

Reading *The Color Purple* from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

Lianghong Wu

The Faculty of Foreign Languages, Huaiyin Institute of Technology, Huai'an, Jiangsu 223001, China

Abstract—Alice Walker is one of the most influential black female writers in modern America. The summit of her literary achievements, *The Color Purple*, wins her three awards since its publication and becomes a milestone in the black literature. This paper sums up the three stages of the relationship between human, women in particular, and nature---fragmentation, over-sewing and wholeness. In this novel, Walker attempts to arouse black women's self-consciousness by showing the fragmentation state of black women and nature under oppressions. She looks for ways of oversewing the broken souls to realize the wholeness of survival. Advocating people to attach importance to the problems of women and environment, Walker expresses her ecofeminist consciousness to establish a harmonious society where human and nature, men and women could co-existent peacefully.

Index Terms—Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, ecofeminism

I. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ALICE WALKER AND *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Alice Walker is one of the most influential writers in contemporary American literary field. She is not only the first black female Pulitzer winner in American history, but also reputed as a writer comprehensively representing our times. Walker, coining the term “Womanism”, is the spokeswoman of the black women in America who have been ignored by the main-stream culture. Actually, most of her works are feminist- and black-oriented, which go deep into their inner world, portray their suffering, awakening, resistance and independence, and speak highly of their tenacious living ability and strong will of fighting in adversity as well.

The Color Purple, generally considered one of her best works, won her three great American literary awards since its publication in 1982 and is undoubtedly regarded as a great and long lasting masterpiece of American literature. It has captured intensive attention in both western and domestic critical circles. Critics' research on it covers a wide range of topics. The theme of the novel and the characterization are often the major concerns of scholars. For example, Judith Plant interprets the subject about Celie's status and believes that holding the naming right can make a forceful stand against fatalism and sexism. (Plant, 1989). There also exists certain research on religion and culture revealed in the novel, as Li Jin points out the importance of religion and culture for the rebirth of black women. (Li, 2004). Some essays have been devoted to “womanism” in this novel, among which Dr. Wang Xiaoying, shows clearly that the pursuit of human's whole survival, permeating Walker's literary creation, constitutes the soul of womanism advocated by Walker. (Wang, 2006). Some other comments tend to discuss the writing techniques employed in the book, including the narrative strategies, epistolary structure, the language features, etc.

These critics at home and abroad do provide deep insight and broad perspectives for the reader to understand the works better. Undoubtedly the close link between race, gender and nature demonstrated by Walker in the novel does deserve further studies. This thesis intends to read *The Color Purple* from the ecofeminist perspective, and offer a relatively comprehensive and detailed look into Walker's ecofeminist consciousness in order to evoke more people's environmental awareness and to make it easier to build a harmonious world.

II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ECOFEMINISM

Since the 1950s, as people are aware of the constantly deteriorating crisis of ecology and the necessity of survival in a clearer way, the ecological and greening thoughts have spread to every corner of human society. With the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a milestone in both ecological history and eco-literature, the ecological movement flourished in the late sixties and early seventies insisting on new vision of society on a par with the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and women's movement. But that was far from perfect since the close relationship between female and ecology hasn't been paid much attention to. Under this circumstance, ecofeminism appears, in the 1970s, as a social and political movement sharing the considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminists point out that the patriarchal world view leads to the oppression of women and the destruction and misuse of nonhuman nature in the male-dominated culture.

Ecofeminism was first coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* in 1974. Spretnak, a classic ecofeminist, defines ecofeminism as “a joining of environmental, feminist, and women's spiritual concerns.” (Spretnak, 1990, p.5-6) Warren asserts that “what makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature

and naturism are feminist issues.” (Warren, 1997, p.4). Susan Griffin, in *Woman and Nature*, states that women have some level of communion with nature that men can not attain. Though the understanding of ecofeminism varies from person to person, ecofeminists share a common awareness of the inextricable connections between women and nature.

Ecofeminists advocate the need to establish a harmonious society that connects nature and humans, male and female, rich and poor. As a black woman writer, Walker expresses her eagerness for the equality of all the living things in the world. In *The Color Purple*, Walker describes her deep concern for the binary oppositions between male and female, humans and nature, and her worries about the earth environment and the status of women. In the novel, the relationship between male and female, humans and nature is in progress and it experiences three different stages for fragmentation, oversewing and wholeness.

III. FRAGMENTATION--WOMEN AND NATURE: VICTIMS OF THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

According to ecofeminists, the exploitation of women and domination of nature are interconnected, which is the result of Western male dominance. In other words, both women and nature are the victims of patriarchy. The main task of ecofeminists is to criticize the patriarchal oppression of women and nature. In *The Color Purple*, both the relationships between human and nature and that of men and women are previously in a state of fragmentation. Women and nature have long been rendered objects of attention, domination and conquest by patriarchy, which make them in an inferior position. They both lie in the marginalized area of the world.

A. *The Maltreatments of Black Women*

In *The Color Purple*, Walker expresses her deep sympathy for the black women by depicting their dual oppressions from racism and sexism in patriarchal society. They are tortured both mentally and physically, deprived of all the rights and even their status and individuality.

The racial conflict between the black and the white in this novel is very conspicuous. The white people constitute the mainstream of the society and have all the privileges over the black. They think they are the saviors of the black who have freed them from slavery, so they have the right to rule them. Therefore black women are always expected to keep obedient and those who dare to resist will undoubtedly have severe penalty. Sophia is just a typical victim of racism in the novel. Although a black girl, she fights frequently against someone who does wrong to her, including the mayor of the city. Yet unfortunately, her struggle couldn't change her fate, instead, it brings her tragedy. Because of her sassing the mayor's wife and hitting the mayor, she is put in prison where she experiences all kinds of hardships one can imagine: being beat, humiliated and forced to do hard jobs. What's worse is that she is then transferred to the mayor's home as a maid. In this way, she is tortured and the white people finally attain their aim to make her as submissive as other black women.

Being at the bottom of the society, besides racism, another major threat to the black women is from sexism, which involves rape, deprivation of rights, and psychological control. In *The Color Purple*, the female characters are considered to be mules, whose will is subjugated to the will of the men. As victims of patriarchy and male chauvinism, most of them have the experience of being raped, being deprived of basic human rights and finally become psychologically controlled by men.

Take Celie, the protagonist of this novel, as an example. She is raped by her stepfather when she is only 14 years old and later gives birth to two children. After her stepfather's repeated physical and sexual violence, Celie is sold to a widower with four children to tend to. It's her industriousness and obedience as well as an attached cow that leads to the widow's decision of marrying her. However, this marriage doesn't eliminate any slightest oppressions she suffers but throws her into another "cage". To the widower, her so-called husband, she is nothing but a laborer in the field, a worker for domestic household and a sexual servant.

According to the traditional western culture, women are universalized as passive, fragile and inferior to men. Then the black women are in the poorer condition, who are stripped of all the rights and hence lose their individuality. Firstly, the black women are deprived of economic freedom. In the *The Color Purple*, the Olinka women are the ones who work hard in the field, with their husbands idling about all day long, but nothing in the household belong to them. Without money to support themselves, women could only depend on men for survival. Secondly, the black women hardly have opportunity to receive education. In the novel, Celie isn't the only one forbidden to school by men. In Olinka in Africa, girls are kept at home to do housework while boys go to school. Since they believe knowledge is power, men are afraid if women possess the power, women may find out the truth hidden by the regime and finally endanger their authority. Thirdly, the black women are stripped of their right to speak. In the novel, those who desire to make their inner thoughts heard will be cruelly beaten by men. The patriarchal authority makes women keep silent so that men's crimes could be concealed and their exploitation of women will never cease.

The black women in the novel, with the traditional idea that women are born to be humble, do believe without doubts that they are inferior to men, and they ought to put up with all these tortures poured onto them. This kind of mental torture is actually the most severe misfortune for them and by doing so men could practice their supremacy through their psychological control over women. Oppressed both physically and mentally, the black women are bearing the burdens that everyone else refuses to carry, and play roles of mule in patriarchal society. They lose their status and individuality. Simone de Beauvoir writes in the introduction to *The Second Sex* that "She is defined and differentiated

with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other” (Beauvoir, 1972, p.16). It’s self-evident that women, without independent status and identities, couldn’t escape the fate to be men’s accessories or playthings in male-dominated society.

B. *The Devastations of Nature*

In western culture, nature has always been considered something to be suppressed and overcome and natural resources should be used to serve the needs of men. In fact, human beings’ attitude toward nature could be traced back in the Bible. When God creates everything in the world, he says, “... let them (humankind) have domination...over creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” “I have given you every plant ...and every tree; you shall have them for food.”(Holy Bible, 2) Having been greatly influenced by this value, human beings have no doubts that they are the controllers and masters of nature. As a result, they have a random exploitation of nature, which leads to the destruction of the natural world.

With the emergence of environmental crisis, the protection of nature has become an international issue of increasing significance. More and more people get to know the crisis of ecology and start to explore the root of it. Rachel Carson criticizes that mankind has sought to insulate himself, in his cities of steel and concrete, from the realities of the earth and water and the growing seed. Intoxicated with a sense of his own power, he seems to be going further and further into more experiments for the destruction of himself and his world. Ecofeminist believe human’s over-exploitation of nature is rooted in anthropocentrism. In other words, men’s domination of all the creatures in nature leads to the devastation of nature. Walker, along with other ecofeminists, attacks chauvinistic and anthropocentric views about nature, seeing nature as the source of energy, the place where everything coexists. In *The Color Purple*, in order to arouse people’s attention to the disastrous natural world, she presents before the reader the environmental deterioration in Olinka.

According to Nettie’s letters, Olinka previously is a peaceful village located in Africa where people live in a “place without walls but with a leaf roof” (Walker, 1982, p.141). And there are “trees and trees and then more trees on top of that. They are so big they look like they were built. And vines. And ferns. And little animals. Frogs. Snakes too.” (Walker, 1982, p.139). The natives live in a peaceful natural environment. But the appearance of the white road builders breaks the harmonious scenery. It is posited that almost overnight, the Olinka village turns to be the territory of the white colonists with the fields being occupied, huts leveled, leaves of the trees cut away. In addition, the victims of this ecological disaster include not only the Olinka village but also its neighbor villages. The white colonizers aim to turn the village into a headquarter of the rubber industry by replacing the forest with rubber trees. The biological balance is completely destroyed with the animals nowhere to stay, and local people being expelled away from their homeland and forced to buy water from the planters. The white colonists, under the cloak of modern civilization, succeed in conquering the peaceful creatures there and destroying the previous ecological environment as well.

As above-mentioned, Olinka is not the only place that suffers from deterioration. According to Doris Baines, a sixty-five-year-old woman whom Nettie and Samuel meet on their way back to England, signs of war are all over Africa and India. Trees are hauled off to make ships and captain’s furniture, while the land is planted with something people can’t eat. Animals are also victims of advanced human society from the primitive one to modern one, with their meat cooked into food, fur made into clothing, bones into ornament.

In addition to arousing people’s attention to the problem of environment, Walker’s portrait of the destructiveness of nature in the novel implies her attack against the dominant hierarchy system and the mainstream western anthropocentric aggression. There’s another point in the novel that needs to be noted. Before the aggression of the white colonists, people in Olinka have gone through the disaster caused by their destroying the balance of ecology. This experience teaches them the lesson of the importance of keeping a harmonious relationship with nature and this lesson is then passed on from generation to generation among them. However, their awareness isn’t enough to protect themselves and their natural world. The white people’s colonialism once again puts them in the environmental crisis. Here, Walker intends to criticize the conspiracy of racism and colonialism that leads to the severe ecological crisis. She is convinced that economic profits drive men to over-exploit nature and it’s men’s inherent depravity that bring about their reckless oppression to nature. Walker believes that only when all human beings tend to protect environment consciously and put themselves in the same position as nature, could all the creatures in the world live peacefully and harmoniously.

C. *Natural Alliance between Women and Nature*

From what’s analyzed above, it’s self-evident that women and nature share the same miserable fate under common oppressions. The connection between women and nature lies biologically in women’s reproductive roles as child-bearers as well as the language used to describe women and nature: women are often described in animal terms such as cows, foxes, etc. On other hand, nature is often described in female and sexual terms: nature is raped, mastered, conquered, and controlled. Because of this interconnection, when suffering from oppression, women tend to get merged with nature to pursue power and comfort from it; whereas being happy, they can also generate resonance with nature. Based on the fact, it truly brings the two together so closely that they form natural alliance, a strategy of vital to overcome and survive the patriarchal society. In the novel, there are many natural images bearing this kind of

characteristic like tree, the hut in Olinka, etc.

In *The Color Purple*, natural alliance between women and nature first presents itself in the close relation existing between women and tree. Trees have always been described as the selfless giver in various cultures. Walker has emphasized this view that “we are connected to them (the animals) at least as intimately as we are connected to trees.” (Walker, 1999, p.310) In *The Color Purple*, Celie regards tree as her redeemer, whenever she is beaten, she tells herself: “all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That’s how come I know trees fear man.” (Walker, 1982:30) She, in adversity, is so helpless and powerless that she can only turn to the trees for comfort. Shug Avery has special affections to trees, too. As for her, trees also have feelings and ought to be protected. She says “My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people...being cut, the arm would bleed and people would feel pain; being felled, the tree would also bleed.” (Walker.1982, p.185)

The hut in Olinka also displays the inseparable relations between women and nature. In Nettie’s narration, the hut, “unlike their school, which is square, and unlike their church, which doesn’t have walls---at least during the dry season---the hut is round, walled, with a round roofleaf roof.” (Walker.1982, p.158) As is known that square represents law, rule and order, while round is symbolic of nature, peace and comfort. Therefore round has special appeal to women. From women’s affections to hut, it can be said that their outpouring of love for nature is obvious. It just reflects from another aspect the natural alliance between women and nature in the novel.

Nature constitutes the tie closely connecting women. Women’s life can’t be separated from nature, and their real psychological protector is not God but nature. In *The Color Purple*, Celie and her sister Nettie, though separated from a long distance, enjoy mutual telepathy and resonance in their hearts through nature. As long as they are under the same sky, they can gaze into the eyes and share the feelings of each other. Through their arduous work in the fields Olinka women do strengthen their affections to nature. and become allies with nature.

Another close alliance between women and nature lies in the fact they are oppressed and dominated by men. With the probe into the inner connections between women and nature, ecofeminists get to know that the root of domination over women and nature is the Western traditional thought---hierarchical dualism which divides the world into pairs of entities, such as men and women, human and nature, mind and body. In each pair, the first entity is always in a superior position to the second one, the common things the two entities share being ignored and differences being over-emphasized. This idea could explain why women and nature have become the objects of the male control in patriarchal society. By showing this point in the novel, Walker just deduces that to end the oppression of women and nature people must transcend the most basic conceptual categories of hierarchical dualism.

Just as what Walt Whitman, a prominent American poet, remarks, “Each of us inevitable; each of us limitless---each of us with his or her right upon the earth; each of us allowed the eternal purports of the earth; each of us here as divinely as any is here.” (Whitman, 2004, p. 27) It advocates for the equal right between men and women and pursues for eternal co-existence, which is one of core goals of ecofeminism. Although human beings have power gaining over nature, they ought to use it in a humanistic way. Otherwise, they would end with being destroyed by nature.

IV. OVERSEWING--THE AWAKENING OF HUMAN AND THE REVENGE OF NATURE

Too much water drowned the miller. Neither women nor nature would like to receive the torture from men willingly. Men’s unbearable oppression on women and insatiable demands for nature will finally meet resistance from women and revenge from nature. It can be proved from feminist movement started from the late 19th century and continuous natural disasters in modern society. According to ecofeminists, women’s awareness of their due rights and nature’s revenge on humankind are the essential steps to establish the harmonious society. With the revenge of nature and the awakening of women, men are forced to contemplate the whole situation. Under pressures, they recognize that women and nature are no longer under their control, and their only solution to survive lies in throwing away the previously traditional thoughts and pursuing equity among women, nature and themselves. Walker thinks the process of oversewing makes the relation between human and nature, men and women move towards balance.

A. Women’s Awakening

In *The Color Purple*, with the help of sisterhood, women under the highly strict suppression and domination gradually realize the necessity of spiritual liberation, learning the truth that they should have known and the rights they must possess. Black women’s collective life and helpless state brought by slavery and androcentricism make it easy for them to seek solace and happiness from other black women rather than men. Sisterhood delivers support and strength to help black women fight against their fierce oppressions. It is regarded as an important way to the women’s consciousness-raising.

In the novel, most women have experienced the change in their spirit from naivety to maturity. They help each other to learn the truth and finally realize the importance to unite themselves. Suffering from repeated physical and psychological abuse, Celie at the beginning can find nobody to turn to but confide to the God by writing letters. She imagines God to be “big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear robes and go barefoot” (Walker, 1982, p.201) telling him everything including her confusions, worries, and even some secrets. She bears in her heart a belief that as long as she can write the word “God”, she has a companion; and that God will rescue people when they are in trouble. Even when Sofia is thrown into jail Celie still fancies God’s rescue. Finally, the real redeemer turns out to be

Mary Agnes. It's under Shug's instructions that Celie realizes that "God is not a white, not a man. God is everything, just inside of everyone." (Walker, 1982, p.202). With the help of other women, Celie eventually learns God in fact doesn't exist in the world. Then she starts to communicate with other women to get help and courage.

Another truth women in the novel learn is the necessity to appreciate their own beauty, to shake off the dominations and to be themselves. For instance, the encouragements of vital significance from Shug do stimulate Celie's transformation. When Celie knows that Albert has hidden all Nettie's letters, she, who used to obeying every instruction of her husband, gets erupted and makes the decision to go to Memphis with Shug. She responds to Albert's mock saying "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here." (Walker, 1982, p.214), which is actually her declaration of independence and resistance to the patriarchal society. Now she is asking for the equal rights to men instead of the mercy from them. It can be concluded that these great changes in Celie suggests the black women's progress in consciousness.

B. *Nature's Revenge*

As Susan Griffin writes: "We say he should have known his action would have consequences... We say every act comes back on itself. There are consequences. You can not cut the trees without a flood." (Griffin, 1978, p.186) Human's constant over exploitations on nature will inevitably stir its resistance, namely, its revenge on human. Just as the proverb shows us—"fire and water are good servants but bad masters", human beings have tasted the bitter fruit of their own behavior and are meant to realize that it's time to balance their relationship with nature in the planet. In this novel, the Olinka people unfortunately become the objects of nature's revenge.

To them, the roof leaf is a savior to protect them from natural disasters. But one time, in order to make profits out of the land on which the roof leaf is cultivated, the chief asks people to remove the roof leaf to plant economic crops like cassava, groundnut. Then they get abused by the wind when the storm comes: their hut fall and many people get high fevers which even cause death. By the end of the rainy season, half of the village is dead. They pay high price for their stupid behavior and eventually come to know the interdependent relationship between human and nature. So after the rain stops, they search everywhere for the root of the trees, and immediately cover the land with the roof leaf again. This brings the village to its previous peaceful state again.

After the white colonists cut down all the roof leaves, the Olinka people suffer revenge again: "they have been eating yams to prevent malaria and to control blood disease for thousands and thousands years. Without sufficient supply of yams, the people are sickening and dying at an alarming rate" (Walker, 1982, p.250). It's really sad that the Olinka people should pay off for the evil actions taken by the white colonists, just like the reason why people forever are the victims of wars no matter what the motive of the war is.

As an equal part of the ecological system, human beings always set themselves as the dominators, and act the role of exploiter and destroyer, which causes the deterioration of ecological system and even makes it on the verge of breakdown. If people don't stop it, human beings doom to be destroyed by nature one day.

C. *Men's Awakening*

The androcentric ideology has deprived black men of their soul freedom and humanity and left them in loveless marriages. Women's increasing resistance and nature's revenge put men in a position where they have to rethink deeply the whole situation. Only when they realize their previous evils to black women and nature can they throw off the masculinist thoughts and reach the goal of self-healing. It's Walker's belief and dream for men's final disillusionment that sets the male characters in this novel to achieve spiritual survival, and change their attitudes toward both women and nature.

The awakening of black women's self-sense is a major element leading to men's transformation. In the novel, after Celie starts her way of a new life, tremendous changes take place in Albert's fate. Thus his awakening starts with Celie's leaving for Memphis. He gets himself locked in the house and wouldn't let anybody in. To be exact, he lives like a pig. During the period when Celie is absent, Albert makes retrospections unconsciously, rethinking about various kinds of violence he exercises on Celie since their marriage, Celie's value to him as a woman, and the changes of his life after Celie's leaving. He then comes to a conclusion that women, with their own dignities, should be treated equally and be loved. His abandoning the traditional masculinist ideology also stimulates him to do something he has never done before. All these changes prove that he has experienced an ecofeminist-like rebirth and now is a natural man.

Besides, true love also contributes to men's progress in consciousness. Since Albert is not the only one experiencing transformation, compared with his father's change, Harpo's is more believable to be a result of the true love between Sophia and him. At first, their family circumstance is quite harmonious: Sofia works in the field or chops wood while Harpo does cooking and cleaning at home. Though violating the traditional family model, they feel at ease in this way. The reason why he tries to control Sophia is that other men are doing this like his father, grandfather, etc. Out of outer pressure, he is destined to do so. After a series of incidents, he also gives up his attempts to bring his wife under control, realizing that it's not a shame for not controlling Sophia but allowing her to do things at her own will. This becomes a major theme of this novel that "love redeems, meanness kills" (Perseott, 1982, p.67) His efforts to reestablish friendship between him and Sophia earn him Sophia's love, and finally reach the goal of spiritual survival.

The final reason for men's transformation of course is owing to nature's revenge. Men eventually learn the importance of treating women and nature kindly. The possibility of men's development and growth is just one of the

reasons why Walker is preferentially fond of *The Color Purple* in all of her novels.

V. WHOLENESS--TOWARD THE WHOLENESS OF SURVIVAL

Through the process of oversewing, the relationships between human and nature, men and women have experienced tremendous changes. Men, women, and nature, respectively having changed a lot, jointly walk toward the wholeness of survival. Walker's setting a Utopian ending expresses her expectation and belief of fantastic life. Her dream goes hand in hand with the ecofeminist ideas. Thus as what ecofeminists point out, in order to build a really harmonious world, humans have to contemplate different kinds of contrasting relationships: men and women, the whites and the blacks, human and nature, etc. This is just the ideal pursuit of ecofeminists for the wholeness of human and survival.

A. *Women's Change from Subjugation to Independence*

Physical and mental freedom is a kind of response to nature which enables people to regain freedom and creativity on the aspect of ecological sense. Women in *The Color Purple*, attain their real freedom through economic independence based on their mental liberation. In this way, they become independent ones in the world, no longer subjugating to men.

As is known to all, women who want to be independent have to be spiritually liberated and get rid of their economic dependence on men as well. Virginia Woolf, a feminist activist, points out in her book, *A Room of One's Own*, which the most important thing for females to become themselves is to have their own houses, with an annual income of five hundred pounds. Undoubtedly, having a job as well as independence in economy is the first step for women to develop their independent identity. Many women in the novel take this way to liberate themselves, like Celie and Mary Agnes.

In Memphis, accidentally, Celie finds that she is talented in making pants and thus she opens a pant shop. To Celie, Making pants itself is a challenge to the patriarchal society where making pants are reserved as the patent of men. She is born to be a designer since she knows how to make the pants beautiful and economical, and to show a person's feature through her design. By opening a pant shop and making pants for people around, she demonstrates her artistic gifts and true emotions and thoughts, enriching her life and stepping on her way to be a whole and independent woman. As to Mary Agnes, under Shug's instruction, she can not only compile songs but dare to sing in public. Singing on one hand becomes an indispensable part of her life; while on the other hand gives her courage and confidence. Mary Agnes gets acknowledgement from others through her endeavors to be a professional singer. She is no longer an invisible person but a new woman with her own job and aggression. She won't be bothered by her color or experience of being raped because what she has now compensated the hurts she previously suffers and she has proved she can do what she wants to. This proves what K. Bonetti once said: one function of art lies in helping you to grow up, to be an intact person. It goes hand in hand with Walker's belief that art can make human beings better.

Having their own jobs also helps Celie and Mary Agnes gain material liberation, and they gradually taste the sweat fruit of independence and finally fulfill their own values. They have succeeded in proving that they are the kind of women with identities and full of confidence that can't be ignored.

B. *Men's Respecting Women and Nature*

In the novel, after their disillusionment, men start to respect women and nature, which is shown from their learning from women and understanding of women and nature.

During the process of self-improvement, black men find themselves learning a lot from women. By changing their attitude toward housework or fieldwork, they tend to do things they have never done before. For example, Albert, who never does any work at all before, begin to do housework like cleaning and cooking as well as farm work. In addition, men also learn to care and love people around them. Take Albert and Harpo for example, to help Haopo's daughter Henrietta recover from blood disease, Albert tries every means to feed her yarns to cure the disease while Harpo goes to great lengths to help Albert go through the blow of Celie's leaving home.

After experiencing all the hardships women have met in housework and fieldwork, men learn to know the true meaning of working and then start to understand women. Albert's learning to sew shows that he has thrown away the wrong idea that women are inferior to men, and that males are supposed to be worth more than the other gender. And he is willing to do labor work together with women in an equal manner. He tells Celie that "I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feels like a new experience." (Walker, 1982, p. 230). His changing from an oppressor into a natural man makes him the only person who understands and comforts Celie when Shug leaves her. Albert's kindness and understanding win him Celie's forgiveness, which does reestablish a new kind of friendship between them.

Men's transformation in the novel is disclosed in their respect to women and nature. After Celie's leaving, Albert begins his inner revolution by starting to take a new look at his attitude toward nature. To some extent, his working in the field shows his attempts to get closer to nature. Working in nature calms him down and offers him the chance to think about his past and future. It is nature that helps him get rid of the idea on men's supremacy. Staying in the wilderness, he feels peaceful and mentally improved. Besides, he takes to collecting seashells which is the symbol of nature. From the sounds of the waves uttered from the seashells, he learns to listen to the voice of nature. His collection of the seashells is actually his unique way to show his respect to nature. It's conspicuous that as black men fulfill their self-improvement and enhance their close friendship with black women and nature, the wholeness of survival is just

around the corner.

C. Realization of the Ideal Human-nature Relationship

The co-existence of human and nature is a preface of a peaceful and harmonious world. Throwing away belief in God, Celie, along with Shug gets closer to nature which has cured their spiritual wound by giving them inspirations and creativities. From her last letter with the addressee as dear God, dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear people, dear everything, it can be seen that at this moment, there is no boundary between human and nature since everything gets emerged into one thing harmoniously and there is no discrimination between human and nature, men and women, white and black.

The same is true of the Olinka people, to whom the roof leaf is regarded as a savior to protect them from natural disasters. After the village is occupied, they choose to run away to join the mbeles or forest people, who live isolately in the jungle, refusing to work for whites or be ruled by them. Their going to nature's embrace indicates the primary formation of the harmonious relationship between them and nature.

On the other hand, great progresses have also been made in the relationship between men and women, white and black. In the novel, men's respect for women undoubtedly improves their relationship. Celie and Albert become good friends, and Harpo and Sophia reunites. What's more, the black and white begin to cooperate. Sophia teaches the mayor's wife to drive and shows her kindness to the mayor's daughter who treats her well while the white missionary, Doris Baines adopts a black as her grandson, and builds hospital, high school and university in Africa. And in the end Celie hires white people to work in her shop. All these demonstrate that the whites and the blacks can get along well with each other, equally and cooperatively. And the harmonious co-existence is built just on the basis of the balanced relationship between men and women, white and black.

All these show that it is likely to realize the harmonious co-existence between human and nature, between men and women. As long as people learn to abandon their racial oppression and human's exploitation on nature, to discharge the conceptual fragment of dualism, to take good care of nature, the earth and the cosmos, ecofeminist's dream of building a peaceful world can finally come true.

VI. CONCLUSION

Walker, as an ecofeminist, never ceases to concern about the victims of racism and patriarchalism and is committed to fighting for the equal rights of all. She is convinced that art can save the human beings. *The Color Purple* is an example, through which she attacks the androcentrism and patriarchalism. Unlike other writers, she concerns not just the pain and hardship of black females but that of black males as well. Her greatness doesn't lie in her focusing on men's violence and maltreatment on women but in her insistence on believing the oppressors can be changed, and that's her most reformative interpretation of patriarchalism.

What she pursues is the harmonious coexistence of men and women, of blacks and whites, and, in a large sense, of all the inhabitants on this planet. She expresses it through Celie's writing that "The only way to stop making somebody the serpent is for everybody to accept everybody else as a child of God, or one mother's children, no matter what they look like or how they act" (Walker, 1982, p.132) Her designing a happy ending for this novel has some realistic meaning to the American society where contradictions exist almost everywhere. While her dream is fantastic, it's covered by Utopian color and is anyhow future-oriented. This means that there still needs intensive efforts of our following generations to make this harmonious world dream come true.

In a word, what *The Color Purple* leaves to the reader is not only a literary and artistic shock, but infinite thinking space for readers to ponder over the reality. As the environment is deteriorating with the passing days, the ecological balance is broken and terrible consequences have been brought about with more and more species dying out, and humankind's survival is threatened. It's high time human beings realized the urgency of stopping destroying and took jointly measures to protect nature by treasuring water, forest, animals on this planet. It is a prelude necessary to the realization of a harmonious world.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bingyan, Zhang. (1998). *Feminist literary theory*. Jinan: Shandong Educational Press.
- [2] De Beauvoir, Simone. (2010). *The Second Sex*. New York : Knopf.
- [3] Gard, Greta. Murphy, Patrick D. (1998) . *Ecofeminist literary criticism: theory, interpretation, pedagogy*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- [4] Griffin, Susan. (1978). *Woman and nature*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- [5] Haiyan, Yang. (2006). Re-visit to Hongyun Town: research on Willa Cather's ecofeminism. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press.
- [6] Jian'e, Ling. (2005). Love and salvation: the soul of Alice Walker's feminism. *Journal of Hunan Technological University (Social Science Edition)*, 1, 50-57.
- [7] Li, Jin. (2004). Ecofeminism. *Foreign Literature*, 5, 57-64.
- [8] Merchant, Carolyn. (1980). *The death of nature: women, ecology and the scientific revolution*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisc.
- [9] Murphy, Patrick D. (1995). *Literature, nature and other ecofeminist critiques*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- [10] Nuo, Wang. (2003). *Eco-literature in Europe and America*. Beijing: Beijing University Press.
- [11] O'Brien, John. (1994). *Interview with Alice Walker in Everyday Use*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- [12] Plant, Judith. (1989). *Healing the wounds: the promise of ecofeminism*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- [13] Walker, Alice. (1970). *The color purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- [14] Warren, Karen. (1993). *Environmental philosophy: from animal rights to radical ecology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- [15] Wei, Sun. Xilin, Cheng. (2004). Reading Alice Walker's womanism from *Their Eyes were Watching God* and *The Color Purple*. *Modern Foreign Literature*, 2, 60-66.
- [16] Yan, Zhang. Zhiqing, Du. (2009). Searching for nature and calling for harmonious humanity-on the ecofeminist thought in Alice Walker's novels. *Journal of Huaqiao Universit*, 3, 23-28.
- [17] Zhinghong, Hu. (2006). *Research on western ecocriticism*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House.

Lianghong Wu was born into Suqian, China in 1973. She received her M.A. degree in literature from Nanjing Normal University, China in 2006.

She is currently a professor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Huaiyin Institute of Technology, Huai'an, China. Her research interests include British and American literature.