The Temple of My Familiar* as well. As will be illustrated in what follows, the novel preaches a

connectedness between people of different races, both sexes and even between people and other fauna and flora. Lissie for example says:

> In these days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighborhood, after all. You used the same water, you ate the same foods, you sometimes found yourself peering out of the same cave waiting for a downpour to stop. (361)

Although the novel tackles issues of oppression of any sort, it does so only to come to the conclusions that universalism is the only way to become a whole person. The most explicit illustration of this attitude is the fact that, whereas in most of her other novels Walker's protagonists are female, in *The Temple of My Familiar* three of the six are male. Moreover, these men are portrayed in a mild, if not positive, way. As Sol says:

> (…) amidst all the tales of oppression and male domination in the novel, none of the individual oppressors are made flesh themselves. They are "they"; whereas the individuals portrayed in the novel, even if they are members of oppressing groups--whites, domineering men--are well-meaning people who are generally seen in a positive, or at least forgiving, light. (Sol, 2002: 400-401)

4.2. Womanist themes in *The Temple of My Familiar*

4.2.1. The race issue

Whereas Walker in *The Color Purple* mainly focused on relationships within black community (especially the prevalent sexism), she touches again more at length on the race issue in *The Temple of My Familiar*. With the six main characters as well as most of the other ones being black, Walker can treat several dimensions of the problem, leading us to understand that racism is age-old and has existed between all sorts of people. The book relates instances of racism during very different periods to illustrate this. Some examples: Lissie clearly remembers the life time in which she was sold by her own uncle into slavery. She says: "The white men, who looked and smelled like nothing we had ever imagined, as if their sweat were vinegar, paid the men who'd brought us, (…)." (63) Probably more than a century later, Hal's father is not allowed into the house of his friend Heath, because he is black (133), which some decades later also happens to young Fanny, whose friend Tanya is white as well. Hal and Suwelo's uncle Rafe are confronted with the race issue when "white folks wanted [them] (…) for the army, to fight in the Great War, or so they said. The truth was, they wanted [them] to be servants for he white men who fought. (…) They wanted [them] to fight some people none of [them] had heard of, and they were white folks, too." (97) Suwelo and Fanny

also find themselves to be discriminated against. As Suwelo tells Hal and Lissie: "We sold to another black family, because we knew that one of the reasons our neighbours wanted to buy our house was to keep other black people out." (241)

The most intriguing scenes dealing with racism, I think, are the ones taking place in Africa. On the one hand, Africa is the homeland of black people and so it rightfully belongs to them. Consequently, when white people come there and discriminate against the blacks, this seems even more unfair than when they do so elsewhere. In that way, Africa is presented as a kind of micro-cosmos, displaying on a smaller scale all the things that are going on in the rest of the world. As Olivia says:

> The Africa we encountered had already been raped of much of its sustenance. Its people had been sold into slavery. Considering both internal and external "markets," this "trade" had been going on for well over a thousand years; and had no doubt begun as the early civilizations of Africa were falling into decline, around the six-hundreds. Millions of its trees had been shipped to England and Spain and other European countries to make benches and altars in those grand European cathedrals one heard so much about; its minerals and metals mined and its land planted in rubber and cocoa and pineapples and all sorts of crops for the benefit of foreign invaders. (148)

Ola, Fanny's father, also tells his daughter about how the white man came to Africa and made everything go wrong. As he says: "[t]he whites had done terrible things to us; (…) But beyond what they were doing to us, as adults, they were destroying our children, who were starving to death – their bodies, their minds, their dreams – right before our eyes." (307)

Yet, on the other hand, the scenes in Africa display other significant things revolving around the race issue. First of all, the Africans show a profound race pride themselves. As Ola says: "the government, after throwing out a majority of the white man's laws, because they oppressed the native population, decided that the one law they would assuredly keep was the one forbidding interracial marriage. This proved they had as much race pride as the white man, you see." (348) This pride is sustained by a myth in which the white man is seen as the "prodigal son of Africa" (309).

> The African white man was born without melanin, or with only incredibly small amounts of it. He was born unprotected from the sun. He must have felt cursed by God. He would later project this feeling onto us and try to make us feel cursed because we are black; but black is a colour the sun loves. The African white man could not blame the sun his plight, not without seeming ridiculous, but could eventually stop people from worshipping it. (322)

Secondly, the book on several points criticizes how little black community itself has learned from the painful experiences of slavery, white domination and racism. Ola's art, as Fanny

argues, for example also gives insights "into the oppression of women, black women by black men, who should have had more understanding – having criticized the white man's ignorance in dealing with black people for so long" (262). Black people are guilty of sexism and other forms of oppression and misuse of power themselves. When someone asks Ola why he does not write plays that put their country and government in a more favourable light, he answers:

> THE WHITE MAN IS STILL HERE. Even when he leaves, he is not gone. (…) EVERYONE ALL OVER THE WORLD KNOWS EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WHITE MAN. That's the essential meaning of television. BUT THEY KNOW NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT THEMSELVES. (…) When my people stop acting like the white man, I can write plays that show them at their best! (182-183)

Nzingha, Fanny's halfsister, draws the same conclusion: "And I feel so frus*trated*, because the men can always run on and on about the white man's destructiveness and yet they cannot look into their own families and their own children's lives and see that this is just the destruction the white man has planned." (255)

Yet, what makes the book especially interesting is that Walker also illustrates how racism works both ways. The two most striking examples of this are Hal and Fanny. As Lissie tells Suwelo, Hal truly fears the white man. Fanny's fear goes further and is turned into sheer hatred. As she says:

> I grew up believing that white people, collectively speaking, cannot bear to witness wholeness and health in others, just as they can't bear to have people different from themselves live among them. It seemed to me that nothing, no other people certainly, could live and be healthy in their midst. They seemed to need to have other people look bad – poor, ragged, dirty, illiterate. (300)

In conclusion, it should be said that, as was already indicated in the section above, the overall message the book wants to convey is that a non-separatist attitude is the healthiest. Lissie, although she herself claims to have almost no positive memory of a white person (97) and clearly is very proud to be a black woman, has had the experience of being white. She has used that experience to harmonize within herself and does not let racism devour her inner peace and wholeness. It is obvious that racism is a destructive force that only leads us away from our goal as a human being.

4.2.2. <u>The gender issue</u>

With Walker being, as she herself indicates, “a rather ardent feminist” (Walker, 1984: 152), we might expect her novels to treat the gender issue in great detail. This is indeed the case for *The Temple of My Familiar*, although we should add that it is not as clear cut as it may seem. In comparison to her most famous novel, *The Color Purple*, for example, Walker devotes far more attention to her male characters, as they constitute fifty percent of the main characters. Although each of the male characters still has to learn something and is not quite perfect as a person yet, their portrayal is strikingly less harsh than that of Mr. in *The Color Purple*, which was criticized extensively for putting forward a very negative view on men. Yet, as she herself indicates, Mr. embodies Walker’s belief that people can develop positively, a view that is present even more explicit in *The Temple of My Familiar*. However, it should not surprise that the one character having reached the status of wholeness from the beginning of the novel already and who consequently serves as a guide is a woman, Lissie.

In the same subtle way, some passages in the novel suggest that, without saying men are evil, women are one step ahead in the development towards wholeness. First of all, throughout the centuries, it is women who have had a special relationship “with animals and with her children that deeply satisfied [them]. It was of this that man was jealous.” (201) Secondly, “the women alone had familiars. In the men’s group, or tribe, there was no such thing.” (361) With the having of a familiar being the symbol of wholeness as it implies a close connection to animal and nature, this again suggests that women were more whole than men from the beginning of history.

Obviously, this rich novel deals with sexism and the gender issue in several ways. Firstly, all of the female protagonists are or have been victims of sexism. The most obvious example probably is Carlotta, who tries to please men by behaving as a “female impersonator” (386). Yet, Fanny as well is perfectly aware of the impact of sexism, which to her is inextricably linked with her position as a *colored* woman.

> [Fanny] thinks of white feminists she knows who are happy that they can at last express their anger. In their opinion, this is something white women have never done. (…) But this seems like a delusion to Fanny. For she knows the white woman has always expressed her anger, or at least vented it, as some of her friends like to say – and usually it was against people, often men, but primarily women, of color. (391)

Secondly, the novel implicitly, yet effectively, criticizes some of the most important aspects of our current sexist or patriarchal society (e.g. religion, marriage, government, academy,…) by numerous references to matriarchal systems. Such ancient matriarchies are opposed to the present-day institutions that Fanny describes as "unnatural bodies, male-supremacist private clubs." (274)[13] The present situation is traced back to the point where everything went wrong. Whereas up to that moment men and women lived in separate tribes, visiting each other regularly and living in perfect harmony with each other, themselves and the nature and animals surrounding them, at a certain moment men and women merge. It is during the lifetime in which Lissie is a lion that this happens. She experiences the consequences of the merger first hand:

> In the merger, the men asserted themselves, alone, as the familiars of women. They moved in with their dogs, which they ordered to chase us. This was a time of trauma for women and other animals alike. (…) I did not know at the time that man would begin, in his rage and jealousy of us, to hunt us down, to kill and eat us, to wear our hides, our teeth, and our bones. No, not even the most cynical animal would have dreamed of that. Soon we would forget the welcome of woman's fire. Forget her language. Forget her feisty friendliness. Forget the yeasty smell of her and the warm grubbiness of her children. All of this friendship would be lost, and she, poor thing, would be left with just man, screaming for his dinner and forever murdering her friends, and with man's "best friend," the "pet" familiar, the fake familiar, the dog. (370)

Not only the animals suffer, both men and women do as well.

> The men now took it on themselves to say what should and should not be done by all, which meant they lost the freedom of their long, undisturbed, contemplative days in the men's camp; and the women, in compliance with the men's bossiness, but more because they now became emotionally dependent on the individual man by whom man's law now decreed they must have all their children, lost their wildness, that quality of homey ease on the earth that they shared with the rest of the animals. (369)

Ever since that moment, men and women have allowed for a patriarchal system to develop, in which women were treated badly. Even black men, who should have learned from their own oppression by white people, are guilty of this.

Thirdly, the two factors that help Celie, the protagonist in *The Color Purple* and probably the most famous victim of racism and sexism at once in literature, to throw off the yoke of her double oppression are also present in *The Temple of My Familiar*. First of all, women, in order to be fully appreciated as women, should explore themselves in every possible way, meaning: also sexually. They have to come to terms with their own sexuality,

[13] This issue will be elaborated on in the section Motherhood & Matrilineage.

know and appreciate their own body, before they will be able to enjoy a sexual relationship with a man. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, sex is referred to in two ways. On the one hand, there is unfulfilling sex, for example, the sex Suwelo forces both Fanny and Carlotta to have with him and onto which he projects his male-oriented fantasies. For example: he tries to force Fanny to wear sexy lingerie and tells Lissie and Hal how: "[s]he felt terrible. She cried and said she felt degraded." (281) It should not come as a surprise that Fanny later confesses to him that she has never experienced an orgasm with him. (283) On the other hand, there is the type of sex that is possible only if both the woman and the man value the woman for being a woman. It is the sex Arveyda and Fanny have at the end of the novel. But, in order for this to happen, Fanny has to come to terms with her sexuality herself. Just like Shug made Celie aware of her "little button" (*The Color Purple*: 83), Fanny is helped as well:

> Fanny thinks of the years during which her sexuality was dead to her. How, once she began to understand man's oppression of women, and to let herself feel it in her own life, she ceased to be aroused by men. By Suwelo in particular, addicted as he was to pornography. And then, the women in her consciousness-raising group had taught her how to masturbate. Suddenly she'd found herself free. Sexually free, for the first time in her life. At the same time, she was learning to meditate, and was throwing off the last clinging vestiges of organized religion. She was soon meditating and masturbating and finding herself dissolved into the cosmic All. Delicious. (389)

The second important thing Shug teaches Celie is to discard the view of God she has. In that way, Walker is "attacking patriarchy (and patriarchal culture) at its Christian foundation" (Hall, 1992).[14] The same view is put forward in *The Temple of My Familiar*. It is important to note however that religion is not done away with altogether.

> Walker does not believe (…) that any attempt at a redemptive system of thought will ultimately prove tyrannical and hegemonic. In Temple, the characters seek methods of connecting to their pasts and each other--through storytelling, music, massage, and of course love and sex--and strenuously avoid the traditional systems of the white male patriarchy, while asserting a philosophy of spiritual unity and balance. (Sol, 2002: 395)

Instead, traditional, patriarchal Christianity – in which both God and Jesus are representatives of the white man – is replaced by something very personal and spiritual, celebrating man's connection with other people as well as with nature. As Olivia tells Fanny:

[14] No pagination.

> We all begun to see, in Africa – where people worshiped many things, including the roofleaf plant, which they used to cover their houses – that "God" was not a monolith, and not the property of Moses, as we'd been led to think, and not separate from us, or absent from whatever world one inhabited. (…) The God discovered on one's own speaks nothing of turning the other cheek. Of rendering unto Caesar; But only of the beauty and greatness of the earth, the universe, the cosmos. Of creation. Of the possibilities for joy. You might say the white man, in his dual role of spiritual guide and religious prostitute, spoiled even the most literary form of God experience for us. By making the Bible say whatever was necessary to keep his plantations going, and using it as a tool to degrade women and enslave blacks. (146-147)

This is also why Fanny's grandmothers, Shug and Celie, eventually found their own church, which they called "a 'band.' (…) 'Band' was what renegade black women's churches were called traditionally; it means a group of people who share a common bond and purpose and whose notion of spiritual reality is radically at odds with mainstream or prevailing ones." (301) Their church worked according to the following principle:

> Everyone who came brought information about their own path and journey. The exchanged and shared this information. That was the substance of the church. Some of these people worshiped Isis. Some worshiped trees. Some thought the air, because it alone is everywhere, is God. (170)

This view on religion as explicitly different from the patriarchal Christianity is supported by the stories of Lissie's past lifetimes in which she relates how in the beginning of civilization people worshipped mothers and goddesses, instead of male figures.

4.2.3. The black (female) artist

As in the essays of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, there also is a lot of reference to artists in *The Temple of My Familiar*. Most strikingly almost every single character in the novel either is an artist from the start, or becomes one as part of their spiritual development. Zedé the elder is a bell chimist and a tailor, Zedé is a tailor as well, Arveyda is a musician, Hal a painter, Lissie a painter and a storyteller, Ola is a playwright, Eleandra was a painter, Nzingha's mother made murals in their hut, Fanny becomes a masseuse – massage, in her case, could be said to be an art – and a playwright, Carlotta becomes a bell chimist just like her grandmother and Suwelo takes up carpentry. Besides the characters being artists, there are also some references to real life artists, not by accident mostly women and artists presumably very influential for Walker herself: Lissie's grandmother is compared to Sojourner Truth

(102), Bessie Head stays in the same hotel in Africa as Fanny (176), Fanny talks about an exposition of Frida Kahlo to her therapist (326) and about Nella Larson to her father (341).

In the book, the status of being an artist seems to be linked to the development process most of the characters have to go through. Being an artist makes it easier to become an integrated person, perfectly in balance. There are three functions of the artist that are referred to explicitly in the novel. First of all, being an artist has to do with one's own development as listening to their inner selves can be a prime source of inspiration for artists. As Carlotta informs Suwelo:

> It was the story about my grandmother, Zedé the Elder, who created the capes made of feathers for the priests; the woman who taught my own mother how to make beautiful feathered things. She had been a great artist, and she had had a little chime outside the door of her hut. She would strike it, and listen closely to it, and if the sound corresponded with the vibration of her soul at the time, she would nod, once – Arveyda told me Zedé told him – and begin to create. (402)

Secondly, as an artist you have a social function in general. This suggestion is clearly reminiscent of what Walker says about artists in her collection of womanist prose (cf. supra). As Nzingha says to Fanny: "Writers don't cause trouble so much as they describe it. Once it is described, trouble takes on a life visible to all, whereas until it is described, and made visible, only a few are able to see it." (261) Thirdly, beside their general social function of informing people at large, they have also a guiding function for specific individuals in their inner circle. Sometimes they can see things more clearly which allows them to show their beloved ones the path they should follow. As Arveyda puts it:

> Artists, he now understood, were simply messengers. On them fell the responsibility for uniting the world. An awesome task, but he felt up to it, in his own life. His faith must be that the pain he brought to others and to himself – so poorly concealed in the information delivered – would lead not to destruction, but to transformation. (125)

4.2.4. Motherhood & matrilineage

As Sol argues:

> Families, tribes, and cultures are of primary importance to the novel, both in the ways that they support the various characters and in the ways in which the characters choose to perpetuate them. (…) The importance of a culture beyond the individual is most clearly demonstrated by the way that storytelling brings the characters to a new understanding of the world and their place in it. Fanny, Carlotta, Suwelo, and Arveyda all need to come to terms with the stories of their parents; they seem to be adrift until they learn where their roots are. (Sol, 2002: 396)

Indeed, as I already argued, “communion” (Dieke, 1992: 508) – in the large sense of the word – is very important in the novel (cf. supra). Yet, upon reading *The Temple of My Familiar* it strikes the reader especially that many of the families, tribes and cultures talked about are matriarchies or forms of social organization in which women are central and/or have power. The book refers to several of such matriarchies, both on a general as on a more intimate scale.

In general, the book suggests that in the beginning of the world all tribes were organized as matriarchies, which gave rise to communities in which men and women lived separately. Zedé the elder testifies this was the case in South America.

> Immediately they imagined a mujer muy grande, larger than the sky, producing, somehow, the earth. A goddess. And so, if the producer of the earth was a large woman, a goddess, then women must be her priests, and must possess great and supernatural powers. What the mind doesn’t understand, it worships or fears. I am speaking here of man’s mind. The men both worshiped and feared the women. (49)

Lissie informs us about the African side, remembering many lifetimes in which men and women lived separately. Once, her mother was the “queen” of their tribe. She says: “I suppose she was what queens were originally, though: a wise woman, a healer, a woman of experience and vision, a woman superbly trained by her mother. A really good person, whose words were always heard by the clan.” (360) Such matriarchies were supported by the religion, as people believed in goddesses and had female priests rather than in men fulfilling these roles. As Lissie argues telling Suwelo about the lifetime she was sold as a slave with her mother:

> These were men sold into slavery because of their religious belief, which was not tolerated by the Mohametans. They carried on the ancient tradition of worship of the mother, and to see a mother sold into slavery – which did not turn a hair on a Mohametan’s head if she was not a convert to his religion – was great torture for them. (63)

In all of these stories the men are described as subservient, in fear for and worship of the women. It is very telling that the book claims that, instead of Freud’s thesis that girls are frustrated and envious their whole life for not having a penis, a penis is nothing but an “elongated clitoris.” (48)

On a smaller scale, the novel portrays several concrete matriarchies. We are for example informed that M’Sukta’s tribe, the Ababa, was a matriarchy. But the most obvious example is the house in which Fanny grows up, with her two grandmothers Celie and Shug and her mother Olivia and about which she says herself: “In our house, however, it paid to be a girl, and all my womanish ways were approved.” (155) Yet, also Carlotta, Zedé and Zedé the elder form a newfound matriarchy when they see each other on vacation. (407)

Besides referring extensively to different sorts of matriarchies, the novel also talks more concretely about motherhood and motherly figures. First of all, there are a lot of biological mothers present in the book: Zedé the elder, Zedé herself, Celie, Olivia, etc. The book suggests the importance of the mother-child relationship in several ways. The two most obvious examples are the relationship between Carlotta and Zedé and the one between Suwelo and his mother. Both Carlotta and Suwelo have to reconnect to their mother in order to get ahead. As Worsham argues, texts like *The Temple of My Familiar*

> seek to replace the Freudian model of female adolescent development (which emphasizes conflict) with a model based on interdependency and "growth through relationships" (Nice, 66), thus fostering stronger positive bonds between all mothers and daughters and between members of the larger community of women. (Worsham, 1996)[15]

Apart from the biological mothers, there are also some spiritual mothers who stand even more explicit than do the biological ones for wisdom and guidance. In that sense, the novel's "preoccupation with matriarchal wisdom (…) foregrounds the maternal not in the restrictive sense of individual mothering but in the wider contexts of social nurturing and pre-oedipal development." (Braendlin, 1996: 61) The most obvious example of this of course is Lissie.

As this analysis revealed, *The Temple of My Familiar* is a womanist novel indeed. Although the book does not have women or women's experiences at its core exclusively, it still embodies several important aspects of Alice Walker theoretical Womanism. Most tellingly, the novel is a clear illustration of Walker's universalist stance as it preaches communion between all aspects of one's own personality, between people of all places and times, of all races and both sexes and even between different species. Secondly, the novel elaborates on the womanist themes that are recurrent in Walker's theoretical writings.

[15] No pagination.

Conclusion

Being both black and female, the black woman's situation and oppression go far beyond that of either (male) blacks or (white) women. Consequently, black women find themselves socially, politically and especially emotionally situated in a no man's land, unable to identify with either Afro-Americanism or mainstream feminism. Although they belong to both minority groups up to a certain height, their specific predicament is never fully grasped by either. That is why, throughout the years, black women have claimed their own rightful place and have created a specifically black feminism.

With her strong fascination for black women, from the start of her career, Alice Walker has presented herself as one of the advocates of this black feminism, coining her own term for and creating her own approach to the issue. This paper explored both the theoretical and practical side of that approach.

Walker refers to black feminism as Womanism, a term rooted in black folk culture to indicate clearly that the concept is shaped by the specific experience of being a black woman. The four-part definition she provides at the beginning of her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), however hybrid, can be said to be conveying two general meanings: a very concrete and a more universally valid one. Firstly and most importantly, Womanism specifically denotes a particular attitude for black feminists or, by extension, feminists of color. Comparing the relation between Womanism and (mainstream, white) feminism to that between purple and lavender, Walker indicates that both share certain features, yet in the end are undeniably different. Walker further elaborates on what a "womanist" is and characterizes the attitude in both objective and more irrational ways. Secondly, stating several times that womanists are non-separatists with regards to both race and gender, Womanism, in a less straight-forward way, seems to denote a universally and eternally desirable attitude for people in general. Admittedly, considering the etymology of the word as well as the obviously feminine frame of the definition, it may appear quite far-fetched to claim that Womanism actually refers to a unisex stance. Yet, on the other hand, the non-separatist philosophy so important to Womanism may suggest itself that it does.

Walker backs up her complex definition with the essays in the collection. Four themes return regularly in this "womanist prose" and are therefore presumably central to Womanism as well. The importance of the first two themes, race and gender, to the issue of black feminism is very straight-forward. The themes of the black (female) artist and of (biological

as well as spiritual) motherhood, however, are less self-evident in that respect. Yet, Walker convincingly illustrates how these aspects function in her philosophy.

Besides her theoretical reflections on the issue, Walker's Womanism also shows in her fiction, which is comprised of several novels, numerous short stories and poems. This paper illustrated how that works for her novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) solely. Although it is beyond dispute that the analysis of only one novel is not a sufficient basis to draw general conclusions on the issue, the scope of this paper did not allow for a larger scale investigation. Moreover, the choice for exactly that novel as a test-case can be easily defended. First of all, *The Temple of My Familiar* is probably Walker's most contentious novel, as the reactions to it range from enthusiastic praise to utter disapproval. Although it was beyond the scope of this paper to touch upon evaluative matters, I still believe this divide in the critical reactions to the novel makes it an interesting object for analysis. Secondly, being (although only superficially) acquainted with the rest of Walker's work as well, I suspected that *The Temple of My Familiar* belongs to the part of her fiction that is not that straight-forwardly womanist. In the novel, as opposed to say *The Color Purple*, the protagonists are not all black women, nor are black women's experiences exclusively at its core. Therefore, in a way, it could be suggested that if *The Temple of My Familiar* proved to be womanist after all, the suggestion that Walker's literary work in total is would seem appropriate.

And indeed, as was extensively illustrated in the practical part of this paper, *The Temple of My Familiar* can be labelled a womanist novel. Firstly, on a very profound level, the book is the practical illustration of the universalist, non-separatist attitude Walker preaches. Not only are three of the six main characters in the novel men, they are also portrayed very mildly. Moreover, the message of the book is that, in order to be "whole" as a person (something everyone should strive for), people have to be at peace with everyone and everything around them, or, put differently, people have to be universalists to the utmost degree. Pleading for a peaceful understanding between genders, races, places and times and even between species, the novel in that way illustrates a womanist attitude and opens up the scope more explicitly than does the definition to men (as opposed to women) and whites (as opposed to colored people). So, whereas a novel like *The Color Purple* can be said to be illustrating and elaborating on the concrete, specific meaning of Womanism mentioned above, *The Temple of My Familiar* on the other hand seems the practical representation of the more universal side of the concept (cf. supra). Having only female protagonists, *The Color Purple* illustrates and focuses on black feminism, black women and their situations and treats the

universalist stance only shallowly by portraying Mr. as a man who changes. In *The Temple of My Familiar* it seems to be the other way around. In this novel the stress is on the universally valid meaning of Womanism rather than on concrete issues of black feminism and sexism within black community. Although these latter are certainly present in the story and are obviously important to its meaning, it is the non-separatist attitude that is most explicitly at the novel's center, which is symbolized by the fact that half of the protagonists are male.

Secondly, the womanist themes that are found at length in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* are also omnipresent in the novel. Moreover, just like the essays link the experience of being an artist and being a mother to womanists, the novel links both experiences to the process of becoming whole as a person. It seems that womanist and whole are synonyms up to a certain height.

Providing black women with a theoretical framework that is easily accessible as well as offering them fictitious accounts of lives, situations and emotions similar to their own and thus creating for them characters they can identify with and which can serve as role models, Walker proves her concern with the black woman's case. Although it inevitably entails a reduction to view the work of a versatile author in one light only, in this paper it was illustrated that Alice Walker's work is indeed predominantly shaped by her specific preference for black women, their situations and emotions. This makes her theoretical and fictional work two sides of the same coin, inextricably linked. They seem to influence, feed on and keep developing in response to each other. Consequently, Walker is able to root her theoretical framework in the concrete and representative (although fictitious) lives of her characters on the one hand and to have characters acting along the lines of her philosophy on the other. This interplay is probably what lends her strength both as a theoretician and a literary writer.

Appendix 1: *The Gospel According to Shug* (289-291)

1. HELPED are those who are enemies of their own racism; they shall live in harmony with the citizens of this world, and not with those of the world of their ancestors, which has passed away, and which they shall never see again.
2. HELPED are those born from love: conceived in their father's tenderness and their mother's orgasm, for they shall be those – numbers of whom will be called "illegitimate" – whose spirits shall know no boundaries, even between heaven and earth, and whose eyes shall reveal the spark of the love that was their own creation. They shall know joy equal to their suffering and they will lead multitudes into dancing and Peace.
3. HELPED are those too busy living to respond when they are wrongfully attacked: on their walks they shall find mysteries so intriguing as to distract them from every blow.
4. HELPED are those who find something in Creation to admire each and every hour. Their days will overflow with beauty and the darkest dungeon will offer gifts.
5. HELPED are those who receive only to give; always in their house will be the circular energy of generosity; and in their hearts a beginning of a new age on Earth: when no keys will be needed to unlock the heart and no locks will be needed on the doors.
6. HELPED are those who love the stranger; in this they reflect the heart of the Creator and that of the Mother.
7. HELPED are those who are content to be themselves; they will never lack mystery in their lives and the joys of self-discovery will be constant.
8. HELPED are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm, for to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity.
9. HELPED are those who live in quietness, knowing neither brand name nor fad; they shall live every day as if in eternity, and each moment shall be as full as it is long.
10. HELPED are those who create anything at all, for they shall relive the thrill of their own conception, and realize a partnership in the creation of the Universe that keeps them responsible and cheerful.
11. HELPED are those who love the Earth, their mother, and who willingly suffer that she may not die; in their grief over her pain they will weep rivers of blood, and in their joy in her lively response to love, they will converse with trees.
12. HELPED are those whose every act is a prayer for harmony in the Universe, for they are the restorers of balance to our planet. To them will be given the insight that every good act done anywhere in the cosmos welcomes the life of an animal or a child.
13. HELPED are those who risk themselves for others' sake; to them will be given increasing opportunities for ever greater risks. Theirs will be a vision of the world in which no one's gift is despised or lost.
14. HELPED are those who strive to give up their anger; their reward will be that in any confrontation their first thoughts will never be of violence or of war.
15. HELPED are those whose every act is a prayer for peace; on them depends the future of the world.
16. HELPED are those who forgive; their reward shall be forgetfulness of every evil done to them. It will be in their power, therefore, to envision the new Earth.
17. HELPED are those who are shown the existence of the Creator's magic in the Universe; they shall experience delight and astonishment without ceasing.
18. HELPED are those who laugh with a pure heart; theirs will be the company of the jolly righteous.
19. HELPED are those who love all the colors of all the human beings, as they love all the colors of animals and plants; none of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them.

20. HELPED are those who love the lesbian, the gay, and the straight, as they love the sun, the moon, and the stars. None of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them.
21. HELPED are those who love the broken and the whole; none of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be despised.
22. HELPED are those who do not join mobs; theirs shall be the understanding that to attack in anger is to murder in confusion.
23. HELPED are those who find the courage to do at least one small thing each day to help the existence of another – plant, animal, river, or human being. They shall be joined by a multitude of the timid.
24. HELPED are those who lose their fear of death; theirs is the power to envision the future in a blade of grass.
25. HELPED are those who love and actively support the diversity of life; they shall be secure in their differentness.
26. HELPED are those who *know*.

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