Chapter – 3

FABLES OF

RECOVERED ORIGIN
"[E]ven though today everybody talks about ancestors in a somewhat lofty way—
ancestor this, ancestor that—they are actually very much like one's siblings. [...] 
Some of them need to be negotiated."

(Walker, TMF 97)

Above acceptance of Walker about the importance of ancestors indicates towards the place of history, heritage and the nourishing fables of these ancestors of black people in her fiction. Not only Walker but most of other African-American writers try to negotiate their tradition, culture and the experience of their predecessors in the fables narrated in their works. This presence of these ancestors is reflected in the novels of Walker, where she along with her characters dives deep to bring out the valuable teachings and morals hidden in the womb of the past.

In the African American culture the term ancestor signifies a singular entity created of the family members blur[ring] into one historic body. So in her novels Walker has presented these ancestors in the abstract form with the help of myths, fables
and stories narrated by her characters. This abstract presence of the past, inspires, empowers and strengthens her Afro-American people to achieve victory over the afflictions of racism and sexism in order to recover their own origin and to define their own self by recalling their history in these fables.

Walker herself admits her emphasis on these fables of the African ancestors both in her texts and in the creative process of writing. And this is the reason that she dedicates her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Color Purple* “To the spirits:/ Without whose assistance/ Neither this book/ Nor I / Would have been/ written”. In her contribution to a collection ‘*African American Women Writers*’ edited by Mari Evans, Walker reveals a very personal account of her creative process when she depicts her writing of *The Color Purple*:

“I gathered up the historical and psychological threads of the life my ancestors lived, and in the writing of it I felt joy and strength and my own continuity […] that wonderful feeling writers get sometimes, not very often, of being with a great many people, ancient spirits, all very happy to see me consulting and acknowledging them, and eager to let me know, through the joy of their presence, that indeed, I am not alone” (265).

It is clear that Walker understands the spirits and the ancestors as one and the same being who take her characters with them in an utopian world to provide them proper environment for recovering their origin.

In the novels of Walker the respectable position of the ancestors is never directly narrated by the author or by the characters themselves but is implied through the admiration of the ancestors by the present-day characters. In other words, the ancestors' superior position is only projected on them by the subjects living in the present. The
characters perceive their ancestors as the light house of practical wisdom, knowledge and experience to provide them proper guidance and to enlighten their path in the dark sea of racism and sexism.

Even other African writers like Toni Morrison also accept that the timeless ancestors are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom for the present-day subjects. Thus Walker has a deep relation with her tradition, culture and African history. Her novels can be perceived as deeply rooted within the tradition.

Before discussing the novels of Walker as the fables of recovered origin, it is necessary here to have some introduction on nature of fables and stories. As the tale, the parable, and the fable are all common and popular modes of conveying instructions. Each is distinguished by its own special characteristics. The Tale consists simply in the narration of a story either founded on facts, or created solely by the imagination, and not necessarily associated with the teaching of any moral lesson. The Parable is the designed use of language purposely intended to convey a hidden and secret meaning other than that contained in the words; and which may or may not bear a special reference to the hearer, or reader. The Fable partly agrees with, and partly differs from both of these. It will contain, like the Tale, a short but real narrative; it will seek, like the Parable, to convey a hidden meaning, and that not so much by the use of language, as by the skilful introduction of fictitious characters; and yet unlike to either Tale or Parable, it will ever keep in view, as its high prerogative, and inseparable attribute, the great purpose of instruction, and will necessarily seek to inculcate some moral maxim, social duty, or political truth. The true Fable, if it rise to its high requirements, ever aims at one great
end and purpose-representation of human motive, and the improvement of human conduct, and yet it so conceals its design under the disguise of fictitious characters, by clothing with speech the animals of the field, the birds of the air, the trees of the wood, or the beasts of the forest, that the reader shall receive advice without perceiving the presence of the adviser.

Thus the superiority of the counselor, which often renders counsel unpalatable, is kept out of view, and the lesson comes with the greater acceptance when the reader is led, unconsciously to himself, to have his sympathies enlisted in behalf of what is pure, honorable, and praiseworthy, and to have his indignation excited against what is low, ignoble, and unworthy. The true fabulist, therefore, discharges a most important function. He is neither a narrator, nor an allegorist. He is a great teacher, a corrector of morals, a censor of vice, and a commander of virtue. In this consists the superiority of the Fable over the Tale or the Parable. The fabulist is to create a laugh, but yet, under a merry guise, to convey instruction.

In her novels to give birth to the fables Walker takes the help of folk tales of African culture. Folk tale basically is the expression of that fanciful heritage spontaneously created in any kind of culture, for the fulfillment of man’s innate needs. At first it was handed down by words of mouth, then it was collected by enthusiasts and scholars, and in the end, it was revised by the individual inspiration of story-tellers and fabulists, who added some elements of personal invention. The exigency of fancy often joins the reality of the environment where the fable was born: so, together with certain natural elements common to the folk creative power (contrast between the good and the bad, the sly and the fool, the tyrant and the victim; a happy ending at the conclusion of a
succession of more or less intricate adventures), it is not difficult to find in the types, in
the names used, in the outlined customs, the characteristics which mark its country of
origin.

In the novels of Walker it is not uncommon to have the fables where animals
would talk and act like people. And many of these were passed down from generation to
generation. This glimpse of past is reflected in every novel of Walker as about her novel
The Temple of My Familiar remarks Ikenna Dieke that the characters of this novel
"betray a peculiar passion to reconnect with their past […]. For them, without a principle
of continuum of the past merging with the present in a constantly shifting mélange, it
becomes meaningless to speak of the self" (509).

In her very first novel, Walker takes inspiration for interweaving the story of
Third Life of Grange Copeland by taking model from these fables and from her
ancestors. Basically she uses quilting, a southern womanish form, as a model for weaving
this novel and to show to her readers the way to recover their origin amid the racial and
sexual hegemonies. Just as her maternal ancestors took bits of waste material and
transformed them into patterned works, at once useful and beautiful, so Walker stitches
together motifs repeated in each generation into a coherent pattern. The essential motif
behind the fables of Copeland family is to reveal the heinous effects of racial and sexual
violence in the life of black people. With the origin of love in the heart of Grange for his
granddaughter Ruth, his fables choose the regenerative pattern by leaving behind the
destructive one.

In this novel, Ruth’s story involves a process of awakening and has been
described as a part of a literary tradition where escape for the body and freedom for the
soul went together. By going into her past Ruth becomes able to create a way out of no way. She finds herself an alien in a strange land, but unlike Mem, she can find her way to a kind of Promised Land, a new horizon to fly with out any grip of domination. By connecting Ruth to her life giving tradition and heritage of black folk art of the south, Grange provides her the strength and the keen existence and thus shows her the way of triumph. Grange’s fables of his personal past, especially from his boyhood, bring Ruth near to her ancestors and in her conscious “all stories encounter with dead folks and spirits and occasionally the Holy ghost”(208). In other words these fables narrated by Grange to her daughter give her vital approach to an imaginatively rich, emotionally potent world- precisely the kind of world about which the race afflicted Brownfield could never become aware. To empower his granddaughter Grange takes the help of legends, myths and fables of the glorious past of Africa and its people. As he reads her passage from the Bible, especially the story of Exodus, empowering her with the compelling myth of an oppressed person who triumphs over circumstances through the strength of his will power. All characters of Walker find strength and their way to move further toward a new dawn after the dark night of racial and sexual afflictions.

These fables help Ruth to grow up liberated, self-dependent and brave soul to face every kind of hazard. These fables provide proper nourishment to the roots of Ruth so that this tree can grow without any fear of cutting down. This is only the effect of this bringing up; the guidance of her past, that Ruth unlike her father and grandfather gives up the idea of running up from this so called barren land to the South to live a productive life. On the contrary she takes the legendary decision of turning this barren and brown land into fertile land and thus to recover her origin, existence and past on this very
mother land. So the fables of Ruth and Grange in real sense turn into the fables of recovered origin for Afro-American people.

Grange himself becomes aware about the dignity of his black identity by studying deep the black history and the fables of his ancestors’ about their struggle, resistance and journey from powerlessness to empowerment. In these fables he finds the energy to come out of the powerless condition and to be the path maker of his granddaughter Ruth by showing her a new dawn of freedom and giving her a new sky to fly on her own wings beyond the reach of fear, humiliation and exploitation like her mother and grandmother.

In her next novel *The Color Purple*, these fables show us the glimpse of some negative traits that prevailed in African culture for example, the people's attitude towards women as writes Nettie, "[t]he Olinkas do not believe girls should be educated […] A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (161-62) This novel is only a historical novel that deals not with the taking of lands or the birth, battles, and deaths of great men but with the historical and psychological threads of the lives of ancestors of black people. In this novel with the help of fables Walker gives her ancestors, their own voice, “For it is language more than anything else that reveals and validates ones existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied to us then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of social fantasy” (Wills Susan, “Finding Celie’s Voice”, *MS* 72).

Sometimes in her novels Walker uses a different ordering principle than we normally use to recognize time, i.e., past lives. She takes fantastic liberties with the presentation of the past and human origins. In her fables, Walker also presents an
arboreal past that is possibly an evolutionary history, and the most utopist of the entire world in the novel. With these fables and multifaceted characters, Walker communicates that in every other person, there is a piece of his own history that comes from within one person and on which our entire past exists.

In her fables Walker communicates the Jungian philosophy of the collective conscious being connected back through time and culture in significant ways. As a character Mary Jane from the novel *The Temple of My Familiar* claims, “we all touch each other’s lives in ways we can’t begin to imagine”. (245) Thus through these fables Walker has been able to lend a certain fulfillment to lives that had been limited. Her fables take us in to new world; a kind of grace that allowed her to create a fictionalized life for her ancestors ‘about these ancestors of black land, says Walker, it was heartbreaking to think that somehow they wouldn’t survive in a form that was faithful to them who they were and what they sounded.

In *The Color Purple*, we find the effect of these fables in the life of Celie and her sister Nettie. As Nettie; who is living in Olinka narrates to Celie the fables, myths and stories behind the rituals of Olinka people. She shares these fables with her sister through letters. These fables make them curious to know more about their past and about their ancestors. In Walker’s fables sewing symbolizes the power women can gain from productivity channeling their creative energy. As here the quilt composed of diverse patterns, symbolizes diverse, people coming together in unity. Like a patch work quilt, the community of love that surrounds Celie at the end of the novel incorporates men and women who are bounded by family and friendship, and who have different gender roles, sexual orientations, and talents.
In Walker’s next novel *Meridian*, by going through the ancestral history of the central characters Meridian discovers the fact that she does not belong to the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation. Similar to her creator, Meridian thinks that if she can carry this song; and this fable forward for the future generations her role will not have been a useless one after all.

Meridian recovers her origin by studying deep the fables of her ancestors. To survive amid the racial and sexual afflictions, Meridian learns to turn to folk traditions (stories, songs, May dances around the Sojourner) for inspiration to discover and define her self. Reluctant to depend on her known words Meridian relies on stories of resistance, and celebration of black women who went before her.

Here the fable of large Magnolia tree, known, as the Sojourn is noteworthy and mythical. This tree located in the center of Meridian’s college campus, is the source of many subversive fables. With the fable of Sojourner tree, the readers receive a patriarchal description of Saxon college and its goal of conferring “lady hood upon its student”. Walker creates these fables in order to provide an inspiration, strength and guidance to coming generations to fight with every kind of exploitation and abuse. Her characters go back into their slave past to find suitable role models for them. As walker says: “On the property that had been a slave plantation, young black women learn to make French food, English tea and German music”(39), and “are blessed to perpetuate the Saxon name!”(93) Walker has full faith in these young Saxon students; that they will spread the name, just as surely as the Saxon slave women were forced to increase master Saxon’s stock of slaves. This sojourner tree is the only symbol of black culture, stamina and struggle on the white dominated artificial campus. This tree is pregnant with many fables behind its
origin. One of the most popular fables is the fable of Louvinie, the slave woman who planted this tree. She was a skilled storyteller like her ancestors but unknowingly and unfortunately her fall turned into her tragedy because with her magic of imagination she has frightened her master’s young child. And for this unfortunate but unwilling incident she was punished, by cutting off her tongue by the root, her only source of survival.

Louvinie loved her tongue very much, so she buried it under Sojourner, and as the myth goes on, the tree grew miraculously with the nourishment of this magical tongue. And as a result this tree also turned into a magical tree, a source of inspiration and resistance for other victims of afflictions. As Walker says: “other slaves believed it possessed magic- they claimed it could talk, make music…. Once in its branches, a hiding slave could not be seen”(44). Thus according to this slave fable, Louvinie transferred her capability of powerful speech in to this tree and became a source of expression for the long suppressed victims of race. As John F. Callaham writes about the power of this tree in his essay “Politics and the Restoration of Voice in Meridian published in the book Alice Walker:

Named the sojourner, the magnolia conjures up the presence of another leader of black women, who like Louvinie, used language in the struggle for liberation. In this way, Walker builds a network of women, some mythic like Louvinie, some real like sojourner truth, as the context for Meridian’s affirmation and radicalization. (161)

Thus Louvinie and this conjured image of sojourner present before us authentic examples of women who use their tongue or power of speech as a weapon in their struggle for freedom from the long prevailing mental and physical exploitations. Master Saxon’s way of punishment to Louvinie indicates towards the brutal suppression of black
art, culture and tradition by the white colonizers. Meridian finds the way to recover her origin within the mothering shadow of this tree. Meridian also chooses to withhold her tongue and keeps silent as a symbolic resistance, preventing it from being cut out. Louvinie’s burial of her severed tongue, and the subsequent creative transfer of her power, proves to be a more practical alternative for Meridian to follow the images of black women speaking out. Thus this fable behind the origin of sojourner in true sense shows the way to Saxon students to recover their origin and roots by going into their ancestral past and using it against the politics of racism and patriarchy.

In the fable of Marilene O’Shay, Walker examines patriarchy’s ability to kill woman, as a parody of society’s idolization of dead woman. Although the fable of Marilene is quite negative and shows that how the true story of Marilene O’Shay has been preserved for future generation on cheap mimeographed fliers that tells us how Henry O’Shay had lavishly provided for this lovely wife, Marilene, and how she had rebuked the role of perfect wife by having an affair with another man. In spite of being a fable of domination, colonization and exploitation even of a dead body of a woman, it gives spark to the revolutionary spirit of Meridian and compels her to muse about the pitiful condition of women in a patriarchal society. Here Walker exposes the colonization of woman even after her death in more powerful way because a living woman may resist her husband’s domination but the mummy, static and rectified, may be completely possessed. In her novel Meridian with the use of her Fables along with many points, Walker also focuses on the role of motherhood in African society. By narrating the fables of the past of black people, not through battles or legislation, but from the lives of mothers, Walker presents motherhood as an angle of seeing life, of valuing all life, or
resisting all that might destroy it. In other words in her fables Walker gives the message that motherhood is not merely a biological state but an attitude towards life.

Meridian connects herself with her past in order to get strength to move towards future. She turns inward and travels back through many generations to free herself from the chains of racism and sexism. She identifies or connects her mother’s great grandmother, a slave but also an artist who became famous and bought her freedom by painting and lasting decorations on barns. Meridian also recall her father’s grandmother, the mystical and high spirited Feather Mae, and quiet like this great lady Meridian experiences an ecstatic communication with the past at a place known as the sacred serpent, an Indian burial mound. The value of motherhood taught by these fables to Meridian arouses her deep sensitivity for her own mother who, through suffering and sacrifice, fulfilled her dreams of becoming a schoolteacher. Such a close study in her ancestral past gives Meridian a sense of strength and continuity, a knowledge of herself as a creative human being, that helps her to come out into a free and self dependent world and leads her towards self discovery. From all these fables of her ancestors, Meridian recovers her origin and creates a new self—an androgynous self; about this recovery of Meridian Almas. Freeman says in his essay “Zora Neale Hurstan and Alice Walker: A spiritual kinship”: “Through the total range of her experiences, Meridian creates a new self – an androgynous self; she is transformed, as symbolized by the wasting illness from which she recovers and returns to the world cleansed of sickness”(475).

In these fables of motherhood, Walker’s use of her story allows her to highlight the insidious ways in which both black and white societies restrict and punish individual mothers.
The fable of Louvinie is a symbolic one and a torchbearer for Meridian in her tough time. Louvinie, a slave woman from West Africa excelled in a particular art of story telling passed on to her by her parents. Similar to other Afro-American people this art functions to keep their traditional culture alive even in their oppressed condition. The fable of Louvinie focuses not only on the function of language and speech but also reproduces the features associated in the brook with motherhood. Louvinie by killing the child of her master with her horror story provides to Meridian an example to resolve her life. Her actual childlessness suggested in sexual terms Meridian’s choice not to be fertile and fear children. Moreover, when Louvinie murders the child in her charge it is clearly a political act, which is not only the case for either “Wile Chile” or Fast Mary- but is true for Meridian also when she chooses to abort her child. The Magnolia tree, consequence of Louvinie’s punishment, actually stands in opposition to the two social institutes– the plantation and the university –and suggests an alternative to their definition of black history and language. It represents the efforts of colonizers to silence black folk culture and exclude women like Louvinie and Wile Chile from the Saxon campus.

Thus in this fable of Louvinie and Sojourner, the Magnolia stands as a symbol to cast the university in stark relief, exposes its version of history as a lie, its use of language as collaborative with the forces of domination. This sojourner tree also functions as a bridge linking the struggle of black women from slavery to the freedom and from past to the present. Every fable of this novel presents this suppression of individuality by rules of morality and by the powerful white anarchist. The struggle to have own existence, vulnerability, our debt to our ancestors, the price of childbirth, friendships among women, the problem of loving men who regards us as less than
themselves, sensuality, and violence all these are the major themes of these fables of Walker.

Meridian like other characters of Walker learns the lesson of self discovery, affirmation and celebration under the inspiration and guidance of the fables of Louvinie the slave narrator whose tongue; her only ornament was cut and buried under Sojourner tree, the fables of Marilene O’Shay and the fables narrated by her mother, coming out from the women of past. Meridian recovers her own origin and chooses the path of legends, by sacrificing a lot in her life for the welfare and regeneration of her community. Known as Sojourner, this Magnolia tree paved the path of another Meridian who like Louvinie, used language in her struggle for liberation and tried to recover her origin by going deep in past. Thus Walker in this novel used the fables of Louvinie and sojourner to provide affirmation and radicalization to the characters like Meridian and to prepare them for the salvation of whole community.

Walker’s fables are not merely her fictions; they are her fictions related to the world. Even in these fables her clear focus is on black women, on the freedom allowed them as an indicator of the health of our entire society. At one reading these fables of the pain, suffering and exploitation of black women may seem ordinary to the readers. But if the reader will try to consider the reality of black women’s condition in American society, they will find them as part of these very fables.

The images of the African ancestors is depicted in an excellent manner in Walker’s next novel The Temple of My Familiar that is in real sense called a storehouse of myths and fables. Here the characters of Walker strive throughout their life to recover their lost origin by diving deep in the fables of their ancestors. Main focus of Walker in
this novel is the depiction of slavery and exposure of the pain, suffering, humiliation, struggle, anger, resistance, and self affirmation adopted by the African Ancestors.

In this novel Walker gives to Miss Lissie the responsibility of a true fabulist of transferring the ancient history of the ancestor to the present day generation. Though there is a shift from the ancestor as a place to its representation through the corporal form of a particular character, Miss Lissie, as the epitome of the ancestral figure, still remains a very broad and abstract character. Some critics understand her as a representation of "race memory".

Alice Walker portrays her as a person who is a lot of women and whose name means "the one who remembers everything" (52). Her character functions as a reincarnating self who ceaselessly shifts through times and eras. She sees herself as a "traveler […] follow[ing] […] the ancient and pre-ancient paths" (366). In addition, other characters perceive her as particular concentrated form of energy and a person with no certain definite form. Her incarnations in different bodies and times help her understand the past, the present, and the future, as she declares connectedness "to all three planes—past, present, future—of life. It can thus be argued that Miss Lissie's awareness of time together with her infinite corporal manifestations make her the very representative of the "timeless" ancestor.

Through these fables she functions as the bridge between the present and the past, incorporating within herself all the experiences of her previous lives. She claims that the primary characteristic of the human mind is to recall anything that was ever known and admits that she "swallowed past experiences all [her] life" (366).
Lissie, in herself is an example of a living fable that encompasses the whole of the cultural, historical, and maybe even mythical, existence of humankind.

These fables of Walker depict Miss Lissie’s uncountable lives and experiences from the pre historic world in which humans and animals lived in harmony under a matriarchal society to slavery in the United States. Characters of Walker regain their capability to love, nurture and respect them and others from the teachings of these fables.

This novel is the best example of fables of recovered origin. Here Walker chooses her character Lissie as a medium to convey the message of past to the present. Lissie, ancient goddess and narrator of these fables has been incarnated hundreds of times usually as a woman, sometimes as a man, and once even a lion. Lissie works as a strong medium for her creator to dive deep in to the layers of ancestral history. In this novel Lissie narrates the fables of human evolution through her lives in different ages. First of all she narrates the age soon after the inventions of fire, when human beings used to live in separate male and female tribes, at peace with their animals familiars. Here Lissie is incarnated as the first white skinned creature, a man with insufficient surviving power, who flees the heart of Africa for Europe. Heating the sun, he invents an alternative god in his own image, cold and filled with rage.

Second is the fable of the age of pygmies, when the man tribe and the woman tribe visit back and forth with each other and with the apes. This peaceful, happy age ends when men invent warfare, attack on the apes and impose themselves on women as their sole familiar. In these fables Walker tells that how patriarchy and the notion of private property came in to origin. Third types of fables are the fables of the war waged by Europe and monotheistic Islam against the great goddess of Africa. The instrument of
this warfare is the slave trade as Lissie herself lives several slave lives. Its emblem is the gorgon’s head, the head of the goddess, still crowned with the serpents of wisdom, cut off by the white hero-warrior Perseceus.

Thus these fables from the past of women kind give some idea of the sweep of the myth Alice Walker recounts, a myth that inverts the places assigned to man and woman, Europe and Africa, in the male-inverted myth called history. In some fables of Walker Africa is shown as the cradle of true religion and civilization, and man a funny, misbegotten creature with no breasts and a lengthened clitoris. The direct impact of these fables narrated by Lissie and an effort to recover origin by going deep in these fables is shown on the modern black consciousness in the lives of Fanny and her ex-husband Suwelo, a middle class academic. Suwelo finds his authentic self by absorbing Lissie’s message and Fanny finds hers opening herself to her dreams and archetypal memories by traveling back in to an imaginary land to meet her African kinfolk. By the end of the book they become successful in defining their self as Suwelo has rejoined Fanny and lives with her in a house shaped like a bird, in which they have separate wings. And Fanny too by going deep into the past moves towards self-celebration and existence. She finds herself free, sexually free for the first time in her life. This book basically is a fable of recovered origin; an explorations of the inner lives of contemporary black Americans as these are penetrated in these fables.

Numerous dreams and remembrances of past lives are narrated in these fables, mostly by Miss Lissie, who tells of her experiences in the jungle as a boy, as a girl and the time she visited a temple with her familiar, a creature part bird, part fish, part reptile, which she caged and which, resentfully, broke out and flew away.
Basically Fanny and Lissie are two strong fabulists in this novel. They are creative artists in this field and their stories are bursting with innate strength, incredible psychic abilities and a belief in any other world more than this visible world. Through their fables, we learn of other life forces presented in the universe and that guides our life at every step. In their fables we examine the evolution of gender roles and the possibility of an existence of a free egalitarian society before true institutions of family, marriage and patriarchy were established.

Walker, in her novels asks her readers to suspend learned literary expectations and become a part of her fables. In her fables Walker speaks directly to the strength of love and the resilience of all living parts of this world- humans, animals, birds, and the earth itself. Walker also narrates the fables of tribal people that are the accounts of hardship, optimism, love and finally, of endurance. These fables still exist in various contexts and to listen to the fabulist are to participate in the recreation of entire universe. About Walker’s unique power of narration Luci Tapahon says in her essay “Learning to Love Through Story Telling.” “Alice walker has written beautifully about dreams, the power of stories-and about the remarkable strength of our own histories.” (1. 13)

All incidents of this novel emerge from the many stories each of the characters is involved in some way telling. Fanny writes beautiful letters to Suwelo, full of the amazing discoveries about her ancestors. Arveyda tells Carlotta about his own painful childhood and the pain and affliction suffered by his ancestors under the slave system. Carlotta shares the fables of her therapist and recovers her origin even in the worst condition of her life. Suwelo comes to know about the fables of his uncle Rafe, Hale and
Lissie when he meets Hale and Lissie in Baltimore. With these fables he learns a lot about his roots and tries to enlighten his future with the light and guidance of his past.

At the center of these fables collective recovery is Lissie, the one who remembers everything. This great grandmother teaches Suwelo with her fables the story of the African race while counseling him on the conduct of life’s enigmas. Her own memories extend through several incarnations and include what she calls dream memories of earliest human time, when, she says, humans and animals lived together as “Familiars” in an Eden –like African paradise. Lissie also recalls the fables of the matriarchal society when once women conducted their lives and taught their traditions to their daughter without any domination of men made rituals. Her memories also work like a critic of the power relations that govern the interaction of blacks and whites and the women with men. Thus these fables examine the nature of racial and sexual afflictions. About these fables says Christopher Zinn in a review of “The Temple of My Familial”, “In this remarkable novel, walker summons her considerable store of fable and tragedy, of historical insight and passionate argument, to cover similar strengths and joys to her reader” (90-2).

Here beside Lissie and Fanny we also become familiar with other fabulist Zeda and her fables. Zeda weaves beautiful peacock feather capes for celebrities in America. Her mother taught this once- recovered art to Zeda. These caps were once part of the ritual ceremonial regalia worn by her ancestors in South America. Zeda gets inspiration from her ancestors and chooses this creative activity of weaving the caps as a medium to earn her bread and to secure the future of her daughter, Carlotta. Zeda is one of the last remaining survivors of her aboriginal community and her fables are the heart wrenching
accounts of the colonization of black people especially women in this discriminated society. Through the fables of Zeda and other characters, we experience the pain and suffering of long exploited people and their humiliation, anger and the fire of their bosoms to uproot the slavery system. These fables are first hand account of what ever has been done with black people. Here main purpose of Walker is to show that how we are the result of our past and our history and how this creates our present, future and past. The characters of Walker find nourishment from their roots deeply rooted in black culture and tradition. These fables are like torchbearer for the pathless victims of race and sex.

Thus every character of this novel has his or her, own fables through which they recover their origin. From these fables we know about the beginning of this universe, the gradual evolution of human being and the character condition of women specially these are the fables about the mothers, who present the glorious examples of the survival of black spirit, tradition and culture even amid the mud of racism and sexism. As Zeda beautifully narrates the fables of her mother; and her magical creativity of weaving the holy clothes of the priests:

“She made caps and headdresses of great beauty, and she did it truly as if magic. There was no squinting line around my mother’s eyes, as there are around mine, because she rarely looked at what she was doing. Her fingers seemed to know just what to do, and her face remained as if she were dreaming. Only her back, from so long bending, was slightly crooked” (47).

Zeda further tells about the great secrets that women have as their own without the knowledge of men. There are many fables in this novel about the changing condition of women. Here Zeda narrates a fable gifted to her by great grandmothers. According to
this fable Zeda tells that how in the beginning women were given the holy responsibility of priesthood by men. These women unknowingly gave birth to the creature and gradually this creature became anxious to discover whether there is any other creature somewhere like him. He went out in search and found others like himself. These new men were quite new to each other and in this strangeness for centuries they kept them busy in staring into each other’s eyes. At that time they were quite unconscious about them and their body, beyond the dangling evidence of maleness, the elongated clitoris. About the dignified condition of women in the beginning says Zeda: “woman was entirely used to herself, while man was still infatuated with his relative newness. Woman was already into adornment. In truth, she was already into high fashion”(49).

But at this time woman was quite unknown about the fashion, she just liked to play with her body. She used to love her soft brown belly and strong brown legs. To decorate her body she used leaves, bark, colored sand, mud, and the toenails of birds. She along with her other sisters hung over the edge of the reflecting pools to love her own image. Zeda also reveals an astonishing fact in her fable, that show how powerful woman and how powerless man was in the beginning; about these women of early time Zeda says: “…occasionally they were host to a man, whom they played with, especially sexually, until they tired of him; they then abandoned him”(49). Zeda further adds that how these given up men shared their experiences with each other and came to know about the fertility of her body. Initially they became afraid of women to know about her capacity of giving birth to men from their body. So this fear of women forced men to worship them as goddess and to give these women the holy responsibility of priesthood because of their great and supernatural powers. But gradually this boon of woman to
produce life turned in to a curse for them and made the men jealous of them because of the lack of this miracle in their over body. Now these men grew sick of the women and very cunningly began to spoil their body by using their power and destructing their body and spirit by making them pregnant again and again. About this oppressed condition of women, Zeda recalls; “...but, oh, the pain! the operations, which were really done right. The heat and the flies and the sweat! The hatred of women, whose pain was every month”(51).

While some of these fables show us the mystery of glorious past of women, others force us to touch the wounds of black people especially of women under the racial and sexual colonization. From the fable of slavery narrated by Lissie to Suwelo we know about the hellish condition of women and children. She tells that how their body, and soul were crushed by their masters and they were thrown into the ditch of slavery. Every symbol of African tradition was removed from their body. These women were gang raped and forced to give birth to other slaves without knowing their father. They were stripped naked and beaten mercilessly on the crew. About her painful confrontation with the racial and sexual jeopardies Lissie reveals her bitter memories in front of Suwelo and tells that how much she had to suffer for being born with black skin and female gender. Following revelation of Lissie really presents a heart rending picture before us:

“The first time I was raped by members of the crew on board the ship, I was violated, they chained me so that my arms and legs were spread out and my thumb was beyond my reach. There was nothing to solace me. But in the hold of the ship, somewhere in the awful darkness, I knew the mothers who had suckled me also lay, and sometimes I imagined their moans of despair were songs of comfort for me and for their own lost children” (68).
All the characters of this novel whether it is Lissie, Fanny or Zeda, all of them have many fables of their great-great grandmothers in their unconscious mind. They not only find their path in the light of these fables but also set examples for coming generations. Lissie narrates these fables to Suwelo, and Fanny and tells them about her various births on this earth as a tree, snake, animals and human being. She tells not only the fables of celebration and sublimation of black people but also about the oppression and colonization of them by recalling the days of painful slavery. As at one place Lissie presents the pain of every black woman in her confession that, “In lifetime after lifetime I have known oppression from parents, siblings, as well as from my own body and mind”(83).

She narrates the tales when there used to be a strong bond of relationship among the animals, trees and snakes as fathers, cousins, lovers, beloved etc. In the fables of Lissie we meet the walking and talking trees. Even in those lives Lissie along with her relatives faced the degradation and humiliation from the powerful and cruel anarchist. As in one of her fables Lissie shares her painful memory with Suwelo: “in the dream memory there are suddenly days and nights of terror, and the faces of fathers and uncles who looked like us but much”(265).

These fables of recovered origin pave the path of Suwelo and compel him to direct his life in a proper way towards self-discovery. Thus both Zeda and Lissie are depicted by Walker as great fabulists in this novel but the difference between Zeda and Lissie is while the fables of Lissie take us into an alien world created by the imagination of Walker among the alien characters, Zeda’s fables are based on reality, on the pain, suffering, hatred, anger and humiliation faced by her and her great grandmothers under
the past patriarchal power structure. Her tales basically reflect the plight of women and her twice exploitation for being born with black skin and female gender.

The fables of Zeda touch the heart of Arveyda and establish a special kind of bond in them. Both Zeda and Arveyda have the painful fables of past to share with each other. Both of them recover their origin and self in the light of these fables. These fables of her mother empower Carlotta and bring her out from the hatred and disgust into the world of love, peace and celebration. On the other hand Fanny’s father and mother Olivia also go back into their past and ancestral history to enlighten the path not only of their daughters Fanny and Nzingha but also of the whole black community. Fanny comes out of her fear, traumas and sorrowful dreams and finds a soothing balm in the shadow of these fables for her burning bosom. Every life effecting decision of these black people is influenced by some or other fable transferred to them as gifts by their ancestors. The fable of Lissie about the animal cousins had moved Suwelo and each day he found himself more conscious of his own non-human relatives in the world. Now he begins to ponder about the imitating nature of the human being and has started the search of his originality. At this turn of his life he has learned the lesson from these fables that, “imitating anything only means that the source of original thing had dried up”(324).

Most of the characters of Walker are expert in some or other art. Like true artist they have the great responsibility of uniting the world by creating fables through their art. As Arveyda unites Carlotta and her mother Zeda, by singing in his songs the fables of Zeda’s courage, of her pride in not burdening her child with an unbearable history and of her true humbleness. Arveyda With these songs gives birth to a special kind of bond
between Carlotta and her mother and inspires Carlotta to recover her origin by going into the past of her mother and by studying the origin of her mother.

Fanny creates a habit to talk with the spirits of ancestors and recover her origin by becoming one with her ancestors. In these fables she finds the key to unlock her heart. At one place in the novel she accepts her bond with her ancestors:

“They open doors inside me. I find, as they are keys to unlock the rooms inside myself. I find a door inside and its as if I hear a humming from behind it, and then I get inside somehow, with the key the old one give me and I stumble about in the darkness of the room. I began to feel the stirring in myself, the humming of the room, and my heart starts to expand with the absolute feeling of bravery, or love, or audacity, or commitment. It becomes a light, and a part of me that was not clear before is clarified I radiate this expanded light, happiness” (188).

This acceptance of Fanny about the radiance of self, and about the sublimation of the spirit basically is the result of her visit with her ancestral history. Thus like many other characters Fanny discovers the secret of joy in her history and learns to recognize her strength to fight and survive happily, to bloom up the flower of her life, to celebrate and affirm herself even among the mud of racial and sexual jeopardies around her. Basically Walker’s novels move along these various streams of conversation, storytelling and memory, recovering the various combinations of ancestry and incidents that, pasted together, to form the long fore ground of these contemporary African-American lives.

Walker is a great fabulist and in excellent manner voices the animals, trees, and birds, along with the human being as the characters of her fables. As, best influence of Aesopian fables is reflected in the fable of lion family in the very beginning of the novel Possessing the Secret of Joy. This is a beautiful fable of self-discovery, resistance and
celebration having the characters Baba, a panther and the head of the family, his wife Lara and co wife Lala. In this fable where Lara, recovers her origin by loving her self and by resisting the humiliation, hatred and exploitation hurled upon her by her husband and his co-wife. This fable of the journey from powerlessness to empowerment in the very opening of the novel indicates towards Walker as a great fabulist who creates such fables with her power of imagination and her power of imagination and fix them as the pole stars for the wandering barks of her characters; to come out from the dark sea of racism and sexism.

Some of the African American fables directly originated from the illusions of Olinka people are inferior in Olivia’s point of view because of the lack of originality in them. Protagonist of this novel Tashi attempts to redefine the community of African women who have endured the mutilation in order to protect what lives at the root of their spiritual and racial heritage- the Afro-centric self. As Tashi, in her madness goes back into her past and learns the horrible fact that female genital mutilation came to America with excised and infibulates enslaved African women, and that it was also used on white women. As her psychiatrist tells her about the racial and sexual past of African women who were examined by white medical students as their project of science:

“They learned to do this procedure on other enslaved women; they did this in the name of science…. They found the use of it on white women… they wrote in their medical journal that they had finally found a cure for the white women’s hysteria” (186).

Pierre, an anthropology student introduces Tashi to the creation myth of the Dogon people, which describes perhaps the first female genital mutilation that each human being from the first was endowed with two souls of different sex, or rather with
two principles corresponding to two distinct regions. In the male the female soul was located in the prepuce (foreskin); in the women the male soul was in the clitoris. He further narrates the fable behind this ritual of genital mutilation and says:

“… the man is circumcised to rid him of his femininity; the woman is excised to rid her masculinity. In other words…. a very long time ago, men found it necessary to permanently lock people in the category of their obvious sex, even while recognizing sexual duality as a given of nature…” (171-73).

Walker tells the myth and fables of Dogon tribe in Africa through Pierre, as he says; the Dogon believe that when the earth was first created, a lonely god sought to make love to it but could only penetrate the earth with his penis after he cut off her clitoris, a termite hill blocking his entrance.

As Tashi bitterly puts it:

“When the clitoris rose… God thought it looked masculine. Since it was masculine for a clitoris to rise, God could be excused for cutting it down. Which he did. Then…. God fucked the hole that was left. Of course I remember….that griaule said god had intercourse. It is we who say god fucked”(229).

These fables of the novels of Walker depict a series of black women largely involved in destructive and distressful relationship with men. In depicting the lot of black women in the society Walker takes hint from past and shows the changing condition of women. Some fables present them at the mercy not only of the men in their lives, but also to their own passions, the forces of nature, or societal expectations of these forces. Fables of black women depict them having the courage to define and subsequently act on their own convictions rather than capitulate to the intimidation of those in power.
Basically these fables of Walker define her concept of “heritage” as a special part of black culture. The creative powers as quilting, weaving, sewing, painting have important place in these fables. These fables celebrate the ordinary women who have been able to devise something beautiful and functional out of throwaways and enable the author to draw sustenance from her roots to endow her character with a creative sensitivity. In these fables, her characters find refuge in their ancestors to protect them from this brutal world. Here Walker stresses the need to deal with the intrinsic nature of black individual and the collective experiences of the black people. Walker uses art as main weapon of the black people to fight with racial and sexual afflictions. In her novels Walker uses art as liberation and life saving device adopted by her women for reconstruction and reclamation of self, of past, of culture, and of community.

The struggle and execution of Tashi is also mythical and creates fables for coming strugglers, in the sense that her act of resistance to the tradition that stifles her wholeness, creates the true freedom of herself. Tashi dies in peace, with no M’Lissa left behind to kill another Dura “screaming her terror eternally into own ear”(166). Tashi’s dying is not only a spiritual transcendence of the life long pain she endures, but also a forceful act of claming the right to inherit the dignity and self-empowerment of the early African women. This fable of Tashi’s life basically is an attempt to capture the ancient African women’s life as the unvoiced resistance to the destruction of female self hood- an act that demands courage. In her death, Tashi reconciles to the ancient African women’s vision of freedom and adds a new fable in the brave history of black women.

There are many fables in this novel as with the help of one fable Pierre interprets Tashi’s dream of imprisonment in tower that is cool, tall, and dark.. Near the end of
Tashi’s life, Pierre informs her of Africa’s strong identification with the termite “that has kept a place for males in this society”. He also tells her about the male made fable as prevailed in African society behind this hellish ritual “no man would marry a loose or uncircumcised female” (235). The village elders have their own fable behind this ritual, they believe that god “created the tsunga and thus it is a religious taboo to break the silence surrounding what Walker presents as a psychic trauma that women have endured for centuries in Africa and the middle east.

Being the student of anthropology, Pierre recounted many fables in order to remove the fear of Tashi’s dream. Initially rejected like the biblical Christ, Pierre has become for Tashi the sacred “corner” stone that she once hurled at him. Thus in reference to Tashi and the fable of Walker these stones have a quite different meaning. Again Pierre, with his fable assists Tashi in her development by explaining the concept of the female soul of the male and the male soul of the female. But this fable narrated by Pierre is already rejected in Tashi’s society because “man’s life was not capable of supporting both beings. Each person would have to merge himself in the sex for which he appeared to be best fitted” (175).

Initially Tashi used to think this ritual of genital mutilation as a symbol of her black identity and very happily adopted it. But later on facing the scornful eyes of American doctors on her body and the hellish pain in physical relations with Adam, she became sick; mentally as well as physically with this ritual. This psychologically disturbed condition of Tashi turned her into an object of research for American doctors, who were very anxious to analyze Tashi. In those days, undoubtedly Tashi was living quite pathless and helpless life. She was not finding the way to move further. In such condition Pierre and her psychiatrist helped her by taking her back into the fables and
myths about this ritual. To solve the riddle of her dreams Pierre tells her so many stories. These fables show her solution of her psychological riddles and at the same time give birth and stability to her feelings of resistance so much that she murders M’Lissa. Thus in these fables Tashi finds the causes to recover her true self. With the help of these fables she finds the reason as well as the path get back her lost identity and in the end of the novel she dies the death of a martyr by turning her life itself into a fable for the coming generations to give them the lesson that resistance to each kind of oppression is the greatest secret of joy.

Racism and sexism are the major afflictions focused by Walker in her novels. As an ordinary writer she does not simply tells us about these jeopardies but she is a true fabulist and is expert in creating fables to reveal the pain, suffering, tears and humiliation and degradation, that black people suffered under the colonization by their white masters. As T.S. Eliot in his critical essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” emphasizes on the value of past to improve the present, he realizes that the past exists in the present, and the past and the present form one simultaneous order. Similar to Eliot, Walker is also interested in tradition and her heritage. In her novels, the reflection of past can be seen in every character. Every character of Walker is the result of his or her past and is busy in recovery of its origin and improving its present with the help of the lesson taught by the tradition, as Eliot says:

“Tradition in the true sense of the world cannot be inherited; it can only be obtained by hard labor. This labor is, knowing the past writers. It is the critical labor of shifting the good from the bad, and of knowing what is good and useful. Only those, who have the historical sense, can obtain tradition”.

(www.rlwclarke.net/courses/.../06BEliot,TraditionandtheIndividualTalent)
This sense of tradition is very much reflected in the novels of Walker. Her characters whether Fanny, Meridian, Suwelo or Tashi struggle a lot in their lives. They fight with every kind of odd situation throughout their life. These characters of Walker, basically are the result of their past. Whenever they find them pathless without any way to go further, they look towards their ancestors for their guidance and inspiration. While on one hand these are the fables of pain, suffering, and humiliation and abuse on the other hand these are fables that give spark to the long suppressed fire of resistance in the hearts of black people. All women protagonists of Walker as Tashi, Celie, Fanny and Ruth search their role models in their great-great grandmothers. They learn the lesson of hitting back by celebrating one’s own self even in the worst condition of life.

At last to conclude this chapter we can say that in all her novels Alice Walker touches the lives of black women and their struggle, the courageous fight they put up against a racist and sexist society that stifles their growth towards selfhood and wholeness. In her novels Walker gives emphasis on the requirement of ancestral history; an understanding of the racial past, as a meaningful part of the present, in order to redeem the self and developing and renewing the black woman’s sense of race and place, expanding her vision into a large world. These women of Walker go back into their ancestral history to recover their roots and origin and to get the strength to fight with the racial and sexual hegemony. In another sense the saga of pain, suffering, resistance and celebration of the life of black women may also be called the fables of recovered origin. By redefining their black history, culture and tradition, Walker lifts the African women to the level of history, and establishes them in the form of such strong trees that that can
never be uprooted even in thunder and storm because they are getting their nourishment from their roots.

Thus in these fables the lives of the distant ancestors of the great forests of Africa are remembered whenever their descendants draw close to each other in happiness and love. For Walker and for her creations, memory and imagination both are combined to create the fables of recovered origin, just as they obtain hidden connections between the lives of these individuals and the spiritual and physical continuity of the African people.
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www.rlwclarke.net/courses/.../06B Eliot, TraditionandtheIndividualTalent