



THE EARLY LIFE OF ALICE WALKER AND ROLE OF HER CREATIVE WORK IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article is about initial period of Alice Malsenior Walker's life and her works that have great importance in American literature. Also this paper is intended to inform basic facts about her status, activism and great contribution in the society of America. A Century before, women started to think about the importance of their roles in society. In all over the world and by all the means, women wanted to change their situation or traditional place in the society this lead to series of strikes marches that aimed to prove their equality to men. During the first and second world war, woman participation in the society emerged because she replaced man who went to the war inside and outside the house.

Alice Malsenior Walker was born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. Her life and childhood coincided with difficult and dangerous times. When she was eight years old, she was playing with her two brothers when one of them shot her in the eye with a BB gun. The injury caused irreparable damage to the girl, Alice turned from a brave, self-confident child interested in adult affairs into a shy and lonely girl. Walker immersed herself in her studies, consistently getting excellent grades, and after graduation won a scholarship to Spelman College, a prestigious black women's school in Atlanta, Georgia. After two years, Walker went to Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. There she majored in literature and studied Latin poetry and history in depth. Walker finished Sarah Lawrence in 1965, and three years later she published the poetry collection.

In 1965, Walker met Melvin Rosenman Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights attorney. They were married on March 17, 1967 in New York City. Later that year, the couple moved to Jackson, Mississippi, becoming the first interracial couple in Mississippi to have a legal marriage. They were persecuted and threatened by whites, including the Ku Klux Klan. The couple had a daughter, Rebecca, in 1969. Walker and her husband divorced in 1976.

In the late 1970s, Walker moved north to California. Walker is the co-founder of Wild Tree Press, a feminist publishing company in Anderson Valley, California. He and fellow writer Robert L. Allen founded it in 1984.



In the mid-1990s, Walker was involved in a romance with songwriter Tracy Chapman, "It was delicious and sweet and wonderful and I was really into him and I was totally in love with him, but it was nobody's business but ours."

Walker's spirituality also played a large role in his personal life, influencing some of his more famous novels, such as *The Color Purple*. Her religious views were defined in terms of the barren woman as a means of uplifting black women. The study of religion in many of Walker's writings was heavily inspired by other writers such as Zora Neale Hurston. Some literary critics, such as Alma Freeman, have even said that Walker regarded her as a spiritual sister. Walker wrote: "At some point I learned about Transcendental Meditation. That was 30 years ago. It naturally brought me back to the way I was as a child growing up in the country, rarely seeing people. I was in a state of unity with creation and it was as if I did not exist as a part of everything".

By the mid-1970s, Walker turned to her inspirations from the Harlem Renaissance period of the early 20th century. In 1974, Walker wrote a biography of poet Langston Hughes (1902–1967), and the following year she published a description of her research with Charlotte Hunt, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," in *Ms.* magazine. Walker is credited with reviving interest in Neale Hurston (1891–1960), a writer/anthropologist. Her novel "Meridian" was released in 1976, and the subject was the civil rights movement in the South. Her next novel, "The Color Purple," changed her life. Walker's poems, novels, and short stories frankly deal with rape, violence, isolation, troubled relationships, bisexuality, multigenerational perspectives, sexism, and racism: things she was familiar with from personal experiences.

'The Color Purple' and Important Books. When "The Color Purple" was released in 1982, Walker gained an even wider audience. Her Pulitzer Prize and the movie directed by Steven Spielberg brought both fame and controversy. She was widely criticized for negative portrayals of men in "The Color Purple," though many critics admitted that the film presented more simplistic negative pictures than the book's more nuanced portrayals.

As London-based bookseller Shapero Rare Books pointed out, "The Color Purple" has been the target of book bans in the United States: The book "has been banned by school boards across the United States since its publication due to the vivid depictions of violence, particularly rape; offensive language; sexual content, with scenes of lesbian love; and perceived racism." The banning of the book, particularly with its note of "perceived racism," is seen by some as troubling, as there are so few Black women authors included on high school and college reading lists.

In addition to "The Color Purple," there is much debate about which of Walker's books are her most important. Early Bird Books, a website that offers free and discounted e-books and author interviews, excerpts from new novels, thematic reading lists, and book club recommendations, says readers should consider the following:

- "Revolutionary Petunias," a 1973 book of Walker's poems for which she won several prestigious awards.
- "You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down," a 1981 collection of short stories. "From cultural theft to misogyny, Walker writes about the terrible things that can happen to women," Greta Shull writes on the Early Bird Books website.



- "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," a 1983 collection of essays in which "Walker writes about everything from political movements to other writers," Shull notes.
- "Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful," a 1984 volume of Walker's poems covering themes of anger, hope, and comfort.
- "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," a 1985 collection of essays in which "Walker writes about everything from political movements to other writers," Shull notes.

Her first novel, published in 1970, was *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. During this time, Walker also worked as an editor at "Khonim" magazine. Gloria Steinem, editor-in-chief of *Ms.*, was very supportive of Walker's efforts, ideas, and writings. In 1976, Walker's second novel, "Meridian," the story of a woman fighting for civil rights in the American South, was published. In 1982, Walker received the Pulitzer Prize for Literature for her third novel, *The Color Purple*. After this great achievement, in 1983, she published the collection of essays "Looking for our mothers' gardens", and in 1984, the collection of poems "Horses make the landscape more beautiful". She has also published *My Acquaintance's Temple* (1989) and *Mastering the Secret of Joy* (1992), as well as children's books and nonfiction. [1]

She was active in the Civil Rights Movement as a student. While passionate about this political activism, along with changes in American literature, Walker was inspired by a keen awareness of human rights and the black experience, particularly the desire to represent the black female voice in literature.

Alice Walker is one of the most valued, active, and courageous black writers in the United States today. She is best known for his novels, particularly *The Color Purple*, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize. She is also the author of poems, short stories, essays and autobiographical works. Walker's work focused on the perspective and experiences of black people, that is, she critically covered the rights of African-American women in society in her works. She often faced criticism because she took a revolutionary approach to criticizing white racist attitudes, black patriarchy, and misogyny. In fact, many of her works explore life in African-American communities rather than directly, and involve discussions of their experiences with white society. Walker's fiction is mostly realistic, but it is sometimes woven with spiritual and supernatural elements. She tends to avoid linear, or unrealistic, narratives and other conventions that he feels are part of the white Western literary tradition. Instead, her work shows the influence of nineteenth-century slavery narratives as well as black folklore. She placed great emphasis on the African language throughout her work, and is also recognized for showing the importance and status of the African language. [2]

Feminism and womanism are the main themes of Alice Walker's stories. She always pays attention to the problems of women in the society and expresses them critically in his works. She was concerned about the upliftment of the subjugated people in society and his literary works were the medium of his social activism. In 1983, Walker introduced the term "womanism," meaning "black feminist or feminist of color," into American literature in her collection, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. The term refers to the unification of black women and the feminist movement "at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression." "Womanism gives us our own voice," Walker says, "because it's the talk of black women and the issues they face in society."



Walker's specific brand of feminism included advocacy on behalf of women of color. In 1983, Walker coined the term womanist in her collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, to mean "a black feminist or feminist of color". The term was made to unite women of color and the feminist movement at "the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression". Walker states that "'Womanism' gives us a word of our own" because it is a discourse of Black women and the issues they confront in society. Womanism as a movement came into fruition in 1985 at the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature to address Black women's concerns from their own intellectual, physical, and spiritual perspectives."

After Alice Walker founded the theory of "womanism", she critically covered the rights, social and political problems of black women in her works. In her novels, the place, status and several problems of black women in society were sharply criticized and expressed within the framework of the law. The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970), Meridian (1976), The Color Purple (1982), The Temple of My Familiar (1989) and Now is the Novels such as Time to Open Your Heart (2004) highlighted the social issues of black women. Several collections of his stories, poetry and other writings have been published. Her work focuses on the struggles of black people, especially women, and their lives in a racist and violent society. In 2000, Walker released a collection of short fiction based on her own life called "The Way Forward With a Broken Heart," which explores love and race relations. In this book, Walker details her interracial relationship with Melvin Rosenman Leventhal, a civil rights attorney working in Mississippi. [3]

In 2007, Walker donated her collection of 122 boxes of manuscripts and archival materials to Emory University's Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Book Library. The collection includes drafts of novels such as The Color Purple, unpublished poems and manuscripts, and extensive correspondence with family, friends and colleagues, in addition to correspondence with editors. The collection also includes a book of poems called "Poems of a Childhood Poet" written by Walker when she was 15. Logan. In 2013, Alice Walker published two new books, one of which is called "Pillow on the Road: Meditation and Walking as the World Wakes Up to Being in Harm's Way." The second book of poems entitled "Follows the happiness that turns madness into a flower" (New poems) was published.

Collections of novels and short stories by Alice Walker:

- The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970)
- Love and Trouble: Stories by Black Women (1973, including "Everyday Use")
- Meridian (1976)
- The Color Purple (1982)
- You Can't Keep A Good Woman: Stories (1982)
- To Hell with Death (1988)
- Temple of My Acquaintance (1989)
- Finding the Green Stone (1991)
- Possession of the Secret of Joy (1992)
- Complete Stories (1994)
- By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998)
- The Way Forward Is With Heart (2000)
- Now's the Time to Open Your Heart (2004)



Poetry collections

- Once Upon a Time (1968)
- Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems (1973)
- Goodnight Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning (1979)
- Horses Make the Scenery More Beautiful (1985)
- Her Blue Body All We Know: Poems About Earth (1991)
- Absolute Faith in the Goodness of the Earth (2003)
- A Poem Traveled to My Wrist: Poems and Pictures (2003)
- Collected Poems (2005)
- Hard Times Call for Furious Dancing: New Poems (2010)
- A Bullet Through the Heart (2018)

Non-fiction books

- In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: A Woman's Prose (1983)
- Living by the Word (1988)
- Warrior Characters (1993)
- The Same River Twice: Honoring the Challenge (1996)
- What We Love Can Be Saved: Writer's Activism (1997)
- There's a Girl!: The Travels and Adventures of a Black Woman (1997)
- Pema Chodron and Alice Walker in Conversation (1999)
- Sent from the Earth: A Message from a Grandmother's Spirit After the World Trade Center and Pentagon Bombings (2001)
- What We Expected (2006)
- Overcoming Silence (2010)
- Chicken Chronicles, A Book of Memories (2011)
- A Pillow on the Road - Meditation and Wanderlust as the World Turns to Harm (2013)

Essays:

- "Beauty: When Another Dancer Is Herself" (1983)

In conclusion, Alice Walker writes about her own youth and development into a woman and shows how gender roles in childhood are more flexible in her own case, she was an eight-year-old tomboy, a term that itself is an imposed gender role. In fact, she was herself, acting out the attitudes she had as a child, reflecting her culture, and developing as a person. After an accident occurs to her eye, leaving her unable to see clearly out of it, she yearns for the eye to repair itself so she can be "normal," can achieve a state she calls "beauty." In this case, she is not concerned about the standard of beauty imposed on women by men but rather on simply appearing to be like other people.

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