I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole, of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women. For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world.

-Alice Walker

“No other book is more important to me than this one”, wrote Alice Walker in the introduction to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston. For many years *Their Eyes Were Watching God* had very few fans. It was looked down on by many groups for issues like painting about racism among blacks with lighter and darker skin groups, painting the black community in poor form and using the traditional southern black phonetic dialect. In the 1970s her book began a new life as it was reprinted and used in classrooms across the United States.

Alice Walker readily admits that her novel, *The Color Purple*, was directly influenced by *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The two books share a common theme of black women emotionally and sexually progressing through a shower of social paradigms. Each of these two stories begin with a black woman as the main character and each leaves with a distinctly different main character who has found her strength and her voice along the way.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie Crawford returns to a small town in Florida in the 1930s after leaving home to find herself and finding many lovers along the road. The story is told through Janie’s voice as she tells Pheoby, her friend the story of her three husbands. She begins with the loveless story of Logan Killicks, her escape with Jody Starks and her eventual true-love, Tea Cake. Many ideas through out the books represent the life lived by the author and many of the events in the book were either events in her life or the lives of those around her. Prominent in this book are the sexist roles within the families. Women did not partake in games of checkers, hanging out, on the front porch or any other masculine roles. Men openly hit women and women were expected to be submissive at all times.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker bear astonishing similarities. Both narratives depict the coming of age of a black woman in a hostile and suppressive environment and use the communication between two women as a frame work. Hurston’s heroine, Janie returns home after along time absence and tells her best friend Pheoby the story of her life.
“Pheoby, we been kissin’- Friends for twenty years, so Ah, depend on you for a good thought. And Ah’m talking to you from dat standpoint.” Time makes everything old, so the Kissing, Young darkness became a monostropalous old thing while Janie talked” (19). In an oral style, the protagonist’s struggle to find her voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is told in retrospect. The metaphor of “time” that “makes everything old” implies that Janie herself has become more mature since the beginning of her story. *The Color Purple* is narrated through the letters that Walker’s heroine Celie writes to, and receives from her sister, Nettie. The novel begins with a threat that is directed at fourteen years old girl, Celie: “You better not never tell nobody but God. I’d kill your mammy” (1). Since Celie is forbidden to speak to “nobody but God,” her letters are addressed to God as her only confident Celie and Janie are therefore caught in a system of patriarchal control that makes resistance difficult.

Using their writing and their language as a spring board, Hurston, Walker and their female protagonists develop individual techniques of resistance toward, the power that gets inflicted up on them. These techniques of resistance after the starting point for the investigation. How do Hurston and Walker succeeded in producing a discourse that resists both gender and racial stereotypes, and how is a female writer of African American origin to address and rewrite a body politics that has been part of a male-dominated and Eurocentric literary discourse for centuries. Also Hurston and Walker resist dominant literary discourse by deconstructing its stereotypical black female bodies and, therefore, free them of their normalizing functions. It further shows that the novels succeed in providing a powerful alternative discourse because they use motifs of female African American culture, as techniques of resistance. These two novels can be read as African American versions of écriture feminine, since their dominant motifs bisexuality, rape, motherhood and spirituality which seem especially apt material for this analysis, as they not only offer and insight into the psyche and everyday life of African American women, but also provide with a social kaleidoscope of twentieth century Black America.

Though Zora Neale Hurston’s, *There Eyes Were Watching God* is not autobiographical it is considered as autobiographical on two levels. First, in a continuation of one of the oldest traditions in fiction, Janie, the protagonist tells the story how and why her life came to be in the place that it is; second, we also know that Hurston invested this narrative with the joy and pain of her own experiences of female development and romantic love, familiar conventions in women’s narratives. In the novel Janie’s story simultaneously written and told, emerges as a composite “reading” of black female growth and development.
against the history of the oppression of race and sex. This narrative reinforces the cultural approach to identity that has dominated the African American male–centred tradition from the slave narratives of the nineteenth century to the present time—but it also makes of the “autobiographical situation” another vehicle for the self-empowerment of black women.

In African American literature, fiction and autobiography share a long history of common boundaries. Although few would dispute the claim that autobiography has been preeminent form of writing among blacks for more than 150 years, all agree that this genre influences and is influenced by fiction, a reciprocal relationship that forces each to greater experimentation. As a result, contemporary African American autobiographers are among writers in the genre who constantly transgress the narrative boundaries of fiction and autobiography. Thus, in appraising African American traditions in narrative, readers face difficulties when they attempt to separate life and art, nature and imitation, autobiography and fiction (Miller, 45). Hurston and later black women writers have taken full advantage of the flexibility of this tradition.

Hurston’s reputations rests on her work as one of the most important literary figures to emerge from the Harlem renaissance of the 1920s; she is best known as a champion of the primacy of black folk culture, and for her challenge to conventional social expectations of female conduct in relationships between men and women. As a writer in the twentieth century, she was among the early black women unequivocally to assert women’s rights to self-fulfillment outside of their allegiances to men. In this novel Zora addresses, Hurston’s delineation of Janie’s psychological journey from a male-identified female to assertive womanhood; her exploration of self-acceptance and black identity in a response to such a work as Weldon’s Autography.

In spite of general agreement about African America autobiography that locates the black self within the racial community, in their personal success, male autobiographers much more than their female counterparts credit their success to individual initiative and personal efforts. On the other hand, black women writing of their lives usually see their gains as a result of the support they receive from others with whom they are associated, especially of other women. Hurston’s novel goes further than most to reinforce the role of community in this text, which, as Barbara Christian, among others, has observed, is made strikingly clear in the structure of the work. In the mechanism of the story within a story, author Hurston, the critic notes, presented her heroine “not as an individual in a vacuum;…but as an intrinsic part
of a community, to which she brings her life and its richness, joys, and sorrows”(57). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is told partly in standard English by a formal omniscient narrator, who is spectator to and participant in the action; and partly in the intimate voice of its protagonist reflecting on her experiences in the presence of a second-person character –the heroine’s closest friend, Pheoby, who also speaks in folk language in her own voice, and to whom Janie entrusts her tale (Kalb, 170).

Further contributing to this understanding of cultural inter-connectedness between Janie’s life and her community, Elizabeth Meese finds that Hurston’s “method displays a keen awareness of the performative quality…but emerges from the tradition of oral narrative, as well as a clever consciousness of the storyteller writer’s role in constructing the history of a people through language.” She also observes that the structure of her story, especially considering the role of Janie’s friend as chorus, enables Hurston to draw more fully on the “rich oral legacy of black female storytelling and mythmaking that has its roots in African American culture.” The writer’s aim, Meese points out, is to transform the separate texts within her text into an integrated text; that is she melds Janie’s orality and the narrator’s intertexts into a unitary self-contained text that symbolizes “a form of feminist self-definition” (Meese, 61).

Although Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a widely read novel today, that wasn't always the case. When her novel was first published, many black readers were enraged. It wasn't until the early seventies when Hurston's novel was rediscovered and thus eventually brought back into the literary canon. What aspects of the novel enraged the readers so that it would be forgotten for more than thirty years?

One of the most important aspects of the novel that enraged the black readers was Hurston's portrayal of the white people. Readers complained that Hurston wasn't harsh enough in her critique of the white people's treatment towards the black people. Rather than portraying whites as the stereotypical "Simon Legree" of Uncle Tom's Cabin the ideal poor, racist "white trash" most whites that take part in the novel are contrarily very helpful towards the blacks and show great compassion towards them as well. For example, when Janie begins her story we meet the Washburns. These are the white folks for whom Nanny worked for and they are very helpful towards both Nanny and Janie by treating them as if they are part of the family. Contrary to a lot of whites at the time who treated blacks as if they were still slaves, the Washburns treat both Nanny and Janie as human beings rather than slaves, showing great
respect and love. In a way they are portrayed as "angels" who truly believe in human equality and don't have one bit of prejudice in them. "Mah grandma raised me. Mah grandma and de white folks she worked wid They was quality white folks up dere in West Florida. Named Washburn. She had four gran'chillun on de place and all of us played together" (8).

Furthermore, by reading Hurston's novel, one can clearly see that all blacks place the whites on a pedestal of knowledge. According to the blacks of the novel, whites know everything and are always right; they are superior and since blacks are supposed to be ignorant and stupid, they should believe and do...

*Their Eyes were watching God* is an important text in the literature of the quest for freedom and self. In American life and writing, as experience and metaphor, white and black women have a long history of the journey as a vital part of their traditions. Among the former the letters diaries and journals of pioneer women traveling with their families from east to west provide one of the most useful source of information on life situations in the settling of the country. In the tradition of African American autobiography, beginning with the slave and spiritual narrative, traveling, physically and psychologically in search of self and freedom was an intimate part of the lives of African American women and men. For early black women writers, travel and journey became an activity closely associated with the freedom to choose useful and dignified lives. Excluding the slave and spiritual narratives, a large body of nineteenth and twentieth century travel writings by black women exist. In spite of the racial, sexual, and economic oppression they encountered on their Journeys the authors of these texts used their travel experiences to explore various aspects of black women’s realities.

Janie’s text is another link in the chain black women’s travel stories in the quest for self. Her conscious journey is of major importance for her psychological development from a male identified woman to a self firmly grounded in a positive sense of independent black womanhood. This search begins for her in northern Florida when she is sixteen, in her “awakening” “beneath the Pear tree soaking in the alto chant of visiting bees” (10) and ends with her return to Eatonville after a stay of eighteen months on the muck of the Everglades. The narration takes place in more than twenty years through deep and meaningful changes in her life. By the end, her story reflects the quality of self – discovery, self-empowerment and personal heroism is the hallmark of the tradition that it enters.

The first leg of her journey of which Janie is unconscious of its meaning occurs when she is a young child. This segment takes her from the servant’s quarters in “de white folks
yard” to her grandmother’s house on a small plot of land, secured through hard work and sacrifice on the older women’s part. This was Nanny’s attempt to enable the child to grow up with a sense of worth, independent of white people. But if the move invests Janie with the dignity of racial pride, by the time she reaches the first blush of womanhood she discovers the restrictive bonds of woman’s place in man’s world, qualitatively as soul-destroying as the experiences of racism. But Nanny, who suffered the worst of black female sexual oppression, first as a slave and later in the knowledge of the rape of her only child (Janie’s mother) does not understand this. In stead, she encircles Janie with a love that ushers her into the prison house of the made – identified woman, a condition that confines women from their own lives. Nanny’s justification of the young girl’s marriage to the aging but financially secure Logan Killicks for safety and protection from other men condones the patriarchal oppression of women. Discrediting the merits of romantic love and personal growth as the “prong all us black women gits hung on,” her ethic subscribes to the maintenance of male dominance over women’s lives (22). Logan has the authority and even is expected to abuse Janie physically, does not disturb the old women. Her life long pain and suffering as an unprotected black women lead Nanny to wish for the assurance of a secure marriage for Janie before she dies. Her unawareness of the politics of gender roles convinces her that, safely married, “Maybe de men folks white or black will not make a spit cup out a Janie.” Pleading for understanding, she implores: “Put me down easy, Janie;” Ah’m a cracked plate” (19).

The moves from the white folks’ yard to Nanny’s house and subsequently to that of Logan Killicks were involuntary on Janie’s part. Not so the Journey away from Logan’s “lonesome place which looked to Janie like a stamp in the middle of the woods” (20) Unknown to her, the move was in the making even before she knew she was to marry Killicks. The initial steps occurred on the spring afternoon when the chant of kissing bees in the blossoming Pear tree awakened her to the mystery of life and nature. The hum that reached her was “Like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again” (10). AT the time, surrendering herself to her instincts she yearned to be a Pear tree, or any other tree in bloom with “glossy leaves and bursting buds, and she wanted to struggle with life” (23-25). Logan Killicks, no singing bee to her blossom, merely desecrated that vision of herself. Later unimpressed by his paid for house and sixty acres of land, or her new status as the only black woman in town to town an organ when he threatened to assert his authority by declaring that she work the mule and plow in his potato field, after initial hesitation, she walked away with Joe Starks. The step was a risk. Joe did not represent sun-up and pollen
and blooming trees, “nor did he make speeches to her ‘with rhymes’ but he spoke of far horizons bought her generous gifts and said he wanted her with him when he became a ‘big voice.’”

Although the men were different, twenty years of life as Joe’s wife proved equally as confining for Janie as her shorter time with Logan Killicks. Logan saw his identity reflected in the success and respect that came to him through hard work, ownership of property and possession of a young and pretty wife. Joe’s god was the lust for power and control over the whole community, including his wife. Janie asserted her individuality by refusing to conform to her husband’s dreams of her, and holding on to her dream of a loving partnership that recognized true equity between each member of the marriage team.

Before she married Killicks she had little time to frame the significant questions of the future which stretched before her, and none to learn the answers in “Did marriage end the cosmic loneliness of the unmated? Did marriage compel love like the sun the day?” by the time she left him, however, she knows that the marriage did not make love, and in this death of her fast dream Hurston remarks, Jamie became a women. In the years of her marriage to Joe, she he wanted her submission she would not give in an struggled against him. After a while the spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlour to shake hands when ever company came to visit what followed were years of profound psychological growth for Janie. She discovered that she had an inside and an out side and she could keep that separate from each other. She know that Joe with whom she run off with had been a youth illusion not the flesh and bold figure of her dreams but something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over buried deep inside her she packed and stored away the thoughts and emotions she never expressed to him. In time she hoped to find some one to share them with. Mean while she had two lives. In one she carried out her wifely tasks and as much as possible avoided confrontations with Joe. In the other she loped a self hidden from everyone else.

One day she sat and watched the shadow of herself going about tending store and prostrating itself before Joe while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes after a while it got so common she eased to be surprised by it…. It reconciled her to things (119).
So complete was her eligibility to keep her selves apart from each other that when Joe died she sent her public face to the funded while her private self went rollicking with the springtime across the world (137).

Tea Cake was instrumental in showing her the possibilities of a life out side of a materialistic and social restrictions one built instead on honest love and respect between people is not in dispute. But Janie had spent the greater part of her second marriage in a journey seeking her selfhood. By the time Tea Cake came into her life she was ready to embrace life willingly and fully. Her awakening under the blossoming pear tree at age sixteen was a call to journey to the horizon in search of people instead her grand mother had sent her on a path down a back road after thing she found those things financial stability and social position with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks but they never satisfied her. Tea Cake showed her how to give herself in love and to reach out to others in acceptance of their love.

When Nanny insisted Janie marry Logan Killicks, she questioned neither the price that women paid for male protection not the implications of the other’s owner ship of women’s bodies and their wills. She never admitted alternatives to women’s subservience to men. Although she meant well where Janie was concerned, the extent of her own victimization by race and sex made of her intentions what Janie called “mis-love.” For, out of ignorance, Nanny “had taken the biggest thing God ever made the horizon… and pinched it in to such a little bif of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter’s neck tight enough to choke her (85). First, in her literal abandonment of Logan kellicks, and later in her psychological separation from Janie rejects her grandmother’s misguided vision of black women’s lives in favour of the journey to the horizon in search of the independent self.

Unlike many other protagonists in black women’s autobiographical narratives, Janie has no female models, no mother or female relatives from whose examples she learns to pattern her acts of rebellion against the peculiar oppressions confront all black women. However, in the relationship between Janie and Pheoby especially after, Janie’s return from the muck-pheoby’s act of bringing food to her friends, Janie’s variation of her story to pheoby, the latter’s response to the story, and Janie’s investiture of pheoby with the authority to communicate the story to the women in the community the narrative affirms the significance of female bonding in women’s search for their identities. Inspire of their initial jealousy, the attitudes of the women of Eatonville will change toward Janie when they discover the person she has become freed from the joke of the title of Mrs. Mayor, and secure
in her identity as on of them she will participate in the community rituals from which her social position had previously excluded her. Her life will shape theirs as much as their will continue to shape hers.

In narratives of guest exe-slave women wrote of the hardships they endured in slavery and during the hear dons journeys they took in search of physical and psychological freedom. Free black women used travel stories to emphasize their efforts towards greater control over their lives. Always, travel insinuated guest for self by rejecting boundaries and limitations on the self.

Janie characterizes her journey as the trip to “de big association of life de grand lodge, de big convention of livin.” (6) She traveled to the horizon of her own dreams and in this place of personal fulfillment we leave her ready to settle down to help to enrich the life of her community. In choosing love and equal part nership over financial security and materialistic concerns, she takes a bold step to ward the emotional health that had not previously been hers. The relationship with Tea cake helped to shape her self-knowledge, but in his death she is free to discover security in herself, and the courage to speak in her own black woman’s voice, no longer dependent on men. Claiming the joys and pains of her experiences as components of her identity, Janie family comes to the end of the four my begun under the blossoming pear tree more than twenty years before. She had been to the horizon. Now she would begin to live through her newly found women identified self.

In addition to the successful journey from male – identified to self- identified woman, Janie’s positive black self-concept at the end of her narrative can be read as Hurston’s response to anxieties of identity common among black people in her time. From the end of nineteenth century through the early part of the twentieth many African Americans, especially those who aspired to middle –class status and privilege, were especially frustrated by the oppressiveness of marginality as members of a group labeled inferior. During this period, the prevalence of novels and autobiographical accounts of the phenomenon of passing was one indication of the magnitude of this anxiety. In the most drastic measure against these feelings, a number of those who could by means of their physical appearances, rejected their black identity and passed is to the white world. Janie’s story, set almost exclusively inside of the black community embodies none of the overt conventions of passing yet inversely addresses anxieties of retail identity. The stories are different but Jamie’s text, read against that of the ex-colored man in James Weldon Johnson’s novel for instance, is a good example
Janie’s achievement of positive identification with the black community is in stark contrast to the failure of the protagonist of John’s novel to admit kinship with the group. His final alienation from African American is a fixed as her connectedness to it. Interestingly, both characters begin their lives unaware of their racial identities, and as children both undergo epiphanies that transform this innocence into profound knowledge. Each child reacts differently to the situation in which he or she discovers blackness. As a young boy, Johnson’s questing antihero never thinks about race because he has no reason to believe that he is other than white until an insensitive white school teacher informs him otherwise.

Janie’s awakening is different. She discovers her racial self out of her inability to recognize her image in a photograph in which she appears among a group of white playmates. However, her identity is further fragmented by the fact that become many people have named her different, she is called Alphabet. She like the ex-Coloradan receives the vital information from a white adult. Surprised but not traumatized by it she looks at the photograph more closely until she recognized herself by her clothes and hair. But unlike the ex-Coloradan, who feels great shame when confronted with this information, Janie accepts herself fully. For Johnson’s character the knowledge is the dread discovery of the self as “nigger”; for her it is the truth of who she is she responds in surprise not pain AW A him colored!” for him the discovery represents expulsion from a community of choice.

Janie and the orphaned ex-colouredman, equally unworldly set out in their youth to find themselves as individuals and to establish their places within communities. At the conclusion of his narrative self, the protagonist of Johnson’s text now a successful white business man in his middle years acknowledges with some regard that through the life choices he made he exchanged the integrity of his retail birthright for the psychic expirerees of materialism and social sabot in a white world that did not know his true identity. When he takes psychological stock of his social and economic gains from the exchange he tries to convince himself that his action links him directly to the African American trickster figure the paragon of putting on ole master. However he knows that weighted in the balance even by his own standards he wants and not only did he in cowardly fashion turn his back on the world of his mother people but in his retreat from the reality of self he squandered his great musical tables through which he could have made a major contribution to the enhancement
and preservation of the culture of his group. His future holds prospects of painful regrets hidden in his dark secret.

One of the important advantages of his passing is the financial security the excluded man is able to establish for himself and his children. By the end of the narrative he is a wealthy man with leisure time to contemplate late his life. Although he is stoic in his acceptance of responsibility for the emotional barrenness his self-rejection creates for him, the psychological cost is high. His secret may never be revealed but as he rightly surmises like the Biblical Esam he sold his birth right for a mess of pottage.

On the other hand Janie rejects the soul-limiting options of materialism and social safety twice in her life once when she walks away from Logan Killick's sixty acres two mules and an organ in the Parlour and a second time when after Joe’s death she agrees to marry Tea cake rather than one of her more off suitors. At the end of the novel as she places her experiences in their proper places in her development she has no regrets for even her mistakes have helped to shape her. She sees her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered things enjoyed things done and undone dawn and doom was in its branches. She accepts all of the parts as contributions to the wholesome black female self whom she embraces.

In his study of the search for voice in twentieth century African American literature, John F.Callahan observes the distinct voices in Histories novel represent the African American call-and–response dialogue that originated in the oral culture while call focuses his discussion of narrative form on the authors independent stand against certain modernist trends in literature and her call to respond to Janie Crawford’s story…with new thought and new words (116) it is also a test that likes back ward to nineteenth century autobiographical narrative.

*Their Eyes were watching God* bears a close resemblance to the traditional as told to glove narrative of the earlier period but in the safety of the no competing voices that tell and write the story it revises the former by returning voice to the silenced ex slave of previous times. in these nineteenth century narratives the call of the African American “I” elicited, not the harmony of a comprehending African American response, but regardless of his or her sympathy, the dissonance of the white anamnesis editor who “cropped and framed” the ex-slave’s story” according to the standards of an alienating culture”. Even when an editor might have produced the facts of the exclave’s life in grating permission to have his or her story
rendered in written form by any white editor the escaped slave lost control of the narrative and therefore of his or her voice. Conversely those who gained control of such narratives assumed the right to do everything to then form improving grammar style and diction to selecting arranging and assigning significance to factual substance. (Andrews, 38).

Janie is not illiterate but she does not possess the literary skills to render her story in writing nor would her intended audiences Phoeby and the community have access to the story outside of its oral rendering in choosing to speak her auto and bio in her own voice in a language that enables her to communicate directly with her close friend and by extinction the entire folk community she remains grounded in the culture of her people and speaks for those who having no options once told their stories to white people who deprived them of narrative authority and compromised the authenticity of their documents. Unlike them she puts her voice in to the mouth of her friend. She can also confidently entrust the integrity of the graph of her discourse to the black female narrator who responsibly to the “call” as she writes Janie’s text into the literature culture this collaborator narrator unlike the nine teeth century white editor comments and elaborates on Janie’s text but does not edit the heroines out of her story important of examples of this reciprocally of voice and speech can be noted in Hurston’s meticulous care to avoid hierarchical privileging of either the oral or written discourse in the similarity of the story teller and the narrators use of metaphor in the function of black folk colloquialisms and action and in the ways in which narrator and character manufactures words for special effects. Such a convergence of the two aspects of language was impossible to archive in the collaboration between escaped slave and nineteenth century white editor.

In fact, at all levels in the search for language through which to make them selves heard black slave narrators felt disjunction in their relationships with sympathetic whites. Those who were literate and wrote their own stories experienced great anxieties ever their perceived in adequacy with the written world to express fully their emotional responses to slavery. This anxiety was only increased by the dilemma of the ex-slave’s uncertainty of whether the writes who championed his or her cause really wounded to know the truth of the feelings (ibid, 9). In Huston’s novel Janie tells her story to her friends who in turn will repeat the story to the community in the language they share. Even in the double transference (Phoebe’s retelling and the narrators writing) Janie’s voice remains the most vital instrument in her story. To borrow form Houston A. Baker Jr., that voice is one of Lyrical
autobiographical recall ……… Janie is a singer who……..recapitulates the blues experience of all black women (58).

A significant aspect of the control both nanny and Joe Stakes impose on Janie is silence about which has been written. But silence also creates loneliness for her as the social status that comes to her through the affluence and authority of women. Both class her off and successfully separate her from the other women still even when she acquiesces to their demands on her internally Janie rejects and struggles against the emptiness and loneliness of the positions they would have her fill.

Janie’s meeting with Tea Cake who fulfills the role of the bee to her blossom opens the way for her to construct a language of liberation through what Elizabeth Mesa calls the discourse of emulations with Tea Cake she tells hereby new thoughts had touch be though and new words said…….. he done taught me the maiden language all over (Meese, 173). The new language she appropriates not only facilitates her relationship with Tea Cake but also permits her to join the communities from which she was previously excluded first on the muck then in Eatonville. With this language she can engage in telling big stories even she had only listened to them before she can reject Mrs. Tanker’s Joe as of the hierarchy of color and she develops her own text on class and sex.

The autobiographical “I” in Their Eyes Were Watching God finds self and voice in forging a new history constructed out of the handing down of one women’s story of liberation to another. Exchanging outside ness for individuality within the community Janie becomes a feminist heroine with an assured place within community and her life becomes influential source though which other women will find a model for their own self empowerment pheoby will not be the only one to grow ten feet taller or be dissatisfiedd with herself on hearing Janis story. For the first time in her life Janie can celebrate horsefly though what she learns in the call and response in relationship of shared love intimacy and autonomy self. Although the structure of this text is different the tradition of black women celebrating themselves through other women like them selves began with their personal narratives of the nineteenth century female slave narratives we know generally had protagonists who sheared their space with the women who instilled pride of self and love of freedom in them. The tradition continued into the twentieth century. For instance much of the early portion of Huston’s autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road celebrates the relationship she had with her mother and the lesson she learned directly and indirectly from other women in the community thus Huston’s structure
for Janie’s story expands already existing tradition to concretize the symbolic rendering of voice to and out of the women community by breaking away from the form laities of conventional autobiography to make Janie’s text an autobiography about autobiographical story telling (Smith, 150). Huston’s struggling with the pains and ambivalences she felt towards the realities of a love she had to reject for the restraints it would have placed on her found a safe place to embalm the tender ness and passion of her feelings in the autobiographical voice of Janie Crawford whose life she made in to a very fine crayon enlargement of line.

Robert Bone called the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a classical of black literature one of the best novels of the period (126-32). Hence in this novel Janie crow ford after dutifully marrying the man her grandmother has chosen for her an old farmer who owns sixty acres and a house and finding no red satisfac tion there strikes out like Huck fine for the territory in search of her dreams and the possibility of a better life beyond the Horizon.

Her second husband is little better then her first but Janie endures hiding her dreams away until she is free to search again she begins her search when she is sixteen years old. By the time she finds what she limits she is forty the important thing is test she never given up the search she simply bides her time until things get better. It has universal implications for women by a masculine society. Hemenway asserts that in this novel Zora Neale Huston discovered one of the flours in her early memo ries of the village, Eatonville. There had usually been only men telling lies on the front porch of Joe Clark’s store (232). It was a society which believed some one had to think for “women and chillum and chickens and course. And where men saw one thing end understood ten, while women saw ten things and understood none like women of the most societies the females in Janie’s town were expected and encouraged to marry for security and economic advancement.

The story is rather awkwardly told by both the heroine Janie Crawford and an omniscient narrator and is revealed for the most part in a flash back to jennies best friend pheoby Watson. The narrative is awkward in same places because pheoby was a part of Eatonville just as Janie was both must have had many common experiences which there would be no need to repeat in the narrative.

As Huston reveals in her autobiography dust tracks on a road much of this story is based on a love she herself has experienced the plot was par form the circum stanched but I tried to emblazon all the tenderness of my passion for him in their eyes were watching
god(268). Has discovered that the him was a men of west Indian parentage whom Zora first net in New York in 1931 then found again when she was in graduate school he was a college student of twenty three who had been a member the cast for the great day and was studying be administer the affair was doomed from the start party because he could not abide her carrier party because Zora could not aide to give up her work and seemed to have a particular aversion to marriage the only part of the eyes were watching god is autobiographical then is the tender was of my passion “the emotional essence of a love affair between an older women and a younger man” (231) Huston’s claimed that the story had been damned up inside her and she has re leased it in seven weeks in habit what she wrote was the story of a woman in search of self and genie happiness of people rather then things the story of a young block woman with her eyes on the horizon. Although Janie Crawford’s search is the main thrust of the novel other themes – freedom from mater finalism interracial prejudice and sex stereotyping also demand out alternation.

The key to the novel is Janie’s idea of marriage which is pitted against other less romantic ideas of marriage in the books. Janie gets her definition of marriage furor nature. When she is sixteen senates awakens as she watches the mystery of a blossoming pear tree in her back yard: from barren brown stems to glistening leaf –buds; from the leaf –buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It starred her tremendously. How? why? it was like a flute song forgather in another existence and remembered again. What How? How? Why? (23) the answers to her question some when hoe seas dust bearing bee sink into the sanctuary of a bloom the thousand sister clayed arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight so this was a marriage she had been summered to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid the sexual imagers in these passages in blatant. The scene is orgasmic and impress Janie so strongly that she experiences a pain remorseless sweet after which she is time and languid this is the idea of marriage she carries with her and for which she searches for nearly thirty years. It is a romantic notion certainly but one certainly worth harboring.

After she witnesses the marriage between the pear tree and the bee Janie likes for similar marriages eke where. She finds what she seeks inside the kitchen of the house where she lives with her grandmother: “In the air of the room were flies trembling and singing marrying and giving in marriage(24), this too is nature at work Janie identifies with the pear tree; all she needs is the right dust bearing bee to pollinate her buds. Then she will be happy:
“Oh to be a pear tree any tree in bloom with blessing bees singing the beginning of the world she was sixteen she had glossy leaves and bursting beets and she wanted to struggle with life but it seared to elude hour. Where were the signing bees for her the intensity of her size would blind her to reality is made ironically and immediately apparent in the very next paragraph where Janie looking through pollinated apparent in the very next paragraph where Janie looking through pollinated air saw a glorious being comings up the road in her former blindness she had known him as hitless Johnny Taylor tall den lean that was before the golden dust of pollen had belabored his rags and her eyes”. As a blossoming pear tree Janie remains pet open for love before she is properly pollinated wow ever she is desecrated many times.

The descriptors come in the form of the people whose notions of marriage differ drastically from Janie’s but not from each others Janie’s grandmother and Janie’s first and second husbands all see marriage as a materialistic security venture they limit Janie and spit on her pear tree image.

Nanny Crawford Janie’s grandmother sees marriage as away out for Janie as escape from poverty and abuse a chance to sit on a high place. Nanny’s greatest wish is that Janie find a respectable husband with property so that she can avoid the traditional fate of black women de negger women is de mule uh de world so fur as the can see ah been proving fun if tub be different wad you lewd hawed lewd (29). “Ah can’t die easy she tells Janie think in may be de men folks white or black is making a spit cup out you (37). A product of slavery nanny understandably wants something different and better for her grand daughter their the servile role women were forced to play and the illegitimate half-white children they were often forced to bear. To Nanny, being married is being like white folks: “You got you lawful husband same as miss Washburn or nay body else or any body else(40). So in an attempt to make her grand daughter like white folks Nanny chooses Logan killicks as her grand daughter is husband. It does not matter to nanny that killicks is middle aged dirty unloving and likes like a small heed in the grave yard all that matters is that he has sixty acres de oiliest organ in town amongst colored falter”, a house bought and paid for and he officer protection.

Tain’t Logan Killick Ah wants you to have baby its protection ah isn’t getting ole honey akin done ole one morning soon now de angel would toward is gonium stop by here. De day and de hour is hid from me but it won’t be long…… may daily prayer now is thus let dose
golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you sale in life.

By choosing Killicks as a husband for her granddaughter Nanny makes two errors. Darwin Turner dents the first: feeling that life cheated her by enslaving her Nanny hours that her grand daughter will enjoy the happiness she herself has never known. But seeking to realize her self through her grand daughter she fails to allow for Janie’s personality and aspirations” (Darwin, 106). As nanny tells Janie Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sitting on high but they was not no pulpit for me Ah been waiting a long time Janie through air it too much if you just take a stance on high ground lack ah dreamed” when Janie complains that she does not love Killicks and can see no way to love him she discovers what nanny means by as stance on high ground you come need wide you moue full we foolishness on uh busy day. Heath you got uh prop tub learn on all you brawn days and big protection and every body got tub tip day hot tub you and cal you his Killicks, and you come warren me but love Janie asserts herself and her wisher when she replies Ah ain’t taking dot ole land tnh nears neither. Ah could throw ten acres of it over de fence every day and never look back to see where if fell. Ah feel de same why bout Mr.Killicks too. Some folks never was meant to be loved and he’s one of em to ease her grandmother mind Janie does return to killicks she is however only marking time.

Nanny’s first error naturally leads to her second because she wants to live through Janie to obtain the things through her the protection and security she her self never had she is blinded to Killicks short comings. Actually Killicks too set in his ways and obverse with his property to treat Janie like a real women, instead, he treats her like the livestock on his form, he soon measures he value, then in terms of how much work she can do and how much time she spends doing it. Ironically, Janie has become something of a “Spit cup” after all, her role is hardly more than servile. Fearing that Janie is more of a liability than an asset, kellicks tells her. If an kin haul do wood heath and chop if fun your, look lack you ought a be able tote if inside. Man Fust wife never bothered me ‘bout chopping’ no wood no how. She’d grab dot are and sling chips lack unman. You done been spoilt rotten”. To insure that he gets returns on his investments in Janie, Killicks purchases a second mule that is “all gentled up so ever un woman kin handle “in”. Though Janie night have progressed from being the “mule of the world”. She cannot escape the mule together, if seems. Flight seems to be her best option, and since her grand mother had died a few months before, Janie needn’t worry about “letting her down easy”.
Killicks, like Nanny, obsessed with materialism, with thing rather than with people. Robert Bone describes Janie’s life with logankillielas, her first husband, and podgy steaks, her second husband, as one of loving devotion to “prose” and her life with Tea Cake, her third husband, as one of loving devotion to “poetry” the “folk culture” and sensual intensity”(130). The “prose” however as Janis R Giles points out”, is closer to a puritan sense of duty which is un natural to Janie and her world because if more correctly belongs to white people, and the “poetry” is actually a prime five form of hedonism which miss Hurston is associating with Blacks”(Giles, 52). Hemingway elaborates, people erred because they wanted to be above others, an impulse which eventually led to denying the humanity of those below. Whites have institutionalized such thinking, and black people were vulnerable to the philosophy because being on high like white folks seemed to represent security and power. Janie’s grandmother and Jody Starks think that freedom is symbolized by achieving the position on high” (9) “Something to Drape Her Dreams Over”.

Janie finds another bad catch in her next husband, Jodystarks, an ambitions young man on his way to make his fortune in the small, all black community of Eatonville, Florida. To the romantic Janie, he is a knight in shining pronoun for he not only rescuers her from her miserable marriage with Logan, but he also offers to fulfill her dreams if she will new away and marry him Janie is reluctant to accept Jody’s offer because he “did not represent sunup and pollen and blooming trees”. Because he “spoke for far horizon”, however she capitulates.

When Starks come to fetch her in his hired rig, Janie unties the apron, a symbol of her servile life with Killicks, from around her waist, and takes a seat beside starts; “With him on it, if sat like some high, ruling chair. From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and spring time sprinkled over every thing. A bee for her bloom. Her old thought were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them”. Unfortunately Janie does not here the presence of mind that she needs to read starts correctly. Starks who reminds Janie of Mr. Washburn, transforms the ring into “some high, ruling chair” and has already told her, “A pretty doll baby Lack you is made to sit on ode front porch and rock and fan you self” (49) should have given Janie Pause. She after all, does not wish to sit on high and be ruled. Stats does represent far Starks. Naïve and trusting, she is petal open for him.
According to Janie, however and by extension, according to Hurston-her marriage with kellicks was never consummated. She was petal open but he was no pollen bearing bee; the only dust he brought was field dirt and most of that was on his feet. Janie had complained to Nanny that” His basally is too big too, now and his toe-nails look lack mule feet. And ‘taint nothing in de way of him washing his feat every evening before be comes tub bed. ‘Taint nothing tub hinder him cause. An places de water for him. And rather be short wide tacks than tub turn over in de bed and stir up de air whilst he is in dare”. Janie did not, could not, love kellicks and thus could not” froth with delight”; no orgasm was forth coming, so obviously no marriage had taken place-not by Janie’s pear tree standards, at any rate. As Hurston says in the second paragraph of the novel, for women “the dream is the truth the sole reality. Then they act and do orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things---Her breath was gusty and short---The familiar people and things had failed her so she becomes a woman”.

Janie’s new husband becomes mayor of Eatonville and, as proprietor of the general store, its wealthiest citizen. Jody Starks, consumed by ambition and a desire for property and possessions, soon begins to Janie Like a show piece; “Jody told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. Every body was coming sort of fined up, and he did not mean for no body else’s wife to rank with her. She must look on her self as the bell-ww; the other women were the gang”. And he forbids porch of the community store. You’re Mrs. Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, an can’t see what un woman un yours ability would want tub be treasuring’ all dot gum-grease from folks dot don’t even own de house today sleep in. Taint no earthly use. They’s just some puny humans playing rounded toes un Time”.

Starks obviously believes that women are to be seen and not heard. When the people of the community ask for “uh few words uh encouragement from Mrs. Mayor Starks,” Mayor Starks is quick to reply, “Man wife don’t know nothing” ‘bout no speech – making. Ah never married her for nothing Lack dot. She’s uh women and her place is in do’s home”. Janie, being the individual is, takes silent exception to her husband’s attitude, it took bloom off of things”. As for as believes, Janie is incapable of such a “masculine” attribute as thought. He himself is too caught up with egotism and self elevation to things” about her except as a possession. As Ellease Southerland diagnoses, Jody’s “ambitions is powerful enough, but his love is short, sighted” (26). He is too busy building a big, white mansion, a high place which he thinks will represents. It is no mistake that he often prefaces his remarks
with “I, god”. His attitude makes” a feeling of oldness and fear take hold of Janie. She felt far away from things and lonely”.

When she is twenty and has been married seven years to Jody Janie closes her relationship with her husband becomes purely perfunctory. The spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor. It was there to shake hands whenever company came to visit, but it never with back inside the bedroom again---. The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to Play in. It was a place where she went and laid down when she was sleepy and tired”.

Not only does Jody prohibit Janie from talking with “the common folks”, but he demands her to wear a head rag to hide her beautiful hair when she works in the store. Parts of the real Janie, then, are all wrapped up, literally and figuratively.

Jody Starks is too much like Logan Killicks to make Janie happy. Starks, Like, Killicks, feels that Janie ought to be proud and grateful for what he has done for her. After all, he has lifted her out of the valley and placed her on his mountain top.

Janie’s position, however, is only temporary until the opportunity she awaits to come. In the mean time, having considered flight and rejected if, she becomes a stock; “She got so she received all things with the solidness of the earth which soaks up urine and perfume with the same indifference”. Things climax about sixteen years later when Janie, who has been constantly and public by reminded of her aging by Jody, decides to strike back. The scene is the store and the results are a short version of the dozens with the fatal blow being levied by Janie; “Humph! Talking” “bout me looking” old! When you pull down you britches, you look lack de change uh life”. Janie has shown Jody that the security and power of the “high place” is largely an illusion. Shortly after words, Jody, now broken takes to his bed. Within a few weeks he is dead. He dies pretending to believe that he has been fixed by his wife. As state in chapter z, to be “fixed” some one was not an uh common belief among blanks during the early twentieth century Hurston had introduced voodoo and its power. The implication is the supernatural voodoo, in this case exercises its powers, whenever summoned by voodoo practitioners, over natural man. Although Joe Starks does not really believe that he has been “fixed” by his wife, then, its possibility is seriously considered by the other town people.

Although Janie hasn’t used voodoo against her husband, she is finally free. She had run off from her first husband to keep house with Jody” in uh wonderful way. But you
wasn’t satisfied wide me de way Ah was. Now! Mash own mind had tub be squeezed and
crowded out tub make room for yours in me”. Jody’s death gives her another chance. Just as
she had thrown the apron away when she left kellicks so she could once again let down her
hair and try to live. Having discovered, “she had an inside and an outside now and--- how not
to mix them, “she sends her” Starched and ironed face” to Joe’s funeral, but she herself
“Went rollicking with the springtime, across the world”. The horizon is before her once
again, and this time Janie does not plan to let it out of her sight.

All of her life, Janie has been searching, but thus far she hasn’t found. She is
interested in People and love while all the people who have controlled her life thus far-her
grandmother, Logan Killicks, and Jody Starks – have been interested in properties and
wealth, and the respectability each seemingly brings. They have insisted upon prose, while
Janie herself prefers and seeks poetry.

As for her husbands, since Janie insisted upon being petal open with them, it was
essential that they be open and communicative with her. They did not the case, however,
both Killicks and Jody refusing to share themselves; they did not know how. When Janie
suggested to Killicks that she mighty run off and leave him someday. Killicks refused ton
reveal his real feelings: There! Janie had put words to his hold in foams. She might run off
sure enough. The thought put a terrilole ache in Logan’s body, but he thought if best to put
on scorn. Ah in getting sleepy, Janie. Let’s don’t talk no more. ‘Taint too many men’s
would trust you, knowing you folks day doing. Jody on the other hand, had insisted Janie to
wear a head rag, but he “Never told Janie how jealous he was. He never told how often he
had seen.

The Color Purple broadens the scope of literary discourse, asserting its primacy in the
realm of academic thought while simultaneously stirring the reflective consciousness of a
mass audience. Unlike most novels by any writer, it is real across race, class, gender, and
cultural boundaries. It is truly a popular work, a book of the people, a work that has many
different meanings for many different readers. Often the meanings are not interesting,
contained as they are within a critical discourse which does not resist the urge to simplify, to
overshadow, to treatise on black life ore radical feminist treat. To say even as some critics do
that it is a modern day “slave narrative” or to simply place the work within the literary
tradition of epistolary sentimental novels is also a way to contain, restrict, control.
Categorizing in this way does imply the text neither demands nor challenges, rather it can be
adequately and fully discussed within an accepted critical discourse, one that remains firmly with the boundaries of conservative academic aesthete intentionality. While such discourse may illuminate aspects of the novel it also obscures, suppresses, silences.

To critically approach *The Color Purple* from an oppositional perspective, it is useful to identify gaps, spaces between the text and conventional critical points of departure. The Novel’s form is eprstolam is most obvious, so apparent even it is possible to overlook the fact that it begins not with a letter but an opening statement, threatening command, speaker unidentified."You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy.” Straightway Celie’s letter writing to God is placed in a context of domination; she is obeying orders. Her very first letter reveals that the secret can be told to no one but god had to do with sexuality, with sexual morality, with a male parents’ sexual abuse of female child. In form and content the declared subject carries traces of the sentimental novel with its focus on female characters and most importantly the female as potential victim of exploitative male sexual desire but this serves only as a back ground for deviation.

Significantly, *The Color Purple* is a narrative of “sexual confession.” Statements like; “First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggles it around then he graphs hold my titties. Then he put his thing inside my pussy,” refer solely to sexual encounters. Throughout the novel, sexuality is graphically and explicitly discussed. Walker has risked exploring subjects and talk about issues which are generally unacceptable to many readers. She seems to have no qualms about exposing any problem which stand in the way of people’s freedom including sexism and racism (Jamison-Hall, 2)

*The Color Purple* is a novel that emerges out of Alice Walker’s central concern with defining the existence, experience and culture of African American women and the brutally complex system of oppression that shape these. It deals with the role of male domination in frustrating the black women’s struggle for identity and independence. It shows how women are oppressed and manipulated by men and humiliated into powerlessness. But it is also a novel of liberation and redemption, showing women oppressed by violence moving from victimization by society and men in particular to a growth in consciousness that allows them to control their own lives. It celebrates the courage and resilience of the indomitable female spirit.

*The Color Purple* is a women’s novel in which it carries an identifiable tradition of women’s writing in terms of theme and narrative strategies, chiefly that of lesbian writing.
Lesbianism, suggests Adrienne Rich, “rejects the values and structure that assumes heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression, the old lie insisting that women have only sought emotional and sexual fulfillment through men—or not at all.” (177). The Color Purple can be called a lesbian novel, not merely because two central female characters become “lovers”, but because women are positioned as central, are positively portrayed and shown as sharing a rich, inner life, bonding against male tyranny and giving and receiving and political support.

The themes in the novel have much in common with those in Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zara Neale Hurston, who was an important influence on Walker, the rise above sexual and racial oppression for self-fulfillment and independence; the breakaway from loveless, suffocating marriage in search of one’s own self and voice, the unity of women whose nurturing relationships with each other help them survives and struggle. The crippled protagonists in the novels of these writers gradually re-kindle self-trust and re-inhabit their neglected bodies by integrating certain approaches to healing. For example they remember and relive traumatic events. They learn to relate their personal experience to cross-cultural and historical frame work and they embrace a women-centered, celebratory sexuality, finally inspiring sensitivity and a desire for justice in their abusers.

The Color Purple is a novel of celebration of the heroism of black women who fight to escape from the yoke of forced identities that drives them along paths they have not chosen. The title itself signifies “a celebration of the beauty, the pleasures of living and how that celebration is at the centre of spiritual and personal growth (Marowski, 388). It also symbolizes the spirit of the black woman, and her sexuality, bold and committed.

Since the 1960s, when she was a civil rights activist, to the 1990s, when she became a spokeswoman for women subjected to ritual genital mutilation and Earth subjected to waste and depredation, Walker, through her poetry, stories, novels, essays, feature films and documentaries has always championed the right to live freely and fearlessly.

Alice Walker’s novels deal with the human experience in general, but especially the human experience from the perspective of the suffering and the downtrodden, the hurt and the oppressed. Many of her characters are victims of racial, sexual and economic oppression and exist under degrading circumstances. Nevertheless, these characters, particularly the women, do not lie down and suffer passively in the face of such trauma. Rather they manage to transcend their desperate and painful circumstances in order to affirm life. Love in its
various forms offers an avenue for regeneration and healing. Another source of empowerment is resistance. A third source of power is through connecting one self to one’s ancestral past, for understanding the cultural history of the past “the song of the people” is necessary for an understanding of the present and for a sense of identity.

It is the foremost story of Celie, a poor, barely literate southern black woman who struggles to escape the brutality and degradation of her treatment by men. The tale is told primarily through her own letters, which, out of isolation and despair, she initially addresses to God. As a teenager she is repeatedly raped and beaten by her stepfather, then forced by him into loveless marriage to Albert, a widower with four children. To Albert, who is in love with a vivacious and determinedly independent blue singer named Shug Avery, Celie is merely a servant and an occasional sexual convenience.

The story that emerges in *The Color Purple* is mediated entirely through the intensely subjective form of personal letters. Almost half are written in Celie’s voice over a thirty-year period and are addressed not to a person living within history, but to wholly extra-historical external entity, God.

While the theme of oppression has been one of the great concerns of Black Fiction, since the novel form was first employed by Williams Walls Brown and Harriet E. Wilson, the oppression of Blacks by Blacks does not have a long history as a subject for representation—white racism, with a notable exception, does not take center stage, male over female, black male over black females, these are the axes of domination that structure *The Color Purple*.

As it is the culture’s fascination with sexual autobiography that has led to a burgeoning of fiction and true life stories focusing on sexual encounters. In the novel, which won the Pulitzer prize for fiction in 1983, Walker takes a perspective or epic approach to characterize delineation and cultural reality (Thadious, 406). This trend is especially evident in popular women-centered novels. Attractions mass audiences in similar ways as their nineteenth century predecessors, these new works captivate readers not by covert reference to sexual matters but by explicit exposure and revelation. Celie’s life is presented in reference to her sexual history. Rosaline Coward’s witty essay, “The True Story Of How I Became My Own Person” in her collection *Female Desires*, warns against the reproduction of an ideology where female identity is constructed solely in relationship to sexuality, where sexual experience becomes the way in which a woman learns self-knowledge.
Walker reproduces this ideology in *The Color Purple*. Patriarchy is exposed and denounced as a social structure supporting and condoning male domination of women, especially represented as black male domination of black females, yet it does not influence and control sexual desire and sexual expression. While Mr. Albert, dominating male authority figure, can become enraged at the possibility that his wife will be present at a Juke Joint, he has no difficulty accepting her sexual desire for another female.

With the appearance of women writers in the 70s, the male dominated black discourse focusing on racial or political oppression no longer suppressed the marginalized gender issues and thus a synthesis between the public and the private was achieved and consequently the black intellectual consciousness widened. The female plot presents the inner drive to assert selfhood and a quest for personal freedom within the cultural legacy and the framework of the Black community. A typed example in this respect is Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

Alice Walker’s heroine Celie and her sister Nettie narrate their life story in an epistolary form which, though it may seem a well established text type in literary discourse, still is able to convey multiple meanings and to strike the reader with effective freshness. The novel is actually the collection of letters written by Celie to God, and later, when it turns out that her sister is alive, to Nettie. Nettie, the educated, missionary sister keeps sending celie letters that are hidden from Nettie for a long time, though finally received by her much delayed. Walker focuses on Celie’s private life story, but Nettie’s letters widen the perspective of Celie’s condition by providing a transcultural, ethnographic description of the black woman’s situation in Africa.

Walker’s use of letters in *The Color Purple*, as a means of self-revelation, and as an intellectual process for Celie’s understanding of both herself and the world, has a long tradition in the context of the African American literature. The style of the novel, however, can be considered a new experimentation within the well established form. The mere acting of addressing God suggests the heroine’s alienation loneliness and marginality. “Long as I can spell G-o-d 1 got somebody along.” It is similarly significant that author does not feel obliged to give her heroine a family name either, a sign of stronger identification according to the “nomenest omen” practice. Thus, the author of the letters, feeling isolated and ashamed, tells about her exploitation and continuous toil, and desperate attempts to communicate with some one. Thus, the vocabulary and the speech like style are the proper vehicles to convey the oppressive conditions Celie has to face. She is an orphan and as a result of repeated rapes
by her step father, she is also the fourteen year old child-mother of a son and a daughter. Being the uglier of the two sisters, she is literally sold to a widower who desperately needs a woman to look after his two children and the household. Celie’s own children are soon given to foster-parents, to a couple who later become African missionaries. It cannot help noticing the romantic switch of the story when it learns that the missionary couple also takes Celie’s sister Nettie along to Africa as a member of their household.

The novel brings light to the historical experiences of black women and how their congregation as women forms a liberating force. It is easily seen that Walker relies on sexual abuse, violence and sexual oppression to show breaches in black generations. In the letters that Celie writes, she explains many examples of degradation, abuse and dehumanization which are not only morally grotesque but also invite spectator readers to simplify about black people in the same negative ways that have occurred for centuries. With the domination shown in walker’s novel has been said that she might be trying to lesser the oppression against black women by black men (Royster, 376). She tried to do this by repeatedly showing the sexual treatment against Celie through the two most important men in her life. The Color Purple sets the aura of sexual laxity which permeates the novel (Petry, 876).

Celie’s narration lacks any reference to the outside world, having its focus restricted to her private life. The family however, is never the safe haven that protects its members against the evils of society, but a male dominated world full of domestic violence. Not only was Celie’s initiation in to sexual experience in the form of rape committed by her stepfather, but sex continued to be a means of oppression in Marriage as well, and family life the site of further dehumanizing experiences. At the beginning, however, Celie can not make too much sense of her experiences; she is rather the passive victim of her environment; “But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (walker, 26), “I don’t say nothing. I stay where I’m told. But I am alive” (29).

Celie survives being a victim by recognizing that fighting back causes more problems than that. Throughout the story, Walker makes it clear that anyone can use, say and do anything to Celie and she will still say something to the effect that she is still here and still alive (Harris, 63). We have to acknowledge, however, that in extreme life situations mere survival can become an art of heroism, as it is in Celie’s case. Initially, the heroine’s relationship towards men, whom she sees depersonalized, as a collectives mass, is revealed in her style as well. The husband’s insignificance from Celie’s point of view explains why she
never names him for a long decade, only replaced his name with a dash, a blank space. Male members of the family violate Celie’s dignity, just as much as the white society violates the black community. The lynching of Celie’s father and Sophia’s imprisonment for eleven and a half years for slapping the mayor are clear examples of similar violations.

Celie’s encounter with Shug is a major experience that help Celie in finding her identity, is admired not only for her physical beauty, but also for her ability to earn a living as a blues singer, enabling her to lead an independent autonomous life, the type of life that was accepted as a privilege only for the male members of the society. The relationship of the two women becomes more and more intimate, and the tenderness and care manifested between them is in sharp opposition to the rudeness of the hetero relationships experienced by Celie. Shug Avery’s relationship with Celie, however, does not remain on the level of lesbian love, but its ultimate goal is to make Celie self confident and to develop her ability to appreciate herself, and to discover whatever is valuable around her, or, using Shug’s terminology, whatever is ‘purple’ in life. It is also this relationship that develops the kind of sensitivity in the heroine that later makes her able to enjoy hetero sexual love as well.

Celie’s transformation from a young passive girl, who is the object of violence and cruelty from her husband into an independent woman with self-existence, is at the heart of this novel. First and foremost Walker tries to probe the whole issue of personal identity. As Celie grows from a submissive but strong teen into an independent woman, her language becomes a badge of honour to her, and also a reminder of her identity and the extreme hardships she survived. Using the change in Celie’s life and search for identity is also a way for Walker to bring the reader closer to Celie’s development from a victim of mental and emotional abuse to a free woman who comes to appreciate herself as a valuable member of the town. While social interactions normally define human reality, these are not things that determine Celie. She is all alone despite the numbers of family members and other people involved in her world. Some characters that do have a huge influence on her are Shug Avery and Sofia. One of the strongest influences in Celie’s change is the strength of the relationship between women, their friendship, their love and their shared oppression (Smith, 183).

It is due to Shug Avery’s influence that Celie leaves Mr.____, her husband and becomes an economically and socially empowered woman. Alice Walker had ended her work at this point and the novel could be interpreted solely on the ground of feminist ideology. It is also work noticing that Celie does not remain with Shug, being enchanted by
her newly gained position as an independent bread-winner, in Memphis, far from her native community. She returns to her family, and what is even more significant, she is able to redeem the esteem of her husband Mr.___, and finally to establish a normal human relationship with him.

The fact that the author considers Shug to be a key character in the novel is emphasized by her association with the color “Purple”, the color of life, the polysemous sign, meant to be the main symbol of the book. Shug, by promoting a transformation in Celie’s consciousness and individuality, also becomes the spokes woman of the “womenist” ideology, a more subtle and more sensitive version of feminism, also called post feminism, which represent an important issue of the novel.

“I believe God is everything, say Shug. Every thing is or ever was or will be And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you’ve found It My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a mother less child, which I was, it come to me; that feeling is part of every thing, not separate at all. Every thing want to be loved. Us sing and dance, make faces and give flower bouquets, trying to be loved. You even notice that trees do every thing to gift attention we do, except walk? (178-79) Shug’s spiritual interpretation of God is strongly rooted in the transcendentalist unitarian concept of God, conceived as an all-Pervasive, Pantheistic spirit on the one hand, and on the other hand as an echo of Walker’s womanist philosophy, the term “womanism” comprises the “black folk expression of mother to female children”. Secondly, Walker identifies the term with a “woman who loves other women sexually and non-sexually”, appreciates women’s cultures women’s strength and emotional flexibility.”

A womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, traditionally a universalist.” Thirdly, the definition also celebrates sexuality and spirituality, as a womanist is some one who loves music, dance and spirit, love and food roundness, struggle, the Folk, herself. Regardless, Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” The intermediate textual connection between the essay and the passage quoted from the novel is quiet relevant.

Consider Shug’s spiritual and abstract interpretation of God, it is may be stated that it is completely contradicts Celie’s concrete and materialistic conception of God, whom she has always thought of as a “big and old and tall and gray bearded and white” man. Shug, on the
other hand, argues in a suggestive way that “God is inside every body. You come in to the world with God. But only them that Search for it inside find it. God ain’t a he or she, but a It” (177). The section marks the most important moment in Celie’s spiritual illumination. God is a white man; white man never listens to black folks; therefore God never listens to her either, or God is not a white man. By realizing the simple truth of this philosophy she comes to accept Shug’s spiritual concept of God. The importance of this revelation is also marked stylistically with the very first use of “Amen”, a strong assertive formula at the end of the letter. A similar revelation takes place in Nettie’s case as well. Unlike her sister, who takes a journey inside herself, Nettie heads for Africa.

Though the two experiences show strong parallelism they also contain a significant opposition as well, in the sense that while Celie’s revelation was of spiritual order, Nettie, the more educated character, experiences an intellectual revelation. “I have been so busy thinking bout him I truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn, not the color purple. Not the little wild flowers. Nothing” (179). Nettie experiences an intellectual disappointment concerning her own poor knowledge at the beginning, and the failure of her idealism concerning role of the missionaries at the end of her journey. “I hadn’t realized I was so ignorant, Celie. The little I know about my own self wouldn’t have filled a thimble! And to think Miss Beasley always said I was the smartest child she ever taught! But one thing I do thank her, for teaching me to learn for myself, by reading and studying and writing a clear hand. And for keeping alive in me, somehow, the desire to know” (123-24).

The relationship between Shug and Celie is important not only to Celie, but also for Shug, who, with Celie’s help, is able to do construct the isolation caused by the prejudices of the black community towards a woman who is to earn her own living as a bar-singer. The quilt-making scene acquires symbolic value in this sense. The patch work quilt is a well established, predominantly American archetype in the human culture, emphasizing multiple meanings. It stands for the co-operation of women in performing a socially useful task and also in creating an artistic, beautiful article. It also signifies the ability of woman to hand down or perpetuate the sense of belonging together and the desire to remain creators of warmth and beauty two principles indispensible for their communities.

As an essential part of her womanist strategy, Walker establishes a causal relation between the black women’s lesbian bonding and the sexism, racism and classism of America society. Whether sexual or affectional, lesbianism is essentially subversive of the patriarchal
social order, as it involves the assertion of female subjectivity. A patriarchal society tends to deny subjectivity to females, whether it is sexual or economic activity. In both realms, they are commodified and exchanged between men, as, in the novel, Celie is exchanged between her stepfather and her husband. Such an exchange and compulsory heterosexuality operate to bind men together as well as helping uphold the system of patriarchy. The anti-female economy of patriarchy reduces women to slaves, while its sexism not only subjects them to male brutality, but also precludes female subjectivity in sexuality by nurturing the myth that sexual intercourse is not possible without the phallus.

Besides sexual and economic, the black women in the novel also undergo racial oppression. As far as Celie is concerned, an enquiry into her parental history reveals, as she herself comes to know through Nettie’s letter, that her father’s murder and her resultant economic enslavement follow upon racial violence. If her father were not killed by the white merchants, she would not sustain economic enslavement follow upon racial violence. If her father were not killed by the white merchants, she would not sustain rape and incest and economically would be no slave to anybody. Squeak’s rape by the white warden of the prison and Sofia suffering at the hands of the white mayor, which bring Squeak, Shug and Odessa and Sofia into a strong emotional tie, are the additional unmistakable evidence of racial oppression in the novel.

Being a central character and probably intended as representative of all black women, Celie is portrayed as a victim of a whole range of oppressions. She is not treated as a human. Her husband does not even look her in the face. “He look at me. It like he looking at the earth.” (21) She is beaten like a child because, as her husband instructs his son, “Wives is like children. You have to let ‘em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.” (37) She is conceded little status as a subject in sexuality: her reproductive organs are controlled by men; and her babies are given away without her permission. Harpo’s heavy handedness to his wife Sofia, which parallels his father’s to Celie and Nettie’s commentary on the Olinka people’s discrimination against their woman, consistently with walker womanist design, suggest the fact that gender oppression is not limited to the Afro-American community in American South but, pervades the entire world of black men and women. The juxtaposition also produces the effects of reinforcing the sense of gender oppression in the novel. To the Olinka people as to the Afro-Americans, as girl can at most be the mother of the her husband’s children, i.e. the breeding machine. This is what
Nettie writes to Celie about the Olink people’s evaluation of their women: “when I asked a mother why she though this, she said: a girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become? I asked. Why, she said, the mother of his children.” (162)

African Americans as well as Africans avoid looking their women in the face while speaking: “They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground” (168). They confine them to care of children, and “among the Olinka, the husband has life and death power over the wife. If he accuses one of his wives of witchcraft or infidelity, she can be killed” (172). This is also true of Afro-Americans in as sense, for in one way or another, wives and mistresses are caused to die in childbirth, or are shot down at whim. The death of Celie’s own mother in childbirth, or are shot down at whim. The death of Celie’s own mother in childbirth and Annie Julia murder by her lover are a case in point.

It is to resist all these sexual, racial and economic oppressions that the black women in the novel turn the lesbianism. For them, it not only serves as an oasis of relief from all types of oppression, but also facilitates their psychological growth by imbuing them with self-esteem, self identity and strength, and helps them to present united front against them.

Consistently with her womanist design, Walker sets herself expose as well as oppose all the various ways in which male American society tyrannizes over them; and, instead of simply making a sensational story of Celie’s victimization, undertakes to offer a psychological insight into her inner world, her early self-insignificance and confusion and eventual sense of triumph and clarity. The novel is characterized by the womanist element in its exclusive devotion to the theme of black lesbianism, in its allowing the black women to predominate over the black men in the end, in its launching an attack against all sorts of oppression endorsed by patriarchy, and in its being structurally rooted in the matrilineal tradition of African American writing.

The three strong women of the narration, Shug, Sofia and Celie come together and each of them brings her personal skill and personal patch to contribute. This close and productive cooperation helps to demonstrate the role of women in strengthening relationships in order to reconstruct a healthy black community. It is not incidental that it is during this activity that Celie starts thinking about herself in a broader context: “First time I think about the world. What the world got to do with any thing. I think. Then I see myself sitting there
quilting tween Shug Avery and Mr.__. Us three set together. For the first time in my life, I feel just right” (61).

In the story, Sofia is brought down by white people because of her feeling of equality with white people. Sofia believed she would be no one’s maid especially because she is black and she felt offended by this gesture. This is not the only racist gesture against blacks from whites. When Harpo’s lover Mary Agnes reveals that her uncle is white and he can help get Sofia out of jail, the rest of the family suggest she go talk to him. Mary Agnes uncle not only talks to her but rapes her as a price for letting Sofia out of jail. Thus, for blacks and whites in the novel, mixed heritage does nothing to bring the races closer but rather it offers each an opportunity to exploit the other (Kirby, 83). Racism in the story is shown from many angles and also express in multiple ways through Walker’s novel.

The patch work motive and the activity of sewing subtly elicit Celie’s future activity, which will bring her material independence while living away from her family. It should also be pointed out that those who bring their contribution to this archetypal quilt are all strong women, united by sisterly love. Shug and Squeak represent the successful careers open to some black women who are talented enough to earn fame and fortune while passing the spiritual values of the black community encoded in folklore; Sofia stands for the toughest women, fiercely fighting for their rights, with an unbelievable sense of righteousness and indomitable character, Nettie symbolizes the intellectuals who tried to fulfill a deep, almost instinctive desire to find and to help their African sisters and brothers; and there are many other minor characters, such as women who raise the children of their relatives, and women who love each other so much that they eve even capable of sharing the love of the same man between them.

The other important thread of Walker’s narrative is the set of letters written by Nettie, the educated missionary sister from Africa, where she is working to enhance culture and Christianity among the members of a native tribe.

With her belated discovery of Nettie letters written over a period of thirty years, a significant change takes place in Celie. She ceases to address her letters to God; this marks the dissolution of her isolation, a process that had already started with Shug’s appearance in her life. This choice also marks a significant moment in her psychological maturation, consequently bringing about a shift in the style of her writing. She consciously declares to Shug that from them on she will write to Nettie, at the same time realizing that “the God she
had been praying and writing to is a man, just like all the other mans she knows. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown,” later adding, “If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place” (175). Along with the gradual alteration of her religious faith, which hither to meant her only source of energy and consolation shape and her sense of self becomes stronger, a fast that is marked not only by the shift in the addressee of the letters but by the concomitant change of the ending formula.

While the letters addressed to God are not even signed, those addressed to Nettie are all consciously signed, either as Celie, Your sister Celie, or “Amen”, an obvious expression of approval. A similar assertion of validation also expresses a strong growth of her self respect, a sign that the heroine is already able to her own experience as something meaningful for others, what is more she realizes that her words can express an authoritative attitude on certain matters. A similar growth of consciousness can be detected in her conversation with Mr. __ before leaving for Memphis. Replying to her hand’s remark “You black, You pore, You ugly, You a woman…” Celie in her remark adds a short, but significant statement, giving a switch to the string of adjectives being attributed her: I’m Pore. I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook. But I am here” (187).

Celie’s claim is startling because throughout her life she has been subjected to a cruel form of male dominance grounded in control over speech. Finding the courage to speak is a major theme of the novel. But the novel also suggests that speech cannot come from the hollow shell of selfhood that Celie presents early on.

As the audience of the letters change from senseless God to a receptive flesh and blood audience represented by Nettie, so does the voice of the narration shift from a merely passive to a forceful, self-expressing tone Celie’s fate, typical of a black woman in the first half of the twentieth century is viewed in a larger context with the introduction of Nettie’s letters relating her experiences as a missionary in Africa, among the Olinkas.

As an empowered author, Alice Walker manipulates these letters in such a way that her presence remains unnoticed throughout the book. By introducing the letters of a second person, the author is able to present the reader with a second point of view without interfering as a more objective authority. However, the author is there as a distanced, controlling third consciousness who arranges the letters in a certain order. Thus, Nettie’s letters clearly present another aspect of the gender oppression existing among the Olinkas: their objection to
the education of the girls, their various, painful and health threatening initiation practices. It is easy to realize that the present social condition of black women is deeply rooted in African tribal traditions, where women’s prestige was very low, their only role in society being reproduction.

There is a way that the olinka men speak to women that reminds me too much of pa. They listen Just Long enough to issue instructions. They don’t even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not “Look in a man’s face” as they say. To “Look in a man’s face” is a brazen things to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees, and what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around pa” (149).

Nettie’s letters argue that black women’s oppression is transcultural. For it is obvious that the legacy of slavery is intensified by the gender oppression of patriarchal family traditions inherited from Africa. It should be observed that the degrading status of black women is presented from two perspectives: which have strong social, political and historical implications: on the one hand from the point of view of Celie’s private experiences, and on the other hand from Nettie’s public vantage point. As Deborah E. Mc Dowell notes “The majority of Celie’s letters represent the private paradigm of the African American female tradition in the novel, and the majority of Nettie’s letters can be said to represent the public paradigm”(47).

The two perspectives are subtly suggested by the different registers used by the sisters. As Nettie is more fortunate in getting a much wider chance improve herself, she represents the educated and conscious member of both her race and sex, who sacrifices her life for the cause of black people every where in the world by becoming a missionary in the land of her ancestors. Her letters often assume the quality of essays, pamphlets, or public speeches when she talks about the indignations caused by her African experiences. These meditations and also the style of the letters reflect social awareness and give a self-conscious interpretation of the experiences quite opposed to Celie’s lack of ability to understand either the world around her or her own condition. Thus, the two kinds of experiences intersect in the two sets of letters to mutually support the underlying message: the universal condition of oppression of Black women.
The act of voicing the hitherto unnoticed voice of the Celie-type black woman was an important step in re-evaluating the role of women in black communities. Just as the acquisition of literacy marks a step towards spiritual and political freedom on the part of the slave narrators, the act of writing or articulating certain experiences brings understanding and spiritual independence to Alice Walker’s Celie, and makes possible the great leap from the incidental and particular to general and universal.

Thus, both Zora and Walker presented in their novels vividly the suppression and oppression of the African black women in America under the clutches of whites and men of the same community.