Chapter 5: Heritage in Alice Walker’s Novels

The theme of heritage is significant aspect of Alice Walker’s novels. Taking into consideration her novels show that heritage and human identity. Especially in her novel the theme maintains every kind of relation which indicates heritage like, most of the sexual relations that are highlighted in the text are those between a man and a woman. These sexual relations are mostly presented as abusive in which the woman participates merely to gratify the sexual cravings of the man. For other women like Celie, the experiences are akin to rape.\(^1\)

Celie’s mother has had to plead with Fonso to spare her the agony of sex in her vegetable state. Fonso does not concede until he takes on Celie to perform the sexual functions that her mother is unable to perform due to severe illness. Celie’s sexual descriptions with men are descriptions of rape. She describes those with Fonso. Fonso tries to force himself on his wife, Celie’s mother, who is very sick but then Celie’s mother pleads with him.

Celie knows that the only way that Fonso and his untamed need for sex would not harm her mother is if she, Celie, allows him to rape her. And so Celie is forced to endure the sexual brutality from the man she knows as her father. Celie’s trauma is evident. The man she knows to be her father asks her, as per custom, to trim his hair. She complies but Celie notices that the man looks at her in a funny way and is a little nervous too. Then he grabs her and crams her up between his legs. Celie is only about fourteen years. And the way it pokes itself and grows. After this horror, Fonso makes her complete the trimming of his hair. Celie feels the pain from the rape as she completes trimming the hair of the man who
has just raped her. The man does not care. He does not even look straight at Celie after this incident. Celie can only overcome such brutality by rebelling against the social structures that have compelled her to be subdued by the man.

Fonso tells Celie not to tell anybody but God about her rape. The notion of God here is cardinal. Fonso or Pa as Celie calls him, issues this threat to the fourteen years old Celie who believes literary in the myth of God’s retribution. To Celie Fonso is a domestic replica of God. Yet Celie decides to write letters to God to express her woes because she is psychologically and physically shattered. By ordering Celie not to confide her ruinous sexual experiences to anyone but God, Fonso unconsciously identifies God as a patriarchal overload, protector of men who become his henchmen, and an accomplice in black women’s ruinous sexual experiences. Celie comes to view God as an absolute patriarch. Speaking in her black vernacular English, Celie describes God as big and old and tall and grey-bearded and white and a man. Celie views God as reified, anthropomorphic and above all, racist and sexist. God is simply a male and that explains why Celie slavishly submits to the men in her life.

Celie has endured a barrage of rapes and brutality that have caused her to experience her body as fragmented and as being possessed by the men who have abused and raped her. At fourteen, Celie has questions about herself image as a result of her abusive father’s repeated rapes. And she describes her first sexual encounter with Albert in her loveless marriage; And when Celie has a chance to speak with Shug Avery, she describes her sexual experiences with Mr. ____. While Shug Avery enjoys her encounter with Mr. _____, Celie’s is a nightmare. Shug Avery has been sleeping with Mr. _____ and enquires from Celie if she minds.
She is surprised that she could be considered a virgin when she has had two children with Mr. Celie’s postulation is clear. Sex is a nightmare. She feels like a toilet where Mr. ____ does his business and thereafter falls off to sleep. He never asks her how she feels. He climbs on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Celie, understandably, feels that nobody loves her. Celie’s sexual encounters with Fonso and Mr. ______ are very damaging to her self image. More damaging to Celie’s self image are particular times when Mr. ____ is beating her. Celie says that for her not to cry, she imagines herself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. Celie detach herself from reality because of her intolerable circumstances.²

The sex that Mary Agnes has with her uncle, the prison warder Bubber Hodges, is pure rape. Bubber Hodges does this to Mary Agnes because she is a woman and because she has black blood. And this rape is also a way of Bubber Hodges demonstrating his power over the woman with some black blood. It is also a way of keeping the woman in her subordinated place.

Fonso assures Mr. ______ that Celie is a good labourer and is sexually experienced but without obligations of her ever becoming pregnant. To motivate Mr. ______ more, a calf is offered. This transaction points to the fact that the men in this community have low regard for the woman. The selling points in the transaction over Celie are that she is good at her work, that she is not fresh and that sex with Celie cannot result into a pregnancy. Fonso says that Celie is spoiled twice. Bearing in mind that Mr. ___ already has big children of his own; his only interest in Celie is sex and someone to look after his children.

Celie is being marketed as a good cook, one to have sex with without the worry of a pregnancy, a hard worker despite being ugly and
that she will go into her marriage to Mr. ____ with her own linen and her cow. Celie is being presented as one who is a perfect example of co-modification of the woman, in which the woman is presented as a commodity for sale.

Fonso is also presented as a sexual brute. When his new wife May Ellen gets sick he has to have sex with Celie to satisfy his untamed sex drive. This is the same Fonso who, when Celie's mother gets ill, resorts to raping Celie.

Fonso has no regard for women. And because of this, he says, Celie is not fresh. Fonso is treating Celie as property whose master has become tired of and wants to dispose of it. To make certain of a deal Fonso offers Mr. ______ a cow in addition to Celie and thereby seals the deal.

The black women in Africa have to undergo circumcision. Basically this is an attempt to deprive them of any possible sexual pleasure. In these circumstances, the existence of the woman at the sexual level is seen as that of providing the man with sexual pleasure. The woman is herself not seen as one who should also enjoy her sexual encounters.

The descriptions of sexual relations that gratify the feelings of the woman are presented as perverted. Celie can only hug Mr. _____ during sex when she imagines that this is the same Mr. _____ that the beautiful Shug Avery enjoys having sex with. Sofia is contented basically because she is in charge of her relationships. Shug Avery's relationships with men are described as being full of excitement and fun. These relationships are not permanent. They are also not socially endorsed. Her relationship with Albert is seen as perverted because Albert is married, first to Annie Julia and then afterwards to Celie. The community does not endorse the
relationship because Shug Avery is seen as a prostitute. This is also opposed by Albert's prejudiced father, because Shug Avery is seen as a blues singer and a woman of lose morals. Albert's brother only comes to see Shug Avery in order to inspect the commodity that his brother has acquired, to see its quality. Such relationships are presented as not worth having. If the women are to be free and happy in their relationships then they are better off rebelling and being labelled as women of loose morals. Rebellion is presented as the only feasible alternative. This is what some women resort to do.

The sexual relationships which satisfy a woman are those between women themselves such as those between Shug Avery and Celie, Olivia and Tashi. Celie confesses that the first time she saw Shug Avery's full long black body with its black plum nipples she thought that she had turned into a man. She realises that she has sisterly feelings towards Sofia but that Shug Avery made her feel like she was a man. Celie has never felt this way in her encounters with men before. Her relationships with men made her feel used and abused. Celie's description of what she saw of Shug Avery's nude body is purely sexual:

Shug Avery realises the attraction and encourages Celie to look on. At last Celie gets a positive reaction from the woman she has admired since she saw her in a picture. Shug Avery tells Celie to stop calling her using the formal term of ma'am. Celie's passion for Shug Avery grows in intensity:

She finally asks. Her success with Shug Avery even surprises Albert who wonders how Celie managed. In Africa, Olivia and Tashi are also enjoying a special love relationship as Nettie suspects.

While the women in Africa are married off to polygamous marriages, the women in America have to endure the conduct of their husbands
having extra marital affairs. Celie has to contend with Shug Avery and Sofia with Mary Agnes. The women, too, seem to have the latitude of changing lovers with no serious consequence. Shug Avery is a perfect example hence her nick name of Shug Avery because she enjoyed sex very much. Sex is not just important to Shug Avery but she finds it sweet, like sugar, it spiced up her life. This is the sex that the men in Celie’s life have given a bad name to by abusing her. Sofia, too, is able to have a sixth child fathered by a different man other than her husband, Harpo. Mary Agnes gets involved with another man leaving Harpo to Sofia.

She is despised by Mr. _____’s two sisters. They frown upon the illicit relationship between Shug Avery and their brother. An important aspect of sexual relations in The Color Purple is the sex education or sexual awareness that Shug Avery imparts to Celie. Shug Avery is shown to have a good understanding of sexual matters; at least she has better knowledge and understanding of sexuality than Celie. When she embarks on the sex education of Celie, she starts from the basics. Celie immediately shows signs of self awareness for the first time. Shug Avery helps to explore first Celie’s physical sexuality. Celie, who all along has been told that she is ugly, has never tried to look at what it is that is between her legs that all the men in her life have craved for. As will be looked at in detail later in chapter five, Celie is amazed first at the hair and then she wonders if what she is looking at is really hers.

This reminds one of Toni Morrison's characters in Beloved, Sethe, who urges her listeners to take a physical examination of them. Sethe's listeners have always been told that they are ugly. They have been denied a sense of identity as a result. They have always been told that they are inferior to the white man. Sethe's message is revolutionary in the sense that it enables her listeners appreciate themselves and gain an identity for themselves.
Celie's instructed self examination follows a similar pattern. This is followed by an intensive introduction to sexuality in which Celie discovers the button which is one of the keys to sexual satisfaction. Celie begins to look at herself as an individual when she identifies her sexuality as her own.

Religion in The Color Purple is tinted with racism, sexism and hypocrisy. These factors come to light in the dialogue between Celie and Shug Avery, in the letters from Nettie and also in the experiences of some of the characters.

Celie's oppression is deeply embedded in religion. Celie, asked by Shug Avery, describes God as man and white: He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. Celie has come to believe that this God never listens to poor colored women. She accuses God of having given her a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister she will probably never see again. Celie's experience with God has been devastating so far. Fonso, after raping Celie, tells her to tell no one but God. To Celie, it is like Fonso and God have connived in her oppression. The implication of this is that for Celie to be free of her oppression she has got to rebel against this traditional and patriarchal concept of God for some unorthodox concept.

Shug Avery makes the point that God must be bigger than the gender or race identity. She points out that God cannot be a man. Her argument is that instead of spending much time doing works to please God, individuals need to celebrate God. She argues that people need to enjoy everything that God has created and that even the feelings and emotions need to be celebrated because they were created by God. God, to Shug Avery, is a Being she comfortably refers to as It. Shug Avery
teaches Celie a religion of admiration and Celie is quick to learn. Admiring the color purple is equated with what Celie calls making love to God, an act she performs with the aid of a reefer. This concept of God is rebellious and unorthodox.

Nettie’s view, shown in her letters, is even more radical as she simply stands firm on the fact that Jesus, the son of God, had kinky hair. To her this means that he was not white. By noticing that black people have got kinky hair, Nettie indorses Jesus as being black.

At fourteen years the raped and abused Celie is compelled to confide only in God of all her troubles and tribulations. Her assumed father who has raped and abused her compels Celie to confide in God only because the knowledge of what is happening to her would kill her mother whose health is drastically ailing. The man she knows to be her father tells her not to tell no-body but God. He tells her that; it would kill your mammy if she came to know about the rape. And since a girl of fourteen has been told not to confide in her mother and she has lost contact with her only sister, and she has no known relative, Celie can only confide in God. At this point God or religion acts as a confidant to Celie, a place of solace in which Celie takes refuge. The problem here is not God but how Fonso has used the knowledge of God to almost permanently silence a young girl who has been abused at his (Fonso’s) hands.

Celi e does not name most of her male characters in her early letters. Therefore the reader finds Celie writing about Mr. ____ whom she later identifies as Albert. It is as if Celie is making a statement that men have no individual identities. Those men are the same and act in the same way towards women. To Celie, most men are the same: brutes not worth knowing by name.
Celie gives religion as part of the reason she does not fight back when she is abused, especially by the man she has always known as her father. She says that the Bible has said that one needs to honour their father and mother. And that this life is temporal but that heaven lasts for ever; this life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways. Celie is religious and at the moment finds sustenance in it. While Fonso is using religion to hide his sin, even when he knows about heaven and hell; Celie is forced to endure the abuse in order to enter heaven. Celie does not ask herself whether Fonso is interested in heaven or whether God does not want her to expose evil and deal with it. She is so oppressed and silenced that she does not see the manipulation and deception that Fonso is doing. She does not see that Fonso is hiding behind religion.

Religion in The Color Purple is portrayed as opportunistic. When Shug Avery is in labour and experiencing an excruciating delivery, the preacher and some women from the church think that it is the right time to talk about repentance. The religious people are taking advantage of the intense labour pains to compel Shug Avery to repent. Shug Avery later sees through this deception and comments: I was too big a fool to repent. This action of the church people is not only opportunistic but also hypocritical. They take advantage of and exploit people in their hour of need.

There is also a way in which religion in The Color Purple is portrayed as irrelevant and impotent in the lives of the people. Nettie asks Reverend Samuel to visit the oppressed Celie and check on how Celie is doing; but he says he can’t risk putting himself between man and wife, especially when he doesn’t know them. Religion has yet another face in The Color Purple. The way that the people of religion treat the situation of Celie and the sick Shug Avery is hypocritical. Shug Avery, the blues singer and mistress of Mr. _____ is very sick and nobody in the town
wants to take in the Queen Honeybee. Her mother does not want her back and her father has called her a tramp. The church people, especially the women, gossip about her without trying to use their Christian religious teaching to reach out to Shug Avery and try to get her help. They are unaware that their pride is yet another type of sin. They are content in pointing out what they think is the major sin. The preacher misuses his pulpit to denounce Snug Avery who is not even in the church. The preacher, in his sermon talks about a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin, singing for money and taking other women's men. The preacher, disregarding his environment, goes on to talk about a slut, a hussy, a heifer and a street cleaner in his denunciation of Shug Avery. He is most insensitive in his criticism that he annoys even Celie who should be the aggrieved party because the so-called slut takes her husband. Celie observes that somebody needs to stand up to defend Shug Avery. Even the brutal Mr. _____ is moved to sympathise with Shug Avery. He observes; nobody fights for Shug, he say. And a little water comes to his eyes. Mr. _____ organises a wagon and brings into his matrimonial home the despised Shug Avery whom the Church has condemned as strumpet.

While the preacher is busy attacking Shug Avery, who is not in church, the other guilty party, Mr. _____, is in the congregation and yet the preacher makes no mention of the wrongs that Mr. ________ has committed. In fact the preacher's words make Mr. _____ look like the victim and not the perpetrator of heinous crimes of abuse and infidelity. The preacher, by implying that Shug Avery has taken another woman's husband, makes it look like Mr. _____ had no say in the matter and was completely innocent. It is a world in which a man can do no wrong.

This is exactly like the patriarchal world painted in the Bible in which a woman is said to have been caught committing adultery. The
woman is picked upon for stoning to death while the man is interestingly missing and not even mentioned. The blemish is simply put on the woman. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was equally a candidate for public disgrace because she had conceived outside wedlock and for the fact that the pregnancy was not for the man she was engaged to, Joseph. Joseph is presented as agonising and trying to find a way to save Mary from public humiliation. Like in the other cases, the question of the man responsible for the pregnancy does not become an issue for Joseph.

An interesting observation about this church is that while the people are aware that Celie has been living in oppression, they do nothing about it. They also leave the manual work of cleaning the church to Celie while they just watch while chatting away with the preacher. To these holy church people Celie is no better than a slave.

The missionaries among the Olinka people are also next to a disaster. They are interested in saving the people from sin and want to change the people’s way of life. They despise the people’s practices as evil while not having a full understanding of why the people maintain their practices. One of these practices is that of the roofleaf. The white missionaries have regarded this as an idol which needs to be destroyed and yet do not understand that this roofleaf has medicinal value and is used as a covering for the people’s houses as roofs. This episode reflects the shallowness of the missionaries’ understanding of the concept of God.

Nettie and Samuel do realise that the missionaries are irrelevant to the lives of the Olinka and so try to be relevant. They take up the issue of the displacement of the Olinka people from their land with their missionary headquarters in London. Their Bishop, a youngish man wearing spectacles and thumbing through a stack of Samuel’s yearly reports does not concern himself with the problem of the Olinka people. He is only
concerned about appearances. He asks how much time has passed since Corrine’s death. He is worried about what the natives will think of the marriage between Samuel and Nettie. Samuel and Nettie leave London without a word on the Olinka problems. The headquarters are not interested in this important issue that affects the people. They are only interested in petty issues of public image as opposed to matters of truth, life and death for the Olinka people. This reflects the impotence and irrelevance of the religion of the missionaries which Celie has also believed in.

A variety of women are presented in The Color Purple who face similar circumstances and are joined together by their love. Without exception, these women love and respect each other, the men in their lives - no matter how abusive these men are - and the children that they have to care for.

Celia’s mentally deranged mother is ill but is concerned enough for Celie to express her dislike of Celie’s condition. She has no idea that Celie’s pregnancy has been caused by the man in her life whom Celie has always known to be her father. And Celie cannot tell her mother about the truth of her pregnancy, which has been as a result of rape by her mother’s second husband, because she fears and has been told by her abuser that such truth would kill her mother.

Celia, apart from allowing her to be repeatedly raped to protect her ill mother, has to take care of her younger brothers and sisters, especially Nettie. As a result of two pregnancies and two deliveries, Celie is no longer appealing to Fonso and because she has not been allowed to breastfeed her baby, she is seen as unclean by Fonso who now tries to turn his attention to Celie’s younger sister, Nettie. Celie offers herself to
Fonso in order to protect Nettie from the impending rape at the hands of Fonso.

Celie also offers herself to be married off to Mr. _____ in order to protect Nettie from a marriage that she is certain would scar her life. When Celie is given to Mr. ____ in a bargain, she discovers that she has to care for a large number of children, some of them, like Harpo, already big. Celie cares for these children despite the continued rape and abuse she suffers at the hands of her husband and the beating she gets from Harpo.

On her first night with Mr. _____, Celie puts her arm around him just because she is thinking about Mr. ___'s mistress, Snug Avery. Celie’s appreciation is not because she is enjoying the sex with Mr. ____ but she relishes the thought that she, who has been told that she is ugly, is sharing a man with the exotic Snug Avery whom she regards as being very beautiful. Celie is bonding with a lady she has not yet met but has only seen in a picture.

Apart from having visited their brother Albert to inspect their new sister-in-law, Kate and Carrie advise Celie to fight back against the constant abuse from their brother, Albert. Kate says; you got to fight them, Celie, she says. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself.

By giving Celie this advice, the critical sisters are showing concern for and comradeship with Celie and all the women. However, at this point Celie is so broken, so fragmented that she cannot fight. She has always been oppressed and has never learnt to fight. She has no sense of the self. At this point in time Celie cannot imagine any other form of lifestyle. She has seen Nettie fight and run away but does not see what good there
is in that; I think bout Nettie, dead. She fights, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive. Kate cares enough about Celie that she compels Mr. ____ to buy some clothes for Celie. Kate's advice to Celie that she must fight is important because in a world where women are supposed to be docile, the injunction to fight is a rebellious one. Yet it is the only way for a woman to attain selfhood.

When Nettie tells Celie to fight and not let them run over you, Celie is resigned to her fate. Nettie prods Celie further: You got to fight. You got to fight, but Celie’s response is: But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive. At the moment Celie cannot fight. All she knows is to endure and to stay alive. Nettie is calling on Celie to rise and fight to live. Celie may be slow to learn this lesson but when she does learn it, not even Mr. ____ is able to stop her.

When Mr. ____'s attempts to court Nettie fail he dictates that Nettie, who has run away from Fonso's unwelcome sexual advances seeks refuge with Celie, must leave his house. Celie, the wife, has no voice and no say in the matter. She is completely under the dominion of the man in her life. Nettie understands Celie’s predicament as opposed to her being bitter at having been evicted by Mr. ______. Both sisters are more concerned about the other’s plight than they are of their own plight. Nettie feels that leaving Celie alone with Mr. ____ and a bunch of his naughty children is like seeing Celie being buried, buried in a life of abuse and hardship. Celie sees her life as being more than buried, it's worse than that, she reasons. If I was buried, I wouldn't have to work. Her only pillar is God. She says, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along.

Celite offers her support and sisterly solidarity to Corrine, the wife of Reverend Samuel, after a shop clerk treats her rudely. She offers Corrine a seat in the wagon and is careful to keep the woman's pride and sense of
the self intact. She compliments Corrine on her selection of the fabric from the shop. Celie is again faced with having to care for her husband's sick mistress, Shug Avery. This is most unusual but the power of the women to bond together overcomes all obstacles.

A setback to women's solidarity is temporarily experienced when Celie encourages the now married Harpo to beat his wife, Sofia, if he wants her to be compliant. This betrayal is not done out of deliberate ill will towards Sofia or a deliberate act to betray another woman but that this is the only type of normal life of a woman that Celie has known and experienced as a girl, mother and wife. That as a woman she has had to be abused and beaten up by the men in her life, that as a woman and wife it is normal to be beaten by a husband. However, this condition of betrayal is temporal as Sofia forces a confrontation with Celie at which the confusion is cleared up. The confrontation leads to a deeper and enduring friendship and sisterhood of the two women. The quilt that they make together has a strong message. The quilt made from different weak, useless pieces of cloth sewn together produces a new, strong and useful cloth. This suggests that even the black vulnerable women, from diverse backgrounds, weak and oppressed, can become strong and overcome when they, like the pieces of cloth in the quilt, come together.

When Sofia later punches the town's white Mayor and is imprisoned, it is the women in her life, Celie, Shug Avery, Sofia's sisters and Mary Agnes (Squeak) who take the initiative of coming up with a plan to have Sofia released from prison. The bond that the women form becomes very important as this is the bond that helps Mary Agnes. Mary Agnes is able to share her rape experiences with the women and this act functions like her own therapy to selfhood.
Meanwhile Nettie has also been helping another family. She is employed by a missionary family of Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine. In this family, which has adopted Celie’s children, Nettie, who only suspects this fact, has an opportunity to help another woman to look after her sister’s children. So, Celie’s daughter, Olivia, and Celie’s son, Adam, come to be raised under the watchful eye of their aunt, Nettie.

In the course of this Shug Avery helps Celie discover the letters from Nettie that Albert has been hiding all along. She helps Celie read and understand these letters. In the letters, Celie comes to learn that not only is her sister, Nettie, alive but also that her own children are alive and well in Africa. Nettie’s letters also give a glimpse of the lives of black women in Africa. They show the bond of love and sisterhood that can develop among women in Africa especially among multiple wives married to the same man. The letters show that the problem of sexism cuts across continents.

Celi e finally confronts the man she has always regarded as her father and later on confronts her husband Albert. In both confrontations, Shug Avery is instrumental and supportive of Celie. Celie moves to Memphis to live with Shug Avery and whilst there starts and develops a business of her own of making pants. Even in Memphis, the spirit of sisterly love and bonding is present. In her business Celie employs two women, the twins Jerene and Darlene, to make her Folkspants, unlimited. Celie uses Shug Avery’s money to start her business. The first pair of pants that she makes is for Shug Avery.

Later when Shug Avery takes on a new male lover by the name of Germaine, Celie returns to her home in the plantations to visit Albert and the two develop their relationship which grows into one of respectful companionship. Nettie marries Reverend Samuel whose wife has died and
adopts her sister's children, Olivia and Adam. When Fonso dies, Celie and
Nettie inherit their father's home. This gives the women financial security
and freedom.

Meridian unravels aesthetic social concerns in the character
Meridian. Meridian is a young woman coming of age and on her journey
from guilt, loneliness and self-doubt, to self-acceptance, empowerment
and love. Meridian is set on a path to greater self-realisation and endures
the hardships of firmly established elements of racism and sexism and
irrevocably establishes her identity amid the chaos of always approving or
supportive of either the woman or her cause. Meridian rises from a
position of spiritual and physical despair to a new being who is in charge
of her capacities and inner strength.

Meridian goes through different stages of growth. This growth is in
the form of resistance. She goes through as she rises through the period
of the civil rights movement.

Meridian first projects her resistance to the established patriarchal
community when, as a young girl of thirteen, she rejects religion despite
her devout mother's urgings. She decides to live with her mother's
disapproval than conform to a chokingly narrow constructed patriarchal
Christian faith. This shows her determination to be an individual in a
community which is hostile especially to a woman's identity.

At the age of thirteen, Meridian, unwilling to accept Jesus into her
life, encounters the wrath of her mother who withdraws her love from her.
The religious belief of Meridian's mother focuses attention on God alone
and neglects the other human beings whom God created. The ultimate in
this belief is to please God even if doing so unfairly hurts other people.
The focus of such individuals is God's forgiveness. Like Gabriel who
neglected his own numerous sins to punish others for their one sin in the past. His claim when challenged of this is that he is only answerable to God and that this God has already forgiven him. Meridian's fraught relationship with her mother casts a shadow over much of her life. Meridian struggles to overcome this and other obstacles in her search for the sense of the self, self-awareness and self-acceptance.

This feeling continues to haunt Meridian well of belonging. She is unsure of the existence of God and her own relationship with the spiritual word. She finds that traditional paths and explanations do not satisfy or comfort her.

While at school, Meridian fails to complete a speech which she has always taken for granted and recited constantly. She is not able to complete the speech because she feels that the speech does not reflect what she believes in. She feels that there is no truth in the words that she speaks. Meridian was explaining to her mother that for the first time she really listened to what she was saying, knew she didn't believe it, and was so distracted by this revelation that she could not make the rest of her speech. While her mother urges her to pray, Miss Winters supports her stance. While Meridian does not get her mother's support, she has another woman to support her.

Meridian further asserts herself as a nonconformist when she boldly gives up her child and her role as a mother to pursue a college education. Contrary to what a conformist would feel, Meridian's feelings are unique; when she gave him away she did so with a light heart. She did not look back, believing she had saved a small person's life. Meridian reasons that giving her son away is the best thing for both the child and herself contrary to community's expectations. This is not an easy decision to make for Meridian as she has the disapproval of her mother.
Meridian is forced to live with her mother's disapproval. Like an act of penance, Meridian decides to dedicate her life to the civil rights campaign. She tries to give the Wild Child, whom the community calls Wile Chile, a chance to integrate into the larger community then and later, following the Wild Child's sudden death, Meridian tries to give the Wild Child a proper funeral. She gets involved with the voter education movement in which she does not affirm to the destruction of human life in the name of a revolution. All these activities that Meridian involves herself in are without the approval of the Saxon College authorities. In these acts Meridian is living up to her identity as a nonconformist. In these activities for the good of the broader community Meridian finds satisfaction. She has discovered something that is truth to her. She has taken it upon herself to make her own decisions and take responsibility for her actions and shape her own destiny.

Meridian is strong enough in her quest for the sense of the self to overcome the loss of her husband, child, her lover, Truman Held, who marries Lynne the white woman and her friend Anne-Marion who is bent on convincing Meridian to be willing to kill for the sake of the revolution. Meridian proves that she has prowess to negotiate her way through life. Her community, family and friends have proved not to be reliable. Increasingly, Meridian has got to learn to depend on herself more and more. She exists as an individual, aiming for her freedom and ability to make her own choices. The Civil Rights Movement becomes, for her, a unique vocation for which she is ready to die. This is evidenced when she is seen facing a military tank in order to fight for the children to see the mummy. She leads her community to confront the white racist community with the corpse of a drowned boy in protest against segregation. She is passionate about her actions and acts from her own convictions to help the various communities she lives in. Meridian has chosen to live in the
south like a servant and a saint among the people she lives with despite struggling with her own identity. She takes time to think about her views and beliefs from her own perspective. Meridian takes interest in community matters. She realises that the black people are not allowed to swim in the public swimming pool and the Mayor and other white authorities have refused to build them one of their own. She cannot contain the fact that several black children drown in the floods while swimming in ditches that served as makeshift pools. Meridian decides to do something about this plight of the people; this act produces results as the ponds are drained of the water. She gets her results just like she does on the issue of the mummy in the the deceit that the whites were trying to play on the black people. The mummy was made of plastic and the children are glad that they did not have to wait till Thursday when they would have had to pay to see the fake mummy.

Meridian shows her continued growth when she is able to face the two people who have caused her pain in her life; Lynne and Truman. At the time that these two people pass through a crisis following the death of their daughter Camara, Meridian mediates between these two and manages to remain friends with both of them notwithstanding the circumstances prevailing. She takes responsibility for her actions and is committed in her decision to serve. Meridian is at the service of Truman and Lynne: Through reaching out to the two people who have hurt her, Meridian is able to forgive and in turn free herself from the bondage that has held her all along. This is reminiscent of the scene in which Miss Winters plays the mother figure to Meridian in Saxon College when Meridian gets sick. She forgives Meridian as though on behalf of her biological mother who has thus far not forgiven Meridian. Miss Winters comforts Meridian, first after Meridian fails to recite a speech and later when she is very ill at Saxon College. In these moments, women are seen giving each other support in challenging times. By stepping into the shoes
of Meridian's mother, Miss Winters helps Meridian attain a forgiveness that she needs to spur her towards personal forgiveness and growth.

The act of forgiveness enables Meridian to understand her outer world even better. She realises that her country is owned by the rich and that the rich must be relieved of this ownership before freedom means anything to her community. Meridian enters a modern church and reflects on the question of the morality of killing for justice. Meridian gets filled with so much rage that she feels that the rich and the racist of the world should stand in fear of her because, though apparently weak and penniless, a little crazy and without power.

Meridian turns to the Civil Rights movement which is strong during this time. The movement campaigns for the rights of the people of color. It also educates people on the importance of their participating in voting. In the process the members of the civil rights movement are beaten and arrested by those that oppose them especially the police and white racists.

She makes sacrifices for the movement but her dedication is in question as she cannot commit herself to kill for the movement. Meridian, as a result, feels more and more ostracised from the movement until she is compelled to work and live among the mostly poor and impoverished rural communities of the South. Meridian lives among these people and helps out in all sorts of ways; from washing dishes to gardening. The communities accept her for who she is and in turn sustain her by giving her provisions, from daily food to a cow.

Meridian's selfless service, suffering and perseverance are like opportunities offered for her atonement and open doors for Meridian to attain self acceptance. When Meridian is well again, she rises out of her
sick bed and goes out into the future with a lot of confidence and self assurance. She finally is able to forgive herself and learns to love and accept herself for who she is.

Meridian is selfless in her service to her community. She works very hard but her bravery and determination are especially prominent. She challenges a tank pointing at her. The result of this is the emergence of a calm, sustaining and growing self awareness. Whereas at the start of the novel Meridian is mostly a broken and damaged individual, mourning about the various loses that she experiences, in the end she emerges as a whole individual. Her commitment to community service has helped her overcome the love that her mother has deprived her. The struggle has given her the much needed wisdom that she needs to survive and regain her lost identity.

She refuses the flattery of men. When Truman offers her a ride in his new car, Meridian turns him down explaining that she prefers to walk. While Truman sees this as a form of the old fashioned protest, Meridian is aware that she is no longer going to be co-modified by any man and that she will stand on her own two feet and not allow anyone to define a life for her.

Before, Meridian has tried to base her identity on other people, like her mother, but has failed. She tries to base it on the Civil Rights movement but again fails. She even tries to base it on her college institution but this disappoints her as well. She ultimately realises that she has got to rely on herself for her self definition and realisation of her sense of the self. Meridian now understands that the respect she owed her life has to continue. She realises that this existence extended beyond herself to those around her.
This does not come out as a contradiction on the part of Meridian that even the contemplation of murder required incredible delicacy as it required incredible spiritual work, the environment and reasons must be clear. To Meridian, it is only in a church, surrounded by the righteous guidance of the people's memories, that she can even approach the concept of retaliatory murder. Meridian believes that it is only among the pious that this idea can both comfort and uplift.

Meridian is now able to reach out and claim her place in her space: to walk behind the revolutionaries - those who know that they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the blacks - to sing for them when they stop to wash off the blood and find that their throats are too chocked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing. This realisation demonstrates that Meridian has found her sense of identity and that she has found and claimed a role in her community. She has made a choice of what her position and role in society is. Her community work and activism become her way of life. Teaching, conducting voter education and protesting on behalf of her communities become her major activities. With the passage of time she grows in self confidence but becomes poorer materially, owning less and less. Meridian is full of confidence and vigorously goes on to face the challenge of voter registration and is able to face the complexities that confront her clients and offer help beyond the voter sensitisation exercise. Truman and Meridian are together as they continue with the lobbying for people to register as voters. They become practical in meeting the people at their point of need, helping with the domestic work and providing solutions to family disputes as in the case of the Treasure sisters, Margaret and Lucille. Meridian has made her own choice and is responsible for it. Her life is dedicated to service of the local communities.
When confronted with the situation of a child who is said to have killed her child, Meridian's mind goes back to her son. This forces Meridian into her sleeping bag weeping underneath Truman's trembling arm. Her heart is roused to compassion for her son. Her heart, however, refuses the girl child who killed her child. Meridian's heart has been moved to life but not to emotions. She is demonstrating that she has found her identity in her environment and attained a selfhood. She now has a strong and stable heart which she calls a fucking heart of stone. Meridian is now able to warm up to life as expressed in her ooeom: Truman, in the true tradition of Alice Walker of not neglecting the men, feels some warmth in a moment of regeneration. Meridian sleeps in his arms that night.

Truman, feeling maternal over Meridian, wipes Meridian's forehead with a cloth soaked in cold water more like an act of baptism. Meridian recognises that this water does vanish into the sand and that she and Truman are cast out alone to heal and recreate themselves. For Meridian, this self recreation is the asserting of who she is the acknowledgement of her selfhood.

Truman's quest to claim Meridian's love once again is challenged by Meridian. She loves Truman but not as before. She has set Truman free to be whoever and whatever he wants to be. However, Truman is not free to think that Meridian is a fool. Meridian does not allow anyone, even Truman to dominate her.

Meridian, now recovered and strong enough, gets ready to move on. She has nothing to pack as she owns nothing. Her inner growth with her newly found sense of identity is evident even on her physical self. Her hair has grown again. She has returned to the world cleansed of sickness. This new Meridian has grown out of the old. This new part of her is sure and ready even eager for the world. Meridian has allowed ideas, no mater
where they came from, to penetrate her deeply and she gets to affirm that her value is in her individuality and not in being in the company of other people. She has divested herself of dependence on the old notions of what a good woman ought to be.

As Meridian departs, Truman feels the room begin to turn and he falls to the floor. A moment later, dizzy, he gets into Meridian's sleeping bag shakily. Truman literally fits into the walk that Meridian has just completed. He fits into Meridian's sleeping bag like in a womb or more appropriately a tomb from which he is supposed to be born again, to resurrect, like Meridian, into a fully grown human being with a proper sense of the self. He, too, Like Albert, is to perform his penance and is yet to discover his identity and claim a place for himself in his space.

When the novel starts, we are introduced to Celie who writes to God narrating the horrors of her life. Celie leads us into the story of her life in her letters. She shows us that her life begins as a virtual slave who has been a victim of racism and sexism. She has been a victim of men and has born the burden of traditional sex roles and many abuses and social injustices. Like the mother in Langston Hughes poem, Celie does not give up. At first she teaches herself to endure, to survive, to stay alive. She imagines herself to be wood. Bending but not breaking. At this point Celie has no sense of identity and is not her individual self.

Celie's journey towards her attainment of the self identity proves to be a long one. Her sense of self worth and identity grows as Celie comes to understand her body, her past and the truth about her life. The point is that as individuals come to know, to understand themselves and their surroundings and get a better understanding about life's realities, they become more liberated and more confident about themselves. Like the Invisible Man says, if you do not know where you are, then you probably
do not know who you are. The problem of Celie's identity is also a question of place. An individual's place or space in the universe affects how the individual will perceive his or her identity. By space the word takes on more meaning than merely the physical place of residence. The physical location is important but more important is the social space or place that an individual occupies in society. An individual may accept a place given to him by society or may reach out to take a place for himself or herself in that society. This is also the case with regard to Celie.

Self knowledge also implies education about life. This education comes from life's experience, the community as in the practised norms of society and through formal education. Celie learns a lot more things with age. As she gets more experience from her life, she gets to learn the prevailing rules of society, rules of conduct and of survival. Then she has all the people around her encouraging her and urging her on. Another form of education comes from the formal education as represented by Miss Beasley. Nettie, too, implores Celie to learn, to learn to read and write, to gain more knowledge.

Celie has the support of her fellow women who continually prod her to fight. These women also prove to be a dependable pillar of support for Celie. Even as they urge Celie to fight for herself, they are by her side providing Celie with the much needed moral, material, spiritual and financial support. They form a solid rock on which Celie can stand as she embarks on her long walk to rebellion and eventual freedom.

Celie's marriage to Mr. ______ enables her to explore the outer world. The trip that Mr. ____ takes Celie on to town is equally important. This is the first time that Celie goes into town. This enables Celie to locate herself. She has gone to town and she understands now that she has lived on a plantation. This distinction enables Celie to see the differences, varieties and possibilities that the outer world can offer. She
notices the differences in the number of people around her and notices their dressing. She understands that life has differences and that people make choices. This realisation is important because confinement of a woman is a patriarchal notion that keeps the woman in servitude. As Celie breaks through this confinement she embarks on her journey to selfhood.

When Celie meets her baby daughter Olivia with Samuel's wife, Corrine, she begins to listen more to herself. She instinctively knows that baby Olivia is her baby; I think she mine. My heart say she mine. Life is not all about reason or logic. There is intuition, too. This intuitive assertiveness helps Celie to listen to herself just like other women in her life have often compelled her to fight for herself. This teaches Celie to think about herself and to learn to respect what she feels about herself. Celie begins to become aware of her individuality and personality.

All the prodding that Celie has been getting, from her women friends and from her sister, to fight for herself, begin to bear fruit in a most interesting way. After advising Harpo to beat Sofia, Celie begins to reflect on what she has done. Having already gained the skill to listen to herself, Celie begins to hear her inner voice; And Celie wastes no time in trusting the judgement of her inner voice. She is strong enough to name the person that she has sinned against Sofia. I sin against Sofia spirit. 230 Celie has begun to see objectively about what is wrong and what is right.

When Sofia comes marching up the path to Mr. ______'s house, Celie has already realised her sin. Sofia helps Celie put into words exactly what her sin is; just want you to know I looked to you for help. 231 Sofia's point, which she makes clearer later on, is that as women she expected Celie to stand by her side in the face of male oppression. That Celie should have advised Harpo against beating her up as opposed to advising him to be violent to Sofia. And Sofia spells out exactly how Celie has
committed her sin, you told Harpo to beat me. Sofia is accusing Celie of having encouraged a man to abuse her fellow woman. And as a result of the abomination that Celie has committed, Sofia returns all the things that Celie has given her; the curtains and the thread and pays Celie a dollar for having used her (Celite's) things.

This proves too much for Celie and she protests at which Sofia asks the inevitable question. She asks Celie why she encouraged a man to beat her. What you say it for? It is Celie's honest answer that changes Sofia's anger to sadness. I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it because I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't. Celie has finally faced the ghost that has been tormenting her all the years of her life. Sofia, however, does not understand her and she has to ask what it is that she does that Celie does not do. Celie spells out her greatest problem: Fight. Celie has always endured by manipulating her emotions, by telling herself that she is wood. Now she realises that it is not enough to just live, to just survive and she opens up to another human being, a woman, Sofia. All along she has confided only in God but for the first time she flourishes in the company of another woman. This encounter proves to trigger the re-education of Celie. Sofia tells Celie;

Similarly, a woman is not safe in a world run and dominated by men. Sofia is in a sense re-educating Celie. The gist of her statement is that a girl child is not safe in a family of men and as a result no woman is safe in the world of men. The implication of her statement is what she has said before, that women have got to look after each other, that women should stand together in the face of male oppression, that women must support each other, help each other and defend each other from the aggression of men. Sofia goes on to teach Celie the importance of this and gives her a picture of how far she is willing to go in order to defend her freedom and independence: I used to hunt game with bow and arrow, she say. Her
point is clear, however much she may love a man, she will not allow that man and indeed, any other man, to abuse her. She would kill that man first before allowing him to abuse her. This is an important lesson for Celie. Sofia goes on to tell Celie about her family: By telling Celie that all the girls in her family stick together, Sofia is merely repeating the fact that all women must stick together in order to survive.

Another lesson that Sofia teaches Celie is about anger and the ability for self expression. Celie’s situation is complicated by her religious beliefs. She believes in God and Fonso has taught her that the only being she can safely confide in is God. Celie has just broken one aspect of this by confiding in Sofia about her weakness of not fighting back for herself. Now Sofia asks Celie what she does when she is angry. Celie’s answer is that when she is mad or angry she gets sick and feels like throwing up, that she just feels terrible. Then after that she feels nothing. This causes Sofia to frown.

Another problem concerns her beliefs. She acknowledges that at times she has gotten angry with her mother but then her mother was ill and she could not indefinitely be angry with her. Regarding the man she always knew as her father, Celie always remembers the Biblical teaching that she has been taught which has required her to honour her father and her mother no matter what the circumstances or provocation or abuse. During the moments when she is provoked or offended by her father, Celie talks to the Old Maker, God. And when the offending party is her husband, Celie is more at a loss. She just shrugs her shoulders. She has been taught by religion to endure as this life on earth is temporal. She looks forward to a time when this life on earth will be over and she will die and go to heaven, after all heaven lasts for ever she says. The implication of this belief is that if one endures the suffering on this earth then that person will enjoy life in the eternity of heaven. The hope is that the
oppressor is going to be punished in hell, a place of suffering and whose fire of sulphur and brimstone is very fierce and burns with a blue flame. Those who will have been the victims of oppression will live to enjoy a life of bliss, praising God every minute mixing even with wild creatures like lions. This is supposed to give solace to the oppressed. It is this behaviour and belief that Sofia challenges. She bursts out at Celie; you ought to bash Mr. ____ head open, she say. Think about heaven later. A well delivered lesson by Sofia but at the moment, it looks like it will take Celie more lessons and probing for her to implement what she learns. The lesson ended, the two women reconcile and start to make a quilt together. Their bond solidifies.

Celie's path to self identity continues to develop because for once someone does something very special for her. The abused and isolated Celie has successfully nursed Shug Avery back to health. Shug Avery has been able to get Celie attend her singing sessions in Harpo's juke joint. Despite Mr. ____'s protestations that wives should not go to night clubs, Shug Avery gets her way. After Celie has sung a song in honour of Mr. ____., she also does one that she has been humming during her recovery. The song is publicly dedicated to Celie. Shug Avery gives the song the title; Miss Celie's Song. This is the first time that anyone has made something and named it after me, Celie observes. Celie's heart comes to life. Celie has emerged from the plantation where there is no radio or record player. It is the first time that she has come to a night club.

Shug Avery's dedication to and appreciation of Celie makes Celie realise that she is of value to herself and to Shug Avery. The song makes her feel special. This truth is incredible to Celie and she cannot avoid but hum along as Shug Avery sings the song. She, for the first time since Nettie left, feels special and loved. Celie is for once happy. Shug Avery
makes her dedication song public. Celie, who has been told that she is ugly, is thanked from the stage for all to hear by her fellow woman.

Shug Avery does not stop at this point. Celie has broken her silence and is now talking with Shug Avery and adds yet another name to persons she opens up to, Sofia and now Shug Avery. Celie confides in Shug Avery that Mr. ____ beats her whenever Shug Avery is out. Celie reveals she is beaten for no apparent reason other than that she is what she is. She is being beaten for being who she is. She is not Shug Avery and she is not Annie Julia. And for this Mr. ____ beats her. Shug Avery declares Shug Avery is sticking with Celie. The lesson that Sofia gave to Celie is being repeated: ladies must stick together. This spirit of sisterhood blossoms and even becomes more and more intimate as the two women continue to bond in their relationship. The two women embrace and Shug Avery kisses Celie on the fleshy part of the shoulder.

Shug Avery, soon, delivers yet another important lesson to Celie. As the two women discuss matters of their sexuality, Shug Avery discovers that although Celie has been repeatedly raped, she has never appreciated sex or love making. To Shug Avery, this means that Celie is still a virgin because she has never experienced any meaningful love making. Shug Avery is implying that until Celie experiences some meaningful love making, she will still be a virgin. This concept of virginity turns into a private symbol when we realise that Celie does not know herself; her body and has no identity or self image of her own. And so in all respects Celie is an abused virgin, a raped virgin. She can be referred to as an abused virgin because she has been raped but has never discovered the joy of love making. She has known nothing but pain in her life.

Shug Avery takes Celie on an important exploration of her body. Shug Avery's lesson leads to the growth of Celie as a woman as she
discovers her physical being and her other emotions that have been abused and suppressed.

When Celie confesses to Shug Avery that she has never enjoyed sex, Shug Avery gives Celie a short but detailed sex education: Shug Avery is guiding Celie towards her self identity and towards self love. It is only when individuals have learnt to identify themselves as individuals, when they have learnt to appreciate themselves and their bodies that they finally come to love themselves. It is only when people love their being that they can appreciate and love other people. Shug Avery accepts Celie's invitation to accompany her on her journey to discovery. You come with me while I look, I say. Shug Avery, once again, responds positively like she did to Celie's care. Shug Avery is a sure and dependable companion. Celie delegates Shug Avery to guard the door as Celie takes the journey to have a look at who she is. The use of the mirror is very important. Celie is having a look at her image in the mirror. Celie has never before looked critically at herself. She has looked into a mirror before. At the other times she has looked into the mirror it has been for the sake of others, in order for her to see if she looks presentable. This time around she looks into the mirror for a different reason, to see and to know how her image looks like. She does this for herself. Shug Avery acts like Celie's Midwife. She is at the door to ensure that the delivery is done safely and without interruption or obstruction.

Celie's birth pains are obvious; ugh, she gasps. Celie is exploring the interior of her being. Like a journey into the bush, the undeveloped area, the remote psych of her being, her sub consciousness, to examine who she really is. Then my lips be black, she observes. Celie has gained the power of observation of how her image looks like.
Celie's exploratory skills are getting deeper and sharper; then inside look like a wet rose. Celie begins to make associations. She associates her inside with the wet rose, a symbol of freshness, youthfulness and beauty. This image that Celie has seen in the mirror agrees with Shug Avery’s observation that Celie is beautiful and is still a virgin. Celie is so in love with what she sees that she has to seek confirmation if it is indeed hers: It mines. The claim seems more of a celebration. But then anxiety sets in, where is the button? In the midst of all the hair, Shug Avery guides her still: Right up near the top, she says. Celie is still unsure and first looks at Shug Avery before gaining enough confidence to get to the top and touch the button with her finger. Like a newly born baby learning her first walking steps, Celie continues with her exploration. And Celie gets her immediate reward. A little shiver goes through her body.

Shug Avery encourages Celie to go further and explore her titties. As Celie hauls up her dress to look at her titties she remembers her lost babies and remembers the pleasure of having them suckle at her breasts. This association of her titties to the babies gives the symbol of life. The breast gives life to the newly born baby. The breasts give sustenance to life. Celie is the newly born virgin who is yet to start to grow from her midwife turned mother figure, Shug Avery.

Just like Shug Avery replaces the photograph that Celie carries, Shug Avery's mirroring helps Celie to replace the void in her troublesome past. Celie is able, through this mirroring act, to take possession of her body and encourages her to seek selfhood through spoken language. Her apparent desire for selfhood is initiated in this crucial mirror scene in which Shug Avery helps initiate Celie’s desire for selfhood.
Celie's immediate response abnegates her previous annihilation and ignorance of her body; it mine, I say. Previously, Celie has cared little about herself or her sexual feelings, and even referred to sex with Mr. _____ as nothing more than him doing his business. Now Celie recognises her genitals as one enjoyable part of a complete self; I look at her and touch it with my finger. A little shiver go through me ... just enough to tell me this the right button. Celie experiences an epiphany-like moment that leads to a fuller, more coherent sense of self. In this moment the presence of a literal mirror enables the protagonist Celie to move from an experience of fragmentation to a vision of a more unified state of self-possession. Celie's response is like that of a child in Lacan's mirror stage. Celie has moved from a pre-mirror experience of passivity and fragmentation to a joy of fusion with a Gestalt of human form. Celie now recognises and claims the fragmented parts of her body, taking pleasure in that reclamation. Celie's clitoris which has largely remained undiscovered awakens her. Shug and Celie, by resorting to the clitoris for sexual satisfaction, have regressed to a stage which Freud describes as infantile. They have also challenged the patriarchal imposed notion that only heterosexual relationships are normal. They also challenge the notion that mature vaginal orgasm is the only normal way for a woman to experience orgasm. This society has imposed on its women psychological clitoridectomy like the clitoridectomy done on Tashi in Africa.

Celie gives credit to her midwife; I don't care if you sleep with him I say. But this is with some sacrifice, for as Shug Avery goes and beds Mr. _____, Celie pulls her quilt over her head and finger her little button and titties and cry.4

Celie's crying, among many other things, implies an awakening. From projecting herself as wood without feelings, Celie is now human and can feel, consequently her crying. The self examination, exploration and
di discovery have produced results. Celie is conscious of her surroundings and aware of what is happening around her and is giving an emotional response.

Celia later learns that Sofia has had a child with another man other than Harpo. Sofia gives Celie a lesson, she says; Life doesn't stop just because you leave home, Miss Celie. Celie remembers that hers stopped when she left her mother's home. She realises that her life stopped further with Mr. _______. What she also recognises however is the fact that her life has just started because of Shug Avery. And Celie notes her own admiration of Shug Avery; Celie's emotions are getting stronger and stronger. Eventually, she asks Shug Avery to stop sleeping with Mr. ______ and Shug Avery grants the request. The two women begin sleeping together, enjoying their romance.

Upon Celie's return to the plantation, she witnesses the conversation between Harpo and Sofia. Harpo projects the patriarchal notion that a mother of five children cannot hang out in a juke joint at night. Sofia challenges this view and tells Harpo that a woman needs a little fun once in a while.

The women are asserting themselves more and more. Sofia, too, beats up the Mayor in the presence of her prize fighter boyfriend who is just looking on. Sofia does not allow the boyfriend to join in because she knows that she has broken a racist law by beating the Mayor. The result of this action is a prison sentence. Sofia wants her boyfriend to stay clear of the fight because she wants him to take care of the Children. Sofia is arrested and imprisoned. In prison Sofia is broken in spirit and it takes the solidarity of the women to get her released. Mr. _______ and Sofia's boyfriend, the prize fighter join Celie, Shug Avery, Odessa and two more of Sofia's sisters to plan the release of Sofia. The ladies come up with a
plan that Sofia's boyfriend feels sounds like Uncle Tomming. In this planning, the women take an active role and actually assign Mary Agnes to execute the plan. It is in the execution of this plan that Mary Agnes is raped. She returns from executing the plan with a limp, her dress ripped, her hat missing and with one heel of her shoe off the shoe.

Mary Agnes shares her horrible experiences with her fellow women who have urged her to share. They challenge her to share with them if not with God. It is at this moment that Mary Agnes takes up Celie’s advice to make Harpo, her boyfriend, call her by her real name of Mary Agnes and not by her nick name of Squeak. In the face of adversity the women show strength to rise to the occasion and assert their presence. The interaction that Celie is having with her fellow women is proving to be very educative for her. She is being exposed to her fellow women who openly challenge the existing patriarchal status quo. Celie is being embraced in a larger family of the community. She sees joint effort at work and the set-backs that come. She sees the sisterhood of the women at work as they provide therapeutic healing to Mary Agnes by listening to her story. While Celie is observing, getting involved and even advising other women like Mary Agnes to stand up for themselves, we are yet to see Celie fight for herself. Having discovered her identity, Celie has seen others fight but she is yet to grow and fight.

The bonding of the women folk is shown to be across race. Eleanor Jane, daughter of Miss Millie, stands up for Sofia each time she is victimised. Eleanor Jane proves to be faithful to Sofia long after Sofia becomes a free woman. She grows up to work for Sofia.

Celia’s mother figure, Shug Avery, goes away but returns later with a husband, Grady. Celie has an instant dislike for Grady. Celie and Shug Avery are now two married women. While Mr. ____ and Grady spend the
whole Christmas drinking beer, Celie and Shug Avery share the house work. No longer is Celie at the service of Shug Avery. They cook, talk and clean the house together. The two women talk more and more. Shug Avery discloses that once Celie told her that Mr. _____ beats her and never works, her feelings for him changed. Shug Avery discloses that had Celie been her wife, she would have covered her up with kisses instead of kicks and would have worked hard for Celie. Upon learning that Celie still does not enjoy sex, Shug Avery declares Celie still a virgin.

Shug Avery, in declaring Celie a virgin, is suggesting a rebellious way of thinking: virgins lose out on life. She is suggesting that the traditional patriarchal value attached to virginity only blindfolds women and prevents them from living and enjoying their lives. Shug Avery’s view in this case labels virginity as a male value which negates the status of the woman. Shug Avery is celebrating the loss of virginity. Shug Avery does not shun the tag of Shug. To the contrary, she celebrates it as much as she freely uses the term fuck to the shock of the reader. She uses the name in her adverts for her shows. The two terms are socially shunned because they are offensive terms. But then this is in a language which feminists say is male constructed and biased in favour of the patriarchal society.

Sexual morality, The Color Purple suggests, is a male constructed value which only benefits the man. Fonso has repeatedly raped Celie while being married to her mother. Mr. _____ is having a public steamy extra-marital relationship while in marriage with Annie Julia and has not stopped while being in marriage with Celie. Yet, Fonso calls Celie spoiled twice because she has had sex out of wedlock and has had two children. And Annie Julia is killed by a man. The attitude and behaviour of the men towards the women is oppressive and restrictive.
Shug Avery is very much aware of the bias of society. She has lived it and has taken control of her relationships. She knows that it's time Celie lived. Shug Avery, the mother figure, takes over the show. Like a mother interested in the growth of her daughter, Shug Avery asks if she can sleep together with Celie. Celie agrees and in bed, they start to talk. Soon, Shug Avery introduces her next lesson to Celie; love making. Shug Avery does not use this socially respectable but restrictive phrase making love. She chooses a word which is free from morality, fuck. Celie, who has associated this word with rape and brutality, finds the word nasty. But Shug Avery is literally shocking Celie from her comfort zone.5

She leads Celie into her past in a form of counselling. Celie remembers the horrors of her past and is overcome by them and breaks down into tears. This time around, she has someone who cares for her with her. She needs not go through this trauma alone. Shug Avery nurses her; Oh, Miss Celie, she says. And put her arms around me. Signs of Celie's healing and growth are clear. As Shug Avery comforts her, Celie's concentration turns to Shug Avery's black and smooth arms which she observes as glowing in the light of the lamp.

Shug Avery has delivered a lesson she started a long time ago. Celie has come a long way to begin feeling good about herself. She has finally bonded with someone. Avery has broken Celie's virginity. Celie's growth has continued, now that her mother figure has successfully gotten her on her path to walking, to growth. Alice Walker has deliberately used the forbidden to break free from the bonds of a patriarchal community to liberate an oppressed woman. Walker's message is clear; to attain self identity, a woman would have to break some of society's rigid norms which oppress her. The two women are fucking each other. The society is mostly patriarchal and so are its norms and rules. These are the norms and rules which oppress the woman. Breaking these norms and rules
proves to be the key to the attainment of the self identity of a woman. In this state of a rebel, a woman will find fullness, happiness and an identity. It is no wonder that the sexual rebellion that Shug Avery and Celie commit leaves Celie acting like a little lost baby.

The physical bonding between Shug Avery and Celie becomes regular. Celie describes how they sleep. Shug Avery has her back on Celie who has her arms round Shug Avery’s waist. Celie feels like heaven. She no longer has to persevere and endure abuse, rape, pain and suffering in order to feel heaven when she dies like her religion has taught her. She is alive and has experienced heaven. The women stick together to ensure that Mary Agnes gets her singing career underway. The protestations of Harpo are quickly over come through reasoning. Celie still bites her tongue in her new image. She, out of habit, refers to Mary Agnes as Squeak but is quick to correct herself. This self correction shows awareness that a woman needs respect and dignity. Unwelcome nick names robe people of their real identity.

The women also turn other tables around. Shug Avery suggests that dressed right, Mary Agnes’ singing would bring in more customers and money; Mary Agnes, listening to you sing, folks git to think bout a good screw. When this shocks Mary Agnes, Shug Avery asks what is too shameful about putting singing and dancing and fucking together. She laughs at this and assures Mary Agnes that the Niggers are going to listen and respect her. The women are taking paths that the patriarchal society will not permit a woman to do. They are exercising their freedom to assert themselves.

Celie has come far. She is bonding with her fellow women and is slowly gaining self confidence. Yet she is not fully positioned in her community. She has no independence and her past is still unclear. She
has so many unanswered questions. Her past is unclear and while she is aware of her present physical and emotional location, she has no notion of the complete truth about herself.

Celie's Pandora's Box is brought to the fore soon after. Celie is holding a letter in her hands from her long lost love, her sister, Nettie. Contact with Nettie's letter brings forth multitudes of pieces of information that Celie has been yearning for. These pieces of information prove to be explosive as they spur forth Celie's energies to assert her and give space to her self identity. The pieces of information from the letters help situate Celie more in her community and further help to unearth truths that enable Celie to move forward and fight for herself.\(^6\)

Celie, after a very long time, gets to know that her sister Nettie is alive. She learns that Mr. ____ has been more than cruel to her as he has been hiding her letters from Nettie. Celie gets to learn that her children, Olivia and Adam are alive. Celie learns that her sister and her children are in Africa, that they have been raised by a missionary family of Corrine and her husband, Reverend Samuel, among the Olinka people of Africa. She learns that her children had been given away by Fonso who, all along, she thought was her father. Celie is shocked but relieved to learn that the man she always thought was her father and had repeatedly raped her is actually her step father.

This shakes Celie to the roots. All she can think about is to kill Mr. ____ for keeping Nettie's letters hidden from her. Shug Avery proves, yet again, to be Celie's mother figure. She sympathises with Celie and prevents her from killing Mr. ____ and helps her retrieve more letters from Nettie that Mr. ____ has hidden away from Celie.
In this talk, Shug Avery reveals a lot of important pieces of information; her mother hated her because she loved to fuck to touch and was very sweet. She uses the term which is not easily acceptable among decent folk fuck. Her mother thought touching the body was not a decent thing to do. This is the same touching which is essential to ensuring that the woman experiences the ecstasy in the sexual act. Shug Avery’s mother reflects the patriarchal view which does not expect women to enjoy sex. Shug Avery’s mother also, for the first time, tells us her real name, Lillie. In this, Shug Avery is presented as a deviant character, a rebel in her community. She is a rebel in her conduct, her speech and her identity. She loves to fuck, she uses the word fuck freely and she retains an identity of Shug as her name. This is a name few would retain in a patriarchal society. It now becomes clear why the preacher cannot name Shug Avery in his denunciation of the Queen Honeybee from the pulpit. It would have implied to the preacher that Shug Avery and her lifestyle were sweet.

When Shug Avery had her third child out of wedlock with Albert, she was turned out of her parents’ home. Shug Avery went to live with her mother’s wild sister who her mother said resembled Shug Avery. She, like Shug Avery, drank, fought, and loved to death. She worked in a madhouse as a cook. She would feed fifty men and screw fifty-five. Shug Avery, herself confesses that she used to fuck in the open so much that they gave fucking a bad name.

Shug Avery confesses that she treated Mr. ____’s first wife, Annie Julia, badly. Annie Julia went to school with Shug Avery. Shug Avery also confesses that she treated Celie like a servant because she had gotten married to Mr. ____. Shug Avery tells Celie that this bad treatment of Celie was all in vain because she never wanted Mr. ____ for a husband.
This type of confession helps develop confidence among the women. They can afford to be candid with one another.

Shug Avery is in a sense putting Celie's pain in a broader context: that all women suffer some pain of one kind or another and that this pain originates from both men and women. Shug Avery is trying to make Celie realise that errors do not occur because one is male. That anyone can err. Later Shug Avery will teach Celie that despite the wrong things that Mr. _____ has done to Celie, he is still a human being. Shug Avery's argument is enhanced by another from Nettie. Nettie, in her letters, tells Celie that not all black men in the world are mean like Fonso or Albert. She also tells Celie that black women need not be beaten down like their mother was. Nettie educates Celie that life can be different, that life can be better.

The letters from Nettie have one other strong message for Celie, fight: You got to fight. Nettie tells her own story of how she had to fight Mr. _____ when he followed her after he had chased her from his home.

Nettie writes to Celie on the importance of the need to learn and to know. At this point, the reader hopes that Celie will come to know a lot more from the letters from Nettie. It is also hoped that the knowing will put Celie on track to being a fully grown being.

It does not take long before Nettie starts sharing what she knows with Celie. The knowledge that Celie gets proves to be liberating. Celie, all along, has confided in God. Even when she has not been able to talk to Him, she has written to Him. It is this concept of God that Nettie starts to re-educate Celie on. For Celie, God is male, white, elderly and all powerful. This image of God, apart from sustaining Celie as her confidant, has been an image of oppression. Celie has, all her life been oppressed by the male. All black people have been under white oppression. And all
power, authority and economic advantage have been dominated by the male. In having God as her confidant Celie has always been under the watchful eye of the oppressive male. It is this image that Nettie starts to destroy much to the benefit of Celie.

Nettie writes to Celie and tells her that each time one reads the Bible, one need to pay attention to the word. She argues that it is the pictures that have been done to represent biblical figures that fool a person. Nettie illustrates her point by referring to the fact that the Bible makes reference to Egypt and Ethiopia. She points out that Egypt is in Africa and that the Biblical reference to Ethiopia referred to the whole of the African continent whose people are the people of color. Nettie argues that this is different from the pictures which illustrate the Biblical lands and peoples as being exclusively white. Nettie goes on to illustrate to Celie that even the God figurehead has some color in its ranks. She argues; that’s why the Bible says that Jesus Christ had hair like lamb’s wool. Lamb’s wool is not straight, Celie. It’s even curly. By attacking the Bible, Nettie attacks one of the very foundations of patriarchal communities.

Race, sex and class divisions are prevalent even at the mission society in New York, as Nettie reveals. At the society house all the pictures hanging on the walls are pictures of white men. The pictures that the missionary societies of England and America have given Reverend Samuel’s team are all in the image of the white men; pictures of Christ, the Apostles, Mary, Livingstone, Stanley to mention but a few.

There are no pictures of white women, black men and black women. The white woman in Africa believes that black people she calls natives are an entirely different species from what she calls Europeans. These realities among the missionary people prove that racism, sexism and class
visions are engraved on the minds of the missionaries. Celie is now supposed to know that the injustices that she has suffered are suffered by many more people across the whole world. The challenge for Celie is clear. Does she sit back and cry that this is how things have always been or must she join the army of many women fighting injustice. This fight will include the rejection of Christianity as presented by the missionaries.

As Celie learns more from Nettie's letters, so does her anger against Mr. ____ grows. Celie is even more determined to kill Mr. ____. Shug Avery tries to impart the law of God against killing on Celie but Celie tells her that she is not Christ. Then Shug Avery has to remind her that Nettie will not want to meet her in prison when she returns from Africa. Shug Avery adds that life would not be good if all she remained with was Grady. Celie only has one choice left; Make Albert let me sleep with you from now on, while you here, she says. Celie has now started making demands and giving commands. She has come a long way. From the fourteen year abused girl to an elderly lady who now is able to make demands.

However, Celie's anger is still great. She now sleeps like sisters with Shug Avery; Now I know I'm dead. It takes Shug Avery to assure her that it is normal to once in a while be angry, but that does not mean that one is dead; Shug Avery has got to find some way of channelling Celie’s anger as it is proving to be negative.

Shug Avery's diversion to have Celie sewing pants has been a success. Both Shug Avery and Celie are sported in new blue flower pants that match and big floppy Easter hats that match too. The rebellion of the women has extended to the clothes that they wear. Shug Avery suggests yet another radical action. She is leading Celie into more rebellion. It is the dressing that she attacks. Lets make you some
pants, she suggests. Celie is at a loss. She does not see why a woman would want pants for. What I need pants for? I say. I ain't no man. In addition Celie feels that Mr. _____ will not be pleased to see his wife in pants. Shug Avery's reasoning is pragmatic; why not? You do all the work around here. Shug Avery is saying that Celie needs pants for practical purposes. Shug Avery is suggesting a rebellion against the patriarchal dress code that has prescribed pants for men and dresses for women. Celie would be more comfortable in her job if she used pants. Then she lets out another cat out of the bag; I used to put on Albert's pants when we was courting. And he one time put on my dress. Shug Avery is exposing the hypocrisy of men. They project patriarchal values and yet enjoy what the patriarchal community considers perverted. Shug Avery tells Celie that a lady in pants is to Mr. ____ what a red flag is to a bull in a bull fight. A lady in pants flares up his sexual desire. Finally, Shug Avery is able to channel Celie's anger into sewing pants with a needle.

The letter from Nettie which revealed to Celie that the man Celie has always thought was her father is in fact not her father but her step father causes a major change in Celie and Shug Avery. Celie learns that her father was a successful business man owning land, a store and a smithy. Because his business was doing very well, the racist whites murdered him. His murder was instigated by racism as the whites could not stand a successful black man in their midst. Fonso takes advantage of Celie's moaning mother; marries her and takes control of her asserts. Fonso uses sex and motherhood to ensure that Celie's mother does not regain her mental faculties by ensuring that she is ever pregnant. The information in Nettie's letter is devastating. The two women, Celie aand Shug Avery, can no longer stomach the level of betrayal and evil that Nettie's letters reveal. That's it, say Shug. Pack your stuff. You coming back to Tennessee with me. Truth has finally been known by Celie and makes her feel dazed. The truth has set Celie free. Knowing264 has set
her free. The bondage of ignorance is in the past. She is free to completely rebel. She can at long last assert herself.

In the past Celie has felt that she had no where to run to but to God in heaven. Now, Celie has a physical place to run to. She can run to Shug Avery's place. In this case, Shug Avery's place is like a place of refuge for Celie. While God helped Celie endure as she waited to die and go to heaven, Shug Avery's company provides her with instant relief and she can start living her heavenly life here on earth.

In the past Celie has written only to God. Then in a confrontation, she opens up to Sofia. With the growth of a sense of the self, Celie opens up to Shug Avery and has enjoyed the fellowship of other women and members of her larger community. At the moment, Celie stops addressing her letters to God and starts addressing them to Nettie. 

The new Celie is now ready to face her oppressive past by meeting in person the man she thought was her father. The two women, Celie and Shug Avery drive to see Fonso. Fonso is in the company of yet another young woman other than May Ellen. Fonso says that May Ellen got too old for him and yet when he married her, May Ellen was almost Celie's age. Fonso now has a new wife, Daisy. Daisy's parents work for Fonso and live on the land. Celie tells Fonso that Nettie has written to her and told her that he, Fonso, is not their father. Fonso's response is short; Well, he say. So now you know. And goes on to tell Celie that her father was lynched by white men who were jealous of his accomplishments. Fonso's reasoning on the death of Celie's father is most crude;

Fonso's reasoning is as corrupt as he himself is. He suggests that corruption is the only way forward for the African even after slavery. He is also being insensitive to Celie, in any case, he has always been cruel to
her and to the women in general. To make the matters worse, Celie has come with a fellow woman. However, Celie's concern is different. She wants to know where her real daddy is buried. Celie is told that her daddy was buried next to her mother's but she learns that lynched people never got a grave marker. Celie goes with Nettie to look for her father's grave but does not find it. Celie is tracing her origins in her continued growth. The truth about her origins will give her a proper identity, especially that her parents were descent folks, a far cry to what she has always been led to believe.

Celia is getting back to the graves of her parents to pay her respects as if to acknowledge that her new strength originates from her parents. She has learnt that her parents were dignified and successful people unlike Fonso. The grave thus acts like humus upon which she now has got to start growing from. Meanwhile, Celia has stopped writing to God and Shug Avery goes back to try and demystify the image of God that has for so long kept Celia in bondage. Celia wonders why Shug Avery does not seem bothered by the thought of God, Heaven and Hell. She wonders why Shug Avery does not make an effort in the normal way to please God and aspire for heaven considering her life style.

Shug Avery tells Celia that just because she does not harass it like some people do did not mean that she is not religious. Celia wonders what good thing God has ever done for her despite her loyalty to him. Shug Avery tells her that God has given her life, good health and a good woman who loves her very much. Celia is bitter with God whom she considers to be a man:

Celia is now able to identify her oppressor but extends this to include God. To her God is a man and like all men he never listens to
women especially black women. Shug Avery warns Celie that God might hear her blaspheme but Celie has had enough:

Celia has associated God to men who have never listened to her all her life and have abused her repeatedly. For Celie’s complete liberation men and God must then assume a subordinate position. Celie thinks that sinners have actually more good times because they are not all the time trying to worrying about God. Shug Avery tells Celie that sinners worry about God too but that once they feel loved by God, they try the best they can to please God by being what they are. This is strange to Celie. She does not understand how God can love an individual like Shug Avery and yet that individual does nothing for God; Shug Avery makes the point that if God loves individuals like her, she needs not labour doing all the religious stuff unless the individual wants to. She argues that there are plenty of other things that she can do that she suspects God likes. She suspects that God likes it when people are having a good time; lying back and just admire stuff, and being happy. Shug Avery tells Celie that people do not go to church to find God but that rather, they go to church to share God. At this point Celie comments that other people do not go to church to share God because they do not have him with them and that such individuals were the ones like those that watched her suffer without lifting a finger to help her while she was struggling with a big pregnancy, Mr. _____ and the children.

Shug Avery asks Celie to describe what her God looks like. Celie describes her God as being big, tall, grey bearded and a white man. She pictures him in white robes and going about in bare feet. She never at any time thinks that God could be black. Shug Avery confesses that even for her that was her exact image of her God in the past. This same old white man is the one Shug Avery used to see each time she closed her eyes to pray. Shug Avery concludes by saying that if individuals go to church to
find God, they are bound to find the same old white man. Shug Avery explains that this white God is found in the Bible for the whites. This is all strange for Celie who exclaims that it is God who wrote the Bible and that the white man had nothing to do with it. Shug Avery then challenges this aspect of Celie’s conviction. She questions Celie why God is pictured as a white man and why everything good in the Bible is associated with the white man while the black person is said to constantly be cursed in the Bible.

It is at this point that Celie makes a confession that she has never thought about why things are portrayed that way. Then she remembers that Nettie, in one of her letters had said that somewhere in the Bible it is written that Jesus had hair like lamb’s wool. Shug Avery laughs at the idea and comments that if such a Jesus visited the churches they were discussing, he would have to have them conked before anybody paid him attention. She also makes a point that the last thing that a black person wants is to think about is that God has kinky hair. Shug Avery concludes her lesson:

Shug Avery is still to make another point. She suggests that when individuals find God, they cannot miss it; feels like the sexual feeling. Celie is again shocked. Shug Avery assures her that God loves the sexual feeling and that God created the feelings and enjoys it when his creation enjoys them a lot more:

The lesson is clear, God, as portrayed by the patriarchal world makes man an extension of God in oppressing women. This has alienated the women from God who see him as oppressive. Shug Avery is saying that the real God is different; loving and fun loving and always trying to please his creation. Shug Avery’s message is clear; do not feel bad if you feel that you have not pleased God. It does not matter, for God is always
trying to please us. Shug Avery is not trashing God in her talk. She is portraying him or It - in Shug Avery's description- in a different light. This is total revolt. Shug Avery is saying that there is no need to try to please God or His extension, men. She revolts against the male construction of God. It is by rebelling against this monster of oppression that women find their proper place in this patriarchal world.

The task for the women is to try and chase the image of the old white man out of their heads especially as they pray. Realising this Célie's eyes are opening and she is able to see the deception she has been forced to believe. She feels like she has been a fool. She reflects:Religion, which was the foundation of Célie's oppression, is broken. Ever since Fonso started to abuse her as a child and told her to confide only in God, Célie has been under the yolk of oppression. As a child and a teen age the image of an oppressive God was engraved on her mind. Now in adulthood, Célie's image of God has under gone reconstruction. The more Célie substitutes the patriarchal image of God as male with little scrubs of bushes in the yard, the more the image of Mr. _____ diminishes. This has had a terrific effect on Célie. Célie is more likely to internalise all the new lessons that she has learnt and fit them in her scheme of things before embarking on her next path of action.

The notion that is projected is that for one to get rid of the patriarchal anti-feminism, one must get rid of the patriarchal image of God, that one must cease being religious in the Christian sense. Walker projects a vision in which women can attain self-fulfilment within the patriarchal order by changing the basic system of logic which governs the patriarchal orthodoxy.

Shug Avery is helping Célie reconstruct the image of her God. God is stripped of its racist, colonial, capitalist and phallocentric connotations
and turned into a sublime feeling of nature, a deep reciprocal communion between women and nature.

Stripped of His identity as a Man and rendered natural that is, resourceful and invigorating, God becomes non-sexist, un oppressive and un repressive.\(^8\)

The whole point being made is that female self-fulfilment cannot be divorced from sexual, psychological and economic self-fulfilment. For the woman to attain this kind of sense of the self, she has no option but to rebel against the dominant patriarchal establishment, including his religion.

For Celie, it is again Shug Avery who initiates the rebellion. She informs Mr. ____, Harpo, Sofia and everyone at the table where they are all having a meal that she has decided to leave and that Celie is coming along with her to Memphis. Mr. ____’s response is predictable; over my dead body he says. Mr. ____ is extremely shocked. I thought that you were finally happy, he says. What wrong now? It is now Celie’s time to stand up for herself. Celie must tell her oppressor what she feels is wrong; Mr. ____ cannot believe what is happening; say what, he ast shock. All around the table mouths hung open. Celie tells Mr. ____ that she is aware that he has deliberately separated her from Nettie, the only person in the world that loved her. Mr. ____ can only sputter. The passive oppressed woman now is able to issue threats. Sofia is so surprised to hear Celie speak up for herself that she is still for a full ten minutes. Celie informs Mr. ____ that her children are also coming home with Nettie from Africa where they were having a descent upbringing unlike the fools that Mr. ____’s children turned out to be. Harpo’s protestations at this are silenced by Celie; Mr. ____ reaches over to slap Celie. Celie jabs her case knife in his hand. Mr. ____ is beside himself.
Mr. ____ is invoking the patriarchal norms of his community which demand that the woman takes care of her own home. Celie rebels against this patriarchal arrangement. And Shug Avery verbalises the rationale behind Celie's rebellion; why would any woman give a shit what people think is a mystery to me. In the traditional patriarchal community, women are supposed to mind. Shug Avery wonders why the woman must mind; it is only when the women stop minding that they can be free.

The women laugh at Shug Avery's reasoning provoking Harpo's reaction. He looks at Mary Agnes and orders her to shut up; It bad luck for women to laugh at men. Harpo, too, tries to use the old patriarchal myth to oppress Mary Agnes. Mary Agnes turns this belief around right back in the face of the men;283 Sofia's temper is also rising. The women are all up in arms in rebellion. To try and assert his authority, Harpo makes reference to Motherhood. He reminds Sofia that they have six children together. Sofia corrects him that they have only had five children together and that the sixth child is not Harpo's. Harpo is speechless. He orders the child in question to fetch him some water to drink but the girl does not obey him till he says please. This is the ultimate exemplification of freedom. A girl child refuses to perform a chore ordered by her father unless he politely asks. Just like Celie believes that she cannot do without God, Mr. ____ believes that she cannot do without him. Like in the Olinka community, Mr. ____ sees Celie, on her own, as nothing. Mr. _____ is a typical oppressor who believes that a slave is happy to be one. Mr. ____, in desperation, plays the last card at his disposal; the economic card. He tells Celie that she will not get a penny of his money; Not one thin dime, he emphasises. But then he forgets that Celie has been a virtue slave. And a slave's only wish is freedom. Celie aptly answers Mr. ____ back; Did I ever ask you for money? And she puts Mr. ____ in the correct perspective of things; It is the slave master who is losing out. The slave has nothing to lose by being free. And Celie is not
the only one on this long walk to rebellion. Mary Agnes, too, has joined the march.

Harpo, like his father, is shocked that his woman whom he considered docile has revolted. Harpo does not understand why his mistress wants to sing when he provides her with everything. To him, a woman has no identity away from her husband and no needs apart the basics for survival. And like Mr. _____, a woman, worse still someone's wife, can not sing in public. Mary Agnes is Jolentha. She insists that her name is Mary Agnes. While Harpo does not see the relevance of this name identity issue, Mary Agnes is aware of the significance of this. She asserts that when she was Mary Agnes, she could sing in public. She has realised that she had lost her individuality to Squeak and now time has come for her to reclaim her identity of Mary Agnes. A woman needs a career, whether it is to sing or to make pants like Celie, women must have a career for them to be free.

Harpo gets to, again, use the trap of motherhood to lay a hold on Mary Agnes. Sofia, however, comes to the rescue; Go on sing, say Sofia, I'll look after this one till you come back. Sofia is releasing Mary Agnes of the responsibility of motherhood which has always destroyed the career of women. And Mary Agnes asks Sofia to take care of Harpo too. This reduces Harpo to a child who needs the care of a mother figure, Sofia. In these offers the women are seen sticking together. Practically all the women in this scene are seen sticking up for one other. The communities of women are seen to be strong when they bond together like the quilt. They overcome. Miss Eleanor crosses the colour bar to rely on the sisterhood of her fellow women even when these are black women.

As Shug Avery, Grady, Celie and Mary Agnes get on their way, Mr. _____ shouts heaps of insults at Celie. He tells Celie that she cannot stand
up for herself that she is ugly and skinny and shaped funny. Disregarding the fact that Celie has just told him off, Mr. ____ tells Celie that she cannot open her mouth to other people. He tells her that all she is good for is to be Shug Avery’s maid. He accuses her of being a bad housekeeper. All this is, of course, a question of sour grapes. Celie trades the curses back. She tells Mr. ____ that he is cursed and that everything that he will touch will crumble, that everything that he dreams about will fail. Shug Avery has to intervene for the traded curses and insults to stop.

determined to regain the personal identity that she has lost through motherhood and the birth of Celie has matured enough to fight and to face reality in the face with a sense of focus;

In Memphis, Celie is exposed to yet another world, a new world. This is a new and better world in which the women are free to dream and plan. Some of their talk is male in nature. They talk about the house that Shug Avery is planning to build. Celie offers to be doing Shug Avery’s laundry but Shug Avery will have none of it. Then the idea of making pants sets in. Celie starts the project using Shug Avery’s money. The first pants made are for Shug Avery then the band members and later their own people back home. Celie is happy. She now feels a sense of worth. In her next letter to Nettie, Celie is able to sign her letter. Apart from signing the letter, Celie gives an address.

Celi e signs her name. Celie has started a pants making project called Folkspants, Unlimited. In this project, she has employed two other women, the twins Jerene and Darlene. She is not treated like a maid or slave. She is free. She is able to situate herself in the community. She has been able to curve a portion, a space for herself in her community in which she regains her visibility. This is what awaits the rebellious and finally free woman; an economic independence. Celie has an individual identity. Being free means happiness, love, work, resources to spend on
the good things of life, friends and time for leisure. Celie has all these. She is able to declare: I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you (Nettie) alive and home soon. With our children.

Celi e is justifiably happy. She has got the essentials of selfhood; happiness, love, work, money, friends, time, Nettie and her two children. Darlene's attempt to change Celi e's manner of speaking does not succeed as Shug Avery does not see the reason why Celi e should change who she is. She can talk in sign language for all I care. This is confirmation that Celi e is accepted for who she is. Returning home for a visit, Celi e feels different. She has on some dark blue pants and a white silk shirt that looks righteous. Mr. ______ sitting on the porch does noteven recognise her.

Celi e avoids her home and heads to Sofia's and Harpo's home where the couple is engaged in a debate about gender roles. Harpo is against Sofia and her sisters' decision to be pallbearers during her mother's funeral. Harpo's view is that women cannot be pallbearers. For Harpo, such a job is for men. He argues that women are weak and accuses Sofia of trying to take over male responsibilities. Sofia does not see any contradiction; the woman dead, I can cry and take it easy and lift the coffin too. This conversation that Celi e listens into is equally rebellious. The women are determined to have their say. Harpo has found out the state of the women from Sofia's mother before she passed on and while Sofia was in prison. The women believe that their ways are as good as anybody else's.

The reunion is great. Harpo and Sofia are both overjoyed to see Celi e. Celi e pays her condolences on Sofia's loss of the mother. Celi e shares her experiences with the couple. She reveals that she smokes reefer. She says that she smokes it when she wants to make love and
especially when she wants to talk to God. Celie feels that of late she and God make love just fine whether she smokes reefer or not. And she exclaims; Girl, I'm bless, ... God know what I mean. Celie is happy and in love with God. She has already learnt that God created all feelings and that he loves them. So she believes God appreciates love making because he created it.

Shug Avery and Celie have created a distinction between mere sex and love making. Despite Celie being raped earlier on, Shug Avery still described her as a virgin. Fonso and Mr. ____ used to have sex with Celie but Shug Avery labels her a virgin. It is only when she has a relationship with Shug Avery that and made to feel worth while and loved. This distinguishes love making from sex. The shocked reader always has to keep this fact in mind in order to appreciate Celie's sentiments. God has cultivated Celie's heart. Celie has a new heart. Celie is born again.

Sex is portrayed negatively. It is associated with violence, rape and death while fuck is associated with love, tenderness and compassion. Fonso or as we learn latter Alphonso, Celie's step father, dies while having sex with his much younger wife, Daisy. Celie is now actively involved in dialogue with other human beings. She is becoming part of her community. She is being integrated in community life as she attends the funeral of Sofia's mother. Meeting Mr. ____ is inevitable. Mr. ____ has changed and is now very clean and his hair is brushed. He is also a hard worker. Celie feels that Mr. ____ is scared of her. Mr. ____ has become considerate of others and is sympathetic of Sofia. He engages Celie in a descent conversation. He is no longer abusive.

His story is simple. After Celie left him, he literary crumbled. His world collapsed. He shut himself in the house long enough that it stunk. According to Sofia, Mr. ______ started living the life of a pig. It took Harpo
to rescue him. Harpo shifted and spent many nights with his father; Mr. _____ washed him, and comforted him in his arms. Harpo was so caring that Sofia started to feel for him again. Harpo made Mr. ____ send Celie all the other letters from Nettie.

The women value the attributes of life here. They value warmth, love, togetherness, consideration, kindness cleanliness and hard work. They support life supporting values which enable humanity to survive. The women know that meanness kills. They have rebelled in order to regain these values of life that the men denied them.

Celie's fortunes take an upswing. Daisy, Fonso's young wife, telephones Celie in the middle of the night to tell her that her step father, Fonso, is dead. He died while having sex. Celie is told that her real daddy, and not Fonso, owned the land, the house and the store. These assets were left to Celie's Mother. When Celie's mother died, these assets passed on to Celie and Nettie. The greedy Fonso never told the girls of this fact. His interest in controlling the properties is the only logical conclusion why Fonso never told the girls. Celie's history is being revealed and this puts Celie in her correct historical context.

Celie, accompanied by Shug Avery, drives to go and see the properties. Their house has been replaced by a bigger and more elegant one. Daisy takes all the furniture with her leaving the house, the land and the store for Celie and her sister Nettie. While Fonso opts not to tell the two sisters of their inheritance, Daisy does so without hesitation. Once again, the women, regardless of their circumstances are seen sticking together and being sincere with one another. Daisy decides to tell the truth where Fonso decided to lie. Celie now has company, friends, land, a big house and a store. Her Folkpants, unlimited will now be sold in the store. Celie has experienced economic independence. She is also free
from the patriarchal God. This is good for Celie. It is hoped that these fortunes will enable Celie grow further.

However, the first event that occurs to Celie after acquiring her inheritance is a break up. Shug Avery has taken on a much younger man, Germaine, for a lover. Celie has never appreciated love from any man. All the men in her life have abused her. Up to this point, Celie has not reconciled with Mr. _____. Her mother figure, Shug Avery, has decided that Celie is now strong enough to move on and learn more lessons of life. But she assures the reluctant and hurt Celie that this is her last fling. Shug Avery says that she is getting old and needs a last fling as she likes her love making with men and soon no man will look at her because she is getting old. She tells Celie that it would be foolish to take men seriously but confesses that men can be lots of fun.

Celie has just been left in the cold in the matters of romantic love. She stays with Sofia and Harpo and Henrietta, Sofia's daughter. Mr. _____ has developed a habit of visiting Henrietta. He still leaves in the same little house. He now has a hobby of collecting shells. It was in the viewing of one of these shells which was said to be unique that Mr. _____ finally has Celie go to his little house. Mr. _____ behaves like a man who has been regenerated. He is sensitive to Celie and enquires if there is anything special that she likes. Celie's says that she loves birds. The discussion is respectful and considerate. Eventually, Mr. _____ admits that he has noticed that everybody in the family is just about wearing pants that Celie has made. He enquires if Celie has turned her skill of making pants into a business. Celie responds in the affirmative. Celie tells Mr. _____ that Shug Avery helped her make the first pair of pants right in Mr. _____'s house in order to prevent her from killing him. And this revelation is followed by a release of emotions on the part of Celie, she cries.
Mr. _____ speculates that Celie does not like him because he is a man. Celie’s response reveals the prejudices that she has developed over time; Celie hates men so much that even the thought of anybody getting pregnant makes her want to cry. She has been mistreated and abused all her life. She has not yet reached the balance that Shug Avery has reached. To Celie, all men are the same, abusive and selfish. The transformation in Mr. _____, however, looks real. He is interested in Celie as a human being as opposed to being interested in what she can do for him. He is also interested in knowing what Celie likes. The two are getting to know each other at a personal level now despite the fact that they had lived together for many years. Shug Avery’s absence is heavily felt by Celie. She is forced to re look at herself, at her image in the mirror. Celie gets back to the time Celie led her into self exploration:

Celite re-examines her self image and thinks that Shug Avery does not love her because there is something wrong with her image. Standing before a full mirror, Celie decides that there is nothing special here for nobody to love. The scene provides the test that proves that Celie’s psychic growth has continued unchecked, that she will not regress in crisis. Here it seems that Celie has successfully moved through the mirror stage and is now able to function within the post mirror stage of symbolic language, which is language that she can use to represent any perceived lacks.

According to Lucan, the need for symbolic language in post mirror stage points to the fact that all individuals remain split. This split image allows an individual to believe in his or her wholeness, but this is simply an illusion one might carry for life. As Ross Daniel argues, however, such misrecognition serves an affirmative purpose for Celie. This time around, the whole self that Celie finds in the mirror is healthier than her previous notion of herself as fragmented and belonging to others. When her
worker, Darlene, tries to persuade her to speak standard English in order to avoid sounding dumb. Celie refuses, concluding, look like to me only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind. Rather than allowing others to own her individual parts of her, such as her sexuality or her language, Celie now owns and enjoys her total self.\textsuperscript{10}

This time around, Celie does not write to God or any one. She has an internal dialogue with herself. She learns from her reflection that when those she leaned on are not available, she has got to look closely around her to see who is available as a friend or even as a lover. Celie does just this and discovers that Mr. \_\_\_\_ seems to be the only one that understands her feelings.

Mr. \_\_\_\_ still cannot believe that Celie has got children. He asks Celie where she got the children from. Celie tells him that her children were fathered by her stepfather. Mr. \_\_\_\_ is shocked to lean that Fonso was the one that had damaged Celie twice. Celie observes that Mr. \_\_\_\_ is trying hard to make something out of him. She also notices that when they talk, Mr. \_\_\_\_ really listens and he confesses that he is a changed man; I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. I feel like a new experience. When other men trouble Celie by pursuing her at Harpo's, Mr. \_\_\_\_ becomes very protective and comes to Celie's rescue: This lady my wife. The man vanishes out the door. Trust is developing between Celie and M. \_\_\_\_. Mr. \_\_\_\_ is becoming more and more humane.

Both Celie and Mr. \_\_\_\_ get to talk about their one lover, She speaks her mind and she fights for herself. Shug Avery is bound to live the life she wants regardless of the circumstances. Mr. \_\_\_\_ believes that Shug Avery's attributes are male. Celie challenges this as she points out that Mr. \_\_\_\_ himself and his son Harpo are not like Shug Avery
even though they are male. Celie's view is that Shug Avery's behaviour is womanly because she has also seen another woman, Sofia, behave like Shug Avery. The conclusion is that the conducts of both Shug Avery and Sofia are neither male nor female and that they are definitely not like Mr. ____ and Celie. Shug Avery and Sofia behave like liberated people who want to be what they are. Celie and Mr. ____ have been describing the image of liberated beings which the two of them are not. They both love liberated individuals. Mr. ____ is trapped in his perceived male role while Celie has been a prisoner of what men like Mr. ____ have considered their domain, an imprisoned domain. It is only when Mr. ____ realises this fact that he, too, like Celie, gets liberated. Mr. ____ confesses that he has been beating Celie because she was not Shug Avery. In other words, Mr. ____ loves liberated women. Nettie demonstrated this independence just like Shug Avery has and now Celie. This could be another reason Mr. ____ warms up to Celie in her liberated state.

Mr. ____ remembers his first wife and reasons that she was broken up by ill-treatment from him because she never told anybody about her troubles. She never told anybody because she did not have anyone to tell. Her family abandoned her the moment that she got married to Mr. ____. Celie, on the other hand, had some one to tell Sofar as you are concern, I'm gone. And Shug Avery meant her words. This helped Celie's conditions to improve at the hands of Mr. ____. Mr. ____ started to get worried each time Celie and Shug Avery were doing each other's hair. This confession testifies to the power of women once they bond together, they can change their circumstances. Mr. ____ acknowledges to Celie that before, he used to be a fool. He also confesses that he feels sorry for Celie that Shug Avery left her. He remembers how he felt when Shug Avery left him too. As the two lonely souls stand under the stars, they realise that they have got at least themselves for company:
The reconciliation between the two is well under way. They continue to dialogue. At other times, Mr. ____ asks Celie about her children. Mr. ____ also learns that Celie’s pants can be worn by both men and women. He learns that in Africa men wear robs which look like dresses, that the African men wear what is comfortable and not necessarily what society dictates. She tells Mr. ____ that the men in Africa also love to sew. When Mr. ____ is surprised Celie challenges him; They (African men) are not as backward as mens here. Mr. ____ is challenged into conceding that he too used to try to sew but then his community used to laugh at him and thus he got discouraged.¹¹

Celie helps Mr. ____ liberate himself further. Mr. ____ admits that it takes long for men to notice anything. He cites his own example to illustrate his point. Took me long enough to notice that you such good company, Finally, Mr. ____ acknowledges Celie for who she is and is able to interact with her in a respectful way. They have now become friends and companions. It has been a long walk to rebellion and freedom. It has been a long walk to liberty for Celie, a long walk to selfhood. Both have rebelled against the patriarchal male establishment. Mr. ____ is seen sewing pants on the porch with Celie.

Mr. ____ has been able to transform and grow because he has taken time to ask himself questions about his humanity. He has asked himself why people need love, why some people are black while others are white, why there are divisions of women and men. And he has asked himself another difficult question, why are we where we are. Just when she is content and believes that she can live life without Shug Avery, and just when Mr. ____ asks Celie with sincerity to marry him again and Celie says No because, to her, men still look like frogs and she still does not like frogs, Shug Avery writes to Celie that she will be coming home. Celie has grown enough to accept reality whether Shug Avery comes or not. She is
now a mature lady. Either way, Celie will be happy. Her happiness now does not depend on other people.

Shug Avery does come home. She has deposited her last fling lover, Germaine, into a college. They have ended their relationship. Shug Avery puts her head on Celie's breast and lets out a long breath. News filters through that the ship on which Nettie and the children were has sunk and that no one has survived. Shug Avery makes inquires for Celie but too much is going on at sea during the war that it is not possible to get accurate information. One thing is clear. The women despite seemingly going their different ways always come to each other’s aid in times of crisis.

The last letter in The Color Purple starts on a very bright note. Celie’s letter is addressed to God, Stars, trees, sky, peoples, everything and again to God. Nettie, Adam and Olivia are back. They are accompanied by Reverend Samuel. The actual meeting of the two women is presented from Celie’s point of view:

The women are now young at heart. Her growth is complete and she realises just how much youthful she feels despite her age. Celie now has the love, companionship, compassion and independence. The sisters now have got a home, land and a store in which they have employed Sofia to be clerk. They are reunited and are absolutely independent of anyone. Celie has a complete sense of identity.

Even though Meridian was published earlier than The Color Purple, it reflects events which happen after the events reflected in The Color Purple. In terms of events it is Meridian which follows The Color Purple.
The Color Purple presents the story of the awakening of a woman, Celie, in the face of male oppression. Celie, once denied of an identity emerges as a strong woman who has a place and an identity in her community.

Celia goes through a number of stages in her long walk to rebellion and eventual selfhood. Celie is constantly sensitised by both men and women to fight for herself. Celie is told by Nettie of the importance of knowledge. She tells Celie of the need to know and pay attention to the word. The need for education is also emphasised by their teacher in the earlier parts of the novel. The withholding of education from women is seen as a means of suppressing women to ensure that they are perpetually under subjugation.

Celia undergoes an inner self-examination which leads to her self-discovery that sends a shiver through her body. This triggers Celie’s growth to selfhood. Celie goes through a period of pairing or bonding. She first pairs up with Shug Avery then with other women in her community. It is in work that women get to know and care about each other.

Celia has lived a life of abuse. Her place in society was that of a slave and an abused woman. She has been under the thumb of the men in her life and Celie, with the help of the women in her life has had to break the patriarchal norms of her environment for her be free and attain her sense of the self. Celie has on going sensitisation- especially from Shug Avery. Celie gets emotional, community and material support especially from Shug Avery. This leads to Celie revolting in order to attain her self identity. Celie becomes independent, both from her abusive husband and from the economic enslavement.
Celie achieves forgiveness and reconciliation. Celie is finally re-integrated into her own environment, community, home and family. The rebellion in The Color Purple makes a point that individuals in society need each other but that to do so; individuals must recognise and respect each other.

Meridian, too, reflects the life of a young woman, Meridian, who emerges from a life dominated by the male gender and racism. She finds her way to freedom having gone through a lot of challenges.

Meridian has had a problem because she has not had the approval of her mother. The civil rights movement has not been able to give her comfort as her failure to commit herself to kill for the movement makes her an outcast among them. Marriage and friendship do not give her the sense of the self that she so much longs for. She has had a difficult time with her friends who have either abandoned her or rejected her because she cannot kill for the revolution.

Meridian learns to rely on herself and in a penance-like gesture dedicates her life to a voter registration exercise in the South. In Meridian, there is complete disjuncture of relationships. Meridian has attained her liberty but this makes her going back to her community unattainable.

Both Celie and Meridian have had to face their past before they can finally release themselves in their path for self realisation. Meridian goes down to the South while Celie has had to come back to the plantation and face Mr. _____. She also has had to drive to her parents home to confront Fonso.10

The women in both Meridian and The Color Purple are constantly admonished to seek things that are more substantial than furs and cars. They are advised to work hard and be independent of men. The oppressed
people are encouraged to stop complaining and do something about their plight by confronting their oppressors. Meridian has had to offer the Mayor the dead child and has faced the military tank. Celie has had to confront Albert and Fonso.

Patriarchal values are denounced as serving the interests of the men at the expense of the women. Society, as presented, is shown to inherently have been structured to benefit the men. The community beliefs and value systems are all shown to have been corrupted by a male-centric perspective.

Rebellion against certain established oppressive structures of society is offered as a way out of oppression. The challenge offered by the two novels is that this rebellion is not just for the sake of rebellion but that it must be supported by the notion of what is right and what is truth.

While Celie finds a lot of support in her community especially from the women around her, Meridian has to depend on herself. She goes to the South and lives a life of a hermit; dedicating her life to the service of her community. Despite the fact that sexual exploitation of women is prominent in both texts, Meridian and Celie react differently to sex. Sex, for Celie, has awakened in her the sense of who she is and has helped her in her quest for the self. For Meridian, sex has had the opposite effect. Meridian has had to endure sex and eventually she gives up sex in order to free herself and attain a sense of the self. Like the preacher in the Baptist church had admonished his congregation, Meridian has stopped looking for a man or a husband, she is doing something useful with her life, a life dedicated to service.

Meridian and The Color Purple expose the wrongs of a particular brand of religion which is bent on the oppression of the weak, the poor and the women. This is presented as a patriarchal constructed religion. This religion neglects Celie in suffering and repels Meridian. The other
type of religion is one which is shown to be practical and looks after the interests of the oppressed people. This is the sort of religion that encourages people to vote.

The novels present the view that there is a connection between western cultural imperialism and Christianity. Christianity and patriarchy are presented as oppressive social structures that promote the servitude of the weak, women and the poor. She has got love, work, land, money, friends and time while Meridian in Meridian ends up alone. Both women, however, attain a sense of the self.¹²

Opponents are not neglected in the texts. Meridian helps Truman and Lynne despite the pain they have caused her. She helps them in their hour of need. Even after the death of Lynne, Meridian allows the company of Truman and the two of them go on a trail of voter recruitment. Truman is told in no uncertain terms to respect Meridian and not think that she is a fool. Celie, too, faces Fonso. Unfortunately for Fonso, he dies at his vice before the reader has the opportunity to see if he is capable of repentance. Mr. ____ joins the new community of partnership and respect. He gives up his false claim of his phallic power and, like Truman, adopts some of the caring attributes often associated with the feminine.

The importance of education and the need to know is emphasised by both novels. Education and a need to know are presented as important aspects in the process of liberation and development of the sense of the self.

Monogamy and heterosexuality are presented as male constructs which only benefit the men at the expense of the women. The women are presented as having been forced into this male construct by the community. Women are presented as being less inclined to cruelty unless
pushed far by circumstances. The women are also presented as being more reliable than the men.

Sexual violence is portrayed in both novels as being about power politics. This is presented as the reason for the male violence against women. The men are presented as being obsessed with power. However, when the women stick together, the men step aside. The men are shown not to be able to withstand women when they stand together for a common course.¹³

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