CHAPTER VI

SUMMING UP

Let a second generation full of courage issue forth . . . let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our blood.

- Margaret Walker

Continuing to sing "songs that people want [her] to sing today . . . that are just inappropriate to the times" (TMF: 383), Walker holds her characters in a state of tension created by living consciously in historical, geographical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual domains. Her characters grow, develop, and learn. But Walker doesn't leave them ending in stasis and completion, or anything like "happy ever after." These characters are left with much work to do in the world and with, at best, tentative personal commitments.

The first Chapter of this thesis examines Walker's place among the Afro-American novelists. Beginning with Harriet E. Wilson, the earliest known female Afro-American novelist to the recent ones, this chapter examines the growth and contribution of these women novelists. Wilson's use of
the conventions of the sentimental novel and the theme of miscegenation are the beginning of the combination of the old and the new forms. Frances Harper and Fauset introduced the novel of manners and genteel realism. These early black women novelists were rarely acknowledged. They used the traditional mulatto heroines in their novels. Nella Larsen who also used a mulatto heroine was against assimilationist assumptions. In general these writers regarded themselves as black and female and threw light upon the critical issues of the black women of their times. They were up against the negative images of the black women. These writers emphasized the self-directedness of their heroines, as well as their light-skinned beauty and Christian morality. These black heroines of these writers had experienced a tension between the femininity in them and their "contrary instincts". If they tried to live by the female version of The American Dream, as pure, refined, protected, and well-provided for, they were often destroyed.

In Zora Neale Hurston's works one can see the portrayal of a black woman who achieves self-fulfillment and understanding. Her language is different from the language of the "conventional" novel of the time. Rooted in black English, she uses metaphors derived from nature. Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) is a forerunner of the fiction of the seventies and eighties. The novels of the 40s depict
heroines as being defeated by social reality and by their lack of self-knowledge.

A definite shift is observed beginning with Gwendolyn Brooks. The writers of this period put more emphasis on reflecting the process of self-definition and understanding women have always had to be engaged in. This shift comes in three stages which the first chapter discusses in detail. One can note the following important aspects in these three phases:

1) Focus on the complex existence of the ordinary, dark skinned woman, who is at the mercy of a hostile society - contradictions between her real value as a black woman and how she is valued by those around her.

2) Emphasis on community and culture as a prerequisite for self-understanding - necessity to rediscover their blackness, their unity in their blackness.

3) Black community itself becoming a major threat to the survival and empowerment of women.

4) Black women taking active part in the movements creating a community of support. They are rebellious with their consciousness altered.

5) Black women challenging the prevailing definition of woman and the focus on sexism and racism as integrally connected.
6) Community of black sisters - 'sisterhood' and lesbianism.

7) Probing the cosmology of their black maternal ancestors in order to place themselves - New womanhood.

The second Chapter begins with Walker's definition of 'womanism' and its varying ideals. It also discusses how Walker's womanism is different from feminism. The varying definitions reveal how, put together, they give a total meaning for a black woman. Woman as a whole. Walker's concept of womanism is derived from her awareness of black experience which she has gathered through her search in her mothers' gardens. She contends that the black woman has lost her 'wholeness' when she came as a slave and Walker makes an effort in tracing the 'wholeness' of the black women of the past. In tracing the 'wholeness' of her black women characters in her works with her personal construct of the history of black women, Walker achieves a wholeness in bridging them.

This researcher copiously uses the definitions, the three cycles of black women of Walker and her divergent views on many issues relating to the black people in the analysis of his work. So, this chapter deals with all the important factors which will help in tracing the journey of the black women characters of Alice Walker towards wholeness.
Chapter III titled "Suspended"Women discusses the black women in dark enclosures and narrow spaces. Their plight due to racism and sexism is discussed by examples from short stories and novels. From their plight, we understand that they are caught in a social web without an exit. Kin killing is a common occurrence in their lives. These women suffer because of the perception of women's roles conceived by society. They become products of dehumanizing culture. Though they vary greatly in the background, they are bound together by their vulnerability to life.

In the role of a mother, the black woman of this cycle becomes a super-human woman of strength, endurance and compassion. Her every goal, every wish, every struggle, is born of her identity as a mother. Walker uses the animal imagery when she speaks of their plight. Margaret, a 'family dog'; Mem, a 'plodding cow'; Josie, a 'spider' and a 'devouring cat'; and Roselily, a 'rat trapped'.

Marriage, for these women, is an entry into another level of silence. Unfortunately, these women believe that marriage will provide them respect and attention they believed whole. It is also noted that larger social issues intrude into their individual lives.
Walker handles with precision the theme of incest and miscegenation in this cycle. She also uses 'voodoo' as a suppressed religion for its creative possibility as a mode of resistance against an exploitative ideology. There is a progression in Walker's world from external to internal. Hannah's (the protagonist in The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff) visit to the root workers signals another stage in the "suspended" cycle of black women who go back to their traditions. It is a 'home coming'. The novel Meridian represents a shift from a preoccupation with commemorating black women's situations for its roots and possibilities.

Walker slowly builds up the transition in her protagonists by portraying from the woman who dreams to the woman who writes and to the woman who openly says 'no' and defies the patriarchal order. But, in spite of their efforts they fail. Though the individual sees the systematic nature of her oppression, she has no systematic counter.

Chapter IV titled "Assimilated"Women deals with the black women characters who move from the "Suspended" cycle like Ruth, Meridian and Celie and also many of the protagonists in the second collection of short stories You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down. A few characters from the first collection In Love and Trouble are also included.
The characters in this cycle undergo initiatory experiences in an effort to find their identity and develop a completeness of being. They are, more often, rebellious rather than misguided. They discover or rediscover the hidden, beautiful, whole, and free selves when they realize that definition of the self must come from within. It is found that the self that survives is not a self dictated by others. With this new awareness of themselves, they develop new concepts about religion, sex, abortion, motherhood etc.

The women characters represented in this cycle stand for different periods of time, from the 1940s to the 1970s. Dee in Everyday Use is symbolic of the black women who want to escape from their roots in order to make it in a white world. Meridian reflects the period of civil rights movement, Black Power movement and the feminist movement. One can observe the emergence of a sisterhood among the black women in this cycle.

These black women learn the need for the integration of the female body and the treatment of women as subjects rather than objects. They do not cling to their loyalty to their black men to the point of total self-abnegation or self-destruction. Some of them also reject violence as the approach to change. A sort of new understanding begins between these black women and white women. They are no more
confined to their narrow spaces and dark enclosures and there is open movement. There is a reference to Africa where Nettie in *The Color Purple* goes to. Walker widens the horizon further.

Walker not only writes about womanist issues in the second cycle but also employs the womanist process, the process of confusion, resistance to the established order and the discovery of a freeing order which is prerequisite for their wholeness.

In Chapter V the emergence of the black women is analyzed. One can trace this growth from Walker's own stories: from the reality of rural black folks to the life-styles of new women; and from women who believe abortion and murder are sins, to women who commit both deliberately and without guilt. In the process of this growth they seek self-identity, self-awareness and a new concept about living. They derive their strength from their ancestors and their traditions.

These women are completely aware of their positions in political and social fields. They undergo a sort of initiation before they move further. In their search for meaning, they also learn the patriarchal constructs of certain traditions and rebel against it. Their new message is
resistance. As they change, the people around them also change.

In order to achieve spiritual freedom, some of the characters return to the life style of their ancestors, a life style in which neither sex seeks dominion over the other and thus one in which neither sex must surrender its spirituality to the other. Both men and women choose to live apart and free, in order to live in harmony. The concept of family becomes open, extended, and loving, and with the characterization of individuals who are not afraid to abandon social prescriptions for honest relationships.

It is observed that these black women are trying to achieve the concept of wholeness as defined by Proclus: first, the human world of men and women; second, the earth of living organisms, including humans and animals; and third, the universe, the magic circle of reunion and integration. These women achieve personal wholeness first by seeking self-identity. Then they move onto societal wholeness in which they live with men in a society maintaining their freedom and independence. They then move further on towards spiritual wholeness in which they try to bridge the gap between themselves and their ancestors. By this they become universalists. This is what Walker refers to in her interview
to David Bradley when she says "we are universalists" (Walker 1984c, 34).

Viewing together the analysis of all these chapters tracing the journey of the black women towards wholeness, one gets a whole picture of the black experience. The female characters grow as they progress from positions of vulnerability to positions of relative strength. One finds positive advances occurring in pockets of adversity. These women characters who reach the emergent stage survive even in unfostering environment.

These women grow through different images: "mammy", "Sapphires", "mulatta", "conjure" etc. Each black woman image was created to keep a particular image about white women intact. Through these different images, one gets a whole picture of the black women. The women belonging to the "suspended" stage are, for the most part, 'looney' women; the "assimilated" women have 'contrary instincts', and the "emergent" women expand their mind with action.

Walker encompasses the past, present and the future as her major characters use their heritage to change their society, even as they seek their own expression. These characters, in a way, are a synthesis of the many aspects of black southern heritage. The changes these characters undergo
are set within the tradition of resistance that is as much a part of that heritage as is oppression. Like many of their ancestors, these women take responsibility for the injustices in their society.

The characters' perception of their past as crucial to their personal transformation in the present and the possibility of change in the future, is very much stressed by Walker for attaining 'wholeness'. Walker's use of time as circular and progressive, a device she learned from Zora Neale Hurston, is central to her major character's capacity to change.

Before these black women reach the emergent stage, one finds that they are separated from their children, from their husbands, from other men and women. There is also a separation of the mind and body. Even the land and its people are separated. But as they become emergent women, it is found that most of the men and women live together with children around. There is also a fusion of the mind and body as these people achieve self-identity and self-fulfillment.

Walker uses 'androgyny' as a metaphor for wholeness. In Meridian, one finds the protagonist in jeans and with short hair in her journey towards wholeness. In The Color Purple, Celie becomes an entrepreneur wearing men's pants. In The Temple of My Familiar, Fanny and Carlotta no more wear high-
heeled shoes and women's conventional dresses. Tashi in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* cuts her hair and acts independently.

One also notices such change in attitudes among black men characters. Grange Copeland, Albert, Suwelo, Arveyda also grow and change. Walker's male characters also achieve psychological health and wholeness only when they are able to acknowledge women's pains and their role in it. Walker's redefinition of the relationships between sexes allows the male and female characters mentioned above "to cure themselves of the same varieties of dis-ease based on societal expectations that plagued [them]" (Winchell 1992, 115). Winchell adds, "The lessons they learn about the need for balance between the flesh and the spirit help them redefine themselves" (Winchell 1992, 115). The emphasis of these emergent women in their relationship with men is on their respective discovery of self rather than one person's possession of another.

An epigraph drawn from African author Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* which Walker uses for her second collection of essays *Living by the Word* sets the stage for Walker to expand in the essays on the definition of wholeness that has been at the heart of her previously published works. In her earlier works, Walker has focused on the wholeness of
the individual and the focus now shifts to include larger wholes as well. The search is no longer simply for the wholeness that gives spiritual health to the individual seekers, although that remains a priority, but also for unity between and among peoples and ultimately for unity with the universe itself.

In the Armah passage, new artists - *fundi* - are being taught the way of the *fundi*. They are told:

Our way ... is not a random path. Our way begins from coherent understanding. It is a way that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other peoples, all to our surroundings. If our individual lives have a worthwhile aim, that aim should be a purpose inseparable from the way....Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness.

(LW: Epigraph)

In her last two novels *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* Walker has stressed the necessity of seeing the world, and all its people, as a whole. Her work to this point has evolved generation by generation, showing the improvement in societal condition and understanding as time has passed.

Walker uses the motif of journey as a metaphor of the Afro-American desire for a new life, consisting of unlimited personal development. She writes, "there is no fixed place /
on earth for man / or woman" (RP: 65). It reveals Walker's preoccupation with the search for human liberation through open motion. By this journey, the women characters move from a vocabulary of objects in the racist, sexist relationship to individuals in search of self-expression and therefore self-empowerment.

The relationship between mother and child is seen as sacred, symbolic of the relationship between the earth and creativity. In their journey towards wholeness, these women characters become mothers not in the biological sense but in their insistence on nurturing life rather than destroying it. One can find in them the desire to change without destroying, to maintain the integration of body and spirit, to resist separation and alienation.

Some of the white women also undergo a change. The white woman's experience in the South, her relationship with black men and women within the context of some social or political movement, has helped her to discover an aspect of her own heritage that her blood relatives erroneously turn away from - the quality of struggle rather than accommodation. In discovering her own history and reinterpreting her life in the face of her own family, her own sex, as well as her minglings with the black South, she begins to understand her own humanity.
The women characters who reach the "emergent" level acknowledge that there is something of the divine in everyone and every thing in the universe. We find an increase in savvy and grace in them. They also thrive and become models and champions of their people. They transcend the boundaries of the female gender to embrace more universal concerns about individual autonomy, self-reliance and self-realization.

Dance, religion, song, and music in the African worldview are also characteristically sensual, for the body and soul are seen as one. This is very much felt in the emerging women characters who journey towards wholeness. These women also hold on to the creative spark by using daily, parts of their lives such as story-telling, singing in the church, root working, quilt making and tending the gardens as mediums of their creative expression.

Walker's main concern is the pursuit of personal, societal and spiritual wholeness of her protagonists. Her analysis reveals the dilemma of black Southerners who are caught between one's responsibility for one's life and the restrictions of sexism and racism. There is a widening of the horizon as one starts looking at her works from the past to the present. Ikenna Dieke observes: "From the predominantly Gothic vision in The Third Life of George Copeland, to the somewhat Camusian vision in Meridian, to the vision of the
great gender divide-and-conquer in *The Color Purple*, Walker moves into *The Temple of My Familiar* and creates a salutary vision which points towards a monistic idealism in which humans, animals, and the whole ecological order coexist in a unique dynamic of pancosmic symbiosis" (Dieke 1992, 507). This vision is further broadened in her latest novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* where she, as a universalist, speaks against the female genital mutilation. The titles of the two collections of short stories also reveal this more. In the first collection *In Love and Trouble*, the thrust is about the black women who experience trouble through their love. The second collection *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, a line from a blues song, speaks about the progress the women have made.

As the black women characters move towards wholeness one can see a parallel in Walker's personal life itself. She, as a small girl with a scar in her right eye, an early abortion and the often experienced feeling of suicide resembles the black woman of the "suspended" cycle. Her active participation in the Civil Rights Movement, and marriage with a white man reveal the "assimilated" woman in her. Her search for identity in her mothers' gardens, her broadening vision, her womanistic attitudes and her personal growth as a poet and as a writer speak of the "emergent" woman in her.
As Walker's characters move towards personal, societal and spiritual wholeness, one can observe a move in Walker, the writer also. In writing her third novel The Color Purple, Walker calls herself an 'Author' and a medium'. In The Temple of My Familiar Lissie remembers her spiritual incarnations. The spirit of Tashi hovered around Walker for a long time and thus came Walker's recent novel Possessing the Secret of Joy.

Walker says: "I believe in change: change personal, and change in society" (MG: 252). This is evident in her characters. Celie's anger is turned into creativity by Shug Avery. She starts stitching pants. Fanny's anger is diverted into creativity - she becomes a playwright. Tashi learns it at the end as she faces the firing squad. These characters become mellowed and they realize the value of forgiveness. There is a perceptible change in Walker, the writer also. Motherhood becomes noble for her and a child is not one to stifle the mother's creativity, she feels. But her views about religion, marriage, and traditions also change radically. In spite of that, one can see the radical revolutionary Alice Walker who wanted to drop bombs into white laps, turning mellowed, wanting happy endings and trusting in the healing power of love. Walker journeys along with her protagonists towards wholeness.
Fission and fragmentation distort the beauty of black culture, which in turn affects the lives of black women. Hence, Walker's concern in creating a world of homogeny, synthesis, balance and androgyny. This in a way becomes the idiom of Afro-American literature. Mel Watkins observes that only through wisdom and solidarity can "Black American literature ... achieved the across-the-board renaissance" (Watkins 1986, 37), a third Harlem Renaissance, not only for men and women but for all the souls of Black folk.

For by telling the herstories of her culture to future generations and imparting traditional customs and social values to the children of those generations, Alice Walker keeps these connections alive and whole.

The extended family, which is broken and distorted in Walker's first novel The Third Life of Grange Copeland, becomes whole in The Color Purple. Her analysis of the connections between Africans and Afro-Americans is further developed in her recent works, The Temple of My Familiar and Possessing the Secret of Joy, in this case within a broad, global context. By such expansions Alice Walker, one can say, moves towards for a "Diaspora" literature.

POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE STUDIES

A study of Alice Walker's works, no doubt, is bound to
open up a wide variety of scopes for research. As is have already seen, Alice Walker is a traditionalist in the art of her writings, the way she develops her plots and the technique she employs are worthy of a separate study.

Though she doesn't want her novels to be termed as sequels, one can sense a sort of growth in certain characters who appear in more than one novel. So, taking all her novels as a whole, one can analyze them under 'growth novels' (bildungsroman).

Child is a major concern in her writings. An Igbo proverb states: "The rearing of a child is not a job for one person nor is a child a child for only one person." From her short stories and novels, one can always sense the significance of a child in a black family. The black mother is the child's protector and provider, very often. Hence child-mother relationship is another area which can be taken up for research.

Myths, by definition, voice a culture's most profound perceptions, and, when given traditional form, can awaken the audience's strongest impulses. So, a study of Walker's use of myths, folklore, songs, story-telling can be taken as a fit subject for research.
As Alice Walker continues to write and as the Afro-American literature is still evolving, this field is a green pasture for young scholars.

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