



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(3): 95-100
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 01-01-2023
Accepted: 09-02-2023

Akshma Singh
Research Scholar, Department
of English, Desh Bhagat
University, Mandi Gobindgarh,
Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab,
India

Dr. Milandeep Kaur
Supervisor, Department of
English, Desh Bhagat
University, Mandi Gobindgarh,
Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab,
India

Corresponding Author:
Akshma Singh
Research Scholar, Department
of English, Desh Bhagat
University, Mandi Gobindgarh,
Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab,
India

Alice Walker's Womanism: Character of Shug Avery

Akshma Singh and Dr. Milandeep Kaur

Abstract

Feminism in the early 1980's in the United States revolved much around social and cultural matters such as sexual liberation, self-definition and self-realization for women. Derived from these ideas within feminism comes Alice Walker's Womanism, that is the writer's own definition of the strong and independent woman of color. This paper investigates the character Shug Avery, in *The Color Purple* (1983), in relation to feminism and Womanism. It is argued that she is an empowered female because of the characteristics and attributes that come along with being a Womanist, despite moral, cultural and societal conditions that indicate marginalization for Shug and all women.

Keywords: Alice Walker's Womanism, Shug Avery, feminism, Womanism

Introduction

In the 1983 novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, an opportunity has been given to follow the strong, open-minded and fun-loving character of Shug Avery as she goes about her life in the American South in early 20th century. This article will, in particular, explore how her relationship to the characters and the world around her is affected by her being a woman with certain powerful attributes and characteristics. In this context it is important to mention that even though Shug is a woman of color, and the importance of race can never be disregarded. In connection to the notion of empowerment comes Alice Walker's term "Womanist" that will be used throughout this article. Here is Walker's definition of Womanist:

1. Outrageous, audacious, courageous, willful behavior.
2. **Also:** A woman who loves other women, appreciates women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually/non-sexually.
3. Loves music, dance, herself, not a victim ^[1].

Shug Avery is powerful because she is a Womanist. She is a role model because of the confident and often bold manner of speaking. Furthermore, her great success as a music artist and the glamorous way she displays herself can also be considered positive attributes. She struggles against discrimination as well as the love she has for the sometimes-cruel chauvinist Albert are a few of the problems that surround her. Albert, he who claims to love Shug, has fathered her three children but has married someone else-Celie.

First, the author will look into how Shug's personality and social skills are portrayed by Alice Walker and in what way those factors affect the way she interacts with others. Shug's sexual freedom as well as her relationship to her children will be used as examples of how she tries to control relationships, her own emotions and the younger, insecure and submissive protagonist Celie.

After that, her language use is to be investigated. Focus then lies on determining the manner in which Shug speaks to Albert and also on what she does *not* say in terms of paralinguistic factors, all in connection to her empowering Womanist attributes. Following the topic of personality is Shug's choice of career, especially her status and financial independence.

Moreover, emotional eroticism and physical appearance play a major role in Shug's life. For instance, the intimate and sexual relationship she has with Albert as his mistress, could indicate that she is inferior to him since he married Celie instead of Shug. Lastly, the Christian and patriarchal society and its norms and ideas as displayed in the novel will be researched. Shug, and her Womanism, are compared and valued against these norms to see how her powerful self-fights for her right to be who she desires, her self-definition, as she threatens the Christian patriarchal order. But before actually turning to the analysis the author will introduce the theoretical foundation of this study.

Feminist literary studies

The prevalent norm in feminist literary studies before the 1980's was to study representations of and texts by white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Due to important political struggles, such as the civil rights movement in the 1960's-1970's, this norm grew to be challenged and questioned by those who felt that it did not reflect a true image of the world in that we live. Critics saw that another dimension was needed in feminist literary studies, making it relevant not only to study white women in the history of fiction, but introducing race and class as factors and so study women of color. Just as the white feminist tradition argues that women have been hidden in literary history, *black feminism* makes a similar claim for women of color. The term *black feminism* is used to expose the social, cultural and moral identity of these women and as a tool to acquire another perspective within feminism^[2]. Rashmi Varma explains, paraphrased by Ellen Rooney, that: "The task of a feminist critical race studies is precisely to help us read the weave of race and gender in society". To be able to investigate the character of Shug Avery in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, *black feminism* is relevant to make an adequate analysis.

Intertwined with *black feminism* comes the theory of *gynocritics*. Whereas *black feminism* primarily focuses on characterization, *gynocritics* mainly studies female writers. Since women have been underrepresented compared to men in literary history, Elaine Showalter observes that this angle is needed to acquire the perspective of female as well as male writing^[3]. To analyze women as writers adds another layer of understanding to characterization and how female authors portray their female characters compared to how male authors do the same. It is argued, in *gynocritics*, that depiction of women in novels becomes less stereotypical when the writing is performed by a female author than a male one.

Furthermore we have the *Anglo-American* feminists' interest in characterization that is worth mentioning, especially in relation to *black feminism* with a similar focus. According to Elaine Showalter and Susan Gubar, two developers of feminist literary theory in the United States, the *Anglo-American* concept measures and values the characters in writing against reality. The *Anglo-American* theory is brought forward merely to exemplify another perspective within feminist literary.

The function of a great deal of feminist writing in the early 1980's was self-empowerment, to leave the reader with the notion or belief that she or he could overcome the obstacles in life and change it to the better. Emma Waters-Dawson, for instance, points out that "Walker adapts the American stock situation of rags-to-riches climb achieved after apparently endless incidents of abuse". Shug is, as we will highlight, a symbol of this idea.

As mentioned, Alice Walker's writing, and so *The Color Purple*, is very much affected by the feminist liberation wave in the 1960's, 70's and 80's in the US and in the Western World. Shug's free spirit and openminded sexuality is one example of that in terms of characterization but there is also a more general view on sexual liberation to be found in the narrative. Maroula Joannu writes that "the joy of the relationship between Shug and Celie is that it evokes not criticism, surprise or excitement, and is depicted as no less 'natural' than any of the heterosexual relationships in the novel"^[4]. This liberated and refreshing take on sexuality

permeates in the story. Walker has openly debated the issue of normalized heterosexuality and questioned it, which obviously *The Color Purple* and certainly the character Shug Avery also are a response to.

Having said this, the analysis will not focus as much on Shug's relationship to Celie, but primarily on Shug's relationship with Albert since it is her behavior in those encounters that is most interesting to us in the context of this study. *Black feminism* as well as the feeling of empowerment in Shug as a Womanist will be used as a theoretical foundation throughout this study. More on sexuality and sexual liberation later on, but first let us begin with taking a look at Shug's personality and how it is a reflection of her Womanism.

Personality and social power

Shug appears to be a successful, self-assertive and confident female-the latter both physically as well as emotionally. She seems to have a strong sense of self throughout the novel and she functions as a moral inspirational source for "doing what is right" to both Albert and the protagonist Celie. Shug is undoubtedly depicted as an individual with empowering personality traits that relate to Alice Walker's definition of a Womanist. How these attributes assist Shug in gaining social power will be exemplified in this section.

Early in the novel, Shug turns ill, most likely due to a sexually transmitted disease. When she does so no one in town takes her in willingly except for Albert. She is extremely weak, has a fever and has lost weight because of the illness. Celie cares for her even though Shug treats her rudely. One day, when she is finally on the road to recovery, Celie helps her take a bath when Shug rises up from the water and utters these words: "Well, take a good look. Even if I is just a bag of bones now". Celie then reflects, "she have the nerve to put one hand on her naked hip and bat her eyes at me". This unwell woman is malnourished, physically out of shape and is fully aware of her condition-the phrase "I is just a bag of bones" signals this. Despite of being in poor physical condition, Shug encourages Celie to "take a good look". Shug is completely stripped naked, exposed and stands in front of a person that she does not know too well. Still, she is in a very powerful state of mind. Thus, it is Avery's personality, her *womanism*, that permeates this situation between her and Celie. The first part of Alice Walker's definition of Womanist includes traits such as "1. Outrageous, audacious, courageous, willful behavior", all of which characterize Shug and become visible in the bathroom scene with Celie. Shug is outrageous and very likely to shock people. She simply stands up naked in front of Celie, who seems to not be expecting this. Shug's audacity clearly appears when she, with extreme confidence, puts a hand on her bare hip and stares at Celie. To be able to act like she does in that situation takes a great deal of courage and most certainly willful behavior. One must not forget that she most likely, in the eyes of others and society, becomes morally judged because of her recent (believed to be sexual) illness. Probably conscious of what people consider about her choice to not act according to the norm of 'a good woman' and be sexually active although unmarried, she is "not a victim" as Walker also defines Womanist. Shug's open-minded and comfortable view on her own body connects in part to the sexual liberation wave of the 1960's, 70's and 80's in the US and other parts of the world. As such it critiques a male-dominant view, as Kate

Millet explains: “The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs”. The sexual liberation resisted this supposedly male-dominated take on a woman's sexuality and dissolved normalized ideas on such matters as sexual orientation and physical appearance. Walker was very much affected by these ideas in her writing as is evident in the characterization of Shug's personality.

Blossom Shimayam Ottoh-Agele ^[5] claims that male dominance over the last centuries has generated in inferiority complex, voicelessness and negative self-perception for women and a reaction to this could be found in literature such as *The Color Purple*. Ottoh-Agele observes that “the Black feminist literature emerged as a literature of self-assertion, self-definition”. By giving female characters and Shug in particular, an empowering and successful persona, Walker reacts and objects to the oppression from 'the man' and shapes her own strong woman with a voice. Shug is comfortable with her body, superior and proactive in her behavior when in the bathroom with Celie. She takes control over the situation because of her Womanist traits and does not let anyone put her down. It is because she is audacious, outrageous, courageous and willful that she empowers herself in this social situation with the wife of the man she loves and has three children with.

Furthermore, not only can the definition of Womanist reveal Shug Avery's stronger side, it could also help us understand the weaker part of her personality. In this next quote Celie asks Shug where her kids are and Shug answers: “My kids with their grandma, she say. She could stand the kids, I had to go.

You miss 'em? I ast. Naw, she say. I don't miss nothing”. When talking to Celie, Avery seems inhumanly strong and self-sufficient. She has gone through a great deal in life, especially when it comes to her relationship with Albert and giving birth to their children out of wedlock. Since Albert was not allowed to marry Shug because his father disapproved, their children received a different upbringing than perhaps was intended by Shug. The words “I had to go” seem to imply that she had to leave her children behind for some reason, probably to make a living the best way she knew how-as a touring artist. Whatever the reasons were for her leaving her children behind, she seems to put on a facade. When confronted by Celie, and not willing to show herself weak, Shug claims that “I don't miss nothing”. She needs to stay in control of her emotions and by uttering that phrase she does not encourage Celie to talk about the matter further. To be dependent on others and as a mother to admit that she needs her children is something essentially human. For Shug though, it becomes a weakness at this point and therefore she defends herself the best way she knows how-to at least verbally take control over the situation. She must have felt enormous distress at the time because of the separation from her children but she refuses to admit it to Celie. Walker's definition of Womanist includes the description of not being a victim and that is exactly what Shug tries not to be in this scene. Since she will not officially confess that she misses her children, she also rejects being a victim in the eyes of others. Perhaps she still feels that she has some power left after this, perhaps not. What becomes evident, however, is that Shug, who most often appears to be strong on the outside, deals with a personal tragedy on the inside - a tragedy so great that she cannot dare to speak about it but rather hides it.

In sum, Shug Avery is undoubtedly shaped by Alice Walker as being a self-defined, self-realized and sexually liberated African-American woman of her time. This portrayal is related to *black feminism*: the author's wanting to create a positive role-model, to counter the inferiority complex that patriarchy has left women with, and it reflects the sexual revolution of the 1970's and 1980's. In the definition of Womanist one can clearly connect several traits to Shug and see how she uses them to her own benefit to gain social power. On the other hand, her Womanist attributes sometimes also lead to negative aspects. We saw this when Shug refused to talk about her children in order to appear strong and independent and also when she did not want to admit any sense of regret of not being able to bring up her children.

Language use

In this section, we will take a look at how Shug uses her language in order to sustain power. The first extract from *The Color Purple* that shows how she uses her language to control people and situations, is from a situation that involves Shug and Albert. Here Albert complains about the fact that Celie wants to see Shug perform at Harpo's: “My wife can't do this. My wife can't do that ... Shug Avery finally say, Good thing I ain't your damn wife. He hush then”. Since Celie could not stand up for herself in this situation, Shug does so for Celie as well as gives her own opinion of her non-existing marriage to Albert. Shug echoes the negative phrases that Albert spits out about Celie, “My wife can't do this. My wife can't do that”, and turns it into a matter between herself and Albert. She once wanted to marry him but was not considered good enough by his father. Shug now clearly seems to hold a grudge towards Albert because of his inability to go against his father's will and marry her anyway.

This grudge that she holds becomes evident in the words “Good thing I ain't your damn wife”. By uttering this phrase, she shows him that she no longer wishes to be with him and at the same time she stands up for Celie in refusing to accept the disrespectful demands Albert has of a spouse. Once again, Shug's audacity, courage, outrageousness and willfulness make it possible for her to talk back to Albert like she does and because of this, her superiority is a necessary outcome in this particular interaction with him.

Clearly, Shug makes her own rules and goes against Albert and patriarchal society. She has the means to silence him with the help of her language use. “He hush then” comes right after Shug's audacious remark of her not being his wife. Albert turns quiet and according to King-Kok Cheung ^[6], this silence is a conscious writing strategy from Walker's side. Walker mostly uses silence in connection with the character of Celie to illustrate and represent Celie's inferiority throughout the first part of the novel, before she starts to speak and stand up for herself. Cheung claims that powerless people are more likely to be quiet. This theory gives us the interpretation that Albert, a man, is in fact the character with less power in his and Shug's relationship because he is silenced when lectured by Shug. She uses what she has (her audacity, outrageousness, courage and willfulness), to control what she can. She often becomes marginalized as a black woman and, in theory, it is extremely difficult for her to have power over a man. Race and gender, the fact that she is African American and a woman, leads to difficulties in that society at that point in

time (Rooney, 2006, 23). But, because her language is a product of her Womanism and she uses it as a tool to control Albert, she triumphs over him in this encounter. Arguably, perhaps Albert's silence alone is not enough to make the claim that he is powerless and she is powerful. The study of their language would be more accurate if one for instance heard the tone of Shug's voice or could see her and Albert's facial expressions in real life. However, in this study we only have access to their words on paper. Jennifer ^[7] agrees with this fact, that silence alone does not provide a fair linguistic analysis, and suggests that it is more complicated than that if one studies linguistic theory. There are more factors to take into consideration beside silencing one another to determine who has most leverage in a conversation and because of that, this idea is far too simplistic.

However, there is more to the way in which Shug uses the linguistic element to empower herself. The paralinguistic impact becomes evident in another situation with Albert: "Turn loose my goddam hand, she say to Mr. ----- ... I don't need no weak little boy can't say no to his daddy hanging on me. I need a man, she say. A man. She look at him and roll her eyes and laugh. It not much of a laugh but it keep him away from the bed. He sit over in the corner away from the lamp". In the beginning of this extract, Shug orders Albert to "Turn loose my goddam hand". At first she held his hand but when she wants to distance herself, she uses body language to do so. To hold one's hand is clearly a sign of intimacy, while a hasty withdrawal from a hand-holding situation indicates the opposite. The final punch that she delivers, before Albert decides to keep away from the bed and from her, is when she rolls her eyes at him and laughs. The eye-rolling and laughter are two more paralinguistic elements used to patronize the man in this situation and it works. Shug's Womanist attributes are what make her act this way and gives her control over Albert. The phrase "Turn loose my goddam hand" indicates that Shug tries to command Albert both physically with body language as well as orally. This forceful ordering around or giving directive is according to Coates used to socially organize groups of people. With that in mind it is believable that Avery, when using this strong form of command, does so to demonstrate control in the relationship.

Beside the paralinguistic and pragmatic analysis of Shug's behavior, there are a few insulting phrases to take into consideration from a *black feminist* point of view as well. She compares Albert to a "weak little boy" and claims that she needs a man instead. Just as a woman and a man are thought to be different from each other, so is a young boy and a grown man. Shug attaches the attribute "weak little" to the word "boy", that indicates that being a younger version of a male does not have the same significance and strength as a full grown one. "Boy" is also used by the white man as a common insult to adult black men. By comparing Albert to "a weak little boy" she transports the status and power he normally has based on the patriarchal value system, and makes him less of a man. Since he is no longer a man in her eyes, he becomes inferior to her. By patronizing and insulting him, Shug gains control over the situation, and him, once again.

In this section we have viewed language use as a mean to empower oneself and as a tool for control. We found out that Shug actively defends Celie, with the exception of the beginning of the novel, by presumptuously responding to

Albert's negative and controlling comments about her. His disrespectful attitude triggers Shug to talk back to him. She also has the ability to silence Albert, which indicates her power over him, as well as the use of body language to distance herself and to patronize him. Finally, the choice of words that Avery utters is also a tool for control. She uses the patriarchal rules, the idea that a man has more value than a woman, to her own benefit by comparing him to a boy and consequently degrading his manliness. Nothing of this could be possible if she had not had the traits that Alice Walker's definition of a Womanist has. It is what truly defines her language use and gives her power.

Status as an artist and financial independence

Shug Avery is a very successful blues and jazz singer and in that respect she is a character that exemplifies Womanist traits. Those traits undoubtedly affected what occupation she chose since being for example outrageous, audacious, courageous is something well suited the life of a performer. Being a famous singer automatically includes many advantages, for instance admiration from others. Here are Albert's words about Shug: "Shug got talent, she can sing, she got spunk, she can talk to anybody, she got looks and she can stand up and be notice". It becomes apparent with these words that Albert has great respect for Shug. The first points in this description are connected to her work as an artist, while the other points describe her personality and appearance more. In Albert's statement, we see that Shug is empowered and has status because of the fact that she is an artist. Lauret convincingly states that "Shug is, to all intents and purposes, a liberated woman and it is her art which enables her to be so". If we now set aside her talent and focus on the Womanist definition once again, the liberation that Lauret writes about becomes even clearer. Shug is believed to be outrageous, courageous and audacious by nature, but it is logical to also suspect that her line of work enhances those traits. An artist has to be brave to stand in front of a large crowd and deliver a show, if not, the audience will not pay to see another show or buy another record if they do not extensively enjoy the experience. Moreover, Shug comes across as a very liberated woman because she inhabits the qualities of being courageous, audacious and outrageous on stage. Her artistry requires her to be and appear liberated, and it is her liberation that gives her power, status and admiration as a performer.

Alongside the status that Shug's occupation provides her, the financial benefits that her career is associated with should also be taken into consideration. She supports herself through her music and sometimes, when events do not turn out the way she intended, through the goodwill of others. Simply the fact that she has a job makes her quite remarkable in *The Color Purple* compared to the other women in the novel. Celie for instance is most of the time dependent on a man to support her and as a result of that, she becomes financially inferior to men. Shug, on the other hand, supports and takes care of herself throughout most of the novel, with the semi-exception of her marrying in the end. It is unclear whether or not Shug then marries for money or love or perhaps both. The main point is that she is a woman who has a career and makes money in a world where women are marginalized and largely dependent on a man for financial support-whereas she is not. Shug defines her own fate and this would not have been possible were it not for her Womanism. Her Womanism results in her

becoming a financially successful artist. The financial freedom in turn results in her status being similar a man's, as self-realized, self-defined and thus powerful.

However, Lauren Berlant argues that the financial independence that Shug enjoys and later on Celie, is just a capitalist and feminist utopia that has no connection to real world feminism. She also explains that "a partnership of capitalism and sisterhood plays a central role" among the characters and helps in giving *The Color Purple* a happy, fairytale ending. It is true that Shug and Celie both enter in different partnerships with each other. First in an emotional and sexual sisterhood where they look out for and take care of one another and later when Shug encourages Celie to open up her own business-in a capitalist partnership. Berlant makes a valid point when she claims that these factors have a central role in the plot, just as Shug's financially independent lifestyle has, but to disregard the meaning of her success in the story because it does not represent a true image of reality is perhaps misleading. *The Color Purple* admittedly has what one could define as a fairytale ending and Shug's flourishing financial state is merely one part of the puzzle in creating this. Other themes such as the reuniting of lost family members when Nettie returns and bad people turning good, are as well major narrative events in the creation of a happily ever-after. Thus, the reader is aware of this perhaps unusual fact of Shug's financial independence and to critique this state might be misleading because the point is not to make realistic claims, since Shug rather functions as an inspiring role-model to the readers of the novel.

Emotional eroticism and physical appearance

The relationship between Shug Avery and Albert has been long and sporadic. As mentioned earlier, Albert's father disapproved of the thought of holy matrimony between the two, and since Albert did not stand up against his father's will Albert and Shug were not wed. Still, when Albert is married to Celie and Shug reenters his life he does not hesitate to fornicate with her within the walls of the home that he and Celie share together. Shug appears to be as infatuated with Albert as he is with her. This is what she communicates to Celie about her and Albert's past: "It was good, too, she say. You know for me to have three babies by Albert and Albert weak as he is, it had to be good". The remark obviously connects to their sexual relationship and reveals that Shug thinks that Albert is great in bed. She manages to avoid to mention her feelings about him and chooses to focus on the more erotic parts instead. Shug to some extent, uses their good love life rather to explain why she sporadically returns to him although he does not dare to go against the father. On the other hand, it could also be viewed as her showing discontent that she could not resist him, despite his weakness, even if she wanted to. If the latter would be a suitable interpretation one has to ask two questions. Is Shug the weaker one when it comes to their erotic relationship and does she lose control over this part of her life? Does she become less powerful by giving herself emotionally and sexually to Albert even though she is a Womanist? While looking into the second part of Walker's Womanist definition where it states that a Womanist is: "A woman who loves other women, appreciates women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually/non-sexually". As a Womanist, Shug "sometimes loves individual men, sexually/non-sexually".

To love Albert both emotionally and sexually does not necessarily mean that she surrenders her power in any way, if he treats her with the respect that she deserves. It is her prerogative as a Womanist to have a man in her life if she chooses so. She chose Albert even though he was weak, however she does not appear to be content with or accept their on-and-off arrangement, still she lingers on. As a Womanist she generally decides her own path in life but this is an exception. Even though Shug "loves ... herself" and is "not a victim" according to the third and last part of Walker's Womanist definition, she cannot deny the will of her heart. She fell in love with Albert and she still loves him, probably always will love him no matter how he treats her or anybody else. That is the true essence of love, one can never control who one falls for not even Shug. This tells us that her strong sense of self could at times be a facade that she displays. Here she does not choose her own way and therefore she does not manage to uphold power over this emotional and erotic part of her life which is her relationship with Albert. Or perhaps it is not about having control, but rather about letting go of her control, as love is part of Womanism. Trudier Harris objects to Walker's choice of positive and erotic Womanist depiction on the grounds that it is a stereotypical portrayal: "The book simply added a freshness to many of the ideas circulating in the popular culture and captured in racist literature that suggested that black people have no morality when it comes to sexuality". She also adds that in racist literature black people tend to enter temporal sexual relationships and destroy marriages by entering into promiscuous unions. This seems to be true also concerning Shug Avery's erotic life and one could agree especially with the last part mentioned about temporal sexual relationships. An example of that is Shug's on-and-off affair with Albert that leads to extra pressure in his marriage with Celie. However, the stereotypical idea about low morality amongst the black community in general, that Harris refers to, has all too many weak spots. Most importantly does it not in any way take into consideration the emotional aspect of the relationships, such as the love people feel for one another. The low morality focuses mostly on the sanctity of marriage and discriminates and excludes those who do not follow this societal norm. Perhaps this is why it is what it is merely a stereotypical image that Walker counters in portraying the relationship between Shug and Albert.

Physical appearance and eroticism connected to the way Shug looks could also be associated to her power as a Womanist. Albert fully and completely adores Avery, there is no question about it. The way that she carries herself and how she looks plays a large part in the effect she has on him. Shug wears a "tight red dress ... little red sassy shoes" and "her hair shining in waves"-all of which are closely related to the idea of sexuality and how a woman should look to sexually attract men. The erotic red color of her dress and shoes signals sex appeal as does the finger wave hairstyle typical of the early 1900's. Undoubtedly, Shug here embodies erotic beauty of her time as we see in the reaction she gets from men in general and Albert in particular. How is then this physical side of her eroticism connected to her as a Womanist? Well, as a Womanist she is brave, determined, acts with extreme confidence and most importantly-she has a great deal of love for herself.

All of these attributes have a role in the way she chooses to display herself and Shug adapts to that time's idea of beauty

and sex appeal to get what she desires. By looking like she does, with the red, tight clothes and wavy hair, she receives affection and admiration from the gentlemen in the audience, especially from Albert. He obviously reacts to her appearance and eroticism to the extent that he even has trouble sitting still in his chair. Shug practically has him wrapped around her finger. Arguably, Shug is empowered by her physical eroticism because she, as a Womanist, has the characteristics that could depict an idea of beauty that transcends into admiration and affection from Albert.

In the end, it has been seen that Shug in some way surrenders to her emotions in her relationship with Albert. Because she has great love for him, but he does not give her the respect she deserves, she is forced to let go of her control in order to be with him. However, Shug is very aware of how her physical appearance affects others and she deliberately enhances her sexuality with the way she chooses to display herself. It is claimed that Shug dresses in a specific way to influence certain behavior in Albert, in order to try to control him. It is her physical attributes, intertwined with certain Womanist behavior, that allow her to act and behave this way and thus render her powerful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Shug initially seems to act in accordance with Womanist behavior and becomes empowered in most parts of her life because of this fact. Her personality and social skills give her a superior position when interacting with others, as does her language use and the use of paralinguistic communication. Shug's status as an artist and financially independent lifestyle are also products of her Womanism, as is her vibrant and sexual physical appearance. Finally, in a male-dominated society where women are marginalized because of outdated and degrading religious norms and values, Shug manages to threaten the Christian patriarchal order and hold her head up high because she is a Womanist. It is more difficult to draw conclusions about Shug's emotional side because of her inability to speak about the loss of her children and her love for violent and disrespectful Albert—the topic is complex and could use further investigation.

Furthermore, it would be interesting in the future to study how a Womanist would be portrayed today compared to how Walker chose to depict her over 30 years ago. How would this strong and self-realized character look and behave in a 21st century narrative? A *black feminism* study of more recent writing, including the empowered woman of color, would be one way to go. There are not many critics who still publish on *The Color Purple*, since it might not be considered relevant by a larger number of people today. The novel has made an impact on contemporary literature and is now studied by scholars as a remarkable and important part of the 20th century canon.

References

1. Lauret M. *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.; c2000. p. 19-20.
2. Rooney E. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, Cambridge: University Press; c2006. p. 7-22.
3. Showalter E. in Greene G & Kahn C. *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge; c1985. p. 53.

4. For more reading see also *Sexual Democracy; Women, Oppression and Revolution* (1996) by Ferguson, *Queer Theories* (2003) by Donald E. Hall and *Sexual Politics* (2000) by Kate Millet.
5. Blossom Shimayam Ottoh-Agele. *Gendered Sleeves Reconstruction in Alice Walker's the Color Purple and Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. *World Journal of English Language*. 2013;3(2):22-33.
6. Cheung King-Kok. *Don't Tell: Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior*. *PMLA*. 1988;103(2):162-174.
7. Coates, Jennifer. *Women, Men and Language-Studies in Language and Linguistics*. London: Longman; c2004. p. 124.