

On Androgyny and Womanism in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

National Chia-Yi University

Abstract

Alice Walker conveys by *The Color Purple* various issues to the readers. For instance, the novelist shows that, in a patriarchal society, there are not only men's deprivation of women's independence, husbands' domestic violence against their wives, but also fathers' severe discipline to sons. In terms of sexual orientation, the reader can see Walker's illustration of the ambiguous love between Celie and Shug and blurs the boundaries of homosexuality, bisexuality, and sisterhood. In addition, the novel proper also represents the unequal social status among different races. Scholarship on Walker has addressed the aforementioned issues; but when it comes to the analysis of the novelist's characterization, there is scanty exploration of Walker's characterization of the four main characters (Celie, Albert, Shug and Sofia) who develop into "whole" persons and eventually embody Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny. Different from other scholars, this current study aims at identifying whether the features of these characters correspond to Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny and verifying whether the characters' growth and self-realization embody the harmonious balance of manly and womanly forces in mind. Moreover, this paper shall also address the questions: 1) whether or not Albert's talent and enjoyment in sewing and cooking represents Walker's deliberate "feminization" or "castration" of a once abusive man? 2) whether or not Walker's portraits of Celie, Shug and Sofia simply personify her concept of "womanism"? and 3) whether or not the concept of womanism which is proposed by Alice Walker for the colored people (especially black women) echoes Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny.

Key Words: Androgyny, Feminism, Womanism, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

探討艾麗絲·沃克《紫色姐妹花》中的雌雄同體與黑人女性主義

摘要

在《紫色姐妹花》一書中，已有諸多學者將男女社會地位不均及種族歧視作為研究的議題，在性傾向方面，亦有學者探討是否西莉與莎格的曖昧情愫模糊了同性戀、雙性戀和姐妹情誼定義的界限。然而，卻很少有對四個主要角色（西莉，艾伯特，莎格和索非亞）性格發展的探索。本研究旨在確定這些角色的特質是否符合維吉尼亞·吳爾芙提及的“雌雄同體”概念，並驗證角色的成長和自我實現是否體現了男性和女性力量的和諧。此外，本研究欲解決以下問題：1) 艾伯特縫紉和烹飪的才能是否代表沃克蓄意對此角色的“女性化”或“閹割”？2) 對西莉、莎格和索非亞的性格刻劃是否僅體現“黑人女性主義”的概念？3) 艾麗絲·沃克提出的黑人女性主義概念是否與維吉尼亞·吳爾芙的雌雄同體觀念相呼應。

關鍵字：雌雄同體、女性主義、黑人女性主義、維吉尼亞·吳爾芙、艾麗絲·沃克、《紫色姐妹花》

I. Motivation & Research Questions

Androgyny is a balanced state which combines both masculine and feminine characteristics. It not only relates to the physical gender characteristics, but also presents an embodiment of the psychological integration for men and women. In other words, if a person has an androgynous mind, s/he can achieve a harmonious balance in mind. In my view, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* presents this harmonious mental state with the novelist's characterization of the four main characters, Celie, Shug, Sofia and Albert. This current study aims at identifying whether the features of these characters correspond to Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny and verifying whether the characters' growth and self-realization embody the harmonious balance of manly and womanly forces in mind. Moreover, this paper shall also address the questions: 1) whether or not Albert's talent and enjoyment in sewing and cooking represents Walker's deliberate "feminization" or "castration" of a once abusive man? 2) whether or not Walker's portraits of Celie, Shug and Sofia simply personify her concept of "womanism"? 3) whether or not the concept of womanism proposed by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden* for the colored people (especially black women) echoes Virginia Woolf's notion of androgyny and 4) if not exactly, what is the difference between the notions on womanism and ideology.

II. Literature Reviews

Alice Walker conveys by *The Color Purple* various issues to the readers. For instance, the novelist shows that, in a patriarchal society, there are not only men's deprivation of women's independence, husbands' domestic violence against their wives, but also fathers' severe discipline to sons. In terms of sexual orientation, the reader can see Walker's illustration of the ambiguous love between Celie and Shug and blurs the boundaries of homosexuality, bisexuality, and sisterhood. In addition, the novel proper also represents the unequal social status among different races. Scholarship on Walker has addressed the aforementioned issues; but when it comes to the analysis of the novelist's characterization, there is scanty exploration of Walker's characterization of the four main characters (Celie, Albert, Shug and Sofia) who develop into "whole" persons and eventually embody Virginia Woolf's notion of

androgyny. The following is a succinct literature review to foreground the originality of my paper.

A. Racism & Social Class

Racism is defined as the belief that members of one race are basically superior to members of other races. As Etika Rahmi asserts in her research "*Racism in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'*" that racism is a negative treatment that is given by group that regards their group as the superior and possess better condition in many aspects, such as biological, economic and educational aspect. Scholarship on *The Color Purple* definitely have noticed and addressed these issues in the novel proper.

In *The Color Purple*, racism is closely related to the social class. Walker sets the story background in rural Georgia in the early 1900s, and we can see that this novel shows the traces of racism toward black people in America. At that time, it is difficult for the colored people (especially African American) to have decent careers compared with the white. Unlike white men engage in the occupation of higher social class such as a mayor or a sheriff, for Albert, Harpo or Alphonso (Celie's stepfather), farming is the main way to make a living. What's worse, even though black men are fortunate to have their own business and be the shopkeepers, it is still possible for black men, like Celie's biological father, to suffer lynching by some white merchants because they resented black men's success. Rahmi contends that in this novel the racist act of the white is reflected in their relationship with black people: discriminatory behaviors such as white's prejudice towards black people in order to maintain white supremacy, discrimination and segregation constructed by using verbal expression, avoidance, exclusion, physical abuse, and extinction and resistance of black people against racial discrimination.

The social environment is even more unfriendly to black women. Under the oppression of patriarchal society and the racial discrimination, black women are often deprived of various rights and autonomy. They are almost at the bottom of the society and regarded merely as men's appendages. For black women, it seems only possible to serve as a mother, to perform for a living as Shug and Squeak do or to join the white household as a maid. As Mugdad Abdulimam Abood and Ahamd Yasir Dhain comment in their essay "*Racism in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'*" that racism is

generally viewed as a cage in the novel, by which the blacks are suppressed by the whites. They believe that Sofia's imprisonment is a metaphor for blacks imprisoned by racism, confined to servitude and domesticity within their own homes. Sofia is brutally beaten by the mayor and six policemen and then imprisoned in jail after answering "hell no" (76) to Miss Millie's request of coming to work for her as a maid. Forcing to do the laundry in jail and being driven to the brink of madness, Sophia finally becomes Miss Millie's maid in order to escape prison. As Linda Selzer concludes clearly in her paper "*Race and Domesticity in The Color Purple*":

Sophia's violent confrontation with the white officers obviously foregrounds issues of race and class, as even critics who find these issues marginalized elsewhere in *The Color Purple* have noted. But it is not only through Sophia's dramatic public battles with white men that her story dramatizes issues of race and class. Her domestic relationship with Miss Eleanor Jane and the other members of the mayor's family offers a more finely nuanced and extended critique of racial integration, albeit one that has often been overlooked. (Selzer 73)

Moreover, in a discussion of God with Shug, Celie depicts her archetype of God is an old bearded white man. It means that white man is seen as power akin to god dominating and controlling the society. All in all, we can see that the racial issue is embedded throughout the novel.

B. Sex & Gender Issue

In general terms, the critical difference between "sex" and "gender" is that the former is biologically determined, and the latter is socially and culturally constructed. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that "One is not born but becomes a woman." In addition, she argues that "the fundamental source of women's oppression is its [femininity's] historical and social construction as the quintessential." As Lori Roller remarks in her research "*Understanding Gender and Gender Equality*" that gender is a socially determined construct describing the characteristics, behaviors, and roles deemed appropriate and expected of men and women by a given society. These

characteristics, behaviors, and roles are learned and reinforced through a socialization process that begins early in life and continues throughout the life cycle.

Likewise, for the four main characters Celie, Albert, Shug and Sofia, their characteristics are more or less influenced and thus shaped by the patriarchal society and its gender ideology. Not only being molested by her father but also maltreated by Albert, Celie endures abuses in silence and gradually lose confidence in herself. The verbal abuse “You got the ugliest smile in the world” imprints in Celie’s mind and shapes her self-image. As being repeatedly told by her stepfather, Celie identifies herself as a powerless and ugly woman for a long time. We can see that a great part of Celie’s inferiority complex and self-depreciation comes from her family background. Moreover, it is because of the patriarchal oppression that forces Celie to become “The Angel in the House,” a literary allusion refers to women who always sacrifice themselves for family and to be absolutely obedient to men—father, husband and son. As Ling Wang comments in his essay “*Gender Trouble in The Color Purple*”:

According to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship relationship is women, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another through the institution of marriage. In other words, the bride functions as a relationship term between groups of men. Celie does not have an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another. She reflects masculine identity precisely through being the site of its absence.
(Wang 63)

Men as head of a family and community dominate the center and possess the absolute power over women in a patriarchal society and objectify women, as Wang observes, for power exchange. However, Wang’s work fails to notice the truth that men themselves can become the victim in a patriarchal society. For instance, Albert in *The Color Purple* has been loving and dating with Shug for so many years but eventually marry another woman because of his father’s arrangement. At that time, a father has supreme power in a family to do whatever he wants—definitely including controlling over what kind of life his son should live. Unable to disobey and dare not to fight his father, Albert has no choice but keep an underground relationship with Shug. Having his own family, Albert assimilates and practices patriarchal gender ideology and

follows his father's suit. He intervenes Harpo's marriage, though failed because of Sofia's self-assertion; and he asserts the absolute power by exerting violence against his wife. Thus, it can be inferred that Albert's violence and abuse are actually a manifestation of his spiritual weakness and he is not that "masculine" as he seems to be. In short, Albert's apparent toughness in the form of violence and domination indeed points to his lack of self-assertion and mental strength.

Wang's review also has not paid attention to how Walker's characterization of Shug and Sofia break the traditional label for women to be soft and obedient and embody the concept of androgyny. Shug is wise, brave and glamorous. She has her own singing career and serves as a perfect, natural and free spirit and personifies liberation from the patriarchal system. Wang mentions in his short essay that Shug possesses feminine gentleness and masculine fortitude and independence; nevertheless, the critic just makes this remark by passing and has not probed deep into Walker's implication in her portrait of Shug with both feminine and masculine features. As for Sofia, she is tender and lovely as a wife and mother; however, she can also be tough and refuses to fulfill the expectations of the patriarchal tradition. Asserting equal footing, Sofia expects Harpo to help with the domestic chores after they are married. What's more, when Harpo tries to rule her with an iron fist, she fiercely fights back for an equal relationship in their marriage. She is unwilling to accept the confining role laid out by the patriarchal system for the "meek" black maid and the "dutiful" black wife. Sofia dares to assert her rights and refuses to take orders from Harpo. And Celie's metamorphosis from an angel in the house to a self-confident and self-assertive woman is another example of illustrating the power of androgyny. Marie Buncombe observes in her paper "*Androgyny As Metaphor in Alice Walker's Novels*":

Walker uses androgyny as a metaphor for the "wholeness," the totality of the black experience as she sees it. This "wholeness" calls for a new look at traditional definitions of such terms as "masculine," "feminine," and "lesbian" since the conventional meanings have led to polarization, fear, and hostility, resulting in the falsification of black history and literature and the destruction of many black people. (420)

Yet, the critic does not put her focus on *The Color Purple*. Thus, the objective of my study is to demonstrate that Walker breaks down the man-made stereotypes about “masculinity” and “femininity” with her characterization of these four protagonists and illustrates eventual wholeness of her characters with androgynous balance.

III. Methodology & Approach

In order to conduct this research, in this section I shall first discuss the notion of womanism which Alice Walker proposes in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*. I would illustrate the historical background and social context for the development of feminism and womanism and examine the differences of the main appeals that feminism and womanism pursue. In addition, my study will trace the origin of androgyny, explore how this notion is manifested in literary works and especially focus on what Virginia Woolf proposes in *A Room of One's Own*. This critical effort shall produce a framework for me to make textual analysis of Walker's novel. My paper will analyze the characteristics and the change in mental process of Celie, Albert, Shug and Sofia in *The Color Purple* and argue for my thesis the four main characters embody androgyny and, as Woolf asserts, become “whole.”

A. The Concept of Androgyny

Androgyny is an ambiguous state which combines both masculine and feminine characteristics. Although there are a variety of definitions in different communities, it is normally considered that androgyny refers to a blending trait of being neither distinctly masculine nor distinctly feminine. Psychologically, androgyny involves gender identity or gender expression which is different from biological sex. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, an American Indologist, points out three types of mental androgyny in her book *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. Doniger thinks people who show both male and female qualities but have to be divided into two parts to become creative is a “splitting androgyny”; for those who combines either one side of gender to be bisexual in individuality is a “fusing androgyny”; as for “two in one” androgyny, it indicates an integrated couple in perfect love.

Apart from the ancient myths, androgyny is such an unique subject that it has

long been discussed in literary works. As Kathryn Pauly Morgan remarks in her essay “*Androgyny: A Conceptual Critique*” that androgyny represents wholeness, completion and unity, the symbol of the androgyny is tantalizing, compelling, and powerful. She thinks in times of atomistic individualism, of psychological and social alienation, it becomes almost irresistible. Among so many great writers, Virginia Woolf especially proposes an impressive notion about androgyny. For example, in her book *Orlando* (1928), the protagonist is unanticipatedly changed into a woman after waking up from the sleep. As Woolf depicts: "In every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity." Thus, as Karen Kaivola asserts in her research “*Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation*” that Woolf in fact posits a vision of identity that transcends the physical sex of the body. Later in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf creates a vision about psychological androgyny by the image of a man and a woman joining into a taxi. Kaivola contends that Woolf calls the scene a "natural fusion", which leads her to consider whether "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness." As Woolf says, which links to Coleridge's ideas:

Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine... [Coleridge] meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. (98)

Moreover, Woolf contends that it is "fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (104). All in all, what Woolf asserts is that one (particularly for writers) must process the harmonious balance in mind can s/he bring different perspectives to the world. It is doubtlessly important for those who fulfill self-realization to own both manly and womanly power in mind. In the fourth part of this paper, I shall provide more details on Walker's characterization of the four main

protagonists in *The Color Purple* from Woolf's point of view.

B. Feminism & Womanism

Generally speaking, feminism means a belief that all human beings should enjoy the same political, economic, and social rights. As Sarah Gamble gives a clear definition on feminism in her book *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, saying that feminism incorporates the position that society prioritizes the male point of view, and that women are treated unjustly within society. From the perspective of modern philosophy and social movements, feminism can be traced back to the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. At that time, European women begin to question the sanctity of male power since they are inspired by the neo-bourgeoisie's resistance to the monarchy. They claim that women are rational and own the ability of critical thinking. In order to eliminate the artificial inequality, women should be given the right to education. The original feminist movement is usually referred to the first-wave, which scholars consider it as that moment of organizing encompassing woman suffrage. Gamble points out that feminist movement makes a change include fighting against gender stereotypes and establishing educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes for women that are equal to those for men. However, as time goes by, there's gradually a division between white and colored women, given the historical background and social context at that time.

The second-wave begins in the United States in the early 1960s, when the society gradually pays attention to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, abortion, domestic violence, and women's right to work. What's more, black feminism gradually develops during this period and the ideology believes that gender oppression intersects closely with racial oppression. Black feminists criticize that white women dominates the main discourse power and they fight for gender rights only from white women's viewpoint which ignores the participation of women from other ethnic groups. As Aleksandra Izgarjan and Slobodanka Markov contend in their paper "*Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present*" that though the goal of feminism is at first to win equality and suffrage for women, it becomes clear in the late nineteenth century that there are two separate women's movements since

white women refuse to support the struggle of black women for their rights.

Alice Walker, an African-American novelist, who notices the difference between feminism and black feminism and thus unprecedentedly coins the term “womanist” in her short story “*Coming Apart*” which was written in 1979. Some years later, in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, Walker defines a womanist as a “black feminist or feminist of color” who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or nonsexually, appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength and is committed to the “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker 1983, xi). In the same paper “*Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present*”, Izgarjan and Markov assert a definitive distinction to highlight the relationship between feminism and womanism:

In Walker’s more metaphorical definition of womanism: “Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (Walker 1983: xii), she distinctly extols womanism and sets it apart by comparing it to the strong color of purple which is often described as the royal color. Feminism pales in comparison by being associated with weaker lavender and this appraisal reminds one of the debates whether feminism really lost its appeal to many women during the 1980s and 1990s. Lavender as paler color is also cleverly associated with the notion that feminism is related more to white women than colored. (Izgarjan and Markov 305)

On the face of it, feminism and womanism may seem to pursue different demands; however, Ayyildiz, Nilay Erdem and Gül Kocsoy remark in their paper ““*Elethia*” And “*A Sudden Trip Home in Spring*”: Alice Walker’s Womanist Response to the Issues of Black People” that Walker provides a new dimension for both feminism and the Civil Rights movement with her theory of womanism. Walker’s inclusion of struggle extended to all people around the world, and her purpose was to achieve universality regardless of race, color, gender or any ethnical differences with her theory of womanism.

IV. Embodiment of Androgyny in *The Color Purple*

Celie, as the heroine is a poor and black woman, which is commonly considered to be a disadvantaged social status at that time. Celie is purely a victim and “The Angel in the House” in the patriarchal society who sacrifices herself and offers herself to her stepfather to protect Nettie. After being sold into marriage to Albert, she not only nurtures the children who are not even hers and but quietly tolerates domestic violence from her husband. As the thirteenth letter writes:

“He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man” (22).

Although for much of the novel, Celie seems to be passive, weak and vulnerable; still, she meets different women as “mentors” who encourage her to stand up for herself and fight. It is because living under the persecution and oppression from the patriarchal society, that makes female characters in the story unite together and support one another. Apart from Shug, as the two narrations from Kate (Albert’s sister) and Nettie we can see that they enlighten Celie to live for her independent life:

“Don’t let them run over you, Nettie say. You got to let them know who got the upper hand. They got it, I say. But she keep on, You got to fight. You got to fight” (17)

“You got to fight them, Celie, she say. I can’t do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself.” (21)

Like a true fighter, Celie proves herself to be willing to stand up for the people she loves. She gives the unquestioning sisterly love to both Shug Avery and Sofia. She tolerates Shug’s rude mistreatment, takes good care of Shug when she is ill and even decorates a room for Shug in her house. To Sofia, Celie visits her often during the years of her confinement in jail, cares for her wounds and gives her strength even though the two are initially in an awful relationship (for Celie once advised Harpo to beat her). Celie may seem to be feeble and vulnerable at first, but I argue that after being inspired by Shug, Nettie and Sofia for their independent minds and bold ways

to fight, I come realize that Celie develops into the strongest and bravest person in the story. As the narration that Celie fight against Albert and her ultimate assertion suggests:

“I curse you, I say. What that mean? He say. I say, Until you do right by me, everything you touch will crumble.” (175)

“I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here.” (176)

In comparison to Celie, Walker portrays Albert as brutish, sexually aggressive, foolish, bumbling, and lazy—which are the typical negative male features in patriarchal society. Albert implements domestic violence to Celie and dominantly orders Celie to do all the house works as well. However, he is not that “masculine” as we assume. Albert is in fact too weak to stand up to his father which results in Shug’s leaving. Likewise, after Celie escapes from his dominion, he collapses even can’t cook meals for himself. In appearance, Albert seems to have control and power over women, but in reality, he is the one who counts on Celie. Sofia’s remark to Celie substantiates my assertion.

“Sofia say after I left, Mr. ___ live like a pig. Shut up in the house so much it stunk. Wouldn't let nobody in until finally Harpo force his way in. Clean the house, got food. Give his daddy a bath. Mr. too weak to fight back. Plus, too far gone to care.” (224)

The impetus for Albert’s growth is Celie’s leaving. The fact that Celie joins Shug in Memphis represents his failure to be a decent husband and implies the downfall of the wicked patriarchal system. Realizing this, Albert starts to do some right things to make up for what he has committed against Celie. He gives back all Nettie’s letters that he has been hiding to Celie and does all the housework in person. What’s more, as Albert becomes nicer, he finds interest in traditionally feminine activities such as sewing and needle works, and he even cooks for the cancered child. Some suppose that part of Albert’s transformation takes on typical "feminine" characteristics and Albert is deliberately “castrated” by the author. However, from the following dialogue

between Albert and Celie we can infer that Albert is actually born with the sewing talent but being forced to give it up because of the oppression from patriarchal society. Thus, I assert that instead of the intended “castration” or “feminization”, Albert’s transition in fact manifests both manly and womanly power and he clearly develops into a decent man at the end of story.

“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. Well, nobody gon laugh at you now, I said. Here, help me stitch in these pockets. But I don’t know how, he say. I’ll show you, I said. And I did. Now us sit sewing and talking and smoking our pipes.” (230)

As for Shug and Sofia, both of them learn independence at an early age because of the family factors. Shug is wise, brave and glamorous. She has her own singing career, she lifts Celie up, gives her the will to leave behind a life of victimhood and encourage her to become an independent woman. Shug serves as a perfect, natural and free spirit and personifies freedom from the patriarchal system. Likewise, Sofia is a little bit similar to Shug to some degree. She refuses to fulfill the expectations of the patriarchal tradition. Like a man, Sofia also expects Harpo to help with the domestic chores after they are married, and she always chooses to fiercely fight back in the face of injustice. In comparison with Shug, Sofia is more straightforward and assertive and serves as a visible reminder to inspire Celie to stand up for herself. The following description clearly expresses that both Sofia and Shug embody the combination of womanly and manly forces in mind.

“Sofia and Shug not like men, he say, but they not like woman either. You mean they not like you or me. They hold their own, he say. And it’s different.” (269)

In addition, the scene that Celie and Albert sit equally on the porch, do the sewing together and share their feelings about losing Shug to another man indicates that they fulfill self-realization and are willing to let go of the past. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf perceives one man and one woman walking toward each other from two sides of the street; eventually, they join together in a taxi. These two scenes are quite

similar, and both serve as metaphors of sexual intercourse and mental androgyny which create a harmony between masculine and feminine forces in mind. As Buncombe comments in her study "*Androgyny as Metaphor In Alice Walker's Novels*" that Walker's characters free themselves from being typecast as "masculine" and "feminine" and embrace the best characteristics of both genders. They rise to a higher level of self-perception and understanding they never realized before.

V. Conclusion

Based on my analysis, I conclude that Alice Walker breaks down the boundary and the man-made stereotypes of gender by using androgyny as a metaphor for the totality of the black experience, male and female, sharing and caring in the struggle for freedom, harmony, and unity. As women, we cannot simply obey or count on men like Celie in the beginning of the story. By the female protagonists Shug and Sofia, Walker tries to convey the importance of independence and we must stand up to fight when facing the maltreatment. As men, we cannot act like Albert or Celie's stepfather who despise women and treat women essentially as servants, slaves or some kind of possession for trade. Violent oppression or dominant dictatorship will eventually lead to people's departure and revolt. As Buncombe suggests that Walker's male characters, tentatively at least, are better able to round out their rather flat existences when they ultimately acknowledge their "feminine" side along with their masculinity and learn to appreciate the "manly" side of the women in their lives. That is to say, when an individual exactly recognizes and acknowledges both manly and womanly features not only biologically in body but psychologically in mind, s/he is truly achieving the androgynous and harmonious balance. Therefore, I assert that Walker's characterization of the four main characters (Celie, Albert, Shug and Sofia) in fact embodies the idea of androgyny and thus shows that Walker is under Virginia Woolf's sway.

References

- Abood, Mugdad Abdulimam, and Ahamd Yasir Dhain. "Racism in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* Vol. 3. Issue 2 (2015): 465–469. Print.
- Ayyildiz, Nilay Erdem, and F. Gül Koçsoy. "'Elethia' And 'A Sudden Trip Home in Spring': Alice Walker's Womanist Response to the Issues of Black People." *Adiyaman Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 34 (2020): 26-48.
- Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.
- Buncombe, Marie H. "Androgyny as Metaphor in Alice Walker's Novels." *CLA Journal*, 30.4 (1987): 419-427.
- Gamble, Sarah (2006) [1998]. "Introduction". In Gamble, Sarah (ed.). *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. London and New York: Routledge. p. vii.
- Izgarjan, Aleksandra, and Slobodanka Markov. "Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present." *Gender Studies* 11.1 (2012): 304-315.
- Kaivola, Karen. "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1999, pp. 235–261.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Morgan, Kathryn Pauly. "Androgyny: A Conceptual Critique." *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1982, pp. 245–283.
- Rahmi, Etika. *Racism In Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'*. Diss. Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, 2018.
- Rolleri, Lori A. "Understanding gender and gender equality." *Research FACTs and Findings* (2013).
- Selzer, Linda. "Race and Domesticity in The Color Purple." *African American Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1995, pp. 67–82.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. Print
- . *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982. Print.
- Wang, Ling. "Gender Trouble in The Color Purple." *Studies in Literature and Language* 13.4 (2016): 62-65.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929. Print.