

Letter-Writing as Voice of Women in Doris Lessing's the Golden Notebook and Alice Walker's the Color Purple

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Abstract: Epistolarity or letter-writing as a literary form in fiction is a powerful genre for women writers interested in using novel to examine modern society critically and present a world better than the one they have had. Since letter-writing reveals the thinking processes of the characters, it has the potential of making the letter a means of expressing their own voices. In feminist works language and the adequacy of language come under careful scrutiny. There have been novels that use letter-writing to focus on the reconstruction of the self, especially women-self. Two of such works are Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). This article argues that D. Lessing and Alice Walker, despite their different national identities, had the aim of exposing almost everything, especially the status, emotions, sexuality and role, of women in their societies through the above mentioned narration technique in their works. And it is claimed that they contributed particularly to women's rights movement as intellectual women novelists to the full extent of their power.

Key Words: Epistolary, Women, Woman-self, Alice Walker, Doris Lessing, Reconstruction

Dorris Lessing'in the Golden Notebook ve Alice Walker'ın the Color Purple Romanlarında Kadının Sesinin Mektup Formuyla Aktarılması

Özet: Roman dalında bir edebi form olarak mektup yazma ya da mektupla anlatma, yaşadıkları dünyadan daha iyi bir dünyayı anlatmaya ve çağdaş toplumu eleştirel olarak ele almaya ilgi duyan kadın yazarlar için güçlü bir edebi tür olmuştur. Mektup yazma, roman karakterlerinin düşünce tarzını ortaya koyduğu için, bu türün aynı zamanda kadınların seslerini duyurmalarının bir aracı olma potansiyeline de sahiptir. Bu tarzla dil, özellikle dil yeterliği oldukça önemlidir. Dorris Lessing *The Golden Notebook* (1962) ve Alice Walker *The Color Purple*'da (1982), özellikle kadın benliğini yeniden kurmaya odaklanabilmek için mektup yazma tekniğini kullanırlar. Bu makalede farklı ulusal kimliklerine karşın bu iki yazarın, yapıtlarında mektupla anlatma tekniğini kullanarak kendi toplumlarındaki kadınların konumlarını, duygularını, cinselliklerini ve kendilerine biçilen rolleri nasıl ortaya koydukları incelenmektedir. Keza bu yazarların, entelektüel kadın yazarlar olarak, kadın hakları hareketine yaptıkları katkılar üzerinde durulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mektupla Anlatılan Roman, Kadınlar, Kadın Benliği, Alice Walker, Doris Lessing, Yeniden İnşa

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“The letter, the epistle, which is not one genre but all the genres, literature itself.”

Jacques Derrida, *Envois*

It is asserted that in epistolary novels “the readers mostly witness women characters that increase their power or sense of self through the opportunity to write their own truths.” (Anna Bower 1997, p. 12). And she claims that

the words form the lives of the female characters in these novels, their physical conditions may not change greatly, though. Behind this relocated power, the novel’s author still controls the letters’ contents and form for particular ideological or entertainment aims, but the letter form will force us to read those manipulations within the dynamic of the female character’s method, strength, and discourse. (1997, p. 12)

Janet G Altman defines epistolarity as “the use of a letter’s formal properties to create meaning” (qtd. in De Pretis, 1995, p. 127) One of arguments for the epistolary novel is that it adds greater realism and verisimilitude to the story, chiefly because it imitates the real, non-fictional life. Such novels demonstrate different points of view without recourse to the omniscient narrator, whom some novelists believed to be an unrealistic representation.

Ruth Perry, on the other hand, asserts that the letter novel is “a self-conscious, self-perpetuating process of emotional self examination which gathers momentum and ultimately becomes more important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing letters. That is the very center of an epistolary novel” (qtd.in McElaney-Johnson, 1999, p 110). According to Perry, the feeling of aloneness is necessary for one to write letters (94). As Elizabeth Campbell puts it, “Women send themselves in letters, feel the presence of the addressee in letters they both write and receive, and, in contemporary novels especially, see the letter as a mirror in which they examine themselves” (qtd. in Wasserman, 2003, p. 336).

Whether created by male or female authors “the epistolary heroines, suffering from physical or emotional restrictions, use the letter-writing process to investigate and to confirm their responses to others and to themselves, as well as to encourage certain responses from others”(Bower, 1997, p. 14). In letter-writing female protagonist uses the pen not only to confirm herself, not only to bridge the gap between self and other “but often to rewrite the self, presenting a personal self-definition that refutes, replaces, or complements the identity. Her concerns and activities will necessarily echo one or more aspects of feminism(s)--discovering and questioning her own voice and language”(1997, p. 14).

Through epistolary, women can have the chance to discover many perspectives on important matters and begin to understand the varied ways in which language shapes

these perspectives. The reason is epistolary has the potential not only to raise women's consciousness but to offer them a variety of alternative views of reality to consider as they struggle to make sense of their existence and work toward a more just world. On the other hand, "for a woman", as Sharp remarks "letter-writing can be an instrument in moving towards a critical awareness of self and the society."

Often letters provide a record of an active struggle to figure out for oneself what kind of world one wants to live in and how one might be successful in attaining one's ends, while the reading of other people's letters can help an individual understand many forces that shape one's oppression, and, in so doing, begin the work of overcoming them. (3)

Some novels use letter-writing to focus on the reconstruction of the woman-self like Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Despite some slight differences in their form and content, Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* have a common point; both are the voice of women. The novels concentrate on the position of women in their particular contexts, and offer an analysis of the women as writer in their respective times and places. Both utilize the epistolary and diary form which is included in the content of epistolarity. Although their contexts differ, the novels are close in their dates of publication; *The Golden Notebook* (1962, but appears in 1957) and *The Color Purple* (1982). This article aims to analyze Anna and Ella, her alter-ego, in *The Golden Notebook*, and Celie, Nettie and Shug Avery in *The Color Purple*. The respective protagonists of the novels in terms of how their femininity and female identity are reconstructed through letter-writing. Some issues like the question of woman, marriage, female sexuality which were once regarded as taboo will also be discussed in order to show how epistolary or letter-writing reveal female identities and selves. Doris Lessing and Alice Walker, whom have been highly influential writers for a longtime, are two woman writers that have quite common characteristics as writers. Though they have had a totally different background due to their birth place and culture, this has not hindered them from sharing some thoughts and ideas at all. In this paper, I am going to make a thorough observation of these two highlighted woman writers with comparisons and contrasts. Among the most outstanding common points between them come the pursue of equality and total freedom of the women, the reversal of the power in the patriarchal society, oppression of the people, and racial issues as first. For such a wide comparison, I will pick Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as two examples to gain an idea about them as two important contemporary writers.

To start with, these two writers have really left a great impact in the world in terms of the way they deal with the women and the suppressed. Especially, Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* has been accepted as a canonistic work of feminism. Similarly, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* has won the writer The Pulitzer Prize for its success. In her well acknowledged novel, *The Color Purple*, Walker touches on some very bitter conditions

of the black women. But the most important thing that Walker succeeds is that from a specific problem she moves on to a much more global issue. Thus she gains a very strong, worldwide acclaimed position by her work. To give an overall plot of the novel: *The Color Purple* plot is set in the American South, Georgia, in 1909. The novel is written entirely in the epistolary form, mainly by Celie, the main protagonist. The first two thirds of the novel comprise letters that Celie writes to God giving him a sketch of her miserable life, first as subject of torture by an alleged father who rapes her and gets rid of her two children and then as the sex object and servant of a husband to whom she is almost sold off. It is in this section that Celie shows the patriarchal oppression she and other women are exposed to. The remaining third of the novel is a set of letters written by/to Celie and her sister, Nettie, who now lives in Africa with the missionary couple she works with and to whom her sister's children were given. Even though the sisters write to each other, there is no communication between them as the letters either never arrive, or do arrive but too late. "It shows that the novel demonstrates Celie's transformation and liberation through the help of other women like Shug, the Blues singer she is in love with, and Nettie. The novel ends with a letter addressed to no one in particular that shows Celie at her happiest with the final family reunion--her sister and children having come back from Africa" (Hamamsy, 2010 p. 23).

Celie is not a strong girl at first. Both the society and the family have been an obstacle on her way. She has no voice neither in the novel nor in her actual life. As Walker utters "The worse thing than being a woman is being a black woman." The reality of these words is clear enough to be seen in the case of Celie. For example, Celie is not going to school. She does the chores at home. Being ugly, she is always seen like an outcast, like an unnecessary thing by the people around her. She is almost invisible and she does not possess her true self let alone her rights. Through the eyes of Celie, Walker presents such a realistic picture of the conditions of the black that no one can even think of any kind of exaggeration. Her younger sister, Nettie has to leave the house, and thus Celie is left all alone. The only thing she can do is writing. Just like Walker, Celie clings to life only by writing. She regains a kind of identity that she has made lose by the people around her. As Lewis suggests, "at the core of the two novels is the study of the changing roles of women in evolving societies; consequently, the works are rather products of convergent evolution, which means they may evolve in many ways from diverse sources, but at some point they intersect" (2001, p.13).

Writing is really the only thing that she can do for herself. It re-gains her a kind of existence and identity. Letter writing is considered to show the various reasons why the letter has frequently been employed as a form of expression in fictional writing and why it has been claimed to be suited to certain types of confessional writing. Lorna Martens defines letter-journals as "novels ... addressed to a recipient who is usually also a confidant" (Martens, 1985, p. 75).

Upon seeing God so indifferent and ignorant to all the drawbacks taking place in their life, Celie starts questioning her belief in God. Celie's denial of God in the novel, a denial

based on her realization that “the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown” (Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1995, p. 195). This might be explained a way as a natural result of her anger at men. But Shug’s feminist and pantheistic religion, to which Celie is converted, is more potentially troubling to a resolutely Judéo-Christian culture. In rejecting the biblical “old white man” image of God (CP, 1995, 201), and the Bible along with it, Shug directly challenges both white and male hegemony and traditional Christianity. She also scorns religious ritual, asking Celie, “have you ever found God in church? I never did” (CP, 1995, p. 202). Shug’s god is not a male deity found in heaven or in church, but a genderless presence “inside you and inside everybody else.... God is everything” (CP, 1995, p. 202). What her god demands is only that you “praise God by liking what you like,” specifically including sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual (CP, 1995, p. 203).

The novel endorses Shug’s view of God by having several likable characters come to share it as they age—even Nettie and Samuel, who had gone off to Africa as Christian missionaries. As Dole explains Nettie’s recognition in Africa of the ties between white patriarchal religious institutions and the oppression of blacks chimes with Celie’s growing realization that “the Christian ‘father’ is not their father, not their spiritual reservoir” (Dole, 1996, 94).

Shug, the lover of Mr._ becomes a great help for her religious change in her mind and heart. She suggests her to leave the traditional belief of God. She urges Celie to think of God as an ordinary being, one of the living beings in nature, like trees, birds, etc. And Celie gains such a viewpoint in the next letter starting with “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God” (Walker, CP, 1995, 242). This kind of reversal in her belief foreshadows Celie’s future breakup with all the notions and her rejection the oppression of the society.

The epistolary type of the novel is very practical and has a lot to do with the themes of the novel. Henderson posits use as a subversion of the form created by men to write about women and, in the process, inscribe male control over literary images of women, a form later appropriated by white women writers as well. By choosing the epistolary style, Third-World women writers are “able to draw on a form which places [their] work in a tradition associated with women, allows a feminine narrative voice, and establishes a bond and intimacy between women.” Furthermore, Henderson theorizes that “Walker’s use of the vernacular ... has invested an old and somewhat rigid form with new life” (Henderson, 1989, 76). Walker prefers a Celie is using a very complex dialect in her letters. Even some black people do have difficulty in understanding the context while reading the novel.

As Singer puts forward “the epistolary form is one that has been employed by writers throughout the history of world literature, and not surprisingly, since letters are intimate and immediate modes of expression and communication” (1963, p.35). The letters become the agent to depict traumatic context, the legacy of slavery. Perhaps Walker has chosen

the epistolary style also to make a firsthand observation and evaluation of the things taking place around the protagonist, Celie. However, Celie is not so good at expressing herself clearly enough at first.

The syntax and the word order is so complex and missing that one can hardly comprehend the sentences. They hardly make any sense. I suppose Walker has deliberately created such an inarticulate Celie for enabling us to follow the absolute change in her through the course of time in the novel. She does not speak freely which is an outcome of the patriarchal society on her; she is never given the right to speak up.

Like Celie, all the other women in the novel are limited in power; they do not have a “say” or a “voice” as to how they conduct their lives. “Ironically, a man incapable of speech has more power or “say” than a woman with voice; his physical silence is more capable than her voice for her desire is silenced” (Lewis 47). It is however, not the only obstacle that Celie faces as a woman during the course of time. Lewis moves on an example, “Celie, upon marriage to Albert, is prey to the actions of 12-year-old Harpo; he splits her head open with a rock when she arrives at Albert’s home on their wedding day, and there is negligible reproach from Albert (2001, p. 47).

For Celie writing is just a substitution for speaking. She does not have any power neither in the society nor her family, thus she is led to loneliness and brokenness. Just like the protagonist, Anna in *The Golden Notebook*, Celie is driven into writing for expressing herself.

Of course the difference between Celie and Anna is great in terms of their social position and welfare status. On one hand we have Celie, who is a housewife with no free will or power; and on the other we have Anna, who is a single mother who earns her life by writing and is free enough to do whatever she wishes to. Celie is the naive one due to her living conditions and the oppression she has been through. In the novel we witness quite many silencing of Celie. When, for example, Celie is raped by her stepfather Alphonso, he orders her to “not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy” (Walker, CP, 1995, p. 11). In this threat he imposes fear and guilt of possible maternal death on the young, superstitious, and psychologically naive Celie. Alphonso silences Celie’s voice. Later, when he and Albert barter for her, Alphonso again silences Celie, but this time it is her credibility, for he tells Albert, “[s]he tell lies” (CP, 1995, p. 15). Repeatedly in the novel other women (never another man) admonish her to fight or speak up for herself or intervene for her with Albert; others act as her voice, for she has none. Albert’s sister Kate tells him Celie needs a new dress; she cannot even declare her most basic needs, much less those that are psychologically intricate. Celie imagines Albert thinking of her as “It,” objectifying herself in his mind as though she were a floor that needed a new rug. Later, Celie asks Shug to remain in their home because Albert beats Celie when Shug is not there, a confession that leads Shug to reject Albert eventually in favor of Celie. So, as a woman, Celie is frequently squeezed by so many oppressing factors. However, Anna is a very experienced and knowledgeable woman as a writer. The brokenness in Anna

is perfectly drawn by her instability in her life. Anna is a prima portrait of a lonesome woman trying to survive in a patriarchal society. It would be suitable to liken them two passengers in life but both are at different points on that journey. For sure, there exists a huge distance between the two.

Anna is far more ahead of Celie in any sense. And Celie is pulling herself up by her bootstraps. Women of *The Color Purple* are much more limited at the beginning of the work. For instance, in *The Color Purple*, Celie and Sofia endure horrible physical abuses. But in the end there emerges a kind of sound strength in them. Without doubt, Celie has a lot more to accomplish and confront in life than Anna does. It seems that Celie has not acquired her basic needs, while Anna is finished with such needs.

Celie is twice discriminated for being a black and a woman at the same time. The white society would discriminate her for being a black, and the black society again would do the same just for her gender. Thus Walker and Lessing have the same viewpoints with small differences in them.

Celie becomes the voice of all the black women in the novel. She randomly finds a way to release herself and follows it till the end of the novel. For example, at the beginning of the novel Celie is desperately selfless. However, at the end, she proves to have created a giant of free will out of herself. She is made to marry to a man who actually has wanted to marry Nettie. The man, called Mr. _ by Walker, is totally a rude and selfish man. He does not care about Celie at all. He does not treat her as a human being. For instance, when his sister Kate asks him to buy some clothes for Celie, he casts a despising look upon Celie as if she were not even a human being to have such needs.

Mr._ has a lover, Shug. One day, despite Celie, he brings her home as she is sick. And Celie has to nurse her at her house. However, it turns out that Shug helps Celie to bring the womanly part out hidden in her. Not having enjoyed her sexual life until then in her life, Celie discovers the womanliness in herself. Celie and Shug share a sisterly friendship along with a sexual appeal. Shug becomes the heroine in Celie's life as she admires her as a woman and as a person. Shug is exactly the opposite of Celie in all aspects. For instance, Shug is free, but Celie is burdened. Shug is beautiful and admired by everyone, but Celie is ugly and despised by people. Therefore, inevitably, Shug causes Celie's personal awakening as a woman and a free person.

Walker also pinpoints that women should stick together with this concrete example. Shug and Celie become two bosom friends after they meet. And they keep some secrets of each other which is definitely the basis of making friends. Though at first they are expected to be on strife, as Celie is the wife of Mr._, we are shocked by their growing such an intimate friendship. I believe Shug takes the position of Nettie after she is gone, and Shug is really close to Celie like a real sister. Similarly, Lessing has a close friend of Anna in her novel. She sides with Anna and shares Anna's problems and does everything else Anna wants her to do for her. Lessing and Walker try to show the desperate need of the women's sticking together. They propose that no woman can ever be happy on their own. They should support each other so as to be strong.

Walker makes great use of the handicraftness of the women. We have Celie and the other women characters in the novel coming together only around a patchwork quilt. Symbolically, this handicraft turns out to be the only path leading to their independence; Celie designs pants and earns her life for the first time. Similarly, Lewis believes that “in *The Color Purple*, beyond intercultural differences, the heroines demand that patriarchal sanctions collapse upon themselves when the women use hand-crafts to free themselves from restrictions and take strength from female influence” (2001, p. 78).

Walker is very much aware of the inequality between women and men. Politically, economically, socially women are passive. The time was 1910-1940s, when there were huge clashes and problems in the society. Taking the time in which the novel is set into consideration, it is easily inferred that Walker has some objections to such unfair and unequal situation of the women. To raise a voice, she has to write them down. And, without doubt, she has chosen the best and the most effective way for such an aim. In those times, women were suppressed and were like prisoners at home. For sure, the case was worse for the black women. For Walker, cultural and traditional ignorance of the women by the society is something too strong to break in advance. However, gradually, this kind of resistance can be built in the society.

In her writing, Walker raises her voice for all the black women, however, indeed she has the pursue of rights for all the women in the world. For instance, incest relationships between the family members take place not only in black society but also in all the countries.

Furthermore, the economic freedom of the women is not something that one can come across only in black society. For instance, Celie is not free, she cannot work, she has to obey her presumed father and husband. If she had had her economic freedom, she would be on her own. For instance, when she goes to Tennessee, and there she takes a job. And only then can she manage to stand on her feet on her own. She gains power for her future life. When she goes back to her husband’s house for a visit, she sees that even her once-rude man is not so rude any more. Dole complained that Walker’s novel makes Mister “a feminized man by the end” (2011, p. 271). Many women viewers too might be dismayed by such a radical upset in power relations: She, for instance, sneered that Walker “allows some of the lazy, lecherous oppressors to redeem themselves by accepting their inferiority to their wives and developing their aptitudes for cooking and sewing” (2011, p. 81). Many other black male reviewers likewise attacked Walker’s novel on the score of its scathing portrayals of its principal male characters: Mister, Celie’s brutal husband; “Pa,” the father who rapes Celie and disposes of her two children; and Celie’s stepson Harpo, who ruins a loving marriage by taking his family’s advice to beat his wife” (Dole, 2011, p. 70). Therefore, “a number of prominent African-American men criticized both book and novel for their negative portrayal of black males” (2011, p. 70).

And this very example shows the importance of the economic freedom of the women. Walker whispers that if you have power, people respect you. But if not, there is no way

of consolidation between you. I believe this is the core point which Walker draws our attention reflecting herself as a womanist. She sides with woman's equality to man.

Similar to Walker, Lessing longs for the betterment of the women's position in all aspects. The most outstanding common point of the two is their efforts for the improvement of the women's situation in society.

Womanist thought as a whole was born in the literary world as Alice Walker coined the term in the 1980s. The oft-cited definition of womanist is taken from a poetic statement at the beginning of Walker's collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). In Walker's words Womanism is:

1. Womanist from "womanish. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, or willful behavior.

2. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1983, p. 126).

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, similarly, posits: "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideas of black life ... Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a 'brother' or a 'sister' or a 'father' or a 'mother' to the other" (SOM, 1983, p. 11). However, at the time Walker penned these words, there was a decided need to distinguish black American women from white feminists. There were certainly black women who called themselves feminist during this time, Angela Davis being one of the most notable. Yet, despite the few who could identify with feminism during the 1980s, the majority of African American women were left cold by the arguments because they experienced exclusion from the feminist movement. As feminism was conceived with white middle-class women as the center of analysis, most black women's lives were set to the margins" (Mitchem, 2008, p. 59).

Now the difference of the two writers can be seen very clearly. Like Walker, Lessing is very much concerned about the women issue and some other problems. Walker is concentrated on the black women issues Lessing much more concerned with the white women problems Accordingly, Lessing is stylistically and thematically makes use of a very interesting way to draw attention in her novel. Therefore, the division of the novel into four chapters is very important. It shows that Lessing is far from being an ordinary writer of our time in terms of theme and style. Themes play a great role in her writing, as she is not ignorant of the problems taking place around her or far from her. As a writer, just like Walker, she does not turn a blind eye to any of the drawbacks in the society. Like Walker, she bears the social responsibility as a writer. And as a woman, the conditions of the women have been an indispensable part of her forming a unique perspective towards this issue. And inevitably, she has been widely accepted as one of the leading figures of feminism.

With the publication of her novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Lessing became firmly identified with the feminist movement. The novel concerns Anna Wulf, a writer

caught in a personal and artistic crisis, who sees her life compartmentalised into various roles - woman, lover, writer, political activist. Her diaries, written in different coloured notebooks, each correspond to a different part of herself. It is composed of 4 notebooks and one notebook covering all the others. The book is basically about a woman writer who is highly distinguished and widely-known. She is the writer of all these notebooks. But every single notebook has a different colour with a different subject: The yellow notebook is about a fictionalized version of herself, the red one is about her active political views, communism, the blue one is about her daily life, and black for her experiences in Africa. And finally, the golden one is all a cover for these notebooks. Anna eventually suffers a mental breakdown and it is only through this disintegration that she is able to discover a new 'wholeness' which she writes about in the final notebook. Lessing's more recent novels have continued to confront taboos and challenge preconceptions, generating many different and conflicting critical opinions. (Contemporary Writers)

Lessing is accepted as one of the first influential feminist writers. The total book is taking place in the orbit of a woman, the protagonist Anna Wulf. "The two women were alone in the London flat." Doris Lessing's most famous novel starts with these words, published in 1962, and now considered one of the major works of twentieth-century literature. It is the story of Anna Wulf, a writer and single woman, who lives with her young daughter in a flat, occasionally renting out a room, less for the income than out of a reflex of social obligation.

Laboring against a writing block, following the immense success of her autobiographical debut novel about a group of Communists in colonial Africa, Anna struggles to find a way to integrate the multiple selves that fragment her personality and make her life unbearably painful. Out of "fear of chaos, formlessness-- of breakdown". By problematizing feminist theories that "do not take into account ... that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds," theories that collapse all women of color into one single, monolithic category, ignoring distinctions" (Christian, 2011, p. 342).

Although framed by a conventional novel called *Free Women*, the point of the novel, according to Lessing, is the "relation of its parts to each other."

By viewing her life from these different angles, going over her experiences, gauging her responses, and carefully probing her intertwined layers of consciousness, Anna eventually manages to unify her identity in one notebook. As she does so, she come to terms with her growing disillusionment with communism, the trauma of emotional rejection and sexual betrayal, professional anxieties, and the tensions of friendship and family. (Contemporary Writers)

Lessing is very important to have written *The Golden Notebook*. Thinking about the time when it was written, it is really hard to understand how original it was in the times of 1962. It is also accepted as a very early work of British postmodernism, characteristically

British in that there is a strong realist centre: "It reads partly, now, as an evocative social document of the early 1960s; for many, it became a feminist novel, although Lessing was keen to point out later that this was not what she intended. The business of this complex book is surely the inability of traditional forms of fiction to portray the divided modern self, irrespective of gender; it is a story of fragmented post-war life, told in a fragmented form". (Contemporary Writers)

Walker, too is a realist writer in that she observes and presents us what she sees. The true to life part is the centre that we are revolving around. The worldwide acclaim of these two writers derives from their being realist in informing us about the actual case of the women and the suppressed.

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* Helene Cixous proclaims, "if she [woman] is whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not single partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that's any more of a star than the others" (217).

Similarly, in both of the novels the existence and the identity of female characters are really drawn as a whole; they are given as an embodiment of their true selves. *The Color Purple* focuses on women who are mothers. Both books are a woman's narrative where a woman writes to another woman as a way of emancipating herself. After assuming the role of stepmother at a very young age, Celie, *The Color Purple*'s primary character, grows from a shy young woman to one who has the confidence to stand up for herself, eventually becoming one of those women whose tongue hurls words of self-defense. When Albert, her husband insults her in the rural Georgia vernacular, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, You ain't nothin' at all" (14). By the end of the story, she is able to stand up to her husband's insults, to retort, "I may be black, pore, ugly, but I'm here" (Ampadu, 2007, p. 15).

A dimension of Alice Walker's theory of womanism which emphasizes women's asexual love for each other, for example, informs Walker's use of sisterly bonding. The intimate friendship between Celie and Nettie, as well, helped to sustain Celie through the period of abuse by her husband. It was a sisterhood that was so deep that it persevered through the long period of absence of Celie's not receiving her sister's letters in spite of the rift that Celie's husband had created to destroy the closeness of the two sisters. Walker's womanism has implications for building community and love among women by advocating sexual love between women. The love between Celie and the blues singer Shug reveals sensualities that played a pivotal role in awakening Celie and moving her towards a greater understanding of herself.

Walker, Ampadu claims, "introduces the global perspective by having Nettie work as a missionary in Africa. As a result, Nettie becomes grounded in Afrocentric thought and she imparts to Celie a pride in her heritage and love of self when she asks Celie" (16): Did you know that the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa?" (Walker, CP, 1995, p. 218).

Another point that we can make is the religion issue. In Walker, religion is reimagined, reexamined and rediscovered. The notion of the belief in divine religion is somehow shattered by questioning of Celie of her own belief in God. Celie is writing letters to God. For her, He is the only one left to write after Nettie leaves. However, Celie is not quenched or satisfied by her devotedness to God as she has witnessed a very solemn indifference of God towards her problems. Celie is awakened in traditional religious faith and worship, as well as in less traditional settings. Gloria Wade Gayles reminds us we can experience “the divine within us “wherever, however, and with whomever we so desire, each time anew and each time in celebration of the divine that is in us and in the entire universe” (1995, p. 21). Such a consciousness, grounded in African cultural traditions, has been cast in fictional literature as one that revises the image of the white patriarchal image of God and embraces spiritual revival. These revisionists, energizing spiritual practices help to move others towards a greater awareness of self. As Ampadu thinks in the case of Celie, after her lover Shug Avery instills in her the desire to find God for herself, she rejects the notion of God as a white old man commonly portrayed in Western society. She reenvisioned God as being within her. This redefinition begins her journey towards becoming a woman who finally musters the courage to stand up to an abusive husband (CP, 1995, p. 57). No sign of help seem to reach Celie in that sense in traditional sense. And her new comprehension of God remingles all her settled beliefs. She cannot assume a God remaining so deadly silent and doing nothing for the human beings. Thus, she gradually becomes aware of a new God image in her heart and mind. Walker defends that religions and beliefs in God should be unique and true to the self. Therefore, no kind of distancing God from the human beings is sensible. Perhaps Walker wants to see religions not as obstacles but a kind of help to people. She wishes for a God that is new and special to every single person.

Everybody should have a specific portrait of God according to his or her needs or their understanding of life itself. However, in Lessing we do not have such a strong need in religious beliefs. She concentrates more on the worldly handicaps for women. For instance, in her novel, Anna is suffering from instability and the pursue of happiness. She tries to cope with brokenness splintered life of hers. Just like the novel she is writing, she has a multiple of divisions in her life. She carries a number of roles with her. She is a woman, a mother, a lover, a writer, a political activist. And this kind of separation in her life has pushed her on the verge of a huge crack in her life. She falls into desperate loss of belief in terms of her identity as a human being. I believe that Anna is not happy for having accomplished all the aims in her life. As in Bernard Shaw’s words: “Satisfaction is death.” So Anna is too much full of many things to long for in her life. The only thing that I would not object to in Anna’s case, might be her neglected womanhood. I suppose she would not be so sad if a man had had ever loved her. In the novel she has a lot of love affairs with men most of whom are married. As a great number of readers detest, this kind of behaviour is really despised for a woman. People do not want to see women powerful and respected like her, being so badly behaving.

Although many believe that the novel is a feminist book, I disagree in that Anna could very well be a male protagonist in the novel, suffering from all such things that Anna has been through. The discrepancy in life can be found in both men and women. Similarly, Lessing rejects calling her novel a feminist one. Lessing is probably reluctant to limit her novel to such a narrow scope of feminism; instead she would love to call her novel with much more global themes and subjects.

Another aspect can be the race issue. "And in a strongly worded rejection of the novel as "revolutionary literature," bell hooks charges that the focus upon Celie's sexual oppression ultimately deemphasizes the "collective plight of black people" and "invalidates [. . .] the racial agenda" of the slave narrative tradition that it draws upon (Walker Writing 465). In short, to many readers of *The Color Purple*, the text's ability to expose sexual oppression seems to come at the expense of its ability to analyze issues of race and class" (Selzer, 1995, p. 82).

Descending from an African American family, Walker can obviously draw us a picture of the black people and the amount of racial discrimination that they have been exposed to. For instance, in the novel, a sassy black woman is sentenced to twelve years of imprisonment just for rejecting to servet he white mayor of the town. The harsh reality is very important for us to have a sound understandig of the black people's situation. Walker proves herself as a big writer in handling such a sensitive issue with great care and unbiased. The greatness of a writer, as it is always accepted, lies beneath such a characteristic of his or hers. To give another example for the unfair exposure of the racial discrimination, Celie's sister Nettie goes to an African undeveloped community of the black people. There, she tells about the colonial intrusion of the power into the virgin lands of these people. Through Nettie, Walker puts blame on the black people in that they do not show any kind of resistance towards these outsiders. For example, Nettie is bevlinded upon seeing all the people keeping silent when the colonist's deforests their lands for establishing a rubber factory. Walker is not a biased person, she sees the bitter reality of the black nation that the white people are not the only ones to blame. They are themselves are as guilty as the white for standng stil and passive in front of the colonial powers. Maybe in this way, Walker tries to show us the urgent necessity in getting togetjer and show their communal power.

Consequently, the two writers have touched on very important issues of the society.

Womanism and Feminism have just been an agent for delivering their message to the people and a great help to draw the attention of the society, and the world. In the two books of these writers we have examined and analyzed all the situations and oppressions of a patriarchal society that a woman is to face since her birth and just because of her gender. The equal standards are what the two writers are after. They seek a society in harmony and fairly ordered. Walker and Lessing have proven to be two highly influential woman writers of our time.

Their worldwide success is respected due to their dedication to women issue and other illls of the society. As a female writer, Lessing depicts the modern women portrait

of our time very vividly, whereas for Walker the case gets harsher; she has to face all the injustices and the prejudices against black people. She, I believe, feels very worried, while writing such of her people. The survival of the genderly and racially discriminated people is very well read between her lines. She is as if trying to flash out every single detail of all the

The Golden Notebook is the story of Anna Wulf, a writer and single woman, who lives with her young daughter in a flat, occasionally renting out a room, living a life under heavy life conditions. Struggling with a writing obstacle and after the immense success of her autobiographical debut novel about a group of Communists in colonial Africa, Anna comes to find a way to merge the various selves that fragment her personality and make her life insufferably painful. Because of her formlessness, chaos and fear she lives, she decides to keep four notebooks, one for each component of her life--black for her experiences in Africa, red for prevalent politics, yellow for her fictionalized version, and blue for her diary. Although framed by a conventional novel called *Free Women*, the point of the novel, according to Lessing, is the "relation of its parts to each other." By viewing her life for these different angles, going over her experiences, measuring her responses, and carefully probing her intertwined layers of consciousness, Anna eventually manages to unify her identity in one notebook. As she does so, she comes to terms with her growing disillusionment with communism, the trauma of emotional rejection and sexual betrayal, professional anxieties, and the tensions of friendship and family.

Many critics and authors define *The Golden Notebook* as a novel of woman freedom; some others consider it a text about 'sex war', female sexuality and a text of fragmentation, formlessness. But the first impression of a new reader of the text could possibly be that it is based on problems and freedom of women and a reconstructed woman-self. Lessing reveals her ideas about the content of the novel in the preface as follows:

[...] this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment. I put them into print. Apparently what many women were thinking, feeling, experiencing came as a great surprise. Instantly a lot of very ancient weapons were unleashed, the main ones, as usual, being on the theme of 'She is unfeminine', 'She is a man-hater'. (Lessing, 1962, p. 9)

Women of feminist temperament are described as people who are unfeminine, manly, fearless and inhumane, mostly by men. That's why those women have reactions, and are often excluded and despised. But they have also responded these conventional powers, demanded justice, voiced up and demanded more than the nature provided with them. Thus they were reacted by both men and their own sex. Lessing argues that,

Women are the cowards because they have been semi-slaves for so long. The number of women prepared to stand up for what they really think, feel, experience with a man they are in love with is still small. Most

women will still run like little dogs with stones thrown at them when a man says: You are unfeminine, aggressive, you are unmanning me. (1962, p. 9)

The protagonist, Anna Wulf, and her closest friend Molly Jacobs gets married two distinctive men and later on have kids and gets divorced. In this process they lose their faith in marriage and men. They, in this way, choose to live on their own, free and self-reliant. They believe that women are identified with their boyfriends, marriages and their relations with men, not as individuals: “‘Free women’, said Anna wryly. She added with anger new to Molly, so that she earned another quick scrutinizing glance from her friend: ‘They still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them’” (1962, p. 26).

The psychiatrist, Paul Tanner who is also Ella's lover, evaluates what Ella preaches women about love, passion, psychological world and mood of love-thirsty women as wrong and inappropriate: “And you [Ella] tell poor women who are slaves of everyone's stupidity to go out and join a social club or take up a healthful hobby of some kind, to take their minds off the fact that they are unloved” (1962, pp. 215-216).

It is so obvious that letter or diary-writing is an escape, a way of relief for the fragmented author. After a conversation between Tommy and Molly which Anna witnesses a few minutes ago, Anna comes downstairs and instantly begins turning it into a short story at the very beginning of the blue notebook. When Anna starts writing the story in diary form, she has the chance of revealing or concealing her real ideas without being interrogated by her readers or critics and even by herself. Epistolary at this specific point, is a sort of lightening rod for the fragmented author:

It struck me that my doing this-turning everything into fiction-must be an evasion. Why not write down, simply, what happened between Molly and her son today? Why do I never write down, simply? What happens? Why don't I keep a diary? Obviously my changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself. Today it was so clear: sitting listening to Molly and Tommy at war, very disturbed by it; then coming straight upstairs and beginning to write a story without even planning to do it. I shall keep a diary. (1962, p. 232)

In the same matter, she, as Ella, adds her ideas about men and concealment of woman self as follows: “[...] I am always coming to the conclusion that my real emotions are foolish, I am always having, as it were, to cancel myself out. I ought to be like a man, caring more for my work than for people” (1962, p. 312). In this part which fully consists of Anna's own ideas revealing herself about her own arguments, there are many letters or pages of diary with specific dates beginning with the pronoun ‘I’: “I came in last night from work into that horrible hotel room.” (9 th. Oct. 1946) “Saw Mrs. Mark today” (January 10th, 1950), “I dream a great deal”(Jan. 14 th, 1950) While Anna, discussing

her feelings for Michael, her lover, states that she may feel detestation and a big anger sometimes just because “when he makes some crack about the fact I have written a book- he resents it, makes fun of my being ‘an authoress’”(1962, p. 239). That statement might be considered to be a clear indication of how important it is for Anna to be able to reveal her fictionalized ideas of herself.

The other novel which has the tendency of becoming the voice of women in epistolary form is Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. The book is comprised of letters written by two sisters, Celie and Nettie. Celie tells her story through private letters she writes to God. The epistolary form of *The Color Purple* looks like a diary. Therefore, Celie narrates her life story with complete sincerity and honesty. As a poor African-American woman in rural Georgia in the 1930s and a victim of domestic abuse, Celie is almost completely voiceless and deprived of rights in everyday society. However, Celie’s letters enable her to break privately the silence imposed upon her.

The author focuses on some characters more heavily which are supposed to be chosen as spokeswomen like Celie, Nettie and Shug Avery. Celie is the main narrator as well as the central character. As a young girl, Celie is constantly subjected to abuse and told she is ugly. She decides therefore that she can best ensure her survival by making herself silent and invisible. Celie’s letters to God are her only emotional relief and way of self-expression. To Celie, God is a distant figure, who she doubts cares about her concerns. Celie does little to fight back against her stepfather, Alphonso. Later in life, when her husband, Mr.____, abuses her, she reacts in a similarly passive manner. However, Celie attaches herself to Shug Avery, a beautiful and seemingly empowered woman, as a role model. After Shug moves into Celie and Mr._’s home, Celie has the opportunity to aid the woman whom she loves and to learn, at last, how to fight back.

When we are first introduced to her we recognize her innocence and simple mind, when she says “he put his thing up gainst my hip” (Walker, 1991, p. 3) and then “he grab hold my titties” (1991, p. 3). She does not use these slang words intentionally because these are the only words she knows to explain her situation. Her failure to sign her name highlights that she has neither identity nor voice and that she is ashamed of the person she perceives herself to be. Having suffered the torture of repeated rape and having to let go of her children, in order to declare that she is sentimentally and sexually clean, she says, “I don’t bleed no more.”(1991, p. 7).

Shug’s maternal pushing gives an instant hand to Celie’s development. Gradually, Celie recovers her own history, sexuality, spirituality, and voice. When Shug says Celie is “still a virgin” (1991, p. 69) because she has never had a satisfying sex life, Shug demonstrates to Celie the renewing and empowering capacity of storytelling. Shug also opens Celie’s eyes to new ideas about religion, empowering Celie to believe in a non-traditional, non-patriarchal version of God.

As Jake Jafferson puts it, “throughout the novel Celie is growing and learning about herself.” To him, Celie’s growth is shown through her letters to and from Nettie. And he

adds, "the letters are the key to her knowledge of the outside world, and her children. With those letters she sees the world and watches her children grow up. She learns that she's not the only one going through a struggle and it gives her strength to carry on" (qtd. in Jefferson).

He especially argues that "The fact that Celie is writing to God shows us that she has a way of coping with her horrendous life. In a way God is the only thing she could turn to since her step-father scared her by saying "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy. This is the first sign of growth we are presented with in the novel. (qtd. in Jefferson)

Shug Avery enters the novel next and is idealized by Celie. Celie does everything she can to be like Shug which in the long run helps her be more of her own person. Once Celie becomes Shug's friend and stops trying to be like her, she instead begins to learn from her and becomes her own person. In a way they were both growing in their relationship at the same time because neither of them had had sexual experience with a woman before. "I don't know nothing bout it, I say to Shug. I dont know much she say." (Walker, 1991, p. 97). Shug teaches Celie about God, sexuality, and love, and helps Celie locate Nettie's lost letters. These actions enable Celie to find her voice and sense of self.

The self-awareness Celie achieves transforms her into a happy, successful, independent woman. After being voiceless for so many years, she is finally content, fulfilled, and self-sufficient. When Nettie, and her niece and nephew, Olivia, and Adam return to Georgia from Africa, Celie's circle of friends and family is finally reunited. Though Celie has endured many years of hardship, she says, "[D]on't think us feel old at all. . . . Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt" (1991, p. 244). Supported by the self-confidence she has gained through her relationship with Shug, Celie suddenly lashes back at Mr. ___ in an angry verbal reproach. She then moves to Tennessee with Shug and opens her own clothing store.

As Shug and Celie's relationship progresses, she begins to experience a real relationship with someone she cares about. For the first time in her life she truly loves someone besides her sister. Celie gains more self-confidence from being with Shug, and with this she finally learns how to stand up to Mr. __. According to Jake Jefferson this is clearly described to the reader for one of the first times in the discussion at dinner. At that dinner the reader is made sure about the spiritual growth and strength besides her free personality. She rebukes Mr. __, "You a lowdown dog is what you is what's wrong, I say. Its time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need" (qtd. in Jefferson).

What is interesting in these two novels is that they have many similarities and parallels in becoming the voice of women. Each has a woman narrator, each has a tendency of expressing almost all kinds of woman problems through letter writing or keeping a diary. The most obvious common point between the two texts is that Celie and Anna write themselves into being. Whereas Anna's and her alter ego, Ella's moments of consciousness

are figured as an inner speech act, for Celie it is the written voice which is her vehicle for self-expression and self-revelation. We read the letters of the text, as it were, over Celie's shoulder and Anna's eyes. The novels intend to reveal the natural process of women's maturing and they are also novels about how this reconstruction process runs. *The Color Purple*'s main characters, Celie and Nettie and *The Golden Notebook*'s Anna and Ella serve as examples of the ideal learning process and voice of women. Poor, oppressed, miserable Celie learns to overcome the patriarchal and manly oppression. On the other hand, fragmented, oppressed and challenging Anna learns to unchain social pressures, and aims at becoming the voice of women-self and a free woman in a male-dominated world.

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