

The Analysis of Black Women's Consciousness in The Color Purple

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Abstract. This thesis scribes a story about the awakening process of the protagonist Celie and the women around her in *The Color Purple*, while they were subjected to the double oppression of black men and white race. Furthermore, it mainly explains the importance of black Women's consciousness and restoration in this novel. Finally, the thesis aims to explain walker's desire that all mankind can live together in a peaceful, equal and harmonious way.

Introduction

Alice Walker and The Color Purple. Alice Walker was one of the most important African American women writers in the Twentieth Century. Her works have attracted many Chinese and foreign readers and critics. Her work, *The Color Purple*, gives her an award, the first prize as a South African American woman.

Walker was the eighth child of a rural family in Georgia. When she was only eight, she lost an eye in an accident. As time goes by, after she graduated from her local school the Spelman, she went to the Sarah Lawrence College with scholarships and graduated in 1965.

The civil rights movement began in 1960s. Alice Walker devoted herself to the political movement about the equal rights of black people. In 1963s, after she came to Washington for only a month, Walker had the opportunity to listen to the speech "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King. Walker also actively participated in feminism in the 1970s, when she was as the editor of the MS magazine. Her experiences in the civil rights movement and the feminist movement have made her resolve to devote herself to the fight for racial equality.

Her works show black women's experience under the patriarchal and racial oppression. They pursue the liberation and strive for the survival and integrity of all mankind. She paints a vivid picture of sexism, racism and poverty. But she also describes a part of life, family, community, self-worth and spiritual power. She paid most of her attention to the concerns of black women and said: "I am committed to the exploration of oppression, madness, loyalty, and the victory of black women".

Walker's epistolary story, *The Color purple*, records a shocking tragedy and triumph of a poor black woman named Celie in her struggle for self-empowerment, sexual freedom, and spiritual growth in rural Georgia in the early twentieth century. After the fourteen-year old girl Celie was raped by her stepfather, Celie became timid and confused. She dared to tell anyone what happened to her. Her two children were taken away by Alfonso. In twenties, she continued to be abused by a widower. The only person that really loved her was her sister Nettie, who left her because of escaping the sexual harassment from Alphonso Albert. Then Celie built friendship with Shug, who was the lover of Albert. She had to take care of her when she was ill. Unexpectedly, with the help of Shug, Celie found Albert hiding Nettie's letters without her notice and she was so angry that she just wanted to kill him. Celie decided to leave her abusive husband the whole summer in Memphis, where she started pants business from the support and encouragement of Shug. Good things came together. She inherited the property from her biological father. Male characters like Albert and Harpo (Albert's son, Celie's stepson) would be converted to the person in charge. They were aware of their wrongdoing to their women. The novel has a happy ending: Nettie, Nettie's husband

Samuel, Celie children Olivia and Adam together with Adam's wife Tashi came back from Africa. Celie was together with her family members.

Literature Review. Alice Walker was engaged in writing during the period of post-modernism, but she was very different from her European and some African American counterparts. African American commentator Bernard Belle believes that Alice Walker's novel falls solidly in what is known as the "new realism" of black literary tradition by Belle. Belle believes that this type of writing "by linear conventional type, plot and slave narrative elements closed, combined with the historical romance, and social realism, and attacked racial discrimination and embraced bourgeois values, more importantly, it embodies a kind of philosophical and political attitude to the human condition". For example, Alice Walker stressed the need to change the patriarchal economic system, which led to alienation, exploitation and destruction of people's lives.

After graduation from college in 1966, Walker devoted herself to the Civil Rights Movement, and she remained a committed writer who encouraged her fellow African Americans to strive for their own identity, esteem and worth. Generally, the theme against racism, classism and sexism remains the most important themes of her novels, which include: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998), *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart: A Novel* (2004).

It was her third novel, *The Color Purple*, that won both American Book Award and the Pulitzer which made a stir in the USA. From then on, Alice Walker has become the focus of public attention whose works have been studied carefully. The theoretical points of view and methodologies are various. This paper discusses her Feminine consciousness and the awakening process of black women.

In China, the study of Alice Walker began with the translation of *The Color purple*. At the beginning of 1990s, the novel made a great deal of research on the novel from different perspectives, such as Black feminist criticism, image criticism and Bakhtin's dialogue theory. In recent years, Professor Wang Chengyu has used *The Color Purple* system. She comments on Walker's views on gender discrimination, national consciousness and language strategies. In the past 10 years, Walker's works have been analyzed. In most cases, they only comment on her representative works, *The Color Purple*. It is obvious that Chinese scholars should pay more attention to Alice Walker.

The author focuses on the previous studies, feminism and black feminist consciousness, which help us explore the black women's awakening process.

Black Women's Consciousness

The Definition of Black Women's Consciousness. Black female consciousness is the master status of women in the objective world, the function and value of consciousness. Women's self consciousness, that is, women's own understanding, is to explain the particularity of women's own existence. It is no longer a woman in the eyes of men, but women in the eyes of their own. It is not only a positive and effective negation to the experience of women, but also a kind of self reflection and self-criticism.

It can be divided into female consciousness and feminism. Womanism is different from Feminism which awakens the black woman. *The Color Purple* describes not only the time when the black women gain the rebirth but also depict the change of the black men who ever oppressed the black women. Womanism not only has a great contribution to the traditional feminism but also the black feminism.

Feminism originated from black women, a branch of black feminism. In the beginning of 1980s, more and more black female scholars including Alice Walker pay attention to the racial prejudice and sexism. Women organizations and other organizations around the world tend to emphasize the women's fate of all colors in the world. In order to study such an aggressive behavior from black feminism and to show the opposition of the "separatist" tendencies that the "black feminist" implies, Alice Walker initiates the use of "womanism". They revolt against the Black Feminist doctrine of racism and white feminism, but also unite the women of all colors. Alice Walker, Shelley Anne

Williams, Michael Awkward and other critics make specific academic fundamentalism to develop it into a more perfect literary criticism theory gradually. Womanism is the most important representative thought of Alice Walker and even the African cultural tradition.

The Awakening Process

Black Male's Oppression. African Americans have long suffered racial discrimination. The first is to sell black slaves who were regarded as animals. After the slavery was abolished, the blacks, especially the black women still had to face racism and indifference. Walker once wrote, "Everything around me is divided into two parts. History is divided into two, literature is divided into two, all people are divided into two groups. This makes people do stupid things." Black women are more likely to be victims of these stupid things. Sophia is a very rebellious character in the book, and she has a strong idea of equality between men and women. She said to Celie, "I've been fighting with people all my life..... Girls are insecure in a predominantly male family." (Walker,1982:59). She loved Harper, but stressed that, "I would beat him, if he wanted to beat me. Sophia can get rid of sexism through her own resistance, but racial discrimination is like a mountain, so she has to suffer the oppression of white men and women. White women's oppression to black women is more cruel and inhuman than those racist men. Sophia refused to be a biddy of the mayor's wife which made them fight with her. The fight resulted in the prison disaster. This is because the white people control the prison and justice. Later, Sophia was released from prison. After being released from prison, Sophia had to lay down their self-esteem to the mayor's home to do the maid, which made a lot of vibration to Celie because her own misfortune also stemmed from the brutal and selfish. Celie's father was a hard-working, smart and capable farmers who opened a store and blacksmith shop. His business was gradually flourishing which caused the discontent to the white man. After her mother was in low spirit, she also lost a warm and safe home in which she could take refuge. So the struggle for black women was far more complicated than the white feminist movement. The development of White Racism not only was not limited in the political, economic and cultural aspect, but also seriously distorted the spirit of the black men. This is a typical example of her stepfather. In order to make a fortune, he was willing to marry Celie's mother, who was frightened to be mad and occupied property. For black women, racial politics and gender politics intertwined which were the two inseparable components of their liberation. They were keenly aware that only by linking themselves with the fate of the whole nation and only when the whole nation is liberated would they be free from sexual oppression.

White Race's Oppression. In *The Color Purple*, black women were not only oppressed by blacks, but also discriminated by white people. Sophia, who was jailed after being beaten by the mayor, was treated as inhuman, lifeless and petrified. Even after she was released, she became a servant of the mayor. It can be seen that black women are not only physically ill, but also mentally ill. Although Shug was a bad reputation of the woman, the father was willing to admit she was a good singer. With the help of Shug, Celie first realized the role and status of women, and her female consciousness began to awaken. Celie decided to leave Abbott, who finally plucked up the courage to take her husband as a "despicable guy", "I am ugly, the body is not good and not very clever, but God, here I am!" (Walker,1982:187). These words gave people a shock. Celie really understood the meaning of freedom and light.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of awakening of black female consciousness from the three major respects of self-recognition, root-seeking consciousness and consciousness for political and economic independence, the awakening process is Celie's silence to being strong and independent. We may say that this successful transformation is the result of her own efforts as well as the help and encouragement from the other black sisters.

There is no doubt that *The Color Purple* is the peak work of African American women's fiction in the 1980s. This is a fascinating novel. Walker is an outstanding novelist who can sometimes be

compared to Toni Morrison, but with a strong individual voice and vision as well as delicious humor that pervade the story and temper the harshness of the lives of the blacks. The canonized text appears with blazing insights, satisfying those undernourished readers who are looking for a book with a black woman-centered outlook. Walker successfully creates a new black woman with awakening female consciousness. Meanwhile, Walker's life experiences and black female consciousness make the novel vivid and authentic. Furthermore, she adopts an epistolary form, employs a shifting first-person narration, and uses black folk speech as well as symbols of colors and cultural images, which are also of great help to strengthen themes of anti-sexism, lesbian love, black sisterhood, national consciousness, female identity, racial discrimination, the relationship between women and nature and so on.

By analyzing the changes of Celie and its causes, we can arrive at the conclusion that black women are really independent with their own dignity and self-respect. In addition, many factors play an important role in the course such as the Womanism and the sisterhood. Alice Walker's true intention of writing this novel is to point out the bright road for the freedom and liberation of black women all over the world. At the same time, the author pays attention to the focus of this thesis, especially the black women, which can make it clear that the female protagonist ultimately grows into a new independent woman from an oppressed girl. Finally, this thesis aims to explain the author walker's the desire that all mankind can live together in a peaceful, equal and harmonious way.

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