

Univerzita Hradec Králové
Pedagogická fakulta

Diplomová práce

Univerzita Hradec Králové
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Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

**Román Alice Walkerové Barva nachu a
afroamerická próza**
Diplomová práce

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího diplomové práce samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

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Anotace

FRIDRICHOVÁ, Lenka. Román Alice Walkerové *Barva nachu* a afroamerická próza. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzita Hradec Králové, 2020. 81 s. Diplomová práce.

Předložená práce se zabývá spisy Alice Walkerové, zejména jejího románu *Barva nachu*, v kontextu žánru epistolárního románu, moderní afroamerické prózy, feminismu a otroctví. První část práce je teoretická a obsahuje informace o autorčině dětství, životě a literární kariéře. Druhá část stručně nastiňuje literární proudy v kontextu autorčiny práce. Třetí část představuje definici a klíčové koncepty feminismu a jednotlivé vlny feminismu. Praktická část práce se pak zaměřuje na vlastní analýzu a interpretaci knihy s důrazem na děj, žánr, jazyk, sociohistorický kontext, feministický diskurz, témata a postavy. Poslední praktická část se pak zabývá porovnáním filmové adaptace a samotného románu.

Klíčová slova: feminism, black feminism, slavery, *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker, epistolary novel, afroamerican

Annotation

FRIDRICHOVÁ, Lenka. *The Color Purple by Alice Walker and Afro-American Prose*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2020. 81 pp. Diploma Thesis

The thesis submitted deals with the writings by Alice Walker, in particular her novel *The Color Purple*, in the context of the genre of the epistolary novel, modern African American prose, feminism and slavery. The first part of the thesis is theoretical and contains information about Walker's childhood, life and literary career. The second part briefly outlines the literary movements in the context of Walker's work. The third part presents the definition and key concepts of feminism and individual waves of feminism. The practical part of the work then aims to analyze and interpret the book with an emphasis on the plot, genre, language, sociohistorical context, feminist discourse, themes and characters. The last practical part then deals with comparison of the film adaptation and the novel itself.

Keywords: feminism, black feminism, slavery, *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker, epistolary novel, afroamerican

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že diplomová práce je uložena v souladu s rektorským výnosem č. 13/2017 (Řád pro nakládání s bakalářskými, diplomovými, rigorózními, disertačními a habilitačními pracemi na UHK).

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Podpis
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13. Rozsah práce
14. Jazyk práce
AN
15. Záznam průběhu obhajoby
16. Zásady pro vypracování
Práce se soustředí na dílo Alice Walkerové, především román Barva nachu, v kontextu autorčina díla, žánru „román v dopisech“ a moderní afroamerické prózy. Dotkne se také problematiky feminismu a otroctví.
The thesis will discuss the writings by Alice Walker, in particular her novel The Color Purple, in the context of the genre of the epistolary novel, modern African American prose, feminism and slavery.
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Graham, Maryemma (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel, 2004.

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Jařab, Josef. Amerika v nás. 2018.

18. Osoby VŠKP

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Table of contents:

Introduction.....	1
Alice Walker's biography	2
1.1 Childhood and Early life	4
1.2 Education and College years	7
1.3 Personal life.....	10
1.4 Activism, literary and political criticism	14
Literary movements in the context of Alice Walker's work	20
1.5 The Harlem Renaissance	21
1.6 Naturalism, Realism and Modernism	24
1.7 The Black Arts Movement	27
1.8 African American literature since 1970.....	30
A brief history of feminism in America and the major female activists at the time	33
1.9 Introduction and definition of feminism.....	33
1.10 The roots of feminism	36
1.11 First Wave of Feminism	38
1.12 Second Wave of Feminism	41
1.13 Third Wave of Feminism.....	43
1.14 Fourth Wave of Feminism	45
1.15 Black Feminism.....	46
The Color Purple: analysis and interpretation of the book.....	50
1.16 Plot overview.....	51
1.17 The form and genre in The Color Purple.....	53
1.17.1 The origin and development of the epistolary novel as a genre.....	54
1.17.2 The function of the epistolary novel as a genre	55
1.17.3 The decline and renaissance of the epistolary novel as a genre	56
1.18 Sociohistorical context of the novel	57
1.19 Language in The Color Purple	58
1.20 The concept of black womanhood in The Color Purple and the feminist discourse.....	60
The Color Purple as the film adaptation	61
1.21 Own comparison and analysis of the book and the film adaptation	62
Conclusion	64
Sources.....	65
1.22 Printed sources	65
1.23 Online sources	70

Introduction

The thesis deals with African-American writer Alice Walker and her novel *The Color Purple*. The aim of the thesis is to analyze the novel in the context of the genre of the epistolary novel, modern African American prose, feminism and slavery.

The thesis is divided into theoretical and practical part. The theoretical part of the thesis explains the basic concepts in order to adequately understand the novel *The Color Purple*. On the contrary, the practical part is focused on the analysis of the novel *The Color Purple*, especially on its form, genre, themes, language, structure, plot and selected insights into individual characters.

The first part of the thesis focuses on Walker's biography, especially on her childhood, college years, personal life, activism and literary and political career. The second part of the thesis introduces literary movements in the context of Walker's work. In this part, the aim is to chronologically divide and describe the four key African American literary traditions that shaped American literary history at that time, namely the Harlem Renaissance; Naturalism, Realism and Modernism; The Black Arts Movement and recent African American literature since 1970. This part investigates the key authors that influenced Walker's literary work.

The third part of the thesis presents a brief history of feminism in America and the major female activists at the time. This part examines the roots of feminism, the individual waves of feminism that shaped feminist discourse, and finally characterizes black feminism.

The following practical part aims to analyze and interpret the book with an emphasis on the plot, genre, form, feminist discourse, themes and characters. Finally, the last part of the thesis deals with the film adaptation of the novel and my own reflection of the film and comparison of the novel and the film.

Alice Walker's biography

“Deliver me from writers who say the way they live doesn't matter. I'm not sure a bad person can write a good book. If art doesn't make us better, then what on earth is it for.”¹

Alice Walker, known particularly for her explosive epistolary novel *The Color Purple*, is undoubtedly considered one of the most significant African-American female writer of the twentieth century. Walker went down in history being the first African-American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the National Book Award in 1983.²

As an internationally celebrated writer, Walker has written many bestsellers and novels that thematically address the issues such as gender discrimination and inequality, racism, stereotypes and male dominance in patriarchal society which all represent a widespread problem in the African-American society. The key issues that Walker focuses on in her fiction are life struggles and experiences of African-American women, particularly in the rural South.

Despite all the qualities of her novels, such as straightforwardness and realism, she has often met with controversy and critique of her work. The main reason was that Walker's work introduced revolutionary and raw critique targeted mainly on white racism, black patriarchy and not least misogyny which is described as a type of discrimination based on hatred, superiority and prejudice of men against women.³

But writing was not her only passion and fulfillment of life. Except for being a highly acclaimed novelist, essayist and poet, she is also a world-famous social activist and a public intellectual, best known for her work and involvement in the Civil Rights and Feminist movements.

¹ Walker, A.

² Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 89.

³ LaGrone, K. (2009) *Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, Rodopi, 16-17.

As a very spiritual and empathetic person, Walker was paralyzed by the cruelty and injustice in American society, which was one of the impulses to openly and naturalistically write about such taboos.

*"And my mother loved beauty. She created gardens and grew our food, and all the magic of that went into my being... So segregation in Georgia, our apartheid, was a real blow to me. It was a real shock to see that people would actually spend their time making horrible laws and killing people and tearing down our school when, instead, they could be admiring what was all around them."*⁴

The Walker family lived in the era of three substantial events of American history. The first one was the Great Depression, which was the worst global economic crisis in the history of the industrialized world. The Jim Crow era was another significant phase of American history that was deeply connected with racism and racial segregation laws. The last crucial event that was experienced by the Walker family was The Civil Rights Movement. Unbearable conditions of racial segregation resulted in the Civil Rights Movement, which aim was to establish a social justice and equality between black and white citizens.⁵

In the video called *A Sharecropper's Political Courage*, Walker recalls and describes her childhood memories when her father showed a great amount of courage as he was the first black man to vote in their county.

*" He was the first black man to vote in our county, passing by three white men with shut guns who said they would kill any black person who voted... And he did that. "*⁶

⁴ Seaman, D. (2013) A Conversation with Alice Walker. In *American libraries*, Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2013/05/08/a-conversation-with-alice-walker/>

⁵ Harris, M (2010) *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*, Springer, 15-16.

⁶ Walk Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize Winning Author (2019). In *Makers*, Retrived May 25, 2020.

As the consequence of her father's citizen disobedience, Walker remembers that the whole family was punished and forced to move into horrible shack.

The following chapter contains a closer outline of the author's life, namely historical background, moral attitudes and values that have shaped her personhood as well as her life.

1.1 Childhood and Early life

Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia. Eatonton was a rural farming town of Putnam County. As a child she experienced poor upbringing as she is the youngest daughter in a family of eight children. Her parents made a living by renting small plots of land and working as Sharecroppers. Walker remembers her parents as hardworking and very moral people.⁷

*"I like to say that I was babysat by nature. My mother had to take me with her to the fields. I would sit at the edge of the field and fall asleep or wait for her to come back after she hoed a row all the way to what seemed like the end of the earth."*⁸

Sharecropping was a system known as a debt slavery that became widespread in the rural South after American Civil War and as a direct consequence of economic upheaval connected with the abolition of slavery. Many poor African Americans used this way of earning money, but they often got stucked in a deadlock situation of continual debt, especially during weak harvests. So the sharecropping system was basically slavery with a new name.⁹

⁷ Harris, M (2010) *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*, Springer, 15.

⁸ Seaman, D. (2013) A Conversation with Alice Walker. In *American libraries*, Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2013/05/08/a-conversation-with-alice-walker/>.

⁹ Jaynes, G. D. (2019) Debt slavery, In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Retrived May 20, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/debt-slavery>

As a child Walker experienced poverty, economic hardships of her family, discrimination in the face of Jim Crow laws and a hard life in general. Walker's parents were older, busy because of their agriculture, with failing health and a lack of vitality, which was the reason why she was struggling with a lack of attention from her parents. As a consequence of these difficulties and mainly because her mother had to work, she started first grade at school a year earlier than usual. Despite these inconveniences, she was a highly independent child with a remarkable commitment to her education and enjoyed a happy early childhood. Walker's teacher soon noted her interest and intellect in the classroom.¹⁰

During her childhood, she had little contact with people outside her family, which led her into a world of fantasy where she often escaped with her thoughts. As a little girl, Walker enjoyed spending Saturdays with her parents and siblings. She always looked forward to weekly trips into town, shopping and night picture shows to watch westerns. Walker literally loved being outdoors, meeting people, interacting with them, spending time climbing trees and hopping on fields.¹¹

As a child, Walker was a kind of tomboy who engaged in games and enjoyed playing with her older brothers. The games were mainly the domain of boys such as "Cowboys and Indians". In the summer of 1952, when she was eight years old, Walker suffered the eye injury. Everything happened while playing with her siblings when one of her brothers accidentally shot her in the right eye with his air gun. Due to this accident and lack of medical assistance, Walker remained blinded to one eye. Having a white film and a scar tissue across the sightless eye, Walker began to feel worthless and suicidal. It is obvious that this kind of disfigurement and deformation had a great impact on her future life.¹²

This accident left her not only with a physical handicap but also with psychological trauma that led to a change of her personality and her perspective

¹⁰ Bloom, H. (2009) *Alice Walker*, Infobase Publishing, 78-79.

¹¹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 2.

¹² Johnson, C. D. (2011) *Women's Issues in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, Greenhaven Publishing LLC, 24-25.

on the world. The problems started to occur because she had been teased by her classmates and misunderstood by her family. Both her school results and self-esteem suffered. In the course of time her confidence and belief that she was pretty slowly vanished. Previously confident Walker became a shy and reserved child.¹³

Instead of exploring surroundings and spending her time in nature, Walker focused on reading and writing. In this way she fell in love with books and discovered European classical writers, reading them over and over again. She was able to spend the majority of her free time reading books, undisturbed. Her mother considered reading and writing to be a kind of treatment for her daughter.¹⁴

There was no support and compassion from her parent's side, they neither adequately punished her brother Curtis for his carelessness with the BB gun, nor they blamed themselves for what had happened to their beloved child. To her confusion and dismay, Walker was sent away from home to live temporarily with her grandparents. After a year or so, Walker rejoined her family, but her feelings about the family were mainly anger and injustice. She felt to be alienated and unjustly punished as an innocent victim. Her enthusiasm for writing grew because it allowed her to write down her feelings and inner grievance against her parents, analyze them and recover from the emotional hardships she faced.¹⁵

As fourteen years old, Walker undergone a transplantation as a doctor removed her scar tissue and remade her appearance. Despite the noticeable improvement of her injury and the fact that she had become high school prom queen, her life still remained filled with the emotional scars of this accident and the feeling of being outsider. This period of her life was essential to her writing career. Being rather in solitude with her own thoughts, writing freed her from feelings of worthlessness and loneliness.¹⁶

¹³ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 3.

¹⁴ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 3-4.

¹⁵ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 4.

¹⁶ Crayton, L. A. (2016) *Reading and Interpreting the Works of Alice Walker*, Enslow Publishing, 37-38.

Living with her grandparents boosted her self-confidence and courageousness of spirit. That was the reason why she frequently challenged her father's wisdom and his system of values and beliefs. Walker's father held on to patriarchal behaviors and treated his wife and daughters differently from the way he treated his sons. Although Walker loved and respected her father, she criticized him for his shortcomings, especially sexism. Walker and her father had clashed for years until she left home for college.¹⁷

1.2 Education and College years

Walker attended high school for blacks in segregated Putnam County, whose curriculum favoured spiritual values and humor as the means of dealing with absurdity and brutality of white supremacy. The school's attitude towards injustice and racial segregation was a foundation of Walker's activism.¹⁸

Walker's activism was fueled by a discussion with her classmates about the impact of segregation on their daily lives. In the biographical book *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker*, Byrd claims that Walker was outraged by the injustice when black kids had to walk to school, but white kids had a bus or as white people got paid more than black people for doing the same job. Walker graduated from Butler Baker High School in 1961. In the same year in August 1961, Walker got a state scholarship at Spelman College, which was a prominent school for black women in Atlanta.¹⁹

Her unrelenting feeling of humiliation and injustice led her to the Civil Rights Movement, in which she became very active. Black people protested to change the repressive social, political and economic apartheid system. Being encouraged by the teachers, other students and activists, Walker was a part of

¹⁷ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 5.

¹⁸ Johnson, C. D. (2011) *Women's Issues in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, Greenhaven Publishing LLC, 19-20.

¹⁹ Wood, B., Clark, K. A., and Chirhart, A. S. (2014) *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times*, University of Georgia Press, 399.

students demonstrations and later became a delegate with a honor to represent her college at the World Festival of Youth and Students in Helsinki in 1962.²⁰

At that time, Walker was influenced mainly by historian and activist Howard Zinn, who was also her mentor at Spelman. He focused on history from the perspective of the victims and gave his students very inspirational lessons based on civil disobedience, which had a major impact on Walker's approach to activism.²¹

Walker's involvement in the civil rights movement deepened her commitment in other social justice movements, especially the women's movement. Walker openly manifested her attitudes in her daily life, as well as in her writings, in which she opposed sexism, patriarchy and any forms of oppression experienced by black women at that time.

In connection with feminism, Walker introduced a highly regarded concept and definition of "womanism" in her collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, in 1983. In the book Walker claims

*"It comes (to me) from the word "womanish," a word our mothers used to describe and attempt to inhibit strong, outrageous or outspoken behaviour when we were children: "You're acting womanish!" A labeling that failed, for the most part, to keep us from acting womanish whenever we could, that is to say, like our mothers themselves and like other women we admired."*²²

Womanism can be described as an alternative to feminism. White feminism was inapplicable for black feminist issues and that was the reason why colored women needed political framework and tools in their struggle with patriarchy and racial oppression based on negative stereotypes. Walker established

²⁰ Plant, D. G. (2017) *Alice Walker: A Woman For Our Times*, ABC-CLIO, 28-29.

²¹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 10.

²² Walker, A. (1983) *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens - Womanist Prose*, Harvest / Harcourt, 100.

the culminating definition, “womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender”, expressing the author's concept of the relation between the womanist and the feminist.²³

Even though black and white feminism are closely related in some aspects, many black women cannot identify themselves absolutely with the mainstream of Anglo-American feminist movement. In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Hooks describes this burdensome issue as follows:

*“Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually- women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority.”*²⁴

One fundamental difference is that black women had faced sexism not only from outside but also from within their own community, and had also faced racism as a whole black community.

In 1964, Walker switched to Sarah Lawrence College located in Bronxville, New York. Being a student at Sarah Lawrence was advantageous at least for two main reasons. First, Walker was given a full scholarship and second, she met her professor, mentor and also a poet Muriel Rukeyser who played an essential role in Walker's writing career as she introduced her works to a larger audience by showing them to her agent. Rukeyser spotted Walker and realized that she was a very talented writer. She helped Walker get her first collection of poems, "Once," published in 1968.²⁵

Walker remembers this valuable and exceptionally distinctive author in the video Alice Walker on Muriel Rukeyser as follows:

²³ Phillips, L. (2006) *The Womanist Reader*, Taylor & Francis, 48.

²⁴ Hooks, B. (2000) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Pluto Press, 1.

²⁵ Cullen-DuPont, K. (2014) *Encyclopedia of Women's History in America*, Infobase Publishing, 264.

“I met Muriel at Sarah Lawrence in 1963. She had suffered a stroke and I didn't know this because I didn't know her either. There was this large, handsome woman, but also a little strange because of the stroke, I now understand. And we all just accepted her strangeness... she was very different from most people, she spoke sometimes in poetry and that was lovely, but it was also so different, you know. Her primary teaching about poetry was to help us understand why people resist it and why they are furied.”²⁶

It is obvious that both Walker and Rukeyser shared an interest in the same issues. Rukeyser was an American poet and a political activist who targeted her poems on equality, feminism, and social justice, practically the same matters as Walker did. Rukeyser is also considered to be one of the most significant, yet neglected writers, with a huge impact on writings of such authors as Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich and many others.

In the video, Walker claims that in poetry it is important and at the same time necessary to go deep in yourself and that is why some people try to resist poetry and do not dare to feel it. In Walker's eyes, poetry is so radically truthful and honest. She also remembers her first poem *Once*, a collection of short witty poems inspired by “*snapshots*” of Africa, the civil rights struggles and her experiences of the Deep South. For Walker, poetry simply means a muse that gives her a freedom and fearlessness.²⁷

1.3 Personal life

Writing of the collection *Once* was preceded by another unpleasant moment in Walker's life. In 1964 Walker accepted an offer to travel abroad during

²⁶ Paci, M. (2015) Alice Walker on Muriel Rukeyser, In *vimeo*, Retrived February 20, 2020, from <https://vimeo.com/134053443>

²⁷ Paci, M. (2015) Alice Walker on Muriel Rukeyser, In *vimeo*, Retrived February 20, 2020, from <https://vimeo.com/134053443>

the summer as an exchange student in Uganda. Then, in the winter of 1965, during the last few months of school, Alice became pregnant with her white former boyfriend David DeMoss, but decided to undergo an abortion. Being pregnant in the society that considers abortions to be unethical and illegal, Walker suffered from anxiety and serious depression.²⁸

This controversial issue, which abortion definitely is, was a much debated part of women's emancipation. Walker was pregnant during the era when abortion was a crime, at least from the view of the authorities. The illegality of abortion had been criticized by feminists and the primary justification of it was the argument that pregnant women have rights to decide how to treat their own body and state institutions and laws have no privilege to prohibit them from their free will. Finally, the urgent need for women's abortions led to a mass movement that succeeded in reversing public policy towards abortions in the 1960s and early 1970s.²⁹

In this context, Walker is politically liberal because she considered the laws imposing an abortion ban discriminatory. Walker attempted to find a doctor to perform an abortion for her, which was unsuccessful at the beginning. Being even more terrified of her pregnancy, she revealed her secret to her friends, and one of them eventually found a doctor to perform an abortion for her. Her nervousness did not disappear even after that as she knew that her mother had always considered abortion a sin.³⁰

Despite persisting depression, Walker successfully graduated from Sarah Lawrence in 1966. After graduating from Sarah Lawrence College, Walker met a fellow civil rights worker Melvyn R. Leventhal when she accepted an internship at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Jackson, Mississippi. Their sympathies and romantic attraction soon grew into a relationship and they married in 1967. Leventhal was a young white Jewish law student at that time and the

²⁸ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 13.

²⁹ Solinger, R. (1998) *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle*, University of California Press, 161.

³⁰ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 13.

problem was that interracial marriages were illegal in Mississippi.³¹

Both Walker and Leventhal were activists and she admired his courage, bravery, as well as willingness to endanger his own social status by helping people in need. They were associated with the same mission to change unjust society. Their marriage was a milestone for Walker because the Mississippi African-Americans feared white people, so their marriage went against all stereotypes. For example, in some Mississippi towns, blacks were forbidden to walk on sidewalks. However, Alice and Leventhal were a team and enjoyed their rebellion against the system.³²

They returned to New York City in 1974 and lived together above Washington Square Park. Their friends and family did not support their marriage and they also faced harassment and threats by white racists. As a result of the hostile atmosphere they lived with a guard dog and slept with a gun under the bed for protection. Living in precarious conditions, the couple was warned by their neighbours whenever white strangers appeared in their street.³³

Walker soon discovered after their marriage that she was pregnant, so they had a reason to celebrate because they both looked forward to being parents. It was good news mainly for her husband, because this fact excused him from being drafted into military service in the Vietnam War.³⁴

Walker discovered her second pregnancy while she was writing her debut novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Being under time pressure, she finished the novel in 1969 just three days before the birth of her daughter Rebecca. Walker and Leventhal were married for ten years, but increasing tension and an atmosphere of constant fear deepened the space between them and they divorced in 1976.³⁵

³¹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 13.

³² Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 13-14.

³³ Bloom, H. (2009) *Alice Walker*: Infobase Publishing, 18-19.

³⁴ Bloom, H. (2009) *Alice Walker*: Infobase Publishing, 19.

³⁵ Bloom, H. (2009) *Alice Walker*: Infobase Publishing, 21.

After divorce, Walker found a job as a teacher at Wellesley College, Boston, and in 1972 she left Mississippi with her daughter. Though Walker was a "mother figure" for other women in the world, she gave preference to her writing career more than to her daughter.³⁶

In her book *Black, White & Jewish: Autobiography of Shifting Self*, Rebecca Walker describes her childhood and hardship as a mixed-race child of a white father and a black mother. In the book, she remembers that her parents were terribly busy with their work and divorced when she was only eight years old.

In the memoir, Rebecca describes her childhood as neglected by her mother and negatively affected by her strict feminist belief. According to Rebecca's words, her mother considered motherhood one of the worst things that could even happen to a woman. Walker also tried to convince her daughter that children enslave women. Their complicated relationship culminated when Rebecca, who had a different view of motherhood, announced her pregnancy. Since then, Rebecca has lost contact with her mother.³⁷

This part of the diploma thesis illustrates Walker's turbulent life full of unforeseen twists and historical contexts that gradually shaped her personality and led her to her literary career. Especially her early life and college years were mentally demanding and as a result Walker also considered committing suicide. Fortunately, her life journey led her to her self-realization and strengthened her personality. Walker is thus a marvelous example of the author who embraces humanity and other forms of life, and is considered by many to be a woman of deep spirituality. Her practical philosophy and spirituality are reflected in almost all of her works, perhaps all.

³⁶ Bloom, H. (2009) *Alice Walker*: Infobase Publishing, 23.

³⁷ Trier-Bieniek, A. (2016) *The Beyonce Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race and Feminism*: McFarland, 208.

1.4 Activism, literary and political criticism

*“Activism is my rent for living on the planet.”*³⁸

As I have already mentioned, Walker is not only a world regarded writer, but also a controversial campaigner for black and women's rights who is also very active in recent 'new-age' concerns. Social and political activism attracted Walker's attention in her early life as her parents served as a source of inspiration for such behaviour. Her father, Willie Lee, was also very active in public life at the time by organizing the first black voters in the county. He wanted his children to be educated, so he built the first school for African-American children in Putnam County, which unfortunately was subsequently burned by racist white men.³⁹

Walker had been involved in activism mainly during her college years, frequently attending and marching in various demonstrations. The turbulent Civil Rights era provided plenty of opportunities for such demonstrations.

Analyzing Walker's books and her writing style, it is evident that she intentionally includes autobiographical elements, social taboos, and controversial issues to raise awareness and promote activism of the problems facing American society.

In essay *Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's in Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, the author McMillan states that autobiographical criticism has been used in literature to manifest and provoke a response to "serious social issues". The most important aim of such moral messages is to communicate to readers and push them to change the current situation in their culture.

³⁸ Walker, A.

³⁹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 3.

*“In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens demonstrates the way literary criticism can use performative autobiography to influence cultural practices and potentially change material lives.”*⁴⁰

The author closely focuses on and explains three central factors of using personal criticism in Alice Walker's works.

*“First, autobiography allows scholars writing from traditionally marginalized positions to simultaneously assert the legitimacy of their viewpoints and challenge perspectives that have been presented as disinterested and universal.”*⁴¹

McMillan points out that this technique is useful and important in writing, especially for people in unjust and oppressed situations, to express their feelings and beliefs through this medium.

*“At the same time, autobiographical criticism has the power to change dominant discourses by raising awareness of views outside of the mainstream.”*⁴²

In this context, writing personal criticism serves as a means of sharing awareness and expressing disapproval of violations of one's rights, discriminatory and prejudicial treatment, in particular on the basis of race, age or gender. Dominant discourse can be characterized as a mainstream system of ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices of the majority that systematically build the nature of a particular society. The aim of autobiographical criticism is therefore to break existing dominant discourses and replace them with new ones.

⁴⁰ McMillan, L. (2004) Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": Indiana University Press, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28(1), 108.

⁴¹ McMillan, L. (2004) Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": Indiana University Press, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28(1), 108.

⁴² McMillan, L. (2004) Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": Indiana University Press, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28(1), 108.

*“The use of autobiography in criticism may finally be important as it inspires change not only in the academy but also outside it, as readers are drawn into a culture of activism.”*⁴³

Walker tried to achieve this aim by writing her debut novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* in 1970. Her first novel incorporates themes such as racism, sexism, abuse, relationships in a patriarchal family, economic deprivation resulting from economic enslavement, and many others. As an activist, Walker sought to reverse the unfair and discriminatory economic system.

*“To her the sharecropping system was worse than slavery because the disenfranchisement of former slaves after the Civil War created a system under Reconstruction that took exploitation to a new level. Under slavery people worked and were never paid. Under the sharecropping system former slaves worked and were rarely paid and ended up in debt.”*⁴⁴

From a sociohistorical context, the predominant sharecropping system was established by the Congress at the time of president Andrew Johnson. The novel set in rural Georgia illustrates what kind and range of violence can cause such an inhumane system. Walker is primarily interested in the message of the novel, she simply wants her concerns to become readers' concerns by showing how the system dehumanizes black people.⁴⁵

Walker discovered the field of political activism when she was a student at Spelman College. Historically The Civil Rights movement began in 1865, when the United States passed the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. But this struggle for social justice and effort to gain equal rights took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955 a courageous black woman Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man and later was arrested. Her brave action

⁴³ McMillan, L. (2004) *Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"*: Indiana University Press, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28(1), 109.

⁴⁴ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 8.

⁴⁵ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 55-58.

started a collective public action because of a great outrage among black citizens, labelling Parks “*mother of movement*”.⁴⁶

Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. there arose a generation intolerant to such discrimination and oppression. Parks’ action not long afterward initiated a boycott of the Montgomery bus system that lasted 381 days. The boycott resulted in a change of laws as the Supreme Court decided segregated seating to be unconstitutional.⁴⁷

Walker first met inspiring King Jr. in 1962, when she was selected by her college and invited to his home in Atlanta. Having a great impact on Walker, she traveled to Washington DC, in order to take part in the August 1963 March on Washington. At the march Martin Luther King Jr. presented his famous speech "I Have a Dream" while standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Walker listened to his emotional and symbolic oration and got even more inspired by King’s style of activism based on nonviolence and civil disobedience. Unfortunately, King was assassinated five years later and Walker being emotionally exhausted by the bitter reality, joined his funeral walking in the processional following King’s coffin.⁴⁸

*“My activism- cultural, political, spiritual- is rooted in my love of nature and my delight in human beings.”*⁴⁹

Walker was also active in humanitarian organisations and she also led a delegation of women to supply people of Cuba with antibiotics estimated to cost five million dollars. Walker favoured this kind of humanitarian aid to people who needed help, unfortunately for her, it did not last long because of the embargo imposed on Cuba by the president Kenedy.

“In 1962, the Kennedy administration had imposed a full trade embargo on Cuba, because it was convinced that President Fidel Castro was moving the country toward a totalitarian

⁴⁶ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 14-15.

⁴⁷ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 14-15.

⁴⁸ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 15.

⁴⁹ Walker, A.

*regime with help from the Soviet Union - then a foe of the United States. The U.S. government had hoped that the embargo would cause Castro to abandon communism in favor of American-style democracy.”*⁵⁰

The problem was that the embargo had a bad impact on Cuba people's life and was harshly criticized by Walker and other Americans who considered it to be ethically unacceptable political step. Walker spiritually supported Cuban families in Havana and also met Fidel Castro himself in 1995. Showing a great act of kindness, Walker could not understand cruelty and ignorance her developed country showed to a small country like Cuba. Later Walker directed her humanitarian efforts to Africa and in 1996 she visited Ghana to improve conditions for local women by helping to abolish female genital mutilation.⁵¹

In the book *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* the authors explore how much is African origin of blacks in western society central to their identity, collecting evidence from a variety of sources and disciplines such as art, music, literature, linguistics, history, and sociology. Walker herself was concerned with Africa's issues in her work.

Such an example can be Walker's novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* as the novel presents uncompromising critique of the practice of female genital mutilation. Walker views it as a simple sexist culturalism, which purpose is to justify the oppression of women by providing a false alibi of "tradition." According to Walker women in this culture are subjects of patriarchal ideologies and woman's right to the integrity of her body is violated by this nonsensical yet still persisting ritual. Human rights violation is obvious in the context of this social phenomenon and Walker wants her readers in western culture to be aware of such atrocity being committed on African women even nowadays.⁵²

⁵⁰ Lazo, C. E. (2005) *Alice Walker: Freedom Writer*: Twenty-First Century Books, 99.

⁵¹ Lazo, C. E. (2005) *Alice Walker: Freedom Writer*: Twenty-First Century Books, 100.

⁵² Olakunle, G. (2001) Alice Walker's Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction: Duke University Press, University of Oregon, *Comparative Literature*, 53(4), 354.

*“Walker’s portrayal of African American missionaries and female circumcision represents a critical juncture in the legacy of African American interaction with Africa. This legacy is based on the contributions of such figures as Martin Delany, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou..., a partial list of African Americans whose ideas form a discourse on Africa.”*⁵³

Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism are the essential paradigmatical ideas created by western writers and intellectuals who depicted Africa as a distant homeland and a source of heritage. The key aim of such authors is then to view phenomena from the perspective of the African person and to disprove and correct mistaken stereotypes and ideas perpetuated by racist western academic sources. Despite this effort, African people sometimes view African Americans as allies, but sometimes also as intruders. Walker supposes that this kind of vigilance stems from problems with the acceptance of African Americans who are critical of traditional and ritual practice in some African regions.⁵⁴

Walker's connections and togetherness with African people are clear. Her altruism is also manifested in her effort to help child victims of HIV, one of the most devastating fatal diseases and serious problems in the African region. Walker donated funds to an African orphanage helping such victims of this murderous disease. For her courage and commitment for defending human rights and supporting altruistic behaviour, Walker was received the Lennon Ono Grant for Peace in 2010.⁵⁵

In 2009, Walker passionately opposed Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by labeling it apartheid regime that according to her used its state apparatus to oppress innocent citizens under international conspiracy. Walker was convinced that Palestinian victims and suffering stem mainly from Arab reluctance to reach a

⁵³ Okpewho, I., Davies, C. B., Mazrui, A. A. (2001) *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*: Indiana University Press, 525.

⁵⁴ Okpewho, I., Davies, C. B., Mazrui, A. A. (2001) *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*: Indiana University Press, 525.

⁵⁵ Crayton, L. A. (2016) *Reading and Interpreting the Works of Alice Walker*: Enslow Publishing, 90.

peaceful solution with Israel. In 2009, Walker also intended to join the Gaza Freedom March that supposed to be non-violent political march aiming to end the blockade of Gaza. However, the Egyptian authorities rejected the protest and the march was later cancelled.⁵⁶

In this context, Walker became a member of Code Pink: Women for Peace, an internationally active movement of female activists who share the same political goals and participate in a wide range of anti-war activities. The main purpose of the organization was to deliver medical supplies and support humanitarian help to refugees. The organization also aimed to organize protests and spread the subconscious of Iraqi women's struggles by preparing reports on their conditions in that state.⁵⁷

This part of the diploma thesis briefly summarizes Walker's significance as a political writer and also her place in African American tradition. It should be emphasized that her work is mostly aimed at provoking controversy, which can be offensive and personally painful, but at the same time culturally very productive. Currently, Walker is still involved in changing world stereotypes by presenting her attitudes in interviews and speeches. Walker also travels the world to visit trouble spots and, as she claims, often finds analogies between local people experiencing violence and her own struggles in the American South.⁵⁸

Literary movements in the context of Alice Walker's work

The following part of the thesis deals with the historical outline of literary periods associated with the work and life of Alice Walker. The aim is to chronologically divide and describe the four key African American literary traditions that shaped American literary history at that time, namely the Harlem Renaissance; Naturalism, Realism and Modernism; The Black Arts Movement

⁵⁶ Curtis, M. (2017) *Jews, Antisemitism, and the Middle East*: Routledge, 23-24.

⁵⁷ Barrett, D. (2018) *The Defiant: Protest Movements in Post-Liberal America*: NYU Press, 128.

⁵⁸ Lauret, M. (2011) *Alice Walker*, Macmillan International Higher Education, 213-214.

and recent African American literature since 1970. The guideline for this structure was taken from the book *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* written by Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

1.5 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement or the New Negro Renaissance, was a unique artistic, cultural and intellectual phenomenon that began in the 1920s and continued until the 1930s. This era is known as the flourishing of black artistic talents manifested in literature, art, music and performance. The period considered the golden age in African American culture soon aroused the interest of many white New Yorkers, although segregation laws forbade the association of the two races with each other.⁵⁹

The roots of the movement date back to the Great Migration, when a large wave of African Americans moved out of the rural South to the urban areas in the Northeast, Midwest and West. As a consequence of the migration, a new cultural mecca of black Americans arose in the neighborhood of Harlem in the northern part of New York City. After decades of oppression associated with slavery, African Americans were able to feel social progress, such as increasing literacy among blacks, as well as the "*privilege*" to identify with their own race.

*"Leaders in Harlem recognized this was a new birth -a renaissance- of African-American spirit and identity."*⁶⁰

Thus The Harlem Renaissance symbolized a major shift in the liberation and self-realization of the African community in America and helped them to talk about their experience.

Nightlife in Harlem attracted many foreigners mainly due to its vibrant

⁵⁹ Hutchinson, G. and Hutchinson, G. E. (2007) *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, 28.

⁶⁰ Herringshaw, D. (2011) *Harlem Renaissance*, ABDO, 7.

atmosphere full of jazz music. White people came to visit Harlem to experience adventure and listen to one of the best jazz and blues musicians in the world. However, the growing interest of white people in black culture and music has met with resistance from African Americans, because many people in Harlem disliked infiltration of whites to their culture.⁶¹

The Harlem Renaissance is undoubtedly associated with the name of Zora Neale Hurston, the central female figure in the movement. Zora Neale Hurston was one of the most prolific authors of her time, and although Walker and Hurston were separated by time and place, they both share the same kind of spirituality in their books. Walker first encountered Hurston's work after her death in 1960, when she studied at college. Since then, she was deeply enthusiastic about her writing style and literary output, which influenced her own literary career.⁶²

In *Resurrecting Zora Neale Hurston*, Walker describes how Hurston's novels shaped her own writing style and served it as a source of authentic folklore material, such as the South's lyrical language mixed with other types of prose as seen in *The Color Purple* as well as in Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

*“I realized that unless I came out with everything I had supporting her, there was every chance that she would slip back into obscurity.”*⁶³

⁶¹ Herringshaw, D. (2011) *Harlem Renaissance*, ABDO, 8.

⁶² Wintz, C. D. (1996) *Analysis and Assessment, 1980-1994*: Taylor & Francis, 451.

⁶³ Alice Walker *Resurrecting Zora Neale Hurston* | American Masters. In *PBS Learning Media*. Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/wal14.ela.lit.hurston/resurrecting-zora-neale-hurston/#.XeJ0IOhKh-w>.

Despite being a noteworthy figure of black women literature, her work was out of print for many years and almost forgotten by public attention. Even the state of Florida buried her in an unmarked grave in a segregated cemetery. In 1973 Walker took her legendary journey to find an unattended place where such a significant author rested. After a thorough search, Walker was sure she had found the place and chose an appropriate gray mark with the following inscription:

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

"A GENIUS OF THE SOUTH"

NOVELIST FOLKLORIST

ANTHROPOLOGIST

*1901-1960*⁶⁴

This somewhat sad story with a happy ending is just an example of the fate of some of brilliant African American writers at that historical period.

Another renowned author very involved in the Harlem Renaissance was W. E. B. Du Bois, who was not only an influential writer, but also a sociologist, historian and civil rights activist. Du Bois's contribution to modern political philosophy is justified because he published a book containing several essays on race called *The Souls of Black Folk*. Importantly, Bois studied the concept of race deeply, and a small but fundamental shift that moved from the biological concept of race to the concept of culture helped him to develop his ideas. Du Bois thereby undermines the arguments used to justify segregation.⁶⁵

It is evident that racism and segregation in general were the main objective of Du Bois's polemics and works. For example, he was a strong opponent of Jim Crow laws, their application and impact on the lives of black

⁶⁴ Croft, R. W. (2002) *A Zora Neale Hurston Companion*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 29.

⁶⁵ Gooding-Williams, R. (2020) W.E.B Du Bois, In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Retrieved March 10, 2020, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dubois/>

citizens. In conclusion, Du Bois was a highly esteemed intellectual author who left a great legacy in various areas by writing sixteen groundbreaking but provocative books on sociology, politics and racial relations.⁶⁶

Another important figure in the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes. While studying at Columbia University, he wrote his first successful poem called *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. Hughes became a recognized writer at an early age and is considered a cultural icon, especially among African-Americans.⁶⁷

By incorporating the rhythms of jazz and black urban dialects in his poems, Hughes is considered one of the earliest groundbreakers of the then new literary art form called jazz poetry. Hughes' universality as an artist is evident when we consider the fact that he had also worked with musicians, such as the trumpeter Red Allen, the trombonist Vic Dickenson and the pianist Al Williams, in compiling his poems. Such creativity and the influence of music can be seen in his famous poem called *The Weary Blues*.⁶⁸

1.6 Naturalism, Realism and Modernism

The period of naturalism, realism and modernism in African American literature lasts approximately from 1940 to 1960.⁶⁹

This era of literature took place against the backdrop of World War II and the Second Great Migration. These events, together with socio-economic and demographic changes, had triggered a major migration that led to the movement of approximately five million black men, women and children. It is important to mention that the second wave of migration was larger than the first one and had a

⁶⁶ Lewis, D. L. (2008) *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography 1868-1963*: Henry Holt and Company, 3.

⁶⁷ Wall, Ch. (2016) *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 1.

⁶⁸ Jones, M. D. (2011) *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word*: University of Illinois Press, 49-50.

⁶⁹ Young, J. K. (2006) *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-century African American Literature*: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 102.

different character. The main reason for this migration was connected with economic difficulties and concerns in the rural South such as massive job losses due to modernization of agriculture. However, other social factors, such as educational opportunities, political oppression and persisting racial violence, also played its role.⁷⁰

Literary realism in the context of African Americans can be described as a raw reproduction of the reality and conditions of the Black Americans, with the aim of portraying the black race in an accurate and truthful way. Naturalism is then a harsher depiction of such reality, describing everyday conditions while focusing on the darker aspects of human life. These dark sides of human nature were mainly topics such as poverty, racism, sexual assault, incest, childhood abuse, violence, prejudice and stereotypes associated with racial segregation and discrimination. Modernism then symbolized an international turning point with a tradition in literature.⁷¹

The central figure and the most renowned American author in the category of realism is probably William Faulkner and his short story *A Rose for Emily*. Although Faulkner was a white author, he explored the relationship between black slaves and their white owners and assumed that the source of southern suffering stems from the institution of slavery. According to Russian scholars, Faulkner concludes that:

*"The institution of slavery distorted the fates of slaves, corrupted the souls of slave owners, and created the burden of historical fault that even nowadays mars the lives of people in the South. Faulkner sees blacks and whites bound together by the irony of history, involved in an inextricable web of shame, guilt and evil, corrupting both."*⁷²

⁷⁰ Kusmer, K. L., Trotter, J. V. (2009) *African American Urban History since World War II*: University of Chicago Press, 5-7.

⁷¹ Harkins, G. (2009) *Everybody's Family Romance: Reading Incest in Neoliberal America*: U of Minnesota Press, 153.

⁷² Hamblin, R. W., Peek, Ch. A. (1999) *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia*: Greenwood Publishing

Faulkner's approach to slavery and its implications thus seems to be ethical and philosophical rather than social.

In African American tradition, the most important names were writers such as Richard Nathaniel Wright, Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin. For example Hurston held an opinion that literature must be based on facts and history and should not in any way be motivated by politics or ideology. Promoting and advocating this point of view, he believed that African-American writers had not attained the objective and main substance of the protest at that time. In this context Hurston criticized writings of The Harlem Renaissance.⁷³

Walker's novel *The Color Purple* also includes elements of realism, especially social realism within a discourse of race and class. In terms of class and gender, the main character of the book Ceilie belongs to the lowest of the low. Ceilie's voice realistically reflects the racist experience she endures throughout her life. Realistic language thus functions as a mirror and Walker presents narrative techniques of the traumatic realism of Ceilies' life. Her letters addressed to God are written in authentic language, specifically with features of Black English dialect with its own lexicon, grammar and phonology, occasionally using obscene vocabulary. Moreover, the novel breaks the taboo of talking about sexual abuse within the black community.⁷⁴

Group, 339.

⁷³ Nielsen, A. L. (1997) *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism*, Cambridge University Press, 135.

⁷⁴ Brantlinger, P. (1990) *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*: Psychology Press, 156.

1.7 The Black Arts Movement

The Black Arts Movement can be described as literary nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s with its roots in the civil rights movement. The Black Arts Movement arose as a response to the severe social and political problems of that time, culminating in the assassinations of three major black human rights defenders, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.⁷⁵

This Black Power era was divided into two nationalist camps: the Revolutionary Nationalism and the Cultural Nationalism. Supporters of Revolutionary Nationalism, especially the Black Panther Party, focused on achieving political objectives and thus their aim was to dominate politics and the economy as a separate black nation. On the other hand, the achievements of the Cultural Nationalism were based on national identity shaped by cultural traditions. This kind of nationalism focused on the liberation of black Americans through literature, music and art in general to promote a common racial and cultural heritage. The common goal of both nationalisms was then to free African Americans from oppression.⁷⁶

One of the main figures and founders of the movement Larry Neals understood the movement as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept." The ideas of both had their roots in important African American historical moments and "*celebrated*" the message of black pride and power. In fact, there are also many links between the Black Arts movement and the Harlem Renaissance. That is why some scholars refer to the movement as the Second Renaissance.⁷⁷

Amiri Baraka, originally named Everett Leroy Jones, was a versatile American poet, playwright and music critic who is considered the major cultural

⁷⁵ Briley, R. (2003) *Class at Bat, Gender on Deck and Race in the Hole: A Line-up of Essays on Twentieth Century Culture and America's Game*: McFarland, 231.

⁷⁶ Austin, A. (2006) *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century*: NYU Press, 77-79.

⁷⁷ Parini, J. (2004) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature* : Oxford University Press, 190.

leader of the BAM. Barak's literary influence on African-American culture is undeniable as he published provocative works focused on artistic exploration and revelation of topics such as black consciousness, identity crises, cultural regeneration, suppressed rage, the purpose of the black nation and many others.

In other words, Baraka was very influential in terms of the dynamism of black cultural nationalism. In this way, a nation is understood as an organic entity that expresses the unique history, culture and spirit of people. After the assassination of Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka became increasingly interested in cultural nationalism and shared the same conclusion with Malcolm X that the future and best interests of African-Americans lie in America, not in Africa.⁷⁸

In the book *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, the author describes Barak's great personality and ideological transformation and claims it to be associated with the Cuban Revolution and the image of young rebellious Fidel Castro. Barak was invited to visit Cuba and even described his experience as "a turning point in his life."⁷⁹

*"I came to realize that Fidel and Cuba's embrace of socialism was the key to understanding the protracted nature of the struggle, not only in the United States, but worldwide."*⁸⁰

Obviously, Barak's political attitudes were very radical when he became a black nationalist in the 1960s, but converted to Marxism in the mid-1970s. However, such a political shift threatened the *Black Arts movement* and at the same time alienated many who had previously identified with it.⁸¹

The non-violent civil rights movement, which began in the late 1940s and ended in the late 1960s, was coordinated and predominantly led by

⁷⁸ Watts, J. (2001) *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual*, NYU Press, 152-153.

⁷⁹ Olaniyan, T. (1995) *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*, Oxford University Press, 76.

⁸⁰ Olaniyan, T. (1995) *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*, Oxford University Press, 76.

⁸¹ Johnson Publishing Company (1975) *Jet*. 47(17), 14.

intellectuals and university students. In contrast, the Black Arts movement was represented by the working class and was rather a spontaneous movement. Contemporary literary critics also associate authors of the BAM (abbreviation for the Black Arts movement) with misogyny and homophobia. The women of the BAM, however, did not accept the sexism of the black men, and most of them were strict political and social activists who publicly disagreed with the movement's leaders in some aspect.

For instance, an American poet and a leading figure in the movement, Sonia Sanchez, personally spoke to Malcom X to criticize all his attitudes. Also Walker, who began publishing her fiction and poetry during the last years of the BAM, perceived its influence to be largely negative because the movement responded in some ways to what she regarded as sexism and homophobia. In this context, Walker later introduced a brand new term called "womanism" describing black feminism as an alternative to the white version of feminism that ignored black feminist issues.⁸²

Importantly, the BAM is full of contradictions that on the one hand include brilliant works of art that promote black autonomy and consciousness, but on the other hand also show the controversial nature of works celebrating violence, racism and black masculinity.

In other words, the BAM represented a significant period for black culture in terms of production of timeless and thought-provoking pieces of literature, poetry, and theater. And despite being predominantly masculine, this era also allowed several black women authors to engage in writing and publishing literature.⁸³

⁸² Mitchell, V. D., Davis, C. (2019) *Encyclopedia of the Black Arts Movement*: Rowman & Littlefield, 15-16.

⁸³ Finkelman, P. (2009) *Encyclopedia of African American History: 5-Volume Set*: Oxford University Press, 188.

1.8 African American literature since 1970

African-American literature undoubtedly experienced its greatest success in the early 1970s. Importantly, in this period, many outstanding black authors came into being who achieved the best-selling and award-winning success with their books. With the transition of the United States into the 1970s, African-American literature became more accepted and also recognized as a legitimate genre of American literature. Along with that, a new wave of African-American literature, the Black Women's Literary Renaissance, was born.

Historically, African-American literature up to the 1970s can be characterized as male-dominated. Before the 1970s, just a handful of important literary works created by black women authors appeared. On the contrary, the time since 1970s is marked by a flood of excellent authors such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor and many others.⁸⁴

Toni Morrison was an American novelist, editor and college professor who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* is set in Ohio in the years of the Great Depression and reveals the life story of a young black lady from a poor and dysfunctional family who suffers from a lack of confidence and self-doubt, because being considered ugly for her appearance, namely her dark skin.⁸⁵

"First and foremost, this is a book about racism, about what it is like to grow up in a racist culture, and about what Morrison terms the "racial self-loathing" that such a culture engenders."

86

⁸⁴ Wallenfeldt, J. (2010) *The Black Experience in America: From Civil Rights to the Present*: The Rosen Publishing Group, 63-64.

⁸⁵ Roynon, T. (2013) *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*: Cambridge University Press, 16.

⁸⁶ Roynon, T. (2013) *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*: Cambridge University Press, 16.

In the novel, Morrison deliberately broke the taboos when she uncovered the dark issues of the black community by including a story of domestic violence and a rape victim into her novel. The story develops a negative attitude to sexuality and the feeling and experience of alienation. The aim of the author is to attract the attention of readers to become more aware of the devastating effects of the beauty standards of the dominant white culture on the self-image of the African-American women.⁸⁷

Another important American poet and civil rights activist in one person is Maya Angelou. In literature, Angelou is most famous for her autobiographical seven-part series in which she illustrates her transformation from an insecure victim of racism to a balanced and confident woman.

The main impetus for writing such an autobiography was her then editor Robert Loomis, who invited her to write a kind of literary autobiography with claiming that it is almost impossible to do so. Angelou could not resist such a challenge to write autobiography as literature, and therefore *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the first part of her autobiographical series, was created.⁸⁸

Like Walker, Angelou was active in the Civil Rights Movement, and in 1957, after moving to New York City, she began working with Martin Luther King Jr. in the fight against racism in the US. She began her literary career in New York, where she published her first short story. In the early 1960s, Angelou moved to the African countries of Egypt and Ghana, where she worked at the University of Ghana and wrote for a local newspaper. At that time, she also met another very influential and inspiring civil rights leader, Malcolm X. Malcolm's sudden assassination then boosted Angelou's determination to use literature to help the black community achieve equality of rights.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Beaulieu, E. A. (2003) *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia*: Greenwood Publishing Group, 301.

⁸⁸ Bloom, M. (2009) *Maya Angelou*: Infobase Publishing, 17-19.

⁸⁹ Jones, B. (2002) *Learning about Achievement from the Life of Maya Angelou*: The Rosen Publishing Group, 13-14.

It should be noted that this era of new black women novelists opened the door to the flourishing of black feminist critical discourse, however, their published works were surprisingly welcomed rather by the hostility and lack of understanding from nationalist reviewers and critics in the heyday of the black cultural nationalist movement. Nevertheless, even later race-centered aesthetic decade of literature still did not appreciate women's works that encouraged exploring other areas and concepts particularly related to gender issues.⁹⁰

The two previously mentioned novelists Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as the author of the book *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* claims:

*"Both variously negotiate the ideological and formal priorities of black feminist criticism. Alice Walker's womanist agenda, as well as her corrective treatment of stereotypes and her celebratory appropriation of folk material, render her fiction most easily amenable to a black feminist reading."*⁹¹

Without no doubt, 1970 was a watershed year for black female literature. It can be claimed that these highly-renowned names of the new generation of female writers dominated in this period to such an extent that black male authors received noticeably less attention. Women of that time explored new yet serious topics, such as self-love, sexuality, motherhood, personal transformation, alienation, acceptance of one's identity and many others.

⁹⁰ Dubey, M. (1994) *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*: Indiana University Press, 1.

⁹¹ Dubey, M. (1994) *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*: Indiana University Press, 1-2.

A brief history of feminism in America and the major female activists at the time

1.9 Introduction and definition of feminism

Millicent Fawcett, a famous British political activist, writer and leader of Britain's largest women's rights organisation, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, proclaimed in 1913:

*"Other movements towards freedom have aimed at raising the status of a comparatively small group or class. But the women's movement aims at nothing less than raising that status of an entire sex-half the human race- to lift it up to the freedom and value of womanhood. It affects more people than any former reform movement, for it spread over the whole world. It is more deep-seated, for it enters into the home and modifies the personal character."*⁹²

A statue commemorating Fawcett was unveiled in London in 2018. Prime Minister Theresa May herself presented a tribute to this inspiring and courageous feminist who undoubtedly influenced the development of social arrangement and the status of women in society. Theresa May then continued her speech with the following words:

⁹² Grasso, L. M. (2017) *Equal under the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Feminism*, University of New Mexico Press, 97.

*"I would not be standing here today as Prime Ministe. No female MPs would have taken their seats in Parliament. None of us would have the rights we now enjoy, were it not for one truly great woman: Dame Millicent Garret Fawcett. The struggle to achieve votes for women was long and arduous. Dame Millicent was there from the beginning, and devoted her life to the cause."*⁹³

The speech perfectly captures the importance and seriousness of the feminist struggle in women's lives today. Personally, I consider these lines to be generally applicable because their main message reminds us to be grateful for the hard work of all the feminists who have ever contributed to the formation of society, as it is today.

Without a doubt, today's organization and the mood of the Western world are evidence of the intense struggle for a better and harmonious society both for women and men. Looking at this issue from a historical perspective, it is clear that the history of feminism includes a large number of movements, ideologies and, last but not least, thinkers who advocate and demand equal rights for women.

The question is: What is feminism? In fact, this troublesome term may include more definitions depending on time, culture or country, and at the same time may induce pejorative association in some people. In any case, the notion of feminism still raises lively debates even in the 21st century and encourages many people to express their views.

According to Christine Beasley, an Australian researcher in social and political theory and gender studies, feminism lacks a clear and simple explanation, which is the main pitfall of its misapprehension. In the book *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, Beasley states:

⁹³ May, T (2018) PM words at unveiling of Millicent Fawcett statue: 24 April 2018, In Gov.uk, Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-words-at-unveiling-of-millicent-fawcett-statue-24-april-2018>.

*"Moreover, feminism's complexity and diversity provide obstacles to those wishing to gain a satisfactory grasp of its meaning."*⁹⁴

In the following lines, my goal is to define the term feminism for the purposes of this work using the mentioned book.

It is evident that feminist tradition developed in parallel with social and political changes and, what is important, prioritizes to distinguish from traditional mainstream thought, better described as "malestream", and therefore aims to question its authority. The feminist theoretical framework includes a critique of misogyny and thus fights against the assumption of a long tradition of male superiority and centrality. Feminists point out, in particular, that Western philosophy, the sacred texts of religion, history, social and political theory was, and for the most part still is, written by men, for men and about men, thus hiding elements of misogyny.⁹⁵

*"When men are oppressed, it's a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it's tradition."*⁹⁶

Although feminist views differ slightly, they all regard traditional theory as problematic in nature by looking at women as second-rate men or "the Other". Additionally, the feminist theories find women's subordination to be crucial to consider in terms of traditional framework, such as the exclusion of women from the strictly reserved political theory of men.

One of the most widely accepted frameworks within political theory is then the public-private distinction, which defines the "private" sphere as characteristic for domestic, personal and unprofessional contexts, and the "public" sphere, which on the other hand stands for the professional world away from home. This dichotomous distinction between public and private organizes

⁹⁴ Beasley, Ch. (1999) *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*: Sage, 9.

⁹⁵ Beasley, Ch. (1999) *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*: Sage, 3-4.

⁹⁶ Pogrebin, L. C. (1991) *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America*: Crown Publishers, 73.

many aspects of social life, especially gender relations, where the 'private' sphere is undoubtedly reserved for women, unlike the 'public' sphere strictly reserved for men.⁹⁷

The term feminism therefore encompasses a number of different attitudes towards the issue, but the key feature of all these existing feminisms is the consideration of women as a subject. In other words, women and womanhood are the focal points of feminist analysis and works.⁹⁸

1.10 The roots of feminism

Western history of feminism is usually incorrectly limited only to the history of modern feminism, which some authors criticize for giving the false impression that women have ignored their subordinate position in patriarchal society until the 19th century. Nevertheless, the opposite is true, and the beginning of feminism has its roots in the earliest times of human civilization.⁹⁹

Early feminist issues were in fact considered by reputable Greek philosophers such as Plato in his Republic, where he advocated that women had the same abilities as men for the rule and defense of ancient Greece. Another ancient author Sappho could be considered the first feminist for her, at that time, revolutionary poems that deals with purely feminine issues such as home life, wedding ceremonies, virginity and motherhood from the perspective of a woman.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Beasley, Ch. (1999) *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*: Sage, 12.

⁹⁸ Beasley, Ch. (1999) *What is Feminism?: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*: Sage, 18-19.

⁹⁹ Tandon, N. (2008) *Feminism: a paradigm shift*: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Tandon, N. (2008) *Feminism: a paradigm shift*: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2.

During the Middle Ages, the French author Christine de Pizan wrote an innovative book defending women called *The Book of the City of Ladies*. In the book, Pizan criticizes the dominant medieval misogynist ideology that traditionally portrayed the female sex as internally sinful and immoral.¹⁰¹

The Age of Enlightenment was a turning point in modern history and an intellectual and philosophical movement celebrating reason. The most visible and most important writer of the time was Mary Wollstonecraft, known mainly for her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This book is undoubtedly regarded as one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy for its disagreement with the unsatisfactory educational opportunities for women at that time. However, it is also questionable whether Wollstonecraft should get the full credit for the book because the English writer Mary Astell created a very similar thesis to Wollstonecraft almost a hundred years earlier. Mary Astel should then be rightly labeled as an early feminist pioneer.¹⁰²

Another important person who laid the foundations of modern feminism and gender equality was the British philosopher and utilitarian proponent John Stuart Mill. In 1869, Mill published an essay *The Subjection of Women*, which included arguments for equality between the sexes. Mill begins the essay with the following words:

*“... the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.”*¹⁰³

It is necessary to clarify that the term feminism was in fact coined in

¹⁰¹ Brow-Grant, R. (1999) *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, 2-3.

¹⁰² Laird, S. (2014) *Mary Wollstonecraft*: Bloomsbury Publishing, 48.

¹⁰³ Mill, J. S. (1869) *The Subjection of Women*, Longmans, 1.

France in 1870s and came into popular usage in the United States between 1910 and 1914. This is the main reason why some scholars do not consider earlier writings to be feminist.¹⁰⁴

The following part of the thesis deals with the history of modern Western feminist movements, which can be divided into four waves.

1.11 First Wave of Feminism

The first wave of feminism is described as a period of female movements that occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Historically, the situation of women before the rise of feminism was poor because women did not yet have a civil status at the beginning of the 19th century, so they did not dispose of rights such as the current ordinary right to vote.

Thus, in many respects, society had restricted women by preventing them from signing wills or contracts, or managing their finances and wages. In short, women were supposed to stay at home to serve their husbands and fulfill their households duties. Additionally, women were not even allowed to attend universities themselves, so they were generally less educated than men.¹⁰⁵

In 1904, the International Alliance of Women was established in order to promote women's human rights around the world. The purpose of the organization was to create an international movement and gather leading feminists from around the world to campaign for women's right to vote in elections. Nevertheless, the membership automatically excluded most women because it turned to be time-consuming and costly, so that, despite some exceptions, only privileged women were able to participate.¹⁰⁶

Early Feminism was directly linked to the abolition movement, for

¹⁰⁴ Mccann, C., Kim, S. k. (2013) *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*: Routledge, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Kahle, A. (2010) *First Wave of Feminism in Politics and Literature*: GRIN Verlag, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Forestell, N. (2012) *Documenting First Wave Feminisms*: University of Toronto Press, 4.

example, the American social reformer Frederick Douglass stressed the important role that women played in ending the Atlantic slave trade and liberating slaves by concluding that:

*“When the true history of the Anti-Slavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages; for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman’s cause.”*¹⁰⁷

What is more, according to Douglass, society at the time was desperately in need of major social reform, including universal emancipation for both women and other racial and ethnic minorities. In his egalitarian doctrines, Douglass emphasized the idea of equality of all people in natural rights and duties, as well as moral status, regardless of gender or race. At that time, the culture and ideology of male supremacy posed a great threat to justice and, to a large extent, contradicted his concept of humanism. As he claimed, male dominance, usually based on purely physical strength, tolerates and even insists on women becoming mere subjects of men’s will, rather than being autonomous and independent human beings. According to his criticism, such behavior and organization of society is inherently antihumanist, antiegalitarian and, last but not least, antiprogressive.¹⁰⁸

The 19th century brought new parliamentary laws in the area of matrimonial law. For instance, the Custody of Infants Act in 1839 and the Married Women's Property Act in 1882 can be cited as great examples of how previous injustice was applied to women in marriage. Historically, campaigns for matrimonial reforms were generally launched during the Victorian era in the United Kingdom, when Victorian feminists advocated new legal reforms and therefore required a fundamental transformation of the marriage relationship.¹⁰⁹

Until then, it was common for a woman to lose her property for the

¹⁰⁷ Martin, W. E. (2000) *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*: Univ of North Carolina Press, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Martin, W. E. (2000) *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*: Univ of North Carolina Press, 142-143.

¹⁰⁹ Kimble, S. L. and Röwekamp, M. (2016) *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History*, Routledge, 6.

benefit of her husband, and moreover, her own legal identity ceased to exist. In addition, according to existing laws at that time, fathers, not mothers, were the custodial parents of their children. A well-known victim of these laws was Caroline Norton, whose intense campaigns, including a letter to Queen Victoria, resulted in the reform and adoption of new, fairer laws governing the private sphere.

Norton's husband was not wealthy, in fact he used his wife's successful writing career as a source of own income. Over time, her husband's temper increased and led to brutal domestic violence, especially when he was drunk. Eventually, Norton left her husband, but the law at the time prohibited her from divorcing him. Disagreements between them escalated as he took their three sons to an undisclosed place and the law did not allow Norton to be in contact with her children. This notorious case of Caroline Norton is therefore an accurate example of the possible problems that wives might have faced at the time.¹¹⁰

Not only did women strive to achieve their rights in private life, but the women called themselves suffragists began to fight for the right to vote. A skilled activist Carrie Chapman Catt deserves a great credit for helping women to get that right. Chapman was involved in the management of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and later in the founding of the League of Women Voters.

Catt's contribution to the suffrage movement was invaluable because she had been intensively active in forcing the US federal governments to give women the right to vote, which was successfully accomplished by the 19th Amendment. Adopting the amendment prohibits the government from denying the right to vote for US citizens on the basis of gender. Nevertheless, all that effort was a long-distance race because the last state needed to ratify the amendment was Tennessee, which later turned to be a nasty battle. Catt described the situation in the following words:

¹¹⁰ Walters, M. (2005) *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*: OUP Oxford, 48-49.

*“In the short time I have been in Tennessee's capital, I have been called more names, been... more lied about than in the thirty previous years I worked for suffrage. I was flooded with anonymous letters, vulgar, ignorant, insane. Strang men and groups of men sprang up, men we had never met before in battle... They... tapped our telephones, listened outside our windows... They attacked our private and public lives.”*¹¹¹

On August 26, 1920, the amendment was officially approved to guarantee all US women the right to vote. For generations of suffragists, however, this meant decades of struggle and civil disobedience to achieve such conditions. Resistance to the suffrage movement emerged because of predominantly conservative and anti-suffragist political movements aimed at maintaining the status quo for both women and men in society. Catt herself described this turning point in American history as a glorious day and another step towards real and triumphant democracy.¹¹²

1.12 Second Wave of Feminism

The movement took place in the United States approximately between the 1960s and 1970s. The aim of feminists at the time was to improve social conditions because they wanted more than just enfranchisement. The first wave, especially in terms of voting and property rights, was different from the second wave, which focused on a wider range of issues. Employment discrimination, such as the promotion of equal employment opportunities and equal pay, was among the main problems, as women usually occupied jobs with or below the minimum wage. Other important issues were sexuality, reliable contraception, better access to higher education and more.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Keller, K. T. (2006) *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Voice for Women*: Capstone, 85-86.

¹¹² Keller, K. T. (2006) *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Voice for Women*: Capstone, 86.

¹¹³ Carlisle, R. P. Golson, J. G.(2008) *America in Revolt During the 1960s and 1970s*: ABC-CLIO.

Historically, the rise of the second wave of feminism is closely linked to the political and social atmosphere of the Cold War, especially the debate over the Vietnam War. Feminist campaigns included features of anti-war activism and opposition to atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. In particular, they stressed the harmful impact of nuclear weapons on pregnant women and newborns.

Women played an important role in the US military history because many of them sacrificed their personal security during the Vietnam War to serve in the warfare. Most of them served as nurses to help wounded soldiers recover from injuries and return to the battlefield. In addition, women also held other important posts, such as journalists, humanitarians, telephone operators, mechanics, teachers, etc.¹¹⁴

An international conflict such as the Vietnam War literally created a new generation of feminists and activists. One of the most noticeable was American political activist Susan Sontag, who traveled to Hanoi to demonstrate her opposition to the American war in Vietnam. Sontag's book *Trip to Hanoi* then represents a strong criticism of US foreign policy combined with the idea of US domination.¹¹⁵

The famous leader of the second wave of feminism is an American feminist writer and activist Betty Friedan. Her most famous work is the book *The Feminine Mystique* from 1963. In this book, Friedan criticizes the traditional American society of the 1950s. Friedan was among the women that founded The National Organization for Women in 1966. It is important to mention that Friedan was not a radical feminist, in fact she welcomed alliances with men who supported the feminist struggle for equality. However, she had to face new, younger, energetic and more radical women who joined the organization and disagreed with Friedan's attitude to the feminist issue at that time.

In 1970, Friedan organized a nationwide strike called The Women's

¹¹⁴ Ferguson, A. (2004) *American Women of the Vietnam War*: The Rosen Publishing Group, 4-6.

¹¹⁵ Edmunds, j., Turner, B. S. (2014) *Generational Consciousness, Narrative, and Politics*: Rowman & Littlefield, 36.

Strike for Equality. The strike took place in the United States and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, the amendment that gave American women the right to vote. The strike turned to become the largest women's right rally in many decades and Friedan justly considered it one of the highest points of her political career.¹¹⁶

1.13 Third Wave of Feminism

Third Wave of Feminism can be characterized as a movement that began in the early 1990s in the United States and continued until the rise of the Fourth Wave of Feminism in the 2010s.

The author of the book *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* agrees that this wave came with the changes that resonate with women's lives today. The author mentions many aspects that helped to change quite outdated gender relations.

"It is due in part to advancements achieved by women, societal changes brought about by the restructuring of economies, increased cultural diversity, the proliferation of technoculture and the expansion of information technologies, the dynamics of globalization and the rise of global capitalism, crises of environmental degradation, diversifying sexualities and intimate practices, changing demographics, and declining economic vitality."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Hamilton, N.A. (2014) *American Social Leaders and Activists*: Infobase Publishing, 145-146.

¹¹⁷ Budgeon, S. (2011) *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*: Springer, 1.

The target of the central interest of feminism, and the third wave is no exception, lies in authentic autobiographical texts revealing reality and truth, in order to link personal experience with knowledge. As long as we really want to understand the politics of the women's situation, then we must know about the personal lives of women who experience such a situation.

It can be claimed that Third Wave of Feminism was focused less on laws and the politics in general, but most importantly, individual identity became a key concern. This wave of feminism opened the door for the development of innovative theoretical frameworks and, more importantly, was much more favourable to women of different colors, ethnic groups, nationalities, religions and also cultural backgrounds.¹¹⁸

Speaking of the list of issues that feminists discussed at the time, the main topics were racism, child abuse, rape and domestic violence, as well as topics such as homophobia or the issues concerning environmental degradation.¹¹⁹

During this wave of feminism, a new term, intersectionality, was introduced to better explain the various injustices that different members of society may feel. The concept of intersectionality can be explained as a theoretical framework designed to realize and understand how a particular aspect of our identity, such as gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, can in combination create a dangerous way of discrimination.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Budgeon, S. (2011) *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*: Springer, 78-79.

¹¹⁹ Budgeon, S. (2011) *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*: Springer, 103.

¹²⁰ Chow, E. N. L., Segal, M. T., Lin, T. (2011) *Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities: Global-transnational and Local Contexts*: Emerald Group Publishing, 3.

We can consider a hypothetical example of an African-American woman applying for a job in a particular company. Although the company does not discriminate against black men, nor white women, our black woman is still in a desperate situation because she is a black woman and therefore is still discriminated because of the combination of her gender and the color of her skin.¹²¹

The concept of intersectional feminism can be seen as an attempt to separate itself from white feminism, by pointing out appreciable barriers that can be experienced by a considerable number of people disrespected by our society because of their distinct identity or appearance.

1.14 Fourth Wave of Feminism

Third Wave of Feminism is a contemporary period of feminist movement, whose main focus is the process of empowering women by creating favorable conditions for participation in both political structures and economic decision-making. This wave of feminism continues successfully with previous feminist traditions and, in terms of empowerment, seeks to achieve new goals, including better access to opportunities without limitations and restrictions, especially in the fields of education, profession and lifestyle.¹²²

¹²¹ Chow, E. N. L., Segal, M. T., Lin, T. (2011) *Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities: Global-transnational and Local Contexts*: Emerald Group Publishing, 3.

¹²² Rivers, N. (2017) *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides*: Springer, 15.

Gender inequality and discrimination still persist in the 21st century and sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture still remain serious issues to deal with. Fourth Wave of Feminism is undoubtedly associated with the use of contemporary press, social media, television, the film industry and other types of entertainment industries. A controversial public figure in the United States is the president Donald Trump, notorious for his inflammatory remarks about women. Prior to his presidential career, Trump had a history of controversial comments about women.¹²³

In other words, this wave of feminism introduces new perspectives on old issues. One of these issues is an increasing pressure on women in the areas of their appearance, abilities, care of their family and being successful in career. In particular, balancing friends, hobbies, family life and professional life while maintaining attractiveness, health and self-sacrifice is really impossible and self-destructive.

According to the author of the book *Women, Feminism, and Femininity in the 21st Century*, school education in general is irreplaceably responsible for helping students to acquire knowledge and other social skills essential to gain respect for human right. According to her, educational system significantly promotes diversity and equality between women and men.¹²⁴

1.15 Black Feminism

"I am a Black Feminist. I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my blackness as well as my womaness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable."¹²⁵

¹²³ Marron, M. B. (2019) *Misogyny and Media in the Age of Trump*, Rowman & Littlefield, 34-35.

¹²⁴ Mousli, B., Roustang-Stoller, E. (2009) *Women, Feminism, and Femininity in the 21st Century: American and French Perspectives*: Springer, 15.

¹²⁵ Lorde, A.

There is a significant difference between white women's feminism and black women's feminism. While the struggle of white women for equal rights within the feminist movement was named and held a prominent place throughout the history of feminism, on the other hand, the struggle of black women remained unnamed, often unrecognized, and worst of all invisible to mainstream American society.

There is no doubt that the issues of these two feminist perspectives differ because the first one deals primarily with gender inequality, compared to the latter, which deals with both gender inequality and racism. In the following lines, I will introduce some of the most influential black feminists, theorists, and their crucial works that helped change feminist theory.

In 1989, American lawyer, civil rights advocate and philosopher Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the new term intersectionality in her insightful essay.

„Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them.“¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Crenshaw, K. W.

Crenshaw also claims that the intersectional experience of black women with racism and sexism had unfortunately been neglected for decades, yet it had been a central dynamic in the process of feminist and anti-racist theories. In her pivotal paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, Crenshaw explains that the experience of being a black woman must be understood both from the perspective of gender and race, because these two concepts create reciprocal interaction. In this case gender and race reinforce each other.¹²⁷

In 1935, African American women founded the organization called The National Council of Negro Women, which was a non-profit organization dedicated to developing the opportunities and quality of life of African American women, their families, and their communities. The headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women was¹²⁸ located in Washington, D.C. and it was also the place where the first lobby groups were established to promote the interests of black women among the citizens of the capital.¹²⁹

In general, black women faced a different kind of oppression, first they were excluded from leading positions in the civil rights movement, and second, white women feminists were afraid to include them to their mainstream movement for many reasons.

First, white feminists focused their agenda primarily on the issues that mostly concerned middle-class white women. Second, white feminists were anxious to cooperate with black women because they feared that black women would make white women feel guilty about their race and class privilege. Third, white feminists refused to risk that such consequences and differences between these two "camps" would result in attempts of black women to develop a radical feminist movement within their own movement. Finally, during the 1970s and

¹²⁷ Maschke, K. J. (1997) *Feminist legal theories*: Taylor a Francis, 23.

¹²⁸ Maschke, K. J. (1997) *Feminist legal theories*: Taylor a Francis, 23.

¹²⁹ Cortés, C. E. (2013) *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*: Sage Publications, 1570.

1980s, black feminists formed groups that were engaged in enforcement of the role of black women in black nationalism and the second wave of feminism.¹³⁰

In addition to Alice Walker and her conception of womanism, there were other black feminists who, with their works and activism, contributed to the rise of the theory of black feminism.

One of them is the American political activist, philosopher and professor Angela Davis, who contributed to black feminism with her most remarkable work *Woman, Race, and Class*, published in 1981. Davis was a striking figure of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, with her reputation of being courageous and persistent in her early radical activism.¹³¹

Besides all that, during her career, Davis served both as a leader of Communist Party and also appeared on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. After being falsely accused and eventually imprisoned for kidnapping and murder, a worldwide campaign called "Free Angela Davis" was established to free her from prison. The campaign was supported by famous artists such as John Lennon and Yoko Ono, who even contributed to it with the song "Angela". Davison spent sixteen months in prison, and the state eventually released her on bail.¹³²

In her crucial work called *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Davis criticizes the criminal justice system in her country, pointing to the fact that prisons have essentially taken over the institution of slavery, in which prisoners remain silent in isolated cells, instead of being forced to labour. Although Davis did not consider herself a feminist during her early career, in her influential book *Woman, Race, and Class*, she offers an alternative view of women's liberation struggles as she traces the history of the women's rights movement in the United States. From this point of view, Davis gained a reputation as a great scholar and feminist treasure.¹³³

¹³⁰ Springer, K. (2005) *Living for the revolution: Black feminist organizations, 1968 – 1980*: Duke University press, 35-36.

¹³¹ Barcella, L. (2019) *Fight Like a Girl: 50 Feminists Who Changed the World*: Zest Books, 92-94.

¹³² Barcella, L. (2019) *Fight Like a Girl: 50 Feminists Who Changed the World*: Zest Books, 93-94.

¹³³ Barcella, L. (2019) *Fight Like a Girl: 50 Feminists Who Changed the World*: Zest Books, 94.

Another prominent activist and black feminist writer is Gloria Jean Watkins, best known by her pen name Bell Hooks. She has published several works, however her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, published in 1981, remains the most important. The book is titled after Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech and examines the impact of sexism and racism on black women. In the book, Hooks claims that the interaction and coexistence of sexism and racism during slavery has led to black women having the lowest status and the worst conditions of any group in American society.¹³⁴

*"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."*¹³⁵

A black feminist, poet and civil rights activist, Audre Lorde was a central figure influencing the development of contemporary feminist theory and queer studies. Lorde's collection of fifteen essays and speeches *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* deals with the complexity of intersectional identity. Lorde incorporates her personal experience with oppression into the work, and the work itself can be described as confrontational and straightforward, as the author explores a wide range of sensitive topics.¹³⁶

The Color Purple: analysis and interpretation of the book

The following chapter of the diploma thesis focuses on the novel *The Color Purple*. The aim of this chapter is to analyze and interpret the novel. The main emphasis is placed on the analysis of major themes and individual characters from the perspective of gender and racial issues.

¹³⁴ Hogan, L. (1995) *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*: A&C Black, 34-36.

¹³⁵ Audre, L.

¹³⁶ Lorde, A. (2012) *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*: Potter/Ten Speed/Harmony/Rodale, 8-9.

The Color Purple is Walker's third and most famous novel. After its publication in 1982, the novel immediately attracted the attention of both literary critics and readers.

1.16 Plot overview

The novel is set in American rural South and opens when Celie, the protagonist and narrator of *The Color Purple*, is a young girl. Celie is a poor, uneducated, fourteen-year-old black girl who lives in rural Georgia with her family. The first chapter reveals an unfortunate and controversial situation in which Celie finds herself. Celie is desperate and begins to write letters to God because her father, Alphonso, often beats and rapes her. The letters in this chapter are addressed to God. In the first letters, Celie tells God that her father raped her and that she is pregnant with him for the second time.

The beginning of the book tells us how Celie is oppressed and abused by the man, whom she believes is her father, but actually is not. In the letters, Celie mentions that she gave birth to a girl, but Alphonso took her and pretended to kill the baby in the woods. When Celie has a second child, this time a boy, Alphonso steals him and puts him away the way he did it the first time.¹³⁷

Unfortunately, Celie's mother is seriously ill. After having a disagreement with Celie and eventually cursing her, dies, leaving Celie alone with her sister Nettie to face their abusive father. At the age of nineteen, Celie is involuntarily offered to an abusive man initially known to her only as Mr. _____. During their marriage, Celie is forced to face another unpleasant experience of being oppressed and raped by her new husband.

¹³⁷ Lister, R. (2010) *Alice Walker - The Color Purple (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism, Paperback, 1.*

One day, Celie walks around the town and meets her little girl with a stranger lady. Celie immediately asks her what the baby's name is. Eventually, Celie discovers that the baby's name is Pauline, but the lady calls her Olivia. The truth is that before their separation, Celie stitched the baby's name on her diaper before Alphonso gave her away.

Throughout the book, Celie narrates her life story by the means of painfully sincere letters. The book familiarizes the reader with Celie's difficult and joyless married life. Eventually, Celie's sister Nettie escapes from Alphonso and comes to Celie's house to stay with her.

Celie finds herself in a loveless marriage full of domestic violence, including rapes and beatings. What is more, she is fully occupied with caring for her husband's four children. Gradually, Celie develops an intimate relationship with her husband's mistress Shug Avery and eventually becomes fixated on her. Shug Avery is a blues singer and Celie experiences sexual pleasure with her for the first time in her life.

Celie begins to build friendships with other black women. One of them is the dominant Sofia, who marries Celie's husband's son Harpo because she realizes that she is pregnant. Sofia represents a strong woman who is able to stand up for herself. Her husband Harpo is not able to control her, so he seeks advice. Celie suggests that he beats Sofia, but it turned out to be a bad idea. Not only Sofia defends herself and fights back, but when she finds out that it was Celie who encouraged her husband, she immediately confronts Celie. In the end, Celie admits that she is jealous of Sofia's power to protect herself. After this clarification, Celie and Sofia become friends.¹³⁸

Unfortunately, Sofia is sent to prison because the mayor's wife asks her to work for their family as a maid, however, Sofia answers with a cheeky "Hell no." After this obvious impertinence, the mayor slaps her, nevertheless, Sofia returns the punch and knocks the mayor down. The accident resulted in Sofia

¹³⁸ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 94.

being sentenced to work for the mayor's family as a maid.

It is remarkable to see how the novel chronicles Celie's growth from a submissive, timid and insecure personality to a completely independent, balanced and liberated woman with a sense and hope for life. In my opinion, Celie's personality transformation is one of the most beautiful motives of the whole book.

The novel ends with a happy ending, in which Celie reconnect with her children Adam and Olivia. A tyrannical Alphonso dies and Celie forgives Albert for treating her badly. In the end, Celie symbolically escapes from years of oppression and becomes a whole and balanced human being.

1.17 The form and genre in *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple can be classified as an epistolary novel. The epistolary form is a literary device in which a story is told through the use of letters and notes. In the case of *The Color Purple*, the epistles are correspondences first between the main protagonist Celie and God and then between Celie and her sister Nettie over a period of approximately forty years.¹³⁹

The reader may notice that Walker decided not to assign any dates or numbers to the letters. Personally, I think the novel is readable even without numbering, however, for the purposes of analysis, it seems better to arrange it in a more transparent form.

Unusually for Walker, an omniscient narrator is not used in this novel. Omniscient narration is a literary technique of writing a story in third person, in which the narrator knows the feelings and thoughts of each character in the story. In the omniscient perspective, authors are the storytellers, compared to this novel, where the voice of the main protagonist Celie controls the narration.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 90.

¹⁴⁰ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 90.

The function of the epistolary form is that this technique allows Celie to speak for herself, so the form can add more realism to the story. Using this method is an important strategy to create an impression of the authenticity of the whole novel and story.

1.17.1 The origin and development of the epistolary novel as a genre

The word epistolary is derived from the Greek word *epistolē*, meaning a letter. The epistolary novel reached its popularity mainly during the 18th century and was usually written in the form of letters, however, diaries or newspaper clippings and other documents were sometimes used. In recent days, electronic forms such as e-mails, blogs or text messages are no exception.

The origin of the epistolary novel has been the subject of debate because there are two theories explaining the development of the epistolary novel. One theory explains that the epistolary form comes from traditional novels in which the authors put letters into their story. Diego de San Pedro's work *Prison of Love*, published in 1485, is an example of this form. According to this definition, the novel is thus considered to be the first epistolary novel.¹⁴¹

The epistolary form became more realized in the late 1600s, when the anonymous work *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* was published in three volumes between 1684 and 1687. Importantly, the work was the first epistolary novel to use changing perspectives. The novel is based on an affair between Lord Grey and his wife's sister. The work itself is very complex, because sometimes the letters fall into the wrong hands or fake letters appear in the novel. The work has been attributed to the English playwright, poet and fiction writer Aphra Behn, but this attribution remains controversial.¹⁴²

The following century can be described as an explosion of the form's

¹⁴¹ Moore, S. (2010) *Novel: An Alternative History: Beginnings to 1600*: A&C Black, 305-306.

¹⁴² Löschnigg, M. and Schuh, R. (2018) *The Epistolary Renaissance: A Critical Approach to Contemporary Letter Narratives in Anglophone Fictio*: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 281.

popularity. One of the most famous groundbreakers of this genre were Samuel Richardson and Choderlos de Laclos. Samuel Richardson was an English writer best known for his three epistolary novels. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* was Richardson's first epistolary novel published in 1740.¹⁴³

In 1749, Richardson published the novel *Clarissa*, which tells the tragic story of a beautiful young woman who is universally loved and admired. The novel explores themes such as evil against innocence or individual versus society, telling the story of an innocent heroine facing a society that forbids women from having any power of their autonomy and choices in their lives. In 1754, Richardson published the novel *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, which this time depicts a male protagonist with the plot set in aristocratic and wealthy society.¹⁴⁴

1.17.2 The function of the epistolary novel as a genre

„The epistolary form emphasizes that there is never only one perspective, one meaning, but rather any number of very similar interpretations of a given situation. The use of letters brings to the foreground the interpretive process involved in reading the Episodios. Just as the letter writers read the same world in different ways, so each reader approaches a novel in always diverse circumstances.“¹⁴⁵

The epistolary form creates the impression of reality by imparting to the reader a first-hand experience, this genre basically presents and reveals a private world of characters, and is therefore so attractive to the reader. The genre allows readers an intimate view of the feelings and thoughts of the characters. Moreover, the use of this technique in the literature develops a direct connection with events

¹⁴³ Owen, K. N. Gale Researcher Guide for: Samuel Richardson and the Epistolary Novel: Gale, Cengage Learning, 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ Owen, K. N. Gale Researcher Guide for: Samuel Richardson and the Epistolary Novel: Gale, Cengage Learning, 1-6.

¹⁴⁵ Urey, D. F. (2014) *The Novel Histories of Galdos*: Princeton University Press, 54-55.

through letters without the intervention of the author. This technique thus makes the literary work a real experience for the reader.

1.17.3 The decline and renaissance of the epistolary novel as a genre

Historians James Raven and Thomas Beebe have studied the development of the epistolary novel and recently documented the rise and fall of the epistolary novel. The research shows the following information: From the beginning to the middle of the eighteenth century, the epistolary form was not very popular and accounted for ten percent of all fiction at the time. On the other hand, the epistolary form experienced a great boom around the year 1776, reaching a total percentage over seventy percent of all fiction.¹⁴⁶

The year 1791 seemed to be a turning point, as the decline was evident with an average percentage of only twenty percent. Finally, the year 1799 marked a further decline to only ten percent of all fiction. The dawn of the nineteenth century thus brought the fact that many authors abandoned this type of novel and focused their attention on other genres in literature.¹⁴⁷

Without any doubt, epistolary forms have experienced a renaissance in contemporary fiction. According to English professor Toni Bowers (2009), nowadays, fiction is enlivened by the means of multiple forms of communication, including tweets, postcards, tapes, messages and many other variations of modern communication.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Whyman, S. (2009) *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800*: Oxford University Press, OUP Oxford, 215.

¹⁴⁷ Whyman, S. (2009) *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800*: Oxford University Press, OUP Oxford, 215.

¹⁴⁸ Löschnigg, M. and Schuh R. (2018) *The Epistolary Renaissance: A Critical Approach to Contemporary Letter Narratives in Anglophone Fiction*: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1.

*"Interestingly, however, the digitalization of modern culture has not only led to a proliferation of medialized epistolary fiction, but has also prompted a new interest in conventional epistolary forms....Paradoxically, an old form has been adopted and adapted to render new forms of narrative expression for a generation of readers who are largely unfamiliar with or no longer practice this form of communication."*¹⁴⁹

Epistolary novels thus captures in a fascinating way how we communicate at a certain moment in time, and contemporary authors offer new and new works in epistolary form that still satisfy the modern reader's demands for quality reading.

1.18 Sociohistorical context of the novel

*"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?"*¹⁵⁰

Exploring the relationship between women and men and the position of women in general in patriarchal society are key concepts that characterize Walker's fiction. Walker focuses on this topic in both her books *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple*.

The Color Purple is important for its sociohistorical context because it clearly depicts the daily struggles of African Americans after the Reconstruction Era until the Great Migration, which changed this pattern. This period of African

¹⁴⁹ Löschnigg, M. and Schuh R. (2018) *The Epistolary Renaissance: A Critical Approach to Contemporary Letter Narratives in Anglophone Fiction*: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Walker, A. (1994). *Everyday use*, Boston. Rutgers University Press, 197.

American history can be described as the transition from slavery to freedom. Although this period officially banned slavery, the role and position of African Americans in American society still remained subordinate. The majority of them lived in the southern countryside and their common means of subsistence was farming.¹⁵¹

In the novel *The Color Purple*, Walker perfectly uses her own childhood experiences with this agricultural lifestyle and the sharecropping system. Walker thus presents this introspection of a poor independent farmer and his community to frame her narration. Using this setting and the precise knowledge of agricultural hierarchal systems, Walker investigates the notion of double discrimination. An important theme of the novel is double discrimination, gender bias and sexual abuse.

It is important to mention that Walker creates the main protagonist Celie with a reference to her own grandmother, who also experienced a very similar life story. At the age of twelve, Walker's grandmother became a rape victim of a slave owner. In analyzing the novel, it is clear that Walker associates the despicable behavior of Alphonso and Albert with their white ancestry. Black male protagonists thus conspicuously resemble white slave owners.¹⁵²

Based on real life situations and experience, the novel can be seen as a reconstruction of the historical past, because the author selects and presents various facts from the historical past of African Americans in American society.

1.19 Language in The Color Purple

As I mentioned in the previous parts of the thesis, Walker's novel *The Color Purple* is difficult to read for many reasons. First, the novel consists of letters that are chronological, however, are not dated and there are distinct time gaps between them. Sometimes the correspondence has long breaks as much as

¹⁵¹ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 90-91.

¹⁵² Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 91-92.

five years between letters.

Second, for a better and correct understanding of the novel, it is necessary to know both Walker's personal life and her unique approach to literature, and especially the socio-historical context of the novel's time.

Third, there exists another difficulty in reading the novel. This difficulty begins when the reader encounters Celie's letters and the language problem that her writing style entails.

Clearly, Celie's letters are not written in standard English. Indeed, Celie writes her letters in non-standard dialect, which can be called black folk language. It can be assumed that Celie's language creates a realistic dimension of the whole novel. From the observations, it is clear that Celie's style of writing letters evokes memories of her childhood closely linked to the blues and poetry from the cotton fields where the girls worked.¹⁵³

To many reviewers, *The Color Purple* seems poetic, and Robert Towers in particular praises Walker for her ability to create the faithful spirit and rhythms of black English. Generally in the reviews, Walker's ability to connect an emotionally powerful story with beautiful black folklore was a success. On the other hand, the opposite camp of critics argued that Walker's novel actually degraded black people only by its exposure of their folk language.¹⁵⁴

Also the authenticity of the language was a target for criticism. Walker even sent an excerpt of her novel to a black women's magazine, however, the editor rejected her suggestion, saying that the language of the novel is not authentic because black people generally do not use such English.¹⁵⁵

Despite the criticism, I am convinced that Celie's voice and language are

¹⁵³ Lister, R. (2010) *Alice Walker - The Color Purple (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism*, Paperback, 48.

¹⁵⁴ Lister, R. (2010) *Alice Walker - The Color Purple (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism*, Paperback, 48.

¹⁵⁵ Lister, R. (2010) *Alice Walker - The Color Purple (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism*, Paperback, 49.

the strongest manifestations of her autonomy. Although her language is illiterate, the reader can experience the pleasure of reading beautiful lines, very emotional, with a sense of understanding her world. Such a unique expression through language is what makes Celie such a characteristic and unforgettable character of the novel.

1.20 The concept of black womanhood in *The Color Purple* and the feminist discourse

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Walker's fiction depicts the development and formation of the main female protagonist, Celie. Celie is initially denied her social role and is defined mainly by her body. The crucial point in Celie's identity transformation is undoubtedly her encounter with Shug Avery, with whom she experiences sexual pleasure and fulfillment for the first time. Due to Celie's traumatic childhood and experience of abuse, her personality is fragmented. However, Shug Avery acts as her mentor and friend, helping her to fully develop her personality and gain confidence.¹⁵⁶

The novel focuses mainly on women's relationships and the friendship of the four main female characters Celie, Sofia, Nettie and Shug Avery. Sofia represents a strong, independent woman who questions the powerful patriarchal system. Walker thus liberates Sofia from submissiveness. Celie, on the other hand, represents the opposite because she is described as weak, submissive, and unassertive. Celie's sister Nettie, in contrast with her sister, managed to escape their tyrannical and abusive father. Finally, Shug Avery is an adventurous blues singer, well-dressed and with no limits on her sexual preferences.¹⁵⁷

„A womanish approach embraces practice and theory and criticism all at once. Womanist criticism subverts classical Eurocentric feminist criticism. Womanist reverts to women of color who embrace universality ether than

¹⁵⁶ Lister, R. (2010) *Alice Walker - The Color Purple (Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism*, Paperback, 67-68.

¹⁵⁷ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 95-96.

*separatism.*¹⁵⁸

The main protagonist Celie perfectly fits the criteria of womanist. Celie can be characterized as a survivor, as a person who transforms and liberates her spirit throughout the story and, in particular, finds her inner strength to emancipate herself from the servitude and manipulation of black men.

The Color Purple as the film adaptation

The film adaptation of the novel *The Color Purple* is a feature-length historical drama directed by Steven Spielberg. The film premiered in 1985 and became financially successful, raising \$142 million from a budget of \$15 million. The film was filmed in North Carolina and was shown at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival. The film's cast included renowned film stars such as Danny Glover and Whoopi Goldberg in the lead roles. The film received positive reviews from critics, especially in terms of acting, directing, screenplay and production. On the other hand, it was also very negatively criticized, especially among black male audience.¹⁵⁹

It is important to mention that Walker's feelings about the film adaptation can be described as mixed and indecisive. The truth is that Walker's first impression was rather negative, and when she saw the movie on a private screening, she wrote:

"Everything about it seemed wrong, especially the opening musical score, which sounded like it belonged in 'Oklahoma.'

„¹⁶⁰

Walker later changed her mind and was not so critical of the adaptation by saying that she actually loves the film or has mixed feelings about it. Personally, I also had very mixed feelings about the film adaptation and I was not

¹⁵⁸ Bates, G. (2005) *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*: Greenwood Press, 99.

¹⁵⁹ Lupack, B. T. (1994) *Take Two: Adapting the Contemporary American Novel to Film*: Popular Press, 112-113.

¹⁶⁰ Holt, P. (1996) *Alice Walker on the Making of the Film "The Color Purple"*.

sure whether I like it or not the first time I saw it. I did not even know whether the film reached my expectation. However, what I know is that I undoubtedly agree with one Walker's comment and it is as follows:

"Remember, the movie is not the book."¹⁶¹

This statement clarifies the fact that both the book and its film adaptation includes the same plot, but at the same time are very different medium. From my point of view, I disagree with the popular claim that books are better than films because books and films are simply different. In this case, the comparison is very subjective and uneasy because every person has different preferences. In the following part of the diploma thesis, I would like to express my own opinion and feelings about the adaptation of the film.

1.21 Own comparison and analysis of the book and the film adaptation

When I started reading the book, I had to stop for a while because I did not expect the novel to begin like this. The first letter surprised me because Celie's description of her situation seemed so realistic to me. The great advantage of books is that books generally allow readers to imagine the environment or events that are happening in the story. As we read the book, we can stop and think about the plot and the characters. On the other hand, there is no time for imagination during the film, because everything happens so fast and we can directly see the main protagonists.

It is true that books considerably boost our imagination. However, what I love while watching films is that films employ and affect our senses, such as sight and hearing. Basically, we are able to see what the main protagonists look like, what their clothes are, what their gestures are, their facial expressions and the tone of their voice. What is more, the music also emphasizes the actual atmosphere of

¹⁶¹ Holt, P. (1996) Alice Walker on the Making of the Film "The Color Purple".

the concrete situation, which also helps to influence our feelings.

In order to achieve the perfect experience, it is absolutely necessary to assign individual roles to experienced and fine actors and actresses who are suitable for a specific role. I think Spielberg did a very good job of managing the cast of this film. I believe that all the actors and actresses performed their best, but one actress I considered absolutely amazing was the character of Sofia.

The character of Sofia represents a strong independent woman who is not afraid to stand up for herself and bravely confronts the dominant racial and patriarchal society by refusing to be subordinate and obedient. In my opinion, Spielberg did an excellent job assigning the role of Sofia to this energetic, charismatic and firm actress. In addition, Spielberg was able to perfectly emphasize the contrast between confident Sofia and, on the other hand, the insecure character of Celie.

In contrast, the portrayal of black male characters in the film adaptation is too stereotypical, in my opinion. In other words, most black male characters give the impression of being stupid, unrefined, egoistic, vulgar and abusive, without any positive attribution.

Without a doubt, Spielberg focused on creating such an image of black manhood, however, it functions as a rather disturbing and irritating element throughout the film. To conclude, all the scenes of violence are too raw and are predominantly a depiction of primitive cruelty based mainly on sexual desire and male dominance.

All things considered, despite the negative depiction of black manhood, both the film adaptation and the book are, in my opinion, wonderful portrayals showing Celie's inner transformation and emancipation.

The film adaptation is not a story of suffering and a hopeless situation, as it seems at the beginning, but it is actually a warm and emotive story depicting the triumphant victory of the main protagonist, who despite her miserable life finds

the inner strength to reach happiness and contentment in her life.

Conclusion

The theoretical part of this thesis introduced a closer outline of the author's life, namely historical background, moral attitudes and values that have shaped her personhood as well as her life.

The theoretical part also introduces an overview of African-American literature, namely the Harlem Renaissance; Naturalism, Realism and Modernism; The Black Arts Movement and recent African American literature since 1970.

The last section of the theoretical part focuses on the brief history of feminism in America and the major female activists of the time. The section introduces individual waves of feminism and black feminism, which differ from classical feminism.

The practical part focuses closely on Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* and the aim of this part is to analyze the main concepts of the novel. In this part, I decided to examine the novel in the context of the genre of the epistolary novel, language, feminist discourse, the concept of gender and the position of women in patriarchal society.

Finally, the last section of the practical part is focused on the comparison of the film adaptation and the novel. This section presents my own comparison and analysis of the book and the film adaptation, concluding that both the novel and the film have their qualities and offer a unique and unforgettable spectatorial and reader's experiences.

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