Exposing the pain and celebrating the triumphs of the black female spirit: an analysis of Alice Walker's In Love and Trouble

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Exposing the pain and celebrating the triumphs of the black female spirit: 
An analysis of Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble*

by

Brittan Nelisa Swanagan

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Literature)
Major Professor: Kathleen Hickok

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1996
This is to certify that the Master's thesis of
Brittan Nelisa Swanagan
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Patricia Ann Swanagan, who, with a lot of help from the Infinite Spirit, continues to be the best mama and daddy anyone could ever wish for. Your never-ending encouraging words pushed me through when I could have easily given up. I love you!

To those who taught me that there is always room for improvement:

Kathy Hickok,
You'll never know how much those two little words helped my tiring spirit:
"Carry On!"

Neil Nakadate,
I'll never forget the way you stared in my eyes, pulling out what you knew I knew, and saying:
"Good! Right! Now go further with that thought!"

Brenda Daly,
God bless your gift of knowing exactly what I was trying to say.
Thank You for all your support and encouragement.

And last but certainly not least, to Roselily: If I see you in Chicago, you've got a friend in me!
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CHAPTER I.
SELFHOOD DENIED: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
OF THE BLACK FEMALE SPIRIT

An evaluation of the Black female spirit as present in Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) must begin by exposing the adversities Black women have been forced to overcome in America; despite undying efforts to nourish their selfhood, they have battled a society that continuously uses race and gender as suppressers of their identity. Existing as a Black woman in the twentieth century involves dismantling the "double-negative stigma," a term used to describe the towering obstacles placed before the individual who is both Black and female. In addition, little nourishment has been given to those labeled powerless and unimportant, whereas our society has encouraged white males to embrace their race and gender as symbols of authority. Unfortunately, their maleness has meant a history of oppression for minority men and women. I believe the internal spirits of Black women have been devalued, ignored, and in the most horrible situations, annihilated.

The Black woman has had to conquer enormous odds in her attempt to sustain a sense of self, and this is evident in today's society and during slavery. On slave ships African women and men were considered inhuman and received inhumane treatment, which included rape, lashings, the eradication of dignity, the removal of any observable heritage, and daily terrorization. However, although the slave experience was horrific for both men and women, historians have given minimal recognition to the effect slavery had on the emotional health of Black females. In fact, enslaved women endured abuse equal to that of enslaved men and in *Ain’t I A Woman?*, bell hooks asserts that the experiences of the Black female slave have been unfairly devalued:
Scholars have been reluctant to discuss the oppression of black women during slavery because of an unwillingness to seriously examine the impact of sexist and racist oppression on their social status. Unfortunately this lack of interest and concern leads them to deliberately minimize the black female slave experience. (22)

For instance, although enslaved women were forced to assume a "masculine" role on the plantation field, enslaved men were rarely forced to perform labor as domestics in white households. In this respect, the Black woman's femininity was confiscated whereas the male slave was, to some extent, able to maintain his masculinity; this issue of femaleness will be discussed further in the chapter entitled "The Restriction of Black Femaleness Within Southern Tradition." My point is that women felt a sense of loss when unable to sustain their womanly essence.

However, the greatest negative impact on the Black woman's sense of self during slavery was her continued sexual exploitation. More specifically, the most profound violation of self was undoubtedly the frequent occurrence of rape and the violent removal of children from their mothers. To be black and female, slave or free, elicits feelings of pride in the ability to share one's sexuality at will and reproduce in the name of "family." These are physical abilities, but their true roots thrive in the soul within the female body. When white, lewd slave owners preyed on the vulnerability of Black women, they simultaneously etched out a great portion of the Black female spirit. Moreover, when they snatched babies from their mothers' breasts, they invaded yet another one of these same spirits. On the issue of rape, Black activist Angela Davis adds that "the rape of black female slaves was not, as other scholars have suggested, a case of white men satisfying their sexual lust, but was in fact an institutionalized method of
terrorism which had as its goal the demoralization and dehumanization of black women" (hooks 27). The connection is easy to ascertain: When a slave woman was demoralized and dehumanized, the effects were felt in her emotional, internal self.

Over hundreds of years, the Black female has made continuous attempts at freeing her troubled spirit, and in doing so she has battled with her longtime foes: racism and sexism. For example, even in the twentieth century, more than a century after slavery was abolished, Black women have fought various societal conventions that discourage them from being their spontaneous, unique, artistic selves. Evidence can be found in the media, where physical beauty is still dependent upon the existence of traits similar to those of the European woman. In the 1960's, "Black is Beautiful" was an expression on the lips of almost every Black man and woman, and pride in the natural, physical beauty of the African American was at its peak. However, it didn't obliterate for Blacks, especially women, the memory of being labeled "ugly" and "unattractive" because of dark skin and kinky hair. As the twenty-first century approaches, significant progress has been made in assuring the non-European female of her unique splendor, but a white, male-dominated society still promotes the white female counterpart as the ideal symbol of beauty.

As mentioned earlier, in the discussion of slavery, rape had a ruinous effect on the Black woman's emotional self, and its effects have manifested in nations around the world. Obviously, rape has a disastrous impact on any woman, and can happen to women of different ages, cultures, races and classes. Many women have said that although their physical selves may have been brutally beaten and abused, the pain of rape runs deep into their hearts and has a lasting effect on their psyches.
In "Surviving Rape: A Morning/Mourning Ritual" Andrea Benton Rushing, a Black English professor, shares the specifics of her actual rape experience as well as her quest for spiritual healing. A successful university professor, Rushing lived alone with her college-aged daughter and seemed "like a woman accustomed to being in control" (130). However, on October 16, 1988, a strange man crept into her bedroom in the middle of the night, straddled and raped her, demanded her cash, and left. The entire incident took place in the dark, and when asked to describe the perpetrator she could only recall the absence of a "beard, sideburns, or goatee," his "clammy imitation leather jacket and heavyish gloves," and his "short, flabby penis" (127-128). After the police came to secure her safety, she claimed the "strong-Black-wonder-woman" impersonation and drove herself to the hospital; her daughter and her best friend (who entered the apartment just after the rape) were too distressed to drive. At the hospital Rushing received the routine post-rape medical exam (physically, she was perfectly sound) and when all was over, returned to her apartment. When she told friends and family of her ordeal, she assured them her "body" was "fine" (132).

Rushing was certain that since the night of the rape was over and in the past, and she had not been physically affected, her life could pick up where it left off. However, her assumption was far from the truth. Three years after the incident she said:

If you'd told me way back then that I'd still be recovering from rape now, I wouldn't have laughed in your face, but I wouldn't have believed you either. I'd faced traumas before - tenure review, major surgery, heartshattering divorce stumbled through some and transcended others, so I expect[ed] rape to slip from me like a boiled beet's rough skin ... Since I'd felt so good and been so clear-headed and capable in the immediate aftermath of being
raped - no signs of the physical exhaustion, disorientation, anxiety, or amnesia that, later, become my almost constant companions - I was unprepared as everyone else when shock's soft shawl slipped from my shoulders. (128, 134)

What Rushing realized, then, is that her internal spirit had taken the majority of abuse; the rapist irritated the inner part of her that once rested comfortably and with ease. I use this example of rape because it accurately demonstrates my belief that damage to the spiritual self is extremely destructive. Similarly, in Walker's short stories, racism, sexism, and male domination (among other societal factors) have a traumatic effect that undoubtedly wounds the Black woman's spirit.

As Rushing found, mental health is an important ingredient in maintaining a healthy spirit. In "Health, Social Class and African-American Women" by Evelyn Barbee and Marilyn Little, we learn that Black men, white men and white women have a level of mental well-being higher than that of African American women (190). Their essay focuses on the limited health care received due to "membership in two subordinate groups, African American and women" (183), and recognizes that Black women have a difficult time attaining happiness when their emotional self is tattered.

**Literary Background**

A historical background of the Black female spirit is necessary if one is to recognize the various ways Black women writers, both past and present, address this same spirit. With this in mind, I would like to focus on the contributions Black women have made to the short story genre; by revisiting their own experiences and those of their sisters, they have expressed the pain, frustration and joy felt by women from different backgrounds, age groups and regions. Once I have
investigated this literary tradition, I will then explain how six stories in Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble* expose women trying their absolute best to save their individual sense of self without further damaging their inner spirits.

Many Black, female writers have addressed, at least indirectly, the repercussions of harboring an injured spirit. This is certainly the primary focus of Walker's collection of short stories which "probes the extent to which black women have the freedom to pursue their selfhood within the confines of a sexist and racist society" (Christian, "Wayward" 92). Further, Walker writes within a tradition of Black women who feel an obligation to voice their anger and frustration at a society that turns a blind eye to psyches damaged by abusive relationships, racism, sexism, male-domination, and a myriad of other troubling issues. Immediately, contemporary novelists like Toni Morrison and Terry McMillan are names, along with Alice Walker, that come to most minds when asked to recall the identities of powerful African American women writers. Certainly they deserve this recognition, for in 1992 they each had a book on the best-seller list; Morrison's *Jazz*, McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*, and Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* collectively sold millions of copies and impacted the lives of all women, especially African American women.

At the same time, as with Walker's collection of short stories, Black women writers have used this genre to address issues relevant to the Black woman. In the introduction to their anthology of short stories, *Centers of the Self*, Judith Hamer and Martin Hamer assert that the short story "more readily reflects the moods and attitudes of black people" because it is the form generally published by African American magazines and journals (5). Because the short story as a genre has existed for decades, the "moods and attitudes" alluded to above can be found in the early writings of historical authors like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. In
fact, her short story "The Two Offers," often considered the first tale published by an African American, "raised questions that were probably central to the lives of many women" (Hamer and Hamer 8). The story questions whether the union with a man is a commitment more important than spinsterhood, and if a woman's place is only in the home. Harper's story is about choices a woman must make; in making life-altering decisions, a woman undoubtedly has to weigh the ratio of self-sacrifice to happiness. That is, how much of her own personal spirit is compromised when her purpose in life moves from the internal to the external?

At the turn of the century, Black women writers became more visible, partly because of the emergence of two new magazines, The Colored American Magazine (1900) and The Crisis (1910). However, many of these writers, like many African Americans, still held to the notion that they could become complete citizens by embracing the values of middle-class White Americans. In turn, domestic allegories emerged that "created an instructive but fictive world, where art did not imitate reality" (Hamer and Hamer 9). Fortunately, the attention to social realism was reborn in the literature of Black women and can be found to this day; many of their writings return to issues that have a direct impact on the individual woman.

This is illustrated most clearly in the late 1960's when the racial oppression challenged in Black women's writings took a back seat to explorations of gender maltreatment. More specifically, "women who protest their treatment by men" (Hamer and Hamer 13) are the subjects of vocal writers like Ntozake Shange, who in her short story "comin to terms" (1979) examines the relationship between a young woman and her boyfriend. Here, the protagonist refuses to have sex on demand with her live-in mate, and in doing so "attempts to free herself from male domination ... sadly, written over one hundred years after slavery, the Black
woman is still fighting for control over her body" (Hamer and Hamer 13). And, as mentioned earlier, the physical body is the gate to the spiritual self; when the former is distressed, the latter is as well, often times to a higher degree.

"After Saturday Night Comes Sunday" (1971) by Sonia Sanchez is an example of the strength with which women endure adversity. In this story, Sandy, mother of twins, is patient with her abusive, drug-addicted lover who is overly absorbed in his own self-satisfaction. Her nakedness at the close of the story represents the extent to which she has given herself while receiving little in return. Ironically, during the story Sandy often feeds her little boys and her lover, but Sanchez makes little mention of her taking food for herself; this can certainly be seen as representative of her unfulfilled, desolate spirit.

A striking resemblance to Walker's "Her Sweet Jerome" is seen in Tina McElroy Ansa's short story entitled "Willie Bea and Jaybird." In her story, Ansa portrays Willie Bea as a young wife "five feet tall, ninety pounds, stick legs, Coke-bottle glasses" (15). Her strength is tested when she discovers a dreadful truth about her husband, Jaybird. When the story comes to a close, Willie Bea is uncertain what to do with what she has just learned, much like Mrs. Jerome Washington, the protagonist of Walker's tale. In short, she is unsure how to handle her troubled spirit and comes up empty handed when she relies on her husband to do this for her.

What, then, can be ascertained when we look at the progression of the short stories of Black writers? And more specifically, how does Alice Walker fit into this literary tradition? If it is true that this genre "is a way to celebrate our fantasies, to mark our presence in time, to pass down our loves, fears, and foibles from one generation to the next" (Hamer and Hamer 5), then we know its presence is both essential and therapeutic. For over a century, Black women writers have taken on
the role of "therapist" by giving voice to the female forced to sacrifice and compromise self because of her race and gender. But at the same time, Walker adds a new component to the race/gender theme by revealing the troubles of the Southern, Black woman who insists on "challenging convention, on being herself, sometimes in spite of herself" (Christian, "Wayward" 87).

Born and bred in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth child of sharecropping parents, Walker undoubtedly has a pronounced connection to her Southern heritage and uses her experiences to give voice to women characters that might otherwise remained silenced. In "The Black Writer and the Southern Experience" Walker says the "black Southern writer inherits as a natural right ... a sense of community" (17). This may very well be an explanation for Walker's ability to capture the essence of the communities in which her protagonists live and die. Further, Walker says Black women writers have a "clarity of vision," and it is certainly this "vision" that allows Walker to understand the forces that restrict and prohibit many of her female characters.

Clearly, Walker's Southern connection is present in In Love and Trouble; as she investigates the Black male-female relationship, she uses the South to intensify the importance of these varied situations. Bettye J. Parker-Smith proclaims in "Alice Walker's Women: In Search of Some Peace of Mind" that the South is an integral factor in the total success of these stories:

What is clear ... is her articulation of the complete Black male-female dialogue in all of her fiction. She captures the exactness of their experiences by using the South as a backdrop. She draws upon the language: a quick, choppy, picturesque recipe of words and phrases. She plays upon the land: open, swallowing, birthrighted, but for the most part unattainable. (480)

Parker-Smith eloquently summarizes the extent to which Walker has used the
South, and examples of each of the above descriptors can easily be found. It is, for instance, the "open, swallowing" land that Roselily is eager to leave; in the midst of her wedding, she "thinks of cemeteries and the long sleep of grandparents mingling in the dirt" (*Trouble* 6). In addition, the "recipe of words and phrases" in Myrna's journals serves as our only insight into the mind of this closet-writer. There are even times when the South's beauty is so engrossing that it distracts the reader from the trouble lingering in many of the stories. For example, in "The Child Who Favored Daughter," "the rows of cotton that stretch on one side of her (Child) from the mailbox to the house in long green hedges" (*Trouble* 35) create a pleasant picture that fails to prepare us for the horror waiting at the close of this tale.

Parker-Smith adds that for Alice Walker, "the South provides a spiritual balance and an ideological base from which to construct her characters" (478). Alice Walker herself is as complex as her characters; she wears many hats at the same time, such as Black, female, Southern, and feminist. Thus far in my discussion, I have explored her identity as an African American, Southern woman writer, but her position as a feminist deserves some attention.

Although she is dedicated to the survival of women in general, Walker's primary concern is undoubtedly the Black woman. Because of this, she prefers the term "womanist" to "feminist," and as a preface to *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* Walker defines the characteristics of a "womanist":

1. **From womanish.** (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown-up. Being
grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."


4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (xi-xii)

So, because Walker identifies herself as a "womanist" who appreciates the strength of Black women as well as their spiritual wholeness, it is natural that she would probe the extent to which that same strength - that sense of self - is tested under adverse conditions. Walker herself adds she is "preoccupied with the spiritual, the survival whole of my people. But, beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black women" (Christian, "Wayward" 82). In "A Womanist Response to the Afrocentric Idea," womanist preacher Lorine L. Cummings discusses the relationship between
Afrocentrism and womanism, and asserts that Afrocentrism, although beneficial in theory, fails to acknowledge the needs of the Black woman. To Cummings, Black women must depend on themselves for understanding and self-nourishment: No one can accurately reflect and/or speak about African American women better than ourselves. Others attempt to discuss their understanding of our experience, but they cannot tell the entire story ... Womanists are voicing concerns of African American women which are often very different from those articulated by their white female and African American male counterparts. (58)

"To what extent does one expose the pain of being a black woman?" This is the question Barbara Christian asks in "The Contrary Women of Alice Walker: A Study of Female Protagonists in In Love and Trouble." Walker, willing to reveal the shortcomings of the Southern, Black community at the expense of tainting the image of that same community, reveals the insanities of her women, as in "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" where the restrictions on Myrna nearly drive her to murder. In addition, we become part of their daydreams, where the onset of a more respected, secure life is foreshadowed by entrapping thoughts for Roselily on her wedding day. And in the most desperate situation, we see the Black woman, after being deceived by the Black male, destroy her own life as her only means of escape. In short, we witness the tortured, abused spirits of these women as they try to seek freedom from situations that hinder self-betterment and happiness. Because we, as removed readers, have the privilege of being judgmental, it's easy to question the actions of these women. We wonder why Mrs. Jerome Washington burns herself as well as "the other woman" in "Her Sweet Jerome." We fail to understand why the young girl in "The Child Who Favored Daughter" doesn't deny her white lover at the beginning of the story; if she had done this, her fate may
have been different. And we are confused when Maggie in "Everyday Use" is willing to give her grandmother's antique quilt to her Afrocentric sister. Nevertheless, it's our responsibility to empathize with their situations and understand that they do what they must to free their spirits from the conventions of marriage, racism and sexism. In "Boundaries of Self", a chapter from Alice Walker, Donna Haisty Winchell says:

One of the dragons that threatens these women is racism in its various individual and institutional forms. Another is their love of black men who use and abuse them. In the stories being in love often means being in trouble. (29)

Above all, we see Walker's women trying to have hope, trying to find a safe harbor for their individual selves that want to be "characteristically and spontaneously themselves" (Christian, "Contrary" 34). In "Alice Walker: The Achievement of the Short Fiction" Alice Petry says, "Walker manages to counterbalance the oppressive subject matter of virtually all these thirteen stories by maintaining the undercurrent of hope" (13).

For instance, in "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff," Hannah's sole reason for living (after the death of all her children) is her belief that the white woman who denied her food during the Depression will be repaid for the grief her uncharitable heart brought on this poor, needy woman. For most, using retribution as a primary motivation for living is quite unhealthy. However, I would argue that if close attention is paid to the external factors that irritate the spirits of each of Walker's women, it will undoubtedly become clear why these protagonists take their chosen course of actions. In addition, this close analysis will also reveal that even in the most tragic situation where death is the end result, we should celebrate that some form of escape is attained. Winchell adds that although
Black women are eager to embrace "the invincibility of the strong women of color ... they seemed to have little sympathy for women whose personal struggles ended in defeat" (29).

Thus far I have used the word "spirit" to describe the innermost self of Walker's women - the foundation of true happiness and the source of most of their anguish. With this in mind, Walker prefaces this collection of short stories with two excerpts, one of which is from Nigerian author Elechi Amadi's book The Concubine (1966). Amadi describes the troubled spirit of a young girl whose marriage had been arranged since she was an infant:

Wonuma soothed her daughter, but not without some trouble. Ahurole has unconsciously been looking for a chance to cry. For the past year or so her frequent unprovoked sobbing had disturbed her mother. When asked why she cried, she either sobbed the more or tried to quarrel with everybody at once. She was otherwise very intelligent and dutiful. Between her weeping sessions she was cheerful, even boisterous, and her practical jokes were a bane on the lives of her friends ... But though intelligent, Ahurole could sometimes take alarmingly irrational lines of argument and refuse to listen to any contrary views, at least for a time. From all this her parents easily guessed that she was being unduly influenced by agwu, her personal spirit. Anyika did this best but of course the influence of agwu could not be nullified overnight. In fact it would never be completely eliminated. Everyone was mildly influenced now and then by his personal spirit. A few like Ahurole were particularly unlucky in having troublesome spirits.

Ahurole was engaged to Ekwueme when she was eight days old [my emphasis]. (128)

The use of the word agwu in Amadi's book seems appropriate considering
Ahurole's marital arrangement; an agwu is a state of "mental derangement; madness, which, though not very acute, makes the victim very quarrelsome" (Williamson 16). The word derives from the Igbo language, used primarily by those from Igboland, Nigeria. The Igbo people are those from the states of Anambra and Imo, a society that has continuously struggled to become more urbanized (Ofoegbu 203). The Igbo language itself, especially in literature, is not as prevalent as Yoruba because "creative literature that has been published in Igbo, about the Igbo and by the Igbo is nothing to compare in quantity and in quality with what is to be found in Yoruba" (Emenanjo 47).

Walker's reference to Amadi's book is significant because it is this same agwu that troubles most of her women. More importantly, just as "the influence of agwu could not be nullified overnight," neither do Walker's women attain a sense of peace instantaneously. For most, years of pain and grief must pass before they are able to reach the state of freedom that is right and appropriate for them. Christian adds, "these stories are about the most natural law of all, that all living beings must love themselves, must try to be free - that spirit will eventually triumph over convention, no matter what the cost" ("Contrary" 46). With this in mind, I will frequently refer to the troubled personal spirits of Walker's protagonists as their agwus, just as Amadi does in The Concubine.

**In Love and Trouble**

I chose Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973) for many reasons. First, I wanted to concentrate on the emotional well-being of the African American female in a male-dominated society. Second, I wanted to focus on this issue in the short story because although a great deal has been written on Walker's novels, little attention has been given to her contribution to this genre. And third, Walker's variety of settings and circumstances helped me
arrive at the fact that women react to their troubled spirits differently, depending on a myriad of external factors.

For centuries the Black female spirit has been ignored, and although many will attest to her strength, she has still been seen as victimized by circumstances beyond her control. A true understanding of the spirit of the Black woman cannot occur until she is taken out of this victimized position. Further, before she is judged or condemned for her actions, a critical eye should be set upon the conventions she must battle. In doing this, it will become more evident that although she may appear to have been defeated, she has really triumphed in a manner that unleashes her own unique, individual self. I would like to address the Black woman's spiritual freedom by looking at three interrelated issues: the constraints of societal convention, the restriction of black femaleness within Southern tradition, and the ideology of revolution as an obstacle to an unsuppressed agwu.

To examine how the constraints of societal convention affect the Black female spirit, I chose Walker's "Roselily" and "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff" because the protagonists in these stories are clearly at odds with themselves in a racist, sexist society that limits their ability to reach happiness. As they exist in a world that functions for the benefit of white males, their struggle to survive is that much more difficult. Societal conventions have restricted most people of color, but in America their effect on African Americans is clear. Not only has financial security been threatened, but so has the overall state of Black Americans' physical and mental health. Other stories in In Love and Trouble address this same issue; in fact, all of Walker's women battle the conventions of a racist, sexist, male-dominated society. However, "Roselily" and "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff" are particularly interesting because of the unique perspective
we have on the lives of these women.

At the same time, I wanted to spend some time on the effect these societal conventions have on Southern women, and "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" and "The Child Who Favored Daughter" seemed to portray the most critical situations involving the restricted Black female spirit. The first story examines the woman who is discouraged from doing anything more than fostering her femininity, while the second looks at the fate of the young Black woman who is determined to explore her womanly self with anyone she pleases, including the white male. In reading these two tales, I was especially enthralled by their endings, with one resulting in death and the other an opportunity for escape. Recognizing that both conclusions are means of escape removes the Black woman from a traditional, victimized role. Again, Walker addresses this same issue in other stories as well, including "We Drink the Wine in France" where a young Black girl and her white professor of French fantasize about each other without ever acting on their hidden desires. Although the tone of this story is different from "The Child Who Favored Daughter," it still demonstrates how the Black female, because of societal conventions, is not free to explore her sexuality with the male of her choice.

Finally, I chose the last topic, revolution as an obstacle to the unsuppressed spirit, or agwu, for two primary reasons. First, I was curious how the issue of change is interdependent upon racism and sexism; this was most evident in "Her Sweet Jerome" and "Everyday Use." Similar to the two stories I've selected for my analysis of the restriction of Black femaleness within Southern tradition, these two stories end quite differently. However, both examine the various ways the Black female spirit manifests when revolution has an impact on self-identity. In addition, these two stories are complemented by other tales in Walker's collection of short stories, such as "Entertaining God," the tale of
a mother who uses the Black revolution as a means of escaping her flawed history. Further, because "Everyday Use" is the most widely anthologized story, I wanted to look at revolution as it pertains to the internal self, an angle few critics have taken.

Although I have selected only six stories from Walker's *In Love and Trouble* for my analysis of the Black female spirit under varied conditions and circumstances, this theme is prevalent in most of the stories in this collection; looking at a few selected stories allows for a closer examination of the issues at hand.
CHAPTER II.
THE CONSTRAINTS OF SOCIETAL CONVENTIONS

For many Black women, past and present, finding a safe harbor against the perils of racism and sexism has been strenuous, demanding, and at times, virtually impossible. Our prejudiced society places potholes in the pavement on which Black women walk, and, at the same time, a nation that is dominated by men transforms these same potholes into ditches most women have a difficult time avoiding. Walker's treatment of this issue is enhanced by her concentration on the Southern Black woman who, in addition to being both Black and female, must exist in an atmosphere that is both rewarding and detrimental. First, the South offers the Black individual a sense of history that connects her to her ancestry; this sense of belonging is beneficial to any person. However, the South is also viewed as the birthplace of American racism, with many violent acts against Blacks taking place on the very land where many were enslaved.

Christian adds:

Focal to Walker's presentation is the point of view of individual black southern girls or women who must act out their lives in the web of conventions that is the South, conventions that they may or may not believe in, may or may not feel at ease in, conventions that may or not help them grow. ("Contrary" 33)

Christian's description of the Black, Southern female is an appropriate portrayal of the women in Walker's collection of short stories, but appreciating their struggle depends heavily on the level of optimism we, as readers, bring to these tales.
What, then, does a Black woman do when her progression from one society to another yields similar restrictive conventions? This is the question that comes to mind when reading "Roselily," the first short story in In Love and Trouble.

Young Roselily, the unmarried mother of three (the fourth given to the child's wealthy father) stands before her friends and family as she is wedded to a Chicago Muslim. The "stiff severity of his plain black suit" (Trouble 5) frightens and comforts Roselily, who, captured in the thoughts of her daydream, pays little attention to the words of her own wedding ceremony. Her marriage, based on necessity as opposed to love, is certain to render "respect, a chance to build ... A chance to be on top" (Trouble 4), but reflections on this impending happiness are diverted by images of entrapment. Roselily is depending on her husband to "free her ... A new life! Respectable, reclaimed, renewed. Free!" (Trouble 7). But at the same time, this young Southern woman's exhilaration is stifled by the climactic fall of her thought patterns; she is aware that by voluntarily becoming a part of this new life, she must abandon any traces of freedom she once had in her single, Southern life. In other words, Walker suggests that Roselily must trade freedom for freedom, a generous price to pay for that which should be, in and of itself, free.

This ambiguity in "Roselily" is characteristic of Walker's work; rarely are the specifics of life in her stories wholly beneficial or detrimental, and this makes it difficult to conclude whether, in young Roselily's situation, her marriage is indeed a blessing. In fact, the title character's name itself elicits mixed emotions in readers of this story. That is, a rose has prickly thorns and a lily is considered pure and fair in appearance, just as Roselily's marriage to the Muslim is going to be both pleasant and unpleasant as she tries "to obtain for herself some measure of social and economic security" (Petry 13). In addition, other conventional associations of
the rose are love, sexuality, and beauty, all factors to be compromised once
Roselily returns to Chicago with her new husband; the desire to obtain a "better"
life becomes more important than love, repeated pregnancies hinder her sexuality,
and Roselily's beauty will be hidden behind the veil she must wear. So to what
extent is she sacrificing self for the safety net her new marriage will provide?

Throughout the story, it is obvious Roselily is entering a societal convention
just as entrapping as the one she is leaving, and we know the conventions offered
to her prior to her marriage have afforded minimal freedom. We learn early on
that she is unhappy and that the life she is living in the South has dampened her
spirit. Her agwu, weakened by single parenthood and tiring hours in a sewing
plant, is so distressed that her daydream conjures memories of her fourth child
given away to his biological father. This relationship, just like the one with the
Chicago Muslim, suppressed Roselily's agwu:

Her fourth child she gave away to the child's father who had some money.
Certainly a good job. Had gone to Harvard. Was a good man but weak
because good language meant so much to him he could not live with
Roselily. (Trouble 4-5)

When Roselily was herself, uneducated and cultured only by the South, this man
could not be with her. Oddly enough, it is he that Walker reveals as the weaker of
the two, for he "cried off and on throughout her pregnancy. Went to skin and
bones. Suffered nightmares, retching and falling out of bed. Tried to kill himself"
(Trouble 5). Nevertheless, her fourth child's father had the luxury of relocating to
New England where his agwu could be at peace with "Bach" and "chess," while
Roselily, already weighed down with the responsibility of three young children,
must stay in the South, among her people who will, if nothing else, accept her for
the Southerner she is. Sadly, their acceptance is due to their similarities to her;
she feels linked to them because of this, especially to her dead mother with whom Roselily feels a "confusing" bond. The Southern conventions which Roselily battles prevent her from having a free inner spirit; she does not have the same freedom as her fourth child's father (as the maternal figure, she cannot relocate with the same ease he can), and her life in the country is unlikely to offer escape from the "detrimental wheel" of the South. What we have, then, is a young woman desperate to create a better life for herself and her children; understanding her situation is essential in understanding why she is willing to commit to "a lifetime of black and white" (Trouble 5).

As wife to a Muslim, Roselily knows what her role will be, and she fears that any freedom her spirit had in the South will be eradicated once she moves to the North with her husband. The narrator reveals that "even now her body itches to be free of satin and voile, organdy and lily of the valley. Memories crash against her. Memories of being bare to the sun" (Trouble 6). But Roselily, conscious of the sacrifices she must make, chooses her Chicago life because her options are limited. In "To Marry or Not to Marry," Carol Nadelson and Malkah Notman explain society's role in a woman's decision to marry:

In the past, few women chose not to marry, because remaining unmarried carried with it a strong social stigma, as well as economic problems. An unmarried woman was seen as unattractive, unworthy, and unwanted. Women also felt this way about themselves. (111)

The man standing beside Roselily offers no comfort, but she still "presses her worried fingers into his palm" because although he is not the soothing image of love she wishes she had, he is a tangible, safe figure to hold on to.

And what of Roselily's new husband? His motivations for marrying her are just as disturbing as Roselily's reasons for marrying him. Little is known about
this Northerner except that "he blames Mississippi for the respectful way the men turn their heads up in the yard, the women stand waiting and knowledgeable, their children held from mischief by teachings from the wrong God (emphasis mine)" (Trouble 3). However, this excerpt reveals two important elements. First, it materializes his antagonistic feelings in regard to the South and second, it exposes his severe convictions connected with the Islamic faith. And still, this information both clarifies and encourages additional questions concerning Roselily's husband.

For example, why does he choose to marry a girl from the South if the South itself, and all it represents for Black people, enrages him to the extent it does? I believe when he "glares ... to the occupants of the cars, white faces glued to promises beyond a country wedding" (Trouble 3), Walker is sending covert signals regarding race and racism. Roselily's soon-to-be-husband deals with his Blackness in a white society by using Roselily as a symbol of his acquired uprightness. Christian adds that "for him a veiled black woman in his home is a sign of his righteousness, and in marrying Roselily he is redeeming her from her backward values. With him, she will have black babies to people the nation" ("Contrary" 35). For the Muslim, Roselily's presence sends a hidden message to the white Southerners who pass by this country wedding: His people, his God and his religion will be strengthened by one (Roselily, that is) who was once in their controlling grasp. And, although it is true that Roselily's new life will be built on Northern territory, Walker makes clear that her condition is not necessarily bettered, for she is moving to the "South Side" of Chicago, where his efforts to "redo her into what he truly wants" (Trouble 8) will undoubtedly further diminish Roselily's individuality and sense of independence. Furthermore, his marrying the Christian Roselily demonstrates his ability to strengthen and expand the Black
race; to wed a Muslim woman would not bring him closer to these goals, and would fail in making him feel as if he has stolen something from the White man. In *The Black Muslims in America*, C. Eric Lincoln explains the strong animosity many Muslims have towards Blacks' involvement in Christianity:

> It would be difficult, probably impossible, to separate the Black Muslim teachings on Christianity from those on race. A fundamental tenet of the sect is that all blacks are Muslims by nature and that Christianity is a white religion. Thus there is not even a possibility than an awakened black would accept Christianity. (72)

Roselily's husband considers it his obligation to "awaken" her, and his union with her is the most effective method he has for transforming her into the Black woman he feels she should be.

So, between the societal conventions of the North and the South, single parenthood and married life, and Christianity and the Islamic faith, Roselily cannot escape racism and sexism. Again I question how free her agwu is, and I am tempted to see her as a victim. Her husband will always stand "in front of her" and his hand will remain "like the clasp of an iron gate" (*Trouble* 8-9). But if some consideration is given to Roselily's limited options, it becomes easier to believe that she is freeing her troubled agwu. Roselily is certainly aware that the life she is entering will not be perfect, and she is mindful that she will not have control of her life in the North; her husband will be dominating and authoritative. But I strongly believe that for Roselily, this is an acceptable price to pay for a "brand-new life."

In short, the fact that "his love of her makes her completely conscious of how unloved she was before" (*Trouble* 8) allows Roselily to bear the adversarial factors of her life as a Muslim wife. And, although I am concerned about Roselily's
future with her new husband, I am more fearful of her hurtful past; because of this I cannot pass judgement on her choices. Winchell says "the life she foresees in Chicago promises to be a nightmare; the marriage veil will merge with the veil she will have to wear as the wife of a Muslim" (30), but I do not see her future life as any more horrific than her past life. I feel strongly that readers of this tale, as with the majority of Walker's short stories in this collection, must redefine the convention of "happily ever after."

**Hannah Kemhuff**

Of all the stories in *In Love and Trouble*, racism as a restrictive convention is most clearly seen in "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff." Petry says Walker's women are "in love and trouble" because of the "roles, relationships, and self-images imposed upon them by a society which knows little and cares less about them as individuals" (13), and such is the case with Hannah Kemhuff. On the other hand, Petry continues by suggesting that the success of Walker's collection of short stories is due to the fact that although the women are downtrodden and often subjects of victimization, an undercurrent of hope in her characters keeps the book upbeat and pleasurable. Perhaps this is why Hannah Kemhuff's story is not the depressing, desolate tale one might expect it to be.

Hannah's *agwu* is kept alive by the optimism she has in a rootworker's ability to punish the white woman who set her life on the path of destruction. The story's title alone tells the plot of the tale, with Hannah seeking the assistance of Tante Rosie, a master of the rootworking trade. Rosie, able to "see" Hannah's past by looking in a water-filled tank, quickly comes to the conclusion "that although the woman looked old, she was not" (*Trouble* 61). Tante Rosie also learns that Hannah was once a young, beautiful girl who married while she herself was still a child and, only shortly thereafter, became the mother of four small children.
Her husband, however, did not love Hannah, and instead gave his love and attention to other women.

It was during the Depression that Hannah's pride had to take a backseat to necessity; the mill where she worked as a cook closed down, her husband was jobless, and there was little money to feed herself and the children. In her initial meeting with the rootworker she explains her desperate situation:

We were on the point of starvation. We was so hungry, and the children were getting so weak, that after I had crapped off the last leaves from the collard stalks I couldn't wait for new leaves to grow back. I dug up the collards, roots and all. After we ate that there was nothing else. (Trouble 62)

With no food and no money, Hannah dressed herself and her children in warm winter clothes sent to her by her sister, Carrie Mae; she worked for "good white people" in the North and they gave Carrie Mae clothes to send down to Hannah and her family. Once they reached the charity line, Mrs. Kemhuff came face to face with a young, white woman who refused her food because of the way she and her children were dressed. It is this woman, named by Hannah Kemhuff as "the little moppet," who becomes the object of Hannah's sought revenge.

In "The Case for Revenge," Andrew Oldenquist asserts that "we cannot have a moral community unless its members are personally accountable for what they do" (76). Perhaps it is true that morals have been compromised when Hannah takes on the role of avenger, but how ethical was it for "the little moppet" to give Hannah's meal tickets to someone else (a gambler, at that) simply because the Kemhuffs were not begging in ragged clothes with their heads bowed and bodies stooped? Hannah recalls for Tante Rosie the incident that changed her life forever:
I want you to know that that little slip of a woman, all big blue eyes and yellow hair ... took my stamps and then one long look at me and my children and across at my husband all of us dressed to kill I guess she thought - and she took my stamps in her hand and looked at them like they was dirty ...

(Trouble 65)

In short, why weren't the supervisors of the relief program present to take responsibility for making sure all those in line, dressed in rags or fine clothes, received the government's goods? Oldenquist's point is well taken, but because of racism and prejudices, the moral community itself failed to serve and support its members.

Hannah's agwu, then, is troubled by the racist conventions she had to withstand, and perhaps, deep within Hannah's self-conscious, the target of her vengeance was not simply "the little moppet" (who became an adult Mrs. Holley), but a racist, prejudiced society as well. After all, she is aware that whites in need of assistance received rations greater than Blacks, and she tells Tante Rosie that she "later heard, by the by, that the white folks in the line got bacon and grits, as well as meal, but that is neither here nor there" (Trouble 63). Or is it? It seems extremely important that Hannah, when telling her story to the rootworker, feels the need to include this observation. In addition, years later, when Tante Rosie's young apprentice (I believe this is Alice Walker herself because of Walker's interest in Zora Hurston's preoccupation with voodoo and rootworking) confronted Mrs. Holley, she notes that "no shaft of remembrance probed the depths of what she had done to colored people more than twenty years ago" (Trouble 76-7).

Can the cause of Hannah's troubled spirit be pinpointed? Is it the racism that brought about the young Mrs. Holley's behavior, or should we look to sexism as the cause of her irritated inner agwu? After all, Hannah's husband was free to
abandon his family at a time when they needed him the most. Hannah describes for Tante Rosie the woman her husband left her for:

I could see my husband over talking to the woman he was going with on the sly. She was dressed like a flysweep! Not only was she raggedy, she was dirty! Filthy dirty, and with her filthy slip showing. She looked so awful she disgusted me. And yet there was my husband hanging over her while I stood in the line holding on to all four of our children. (Trouble 64).

I believe Hannah's inner spirit receives a double blow: A racist society prevented her from receiving the help she was entitled to, and a sexist society allowed her husband to forsake his family.

As readers of this story, it is easy for us to view Hannah as a victim of societal conventions just as we saw Roselily in this same role. And when Hannah dies, we may be quick to say she took a troubled agwu to her grave with her. It is true that through a series of unfortunate events, she loses her husband, her children, her health, and in the very end, her life. Of all the women in In Love and Trouble, Hannah's spirit remains in a troubled state the longest, but it is set free once she is certain Tante Rosie will seek the revenge that she, tired and old, cannot seek herself. Further, when she dies, Hannah's agwu is at peace because she believes Tante Rosie's rootworking skills will be successful:

It is enough that I have endured my shame all these years and that my children and my husband were taken from me by one who knew nothing about us. I can survive as long as I need with the bitterness that has laid every day in my soul. But I could die easier if I knew something, after all these years, had been done to the little moppet (my emphasis). (Trouble 67)

And something was done to the little moppet; it was a revenge tactic that would, according to Tante Rosie, right the terrible wrong Mrs. Holley rendered to Hannah.
some twenty years ago. The "potion," consisting of "a mixture of hair and nail pairings," "goober dust" and a portion of Mrs. Holley's "water and feces," guaranteed that she would not live more than six months longer than Mrs. Kemhuff (Trouble 89).

Prior to Walker's visit to "the little moppet," Mrs. Holley was an extremely social, outgoing individual who could often be found "shopping for antiques, gossiping with colored women, discussing her husband's health and her children's babies, and making spoon bread" (Trouble 73). Her life, in sum, was carefree and nonchalant, and she felt that she controlled her destiny. She had an abundance of confidence in herself and her abilities, and viewed rootworking as a ridiculously superstitious practice. To the apprentice she asserts her disbelief in voodooism:

> I been hearing about Tante Rosie since I was a little bitty child, but everybody always said that rootworking was just a whole lot of n____, I mean colored foolishness. Of course, we don't believe in that kind of thing, do we, Caroline? (Trouble 75)

Caroline, the young Black friend of Mrs. Holley, replies with an emphatic "No," but as the story progresses, we find Mrs. Holley unable to convince herself of the absurdity of Tante Rosie's powers; by the end of the story, she dies not from the voodoo itself, but from her dangerously paranoid demeanor. In "Paranoia and the Structure of Powerlessness," John Mirowsky and Catherine Ross assert that "belief in external control, mistrust, and paranoia form a stairway of deepening alienation" (238), and although Mrs. Holley said she didn't believe in Tante Rosie's powers, she obviously did because she ultimately lost charge of her life. Walker writes of Mrs. Holley's eventual demise:

> She collected stray hairs from her head and comb ... She ate her fingernails. But the most bizarre of all was her response to Mrs.
Kemhuff's petition for a specimen of feces and water. Not trusting any longer the earthen secrecy of the water mains, she no longer flushed.

(Trouble 79-80)

What did Mrs. Holley do with her excretions and how does her death contribute to Mrs. Kemhuff's freed spirit? Well, "the little moppet" stored her feces and water in bags and other large containers and kept them in the upstairs closet. She died alone, probably from starvation because she refused to eat anything for fear of being poisoned. Mrs. Kemhuff, then, rests easily in her grave, perhaps with a smile on her face because she knew Tante Rosie would "handle" Mrs. Holley. It matters not to Mrs. Kemhuff's agwu if Tante Rosie's rootworking attempt was successful; what is important is that Mrs. Holley suffered just as Hannah herself had. Again, the common reader may look upon the pitfalls of Hannah's life with pity, but the sense of freedom and relief felt by Hannah at the end of her life indicates she was released from her irritated personal spirit.

In the dedication of "The Revenge," Walker says the story is written "In grateful memory of Zora Neale Hurston," and if one is familiar with Hurston's Mules and Men the similarities in plot and theme cannot be mistaken. Alma Freeman's essay "Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: A Spiritual Kinship" examines the relationship between these two African American writers:

Not only do both women stand as exemplary representatives of the achievement of the American Black woman as writer, but their fiction reveals a strong spiritual kinship. Though separated by place and by time, these two Black women writers, inevitably it seems, were drawn together, and Zora Hurston became an important influence in Alice Walker's life. (37)

The "spiritual kinship" that Freeman refers to is most evident in "The Revenge" and Hurston's Mules and Men. For example, Walker weaves material on voodoo
practices from Hurston's book of folklore, as when Walker as an apprentice quotes a "curse prayer" taught and used by rootworkers like Tante Rosie. It is quite odd that two people who existed in separate lifetimes could have such a strong relationship, but in the case of Walker and Hurston this bond seems to be unmistakably natural. As many of their protagonists are "fighting against both racial and sexual oppression, they choose either a life of continued subservience, anguish, and pain, or they opt to become growing, emergent women who seek to take control of their own lives" (Freeman 38). The latter is the essence of Hannah Kemhuff's story; a woman has overcome a great deal of torment and, in the end, takes control of her own life in the only way she knows how.
CHAPTER III.
THE RESTRICTION OF BLACK FEMALINESS WITHIN SOUTHERN TRADITION

For centuries, American patriarchal society has been detrimental to the spirits of Black women in a variety of ways. In our male-dominated world, women of all races and cultures are, to a large degree, discouraged from setting foot outside of their female-identified arenas. In Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction, Sally Robinson maintains that women who attempt to defy the norms of our society experience great turmoil:

The fact that women remain subject to normative representations - of Woman, the feminine, the biologically female - reminds us that such representations continue to exert a great deal of pressure on any attempt to represent women as the subjects of feminism, or indeed, as the subjects of any discourse or social practice. (8)

In "Roselily" and "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff," Walker presents the Black woman who cannot explore her creative self because her foremost concern is simple survival. We do not know Roselily's talents, for example, because she has not the capability of expressing them; her strength is spent on maintaining the existence of herself and her children. Further, we cannot visualize Hannah Kemhuff as a sexual being because when we meet her, we see only the ragged, old woman underneath layers of shawls. But at the same time, Walker writes of women whose spirits are irritated by more than the struggle to attain the necessities of life. In one tale the protagonist attempts to adopt a role typically held by white men: the American writer. And yet, my argument remains that these women are not victims, but survivors of troubled agwus.
Myrna

In "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" Walker addresses the minority woman who must restrict her creative expression to journal-writing, similar to the way Roselily can express her feelings only through her daydream. Myrna, wife to Ruel and lover to Mordecai, has tired of having her writing ridiculed by Ruel, who, as an alternative, "brings up having a baby or going shopping, as if these things are the same. Just something to occupy ... time" (Trouble 15). Because her husband rejects her writing, "Myrna is open, both sexually and artistically, to Mordecai, an artiste" (Christian, "Contrary" 37). But this relationship is just as detrimental as the one with her husband, who insists that she represent the perfect Southern belle; instead, Mordecai steals the stories she willingly shares with him. Because of her relationship with these two men, Myrna, a beautiful, talented young woman, is subjected to abuse in two different forms, both detrimental to her inner self. When we are introduced to Myrna, in September of 1961, we learn about her life through a series of journal entries. In these, she is able to record everything from her present circumstances to her planned escape from them, not to be executed until she is ready. From the first entry alone a great deal is learned of Myrna's anger at the role she is portraying; she is sarcastic when referring to her "Helena Rubenstein hands" that are "sweet-smelling, small, and soft..." (Trouble 10). Most may wonder why Myrna complains. After all, unlike Hannah Kemhuff's hands that are calloused by life's cruelties, Myrna's have the luxury of doing nothing at all. Unfortunately, this is the very thing that troubles an agwu that functions differently from Myrna's flower-scented physical self.

"'I have a surprise for you,'" Ruel said, the first time he brought me here. And you know how sick he makes me now when he grins." (Trouble 11). This is an excerpt from the notebook Myrna allows Mordecai to read; immediately, we learn
of Myrna's dislike for her husband who insists she enjoy what he wants her to enjoy, such as a beautiful house with new furniture, frequent trips to the shopping mall, and designer creams and perfumes. And still, what is most troubling about Ruel is his inability to accept what Myrna herself wants; his response to her desire to write is simply, "No wife of mine is going to embarrass me with a lot of foolish, vulgar stuff" (Trouble 15).

In The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult, Alice Walker says she is disheartened by men's inability to appreciate women's writing:

It was painful to realize that many men rarely consider what women write, or bother to listen to what women are saying about how we feel. How we perceive life. How we think things should be. That they cannot honor our struggles or our pain. That they see our stories as meaningless to them, or assume they are absent from them, or distorted. Or think they must own or control our expressions. And us. (39)

Moreover, once it has been made clear what Myrna's true passion in life is, as well as her husband's reaction and response to it, a portion of Myrna's troubled agwu becomes unmistakably clear. Further, both of the above factors lead her to her lover, Mordecai.

Mordecai encourages Myrna's writing, and this, coupled with her need to find refuge from Ruel's expectations of her as his wife, causes Myrna to willingly expose her creative ideas (an extension of her self). But Myrna is not a naive woman; she perceives the genuine nature of both her husband and Mordecai. Of the latter she says:

I think Mordecai Rich has about as much heart as a dirt-eating toad. Even when he makes me laugh I know that nobody ought to look on other people's confusion with that cold an eye. (Trouble 14)
Nevertheless, she welcomes Mordecai into her life and, thinking she has nothing to lose from sharing her work with him, allows him to read a character sketch about a woman who kills herself because, after being crippled, she can no longer satisfy her husband sexually. Myrna shares more than her writing. She says, "Under Mordecai’s fingers my body opened like a flower and carefully bloomed" (Trouble 17); in addition, it comes without surprise that she is totally vulnerable after he compares her to Zora Neale Hurston, Walker’s (and Myrna’s) major literary influence.

After Myrna shares her story idea with her lover, she says she is "nearly strangled" by her fear, which has escalated when her visits with Mordecai come to a halt. All of this, in conjunction with her unhappy marriage, drives Myrna near the edge, but while she is sitting in a fertility clinic waiting to see why she and Ruel cannot conceive a child, she sees a story in a journal that eradicates any sanity she had. She writes in her journal:

Today at the doctor’s office the magazine I was reading fell open at a story about a one-legged woman. They had a picture of her ... not black and heavy like she was in the story I had in mind. But it is still my story, filled out and switched about as things are. The author is said to be Mordecai Rich. (Trouble 21)

Four days later after washing "the prints of his (Ruel’s) hands off (her) body," Myrna tries to kill her husband by slicing his head off with a chain saw. Fortunately, or perhaps (for Myrna) unfortunately, "this failed because of the noise. Ruel woke up right in the nick of time" (Trouble 21). This latter event sends Myrna to an asylum. In the last two entries, dated three years after she attempted to decapitate Ruel, Myrna is back in her home with her husband, new clothes, and her carefully manicured hands that write only in her journals.
How, then, has Myrna's troubled agwu been freed? It appears she has made little progress in this story, for her writing has been stolen and she is still under the careful eye of Ruel. In short, for Myrna, her Blackness and her femaleness are not fulfilled because she cannot write freely; that is, she is prohibited from using her experiences as a Black woman to write about that which she deems important. However, the ill-behavior of Ruel and Mordecai teaches Myrna two valuable lessons that allow readers to be optimistic about the story's conclusion and Myrna's future. First, although Mordecai capitalizes off the "story about a one-legged woman" (Trouble 21), Myrna still receives the encouragement she needs to feel her writing is worthwhile. For once, she is complimented for traits beyond the physical:

Mordecai praised me for my intelligence, my sensitivity, the depth of the work he had seen - and naturally I showed him everything I had ... Already I see myself as he sees me. A famous authoress, miles from Ruel, miles away from anybody. I am dressed in dungarees, my hands are a mess. I smell of sweat. I glow with happiness. (Trouble 18)

Although this vision does not immediately become Myrna's reality, it materializes in the form of a tangible possibility. Mordecai's presence would be eliminated, but the substitution of sweat for Helena Rubenstein hands is enough to pacify Myrna's irritated spirit.

Second, Myrna has learned a valuable lesson that makes her triumphant at the story's conclusion: She realizes she has the capability to transform her feminine silence into a powerful, internal force. During her internment at the mental hospital, Myrna realizes the one thing that converts her from victim to survivor. That is, she learns how to manipulate the spoken word even though, once back in Ruel's home and freshly manicured, her written words are
discouraged. Christian explains:

Like countless Southern belles, she has found that directness based on self-autonomy is ineffectual and that successful strategies must be covert. Such strategies demand patience, self-abnegation, falsehood. ("Contrary"

By realizing what she can't do (outwardly express her anger at her husband) to escape her unhappy situation, she places herself in a powerful position which will allow her to leave Ruel once he has "tired of the sweet, sweet smell" of her body (Trouble 23). The power she gains derives from her ability to control words, making yes mean a firm no. Specifically, Myrna decides to become (superficially) the wife Ruel wants, but this is merely part of her plan to eventually release her inner self:

I wait, beautiful and perfect in every limb, cooking supper as if my life depended on it. Lying unresisting on his bed like a drowned body washed to shore. But he is not happy. For he knows that I intend to do nothing but say yes until he is completely exhausted. (Trouble 23)

So, in the end, Myrna's agwu appears, similar to that of Roselily and Hannah Kemhuff, to be unhappy because of societal conventions and expectations that suppress her femaleness (this, for her, is partly identified by her writing), but in fact she has taken control of her situation; this pleases Myrna and in turn makes her a patient, strong-willed woman. Winchell says, "Seldom in In Love and Trouble do we see Walker's women fighting back successfully against preconceived, stultifying, and restrictive notions of women's roles" (31). However, I disagree because Winchell ignores the spiritual triumphs of these women; just as Roselily and Hannah had to find their own way of expressing their troubled spirits, Myrna must do the same: extenuating circumstances call for bizarre reactions.
The role the South itself plays in Myrna’s suppressed agwu can be seen most clearly by looking at the regional differences of the men in her life. Ruel, a Southern man who "has never left Hancock County, except once, when he gallantly went off to war" (Trouble 12), disapproves of Myrna’s writing, and wants her to live as other (white?) Southern belles do. As the man, he wants to show that his long hours in the peanut field pay off, and his dainty, beautiful wife is a symbol of his success. But simultaneously, Walker chooses to make Mordecai a Northern man who "never saw a wooden house with a toilet in the yard" (Trouble 14), and also a man who accepts (and steals) her writing unconditionally. There is also a difference in the way these men accept Myrna’s physical self. She says, "He [Ruel] married me because although my skin is brown he thinks I look like a Frenchwoman. Sometimes he tells me I look Oriental: Korean or Japanese" (Trouble 13). Although Ruel wants a Southern, Black woman, he can only accept Myrna’s Blackness if she is physically unlike other Southern Black women; Myrna’s Black femaleness is restricted by her own identity as a Southern, Black woman. Mordecai, on the other hand, cherishes her "heavy, sexy hair" and accepts her as the beautiful, Black woman she is. Of course in the end, her acceptance or unacceptance by either man becomes irrelevant because she has accepted herself and her ability to take control of her life.

**Child**

In all the stories I have looked at thus far, the protagonists’ agwus are irritated by both internal and external factors. That is, Roselily, Hannah Kemhuff, and Myrna are not at peace with their inner selves; they cannot look within for the support they are not receiving from their husbands, societal conventions, and other outward factors. However, in the most troublesome story in *In Love and Trouble*, we meet a young woman whose spirit is threatened
externally, but who is otherwise at peace. And, unlike Myrna's femaleness that restricts her from expressing her love for the written word, the protagonist in "The Child Who Favored Daughter" is literally detached from her femaleness by her crazed, jealous father.

We know her only as Child, daughter of a man who destroys the lives of three women including his wife, who committed suicide "while she was still young enough and strong enough to escape him," a sister, who was found "impaled on one of the steel-spike fence posts near the house," and Child herself, who dies at the brutal hands of her father (Trouble 39-40). Even so, when we meet Child we immediately know that she is comfortable with her existence, including her sexuality, for she is in love with a Southern white man, a forbidden love. Child sees her father sitting "tensely in the chair" as she walks the path leading from her school bus to her front porch, and she also knows he has found the letter she wrote to the unnamed white lover. Although the day is hot, the air is dry, and she sees the anger on her father's face, Child appreciates the warmth of the sun's rays and is not rushed by her father's impatience; instead, she gazes "intently at a small wild patch of black-eyed Susans and a few stray buttercups. Her fingers caress lightly the frail petals and she stands a moment wondering" (Trouble 36). At the same time, and in direct contrast to his daughter, the father's thoughts are impure:

She is near enough for him to see clearly the casual slope of her arm that holds the schoolbooks against her hip. The long dark hair curls in bits about her ears and runs in corded plainness down her back. Soon he will be able to see her eyes, perfect black-eyed Susans. Flashing back fragmented bits of himself. Reflecting his mind. (Trouble 38)

The thoughts in her father's mind send him back to his own youth when he had a
sister, "tawny, wild, and sweet," and known only as "Daughter." Similar to the incestuous thoughts he has for his own daughter, he remembers Daughter's life and death, which was caused by the punishment she received after her family discovered she had an affair with a white man. His sister, who had "chosen to give her love to the very man in whose cruel, hot and lonely fields he, her brother, worked" (Trouble 38), flirted with her brother by batting her eyelashes and stroking his cheek. Walker says the hurt he felt throughout his life "poisoned" him, making him blind to the beauty of love and "weary of living as though all the world were out to trick him" (Trouble 40). Some critics say it is this "poison," coupled with his rage and insanity, that drives him to his vicious act of cruelty.

Even when she is face to face with her father, Child, refusing to let his fierce gaze and his shotgun disrupt her tranquil spirit, "sways back against the porch post, looking at him and from time to time looking over his head at the brilliant afternoon sky" (Trouble 41). He leads her to the shed, where he beats her and leaves her wet, bloody and alone.

The next morning, after looking at old photographs of his dead sister Daughter, he returns to the shed and finds her "dark eyes reflecting the sky through the open door" (Trouble 44). He begs her to deny the letter he has found and never to see her white lover again, but she refuses. It is here where she is, I believe, aware of his sexual thoughts toward her, and it is also here where she speaks the only words she needs to say: "No ... Going" (Trouble 44). I agree that "what the daughter sees in his eyes is more terrifying than the darkness in the shed where she waited alone overnight. What she sees is his desire for her" (Winchell 37), and I would add that this same desire is the only circumstance that could totally disrupt Child's otherwise peaceful agwu. This incest driven type of story is familiar to Alice Walker, and "The Child Who Favored Daughter" is not her
first tale that exposes such a sensitive topic. For example, *The Color Purple* (1982) "drew a plethora of emotional responses from black communities as well as from black academics" (Harris 903). Many questioned how Blacks could rise as a nation when Walker, as well as others, exposed disaster within this same community. But Walker, willing to expose the pain and celebrate the triumphs of Black people, especially women, feels that only injury can come from silence. Of *The Color Purple* says, "I have been glad to see how the issues of incest and domestic violence were opened up by the book" (*River* 41).

At any rate, when Child continues to maintain her position, her father restricts her femaleness in the most horrendous way:

She gazes up at him over her bruises and he sees her blouse, wet and slippery from the rain, has slipped completely off her shoulders and her high young breast are bare. He gathers their fullness in his fingers and begins a slow twisting. The barking of the dogs creates a frenzy in his ears and he is suddenly burning with unnamable desire. In his agony he draws the girl away from him as one pulling off his own arm and with quick slashes of his knife leaves two bleeding craters the size of grapefruits on her bare bronze chest and flings what he finds in his hands to the yelping dogs. (*Trouble* 45)

At this point in the story, Child is dead and her blossoming spirit has been stopped in its track, forever locked in the murderous hands of her father. Or has it?

In "Tiptoeing through Taboo: Incest in 'The Child Who Favored Daughter'," Trudier Harris explores the effect incest has on Child, and she makes some interesting comments about Child's father and the way in which his troubles destroy his daughter's life:

He tries to free himself from what he cannot name, what he cannot express, and once again destroys a woman in his life. Daughter, his wife, and
his daughter are dead because he cannot face the image of the nonbrotherly love he wanted to bestow upon his sister. (502)

This may be true, but I can render little sympathy for Child's father, for in the end he has his life (however pathetic), whereas Child's life has been literally cut short. "By killing his daughter, he has at once shut out the image of Daughter which haunts him, he has murdered his own incest, and he has eliminated the last woman who has the power to haunt him" (Washington 94). He has, in a sense, freed his own troubled agwu, but at the close of the story Walker suggests he has grown closer to the insanity that lurks inside his twisted mind, for "if he stirs he might take up the heavy empty shotgun and rock it back and forth on his knees, like a baby" (Trouble 46).

Again I return to Child's agwu, and discover a hint of irony in the story that demonstrates my belief that Child's spirit, as inconceivable as it may seem, is freed by the close of this tale. Although, as critic Mary Helen Washington asserts, Child's father has supposedly freed himself from the haunting images and memories of the three women in his life, these same images may very well reappear if he moves in any way. That is, the summer wasps and the red dust of the South pose a threat to his continued existence. However, Child, unable to ever again enjoy the beauty of life, no longer has to use her inner self to battle the wrongs of the outside world, specifically her father. Parker-Smith says Walker's "modern women accept every challenge necessary to protect their mental and physical selves" (486). If we accept this assumption, then it can be said that Child's peace of mind cannot be attained until she is removed from her external atmosphere. In short, her agwu cannot be freed until she escapes, by any means necessary, the negativity surrounding her; death is her ultimate means of escape.
Chapter IV.
Revolution as an Obstacle to Unsuppressed AGWU

I have not labeled myself yet. I would like to call myself revolutionary, for I am always changing, and growing, it is hoped for the good of more black people. I do call myself black when it seems necessary to call myself anything, especially since I believe one's work rather than one's appearance adequately labels one.

-Alice Walker

Alice Walker's above definition of "revolutionary" fosters betterment and improvement regarding the societal conditions of Black people, but at the same time, she is committed to investigating the effect revolution has on Black women. "Her Sweet Jerome" and "Everyday Use" are stories in In Love and Trouble that examine the notion of change and advancement, but she is wary of the repercussions the inner spirit of the Black woman must endure in exchange for the progression of Black people as a whole.

Evidence of this is present in her novels, essays, and poems as well as the short stories mentioned above, particularly in Meridian, Alice Walker's second novel published three years after In Love and Trouble. This novel "chronicles the sexual and racial politics of the civil rights movement" ("Alice Walker" 903); the title character jeopardizes her own physical and emotional well-being, breathing the air from her frail body into the lungs of the Black revolution. The love Meridian has for "the cause" is greater than that for herself, but what does she gain from her commitment to Black people and Black power? As the novel journeys through Meridian's failed marriage, abandoned baby, and relationship with a Jewish woman, Walker portrays a woman whose agwu is in a continuous state of turmoil.
In "Meridian: Alice Walker's Critique of Revolution," Karen Stein asserts that Walker uses this novel to show that "the Movement failed to acknowledge women's selfhood and thus perpetuated the counterrevolutionary values of a destructive society" (129). I agree, but when looking at the protagonists in In Love and Trouble, I refuse to position these Black women as victims of various societal conventions such as sexism, racism, and in the case of Meridian, a human liberation movement that leaves her looking "like death eating a soda cracker" (Meridian 25).

Mrs. Jerome Franklin Washington, III

Similar to Walker's Meridian, the inner self of the protagonist in "Her Sweet Jerome" suffers at the hands of the Black revolution; however, Mrs. Jerome isn't a civil rights activist; in fact, she is totally unaware of the movement and her husband's participation in it. She suffers because of her naïveté, and her death at the close of the story serves as her only means of escape. In realizing and accepting this, we can understand that her troubled agwu is eternally released.

Identical to Child in "The Child Who Favored Daughter," the protagonist in this tale is known only by her relationship to someone else. But, unlike Child's, Mrs. Jerome's agwu is irritated by a myriad of internal and external factors, and this makes it very difficult to perceive her death as beneficial to her inner spirit. In other words, Child's inner self is already tranquil and calm, but Mrs. Jerome's is chaotic and unsettled. And yet, I continue to believe that as readers we must approach this story, as with most literary works that do not rest comfortably in the American canon, with adjusted expectations. Although "scholars of women's studies have accepted the work and lives of black women as their subject matter in a manner unprecedented in the American academy" (Gates 92), we have still been trained, by a male-dominated discourse, to anticipate certain actions (and
reactions) of these same Black women to correspond with those of their white, female counterparts. Appreciating the plight of Mrs. Jerome requires that we approach her story in an unconventional fashion.

Mrs. Jerome Franklin Washington, III is truly in love and trouble because of an unhealthy relationship with a man ten years younger than herself. Critic Mary Helen Washington labels her as a "suspended" woman because she cannot attain happiness until she removes herself from a "marriage that destroys her little by little" (92). When we first meet Mrs. Jerome she is rummaging through her husband's clothes, looking for some clue that will explain why he has further distanced himself from her. Financially, she does not need his support, and was "proud to say that she could make her own way ... she was fond of telling schoolteachers (women schoolteachers) that she didn't miss her 'eddicashion' as much as some did who had no learning and no money together" (Trouble 26). Nevertheless, her attention is diverted when she meets Jerome, a cute young schoolteacher, "dapper, every inch of a gentleman" (Trouble 26), but unfortunately, attracted to his wife only because of her father's money.

Baffled by their relationship, the townspeople, especially those sitting in Mrs. Jerome's beauty salon, assume Jerome is "'sticking his finger into somebody else's pie'" (Trouble 28). When she hears this, she lets her otherwise bulky figure turn flabby as she tramps around town looking for the reason her husband doesn't want to be intimate with her. "She turned the whole town upside down, looking at white girls, black women, brown beauties, ugly hags of all shades" (Trouble 29). To her total surprise, she discovers that the object of Jerome's affections is a stack of paperback books on Black power and revolution, and "with a sob she realized she didn't even know what the word 'revolution' meant, unless it meant to go round and round, the way her head was going" (Trouble 34). Walker intentionally alters the
connotation of revolution to illustrate Mrs. Jerome's non-progressive state of being; confused and frustrated, Mrs. Jerome burns her husband's books, ultimately setting fire to herself. Because of an "inherent weakness," she is unable to remove herself from the "denigrating and immoral situation in any other way" (Parker-Smith 486). What is it that shatters Mrs. Jerome's agwu? Specifically, why does suicide become her sole option once she learns of her husband's true love? In order to answer these questions, some attention must be given to her oppressive surroundings, including her abusive husband.

The effects of a racist society are not explored as deeply in "Her Sweet Jerome" as in other stories in In Love and Trouble, but Walker clearly attempts to expose sexism and its repercussions by painting for her reader a picture of Jerome that is different from the angelic one seen by his wife. Although he was "studiously quiet," he made a habit of "beating her black and blue," which she continuously denied. But this physical abuse, harmful to her exterior, wasn't as distressing as Jerome's belittling gestures and comments:

She could not open her mouth without him wincing and pretending he couldn't stand it... Other times, when he didn't bother to look up from his books and only muttered curses if she tried to kiss him good-bye, she did not know whether to laugh or cry. (Trouble 26-27)

When Walker reveals this, we realize the extent to which Mrs. Jerome's agwu is troubled, and we also understand more thoroughly why she is adamantly determined to find the "woman" her husband spends so much time with: She cannot accept that she is the problem, and by spending all her energy looking for an external excuse, she doesn't have to acknowledge her own shortcomings. For Mrs. Jerome, the truth is as painful as her death: Whether Jerome's passion burns for another woman or for the Black revolution itself, he doesn't want her.
When she burns their marriage bed and "the bits of words transformed themselves into luscious figures of smoke" (*Trouble* 34), she is expressing the sexuality that Jerome detested.

It is extremely difficult to free Mrs. Jerome's *agwu*. After all, unlike Child, she ends her own life, for once the flames and smoke in the bedroom have become unbearable, she backed "enraged and trembling into a darkened corner of the room, not near the open door [my emphasis]" (*Trouble* 34). The same revolution that praised Jerome as a "scholar" and an "intellectual" ridiculed and alienated Mrs. Jerome. In "Afrocentrism and Male-Female Relations in Church and Society," Delores S. Williams asserts that Afrocentrism and Black power do not serve the needs of Black women. She explains:

So what specifically is this Afrocentricism besides woman-exclusive?

According to its main proponent, [Molefi Kete] Asante, Afrocentrism is a spiritual and philosophical ideology (a state of living, thinking, and knowing) that places African American history, culture and African heritage at the center of black people's lives ... [but] Women are invisible in Afrocentrism until Asante begins to define the nature of male-female relationships within Afrocentric thinking. (46-7)

I agree, and it is dispiriting that Mrs. Jerome's marriage exists in name only; if the revolution and Afrocentrism were functioning at a level that encouraged the male-female relationships Williams speaks of, both Jerome and the community itself would have viewed the Washington's union as more than a cruel joke.

And yet, I believe Walker's strategic use of particular words and phrases indicates that Mrs. Jerome's life did not end without some gain on the part of her *agwu*. Careful insight reveals that Mrs. Jerome's death allows her to eliminate the cause of her unhappiness, thus liberating her internal spirit. For instance, it
appears as though Mrs. Jerome's suicide only eradicates her existence, but as she screams "I kill you! I kill you!" whom or what is she addressing? If we interpret this literally, we can say with certainty that she has destroyed the books that "ignorantly amused" her. But the books represent both her unloving husband and the revolution, and I would argue that although she allows herself to die, she takes with her that which brought her misery and anguish. Her situation is similar to that of Hannah Kemhuff, who dies knowing "the little moppet's" life is also drawing to a close. In short, there is a sense of satisfaction, for both Mrs. Jerome and Hannah, in knowing that their lives did not end in vain.

In addition, Mrs. Jerome's final moments disclose that her death, although physically painful, brought her gratification; Walker's manipulation of the concept of agony and ecstasy illustrates my point. Walker says, "... the fire and the words rumbled against her together, overwhelming her with pain and enlightenment" (*Trouble* 34). Mrs. Jerome discovered she had ultimately found a means of expressing her anger, and her endless attempts to find Jerome's "other woman" had proven successful. Her life was the only possession she had to render, a meager price to pay for the freedom of her agwu.

In "The Civil Rights Movement: What good was it?" Walker comments on the Black revolution and its ability (or inability) to advance Blacks' position through education and knowledge. She says, "Man only truly lives by knowing; otherwise he simply performs ... accepting someone else's superiority and his own misery" (121-22). I feel that Mrs. Jerome doesn't truly live until her naivete has been eradicated. Simultaneously, her agwu, fed by truth, acceptance and self-worth, is not freed until she dies. Parker-Smith says that for Walker's characters "death is never lamented. There is no jumping up and shouting and falling out after her deaths. Rather, one feels a calmness, a hush prevailing [my emphasis]"
(489). Although it is indeed a challenge, this "calmness" noticed by Parker-Smith can be found once Hannah Kemhuff, Child and Mrs. Jerome's physical beings have ceased. All one has to do is tune in to the "hush prevailing" of their (Walker's protagonists) liberated internal spirits, and one, anyone, can hear the resonant sound of silence.
Lost my voice?
Of course.

You said "Poems of
love and flowers are
a luxury the Revolution
cannot afford."

Here are the warm and juicy
vocal cords,
slithery,
from my throat.

Allow me to press them upon
your fingers,
as you have pressed
that bloody voice of yours
in places it could not know
to speak,
nor how to trust.

Alice Walker-
"Lost My Voice? Of Course."
Mama, Dee and Maggie

"Everyday Use" is probably Alice Walker's most widely anthologized short story, and much has been written about the tale and its relevance to family, cultural identity and the art of quilting as an African American pastime. However, in continuing with my theme I want to examine the personal spirits of the three women in the story, including Mama, Dee and Maggie. When the story opens, Mama and her daughter Maggie have just cleaned the front yard of their Southern home. Maggie is "homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs," Mama is "a big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands" who watches protectively over Maggie, and they are both waiting for Dee, who is "lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure" (Trouble 47-9), to return to her country home for a visit. She has been away at a school in Augusta, and during previous trips home Mama says she "washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know" (Trouble 50).

When Dee arrives, she is with "a short, stocky man" with hair "a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tale" (Trouble 52). However, it is her appearance, extravagant, bright and Afrocentric, that grasps the attention of Mama and Dee. Everything about her defines her presence as culturally hip, including the first words out of her mouth: "Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" As readers, to some extent we accept Dee's cultural awareness as beneficial, and we are not wary when she snaps numerous pictures of her family and her meager house. For a moment, Walker even tricks us into thinking Dee is proud of her home, and we are not terribly bothered when she demands to be called by her Afrocentric name, "Wangero Lee-wanika Kemanjo," proclaiming she has abandoned her slave name.

Christian says, "she has returned to her black roots because now they are
fashionable ... Ironically, in keeping with the times, Dee has changed her name to Wangero, denying the existence of her namesake, even as she covets the quilts ... [she] made" ("Wayward" 86). The quilts Christian refers to becomes the element that reveals Dee's true intention, which is to lay "claim to various homemade items fadishly valued as decorations" (Richards 447). These quilts, made by Dee and Maggie's grandmother and great-grandmother, are cherished and appreciated by Maggie, who has learned the skill itself and treasures the cultural significance of each piece of the quilts. Mama says of these quilts:

After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. (Trouble 56)

Up to this point in this tale, Mama, Dee and Maggie's spiritual states are relatively obvious. For example, we know Mama is a strong maternal figure, accepting of the faults and attributes of both her daughters. And we know Maggie is timid and lacks assertiveness, yet is tied closely to her family background. (Ironically, it is her unappreciative sister who receives the family's name.) Dee, we believe, is sound and comfortable with her agwu, one fed by education and experiences beyond a dirt-covered front yard.

But, when Mama denies Dee the quilts and gives them to Maggie (who, culturally, has more of a right to them than Dee), Wangero becomes angry and yells that, "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! ... She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use" (Trouble 57). Immediately we know that
Dee's inner spirit is off-balance because she has abandoned community, the root of any culture. On the other hand, "Maggie is not aware of the word heritage. But she loves her grandma and cherishes her memory in the quilts she made. Maggie has accepted the spirit that was passed on to her" (Christian, "Wayward" 87).

Essentially, I believe the above is the difference between Dee and Maggie, for although Dee looks, in appearance, like one in touch with the true meaning of culture and tradition, she is more in tune with how others will react to the antique quilt she plans to hang on her wall. In short, Dee doesn't realize that by redefining her family's inventions as mere cultural artifacts, she is forfeiting her ability to truly connect with her heritage.

In addition, Maggie, in contrast to Dee, is dressed plainly and has a simple name, but her ability to connect spiritually with her ancestry demonstrates that because she is timid, soft-spoken, and stays close to her family's history, she is more in tune with her inner spirit, her agwu, than Dee could ever be. When Maggie tells Mama that Dee can have the quilts because she "can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts,'" Maggie confirms for us, as readers, that she draws strength from her sense of community and family and doesn't need the idealized concept of Afrocentrism to define or reinforce her Black-ness. Further, from the reactions of Dee and Maggie, I believe Walker is again questioning the notion that change is equivalent to advancement and betterment. Instead, she is asserting that culture can be found within one's self, and is easily lost when one, such as Dee, is blind to her true identity. Christian adds, "Walker challenged the idealistic view of Africa as an image, a beautiful artifact to be used by Afro-Americans in their pursuit of racial pride" ("Wayward" 83). Pride in one's race, I believe, cannot be demonstrated by physical elements, and Maggie, unlike Dee, realizes this as truth. In From Civil Rights to Black Liberation, William W. Sales,
Jr., adds that the Civil Right Movement's failure to nourish the relationship between self and community was one of its major flaws:

While the opportunity to participate in nonviolent direct action was an important part of the process of psychologically redeeming southern Blacks, the Civil Rights Movement generated no specific demands relevant to the protection and enhancement of the cultural identity of the African American. (45).

If Sales' assertion is plausible, then it is logical that Dee and Mama have identified, to an extent surpassing Dee, with their culture and sense of family and community.

And finally, the condition of Mama's spirit is healthy and solid because of her self-acceptance. For instance, sometimes she daydreams she is on a television show where she and Dee are reunited, but she knows her reality consists of her daughter constantly wishing she was "a hundred pounds lighter" with "skin like an uncooked barley pancake" (Trouble 48). Still, Mama's agwu is further developed when she takes a stand against Dee, giving the quilts to her plain, quiet Maggie. In "Patches: Quilts and Community in Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'," Houston Baker, Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker contend that "Maggie is the arisen goddess of Walker's story; she is the sacred figure who bears the scarifications of experience and knows how to convert patches into robustly patterned and beautifully quilted wholes" (162). I believe that Mama, not blinded by the unnecessaries of life, recognizes this wonderful characteristic of her daughter, and acts out of a spiritual love when she "snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap" (Trouble 58). Walker summarizes the peaceful agwus of Maggie and Mama at the close of the story, just as Dee, irritated by both of them, returns to a heritage that has little to do with the true meaning of
the word. Walker writes:

Maggie smiled ... a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

(Trouble 59)

Walker's concept of revolution, that of change and growth, manifests in the final glimpse we have of the lives of Maggie and Mama. They have both undergone a type of transformation: Maggie has learned that her sense of self gives her the strength to face the world with brevity, and Mama realizes how precious her Maggie, scarred hands and all, truly is.

In "Her Sweet Jerome" and "Everyday Use" Walker explores revolution, a controversial issue for many living in the 1960's and early 1970's. But she is ambiguous about the effect "change" has on Black women. In reading her stories, we must question if change is genuinely beneficial. Obviously, illustrated through Wangero, the inner spirits of Black women are sometimes injured as activists rally for "the good of more black people" (Walker, Same River). But if you're Mrs. Jerome, what does the revolution get you? Death? Ridicule? Again, Walker's ambivalence and complex understanding require a patient probing on the part of her readers to seek answers to questions she deems fundamental and critical to the spiritual growth of Black women.
CHAPTER V. FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR: APPROACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE WITH ALTERED EXPECTATIONS

Alice Walker's *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* gives voice to women who might, without the venue provided by Walker, remain silenced and forgotten. Reading this collection of short stories is by no means a comfortable experience. It is difficult to read the trials and tribulations of Walker's protagonists without feeling anger at the racist, sexist societal conventions they must battle. In addition, we are saddened by their troubles, and we wish we could somehow help these women. However, this leads to our most difficult experience: We feel hopeless because we know we cannot help these women out of their predicaments, nor can we pretend their circumstances are different or nonexistent. As a Black woman, I feel a connection to Walker's women that is eerie in nature; yet, at the same time, I believe this sensation allows me to be optimistic about their fates. Perhaps this comes from my own experiences, where the end results of various circumstances may have appeared to be disastrous to others, but were the only way out for myself. In short, the choices we all make in life depend heavily on our personal situations; no one has an obligation (or right) to place judgment on the decisions we make in life. Because "the women in this volume truly are 'in love and trouble' due in large measure to the roles, relationships, and self-images imposed upon them by a society which knows little and cares less about them as individuals" (Petry 13), this same society should avoid labeling their actions or placing them in the same victimized roles Black women have struggled to escape for centuries.

Walker's women, as difficult as it may be to believe, do what is necessary to free their inner spirits, and sometimes that means the destruction of their physical selves. This is difficult to accept, but as Petry concurs, *In Love and
Trouble was necessary if Walker was to follow it with her second collection of short stories, *You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down* (1981). The difference between the two is easy to ascertain from the titles alone. In *Good Woman*, Walker portrays the Black woman who is, to a large extent, victorious over her male counterpart. In fact, it may be said that the roles are reversed. That is, in *In Love and Trouble*, the Black men are the oppressors, and they keep the good women in these thirteen stories down (and sometimes out). This may very well be the reason why the personal spirits, or *agwus*, of the women in the 1981 collection are less troubled. Nevertheless, when examining the spiritual health of Walker’s protagonists, it is imperative that we examine closely their environments as well as the obstacles they must battle. In doing this, we can better understand their *agwus*, and this, in turn, allows us to appreciate the various ways these same *agwus* seek freedom. Through my analysis I have concluded that based on the circumstances of Roselily, Hannah Kemhuff, Myrna, Child, Mrs. Jerome, Dee, Maggie and Mama, each of them does what is necessary to attain the spiritual peace we are all, in our individual ways, constantly striving for.

I have analyzed only six of the thirteen stories in *Trouble*, but I would encourage readers of the remaining seven tales to approach their protagonists in the same manner as myself. For instance, when reading "Strong Horse Tea," a story about a young mother who believes horse urine will cure her ailing son, remember the spirit of Hannah Kemhuff, who died believing a rootworker would avenge her death. Rannie Toomer, the mother in "Strong Horse Tea," believed the urine would serve as the cure. And, even though her son died, *her agwu* was, to some extent, released because she had the courage to take matters into her own hands; Rannie Toomer realized that only she, not the white, racist postman or the town doctor, had enough compassion and determination to do anything necessary
to save her baby boy. Readers of the works of Black women writers must remember that just as the stories themselves are culturally, uniquely different, so are the choices the characters have in life equally different from what we have been exposed to in various "canonized" works.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


