

In Love and Trouble

Alice Walker's Walker's Green Setting and Green Platform

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:8 August 2013

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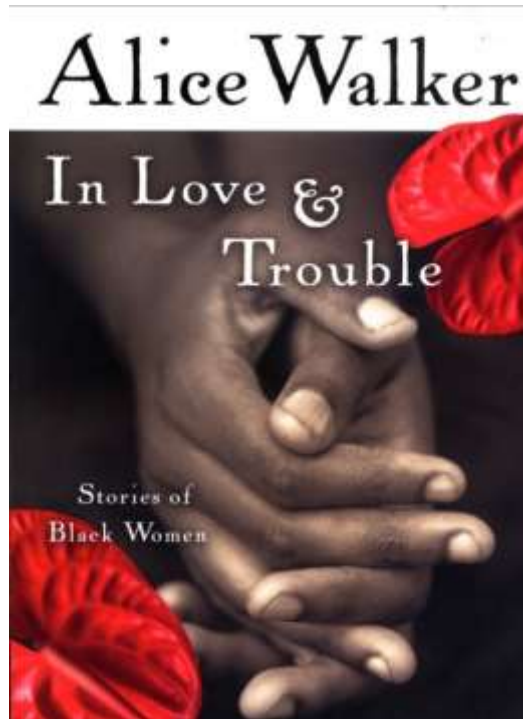
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Alice Walker is equally renowned as a short story writer, poet and novelist. She became very prominent after the publication of *The Color Purple* in 1982. Even before this, she had published short stories well noted for their excellent depiction of remarkable women engaged in stupendous struggle. Hitherto she has penned three collections of short stories entitled: *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973), *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories* (1982), *The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart* (2000). She has also written a short story book for children *Finding the Green Stone* (1991).

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Stories from an Environmental Perspective

This paper focuses chiefly on four stories from *In Love and Trouble* from an environmental perspective. The effort is to place her stories in the wider context of the current ecological vision. Although not a single story directly speaks of nature and other allied forces yet a closer reading enables us to unearth the green platform and the green setting on which the entire edifice is skillfully erected.

Roselily

For example, 'Roselily,' the opening story in *In Love and Trouble*, can be taken as a starting point of discussion. The story is about an introvert lady named Roselily who is perplexed and endeavours hard to justify her decision of marrying a Black Muslim. Though, it is a love story yet there are no parks, trees, rivers, fountains and brooks. The wedding takes place in the church. Practically, there is no outward action. The protagonist travels down from her balcony

into the church and story comes to an end after she is wedded and her husband turns deaf ears to the well-wishers and stands offish.

An Invitation to Trouble

On surface, there is nothing called a natural setting. Leaves, weeds, dogs and air are mentioned occasionally. Author's aim is to project how falling in love is an invitation to trouble. Yet a closer reading uncurtains various environmental implications of the story. Primarily, the title itself is taken from nature. It is the combination of two flowers: rose and lily.

The central character's attitude seems almost an exact replica of the values and behavior expected from both the flowers. Her name is Roselisy and she truly justifies it. Rose is of various colours like red, yellow, pink and white, and so one finds Roselily too in various roles such as: mother, daughter, wife and sister.

Rose and Lily both symbolize freshness, beauty and love. They live their lives for others. One remembers here Ben Jonson's "Oak and Lily" where the former *Poet Laureate* extols the virtues of Lily. For the poet, Lily has a short life, it is a flower of a day. It withers away with the setting of the sun yet its shorter lifespan bestows freshness, mirth and joy among the beholders.

Ben Jonson writes:

A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night:
It was the plant and flower of light.

A Combination of Two Flowers and Two Stories in One

Similar is the case with Rose that thrives and blooms in mire, but showers happiness, love, beauty and charm on the onlookers. It lives out its existence unconditionally for others. Roselily, a combination of both the flowers, is like both of them. She certainly embodies their

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characteristics. She is not sure whether she loves the man she is marrying. She is also doubtful about whether the man will free her or hold her forever. She knows that after wedding her life would be spent in robes and in veils which is contrary to the life that she has lived up to now. He has already told her that he will not let her work after marriage. There will be rest in plenty for her. She wonders what they will do and concludes that they will make babies.

True, Roselily won't be required to go and work in a sewing plant. There will be no need of learning how to place straight seams on the dresses of men. She is not marrying him for this comfort, but for her children's sake. She wants to give them better opportunities in life. Her earlier husbands have left her. She is mother of four children out of which three are staying with her. She envisages a wonderful future for them in Chicago, a place where her new husband lives. She reflects: "But in Chicago. Respect, a chance to build. Her children at last from underneath the detrimental wheel. A chance to be on top. What a relief, she thinks. What a vision, a view, from up so high" (Walker 8).

Restrictions upon Life

Roselily knows very well that her life after marriage would be full of restrictions. Her husband's hand seems to her like clasp of an iron bar. She wishes to break free from satin and voile. She knows she cannot be a bride and virgin forever. She endures the absurd giggling of her sisters about whom she thinks that her husband should marry one of them. Towards the end, she presses her worried fingers in his palms while he stands before her. Unflinchingly and unrequitedly, she accepts everything for her children's sake like Rose and Lily that spend their lives for others- former thrives in mire and mud and latter lasts for a day. And in return, they bestows happiness and joy on others.



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A Garland-like Structure

Adopting Rueckertian strategy of finding analogies or applying biological concepts on the study of literature, one comes across a garlandlike structure in the story. Just as a garland of flowers is woven by bringing together various flowers and if flowers are of different hues then it charms more than expected. Similarly, in this short story various headings which are inscribed on various subsections if placed together then they become a full-fledged sentence which carries an independent meaning that is directly and proportionately related to the context. Extra beauty is added by imagining those inscriptions as flowers of different hues since inscriptions vary in size and length.

The complete sentence that results when one joins these flowers like inscriptions is as follows:

Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here, in the sight of God, to join this man and this woman, in holy matrimony. If there's anybody here that knows a reason why, these two should not be joined, together, let him speak, or forever hold, his peace.



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Does Crime Pay?

Similarly, “Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?”, the second story in *In Love and Trouble*, offers a remarkable analogy with the natural world. Nature has been munificent for humans since the beginning. But, humankind has not returned their gratitude the way they should have. They have exploited the earth and nature for their personal benefits. For example, near the banks of rivers, they have raised lucrative projects like hotels and resorts. Dams are built to control the water. Houses that are built near rivers’ banks pollute the water and thereby disturb the aquatic life.

Nature undeterred and undisturbed has to follow her course. The nature of the water is to flow and it flows and when it does it engulfs everything that comes its way. Recent tragedy in Utrakhand where buildings and all industrial projects, the manifestations of man’s temporary triumph, were swept down to debris or wreckage, speaks vociferously about nature’s vengeance. Anything bottled for so long is bound to blast. Retribution or nemesis that nature inflicts on man varies from flood to quakes to tsunamis to landslides to incurable diseases.

Man's Exploitation of Woman

Likewise, in "Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?" man exploits woman and she in return seeks vengeance. Here, woman can be considered as an equivalent of nature. In fact, by mutual consensus, woman and nature are often identified. Since the culprit remains the same for both - Man. Man has tantalized woman under the incognito of patriarchy and nature of capitalism. Since the ravisher is the same person for both the categories, woman feels more affinity with nature. In many cultures such as Indian and African, nature is hailed as mother and this further strengthens the bond between woman and nature.

Myrna in *Really, Doesn't Crime Pay?*

Myrna, the central character is an aspiring author. She is married to Ruel, a warrior who fought in Korea, a rich man who works in a store and owns hundred acres of peanuts farm. Though, there are no stances in the text where Ruel physically or sexually abuses Myrna yet she has to suffer. He does not let her pursue her writing career instead often suggests her to make babies and go for shopping.

As a result, Myrna feels somewhat stifled. Instead of writing full-fledged stories, she stoops down to the level of writing outlines. She has written so much that even a shed can be filled with her scripts. Later, Mordecai Rich, a budding writer in search of truth and beauty enters in her life. Under his touch, she blooms and thrives. He admires her writing and addresses her as another Zora Neale Hurston and Simone de Beauvoir. She even goes to bed with him. Everything seems to be moving nicely. Under his touch, her body blooms like flowers. She calls it a miracle. It seems strange and wonderful, though she knows there is no love involved in it. She remarks in almost triumphant tone, "Now Ruel will find that I am not a womb without a brain that can be bought with Japanese bathtubs and shopping sprees. The moment of my deliverance is at hand!" (Walker 20)

Later Mordecai Rich offers to take her stories with him and see what he could do with them. She gleefully gives him everything her stories as well as her body and he flies away never to return. As a result, she goes insane. Her senses desert her. She starts hunting the town in

search of Mordecai. Her husband wants a child from her that she never denies. After many futile attempts to impregnate her, Ruel takes her to a hospital for speedy conception. There while reading a magazine, she discovers her own story that she once let Mordecai see, published under the name of Mordecai Rich. Her disintegration is somewhat accelerated by this. She also tries to kill her husband but luckily he gets up in time. She is later admitted into a mental asylum.

Mild, Subdued, Effective Revenge

After recovering, she comes back and takes her vengeance. Here, she does not acquire a wild form that nature sometimes does. Her path is mild and subdued. She has not forgotten anything. She pretends to be a kind of tamed wife. Her husband still wants an offspring and she submissively goes to bed. He feels resented because she sometimes laughs when he carries on about her goodness. She remains completely passive in bed and says nothing but yes until he is exhausted. She constantly takes birth control pills without letting him know. This she does in a celebrating way:

The house still does not awaken to the pitter-patter of sweet little feet, because I religiously use the Pill. It is the only spot of humor in my entire day, when I am gulping that little yellow tablet and washing it down with soda pop or tea.
(Walker 24)

It seems as if she blames her husband for her miserable life. It was he who denied her a writing career and asked her to go for shopping or have babies as if they were the same. Had he allowed her to be what she wanted, no Mordecai would have diddled her. She would have been a well-known author and Mordecai would have followed her like bees go after jaggery. He wishes to be a father and she denies him without letting him realize. She does everything what a man expects from his wife. She prepares supper, goes to bed unquestioningly. She goes for shopping twice a day. She purchases hats, dresses and shoes. She sweetens and softens her body regularly, keeps perfumes, skin softeners and pots of gloss and eye shadow. She feels amused while painting her own face as if in sheer victory. Her determination to teach the wrong doer a lesson can be seen in the concluding lines of the story where she assuredly and confidently avers:

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When he is quite, quite tired of me I will tell him how long I've relied on the security of the Pill. When I am quite, quite tired of the sweet, sweet smell of my body and the softness of these Helena Rubenstein hands I will leave him and this house. Leave them forever without once looking back. (Walker 24)

Encapsulating an Ecological Thought

The content of the story encapsulates an ecological thought. The structure also brings forth an analogy with biological world. The story has the structure of a fruit. Say, for instance, an apple or a watermelon. Just like fruits contain seeds this story too has two short stories within it. Just like a seed of a fruit needs proper care, earth, water, sun and fertilizers to grow into a plant which yields the same fruit, the two short stories in this story also need proper attention and nurturing before they grow up in full flashed story like the one of which they are the part. Just like seeds in a fruit contain the essence of the fruit, so here too both the short stories contain the essence of the larger one.

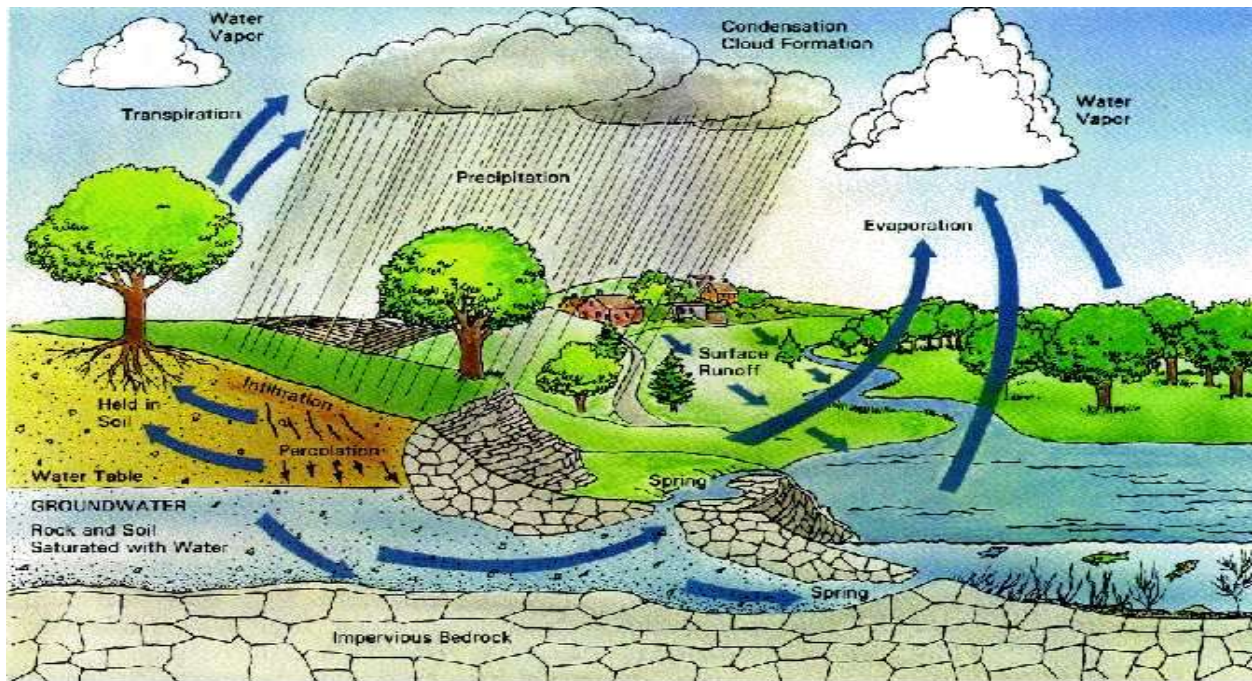
The Child Who Favoured Daughter

The Child Who Favoured Daughter is another story in the collection. This story also offers resemblance with ecosphere. Here one encounters nature straightaway. There are cotton fields, trees, clouds, wind, flowers, dogs, moon, sun and wasps. But they do not interfere with the characters or the plot. They just provide a setting for the action to unfold. Their presence or absence in any way does not hinder the development of the main action. However the most brutal incident in the story in which a father beats his daughter ruthlessly takes place when it is raining outside. The storm outdoors and upheaval indoors somewhat provide a platform to the writer where external and internal disturbances are proportionately balanced. Here, the father too shares a kind of affinity with dogs. He not only feeds them when they are hungry with food but also flings the remaining parts of his daughter's breast at them.

All this is not significant in the overall biocentric reading because the father is enraged and bound to punish his daughter whether rain or no rain, whether storm or no storm, whether dogs come or not. He must have flung the parts of his daughter's breasts on the earth itself had there been no dogs. Nature merely provides a backdrop. She is not a living character that influences the course of the action.

Correlation between Biosphere and Action

However, an environmentally conscious eye cannot help but perceive the correlation between biosphere and the action of the story. The process of recycling that transpires in atmosphere regularly is at work in this cultural artifact. Recycle means reoccurrence. It is like a wheel that keeps on revolving. It is cyclic in nature. One may think that it is over but it comes back like Phoenix rising from its own ashes. It is never dead. For example, rain results because of a constant recycling of the water. Sunlight absorbs water from ponds and rivers. Water goes up and acquires the shape of clouds and then it rains. For a while one may wonder where the water has gone, but it is there. It changes its shape. It comes back. Similarly, in the autumn trees shed their leaves. Greenery disappears for a while. But with the advent of spring leaves come back. The earth again thrives. The orchards prosper and joy returns. Even seasons keep on following their regular course. Autumn is followed by spring. Summer is followed by winter and the process continues annually. Nothing is lost forever. Only the outward appearance is metamorphosed.



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Cyclic Betrayal and Punishment

In the story too, this recycling of betrayal and punishment constantly reoccurs. Only the characters undergo a change. Walker here tells the story of two generations in which daughters are beaten by their fathers because they bring ignominy by merging with whites. Initially, it was the girl named Daughter who betrays her family. She bestows her love to the man in whose fields her brother works and where he is treated as no man. This brother loved his sister whole heartedly and sister too on her part reciprocated his love. In fact, she could not resist reciprocating anybody's love. She could never keep money, clothes and health with her. When she came back with some other woman's husband, she was broken down: "When she came back all of her long strong hair was gone, her teeth wobbled in her gums when she ate, and she recognized no one" (Walker 38).

She was at the mercy of everyone. They threw her betrayal at her like sharp stones until they satisfied themselves with the realization that she could not feel either their ostracism or her own pain. She was tied to a bed and her food was flung at her as if she were an animal. Day in and day out she would sing and scream that she was on fire. At night when she would hovel at

the shadows thrown on her by moon, her father would get up and lash her into silence with his belt. After recovering her old self, she pleaded her brother to let her loose, but he fearing that if let loose, she would run into woods and never come back, denied. She, like a weary animal, got up freeing herself. She knocked her brother unconscious and ran away. The same night, she was impaled in one of the fence posts. She later died. Her brother could never forgive her because she gave her love to the Lord of his bondage.

One may reflect here that the saga is over. The daughter who betrayed the family received her nemesis and happiness engulfed the family forever. But, the situation turned other way round. Years passed. The incident again transpired, this time with a difference. The brother's attitude towards women was somewhat embittered. He struck his wife so hard that she became crippled to pervert her from returning imaginary overtures of the white man. Later, she killed herself when she was young and strong enough to escape him. After several years, the entire scene takes place again. This time it is his daughter who deceives him. She loves a white man who is already married with someone of his own kind. He gets hold of her love letter and sits in the porch with his short gun waiting for her while she walks gently across the yard towards the home. He knows that she knows he has got the letter, "If he cannot frighten her into chastity with his voice he will threaten her with the gun" (Walker 37).

Later, like his father, he beats his daughter. He shoves her roughly on the ground. She is like a rootless willow under his hands and as she does not resist, he beats her long with a harness. Where the buckle hits, the blood gushes out. Next morning, he goes back to the same place and when his daughter does not own the letter and attempts to move out, he seizes her breasts. Yelping dogs create frenzy in his ears. He is burning with unnamable desire and in agony he knives her breasts and flings at the dogs what he finds in his hands. In this way, the entire episode of previous generation reoccurs. In both the cases, the daughters of the family were beaten and ill-treated. On every occasion, the Whites were somehow responsible in disturbing the peace and harmony of Blacks. In this way, the wheel of betrayal and punishment rolls constantly. Who knows, may be in future, his son from another wife or any from his kith and kin will do the same with his daughter or sister or wife when whites, as they are habitual by status and disposition, will again intervene in the serene life of black families.

“Everyday Use” is yet another story that is raised on a green platform. Though the half of the action transpires in the open yard yet the story has a metaphorical green setting when parallels are drawn between human and non-human world. Initially, the first paragraph itself is scathing rebuff of indoor culture of today’s world. Today, one is so engrossed in comfortable flats that nature seems to be completely shut out. One finds peace and respite in air conditioners and blowers that natural air has almost become non-existent. The narrator announces that she and her daughter Maggie will wait for her outrageous and outgoing daughter Dee in the yard that she and her daughter swept clean yesterday afternoon. Walker seems to be nostalgically remembering her own childhood in rural Georgia when she with her friends would lie down in the open fields on mats, as Evelyn C. White records reassuringly in Walker’s biography. This is how Walker paints the entire scene in the story:

A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house. (45)

The mother here is waiting for her college going girl who is active and extrovert unlike her stay at home daughter Maggie. She thinks about those reality shows in which pretention and half reality preponderate. She thinks that she with Dee is standing in a brightly lit room with so many people around them. Dee is embracing her with tears in her eyes. She is pinning a large orchid on her dress though initially she had called orchid as tacky flowers. She is presented on the stage the way Dee wants her to be. Wait reduced, hair glistening and skin like uncooked barley pancake. Johnny Carson has to struggle hard to keep with her quick tongue. But, this she wonders is only the way cinema presents human beings. There is no truth in it. She has another side to her character which is consummately concealed.

She is large, big boned lady with rough working hands like man. She wears flannels in the winter to bed and overalls during the day. She can work like a man whole day. She can eat the steaming pork minutes after it was taken from hog. Once, she struck a bull calf straight in

between its eyes with a hammer. She can work whole day like a man and break ice to get water for washing. She can even kill and clean a hog mercilessly as a man. Her fat keeps her hot in zero weather. She is also not well educated. Moreover, she does not has the courage to look a white man in eyes. She remembers encountering white man with one foot raised in flight and head turned in whichever direction it found farthest. She also does not possess a quick and witty tongue.

Common Pretexts

All this surely reminds one of the pretexts used by industrialists while raising their industrial plants near natural resources. Every year many jungles are cleared, hotels and resorts raised regularly in sensitive zones. Capitalists erect their factories near rivers and villages. Countless people are forced to evacuate their lands. And all this takes place in the name of progress, development and prosperity. They always say if a particular factory is raised near a water body or in the village or elsewhere it will have many positive yields. Many people will get employment. Poverty of so many families will be lessened. Their children will be able to go to schools. The workers will be provided with good houses. The income of country will increase. Foreign currency would come inside. Infrastructure will become better. All this surely is true.

But, this is only the one side of the coin. The other side that is detrimental for the health of environment is often harbored adroitly. Nobody highlights that how pollution will increase once a factory is erected? How detrimental it can be for the health of ozone which for generations has been protecting human beings from ultraviolet rays? How various diseases of air will harm the workers and the neighbors? How the waste dumped in the fields and water will mar fecundity of earth and be pernicious for the aquatic life? All this never gets highlighted. Even various admonitions of weather department and disaster management department are mischievously neglected. However, this does not mean that one should completely shun science and technology. The point is that they should be used prudently for the benefit and health of all. Creativity and community must be the aim of all projects.



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Engulfed in Greenery

The story can be seen as engulfed in greenery from another angel. Dee, the boisterous girl who comes from city with her boyfriend most probably from college comes with a particular mission. She wants to take churning top, dasher and quilts with her. This is very significant. When she comes, there are two remarkable changes in her. First, her name as she herself says is no longer Dee. She has renamed herself as Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo. This is an African name. She no longer wanted to be named after her oppressors. She redefines herself abjuring the ways of whites symbolically and literally.

Her dressing sense also reveals her affinity with African soil and culture. This is how she is described when she climbs down from the car:

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up o shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The

dress is loose and flows, and she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go “Uhhnnh” again. It is her sister’s hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtailed that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears. (49)

Black Nationalist Movement – Back to African Roots

All this is directly in contrast with the way in which blacks were living up to now. In fact, in 1960s as Black Nationalist Movement gained momentum, Afro-Americans started to look back to their roots. They could not go back to Africa physically, but in mind and body they could metamorphose themselves in the manner of their brothers and sisters who lived many miles away. Walker, in another short story “Her Sweet Jerome” reveals a group of African women who were part of Black Nationalist Movement. They addressed themselves with African names, wore dresses made of African clothes, got their hair kinky, wore long and whooping earrings and never attended church.

Dee too belongs to such a group. Following Africa and her ways is surely symbolic. Africa not only represents a country and a continent but also an ideology. Africans are the sons and daughters of the earth. From birth till death, their culture is steeped in nature. They revere jungles, crops and ancestors. Becoming African is not only wearing African dresses and acquiring African names but following a way of life as well. So, when Dee demands churning top and dasher, renames herself, gets her hair straightened, wears long ear rings and dresses herself in bright blasting colours, she metaphorically adopts a way. This way of life is truly contrary to the way in which European live.

Adopting African Ways to Save the World

Many of her characters like: Hannah Kemhuff, Dee, Tante Rosie, Ranni Toomer and Sarah from other short stories adopt various African ways. Walker perhaps is hinting that adopting African way is but an only solution to save the world from environmental crisis. Dee further demands quilts form her mother. She considers those quilts as her heritage. Actually those quilts were made by joining various scraps of worn out clothes - clothes that were worn by

her great grandfather in civil war, her great grandmother, her grandmother, her grandfather. So on and so forth. Her mother denies to give her those quilts because she has already decided to give them to her younger daughter on her wedding. But, she is of the opinion that her younger sister, Maggie would be backward enough to put them to everyday use. They would be put out on bed and in five years they would be in rags. Her mother enquires that what she will do with them and she replies that she would hang them as if this was the only thing that could have been done with the quilts. Maggie is ready to part from the quilts because she thinks that she can remember grandmamma without any symbol. Moreover, she knew how to quilt. Her grandmother and her aunt had already taught her. In the end, the mother decides to keep quilts for Maggie and Dee goes empty handed.

Consonant with the Heritage

The point that captures readers' attention here is that both the sisters are somehow consonant with their heritage. Dee has recently acquired this perhaps from books and people around her or may be from social moments whereas Maggie received it from the very beings who shaped it. Walker perhaps wants everybody to be conscious because without consciousness nothing can be done. If one is aware, one will act without awareness no action can be imagined. Both Dee and Maggie are aware of their heritage. Living in harmony with nature was also one part of African legacy. Anybody following African culture would end up establishing a connection with nature. Though, Walker does not hint it explicitly yet one can construe it on the basis of what African life represents in totality. This sure is the central point of almost every ecological vision today that one has to go back to the ancient way of reverence and respect if one wants to continue one's existence on earth. Arrogance and egotism can only aggravate ecological disasters.

Speaking to a Different Audience

The last dialogue of Dee cum Wangero with her sister is very germane if read out of the context. In the story, Dee is speaking to her sister, but thanks to the freedom that readers enjoy

while reading in post-modern scenario, one can imagine or take her address as made to the Europeans. She speaks with conviction:

You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it. (55)

Indeed, she is right. Everybody should try to make something of one's self that is from remaining unaware, one should try to be aware of the entire world around. One should relinquish the selfish way of living and be conscious about the sanctity of the existence of all. The world is changing rapidly. This is indeed a new world because in old world man and nature had amity with one another. One was conscious of the existence of the other. But, the way man is living today, realization of this seems impossible. Without realization, survival is impossible. And it is the survival that is at the root of ecocriticism.

Enacted on Green Platform

To conclude, it can safely be asserted that Walker's short stories surely are enacted on green platform. The issue of color and class definitely is there, but it relapses into insignificance when one reads them in the context of environmental crisis. Everybody has to contribute in his or her way to save the earth. Walker is no exception. She utilizes her talent as an author to deal with most current and highly sensitive issue though covertly.

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