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## **Love Manifestation by African-American Males in the Selected Fiction of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker**

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Love is “one passion which satisfies man's need to unite with the world and to acquire at the same time a sense of integrity and individuality...” (Segal, 31). It is one of the most powerful and basic human emotions, absence of which leads to alienation, frustration and emotional blockage. It becomes “the elavital”, to quote Henry Bergson, a life force which keeps life on its toes. African Americans have suffered the most devastating oppression and humiliation under a racist and sexist society. Slavery was a prolonged nightmare which prevented them from expressing their emotions and tore them apart. Even after the abolition of slavery, memories of the poignant past kept lingering in the psyche of the African American people. The psychic residue of slavery was like a black hole, sucking everything around it. As a result the past hindered the working of the present. Racial discrimination prevalent in America did not allow the blacks to forget the wrongs done to them. They suffered discrimination of class and color just as they did when slavery was legal. Repressed desires resulted in frustration and an inferiority complex. This led African American people, especially males, into a psychic state which made them "dangerously free" and where the most horrific deeds often became the most candid and honest expressions. This paper intends to delve deep into several representations of love- its importance and representation in the lives of African American people especially males. It is an investigation to understand how African American males expressed their affection towards the members of their family and under what circumstances their love was distorted or horrific.

“Slavery was a wordless, nameless, timeless time” (Wallace, 8) because its where memory, which Cathy Caruth calls “the repository of trauma”, haunts the victims and affects their persona. ‘Trauma’ in the words of Cathy Caruth, as quoted by Gurleen, is “not locatable in the simple, violent or original event in an individual’s past but rather in a way it is precisely not known in the first instance-returns-to hurt the survivor later on” (98). Thus the psychic residue of the past trauma interferes in the present in many ways and causes “alienation too vast to be conquered” (38). Thus the repressed desires which do not find an outlet are manifested in the most distorted and fragmented ways. Robert Staples observes that:

With the decline of America as an international power, and its escalating domestic problems, a natural solution is to have peoples of color bear the brunt of the fallout from what are problems resulting from the internal contradictions of monopoly capitalism. Confining problems of unemployment, poverty, and military conscription to that segment of the populace which is black and brown and powerless appeases the white majority proletariat when issues such as school busing, crime in the streets, and welfare are interpreted as matters of race, the races become polarized and less likely to unite on the basis of their mutual class interests. One might take note of the fact that the recent immigrants to America have come primarily

from the Third World. And immigrants are traditionally given the lowest paying and hardest jobs. All these factors illustrate the role of color in maintaining the consciousness of class at a low level in this country. [However] With this political and economic context, young black men are destined to get the worst of both worlds. As the most dispensable members of the working class, their needs and problems will be given low priority by the elite. (34-35)

Morrison reveals in *The Bluest Eye* that African American males don't know how to react to a particular situation. Morrison said in an interview held in May 1977, "Loving is always passing us by, always passing us by... and always the ego interferes: some pride, some sort of arrogance... and it just slips through our fingers." She acknowledged that all the fiction by her is about love in some or the other way, "All about love... people do all sorts of thing, under its guise... The violence is a distortion of what, perhaps, we want to do... with the best intentions in the world we can do enormous harm". Thus "lovers and mothers and fathers and sisters..." (60) everyone can show love in the most horrific way. Morrison admitted that she planned to write about something other than love in the first three novels but to her surprise all of them are expressions of beauty and love. *The Bluest Eye*, the first novel was "about beauty, mirages, and self-imagery"; *Sula*, the second novel was about "good and evil" and *Song of Solomon*, the third novel showed "dominion... [the] way men do things and relate to each other".

Toni Morrison works on the grey patches of black life. She avoids comfortable absolutism and resolution in her works which would satisfy her readers. She embarks on the journey through her characters' lives, traveling beneath the surface reality. Her novels require the reader's involvement. Characters portrayed in her novels are a "combination of virtue and flaw, of good intentions gone awry, of wickedness cleansed and people made whole again. If you judge them all by the best that they have done, they are wonderful. If you judge them by the worst that they have done, they are terrible." As a matter of fact, the love depicted in the fiction of Morrison is multifaceted and often monstrous deeds such as rape, infanticide and murder become different manifestations of love. She says in one of her interviews with Robert Stepto that sometimes "evil is as useful as good and sometimes good looks like evil; and sometimes evil looks like good" and the behavior of male characters in Morrison's fiction can be analyzed in this light. For example, Guitar Bain's killing of innocent whites is an expression of perverted love for his community and so is the love of Grange Copeland for his wife and family whom he hated out of love. But acts like those of Cholly raping his daughter and Brownfield murdering his wife evoke a feeling of grotesqueness and distaste response. This expression of love can be called 'horrific love' because it produces an awful shuddering and an intense repugnance or fear for the person for whom it is felt. Toni Morrison coined the term "Graveyard love... for a really bad relationship. It means to love someone so much, you do not care about anything else. It is, therefore, obsessive" (Crayton, 30). It means that when a person loves someone so much that he or she becomes bitter or brokenhearted if it is not reciprocated for example Hagar's love for Milkman in *Song of Solomon*.

*The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's first novel, is an indictment of entrusted values and entangled lives, Morrison's most blatant and harrowing testimony. It explores the impossibility of love in a world that values looks at the expense of humanity. Racism holds little hope of triumph for black males; it is too stifled and degenerated. Robert Staples states that race is a political as well as cultural phenomenon. It is a "political phenomenon because it defines the way in which you are to be treated by the political state and the conditions of

your oppression. It is cultural in the sense that white cultural values always have ascendancy over black cultural values. Thus, what is 'good' or 'bad', 'criminal' or 'legitimate' behavior is always defined in terms favorable to the ruling class. Black crime in America evolves because racial inequality is perpetuated by the political state" (40).

Pettis Joyce says that the African American community must undergo the "purgatories of its historical past before it reaches the paradise of self-knowledge". Characters like Cholly Breedlove and others are in constant struggle with themselves to achieve a balance between the problems of attachment within a black family and boundaries as created by the dominant white race. *The Bluest Eye*, besides being, a story of a young, barely pubescent girl, Pecola, it is also a story of a black man whose life is caught up in the racist and capitalist society. The external parameters imposed on the identity of black males in America distort their emotional quotient and consequently they are shattered. Like all black men, Cholly is not unfamiliar with words like loneliness, separation, frustration and psychic striptease. He is a victim of profound humiliation. Cholly's second name, 'Breedlove', sounds ironical because he never breeds love in his life nor did he receive any. His life is a compilation of abandonment, self-contempt and despair. He was an orphan whom Aunt Jimmy rescued him from a junk heap and raised him. His life was grounded in his narcissistic desires where "his own perceptions and appetites" (126) alone interested him. He did not receive any love from his parents which could have instilled some values in him.

Cholly Breedlove's life characterizes perverted expressions of love. His first sexual encounter with a black girl ended in humiliation which perverted his expression of love into an act of shame. The incident took place on the occasion of Aunt Jimmy's funeral when he met Darlene, a black girl, and indulged in sexual pleasure with her in the forest. However, during the process of love-making, white men intervened to flash lights on them and insisted laughingly, "Get-on wid it, nigger..." (117). This intrusion of the white male hunter disturbed Cholly's emotional quotient because instead of directing his anger toward white men he directed his anger towards the black girl who bore witness to his impotence. His hatred towards the girl was so intense that "he almost wished could do it... hard, long and painful, he hated her so much" (117). This childhood incident distorted his sense of loving and objectified every expression of human emotions. He "...hate[d] the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight" (119). He learns from this incident that his survival, as a helpless human being, is just like an "object" in the dominated white society. Thus the black girl became the victim of his displaced fury. Later on, he runs away from the fear of making Darlene pregnant. The fear compels him to repeat his father's cycle of abandonment. He runs away in search of Macon, perhaps his biological father, "to complete the cycle of despair and denigration". Consequently, Cholly becomes a free man "dangerously free"; one who has nothing to lose in life. He was "free to feel whatever he felt-fear, guilt, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in darkness or between the white sheats of a singing woman" (125).

A similar kind of inversion of love occurs again when Cholly marries Pauline, Pecola's mother. He met her in Kentucky for the first time where he saw her scratching the back of her deformed foot. His marriage to her was an effort to take the responsibility of a family but their marriage was a failure. His expression of love was distorted mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, whenever he tried to understand and express his feelings of love, the memory of the childhood incident with the black girl interfered with his positive perception



of that emotion. Secondly, the white standards of dominant culture tended to negate their existence. Cholly, as Jane Bakerman said, “is a broken man, chained by poverty circumstance, so that he might love her in the worst of all possible ways because he can’t do this and he can’t do that. He can’t do it normally, healthily and so on. So it might end up this way [i.e. rape of his daughter, Pecola]” (). All three novelists’ works serve, to use Morrison’s words, as a “bench by the road” where “they can begin to talk, to listen and to heal”. Cholly used Pecola, just as he had used Pauline earlier, as a last effort of self-affirmation where he hoped to rescue her as well as himself from the denigrating glare of white people and consequently a loveless existence. Through this seemingly positive act of his, he attempted to “save” his daughter from the pain and frustration of being black in the world of whites and he chose to rescue her by loving her. It is perhaps horrific yet inexorably symptomatic. On the tragic day “guilt and impotence” (127) became a reaction to a sequence of emotions like guilt, pity and love. It was an act filled with a sense of despair in “being a burn-out and black man”. His inability to love and protect his daughter was “a reaction to her young, helpless, hopeless presence”. Thus in a “pitiful gesture... not the usual lust but tenderness, a protectiveness” (128), he committed the most heinous crime. It was an act of “disintegration” (127). His act of rape can be interpreted as a horrific effort to return to the romantic days of his love with Pauline. The ambivalent act of rape of his own daughter is a manifestation of “[self] hatred” (127). It was an act on “the border of politeness” (128) to make his daughter, Pecola, happy and lovable for the white world. Cynthia A. Davis said “the desire to create himself as her protector. All he can do to restore his selfhood is to deny hers further. In the recurring scene of black male resentment at black women’s submission to oppression, Morrison shows the displacement of male humiliation onto the only person left that a black man can ‘own’ – the black woman” (13). Pecola thus becomes a “witness to his failure, his impotence” (119) like Darlene and Pauline been in the past. Cholly’s violence is a reaction to his inability to protect Darlene from the humiliating gaze of the white male hunters. That humiliation becomes part of his life and it releases itself later on Pecola. Her act of brushing her velvet leg becomes another stimulant for Cholly. It reminds him of his first meeting with Pauline and since his reactions were based on the particular moment, his reaction to Pecola’s brushing of her leg was same as had been with Pauline. Thus his distorted view of life flows from his sense of nothingness. African American males “are doubly defined as failures and outsiders, they are natural scapegoats for those seeking symbols of displaced emotions. So Cholly Breedlove, in his sexual humiliation, looks not at his tormentors, but at his partner, with hatred... never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him... For now, he hated the one who had created the situation...” (13).

It is the most dramatic and ambivalent manifestations of horrific love in Morrison’s novels. However, prior to rape, Morrison takes us carefully through different phases of Cholly’s life, creating a bridge of understanding between the victim and her reader. It is noteworthy that Morrison’s treatment of rape as an act of love in the story is in sharp contrast with the way incest has been handled in the works of other writers.

*Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s third novel, starts on the day before Milkman was born at the “No Mercy Hospital” in 1931. In the story, “Milkman’s life stands in clear testimony that his life had been a journey from innocence to experience, from shadows to self, from a “fractured psyche to wholeness”, to quote Pettis Joyce. It becomes a “quest novel”, for it documents the journey of a man in search of the Holy Grail. The protagonist in the story travels from one place to another, asking questions and piecing together clues. It is the only novel by Toni Morrison driven by the male spirit and “the way we [readers] should look at

the male world and its violence”. It is a sort of fictional biography of Milkman, Macon dead (III).

The novel’s central concern is hinted at in the title itself. It is a story of the flight of Solomon, sung in the form of a song from the perspective of those left behind. It is based on the story of a male adventure story, the Ulysses’ theme but it also exposes the ordeal of women who were left behind. After learning about his ancestral history, he understands the pain of his great grandmother, Ryna, who was left by his great grandfather, Solomon; of Ruth, who was mistreated by his own father; of Milkman’s sisters who were under the strict patriarchal order of the family; and last, but not the least, of Hagar who was left behind by him when he decided to undertake an uphill journey in search of his identity. Morrison critically mentions the male paradigm of heroism where the power and wonder of the flying Africans in the story is undercut by the question, “Who’d he leave behind?” (332). This question lingers as a reminder which women of those men had to endure alone because men, preoccupied with their own identity crises, were unable to shoulder their responsibilities.

Guitar Bain’s violence and terrorist bent of mind is an expression of the horrific manifestation of love for his black community. He justifies his retributive killing of whites by saying, “What I’m doing aren’t about hating white people. It’s about loving us about loving you [i.e. black people]. My whole life is love” (159). He is a member of ‘The Seven Days’, a secret organization that avenges the killings of innocent black people by murdering a white for every black killed anywhere in America. Thus, violence and racism are key elements in the novel as demonstrated through the organizations like ‘The Seven Days’. Identity crisis, abnegation of responsibility and an existential void are elements which render the black male “totally” ineffectual. An insurance agent, Robert Smith’s suicidal leap at the beginning of the novel reflects the agony and pain of the young black male. Smith was a member of the politically motivated organization and his suicidal leap symbolizes the violence and aggression of a black man. Guitar tried to convince Milkman of his perverted expressions of love for his community by saying that organizations like ‘The Seven Days’ existed because of ruthless racial discrimination and lack of any legitimate means of justice for African Americans in America. Kathleen O’ Shaughnessy said “Although none of Morrison’s characters are purely representative, and we see Guitar’s humanity in his friendship with Milkman and in his pity for Hagar, it is as the advocate of a group espousing racial hatred disguised as love that Guitar is mainly presented” (127).

Milkman, the protagonist, falls in love with Pilate’s grand-daughter, Hagar, but leaves her estranged when he embarks on a journey in search of his identity. Milkman’s love for Hagar is not a horrific kind of love but Guitar Bains’ perverted love for his community is a manifestation of horrific love because it involves an element of the grotesque. Milkman’s love for Hagar stands in sharp contrast to Guitar’s convoluted definition of love. Speaking against pernicious love in one of her interviews, Morrison says that her motive in *Song of Solomon* was “to see really and truly of what these people are made, and I put them in situations of great duress and pain, you know, I ‘call their hand’. And, then when I see them in life threatening circumstances or see their hands called, then I know who they are” (141). Morrison explains in one of her interviews with Jane Bakerman that she had always been in an “effort to push every emotion all the way to its final consequence because... [the darker side] interests me more.” Thus, it would be incorrect to say that women novelists always project the negative side of black men’s personality. It is not truly their negative side but a replica of the circumstances which rule their lives. It is an effort to explain their reactions in a particular environment. She also reveals that she is attracted to violence prevalent in the

life of black people because “she believes that all of us, at least in part, are violent creatures. So it’s on that she is talking about black men but all of us which includes both men and women.” She explains “It’s not that I deny that part of life... Our existence here, has been grotesque” (Jones, 141).

However, the reason for Milkman’s not being in love was that he didn’t know much about this kind of emotional synthesis called ‘love’. In the first part of the novel, he is depicted as an estranged black man who was out of touch with his cultural heritage. He was a self-absorbed young black man who spent his life committed to nothing, excited by nothing who took the easy way out of every situation. Milkman worked for his father who was a landlord. Morrison describes Milkman’s life as a “life that crawled, life that shrink and crept and never closed its eyes. Life that burrowed and scurried, and life so still it was indistinguishable from the ivy stems on which it lay. Birth, life, and death-each took place on the hidden side of a boy” (202). He worked on the same monotonous pattern of life until he met Pilate, his spiritual mentor, who awakened him to his rich African American heritage and his vast potential in being a male in the African American community. Being the successor of the Dead family, Milkman had “infinite possibilities and enormous responsibilities stretched before him, but he was not prepared to take advantage of the former, or accept the burden of the later” (68). Morrison critically examines that “somehow everybody was using him (i.e. Milkman) for something or as something. Working out some scheme of their own on him, making him the subject of their dreams of wealth, or love, or martyrdom. Everything they did seemed to be about him, yet nothing he wanted was part of it” (165). During the course of his journey, Milkman learns to reciprocate love. It is evident he responds to Sweet’s generosity with a gesture of caring. “She put witch hazel on his swollen neck. He made up the bed. She gave him gumbo to eat. He washed the dishes. She washed his clothes and hung them out to dry. He scoured her tubs” (289). The response to Sweet’s generosity generates feelings which is why he reciprocates her care in the form of little concerns. Milkman’s love for Hagar cannot be called horrific love because there was no element of violence and repugnance in it. Morrison suggests that Milkman plunged himself into the African American historical pool to derive some sense of identity from it and it helped him to generate this powerful human emotion called love.

During the course of his relationship with Hagar, Pilate’s granddaughter, it cannot be deduced that Milkman’s expression of love was horrific. Instead, Hagar’s expression of love towards Milkman can be called horrific because she tried to kill him after being deserted by him. Interestingly, critics shower negative remarks on black women’s portrayal of black men. Morrison reveals that critics are more interested in the source rather than in the circumstances which drive such expressions. *Song of Solomon* narrates the saga of lost love in the novel. It is ironical to see Guitar Bains, the member of ‘The Seven Days’, acting horrifically because he was the one who explained to Hagar the significance of love. He said:

You think because he doesn’t love you that you are worthless. You think because he doesn’t want you anymore that he is right - that his judgment and opinion of you are correct. If he throws you out, then you are garbage. You think he belongs to you because you want to belong to him. Hagar, don’t. It’s a bad word, ‘belong’. Especially when you put it with somebody you love. Love shouldn’t be like that. Did you ever see the way the clouds love a mountain? They circle all around it- sometimes you can’t even see the mountain for the clouds. But you know that... The clouds never cover the

head... don't wrap him up. They let him keep his head up high, free, with nothing to hide him or bind him. (306)

Guitar perhaps seems to question the readers about the dilemma of African Americans "Why did they (i.e. African Americans ) think they were so lovable? Why did they think their brand of love was better than, or even as good as, anybody else's? But they did. And they loved their love so much they would kill anybody who got in it's way" (306).

Morrison's fourth novel, *Tar Baby* (1980) is a story of a passionate and turbulent love between a young, sophisticated "educated nitwit", French speaking model named Jadine Childs and William Green, an African fugitive who escaped from Eloë, "the oldest, and most impressive" (8) to an island called Isle des Chevaliers, a fictitious island, named after a group of mythical African horsemen. According to the legend, Africans were brought to the island as slaves but they escaped and were said to be roaming in the hills on horseback from then onwards. It was on this island that Son met Jadine and her uncle and aunt, Sydney and Ondine Childs, worked as servants for a wealthy white man, Valerian Street. He was a candy factory owner in Philadelphia, retired and settled on an island with his wife, Margaret. They lived in L' Abre de La Croix, "the most handsomely articulated and blessedly unhistorical house in the Caribbean" (9).

The novel begins with the escape of Son from Eloë. He was a fugitive who ran away from his village, Eloë, after killing his wife. He murdered her because he saw her in bed with a teenage boy. The murder resulted from an act of deceit on the part of a wife but the aggression and the violence black men exercised is noteworthy. The incident tries to probe into the consequences which made these men vulnerable and behave in such a violent way. He swam across to an island in an attempt to escape from the Eloë police. His appearance caused uproar in the house but Valerian allowed him to stay in his mansion. Jade and Son, although from two different economic and social backgrounds, fell in love with each other. They decided to escape to New York. However, in New York, Son realized that "the business of being black and men at the same time too difficult" in the white world and hence he got "dumped" (217). He realized that he was not able to match himself to the parameters of white standards. He tried to convince Jadine to accompany him to his village but Jade was dissatisfied with the simple, small town country life of the South. The friction between Jadine and Son created due to different cultures and its inherited ideology is significantly rhetoric in the novel. Kareen Carmean, writes, "Son and Jadine are opposites in the most essential ways, incompatible in their personal hopes and dreams. On the other hand they can't entirely let go of each other, as if stuck to a tar baby". Morrison voices the dilemma of Son's mind which is symbolic of the black male's dilemma. The dilemma of Son's predicament was that he knew about the "Conflict between knowing his power and the world's opinion of it" (167).

As a result, at the end of the novel, Son moved into the jungle in search of the mythical horsemen. This inward movement of Son into the jungle can be interpreted in various ways. Some scholars consider it as evolutionary because it hints at the conviction of a black male firmly rooted in his culture i.e. a black man has chosen to remain grounded in his culture while on the other hand there are a few scholars who consider it to be a movement into darkness i.e. the darkness of African myths and culture. However in this evolutionary movement, "he walked steadier, now steadier, the mist lifted and the trees stepped back bit as if to make a way earlier, for a certain kind of man. Then he ran. Rickety split, lickety-split" (306). Son's identification with the blind horseman on the island in the end connects it with the Briar-Rabbit's escape from Briar Fox's trap. Son's story also



recapitulates the emancipation narrative of the slaves. The beginning of the novel suggests the escape of a fugitive jumping onto a ship while the ending clearly encourages his identification with the ancestral fugitive horsemen on the island. The novel thus documents Son's route to freedom and it testifies to the liberation narrative.

Thus the theme of ruined love finds expression in almost all the novels by Morrison. Cholly Breedlove's rape of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Guitar Bain's perverted love for his race in *Song of Solomon* and Son's murder of his wife and the rape of Jadine Childs in *Tar Baby* are most dramatic and ambivalent manifestations of love in Morrison's novels. *Beloved*, the fourth novel by her, chronicled the most devastating and grotesque expression of love where a mother killed her daughter named "Beloved" to save her from the ills of slavery. In this novel, Morrison not only depicts the individual's capacity for destructive love but reveals the devastating historical truth about infanticide which prevailed during slavery. Infanticide is an expression of love and it was of common occurrence among slave mothers during slavery, at times in rage against malefic white fathers and at times in paradoxical acts of mercy directed towards their children. Thus, *Beloved* is not only "truth and seminary", to quote Sethe's words, but it is history reconstructed. She wrote this novel to bring her imagination close to lived experiences.

The story displays wide spectrum of a basic human emotion called love and it is documentation as to how slavery restricted its expression. Set against the historical frame of slave culture, *Beloved* offers the most extensive and complex account of "tough love". The novel speaks of "unspeakable things unspoken", pains and hurts of the African American morass. It talks of era when slavery swallowed every human sentiment like "an octopus of exploitation" to quote Stokly Carmichael. There are various expressions of love by males in *Beloved*. The novel chronicles the survival of the black community despite the mutilating tortures of slavery. The story opens with the arrival of Paul D at 124 Bluestone where he meets Sethe and Denver. Paul D was a former slave who lived in 'The Sweet Home' plantation along with other slaves. Nevertheless, his arrival at Sethe's house created ripples in the stagnant memories of the past. This past is visited and revisited, back and forth, in the present to achieve hopeful future. His contribution to this all female world at 124 Bluestone is also an endeavor to purge himself as well as others from the memories of the painful past. He recalls the past experiences and sufferings in order to revisit the ordeal of slavery.

When Paul D met Sethe after 18 years of separation, their past and present were stirred to life. When he touched her back while making love to her, it was etched with scars resembling a branching tree rendered numb to sensation. This symbolized the pain of slavery and the psychic residue which resided in their minds. Paul D had a soft corner for Sethe from the time she arrived on the plantation farm. After coming to 124 Bluestone, Paul D revealed to Sethe that Halle, her husband, didn't come to her when they decided to elope from the plantation farm because he saw the Schoolteacher and his nephews molesting her. This exposes the helplessness and harsh self judgment of these males where they were paralyzed by the white masters and were not allowed to act according to their will. This incident is an examples of "tough love" because slavery didn't allow these people, especially males to make judgments and act for their family. Slavery deprived African American people from their basic human emotions. This kind of love was known as "tough love" because its expression was prohibited in slavery. As a matter of fact, love can be "dangerous" only when it is free. As it was in case of Cholly Breedlove but slavery didn't allowed males to behave in that manner. Hence the love expressed by these people was "tough" kind of love.

So the only reason why Halle was unable to come on that day was his love for Sethe. Indeed, this was why *Beloved* became the story of people held in bondage rather than slavery itself. Morrison reveals in an interview that she didn't want to write about slavery as a racial institution or "slavery with a capital 'S'. It was about anonymous people called slaves". She said that *Beloved* is a testimony about "what they [as slaves] do to keep on, how they make a life what they are willing to risk, however, long it lasts in order to relate to one another" (Rhodes, 8).

Paul D explained to Denver that she had to stop herself from acting according to the slave mentality because after being in slavery, it was very difficult for them to free themselves from that mentality. It hampers the growth of a person and restricts further growth. It enslaved people not only physically but also psychologically. He therefore advised her to act in a free way which they (Paul D and Sethe) were unable to do because they possessed psychic residues of the past and it was gradually absorbed in their behavior. Morrison revealed that slavery didn't allow black people especially males to act freely and so the right thing to do became the wrong thing to do, for they had no rights at all. Characters like Stamp Paid along with Paul D and Halle were not allowed to access basic human rights. It was ironical that they were not allowed to possess any emotion during slavery and were not able to possess after it also because of the traumatic memories. During slavery, they were not able to express any love because basic human rights were denied to them. Slavery undermined any emotional synthesis like love between slaves.

Morrison said in one of her interviews that violence is an integral part of everyone's life but "there is so much love also". Both love and violence went hand in hand for African American people. She said love "can do enormous harm" and with the best of intentions "lovers and mothers and father and sister can do enormous harm". She said that "[...] people do all sorts of things, under its name, under its guise... all about love" (41). Perhaps this could be the reason behind so many expressions of love in her fiction. Love in *The Bluest Eye* is "dangerously free"; in *Song of Solomon*, it is "graveyard love" while in *Beloved* it is "tough love".

Walker's fictions are structured on a complex ideology of "womanist" rather than feminist ideology because she is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female". She has been accused by critics several times for portraying black men negatively in her fiction. But this response is in line with other novelists like Toni Morrison who have also faced the same problem. Walker said she was shocked at the hostile reaction of some black male critics on the characterization of Mr. - alias Albert in *The Color Purple*. According to Walker "The attack on the book *The Color Purple* relate to the efforts to control the image of black males in American society. They are a response to the negative images that permeate the public domain" (15). Alice Walker in her expository prose, '*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*', talked about the love of black women. She said:

Indeed, I can imagine black women who love women (sexually or not) hardly thinking of what Greeks were doing; but, instead, referring to themselves as "whole" women, from "wholly" or "holy". Or as "round" women-women who love other women, yes, but women who also have concern, in a culture that oppresses all black people (and this would go back very far), for their fathers, brothers, and sons, no matter how they feel about them as males. My own terms for such women would be 'womanist'... spiritual and concrete and it would have to be organic, characteristics, not simply applied... In fact, to be consistent with black cultural values (which, whatever their shortcoming, still have considerable worth) it would have to do entire

community and the world, rather than separation, regardless of who worked and slept with whom. (81)

African American women novelists like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Paule Marshall have created a formidable wedge, widening the discourse for African American voices and providing black men with a forum to raise the pressing issues that are unique and integral for their survival. Racism was a maligning social disease and the only way to survive against the scourge of racism was “unremitting... struggle”. The lesson, then, for the black man thus remains the same in the future as it was in the past “They should never give up” to use the words of Derrick Bell. Women writers helped these male characters to endure the wrath of racism with “conviction, courage and strength for the fight” (Boyd and Allen, xvii). Walker reveals in one of her interviews with John O’Brien that her works are “preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people”. She explained, “I am committed to exposing the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black women” but this doesn’t mean that it was not concerning males of her society because ‘womanism’ does not mean ‘anti-male’ at all. It is an anti-racist propaganda. Black men’s predicament in a white dominated society can be understood more clearly from W. E. B. Du Bois’ rhetoric question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” Here, black men are themselves a “problem”, so being a “problem” is also a big “problem” for them. They face invisibility in white America at every step of their life (xvii).

Love in the fiction of Alice Walker is a strong human emotion and there are various expressions to manifest it. It can be filled with sweetness and warmth or with aggression and violence. It is expressed differently by different people. Male characters like Grange Copeland in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Truman Held in *Meridian*, Alphonso and Albert in *The Color Purple* are victims of a racist white culture. The frustration and anger which they suffer is due to the derogatory treatment they receive from racist whites. Being victims themselves, they direct their anger at their family which becomes the object of their frustration and anger. But men like Brownfield Copeland in *The Third Life...* and Tommy Odds in *Meridian* have expressed their love horrifically.

The first novel by Walker, *The Third life...*, shows the various dimensions of black men’s love as viewed under tough conditions. The representation of love by women characters like Mem Copeland, Margaret Copeland and Josie is consistent and strong unlike the love of men which meanders between frustration, violence and anger. The setting of the novel is rural Georgia and Walker explores two generations of a black Southern sharecropper family. As a black and a “womanist”, Alice Walker offers the “whole truth” (from Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*) of black male’s life. The novel is like a window through which Walker shows the reader the oppressive and dehumanizing socio-economic structure of the Southern sharecropping system which denied personhood to males. The inevitable conditions drained every single drop of human emotion from the life of the black man who was turned into a “stone man” devoid of feelings. Love evaporated from their lives, and if present in some cases, it was expressed in the form of anguish. In a few cases where deterioration was at peak, it was expressed in a horrific way. Thus Grange loved his wife and his son, Brownfield, he never expressed his affection for them. He never show love for his son because he couldn’t free himself from the feeling of guilt of not being able to save his son from getting into the same cycle of despair and anguish as his own. The scene in which Grange was not able to show affection for Brownfield even while leaving the house shows the repressed emotions of a black man. The feeling of worthlessness in

the white-dominated society compelled Grange to move North but it was a step towards invisibility rather than identity.

Brownfield Copeland, deserted by his parents, followed the same path of despair and degeneration which his father paved for him. His marriage to Mem, a schoolteacher niece of Josie, turned “totally dysfunctional”. His life had been an “overwhelming bad dream” (106) of depression and invisibility. Despite Mem’s effort to better their life, Brownfield degenerated. He had an ambivalent relationship with his youngest daughter as he had had with his own father. Brownfield loved her immensely but she symbolized responsibilities and which he, as a black male, found difficult to fulfill. This caused frustration and self-hatred in him. His children were also afraid of his white boss as he was of his father’s white boss, Mr. Shipley. “He could not save his children from slavery; they did not even belong to him” (ibid). For him, “moving about at a whim of a white boss was just another example of the fact that his life, as it was destined had gone haywire and he could not do anything about it” (9). He confessed to Mem that it was hard to be a black man in the world of whites. He laments that “the white folks just don’t let anybody feel like doing right” (9). Brownfield’s life is a depiction of the harsh realities of men’s lives. He was caught in the inevitable ennui of life. He killed his albino son in order to seek revenge or perhaps he didn’t want him to crawl in the same cycle of despair and devastation of which he himself was a part. He murdered his wife in frustration and despair showing horrific love. However these novelists did not consider black males as their enemies. They understood that black males are victimized under the oppressive white-dominated system. Women like Mem, Margaret and Josie acted as punch bags for these males who were not able to express their frustration against their white masters.

The second novel, *Meridian*, by Walker is a step ahead of *The Third Life*. The story scripts one of the most horrific expressions of perverted love as an example of a “racist clincher” (174) where “...white body was offered up as a sacrifice to black despair”. Racial discrimination filled African Americans with violence and rage because they wanted to avenge every wrong done to them. As a result, the expression of love by them transformed into violence and was expressed in a distorted way. Tommy Odds, a friend of Truman Held, rapes Lynne, Truman’s second wife and a white racial activist, as an expression of his perverted love for his community, for he was embittered as a result of racial discrimination. He vents his frustration in an act like rape which becomes synonymous of revenge on white people. He said Lynne “... was not a human being, as if her whiteness, the mystique of it, the danger of it, the historically verboten nature of it, encouraged him to attempt to desiring her without any feelings of guilt” (176). Portrayal of Truman Held is based on Walker’s perception of black male leaders of her age. Most of the prominent African American male leaders of the 60s’ were “hypocrite” as said by Walker. She said that these leaders pretended to be saviors of their community but their actions showed their appreciation of white culture. They considered black women as Mother God but married white women. This proved that black male leaders were hypocritical. This could be one of the reasons why the Civil Rights Movement lost its vigor and authenticity because the black people and community lost faith in their leaders. Thus two sides to the black male youth’s behavior exist in this novel.

“Many youths have become enmeshed in a web of machismo, which is manifested in narcotized and infantile behavior patterns which can isolate them from the adult black community. Yet, they contain the potential for revolution in their anti-tradition stance, and with the current attack on their very existence by the forces of institutional racism, they have nothing to lose” (Staples, 34). A similar kind of



perverted expression of love was also found in Morison's *Song of Solomon* in the character of Guitar Bain. His terrorism and violence was the expression of perverted love for his community. The only difference between the violence of Guitar Bain and Tommy Odds is that Guitar killed white people as an expression of his love for his community while Tommy Odds raped Lynne as an expression of his perverted love. "Regardless of white society's taboo on black aspirations to white privileges, it is precisely the wish of the black male to take the Euro-American male's place... It is Fanon's contention that the African [American] male is an envious man who covets all the European's possessions, to sit at his table, to sleep in his bed and to sleep with his wife. The rape of white women by Afro-American men often reflects this desire of the African" (Staples, 63). Besides being an "act of desire", rape is "an insurrectionary act" because it delighted black men that he was defying white man's law, his system of values and his woman. It becomes very satisfying to them because they are resentful about the fact that how white men had used black women. Thus rape did by Tommy Odds give him a feeling that they are finally able to seek revenge. From the time immemorial black males were punished for becoming intimate with white females who were considered to be "the symbol of white privilege." Actually women are always considered to be a weaker sex and property of a male in the patriarchal society. But white women are a "symbol of white privilege" because they are available to only white man. Thus any kind of alliance, sexual or marital, with black man is considered to be anti-social. Nonetheless these self-made rules have governed the society always. Lynching in the South was a brutal reminder to African American males that any relationship with white women was regarded as a crime. This was the reason that most of the rape cases were interracial.

The third novel, *The Color Purple*, by Walker, was written in an epistolary form. The novel is a testament of an "ugly duckling" to use the phrase of Trudier Harris, Celie, who was treated as "the beast of burden" by the males of the black patriarchal society, but she was eventually redeemed through her suffering. Her redemption by the end of the novel links her to the heroines of fairy tales from Cinderella to Snow-White. But the villain in the story instead of an abusive stepmother was the stepfather, "Pa". Nevertheless, Celie's predicament, real or fictive, was that she was forced to deal with conditions which seem antithetical to the reality of her survival. The story begins with the instruction by the stepfather, "You better not ever tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy". But eventually Celie realized that God, in being a male, was also indifferent to females. Her letters to God revealed that as a child, she was repeatedly raped and beaten by a man she believed to be her father. The intensity of Celie's oppression by her stepfather can be understood in her act of erasing her identity in a letter where "I'm ..." was replaced by "I have...". Her stepfather impregnated her twice and sold her children to Samuel, a black man and his white wife, Corrine, as revealed by Nettie's letters. Laureen Berlent said that Celie's negation of the self arose from the (f)act of rape leading to segregation of her "self". This ideology was rooted in the patriarchal ideology during slavery where women were completely subjugated. Lost in wilderness, Celie was nonetheless able to resist this subjugation by writing letters to God which informed readers about the generic scenes of female humiliation in Africa. There was no end road to the exploitation of Celie because even after marriage her husband, Albert exploited her. He played the same "big-mean-daddy role" in Celie's life when she was forced into a loveless marriage with him. He had no feelings towards her and used her just as a sexual tool. He was a widower, a downtrodden farmer who had four children. The emotionally draining treatment accorded to her reduced her to the status of a

domestic servant in the family. The novel reflects the different shades of love between a black man and a woman with the help of a triangular love affair. Celie was forced into a loveless marriage by her Albert but he loved Shug Avery who was the “professor of desire and self fulfillment” to use words of Laureen Berlent. Shug later becomes a catalyst for the emotional empowerment of Celie. She exhorts Albert to stop brutalizing his wife. Her emotional support started Celie’s personal evolution. However, the turn in the tale comes from the revelation that the man who raped Celie wasn’t her real father because her real father was lynched long ago. This revelation about paternal origin empowered Celie because it freed her from the guilt and shame of incest. The elimination of perverted expression of love in the form of rape by her mistaken father stood in the way of her “right” to control her life but the revelation of the true identity of her stepfather eventually started her journey towards self-identity and self-esteem.

The story primarily is a documentation of the exploitation of black women by black males. Love is expressed in various manifestations. For example it was expressed in the love of Albert for Shug and later for Celie also and in the love of Harpo for Sophie. Although Celie was repeatedly raped by her (assumed) father in her childhood yet that cannot be regarded as a horrific expression of love as was in the case of Cholly Breedlove (a character by Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*). It could be called the lust of a black man who used women’s bodies as objects for sexual gratification. Walker wrote in her own work, *The Same River Twice*, that “it is hard to wonder what would have been the effect if you black men had been encouraged by other, older black men to listen to what black women writers, black women and girls, have been saying, and to understand it is not black men we want out of our lives, but violence” (44). In the same non-fictional piece of work, Alice Walker wrote, “Love is not [about] controlling but setting free,” (44) because very often, males in her fiction are busy trying to control black women either physically or psychologically. Walker’s portrayal of black men, as it seems to critics, remains negative but the idea behind that negativity is not denigration of the black man’s image, rather it is a revealing effort on her part to make the predicament of black male contemplative. She viewed African American males as a necessary part of God’s creation which is promiscuous for the survival of the “whole community”, including both males and females.

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