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“FAIR IS FOUL, AND FOUL IS FAIR”: A CARNIVALESQUE APPROACH TO JUSTIN KURZEL AND BILLY MORRISSETTE’S CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S MACBETH

Abstract: *The conventional approach to literary adaptation, which insisted on rigid adherence to the source and denounced any deviation from the established text as unprofessional and negligent, has been substituted with attitudes that define the adaptation-source relation in new ways. Bakhtinian dialogism, as one of these approaches, redefines this relation in terms of a persistent contact between the two sides as the participants of a never-ending, all-inclusive network of relations. The idea of carnivalesque, a key part of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, can be used in adaptation studies to reflect both on the nature of adaptation-source relation and the internal mechanisms and techniques used by a particular adapter to reverse and suspend the orders and hierarchies established in its source work. Within this framework, the present study investigates Bakhtinian carnivalesque in Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrissette’s cinematic adaptations of William Shakespeare’s Macbeth (1606). Kurzel’s Macbeth (2015), set in Scottish Highlands during the 11th century, seeks to retain the Shakespearean air while addressing its contemporary issues mostly by highlighting or adding to the elements of carnival within the play. Morrissette’s Scotland PA (2001) takes a radically different stance toward the play, though. He transforms Shakespeare’s bloody tragedy into a dark comedy about the revolt of the lower class against the social structure. The study suggests that while these two adaptations take different, and at times opposing, approaches toward the play Macbeth, they both point to the carnivalesque potential of the play which can be released in and adapted to various socio-cultural contexts.*

Key Words: *adaptation studies, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, carnivalesque, William Shakespeare, Macbeth*

Introduction

Adapting Shakespeare for screen has long provoked various responses among literary critics. While some insist on sticking hard to Shakespeare’s texts and denounce any deviation from the Bard’s poetic language, others argue that a successful Shakespeare film needs to be

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grounded in its contemporary socio-cultural context. The former group of critics – referred to as proponents of fidelity criticism – attribute the success of an adaptation to the degree that it upholds the magnificence of Shakespeare's language and his choice of setting as well as character and themes. The latter, however, contend that if movie directors seek to nod vigorously to the youth audience and reflect the values of their current society, they have to refashion and modernize their narratives.

Much of the debate between these two camps lies in their different attitudes toward the relationship between the source text and the adapted film. Fidelity criticism establishes a vertical relation between the source and the adaptation where the source text finds a sacred position which must be respected by the adapted work. Thus, even minor changes in the adapted movie suggest either irreverence or ignorance on the part of the filmmaker. This trend, which still has its own apologists, was partly popularized because of the immense influence of classic works of literature in the early days of cinema. Back in the late 19th century, pioneers of movie industry had to rely on renowned literary classics to guarantee large numbers of viewers. Moreover, since early movies were silent, the most assured way to avoid the spectators' boredom was activating their previous knowledge of famous stories. That's why the first cinematic adaptation of a Shakespearean play, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *King John* (1899), is nearly as old as the cinema itself.

As the number and quality of cinematic adaptations grew, the methodology of the critical evaluation of these works changed too. Faithfulness is no longer an absolute yardstick to assess the value of an adapted film and determine its success or failure. Instead, every adaptation is treated as an autonomous discourse and a living utterance which is in perpetual interaction with other textual, political, social, and cultural discourses. Therefore, an adapted film, while affecting its surrounding discourses, is subject to multiple influences which are not necessarily the ones that the source text has been exposed to. This results in highlighting certain elements of the source text while undermining or even omitting certain others.

As this study endeavors to show, Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrissette's adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), despite all their differences, stress the carnivalesque features of the play through addition or deletion of specific elements or dealing with the play in totally new contexts. The next section addresses a brief history of carnival as a key cultural and social event. Then, the project will discuss the theory of carnival and the concept of carnivalesque as stated in the works of the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin. The study will continue with the discussion of the carnivalesque in Justin Kurzel's

Macbeth (2015) and Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA* (2001), showing how each movie director benefits from the carnival world and atmosphere to voice his concerns. The last section of the study draws together the key staples of the paper, pointing out how Bakhtinian carnivalesque can enrich our understanding of Shakespeare on the screen.

Carnival; A Brief History

Although the precise beginning of carnival as a seasonal event before Lent is not clear, some scholars argue that "the word 'Carnival' may have come from the Latin term *carnem levare*, meaning 'the putting away or removal of flesh (as food)'" (Isaac-Flavien, 2013: 43). This festive activity has been celebrated around the world in different ways. While each carnival has features that are unique to the region where it is held, there are certain common features, too. In his study of popular culture in early modern Europe, Peter Burke mentions that one central concept nearly in every carnival was "the world upside down" (1978: 189). The idea suggests that carnival, as opposed to state or church-sponsored feasts, "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). The suspension or reversal of the social hierarchies during carnival season turned it into the most popular festival of the year. Burke maintains that in southern Europe during early years of modern period, "carnival was the greatest popular festival of the year, and a privileged time when what oft was thought could for once be expressed with relative impunity" (1978: 182)

The celebration of carnival was not limited to the European territories though. For instance, in the West Indies, particularly in Haiti and Trinidad, the African slaves revolutionized the carnival celebrations by bringing them out of ballrooms and dance halls and taking over "the city streets and the festive areas of the plantation" (Liverpool, 1998: 30). In Haiti, "the edict of February, 19, 1765 … forbade the participation of slaves in Carnival" stating that "a slave in a mask or in disguise would be arrested, whipped, marked with the fleur-de-lis, and placed in an iron collar; there would be harsher punishment, possibly including the death penalty, for a second offence" (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 148). The carnival season, thus, was a type of resistance for these slaves who had to put up with their masters' atrocities and torturous behaviors throughout the year and be deprived of an activity whose main objective was undermining the racial and social ranks. Therefore, carnival signified "a direct revolt by the Afro-Caribbean people, against oppression" (Stevens, 1995: 65). This crucial

feature has endured in the contemporary carnivals albeit to various degrees and with different implications. Moreover, carnival was a unique opportunity for these slaves to preserve and "reconstruct their fragmented histories, which were effectively eroded through colonization" (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2002: 241).

The contemporary celebrations of carnivals have gone through many changes. Some of these transformations originate from technological advancements which introduce new gadgets and devices for holding the festivals. In London's Notting Hill Carnival, for instance, the use of GPS trackers and iAuditor app has made it possible for the organizers to keep track of every detail during the event. Sometimes, these changes have come in the form of restrictions and prohibitions imposed on carnival by those institutions which consider the event a threat to public order and morality. In spite of all suppressions and oppositions, carnival has managed to establish itself as a "social fact" which represents the collective identity of a society or a class of society and "affirms the collective creativity of the people" (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 147).

Bakhtin and the Carnivalesque

The carnivalesque is one of the central ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and one of his major contributions to social and literary studies. The influence of carnival on Russian society and literature attracted Bakhtin though he was not the first scholar to investigate this festive activity. According to Krystyna Pomorska, "the nineteenth-century critic Vissarion Belinsky's renowned characterization of Gogol's universe as 'laughter through tears' was probably the first observation of this kind" (1984: xi). Similarly, in the English literary studies, critics such as Northrop Frye and C.L. Barber are associated with the study of carnival and festivity before Bakhtin's comprehensive study of carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) was published and translated into English. What differentiated Bakhtin's work from those of Frye and Barber, though, is his radical, non-conservative approach which "brings out the deeply ideological significance of such phenomena in a way that has been claimed by Marxist, anarchist and humanist" (Knowles, 1998: 7).

Although the studies which take Bakhtinian carnivalesque as their critical approach to specific literary works have been mainly concerned with identifying comic imagery, grotesque moments, and sexual indecencies, Bakhtin's view of carnival is far more comprehensive. For Bakhtin, carnivalesque suggests a force that "illustrates the way the principles of inversion and permutation work underneath the surface of carnival and festive misrule" (Laroque, 1998:

83). It is within this context that he is able to find essential elements of carnivalesque in Shakespeare's drama: "And first of all this 'belief in the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life' determines Shakespeare's fearless, sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism. This pathos of radical changes and renewals is the essence of Shakespeare's world consciousness" (1984: 275). Although Shakespearean plays render such accessible manifestations of carnivalesque like lower body stratum and banquets, it is a sense of carnivalesque that is pervasive in his works as well as those of Boccaccio, Rabelais and Cervantes. Here, Bakhtin is not dealing with the impact of certain themes, ideas, or images, but rather with "the deeper influence of *a carnival sense of the world itself*, that is, the influence of the very *forms* for visualizing the world and man, and that truly *godlike freedom* in approaching them which is manifest not in the individual thoughts, images, and external devices of construction, but in these writers' work as a *whole*" (1999: 158; emphasis original).

As Robert Stam contends, "Bakhtin's approach … has a built-in 'place' for film" (1992: 59). Thus, the present study aims to identify the elements of carnival and festive culture that find expression in the new – but totally diverse – socio-cultural contexts of Justin Kurzel and Billy Morrissette's cinematic adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. But more importantly, the study discusses the significance of these carnivalesque elements in each adaptation and their role in expressing the voice and conveying the intended meanings of the directors.

Kurzel's *Macbeth*: Carnival in Scottish Highlands

Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), similar to its Shakespearean source, opens and closes in the 11th century Scottish highlands, but what happens between the opening scene and the closing montage reflects the director's many concerns that diverge from those of the playwright. Unlike Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Kurzel's film does not begin with questions. However, the opening of the movie creates serious questions for his spectators about what is about to come. There is no thunder or the appearance of the three witches at the beginning; instead, the camera renders a close-up of a boy-baby lying dead on the pyre set to be burned before it moves to a crowd of mourners including his father Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) and his mother Lady Macbeth (Marion Cotillard). It is after this unexpected opening scene that we encounter the three weird sisters.

Kurzel's witches are not alone though. The three sisters are companied by two kids: a baby lying in the arms of one of them and a young girl standing by their side. The appearance of three new characters, all children, in the first five minutes of the film proves

Kurzel's concern with the state of children not only in the 11th century Scotland, but more importantly, in the 21st century socio-historical context. In her study of the representations of children in some adaptations of *Macbeth* including Kurzel's, Gemma Miller notes that Kurzel "takes the all-pervasive trope of childhood in Macbeth and turns it into a visual image that permeates the landscape of his film" (2017: 62). Kurzel's emphasis on the role of children in Macbeth's story is unprecedented among all cinematic as well as dramatic adaptations of the play. *Macbeth* (2015) suspends and reverses the relation between adults and children, giving the often neglected kids of the play a decisive role in the film's narrative.

In the carnivalesque air of the film, children show "an active interdependence rather than the playing out of a predetermined role within a rigidly fixed structure" (Matibag and Larose, 2013: 150); a structure which promotes an innocent image of children. In other words, the film defies the conventional and straightforward binary opposition of innocent children versus cruel adults and establishes "an ideal and at the same time real type of communication, impossible in ordinary life" (1984: 16), but totally feasible during a carnival. In his book *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982), Neil Postman points to "the 'adultification' of children and 'childification' of adults" (qtd. in Miller, 2017: 54) as a consequence of the erasure of the boundary between children and adults. Kurzel's *Macbeth* reflects the destruction of this boundary and turns the world of Shakespeare's tragedy upside down. Burke notes that the concept of 'the world upside down' was a favorite theme in popular prints during the early modern Europe as "the son is shown beating his father, the pupil beating his teacher, [and] servants giving orders to their masters" (1978: 189).

The 'child beating adult' motif underlines Kurzel's position on the child-adult relation throughout the movie, but it reaches its apex at the end where the adult Donalbain is replaced by Banquo's returning son Fleance. The movie displays a destructive Fleance, through parallel scenes, retuning to confront Macbeth's successor Malcolm. Walking past Macbeth's dead body in the bloody battlefield, the boy heads to challenge Malcolm with his sword which he can barely hold. The camera then shifts to show Malcolm alone in his castle apparently unaware of the imminent danger. Fleance is back "to fulfil the witches' prophecy and seize the crown by means as violent as Macbeth himself" (Miller, 2017: 53). Paradoxically a victim and a victimizer, Fleance represents one example of the carnivalesque atmosphere of the movie in which "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12).

As Knowles contends, "carnival always celebrates renewal" (1998: 5). Kurzel's adaptation, similarly, ends with a sense of

regeneration, but it is more a warning than a celebration of renewal. The reappearance of young Fleance to claim the throne of Scotland implies "a continuation of the cycle of violence extending beyond the ending of the play's narrative, and certainly beyond the deaths of the protagonists" (Miller, 2017: 52).

The movie's cycle of violence far exceeds the violent images of the play. Early in the movie, the three witches ask their opening questions about the time and location of their next meeting: "When shall we three meet again? … Where the place?" (1.1.1-6). The question highlights what Bakhtin calls the "literary chronotope" which means "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" or, in other words, "expresses the inseparability of space and time" (Bakhtin, 2011: 84). The witches' answer to the 'when' question is the same as their reply in the play. However, their response to the 'where' question is not "upon the heath" (1.1.7), but "upon the battlefield" (Kurzel, 2015). This change of place, and accordingly the change of chronotope, is a crucial step toward reaching the carnivalesque atmosphere of the movie because a battlefield better represents a carnival as "a festival of aggression, of destruction, desecration" (Burke, 1978: 187). Similar to almost every carnival, Kurzel's film contains a plethora of violence and hostility. From the horrific scenes of the Battle of Ellon, especially when a very young soldier's throat is slit, to the final confrontation between the tormented Macbeth and Macduff, the movie indulges his viewers' vicarious desire for violence and bloodshed. During the Battle of Ellon the camera lingers most of the time, including the moment of the young soldier's murder, and prolongs the sufferings of men on the battlefield in a painful slow motion. The fact that no heroic music accompanies the fighting scenes in this movie indicates that war, for Kurzel, is not a time of valor and bravery, but a carnival of unrestrained brutality and self-annihilation where soldiers are not glorious warriors, but worthless individuals who kill and are killed indiscriminately.

Kurzel's decision to reduce the number of castle scenes is also in line with the general carnivalesque attitude of the movie. Act 1, scene 6 of the play begins with the arrival of Duncan and his attendants at Macbeth's castle. The castle obviously impresses the Scottish king as he opens the scene by saying: "This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/ Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself/ Unto our gentle senses" (1.6.1-3). In the movie, however, these lines are omitted because the whole idea of Macbeth living in a castle seems unfitting to Kurzel for his project. Moreover, we see almost no real houses in the movie. Lady Macbeth's "All our service,/ In every point twice done and then done double,/ Were poor and single business to contend/ Against those

honours deep and broad wherewith/ Your majesty loads our house" (1.6.15-19) has been reduced to "All our service, in every point twice done and then done double" (Kurzel, 2015), removing, among others, the word 'house'. It is worth mentioning that the word 'house' is not mentioned at all throughout the movie and the word 'home' is mentioned only once (Banquo: "That trusted home might yet enkindle you unto the crown besides the Thane of Cawdor") (1.3.119-121).

In Kuezel's film, Duncan is settled, and then killed, in a tent, not a house. It seems impossible for Macbeth to commit its murderous crime in a house because, as Roberto Da Matta states, "the category 'house' pertains to a controlled universe, where things are in their proper places" (qtd. in Liebler, 1995: 208). According to Burke, "physical space helps to structure the events which take place in it" (1978: 108). Therefore, Kurzel selects a tent for Duncan's temporary dwelling at Macbeths' to dilute the intimacy, order, and firm relations associated with a house and let his protagonist challenge his code of hospitality, shatter the social structure and implement his plot.

Despite the changes made to the play, Kurzel preserves the banquet scene with almost fewer alterations compared to the other parts of Shakespeare's tragedy. Macbeth's irrational reactions at the banquet after he encounters Banquo's ghost disrupt the event's expected arrangement and push Lady Macbeth "to play the perfect hostess, cover Macbeth's lapses, and maintain the required order" (Liebler, 1995: 215). In the movie, as well as the play, Macbeth opens the scene by saying, "You know your own degrees; sit down" (3.4.1). This very first sentence promises an ordered and organized banquet where everyone will sit, eat, and behave according to the established hierarchy. What follows, however, is a hard blow to the customary structure despite Lady Macbeth's claim that it is "a thing of custom" (3.4.97).

Macbeth's fatal action temporarily disrupts the hierarchy of nature and drives Scotland into disorder. He wants to safeguard his reign with his subsequent crimes, but neither nature nor Scotland is tolerant of the reversal of the order. The camera's insistence to show wide shots of Scotland's scenery in which the protagonist is dwarfed suggests Macbeth's inability to defy the natural order. Moreover, Malcolm, with the help of England, struggles to stop the chaos and reestablish the Scottish hierarchy. At the play's ending, he fulfills this mission by having his thanes and kinsmen ranked as "earls, the first that ever Scotland in such an honour named" (5.9.30-31). The movie's ending, however, differs sharply from the play as it shows the retuning Fleance running past the dead Macbeth with a sword in his hand. The editing of the scene, which also shows Malcolm leaving his castle carrying his sword, suggests a looming battle between Fleance and

Malcolm for the throne of Scotland, a continuation of disorder, and a further suspension of hierarchies.

The plenitude of grotesque images in the movie, the unrestricted violence and aggression, the different position of children who maintain a high profile throughout the movie, the absence of any reference to 'house' and 'home', and the extension of disorder beyond the filmic ending add to the "scene of soothsaying" (1984: 244) which Bakhtin refers to as an indication of carnivalesque in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Kurzel's movie takes up the carnivalesque approach not only in its internal mechanism, but also in its relation with its source play. The film ranks high among the cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's bloody tragedy because it redefines its dialogic tie with the play by not adhering to its established structure.

Morrissette's *Scotland, PA*: Revolt of the 'Underachievers'

What connects Billy Morrissette's *Scotland PA* to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not how the film hints at its possible Shakespearean links, but how it strives to suggest that the classic story is unfit for the modern times. Set in the early 1970s, Morrissette's dark comedy replaces Scottish nobles with low-born residents of rural Pennsylvania. Shakespeare's Dunsinane Castle has been substituted by a fast-food restaurant called 'Duncan's Cafe' which later is renamed as McBeth's. The new chronotope of the film makes significant changes to the major ambition of the protagonist, transforming it to an unquenchable desire to fulfill class aspiration and walk up the social ladder by killing the restaurant owner, Duncan, and usurping his business.

The relationship between crime and class has been the subject of several studies. Anthony Walsh, for instance, investigates the traditions that probe the relationship between class and crime. He states that although the existence of such a relationship has not been supported by the studies, "when people get less than they expect they are ripe for criminal behavior" (2011: 66). Therefore, the director's choice of class is his response to a major socio-political phenomenon of his time. Although the concept of class still remains ambiguous and poorly defined, "it continues to be crucial for any detailed understanding of the dynamics of the Western capitalist society" (Scase, 1992: 4). Central to the Morrissette's adaptation of *Macbeth* is the idea of challenging the established social order by those who make up their minds to undermine the hierarchy. Here, the filmmaker is not primarily concerned with the unequal distribution of wealth, but deals more with consequences of class inequality which, according to John Kirk, "cut into subjective experiences and bury themselves deep, and

this in turn has profound implications for how people see themselves, others and the world" (2007: 5). Morrissette's protagonists, Joe 'Mac' McBeth (James Le Gros) and his wife Pat McBeth (Maura Tierney), are "not bad people"; they're "just underachievers who have to make up for lost time" (Morrissette, 2001). Their murderous act is rooted in their lack of respect for the "other half, better half" (Morrissette, 2001) of the class-based society which leaves them with no alternative but contriving a plan to protest against its discrimination and injustice. This American adaptation of *Macbeth* "translates the play's tragic ambitions into anxieties over class and social mobility, while at the same time self-consciously involving itself in the kind of 'low-class' representations of Shakespeare that displace his own traditional status as high-culture" (Brown, 2006: 149).

To highlight such class-related anxieties, the director frequently draws attention to the meaningful differences between the McBeths' characteristics on one hand, and Duncan and McDuff's traits on the other. The last name of the couple, McBeth, instead of Shakespeare's Macbeth, may be influenced by the process which has been termed as "McDonaldization": a concept "synonymous with the culture of mass consumption and globalization" (Hoefer, Jr., 2006: 157). While Duncan is associated with fine arts and Beethoven's music, Mac and Pat's scenes are accompanied by rock music soundtracks. Duncan repudiates his son Malcolm for playing in a rock band instead of working for their family business. Also, the film contrasts the McBeths' carnivorous habits and their fascination with fast food with McDuff's vegetarianism and thus "articulates a clear connection between taste, class, and moral character" (Deitchman, 2006: 144).

Morrissette expresses his carnivalesque attitude toward the play from the very beginning of the movie when three stoned hippies meet Mac at a carnival and prophesy that he will be managing a drive-through restaurant in the near future. The movie's portrayal of the three witches soon clarifies the director's intention to diverge from Shakespeare's text and loosen his film's ties to the play. Morrissette's choice of plot and characters indicates that he is not reluctant to invite his viewers to draw an analogy between his film and the play because such a comparison "underscores the sordid and petty rather than heroic dimensions of the McBeths' small-town, working-class ambitions" (Lanier, 2006: 194). However, the specific features of the filmic chronotope have left the director with no choice but to eliminate all the signs that, as Morrissette himself acknowledged, seemed "too Shakespearean", making a "Shakespeare for the kid in the back row who is getting stoned, reading the Cliff Notes" (qtd. in Brown, 2006: 147). Thus, the Shakespearean model of Duncan's murder with a

dagger is replaced by Morrissette's model where he is immersed in the boiling oil of a fryolater. The filmmaker does not stop at this point, but goes further to question if any other approaches to adapting Shakespeare for the 21st century audiences can be possible. When the hippies are thinking of a way to help Mac to get rid of McDuff (a lieutenant investigating the case of Duncan's death), Hippie #2 suggests that Mac kill McDuff's whole family. This solution draws ire from Hippie #3 who responds: "Oh, yeah, that'll work … about a thousand years ago" (Morrissette, 2001). He then elaborates on his answer: "These are modern times. You can't go around killing everybody!" (Morrissette, 2001). This meta-cinematic scene mocks its source text and rejects Shakespeare's method to move the story forward as irrelevant, "both in the sense that modernity cannot accommodate medieval historical events, and that this particular Macbeth adaptation cannot, or is not willing to, accommodate certain major plot turns in Shakespeare's play" (Semenza, 2013: 145).

Morrissette brings the marginalized Mac and Pat into the center of attention and power in his film and temporarily reverses the established order which makes *Scotland PA* a carnivalesque space. His protagonists are among the few individuals in their neighborhood – as a microcosm of the world – who realize the controlling power of social hierarchies because such hierarchies are "absorbed within comportment as part of the being-there of the way of life into which individuals are socialized" (Charlesworth, 2004: 220). However, since the suspension of this system is just temporary, the couple fails to promote their social class, which proves that even excessive use of violence cannot help individuals find a way to escape the categories that the social system imposes on them in a class-based society.

Late in the movie when the couple is enjoying financial success and social power after Duncan's death, we see a photo of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis before the camera shows a shot of Pat who, ugly and scruffy, is staring at herself in the mirror. The contrast suggests that class mobility is impossible and the underachievers are unable to run away from their origins and doomed to remain underachievers forever. Lower-class individuals like Morrissette's couple embarrass the social order which always regards them as "waste people" (Isenberg, 2016: 19). *Scotland PA* is a comedy. However, the grotesque and dark fate of the modern Mac and Pat in an indifferent society is not less painful than the tragic end of Shakespeare's protagonists. The movie provokes laughter, but it "is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (1984: 11-12). In other words, Morrissette's cinematic discourse transforms *Macbeth* story into a

grotesque narrative of "laughter in the face of death" (Harrison, 2017: 188).

The grotesque imagery is present up to the very end of the movie when the lead character falls off the roof of the restaurant after his fight with McDuff and is impaled on the horns of his car. The death of the protagonist, as the representative of the socially deprived category, signifies, firstly, the annihilation of his dream to flee from the class he is forced to belong. More importantly, though, it points out to the triviality of Mac's death as it stirs no commotion in the neighborhood and can't foil McDuff's plot to take possession of the restaurant. Given Duncan's first name, Norm, which implies his normal position within the society, Mac's attempt to seize his boss's place is a manifestation of his desire to be treated as a normal individual, not an 'underachiever'.

Conclusion

Bakhtinian carnivalesque is one of the key concepts in his theory of dialogism. Although he did not coin the term, he was the first to give a comprehensive account of the history and application of carnivalesque. Bakhtin studied this idea in a number of his essays, but it was in *Rabelais and His Work* that he fully investigated carnivalesque and its practice in literature. In addition to Rabelais, Bakhtin referred to Cervantes, and Shakespeare, among others, as writers whose works manifested elements of carnival. Since carnival is a time of total reversal or suspension of hierarchies and the established social order, it is commonly associated with comic moments, laughter, and bodily references. However, as Bakhtin contends, with writers like Shakespeare we shouldn't wait for particular carnivalesque moments or images as the spirit of carnival is embedded in their works.

The two adaptations in this study reinforce the carnivalesque atmosphere of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in two different ways. The choice of the dominant chronotope in the movies has made significant changes to the outcome as "chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" (Bakhtin, 2011: 84-5). Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*, set in the 11th century Scotland, endeavors to preserve the main chronotope of the play while undermining some of its established systems including the marginality of children. Kurzel's movie provides ample space for children to exert their influence on the course of action and even on the film's ending. The adaptation also omits the word as well as the concept of 'house' as a further attempt to buttress its carnival spirit. Billy Morrissette's *Scotland PA*, which grounds Shakespeare's play in the socio-political

context of the 1970s, is also set against a carnivalesque backdrop. However, as a dark comedy, it differs sharply from Kurzel's version because it makes no attempt to sound like Shakespeare; instead, it opposes the elitism and high culture long associated with the Bard. *Scotland PA* elaborates on the relationship between class and crime to show that in a society where people are valued based on the class they belong, even committing murder can't help those at the bottom of the hierarchy to get rid of their forced categories and experience life like 'normal' people.

Kurzel's *Macbeth* and Morrissette's *Scotland PA* both highlight the carnivalesque aspects of Shakespeare's play to express each director's distinctive concerns. However, while Kurzel's film builds on the play's potential to be carnivalesque by stressing certain aspects and elements, Morrissette recontexualizes the early 17th century dramatic work into a modern bloody comedy of class struggle.

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RAPE AS CATALYST TO EPISTOLARY DISCOURSE AND WOMANIST BONDING: ALICE WALKER'S RECONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGY IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Abstract: *A patriarchal society employs several strategies to reinforce the pattern of domination and strengthen its grip on power. One of these strategies is rape, which serves as a weapon to terrorize and further subjugate women. A typical reading of any such an encounter between a male aggressor and a female entity entails the victimization of the latter, followed by her loss of bodily integrity and also subjectivity. This reading obviates the possibility of women's resistance during and after the crime as it perpetuates men's sexual domination and women's vulnerability to violation as natural inevitable patterns. Nevertheless, recent feminist critics, including the American scholar Carine M. Mardorossian, reject the conventional view of women rape victims as passive and state that speaking out against the offence turns the individual victim into an active voiced agent who can not only survive the incident, but can also raise consciousness in the androcentric community and puncture the sociopolitical structure of power. Alice Walker's The Color Purple is famous for its bold treatment of the controversial issues of rape and incest in the African American community. In line with Walker's theory of womanism, the protagonist of the novel, constantly raped and silenced by her father and husband, transforms herself from a subservient victim into an assertive subject after establishing a meaningful discourse with other women. Through engaging in epistolary and face-to-face womanist communication, she manages to rid herself from the stigma of being a rape victim and after a while, plays the role of a savior for other oppressed women. This paper tries to analyze Walker's deconstructive approach towards rape and shed light on the role of epistolary discourse and womanist bonding in helping the protagonist find her autonomy and voice.*

Keywords: *Alice Walker, The Color Purple, rape, mardorossian, womanism, epistolary novel, female bonding*

Introduction

Alice Walker is today known and praised for being a black feminist novelist. A staunch supporter of the women's quest for liberation from patriarchal supremacy, Walker reflected her activism in all her literary productions through an audacious discussion of such controversial subjects as rape, incest, lesbianism and female circumcision, all topics which had been largely untouched by the United States' mainstream literature.

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Walker employs her version of feminism, which she terms "womanism," as a strategy to deconstruct the dominant sexist stereotypes of black women and to empower them to stand up in the face of patriarchal manipulation. Though Walker pays special heed to African American women's marginality, she never stops there and tries to include other subaltern groups in her theory. Walker defines a womanist as

> a black feminist or feminist of color … A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance 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 (*In Search* xi).

As the quotation shows, Walker starts her reconstructive redemptive project from the black woman and then expands it to include all races, genders and species, i.e. the whole universe including both humanity and nature. Different from the "sexism in reverse" scheme of radical feminists and far from being a monolithic and homogenous strategy, the term captures the postmodern ethos of decentering, eclecticism, syncretism, and inclusiveness. A womanist would never go for the reversion of the patriarchal binarism of man/woman in an attempt to dethrone the former from his long-established superior position as a demi-god and supersede him with a female tyrannical deity. Thus, as a postmodern novelist and activist, Walker targets the whole logic and structure of any such a dichotomous division.

Considering Walker's deconstructive mindset, one might rightfully expect the blurring of traditional fixed (and fixating) boundaries in her works. Conventionally, when the rape of black American women is discussed, the public mind would recall it as a violation committed by white slave owners before the Emancipation. However, Walker courageously shifts the context and in her Pulitzer-winning novel *The Color Purple* (1982), writes about the rape of a black woman by a member of her race, who is, more disturbingly, also a family member: her father.

Nonetheless, Walker did not intend her novel just to portray the suffering of an abused black woman. Instead, she meant to depict how a repressed rape victim can survive the trauma, rise from the ashes and turn into a savior who can help transform and rescue not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors. In other words, the rape attack serves as a catalyst in the novel which makes possible and expedites the

protagonist's metamorphosis from a silenced black woman into an assertive prosperous lesbian.

The paper analyzes the role of rape in the novel in the light of recent revisionist theories of the crime, including that of Carine M. Mardorossian, and discusses how letter writing and womanist female bonding help the protagonist, Celie, to get rid of the feelings of shame and self-blame as a rape victim and construct a political consciousness as a rape survivor.

I. Rape Punctures Patriarchy: A Deconstructive Approach

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines rape as the "unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female." As the definition shows, rape concerns a violent action which authorizes male power and deliberately turns a blind eye to female pleasure. Thus, apart from the physical damage that the crime can cause for the "victim," rape takes on a political significance since it is systematically used as a weapon in the hands of the patriarchy which brandishes it in both private and public spheres in a conscious attempt to violate and negate female autonomy. This means that the crime not only transgresses a woman's right to bodily integrity, but also emblematizes a sociopolitical indicator of silencing and disempowering. So it can be asserted that a single act of rape is not just a crime committed against an individual woman, but one that affects the whole gender and bolsters androcentric norms (Catty 4).

Rape is conventionally deemed as a crime which brings about "dishonor," a patriarchal concept which, alongside honor, serves to perpetuate men's domination and women's subjugation. Thus, rape is rejected just because it results in an unfortunate situation for a father or husband in which a property of his (i.e. the raped woman) loses much of its value in the patriarchal system of exchange and pricing. In other words, rape is dismissed as an abominable act only because it tarnishes and devalues men's *possessions*. Such a lopsided view certainly fails to offer a comprehensive analysis of the violation as it ignores the traumatic suffering of the woman and moreover, reinforces the pattern of domination by highlighting "honor" and the dire need to protect it. As expected, a dishonored woman is regarded contaminated and devalued despite the fact that she has herself been victimized by an agent of patriarchy (Fredrick 6).

The dominant attitude in Western culture toward the rape of women still largely disregards men's responsibility in the crime and holds women accountable for the aggression. This sexist mentality denies female agency and the "victim" will never make it under societal

pressures to recognize herself as her previous "untainted" self (Healicon 3). Some feminists, including renowned scholar Susan Brownmiller, denounced rape as a blatant manifestation of man's attempt to reinforce his sociopolitical dominance, further noting that the crime is biologically inevitable and thus natural:

> Man's structural capacity to rape and women's corresponding structural vulnerability are as basic to the physiology of both our sexes as the primal act of sex itself. Had it not been for this accident of biology, an accommodation requiring the locking together of two separate parts, penis into vagina, there would be neither copulation nor rape as we know it … We cannot work around the fact that in terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists (Brownmiller, 13-14).

Such a view fixates women as "inherently rapable," thus propagating the image of a woman victim as non-resistant and submissive who has no other choice but to live constantly with the Damocles sword of a looming attack on her head. This biological dualism serves to further polarize the atmosphere with women victims and men violators at the two sides of the gamut. An upshot of this deepening rift between the two sexes is male peer support (that is, the patriarchy's underestimation of men's violence against women) which, closely similar to Brownmiller's stance, naturalizes and even provokes rape (Powell and Henry 6-7). As Madoone Miner aptly states, "Men, potential rapists, assume presence, language, and reason as their particular province. Women, potential victims, fall prey to absence, silence, and madness" (qtd. in Cutter 162).

In a series of interviews conducted with women rape victims, they "speak of being broken and fragmented, of losing themselves, of suffering irreparable damage, and feeling disconnected from their bodies" (Healicon 20). In other words, the victims feel as being "traumatized and tattooed emotionally," grieving that "those branded marks of pain … would remain forever" (Winkler, qtd. in Healicon 20). This stigma leads to a feeling of shame which forces the raped woman to unceasingly evaluate and reevaluate her identity in relation to other people's judgments, which are in her case almost always skeptical and denunciatory.

However, feminists have recently tried to reinterpret rape, noting that it can serve a liberatory purpose for wronged women in an androcentric society since its nullification of the concept of chastity is in fact "a destruction of the very virtue which is implicitly antithetical to female authorship [i.e., agency]" (Catty 4); that is to say, rape can subvert the very misogynist norms which sanction and reproduce it because the

aggression simultaneously undoes the patriarchy's cherished concepts of chastity, virginity and virtue. It is with regard to such a deconstructive potentiality that Ellen Rooney sees experiences of sexual violence as potential "privileged sites for investigating the construction of female subjectivity because they articulate questions of desire, power, and agency with a special urgency" (qtd. in Cutter 166-167).

Lisa Guenther also notes that any attempt on the part of the dominator to "desubjectify" the dominated is basically unavailing, since it firstly entails recognizing the agency and subjectivity of the marginalized Other:

> This alterity can be violated, denied, degraded – but it can never be utterly destroyed, because it cannot help addressing itself to the other whom it seeks to annihilate … Thus subjectification occurs in spite of the project of desubjectification … In order to desubjectify you, they still have to single you out, and in singling you out, they undermine the very project of effacing your singularity (qtd. in Healicon 32).

Adopting a similar deconstructive approach towards the concept of rape, Carine M. Mardorossian, the professor of University at Buffalo, rejects Brownmiller's demarcation between man's natural raping disposition and women's inherent rapability, cautioning that such ghettoization of rape erroneously demonstrates that the offence stems from "normative rather than deviant identities" and consequently perpetuates the structural paradigmatic binarism of masculinity/femininity (Hlavka 598). Thus, she analyzes rape not as an inevitable outcome of the two sexes' biological differences, but as a result of the structural positioning of power which justifies man's superiority and trivializes his violation of female subjectivity.

Such a view denies a linear, fixed and finite reading of rape which deems man's aggression as reprehensible but still and always looming over the female victim, hence allegorizing the ongoing confrontation between all-winning Everyman and all-battered Everywoman. Nevertheless, the new feminist scholarship contends that rape, rapist and the raped are all intersubjective constructs which can be modified and reformulated upon the society's arbitrary will. In other words, these constructs are not immutable positions and can be subverted or reinterpreted anytime. As Healicon puts it, Mardorossian and such other critics as Catharine MacKinnon, Louise du Toit, and Ann Cahill, recognize "the possibility of female agency and change whilst acknowledging a subjectivity tied to, but not fixed within, social structures" (21).

Dissatisfied with the previous feminist critiques of rape, Mardorossian takes to task postmodern feminism for its subscription to the conventional male domination-female passivity pattern in the

analysis of the "taboo subject," accusing it of catering to the stereotypical representation of women as powerless and submissive who are irrevocably and irremediably vulnerable to men's violent sexual fantasies (743). According to the Buffalo scholar, even in its criticism of the "ideology of rape" which can still be traced in many cinematic and media representations, postmodern feminism ignores "the discursive nature of rape" and addresses the offence within the same "psychologizing and victim-blaming" framework that has for long marked the hegemonic theories of sexual violence. She further argues that the excessive preoccupation with subjectivity, interiority and the psychic dimensions of rape would eclipse the "reality" of the traumatic experience and its destructive effects. Moreover, she concludes that overtheorizing would deterministically presume a simplified, homogenized, fixed response from the victim and thus negate other possible reactions which do not fit into the conventional category (746-747).

Mardorossian also warns against the recurrent employment of the term "victim" by feminist critics of rape, noting the usage does not merely describe the life of the raped but rather determines it at the cost of sacrificing the individual's agency. According to the scholar, the harassed woman is represented as "irremediably and unidirectionally shaped by the traumatic experience of rape and hence incapable of dealing with anything but their own inner turmoil" (768). So any further employment of the term merely reifies the victim/agent binary which prevents women from altering the seemingly incontrovertible state of affairs in the patriarchal society (Chadwick 240). She cautiously uses the term survivor instead of victim, but stresses that a rape survivor can be said to have surmounted the traumatic experience only if she comes out of the cocoon of interiority and turns into an active agent in the sociopolitical sphere.

Touching upon the aftermaths of the violation, Mardorossian refers to the frequent appearance of self-blame among rape victims as a "coping mechanism" employed in response to the considerable pressure of the society which still, strangely enough, holds women responsible for the so-called dishonoring incident. Using Foucauldian terminology, she severely castigates such a stance and emphasizes that "locating rape prevention in women's self-reflexivity … runs the risk of becoming a new form of panopticism, an interiorized and individualized system of surveillance by which every woman becomes her own overseer" (757). Mardorossian finds problematic this "metaleptic" socio-cultural reading of rape since it propagates inwardness and self-interrogation in a way that closely resembles Christian doctrines and also prioritizes the personal over the political (758).

Having so far pointed to the discursive, political and public implications of rape, Mardorossian now goes for the methods of empowering women survivors. In so doing, she cites Wendy Brown's *States of Injury* (1995) in which the scholar contends that "voicing of women's experience" of sexual violence via speaks-out can serve to empower the survivors as it provides "a forum for feminist truth-telling" (qtd. in Mardorossian 762). Though Mardorossian approves of Brown's underlying idea about the empowering potentials of speak-outs, she claims that Brown's concern with the retrieval of the unified, foundational pre-rape self is reactionary and far from subversive: "The experience of confessing a sexual act or 'sin' one commits and that involves the 'truth' of one's own identity is a far cry from speaking out against a transgression committed by an agent exterior to oneself" (763). What Mardorossian wants to hit on is the fact that an act of confession will never puncture the structure of power if it is recast in the patriarchal discursive clichés of women's self-blame and men's acquittal. Furthermore, the putative recreation of the survivor's former subjectivity, which was itself conditioned by demeaning sexist stereotypes, would not eventuate in progressive sociopolitical changes as long as it is no more than a personal act of ego-reformation.

Thus, any such attempt to "voice" rape survivors should refrain from overpersonalizing and depoliticizing the experience and its resultant trauma. For Mardorossian, the ideal confessional speak-out is the one which provides "a site of collective enunciation" (764). This collective, consciousness-raising disclosure politicizes rape and subsequently empowers the woman survivor not because it retrieves her whole, unfragmented pre-rape identity, but because it allows her to produce her account of the event; it is "the act of narrativizing" which disrupts the equations of power (765).

Discussion

I. From Passivity to Voice: Letter Writing and Formation of Liberatory Discourse

Walker's employment of epistolary format and a first-person narrative voice in *The Color Purple* is in line with her consciousness-raising and emancipatory plans for women. Before the 1970s, readers conceived of rape as titillating and pleasurable since most of the accounts of sexual violence were narrated from the perspective of the male rapist who, quite naturally, effaced the victim's voice and gave a different picture of the offence. However, the epistolary format allowed Walker's protagonist to find her voice and gain control of her rape story. In effect, Walker's main aim in the novel is to show that "a rape victim

could survive sexual violations, heal from this violence, and go on to live a happy and fulfilling life" (Field 150). The epistolary genre also changes the reader's traditional position within the narrative as s/he no longer views the sexual violence voyeuristically, is instead placed within the victim's consciousness and thus fashions a totally different conception of the violation. So it can be said that *The Color Purple* is unique in two ways as it employs a rape victim as the narrator of the story and also shows the possibility of her survival and successful recovery.

The novel finds a new significance if we note that African American women were traditionally recommended against recounting their rape by black men since they would then be accused of betraying their community by proving right one of the major stereotypes of black man in the white psyche: that of hypersexual rapist. It goes without saying that the majority of black men lynchings were carried out based on the unfounded allegation of their (attempted) rape of white women. So African American women's speaking up against black men's violation was always denounced and frowned upon since it allegedly fed the fantasy of the white society and thus discredited blacks' struggle to win freedom and equal rights (Field 151).

Set in rural Georgia, the novel starts with Celie, the fourteen-year-old protagonist, writing a letter to God, describing how she was repeatedly raped by her father, delivered two children as a result of the incestuous affair and was later separated from her children as "Pa" sold them off. As expected, the main character - a dark woman of low social standing with little formal education who is considered ugly according to the colorist conception of beauty in the African American community – is left with a tarnished ego following the abhorrent offence as she is both physically and psychologically wounded by her father, the one who Celie might have expected to act as her guardian against the racist climate of the US south early in the twentieth century. Celie has come to this understanding that the rape has defiled her body and decreased its desirability in the eye of the sexist black community (Pa tells her future husband that she is not "fresh" for having undergone two pregnancies at such an early age) and has also abrogated her soul and subjectivity (as she is a non-entity and her consent was never sought either before the sexual intercourse with her father or later in marriage with Mr. ____).

Celie's first letter introduces readers to Pa, the patriarch, who not only wipes out Celie's selfhood and agency, but also tries to silence the victim by ordering her "to shut up and git used to it" (1), implying that there is no way out of this forced relationship. In another attempt to silence the protagonist, Pa resorts to a patriarchal stratagem which positions man's phallus as the ultimate symbol of power to be envied, desired and fought over by competing women: Pa threatens Celie not to

report the offence to other people, warning that the story "would kill your mammy" (1) because the incident would presumably transmogrify Celie into a sexual rival for her mother. The misogynist scheme finally resulted in "the separation and linguistic isolation of mother and daughter by creating sexual jealousy between the two," disrupting any possibility of female bonding (Tucker 83).

Moreover, Pa metaphorically cuts Celie's tongue by discrediting and delegitimizing her utterances. While negotiating the terms of Celie's marriage with Mr. ____, Pa warns the suitor that Celie "tell lies" (8), a claim which further unvoices Celie as no one would believe her account of events because she is not only a woman, but also a mendacious one. In so doing, Pa, the patriarch, disavows Celie's expressions by accusing her of what Tanya Horeck calls "female rape fantasy." Horeck contends that the patriarchal society rejects as untrue and unreal the women's experience of sexual violence by accusing Eve's descendants of "fantasizing" about the crime, thus coming up with such conclusions as "she made it up" or "she really wanted it" (4). Therefore, it is no surprise that women have a difficult legal procedure ahead to prove rape in that their testimonies are historically looked with suspicion in courts of law. Some critics argue that courts systematically question the credibility of women's accusations of rape and interrogate the victims more harshly than the suspects themselves (Ferguson 90-91).

In naturalizing and normalizing the rape, Pa draws upon the stereotypical representation of black women as jezebel in white American psyche. The jezebel stereotype represented black women as "promiscuous, loose, immoral, sexually aggressive, and lacking sexual restraint" (Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight 429). The stereotype was extensively used by white slave owners to justify their manipulation of black woman slaves as sexual objects and breeders in plantations. Castigating Celie for being "evil an always up to no good" (3) and thus "a bad influence on my other girls" (8), Pa is in fact reproducing Celie in the image of a jezebel, a point which shows black women's double marginality by racist white society and sexist black community. On that account, Pa justifies the sexual harassment by taking for granted that Celie, as the embodiment of the stereotype, invited and even enjoyed the attack. The demeaning image helps Pa to acquit himself from the offence since both the rape and the resultant pregnancy are imputed to Celie's "intrinsic moral defects" and not to Pa's lasciviousness (Sangwan 177).

Objectifying Celie as a replaceable sexual toy, Pa consents to Celie's marriage to Mr. ____ in a gesture which more resembles a bartering trade than a matrimonial bond (Abbandonato 1111). Mr. ____ proposes to marry Celie's beautiful sister, Nettie, but Pa disagrees as he plans to start abusing Nettie after he gets rid of Celie. Since the

protagonist is "ugly" and not "fresh" (8), Pa promises to give Mr. ____ a cow to wheedle him into marrying Celie instead of Nettie. Mr. ____, who basically intends to replace his dead wife with a new one to take care of his children, first disagrees, but then succumbs only by asking, "That cow still coming?" (11).

The novel provides numerous instances which demonstrate that Celie has to a large extent internalized the misogynist norms of the patriarchal society (Bealer 30). She suggests that Harpo hit his wife, Sofia, to put an end to her unorthodox and unruly behavior. She also never objects to Pa's mistreatment of her: "Couldn't be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy. Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what" (41-42). Later on, she obsequiously goes to Mr. ____'s house upon her father's decision to serve as his servant, babysitter, farm hand and mistress. The same subservient attitude persists in her married life and she never questions her husband's hegemonic authority, citing religious orders and the transience of this world: "sometimes Mr. ____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband… This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways" (42).

Celie's plight never ends after departing from her father's house and she continues to be raped, both physically and symbolically, by her husband. As rape is technically marked as a sexual relationship which prioritizes male will and totally abrogates female pleasure and agency, Celie and Mr. ____'s sexual intercourse can be categorized as marital rape: "He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (77). Celie's description of the scene represents a callous intercourse verging on rape in which the man unfeelingly hoists the woman's dress and plunges in without any foreplay, a motion which clearly shows his disregard of the female orgastic pleasure. Moreover, their missionary position during the intercourse is in fact emblematic of the discursive denigration and objectification of Celie in all contexts (Bealer 30). Notably, the relationship is once more described in trade terms: it is a "business" in which the woman's feeling is of no importance, hence she has no way other than the erasure of her uncared-for self; she has to pretend she is not there.

Celie is also constantly beaten by her husband and again responds by erasing her subjectivity via assuming a vegetative state: "He beat me like he beat the children ... It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree" (22). Celie's semiotic suicide (killing herself and metamorphosing into wood) is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's theory of the death wish which maintains that a person tries to steer clear of life's pains and pressures by adopting an unfeeling

state paralleling spiritual death and paralysis. And so does Celie, who feeling emotionally numb and devitalized, dissociates herself from any sentiments and emanates no life force. As the quotation shows, Celie intentionally avoids recognition as a living feeling organism and recasts herself as a dead tree ("wood") which can be manipulated, molded and used at any man's disposal. Such a response is quite typical of a trauma victim who tends to escape "from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness" (Judith Herman, qtd. in Field 162).

Totally dependent and stagnant, Celie is always signified by the dominant order and does not dare to challenge it. Prevented from taking part in the process of signification, Celie is deprived of the power of naming as a means of exerting sociopolitical agency, and thus significantly fails to call male characters with their real names. She uses a long line to name her husband (Mr. ____) and Nettie's protector and future husband (Rev. Mr. ____). The semiological shape of the names is evidently phallic, showing her obsession with and fear of men's sexuality as the absolute power which may whimsically be used against their victims (Tucker 84).

As a subalternized (non-)entity, Celie, the wife, is never recognized as an eligible interlocutor within the patriarchal discourse and as a result, is stiflingly isolated. Under such circumstances, Celie's only hope of real, full-fledged communication is shattered as Mr. ____ confiscates the letters sent by her sister and secretly holds them in a trunk, thus further silencing the already isolated victim through a discursive rape that proves to be far more poignant and effective than the physical one (Cutter 168).

Considering Walker's strong emphasis on the notions of indeterminacy and inclusiveness, she envisions Celie's liberation from the yoke of sexism via using tools which are conventionally marked masculine. First of all, Celie's resort to pen as a phallic object to narrate her story confirms Pa's claim to superiority as an ultimate point of reference, power and desire over which women are expected to fight. In the very first line of the novel, Pa orders Celie to keep silent about the rape: "you better not never tell nobody but God" (1). Thus, Celie, by starting to write and address her letters to God, is in fact obeying the injunction of the patriarch, highly accentuated by the three negating words "not," "never" and "nobody." However, the very act of writing turns the paternal order on its head as it demonstrates Celie's dissatisfaction with the status quo as well as her desperate desire to establish a discourse to inform others that she has been ruthlessly maltreated by the androcentric society (Lewis 161). In other words, the protagonist's letter writing is an act of subversion because it evinces

Celie's "refusal to have her story told by anyone other than herself" (Smith 8).

Describing Pa's rape attack in one of her early letters to God, Celie writes, "When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. But I don't never git used to it" (1). So the very act of writing runs counter to Pa's desire to stifle Celie's voice forever as she desires to reveal, at least on an unconscious level, that the rape incident has left an indelible impression on her psyche. In point of fact, Walker's employment of a phallic object (i.e., the pen) to recount the suffering of a woman inflicted by the phallus owner himself can best be read and analyzed within a womanist framework. While Walker's inclusive concept of womanism allows for the employment of patriarchal mechanisms and instruments, it is crucial to purge these sexist elements from their discriminatory background and imbue them with egalitarian gender qualities. Similarly, the act of writing, which entails holding a "pen" in one's hands, has to be divested of its masculinist halo and be granted a feminist mark so that it can serve a therapeutic function and redeem the unvoiced raped victim.

Lindsey Tucker argues that Walker's employment of the epistolary mode of writing best matches her womanist agenda of creating a discourse which can empower marginalized women. According to the critic, the epistolary method as a rather private genre, was mostly and primarily used by women "because of their inferior education and because of the fact that such writings were not expected to be published." As an "informal, artless" form, letter writing can serve as "a means of describing domestic life" (82), thus appropriate for narrating the story of such a *homely* personage as Celie. This is exactly where Walker's craftsmanship comes to the surface as she metamorphosed an "artless" genre into both a publishable product of highly artistic beauty and an object of maximum (psychological) practicality, or, as the name of Walker's mostly anthologized short story suggests, of "everyday use" for the traumatized protagonist.

Writing has been recognized as a useful therapeutic technique to help patients overcome psychological disorders. In the "personal diary technique," for example, a patient is asked to write her diaries in a personal journal on a daily basis and sign each entry. Based on the changes appearing over time in the handwritings and signatures, psychotherapists analyze the patient's clinical status (Torem 269). Likewise, psychiatrists use letters as part of "narrative therapy" to enable patients to "reauthor dominant, problem-saturated stories and incorporate positive, and empowering aspects of themselves and their life experiences from which they have disconnected," thus reminding them that the problem with which they are beset is not an inseparable,

intrinsic part of their identity. The technique allows the patient to "externalize" the traumatic experience, move beyond the embarrassing stigma and finally recover by retelling the earlier story and coming up with an alternative, not-self-incriminating account (Hoffman, Hinkle and Kress 25).

Unlike the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" who was continuously monitored by her husband and sister-in-law, to prevent her from writing as a practice which allegedly unfits her position as a sick woman, Celie is enabled by writing to flee from insanity, forget her rape victimization memories and step by step, forge a new identity (Tucker 83). Though all of the letters in the first half of the novel depict Celie as a submissive, dependent yes-woman, the fact that she has mustered her scanty morsels of literacy and is venturing on the task of writing which is traditionally viewed as men's prerogative, foreshadows the epiphany and emancipation of the protagonist, who in the case of this novel, can also be conveniently called a heroine.

In a similar manner, Walid El Hamamsy refers to letter writing as an apt medium to be employed by marginalized figures in that the letter, due to its private nature, allows its writer "to voice feelings and thoughts that s/he might not otherwise have been able to do due to social conventions and the nature of public discourse" (152). Also in the novel, letters play a therapeutic role as Celie does not write in the first place to elicit a response from her addressees, but only to narrate her unbearable conditions. This means that through letter writing, Celie creates "a resistant narratological version of events that ultimately preserves her subjectivity and voice," avoids being a "passive sheet upon which the father writes unalterable messages" and "externalizes her experiences so that they do not destroy her" (Cutter 166), hence the realization of Mardorossian's pattern of empowerment through "narrativizing."

Isolated, unloved and uncared for, Celie finds comfort in letter writing as the one and only medium through which she can vent her repressed thoughts and emotions. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that it takes at least two interlocutors to form a communication. This is while Celie is compelled to initiate her communicative struggle by writing letters to an unresponsive God as the only approachable option. According to Hamamsy, "the usual interaction that takes place in letter writing, between addresser and addressee, is replaced by another kind of interaction between the addresser and herself, a dialogue of a monologic nature" (163). Patricia Waugh also describes Celie's letters as "written initially to herself, but there being no available concept of self to ground the process of introspection, actually addressed to god as an impersonal and authoritative being" (qtd. in El-Hindi 160).

Though a communication is not established per se, letter writing transforms Celie from a passive object who is always acted upon (she is raped; she is ordered to marry; she is beaten; etc.) to an agentic subject who *does* something. In other words, Celie gradually undergoes a drastic change from an overdetermined "victim in a patriarchal plot" to "a linguistic and narratological presence as the author/subject of her own story" (Cutter 163). Meanwhile, the protagonist's inability to menstruate as an aftermath of being repetitively raped can be read as her urgent desire to find her voice and narrate because, as Tucker notes, "Celie is pregnant with her own story" (85).

Though Celie does find her voice through letter writing, she would never be able to fully reclaim her subjectivity without forging a real communication with the outside world. Celie's unrequited letters to God resembles a kind of confession as she still views herself corrupt and sinful following the incestuous rape. Celie starts her first letter by crossing out the incomplete sentence "I am" and announcing that "I have always been a good girl" (1), thus regretting the ineluctable fact that she is not one anymore. This means that there is no present tense "I am" because there is no actualized identity for a woman who is physically ravaged and psycho-emotionally deadened (Field 162; Smith 7).

Celie's guilt-stricken response to the incident is quite typical of a woman rape victim. Blaming herself for the crime, she feels guilt, shame and remorse and therefore, confesses to God to purge herself of the deviant stigma of rape and more mortifyingly, incest. Calvinists, for instance, view confession as one's acknowledgment of her/his sinfulness and also as her/his pursuit of God's grace and forgiveness (McConnell 76). However, such a private act of confession in the novel fails to realize Celie's desire to find a sympathetic partner as it transpires that her "God" is not only a patriarch, but also a white, and potentially racist, one: He is "big and old and tall and graybearded and white" with "bluish-gray" eyes and "white lashes" (194).

Such a mental picture is quite justified considering Celie's traumatic life. Having been raped by her father as a teenager and physically and emotionally abused by her husband on a daily basis, Celie typically associates power with masculinity and comes to identify God as an omnipotent man closely resembling her manipulators (Andujo 65-66; Abbandonato 1110-1111). Unsurprisingly, when questioned by her mother on who fathered her child, she attributes the paternity to God, saying, "I don't know no other man or what else to say" (2).

Certain that God is a "trifling, forgetful and lowdown" arch-patriarch who acts "just like all the other mens" (192) and thus would never offer her a helping hand in spite of her repeated requests, she has to find another confidant(e). As Patricia Andujo maintains, "Just as her

stepfather physically rapes her, God also rapes her spiritually and emotionally through His denial of compassion and protection" (66). Disillusioned with patriarchy and its black and white manifestations, Celie now turns to women to confide and find solace.

II. Womanist Bonding and Reclamation of Feminine Identity

The highly significant female bonding happens when Mr. ____ invites Shug, his former mistress and a notoriously loose singer, to stay with them because she is sick, physically weak and in dire need of one's constant care to help her recover from illness. Celie, who for the first time feels a deep emotional and sexual attachment to another person, readily accepts the responsibility of nursing Shug back to health. Though Celie's love is unrequited at the beginning of their encounter and Shug behaves condescendingly towards her, the two women gradually develop a distinctive "womanist" liking for each other as Shug completes her convalescence period and restores her health. Having long been deprived of a loving interlocutor whether in epistolary or real world, Celie now finds a being who caringly listens and fully endorses her attempt at self-discovery and self-redefinition. She conveniently unfolds her blighted past to a friend who respects her as an equal subject, calls her "Miss Celie" and even dedicates her a song, appreciatively saying that it was Celie who "scratched it out of my head when I was sick" (73). The dedication is far more than a friendly gesture in that it unprecedentedly puts the protagonist in the position of a recognized and respected (co-)creator (Tucker 86).

Kevinn Everod Quashie notes that in Walker's novel, selfhood is the result of the ongoing process of becoming and is fashioned in "the dynamic relationship between one woman and her other, her girlfriend" (190). According to the critic, a girlfriend can be defined within Walker's womanist discourse as "someone who makes it possible for a Black woman to bring all of herself into consideration … to be herself." Resultantly, the self not only identifies with, but also identifies as her other, so that after a while, the two women become "contagious" and even "indistinct" subjects (188). That is to say, the female bonding transforms the Other into "an/other" version of the self (195), so instead of competing as sexual rivals for the love and phallic power of Mr. ____, Celie and Shug become one in unison in terms of friendship, spirituality and sexuality.

Over the course of the novel, "the chief agency of redemption … is the strength of the relationships between women: their friendship, their love, their shared oppression" (Dinita Smith, qtd. in Hamamsy 168). It should be noted that the conventional bourgeois morality always demanded African American women abide by a politics of silence and

never discuss "deviant" sexual orientations like lesbianism since any such a disclosure would run counter to the black community's "salvific wish" and would confirm the white society's stereotypical depiction of blacks as sexually pervert and abnormal. Contrary to this restrictive perception, the establishment of a homosexual relationship plays a significant role in Celie's move towards self-actualization as the protagonist finally comes to appreciate and love her body as a source of orgastic pleasure rather than a site of suffering and a tabula rasa to project and gratify masculine sexual fantasies (Lewis 160-162). In fact, the same-gender love authorizes Celie to experience the status of a valued sexual subject and reformulates the traditional conception of romantic heterosexual love (Smith 10). With its unabashed and positive depiction of homosexuality, the novel also repudiates Freud's view of orgasm which prioritizes vagina over clitoris as the only site of utmost sexual pleasure. The shift in the orgastic zone is politically charged as it delegitimizes Freud's psychosexual theories as phallocentric and heterosexist (Abbantanado 1112).

Thereupon, one should note that the sexual intimacy between the two women is indubitably important but not paramount because it is the sororal emotional interaction which triggers and maintains Celie's ego-reformation. The text shows the power and efficacy of what Adrienne Rich terms "lesbian continuum" that includes diverse forms of female connections and interactions, only one of which is erotic (qtd. in Abbandonato 1108). Whether homosexual or sisterly or both, Celie's affections for Shug is basically an act of resistance because it symbolizes self-love; that is, through homosexuality, the black woman no longer has to sacrifice her subjectivity for African American (men's) political struggle but can put her self, body and sexuality before all sociopolitical and ethical considerations (Quashie 196).

Unlike Celie who was signified and fixated by the patriarchal society as an ugly, poor rape victim, Shug stubbornly and categorically refuses to be signified, and it is exactly this volatile quality which propels her mobility, sexual freedom and redeeming power. While Celie is desperately seeking a communicative partner, Shug is a renowned singer and thus has immediate access to a subversive voice and a more-than-eager audience (Tucker 85-86). Being the first real person whom the protagonist trusts by telling her about her father's rapes (Bealer 32), Shug also expands Celie's number of actual correspondents by discovering that Mr. ____ has hidden Nettie's letters for years. The revelation proves to be of grave significance for the heroine. By deciding to change the addressee of her letters from an unresponsive God to her recovered sister, Celie deconstructs the logocentric concept of God as "an absent present" to a female confidante who is at least partially present

(Tucker 84). It is precisely at this point in the story that Celie finds her whole voice after she is eventually able to communicate with a real caring respondee (El-Hindi 160).

This is one of the formative moments for her newly won identity because the incensed Celie earnestly decides to kill her husband with a razor. Shug, mindful that the rape-revenge pattern would ultimately bring about more violence and destruction, prevents the protagonist from murdering the rapist and instead encourages her to vent her anger through another act of *textual* creativity: sewing (Smith 11). Walker's revisionist strategy is again manifest here as she shows the futility of a phallic object that can function as a lethal weapon and replaces it with another phallic tool which has lost its masculinist edge and can be at the service of feminine creativity and artistry: "… everyday we going to read Nettie's letters and sew. A needle and not a razor in my hand, I think" (147). Sewing is in fact no different from writing, as both acts "appropriate," in the postcolonial sense of the verb, phallic objects to advance feminist ideals through creation.

Martha J. Cutter compares this turning point with the Greek myth of Philomela. Pandion I, king of Athens, seeks the help of Tereus, king of Thrace, to quell a riot and upon victory, offers his daughter, Prokne, in marriage to his ally who later takes her wife to his territory. Once homesick, Prokne asks Tereus to bring her younger sister Philomela to Thrace. On their way to the kingdom, Tereus begins to lust after the beautiful Philomela and finally rapes her. Fearful that she may report the scandalous incident and defame him, Tereus mutilates Philomela by cutting her tongue and further conceals her in a distant location. Once home, he tells Prokne that her sister fell ill and died during the journey. Trying to notify Prokne about the brutal violation, the exiled, unvoiced woman weaves a tapestry showing the events that befell her on the doomed journey. After receiving the tapestry and finding out about the unfortunate occurrences to her sister, Prokne takes revenge on Tereus by killing their only son, Itys, and serving him as a meal to her husband. She later flees Thrace with Philomela. After Tereus knows of the sisters' plot against him, he follows the women aiming to kill both, but the Olympians intervene and metamorphose the sisters into a nightingale and a swallow and the rapacious Tereus into a hawk.

According to Cutter, Philomela's resistant act, i.e., weaving an alternative feminine text to reveal Tereus' wrongdoing, fails "to transform in any lasting way the social or linguistic forces of patriarchal domination" because it provokes more violence and dispossession (162). In other words, Prokne's murder of Itys in revenge for her husband's lechery is in effect an imitative repetition of the patriarchal pattern of violence and violation, and at last, results in the eternal

silencing of all three figures as they lose their human voices and transform into birds at the end of the story.

Cutter contends that Walker uses the story of Philomela as the starting point of her novel, but rewrites and re-envisions the myth in a bid to bring about a palpable improvement in the sexist society. In line with her womanist strategy, Walker seeks "an alternative discourse that allows for the expression of both masculine and feminine subjectivity" and she comes with what Cutter calls "a language of the sewn" which is not gender-specific and is thus empowering to both women and reformed patriarchs (163). Apart from the physical act of sewing which is highly prominent in *The Color Purple*, the very structure of the novel resembles a quilt made of scraps of cloth and skillfully integrated into an artistic whole. As Cutter puts it, the novel "conflates the pen and the needle" in an attempt to "deconstruct" such hierarchical binaries as masculine and feminine, lexical and graphic, formal and informal, and oral and written (164).

After finding Nettie's letters, Celie embarks on a tailoring profession and sews pants based on each individual's physique, personality and job. It is of grave importance to note that the patriarchal society always relegates weaving and sewing to the status of banal house chores done solely by women (Tucker 87). The fact that Walker appropriates such devalued domestic tasks as metaphors able to replace violent patriarchal discourses shows her revisionist, re-membering policy.

III. Epiphanic Coming to Voice

Celie comes to understand from Nettie's usurped letters that Mr. ____ had abortively tried to rape Nettie and upon failure, had decided to sever their sororal bond in a vengeful gesture. Mr. ____'s attempt once again illustrates the thingification and interchangeability of women within the patriarchal framework. Celie resumes her contact with her long lost sister and is, at least partially, reunited with Nettie. The womanist bonding with Shug and Nettie emboldens the heroine who has now the audacity to accost Mr. ____ and announce her decision to leave him for Shug. As expected from a tyrannical patriarch, Mr. ____ resorts to prevalent stereotypes which systematically demean women in both white and black communities: "He laugh. Who you think you is? … Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (206). Besides, he once again tries to silence and separate women by eliciting jealousy and pitting them against each other: "Nothing up North for nobody like you. Shug got talent … She can sing. She got spunk … She can talk to anybody. Shug got looks ... But what you got? You ugly. You skinny. You shape funny. You too scared to open your

mouth to people. All you fit to do in Memphis is be Shug's maid" (205). Nevertheless, Mr. ____'s subterfuge proves to be unavailing this time since the two women have formed a womanist interaction based on equality, respect and sisterhood.

Celie, now liberated from the yoke of the victimizing culture, shamelessly accepts her flawed status as a rape victim and abused woman only to turn it on its head and use it as a springboard for her upcoming ascent: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook ... But I'm here" (207). The extract shows Celie's reaffirmation of her identity as a being in the *present* state of affairs, a point which is exemplified by her repetitive use of "I'm" in stark contrast with her crossing out of the proposition on the novel's first page. After she leaves her husband to live with her new love in Memphis, Celie initiates a profitable sewing business. Besides, she becomes notified after a while that Pa was not her real father, which exonerates her from the stigma of incest. It is only after all these events that she finds the self-esteem to put her signature for the first time at the end of one of her letters to Nettie (El-Hindi 160), signing

> Your Sister, Celie
> Folkspants, *Unlimited* (214, emphasis added).

Celie, now autonomous and unlimited, finds that Shug has fallen in love with a boy a third of her age. Despite feeling betrayed and abandoned, she describes her heart to be like "blooming blood" (259). However, this blood is totally different from the one she describes while talking to Shug about her father's rape: "the blood drip down my leg and mess up my stocking" (112). Though in the latter example, blood represents anguish and grief, her present conception of the subject is phoenix-like: it is creative, regenerative and even joyful (Cutter 165).

In Celie's new worldview, destruction and revenge have no place. Even at times that she is wronged, Celie does not seek the extirpation of the other side. Faced with Shrug's urgent plea to let her have her last fling, Celie responds by re-affirming her love: "I love you ...Whatever happen, whatever you do, I love you" (251). Enjoying a self-confident personality, Celie is now able to master her life regardless of what others think and do. According to Brenda R. Smith, Shug's betrayal and departure could in fact precipitate the protagonist into another kind of stifling confinement, but the reformed and independent Celie manages the situation and does not sacrifice her hard-won authority (13). Even when Shug informs Celie that she has decided to return to her, Celie responds, "If she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content ... this the lesson I was suppose to learn" (283). The excerpt shows that black women's girlfriend alliance strongly highlights the female individual's

agency as it first teaches them how to choose and identify with one another and then how to "unchoose" and "disidentify," constantly warning that they should never rely too much on any kind of partnership (Quashie 197).

As Mardorossian strongly stresses, the transformation from victim to survivor is realized only if the conversion does not remain a personal and private issue: having found her voice, Celie now plays the role of a redeeming Shug for other characters of both genders. For instance, Celie encourages Squeak, her stepson's mistress, to reclaim her identity by compelling her boyfriend to call her by her real name, Mary Agnes, and not by her nickname, Squeak (George 140). And most important of all, Celie converts Mr. ____ too. As she returns to Georgia after Shug's departure, Celie finds a totally different Mr. ____ who has adopted a totally different worldview following his extreme loneliness and the ensuing spiritual crisis: he's now a caring, understanding man who respects Celie as an equal subject. In return, the empowered Celie calls him by his first name, Albert, and engages in "constructive" dialogue with him: "Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes" (272), admitting that "He ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to" (276).

To prove that her womanist discourse is not exclusive and gynocentric, Walker shows Albert to start sewing at the end of the novel after he admits that he was fascinated with the act as a child: "When I was growing up, he said, I use to try to sew along with mama cause that's what she was always doing. But everybody laughed at me. But you know, I liked it" (272). In other words, the society transmogrifies Albert into a patriarch by interdicting sewing and repressing his so-called feminine proclivities, and this is Celie, the savior, who transforms him into Albert again, an androgynous character who unashamedly sews and talks with women (Averbach 62).

It is exactly the sewing activity which "stitches" Albert to Celie's egalitarian community, reforms the rapist and finally breaks down the seemingly interminable cycle of violence, violation and revenge. The dénouement of *The Color Purple* confirms that Walker's attempts at writing *herstory* never intends to "exclude the males at all, but accommodates, redeems, even celebrates them" (Tucker 93). This means that the feminine discourse fashioned at the end of the novel "belongs entirely to neither gender" and "functions as a language that both men and women can speak, a language that offers the possibility of radical social transformation" (175). So while Celie becomes the matriarch of her new extended family, she does not exclude Albert, the former patriarch, from the new social order. Instead, she passes the

sewing knowledge to the reformed man and then befriends him (Field 167; Smith 14).

In fact, Walker's representational strategy "does not position identities like 'black,' 'woman,' 'white,' and 'man' against one another in a re-structured hierarchy, but rather conceives of blackness as an experience through which the vulnerable, inter-subjective qualities of gender, racial, and sexual identification are clearly seen" (Lewis 159). In other words, Walker's "black queer realism," as Lewis terms it, never calls for the obliteration of the moments of "vulnerability and social abjection," but embraces them as "a source of sustenance" which legitimizes intersubjectivity and facilitates mutual understanding (170).

The novel ends with Celie invalidating the demeaning stereotypes of (black) women: she is neither an angel in the house nor a mad woman in the attic, but an autonomous womanist who can act as a savior for both victims and practitioners of patriarchy.

Conclusion

Five years before the publication of *The Color Purple*, The Combahee River Collective, a black lesbian feminist institution, issued a statement, calling for an all-inclusive activism beyond racial, sexual and classist demarcations: "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression … based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking … Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand" (qtd. in Aldridge 397).

Walker's novel best captures and manifests the spirit of the institution's statement. Her syncretic womanism in the novel shows "how a Black female subject can negotiate her identity in relation to other subjects who are not Black women but who hold a similar political commitment" (Quashie 188). A universalist and not a separatist, Celie establishes a new communal and social order closely similar to Peggy Sanday's description of the rape-free society in which "silencing the feminine is not necessary for becoming a proud and independent male" as they are marked by "sexual equality and complementarity" (qtd. in Cutter 175).

Noting the constructive and reconstructive development of the novel and its protagonist, Smith calls *The Color Purple* a female Bildungsroman, saying it has the traditional features of the genre, including the call to adventure/departure, the journey/ initiation and the return. The critic highlights Celie's transformation from "a tragic heroine to female hero," saying the drastic change takes place only after the protagonist manages to abrogate discrimination and establish a

community of equals (5-6). Smith's employment of the term "female hero" is of significance as it shows an androgynous quality which is at the core of Walker's notion of womanism.

This means that while Philomela's story led to the destruction of both the raped and the rapist, *The Color Purple* offered an alternative text which ended in recreation, allowing the major characters to reform themselves and craft a new subjectivity. It is only after fashioning a new womanist identity that Celie comes to appreciate the color purple as the symbol of nature's splendid aspects. Celie is not only one with herself, but also with the whole nature, the whole world, the whole universe.

It is well to mention here that this paper has tried to provide a "womanist" reading of Walker's masterpiece in an attempt to introduce and promote a theoretical framework which can bind different subaltern groups all around the world. Meanwhile, Iranian scholars can similarly address the controversial topic of rape in their own country, an issue that has for long been considered a taboo by fanatical hardliners. Over the recent years, the woman question in Iran has started to receive the critical and sociopolitical attention it deserves. In like manner, such feminist studies as the present one can dismantle the androcentric structures of power and allow other(-ized) topics to come to the fore.

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