Alice Walker's major concern in her first novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is black man-woman relationship. In an interview she stated her idea behind writing this novel: "And I wanted to explore the relationship between men and women, and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity. Why are women so easily "tramps" and "traitors" when men are heroes for engaging in the same activity? Why do women stand for this?" Walker says that, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, though sometimes humorous and celebrative of life, is a grave book in which the characters see the world as almost entirely menacing. She is much against her work being labelled "gothic." She feels that what she writes has something to do with real life. Walker describes her novel as "a novel that is chronological in structure, or one devoted, more or less, to rigorous realism." She further says, "*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is a very realistic novel. I wanted it to be absolutely visual. I wanted the reader to be able to sit down, pick up that book and see a little of Georgia from the early twenties through the sixties -- the trees, the hills, the dirt, the sky -- to feel it, to feel the pain and the struggle of the family, and the growth of the little girl Ruth. I wanted all of that to be very real." Walker, being both black and female, tries to project her vision of the world most often through the eyes of her black female characters. In the Afterword to the 1988 edition of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, she writes, "In my immediate family too there was violence. It's roots seemed always to be embedded in my father's need to dominate my mother and their children and in her resistance (and ours), verbal and physical, to any such domination."
The Third Life of Grange Copeland expresses Walker’s powerful ambivalence towards Southern life. Her ambivalence is a rich and complex mode of vision which prevents her from either naively romanticizing the South or reducing it to an oversimplified vision of despair and resentment. Walker, herself a Southerner from rural Georgia, says, “I hated it, generally. The hard work in the fields, the shabby houses, the evil greedy men who worked my father to death and almost broke the courage of that strong woman, my mother.” She viewed the South from a substantial critical distance, partly because of her status as a black woman in a world dominated by white males. As she points out in “The Black Writer and the Southern Experience,” “For not only is he in a position to see his own world, and its close community (“Homecomings” on First Sundays, barbecues to raise money to send to Africa -- one of the smaller ironies -- the simplicity and eerie calm of a black funeral, where the beloved one is buried way in the middle of a wood with nothing to mark the spot but perhaps a wooden cross already coming apart), but also he is capable of knowing, with remarkably silent accuracy, the people who make up the larger world that surrounds and suppresses his own.” But she nevertheless emphasizes that the Southern black writers have “enormous richness and beauty to draw from.” This “double vision” is seen in most of her novels. Walker’s complexly split vision of the South is at the centre of her fiction and is best seen in the development of the characters. Walker says that she is able to draw a great deal of positive material from her “underprivileged” background:

No one could wish for a more advantageous heritage than that bequeathed to the black writer in the South: a compassion for the earth, a trust in humanity beyond our knowledge of evil, and an abiding love of justice. We inherit a great responsibility as well, for we must give voice to centuries not only of silent bitterness and hate but also of neighborly kindness and sustaining love.
The Third Life of Grange Copeland expresses Walker's deep awareness of the racist society, and its severity which has been an integral part of southern culture.

A recurrent motif in Alice Walker's novels "is her insistence on probing the relationship between struggle and change, a probing that encompasses the pain of Black people's lives." Such pain sometimes results in growth, the growth of one's self. Walker focuses on the struggle of the Blacks, especially Black women who try to claim their own lives, pushing against the barbed-wired wall of racism, sexism, age, ignorance, and despair. Their struggle is endless. They seem to be trapped by circumstances. Their entrapment is the result of their sense of powerlessness against dominant society as well as the fact that they have little understanding of the structure of that society. The struggle and frustration of black women are very well brought out in this novel. Walker sees the experiences of Black women as a series of movements from a woman totally victimized by society and by men to a growing, developing woman whose consciousness allows her to have some control over her life.

The black women are doubly burdened. They are, in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, "the mules of the world". Carrying the burdens heaped upon them by society and by family, these women are victims of both racial and sexual oppression. They are often subjected to and destroyed by oppression and violence. Pain, violence and death form the essential contents of their lives. Walker refers to such women as "suspended women," "suspended in a time in history when the options for Black women were severely limited ... (who) either kill themselves or ... are used up by the man, or by the children, or by ... whatever the pressures against them." They are
suspended in time and place and they cannot move anywhere. These women either kill themselves, retreat into insanity, or are simply defeated one way or another by the external circumstances of their lives.

Margaret and Mem are the victims of environmental deprivations and extreme insensitivity. They are unfortunate women who are victims of the brutal behaviour on the part of their husbands. These two women exemplify the type of women described by Alice Walker in an interview with Mary Helen Washington: "Women who are cruelly exploited, spirits and bodies mutilated, relegated to the most narrow and confining lives, sometimes driven to madness."11 Their lives are lived under extreme forms of oppression. The women of the late sixties exhibit the qualities of an emergent model. Ruth in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* who is raised in the sixties becomes the natural inheritor of the new order, thus marking a transition.

*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* focuses on a black family, the Copelands. It traces the history of the Copeland family through three generations, those of Grange, Brownfield, and Ruth. Walker focuses on the relationship between the racist sharecropping system and the violence that the men, women, and children of that family inflict on each other. Walker focuses on the struggle with, and the terror of, the racism that permeates their lives and is responsible for the patterns of destruction. She also explores the relationship between daughters and fathers through her characters. Walker says, "I wanted to learn myself, how it happens that the hatred a child can have for a parent becomes inflexible."12 Walker’s central theme in the novel is stated thus:
The question of responsibility for personal action and societal change is one recurrent motif in the complex quilts that Walker makes out of thrifty sentences, knotted questions, tight metaphors, terse sections. Her novels continually stitch a fabric of the everyday violence that is committed against her characters and that they commit upon one another in their search for regeneration, and regeneration is what black people desire.\textsuperscript{13}

Though the primary focus in the novel is on the life of Grange Copeland, he becomes largely a vehicle through which the broader racial experience is narrated. The novel is based on the principle that societal change is invariably linked to personal change, that the struggle must be inner -- as well as outer-directed. Walker says, "I believe in change: change personal, and change in society."\textsuperscript{14} The structure of the novel is based on the dramatic tension between the pervasive racism of the society and the need for Walker's characters, if they are to hold on to self-love, to accept responsibility for their own lives. In the novel, Walker gives a vivid picture of the tension between the power of oppressive societal forces and the possibility for change. "So Grange Copeland was expected to change. He was fortunate enough to be touched by love of something beyond himself,"\textsuperscript{15} which changes his "smothered and tense" life.\textsuperscript{16}

Alice Walker stopped practising the traditional religion in which she was brought up. But she nevertheless makes extensive use of religious motifs in her fiction. Although Walker completely rejected Christian faith, she could not straightaway reject certain aspects of the Southern black religious tradition: "As a college student I came to reject the Christianity of my parents, and it took me years to realize that though they had been force-fed a white man's palliative, in the form of religion, they had made it into something at once simple and noble."\textsuperscript{17} The Southern black sharecropper and poor farmer was given a religion that was intended to "pacify"
him as a slave. But he soon transformed it into an "antidote against bitterness,"* thus converting a source of enslavement into an important cultural resource.

Grange, the title character, undergoes a dramatic transformation of the self. Walker approaches the experience of conversion analogously without any commitment to Christian orthodoxy. Her characters are saved by the love generated by their experience of the natural world and the human communities of which they are an integral part. Walker believes that a person is not simply the static product of environment but has the possibility of converting to different "lives" generated by transformations of the self. Grange Copeland offers a vivid picture of such a transformation. He begins his life in a totally dehumanizing environment, but later he goes on to transform his life twice until he becomes a "reborn man" (157) one who achieves a "total triumph over life's failures" (136). Grange Copeland is the victim of the white race domination. His first life reduces him to the level of "a stone or a robot" (8) a passive receptor of environmental conditions. His inferior position makes him unfit to assume the roles of a husband or father. Eventually he deserts his family and moves to North. He recovers his manhood and self-respect when he allows a white woman to drown in the park. He sees the white woman as a symbol of the system, which has suppressed him. Grange feels that by such an act of murder he has rebelled against the environment which has morally paralyzed him. He sets up a "new religion" (153) and he radically assumes a "second" life.

Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* reveal certain similarities regarding their interest in religious conversions. The hero of the novel *Wise Blood* lives a life characterized by major transformations
of the self similar to Grange Copeland's. Like Grange, Hazel Motes' life too has three basic lives which correspond to a three-part journey. Both characters at key points in their lives are dehumanized by the social environment. Just as Grange is spiritually and morally crippled in his first and second lives by the racism and hatred of the segregated South, Hazel feels that his Army experiences have greatly diminished him as a human being. He takes on the casual amorality of his fellow soldiers. Both Grange's and Hazel's conversion to a positive mode of belief saves them in their third lives. Grange Copeland undergoes a true conversion when Ruth makes him "see" (196). Hazel Motes is reborn by acquiring a spiritual vision which is paradoxically brought on by his loss of eyesight.

Grange sacrifices his life for the sake of his grand daughter, Ruth. Thus the regeneration of a freer life coming through death forms the theme of the novel. Brownfield does not change, "because he was not prepared to give his life for anything, or to anything. He could find nothing of value within himself and he did not have the courage to imagine a life without the existence of white people to act as a foil. To become what he hated was his inevitable destiny." He was a person who "could never renew or change himself" (227). The personal histories of Grange and Brownfield remain the dominant focus of the narratives, but the women's stories serve significant textual and ideological functions.

Margaret, Grange's wife, is initially submissive to the core. Her first situation of submission is revealed when she agrees with Grange during a family dispute. Her son Brownfield wonders and thinks that "his mother was like their dog in some
ways. She didn’t have a thing to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father” (5). Margaret is submissive and loyal, and totally dependent on her husband. She lacks control over her own life. She dismisses the opportunity to escape from her present life and establish for herself and her son a more meaningful existence in the North. Although the idea to move to the North is approved by Grange, Margaret prefers to adhere to her current situation, to a value system that dictates and perpetuates her own subservience:

""You could’ve gone," said Grange softly, to his wife.
"I don’t know nothing about up Norse."
"You could learn."
"Naw, I don’t believe I could." There was a sigh in her voice.” (14)

Margaret reacts to her situation but fails to explore the possibilities available to her. She has no courage or sufficient insight to evaluate her options. Walker’s women suffer from a flaw, an inherent weakness that prevents them from having the innate ability to extricate themselves from their denigrating and immoral situations. Margaret seeks some diversion from the drudgery of her life. She is frustrated and turns to other men in an effort to alter the quality of her life. She tries to find a way out of her hopeless situation. Her hopeless condition makes her follow her husband’s path. Brownfield finds the quick transformation of his mother “that one day she was as he had always known her; kind, submissive, smelling faintly of milk; and the next day she was a wild woman looking for frivolous things, her heart’s good times, in the transient embraces of strangers” (20). Brownfield feels that his father is responsible for his mother’s change. Margaret shifts from submissiveness to wantoness. On weekdays she was “sober and wifely,” but on weekends “she became a huntress of soft touches, gentle voices and sex without the arguments over the
constant and compelling pressures of everyday life” (20). Even Grange later finds himself responsible for the change in his wife’s behaviour. It is his lustful ways that make her throw herself on other men. Margaret in fact tries “to play her husband’s game” (177). Once refusing to “sell herself” she now chooses to give herself freely to other men. Though she never liked her “sister’s Northern existence,” “she had grown restless about her own life, a life that was as predictably unexciting as last year’s cotton field” (19). Even when Margaret found relief from her cares in the arms of her fellow bait-pullers and church members, or with the man who drove the truck and who turned her husband to stone, she still had a soft corner for Grange: “there was a deference in her eyes that spoke of her love for Grange” (20). She humbly respects her husband’s feelings and ignores her baby. Grange, unable to forgive his wife, leaves her to her fate and deserts her. Margaret, unable to envision a life without him, kills herself and the baby, thereby exhibiting in death her repentance by separating from her baby.

Walker uses death as a resolution of the conflict that engulfs her women. She dramatizes the notion that death symbolizes the relief of the character’s guilt. Margaret tries to wash away her sin and redeem herself of the guilt of infidelity by taking her own life. She dies because she could never forgive herself of sin. She loved Grange so much that she could not live without him. Margaret lives a life devoid of self-respect and recognition. Klaus Ensslen writes thus:

Margaret drastically exemplifies this state of suspension without creative outlet, devoid of real options, when we see her driven into the radical moral resignation of suicide. On the other hand, Margaret’s spontaneous reaction to her husband’s desertion already contains the seed for an as yet unseized opportunity for self-definition equating or even transcending Grange’s self-estimate at
that point: while he goes through the accelerating motion of flight, she seems to be able to discover -- even if only fleetingly -- a positive form of self-directed joy in living, in sexual self-assertion -- comparable to what Alice Walker has described in other women when they take recourse to flower gardens or the knitting of quilts. Margaret thus embodies a kind of germinal unconscious attempt at feminine self-realization. 20

But Margaret’s attempt at self-realization is unsuccessful and fails to come to fruition. Her death is a quiet giving in, a resignation, rather than an assertive departure. Although Margaret has never been dominant in life, her suicide might be seen as a final act of rebellion.

Mem, Brownfield’s wife stands much in contrast to Margaret. Even Brownfield “thought of her as of another mother, the kind his own had not been. Someone to be loved and spoken to softly, someone never to frighten with his rough, coarse ways” (45). Although Brownfield was enjoying his life in the company of Josie and her daughter Lorene, he is quickly attracted towards Mem, Josie’s educated niece, who reminds him of an ideal woman. Mem is a shy and quiet person and a very good teacher. She is concerned about Brownfield and tries to educate him. When Brownfield proposes, she readily agrees to his proposal and believes him totally when he says, “We ain’t always going to be stuck down here, honey. Don’t you worry” (49). She believes fully in a man unworthy of her trust. Years later, the contentment, the love for each other, and the joy of the early married years are replaced by misery, scorn and contempt. Mem, once idolized by Brownfield for her education, proper language, and beauty, is now despised and accused. She silently bears his accusations and accepts “him in total passivity and blankness, like a church.” Walker describes Mem as “too pure to know how sanctified was his soul by her
silence" (54). She remains silent even though he treated her like a nigger and a whore. "Woman’s plight is to suffer in silence, to live the myth of the strong black woman. The irony of the myth is that it only enables survival under dehumanizing circumstances." Brownfield feels jealous of Mem’s education which is the source of her power, the power which allies her with his white oppressors:

His crushed pride, his battered ego, made him drag Mem away from schoolteaching. Her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write. It was his great ignorance that sent her into white homes as a domestic, his need to bring her down to his level. It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, although she was no party to any of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. (55)

Mem bears everything without a single word of complaint because she loved Brownfield. Her love for Brownfield makes her accept all his burdens along with her own. Brownfield did not begrudge her the greater heart, but he could not forgive her the greater knowledge.

"Black women not only digest the hurt and pain, they also feel it is their duty to become a repository of the Black man’s rage." They also feel guilty and responsible for the emasculation of the black male. This feeling of guilt makes the black women weak and crippled. Their weakness and vulnerability give a chance for the black men to use them as their punching bags. "Every Saturday night he beat her, trying to pin the blame for his failure on her by imprinting it on her face" (55). Brownfield beats Mem "into ugliness." Mem is made fun of. She is ridiculed, embarrassed, and humiliated in front of his friends. For a woman like Mem, who had so barely escaped to a “culture of poverty”, a slip back into that culture was the
easiest thing in the world. First to please her husband, and then because she honestly could not recall her nouns and verbs, her plurals and singulars, Mem began speaking once more in her old dialect. The starch of her speech simply went out of her and what comes out of her mouth sagged, just as what had come out of her ancestors sagged. Mem loses interest in her books and burns them up. She becomes ugly and haggard. "Everything about her" he changes, not to suit him, for she had suited him when they were married. He changes "her to something he did not want, could not want, and that made it easier for him to treat her in the way he felt she deserved" (57). Walker calls Brownfield Mem's "Pygmalion in reverse" (56).

Temperamentally Mem is a replica of Margaret, essentially docile and submissive, and doing whatever Brownfield wants her to do to promote his sense of manhood. But Mem is less rebellious when compared to Margaret. She never betrayed her family for personal pleasures. Mem has never been guilty of the infidelity Brownfield accuses her of. Even when Brownfield regularly visited Josie, till the end, she remains faithful to him. It is only when Brownfield wanted them to shift to the place where he wanted that Mem gets really mad, she expresses her genuine anger. Despair, hatred, and ambition to live in a decent house and lead a better life overpower her. She even threatens to kill Brownfield unless he agrees to go according to her wishes. She delivers her ten commandments and makes him abide by her rules. She had always cherished a dream to own a house. "There was a time when she saved every cent she was allowed to keep from her wages as a domestic because she wanted, someday, to buy a house" (57). But her dreams were shattered by Brownfield. As the children grew up, her concern for them makes her look for a
clean house. She succeeds in getting a decent house and a job for herself and for Brownfield. Her single act of assertion destroys Brownfield’s sense of manhood. He plots Mem’s subjugation and lies in wait for the return of her weakness. Brownfield waits “planting a seed to grow that would bring her down in weakness and dependence and to her ultimate destruction” (103) and succeeds in his evil mission. Walker refers to Mem as a “non-fighter.” She fails to calculate her risks as well as her opportunities. Mem lacks an important attribute necessary for effective coping. Mem falls sick and her broken health gives an opportunity for Brownfield to take apparent control over her. In spite of her sickness and depressed condition, Mem still feels confident and her determination does not die. She angrily retorts to Brownfield’s teasings and says:

“... I’m sick,” ... “but I ain’t going to ask you for mercy, and I ain’t going to die and leave my children. I’m going to git well again, and git work again, and when I do I’m going to leave you.” (107)

Mem is involved in planting and cultivating flower gardens. Her gardens symbolize her tenacious will to survive in beauty and in love. Walker envisions her own mother who cultivated magnificent flower gardens despite her hard and wearied work. She feels that whatever her mother planted grew as if by magic. She writes, “Because of her creativity with her flowers, even my memories of poverty are seen through a screen of blooms -- sunflowers, petunias, roses, dahlias, forsythia, spirea, delphiniums, verbena, ... and on and on.” Walker refers to her mother’s gardens as her “art”, “her ability to hold on, even in very simple ways.” Walker says thus:
Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities -- and the will to grasp them.  

She continues saying her mother's gardens taught her the essentials of art and beauty, endurance and survival: "Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength -- in search of my mother's garden, I found my own." 

Margaret fails to influence her son Brownfield because of her rebellious nature, whereas Mem fails to influence her daughters because of her absolute submission. Ornette, second daughter of Mem who is rebellious in nature, thinks that "Mem had married beneath her and should have married instead a teacher or a mason or anybody with land of his own and a fine house" (112). Though all of them loved her, none of them admired and wished to have her as their model. Ruth, the youngest one, has too much self-esteem to allow herself to be treated the way her mother was treated. She could not understand why her mother had "walked on after she saw the gun?" (122). Mem's life influences Grange, for her sufferings bring back to memory Margaret's plight and his wrong doings. But neither her life nor her death fails to bring about a change in Brownfield.

Brownfield Copeland is one of "the living dead, one of the many who had lost their souls in the American wilderness" (139). "He lay thrashing about, knowing the rigidity of his belief in misery, knowing he could never renew or change himself, for this changelessness was now all he had, he could not clarify what was the duty of love; whether to prepare for the best of life, or her the worst" (227). His refusal or inability to change makes him stand out as a horrid man devoid of any trace of...
humanity. Brownfield is one who is cruelly victimized by extreme racism and poverty. He is portrayed as “a human being, completely destroyed” (225). Abandoned by his father and his mother, his own life was becoming a repetition of his father’s. “He was never able to do more than exist on air; he was never able to build on it, and was never to have any land of his own; and was never able to set his woman up in style, which more than anything else he wanted to do” (54-55). Brownfield’s jealousy leads to his wife’s death. He could not bear to see Mem getting down from the white man’s car. That sight reminds him of his mother’s callous behaviour -- Margaret climbing out from a white man’s truck -- years before.

Mem’s love for Brownfield costs her too much. Her love, self-sacrificing nature, and gentleness only prompted him to take control over himself. The more compelled she was to save him, the worse he treated her. Although tired from work, she tried to be cheerful, but Brownfield aims his gun right into her face and fires. Unaware of his evil intentions, Mem succumbs to death. Brownfield never regrets his callous act. He supports his act saying, “He liked plump women” and that “he had murdered his wife because she had become skinny” (161). Mem’s “weakness was forgiveness, a stupid belief that kindness can convert the enemy” (162). She was too willing to forgive, and her generosity ends her life. Unlike Celie in The Color Purple, Mem is educated, independent, and has an identity as a school teacher. Even then she is suppressed and humiliated and dies a miserable death at the hands of her own husband, the man she loved.

The suffering of black women is a consistent theme in Walker’s novels. She brings out the subtle hatred, jealousy, distrust, and the competitive attitude women
have towards one another, especially when a man moves often clandestinely from one woman to another. There seems to be no explanation or rationale for the condescending attitude that the women have for each other. Unlike the women in the novel *The Color Purple* who share each other’s pain, sorrow, laughter, and dreams applauding each other’s achievements and helping one another, the women in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* are spiteful towards one another.

Walker brings out these qualities very well in the characters, Josie and Lorene, mother and daughter, who own the Dew Drop Inn in an adjoining small community. Josie is another victimized black woman who creates for herself a world and an identity of her own. Her father, a preacher, drives her out when he comes to know about her pregnancy. Trying to win his favour and forgiveness, she hosts a party on his birthday. She drinks too much and messes up everything, thereby losing her father’s love forever. Josie opens a business and her daughter, Lorene, works along with her. At times they even share the same lovers. Their physical degeneration reflects their vulnerability, greed, pain, and rebellious nature: “Josie’s face was heavy and doughy, lumpy and creased from sleep, wet from her dream. She had the stolid, anonymous face of a cook in a big house, the face of a tired waitress. The face of a woman too fat, too greedy, too unrelentless to be loved” (42). She lures young Brownfield into her trap. Josie’s love for money and sex makes her hard, greedy, and selfish. She “did her job with a gusto that denied shame, and demanded her money with an authority that squelched all pity” (41). Lorene works along with her mother. “Her hard, malevolent eyes were a yellowish flash in her dark hairy face”. She looks masculine, as “sinewy as a man.” “Only her odor and breasts were female” (34).
Josie does not care about Lorene. She does not exhibit even the slightest maternal feelings towards her daughter. She feels Lorene as a burden to her. She tells Grange, “she (Lorene) been a chain round my neck long enough. If it hadn’t been for her me and your daddy would have been together in the first place” (61). Josie degrades herself still more, competing with her daughter for Brownfield’s attention and sex. They both start fighting over him, blaming each other. When Brownfield decides to marry Mem, Josie goes to the extent of telling Brownfield shamelessly how much better she was for Grange than Margaret, and her involvement with Grange. Though she enjoys her profession, she still desires to settle with one person. She tries to fit herself into the role of a domestic wife by marrying Grange. Although her profession demands no commitment to anybody, she sells her only security, the Dew Drop Inn to provide money for Grange to buy a farm. She even tries to regain his love by plotting with Brownfield. Josie loses her independence and she starts washing clothes for white and black to buy her bread. Her face looked “puffy and sad,” her dress ripped along the seams under the arms showing her yellow flesh, “wet and slack” (222). Her smallish eyes expressed her inexpressibly hopeless and dull future. All the impudence of self-determination goes off and she becomes like any other black woman, weak and dependent. Walker mentions another woman, Miss Mamie Lou Banks, a washerwoman, who symbolizes the multiplicity of pain that the Black women inflict on each other. Giving an account to Brownfield of the children’s whereabouts, she tells him, “one of they daddies is dead from being in the war, although he only got as for as Fort Bennet. The other one of they daddies is now married to the woman what lives in the next house down the road. If you
stands up on your tippy toes you can jest about see her roof, sort of green colored. I thought she was helpin’ me get another husband and all the time she was lookin’ out for herself” (30).

In the novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* the three generations of Copelands converge to create Ruth’s identity. Ruth’s life is linked with Grange’s who takes up the responsibility of sheltering her, directing her in the right path, and preserving her soul in its youthful freshness. Walker’s older men, for example, Grange in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Albert in *The Color Purple*, who have been abusive and cruel in their youth are redeemed by learning to love and to assume responsibility for their actions. Walker is criticised for her being more sympathetic toward her black male characters as they grow older. Her images of young male brutality toward women are not surprising. Violence was a fact of life in Eatonton in general and in her own family in particular. In an interview with David Bradley, Walker recalls:

> I knew both my grandfathers, and they were just doting, indulgent, sweet old men. I just loved them both and they were crazy about me. However, as young men, middle-aged men, they were ... brutal. One grandfather knocked my grandmother out of a window. He beat one of his children so severely that the child had epilepsy. Just a horrible, horrible man. But when I knew him, he was a sensitive, wonderful man. 27

As asked if her father would have eventually been like her grandfather, Walker replies wistfully, “Oh, he had it in him to be.”28 She feels that as he grew older he became more like some of her worst characters. She never saw him mellow into the benevolent old man each of her grandfathers had become. The return of Grange, in his “second life,” endows him with larger-than-life dimensions. This change in
character presents Grange as the embodiment of human possibility. At the core of Grange's transformation is the novel's ideological statement that one cannot be so dehumanized by a system as to lose one's own humanity. Walker feels that the oppressed blacks can take control of their own lives by an understanding of the system and the individual's position within that structure. Thus the African-Americans will be able to emerge 'whole.'

Grange in his "third life" undergoes a change, a true conversion which transforms his life. His return to the South helps him to assess his behaviour and allows him to make amends for his past mistakes. He realizes that his desertion resulted in his wife Margaret's suicide. He tells his son Brownfield, "We guilty, Brownfield, and neither one of us is going to move a step in the right direction until we admit it" (209). Grange admits his crimes and honestly relates them to his son, which is the main theme of the novel:

I know the danger of putting all the blame on somebody else for the mess you make out of your life.... And I'm bound to believe that that's the way white folks can corrupt you even when you done held up before. 'Cause when they got you thinking that they're to blame for everything they have you thinking they's some kind of gods! ... Then you begins to think up evil and begins to destroy everybody around you, and you blames it on the crackers. Shit! Nobody's as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls, don't we? (207)

Grange plays an increasingly positive role in helping Brownfield's family. Because he "felt guilty about his son's condition," he "assuaged his guilt by giving food and money to Brownfield's family" (70). Grange attempts to atone for his sins by helping Mem and later by looking after Ruth. He takes up the familial roles of a father and guardian, which Brownfield had discarded. He treats Mem with kindness and
becomes a loving father to Ruth. It is his love for his grand daughter that changes
his life. From his first life which was “smothered” by a dehumanized society and his
second life wherein he was “frozen” by his hatred for the whites, he becomes a
“reborn man” in his third life redeemed by “love” through the magic of Ruth’s hugs
and kisses.

Grange instills in Ruth a sense of dignity forbidding her to pick cotton and by
not allowing her to ride on the pick-up truck in public. She is dressed in relatively
expensive and fashionable dresses. Ruth is on the whole treated in a different way
which makes her feel that “she was very special” (125). The beginning of her life
with Grange was “the beginning of her initiation into a world of perplexity, and a
knowledge of impersonal cruelty beyond what she had known in her own home”
(137). Ruth learns many things in the company of Grange. He gives her a detailed
description of black history and he tries to instruct her by exploiting his extensive
knowledge of Southern black folklore and history. He had even stolen books from
the library for her to read. Grange would sing and dance with her in order to give
her a sense of her African heritage. He makes her aware of a rich variety of black
folk tales. Listening to the blues songs which Grange sings, Ruth feels “kin to
something very old” (133). It is a vital musical tradition arising out of the South
which transforms pain and suffering into a spiritually tough affirmation of life.
Watching Grange dance, Ruth marvels at the grace of his movements. Although
Grange takes pride in his being anti-religious, he carefully instructs Ruth about the
things in the Bible. Ruth mildly mocks him saying, “For a man who don’t like the
church, you sure like to thumb this book” (211). Grange particularly delights in
telling her the story of Exodus, which he reads to her “for perhaps the hundredth

time”. Like the Jews in Exodus who, Grange says “Got out while they still had
some sense and cared what happened to they spirit” (210), Ruth must leave an,
all-too-real Egypt in order to experience a mythic “Promised Land.”

Even though Ruth realizes the extent of white injustice, she recognizes that
the whites cannot totally be responsible for the cruelty of black men towards their
families. Grange could never reconcile himself and forget the past when he went
out on the streets shouting “Teach them to hate, if you wants them to survive”
(153). Unlike Grange, Ruth believes and hopes that there would be a change in
their life. She says “Maybe it would be better if something happened to change
everything; made everything equal; made us feel at home” (210). Ruth is deeply
excited about the Civil Rights Movement which promises to transform American
society and give Blacks greatly expanded possibilities. Grange sets himself to protect
his granddaughter’s purity and innocence. He wished that in all her living there
must be joy, laughter, contentment in being a woman. For Grange “Survival was
not everything. He had survived. But to survive whole was what he wanted for
Ruth” (214). Grange feels very possessive and over-protective about Ruth. He
tells her, “I wouldn’t be worth nothing if I couldn’t take care of my own. And I
want you to always remember -- you is my own” (243). Grange on the whole
teaches Ruth to confront the whites all alone. He goes to extent of even shooting
his son, Brownfield, in order to free his granddaughter. His gesture reflects his total
commitment towards Ruth’s emancipation. Grange creates an opportunity to move
forward, free from all the shackles. With the financial assistance, and more than that,
with the emotional and moral support of her grandfather, Ruth steps into the future, achieving self-realization and a definition of self which her mother and grandmother failed to acquire. Although Ruth was well read, sometimes she expressed her fear of a bleak future and felt very depressed about it. "What scared her was that she felt her woman's body made her defenseless. She felt it could now be had and made to conceive something she didn't want, against her will, and her mind could do nothing to stop it" (193). But Grange was always by her side supporting and encouraging her. He tells her, "you won't sell yourself; don't even get that thought in your head. Maybe something'll turn up. Things change." (195). "When I die this farm ain't going to be nobody's but yours. I done paid for it with every trick I had. The fence we put up around it will enclose freedom you can be sure of, long as you ain't scared of holding the gun" (195-196). Although such a pastoral "refuge" satisfies Grange with a sense of place and continuity with the past, Walker clearly endorses Ruth's desire to leave it for the open space which her young spirit desires. Ruth's story emphasizes the fact that staying at home or returning home for good can stifle certain kinds of people. Although Grange's Southern home provides Ruth an essential foundation for human growth, ultimately she must leave that home if she is to continue to grow. She must eventually leave the pastoral world to realize her own identity.

The fences which gave Grange a sense of security eventually induce claustrophobia in her. She needs unlimited space if she is to fulfill the deepest prompting of her ever-growing self. Ruth can enter the open spaces which will allow her to develop her identity because she finally learns what very few people in her world are aware of. The self and society are not static givens, changeless absolutes, but a set of open possibilities for which she must take full responsibility.
Grange’s sole aim and his one duty in the world was to prepare Ruth for some great and Herculean task, some magnificent and deadly struggle, some harsh and foreboding reality. After shooting his son, Grange takes Ruth and runs for safety. Even before his death, he encourages Ruth when she says:

“We don’t have a chance.”
“I ain’t” ... “but you do.” (246)

He dies without even leaving her a gun for he knew that “she would live longer without it” (247). In giving up his own life to save that of his granddaughter, Grange envisions a better life for her through sacrifice and regeneration.

Thus Ruth is a product of her past but she is also a child of the future. She is liberated from the contaminations of the world around her. Ruth is a protean spirit open to conversion and thus is able to experience the secular equivalent of grace and redemptive human love leading to the expansion of consciousness and the renewal of self. Grange’s nurturing has provided her with the emotional and spiritual base which she needs to develop a resilient self, capable of undertaking the open journey. She builds up her personality on the three lives of Grange. Although her options in the world are limited, her growing awareness of society as a dynamic process allows her create her own self. The Third Life of Grange Copeland succeeds as a novel as it consciously avoids an over-simplified vision, which expresses only one “side” of Southern life. Artfully mixing its three main narratives in order to include the “missing parts”, the novel suggests a “whole truth” about the South which is complex and many-sided. The novel thus remains true to the author’s deepest promptings and her most profound sense of her Southern black heritage.
REFERENCES


3 Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 176.


18 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 16.


