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'Ambivalence' in Alice Walker's Art of Characterization

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Black writer's fictions and narratives generally revolve around the black subaltern, especially the African American life style. Any individual by instinct will be eager to express an art form which belongs to his/her own culture. Black people tried establishing their culture primarily through self narratives, ethnographic writings and then through the sophisticated creative art form, such as fiction. Alice Walker being an African American is entirely subject to the subaltern studies. Subaltern experiences and post-colonial space have been the source for all of her novels and characters.

Subalternity as a subject has greater connectivity with racism, sexism, dual consciousness and double marginalization to a larger extent. Rebellious nature is a psychological response for any kind of oppression. Any kind of domination would definitely result in rebellious attitude, where people would behave in such a way in which they actually don't want to, in order to break the restrictions. Human nature and character greatly depends on their personal and social environment. Behavior pattern or attitude of any particular subaltern may be an outcome of the suffering, the entire community had undergone throughout. Thus racism and sexism had played a vital role in sketching the attitude and behavior pattern of any subaltern society.

Colonization was the major cause for the submissive and rebellious or resistive nature of the subaltern societies. The word 'Colonization' brings along with it the binaries 'Submissive' and 'Resistive' 'Rebellious' from the same society. 'Ambivalence' 'Hybridity' and 'Mimicry' are the post-colonial models of behavior patterns expressed through the African American literature.

Colonization has inculcated the quality of 'Ambivalence' in the mind of the colonizer and the colonized worldwide. Ambivalence caused by colonialism, racism and sexism is found to be a major concept in Walker's art of characterization. Her male and female characters are ambivalent by nature due to the above said causes. African American literature is inseparable from subaltern studies, colonial and post- colonial literature, as African Americans were the main reserves for colonization and slavery.

This article analyses Walker's art of Characterization focusing on how Walker's characters turn to be a victim of 'Ambivalence' a psychological concept, as well as a post- colonial element. This article analyze Walker's characters under the light of the above two criteria.

Ambivalence is a term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action [Young 1995:161]. Adapted into colonial Discourse theory by Homi Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because The colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some

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colonized subjects are ‘complicit’ and some ‘resistant’, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. Ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time.

Most importantly in Bhabha’s theory, however, ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between colonizers and colonized. Ambivalence is therefore an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer. The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values that is, ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be ambivalent or ‘two- powered’. The effect of this ambivalence [the simultaneous attraction and repulsion] is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse.

Ambivalence therefore gives rise to a controversial proposition in Bhabha’s theory, that because the colonial relationship is always ambivalent, it generates the seeds of its own destruction. This is controversial because it implies that the colonial relationship is going to be disrupted, regardless of any resistance or rebellion on the part of the colonized. Bhabha’s argument is that colonial discourse is compelled to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers – this would be too threatening. For instance, he gives the example of Charles Grant, who, in 1792, desired to inculcate the Christian religion in Indians, but worried that this might make them ‘turbulent for liberty’ [Bhabha 1994 :87]. Grant’s solution was to mix Christian doctrines with divisive caste practices to produce a ‘partial reform’ that would induce an empty imitation of English manners. Bhabha suggests that this demonstrates the conflict within imperialism itself that will inevitably cause its own downfall. It is compelled to create an ambivalent situation that will disrupt its assumption of monolithic power.

Robert Young has suggested that the theory of ambivalence is Bhabha’s way of turning the tables on imperial discourse. The periphery, which is regarded as ‘the borderline, the marginal, the unclassifiable the doubtful’ by the centre, responds by constituting the centre as an ‘equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence’ [1995: 161]. But this is not a simple reversal of a binary, for Bhabha shows that both colonizing and colonized subjects are implicated in the ambivalence of colonial discourse. The concept is related to ‘Hybridity’ because, just as ambivalence ‘decentres’ authority from its position of power, so that authority may also become hybridized when placed in a colonial context in which it finds itself dealing with, and often inflected by, other cultures. The hybridist of Charles Grant’s suggestion above, for instance, can be seen as a feature of its ambivalence. In this respect, the very engagement of colonial discourse with those colonized cultures over which it has domination, inevitably leads to ambivalence that disables its monolithic dominance.

Bleuler’s tripartite scheme:

The concept of ambivalence was introduced in to psychiatric parlance by Eugen Bleuler in 1910-11. Bleuler distinguished three main types of ambivalence. Volitional, Intellectual and Emotional. Volitional ambivalence refers to an inability to decide on an action—what Montaigne Called “ a spirit justly balanced between two equal desires”. Intellectual ambivalence – The Skeptical belief that “ there is no reason but hath a contrary to it” . Emotional ambivalence Involves opposing affective attitudes towards the same object, as with the man who both loved And hated his wife.

In Walker's famous novel *Color Purple*, The character Shug Avery, a Blues singer is an anti heroine who turns to be a heroine at the end of the novel. She is a mistress of Albert and co-wife of Celie. She fell in love with Albert in her teenage and gave birth to three children. Shug could not marry Albert as he could not stand strong against his father's choice for his life partner. Though Albert was married to Annie Julia and had children, he never gave up the relationship With Shug or she never let him to do so. Shug always returned to Albert for sexual pleasures and thoroughly enjoyed it. Albert respected shug equally and welcomed her calling him by his name.

When Shug was deathly ill due to some womanly disease no one was there to take care of her except Albert. He brought her home and treated her. It was Albert who gave her rebirth from the illness. Celie's innocence and kindness in nursing her co-wife impressed Shug to that extent, that she betrayed her long time lover Albert for his injustice and dishonesty towards Celie. She discovered Nettie's letters from Albert's Trunk box and handed over it to Celie. Though shug needs Albert simply for sexual pleasures, she had been in his life throughout. It was Shug's betrayal of Albert's cruelty that shattered Celie's respect for Albert and isolated him from his family pulling down his dignity. Albert wouldn't have expected such a betrayal from his dearest lover shug for whom he ignored his wives Annie Julia and Celie. Shug's psychological state falls under 'Volitional ambivalence' which refers to an inability to decide on an action—what Montaigne called “ a spirit justly balanced between two equal desires” thus Shug's love for Mr. Albert and Celie.

In the novel '*By the light of My Father's Smile*' Walker has depicted Susannah's character as a prey of both Volitional and Emotional ambivalence. Siblings rarely respond in the same way to their shared upbringing. In case of Susannah and Magdalena, tensions exist even before their father beats Magdalena. The two girls differ in terms of their behavior and outlook on life. Magdalena feels as if their parents love Susannah more than her, so jealousy and resentment are two emotions that undermine any possible sisterly relationship. Most important foci in the novel are an examination of father/daughter relationship. Robinson's youngest daughter Susannah, turned against her father after she witnessed him beating her older sister, Magdalena. Magdalena's crime was having had sexual relationships with a local Mexican boy Manuelito. Now many years have passed, but Susannah is still searching for peace of mind and wholeness, and her primary method of striving for a better state of being is sexual experimentation.

Closing her eyes, she felt Magdalena watching her as she struggled to suppress the love she had felt for her hapless father. “ I do not care for any”, she heard Magdalena's maturing voice, as it had sounded that long-ago day in the car. She saw again the Green apple jellybeans, fresh and bright in her father's out- stretched palm. Saw herself refusing to raise her hands or her eyes to return his warm look. Saw and then felt herself betray her own love. On remembering the incident Susannah sobbed and felt the unconditional love for her father which was killed by Magdalena. She felt her foolishness in supporting Magdalena in killing it. Her foolishness in allowing killing the unconditional love for the sake of a person like Magdalena, who never cares for the wounds she cause to others. Susannah cries “I didn't know what it meant to give you up. And now it is too late” Susannah accused Magdalena for not letting her to forget the rudeness of her father. When Magdalena questioned her, why she should forget it, Susannah earnestly replies “because he's my father”. Susannah felt that she loved her father very much and he too reciprocated the love. It was only Magdalena who frightened her of him. She was forced to choose between her father and sister and being a child Susannah did not realize the value of losing her father for the sake of her sister. Even at this stage, she yearns for her father's love, but could not completely ignore her sister when she comes to know that Magdalena was sick and lonely. Susannah's relationship towards her father, when he was alive oscillates between love and hatred as she is a victim of emotions. She expresses the same emotion towards Magdalena, by

caring her during her illness and hating her for has distanced her lovable father from her. Susannah is volitionally ambivalent as she could not decide between her beloved father and sister. She is emotionally ambivalent as she also loves and hates both her father and sister.

In Walker's *Meridian* the Protagonist is intellectually ambivalent, where she has no reason for resigning the role of motherhood in her personal life. The concept of motherhood is sacred cow in the united States, and it has affected both black and white woman to some degree. Under the romanticized version of motherhood, woman should be hard-working, caring and self-sacrificing when it comes to raising their children. Within this schema, there is no place for a childless woman, above all for a woman who chooses to be child less. The choices Meridian makes concerning motherhood, namely adoption, abortion and sterilization, are extreme, but they serve.

The purpose of showing how not all women can be unquestionably classified as maternal. Meridian rejects the "nice" role of the "happy" mother, recognizing that "happiness" is merely an empty sign that accompanies the equally empty role of young, pregnant wife. Happiness does not apply in any way to Meridian's emotional state, but the conventional (and therefore seemingly logical) association of "happiness" with "motherhood" precludes her ability to state otherwise.[60] She feels guilty for leaving her baby, and cannot adequately explain why she must. But by shedding her prescribed "happy mother" role and standing up for her own needs, Meridian takes the first steps toward becoming a "revolutionary petunia." [61]] According to this role, a mother, particularly The Mythical Black Mother, should sacrifice her individual personality and concerns in order to live for her children. Meridian's cumulative guilt becomes so great it prevents her from seeing or moving freely[63].

Meridian carries a bloated and decomposing corpse to the Mayor's office to force the authorities to acknowledge their responsibility for the child's death. She tries to protect the Wild- Child. She feels for the death of Truman's daughter Camera. Meridian wants to help the children Of Chikokema. Though Meridian ignores motherhood personally she do demonstrate maternal inclinations in social life. In the chapter "release", Truman tells Meridian, " Your ambivalence will always be deplored by people who consider themselves revolutionists, and your unorthodox behavior will cause traditionalists to gnash their teeth." Meridian had a caring mother, a lovable husband who expects her to reciprocate his love and a beautiful child, for no reason she showed indifference and ignored them in search of self-freedom. Meridian rejects Motherhood in personal life but tries to adopt it in social life, which expose the Intellectual ambivalence in her nature.

'*In Temple of my familiar*' ,Little Zed's father died when she was a university student. Throughout her teacher training course she had to face a lot of riots and physical attacks. One day her school was shutdown and Zede was arrested for being a communist. In the three years of prison life ,Zede gave birth to Carlotta in the prison camp. Her father was Jesus, an uneducated prison guard. She escaped to San Francisco with Carlotta. Though Zede underwent teacher training, she could not take a job as a teacher, as the violence of her past life frightened her. She got a job in a sweet stall. First time when Carlotta took Arveyda to meet Zede, She reacts as if she tries to recognize somebody in him. Arveyda also felt the same way. Both of them mistook each other for their beloved ones. Arveyda felt his mother in Zede, and Zede recognized her husband Jesus in the appearance of Arveyda. The subconscious love between them grew unconsciously and one day resulted in a cultural disaster. Arveyda's troubled childhood in Indiana has left him searching for a sense of identity and belonging. In the course of that search for meaning, he devastates Carlotta by leaving her for Zede, her own mother.

In three years of their married life Arveyda and Carlotta had two children. At a point of time Carlotta felt some sort of indifference in the relationship between her Mother and her husband. She could recognize that they struggle to face each other. Later she comes to know that Arveydahas fallen in love with her mother and they both had orgasm. Zede fell on Carlotta's lap and confessed for the guilt. " it is as if you went out" Carlotta's mother sobbed after that first meeting, "and brought your father home". She cried striking her head with her palm in gesture of pain Carlotta had never seen before. "Arveyda loves you", said Zede."You must believe this. But also he and I loved each other from the start" [19].Being deceived by her own mother, Carlotta leaves Arveyda with her children. Zede and Arveyda travels to south America in the course of exploring Zed's past. Through the horrific recollections of slavery in Zed's tales of her youth in south America the novel offers eyewitness accounts of the deliberate and relentless enslavement and extermination of peoples of color. Zede has performed a traditional black mother role by running a female headed family and had struggled and sacrificed a lot to bring up Carlotta by single parenting. But she had played an emotional role too, which was in juxtaposition to the traditional one. Zede is a victim of 'Intellectual Ambivalence' were she has no reason for playing the contrary roles. In the case of Zede and Carlotta, an enemy could not betray Carlotta more effectively than her mother does when she starts an affair with her son-in-law.

The Psychological ambivalence of the Characters Shug, Susannah and Meridian in choosing between the roles of a beloved lover or friend, dearest daughter or sister, and a mother or socialist well reflects the obsession with identity. Zed's ambivalence in choosing between an orthodox and unorthodox role results in Cultural schizophrenia. Walker's handling of the literary device of 'Ambivalence' well express human Psychology.

The governing tropes of Du Bois's 'Souls' are double- consciousness and the "veil" – the curtain separating black and white life. By turns, Du Bois locates himself above, below, within, and without the veil, employing an imagery as old as the Bible. Allied with this is his concept of double-consciousness- a term with roots in contemporary thought, and certainly in that of earlier American thinkers such as Emerson and James, but with Du Bois makes uniquely his own. "One ever feels his two-ness." Du Bois wrote in the signal passage defining double consciousness, "An American and Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" .

In *Color Purple*, Sophia one of the main characters expresses post colonial ambivalence. Sophia was that kind of a woman who could never accept racism and sexism in her life. She was physically and mentally strong woman, who never gave a chance for inferior feelings. When her husband Harpo tried controlling her by physical attacks , she fought back and left him bruised. She never allowed anybody to rule over her. Once in the market, when the Mayor of the town asked her to serve as his maid, Sophia replied in a rude manner which provoked the mayor to slap her. Without a moment's lapse she returned the blow , for which she was sentenced to jail for a period of twelve years. She served as a maid in mayor's house and raised his daughter Eleanor Jane. The little girl took Sophia for her second mother and loved her very much. She was the only person in the family who always stood by the side of Sophia at any cost. Generally, 'black mammies' raising white children never mind how bad they are treated by their white masters, will love the white children brought up by them. Sophia a woman with self respect, her consciousness of racism and the role of a prisoner maid, stopped her from loving Eleanor Jane. When Eleanor seeks Sophia's wishes for his son Reynolds, Sophia replies that she feels nothing for him. Though Sophia was submissive in the prison house, internally she suffers the scare of racism which did not let her to reciprocate the love of Eleanor, which was influenced by racism and claimed twelve years of her family life.

In *'By the Light of my Father's Smile'* Robinson and Langley, an African American anthropologist couple moves to Mexico, in the disguise of Christian missionary as they lacked funds for their research to learn about the Mundo Indian culture. Robinson was haunted by the guilt of the masquerade, in order to explore a culture which insists on telling the truth. Though he had no belief in Christianity, he preached the religion to the people. The irony was that, the earlier preachers who tried to establish the religion in the village were driven out by the villagers, for the preacher's had no faith in celebrating family and sexual relationships. Robinson sucked into his black attire, was a preacher for the society and a lovable husband for his wife, who enjoyed an active sex life with her. He loved her more than anything and felt that there would be nothing in his world for him without her. Robinson feels himself to be lost under the disguise of a missionary, when his all accepting Susannah, sometimes looked at him in dismay and disappointment asking "Daddy, where is your own spark". As though a reward for his deceit of the villagers, Robinson had to wait for a long time after his death, to get the help of a Mundo Manuelito, in order to attain salvation. Robinson who thought to have succeeded in deceiving the villagers as a missionary, comes to know only after his death that he had been spied, up to his bed. Walker has portrayed the character fluctuating between the pious and the extremely opposite atheist attitude. Since the African couple lacked funds for their research, their economical conditions to run a life and continue the research had forced the atheists into the colonial religion of Christianity. As given in the example of Charles Grant's strategy in spreading Christianity in India, Though black people adopt themselves to the colonial culture, they were never treated equal by Americans.

In the novel *'Meridian'*, Truman and Meridian have been drawn together by their shared experiences of beatings and Jialing's as a result of their civil rights demonstrations and voter registration drives. She treasures him because he punctuates his conversations with French phrases which she had difficulty understanding, and he values her as "a woman to rest in, as a ship must have a port. As a train must have a shed" (141). They become sexually involved, and soon Truman discovers that she has been both mother and wife. Thus, he turns to Lynn Rabinowitz, another civil rights worker, after he has made it clear to Meridian that dating white girls is "essentially, a matter of sex." It becomes obvious at this point that in spite of his veneer of sophistication and charisma, Truman Held is a victim of racism and sexism, and he is driven by the same animalism which motivates the other characters of the novel. Scene by scene, Walker reveals him as an ambivalent, fragmented personality who is symbolic of the classic "double standard." On the one hand, he desires virginity; on the other, he is driven toward physical conquest. Truman's inhibitions and inadequacies prohibit him from accepting and appreciating the intelligent black woman whose assertiveness and independence he views as a direct threat to his masculinity. Truman turns to Lynne because, on first inspection, she embodies the qualities of a perfect wife. [15] True/man, called "True" by Lynne, is in fact, quite false: a black would-be revolutionary who loves to dress well and speak French. He paints strong black women, earth mothers, yet he finds himself attracted to white virgins. Meridian notes that, despite his revolutionary slogans and liberal education, Truman really wants a quiet little helper that would look good while hanging on his arm. Truman "did not want a woman who tried . . . to claim her own life. She knew Truman would have liked her better as she had been as Eddie's wife . . . unattractive woman, but asleep" (110). Meridian is too independent to be the clinging vine Truman desires.[62] Truman has turned the stereotype of the strong, fecund black woman into a marketable aesthetic object, and potentially the money he makes through the sale of his work will provide him with the means for not dealing with black women in his future—by marrying another white woman. As Truman works "night and day on the century's definitive African-American masterpieces," he still has not come to terms with his own ambivalent feelings about black women. 'They are so fat,' he would say, even as he sculpted a 'Big Bessie Smith' in solid marble, caressing her monstrous and lovely

flanks with an admiring hand” (168). Truman can appreciate black women only as art. Truman’s art becomes his substitute for dealing with the black women in his past. He can paint and sculpt Meridian over and over, but he cannot fully accept her as a lover and a friend.

Truman’s art does not challenge his own stereotypes about black women, nor does it prompt him to “seek them again in the flesh.” It is precisely their flesh that Truman finds threatening. His objection to large women is clearly not on aesthetic grounds because in his art he can admiringly caress the large flanks of Bessie Smith . It is the flesh itself, the reality of actual black women that he cannot come to terms with. Seeking black women “in the flesh” also carries a sexual connotation and is directly connected to Truman’s avoidance. While he can control the flesh/sexual representation of black women in his art, he fears that real black women do not control their flesh; they “let themselves go.”[145] Although Truman is able to question the motives and sincerity of the celebrities he reads about, he still does not fully question his own motives and his need to be politically and publicly correct. As the new revolutionary artist of the ’70s, Truman explains that the revolution of the ’60s was just a fad. “The leaders were killed, the restless young were bought off with anti-poverty jobs, and the clothing styles of the poor were copied by Seventh Avenue. And you know how many middleclass white girls from Brooklyn started wearing kinky hair” (189). Truman’s critique is, of course, equally applicable to his own dress and lifestyle. Like a cultural chameleon, each time Truman is described he has adopted a new, updated image. Truman’s usage of French language, dressing and preference for white woman well express the cultural hybridization, which is a product of post colonial environment. Mimicriying colonizers leads to ‘Hybridization’ and results in ‘Ambivalence’ which are related to one another.

Tashi the protagonist of “*Possessing the secret of joy*” was sentenced to death for killing M’Lissa, the Tsunga of the African tribe. The tsunga performs circumcision on the girls of the tribe. Tashi kills her, as an act of revenge for the death of her own sister Dura , and for the mental disability of her son which came as a consequence of her own circumcision. Tashi’s goal of murdering M’Lissa, is to eradicate at least symbolically an Olinkan tradition that cripples women.

Tashi recalls how the girls of her village taunted her for not being circumcised. Her intagenitals were a symbol of her outsider status within Olinkan society. Her decision to be circumcised is partly motivated by a desire to achieve a sense of belonging. Her final argument with Olivia shows that she equates her circumcision with resistance to cultural assimilation by Non-Africans. Similarly, her desire for tribal scarring on her cheeks is intended to define herself overtly as an Olinkan. She accuses Olivia, as American missionary, of working on behalf of white people to undermine African cultural authenticity and African’s in general. A conflict is created between Tashi’s African and her American identities, and this split is indicated by the different names – Tashi and Evelyn that she uses. However, she is not always just African or just American. As the chapter headings imply, the interplay between the two strands of her personality alters depending on her frame of mind. Thus, the headings Tashi- Evelyn or Evelyn –Tashi indicate which influence predominates at given moments in her life. Additionally there is another facet of her complex character that is evident in her identification as “Mrs.johnson,” Adam’s wife. The state between the binarism, and double-consciousness will evidence the signs of extreme ambivalence manifested in various kind of obsession with identity, as it is an outcome of post-colonial context.

Gramsci claimed that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes, although the history of the latter is usually that which is accepted as ‘Official history’. For him, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic since they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less

access to the means by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions. Only permanent victory can break that pattern of subordination, and even that does not occur immediately'. This helpless subordination and double consciousness results in post-colonial ambivalence as depicted in the characters of Sophia, Truman, Robinson and Evelyn.

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