



A Character Study of Alice Walker's The Third Life Grange Copeland

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Abstract: Alice Walker, famously recognised as the author of *The Color Purple* in 1982. Her achievements for this foresaid book won the Pulitzer Prize-winning award that brought international claim as black women writer in American literature. She was born to sharecropping parents in Eatonton, Georgia, in 1944. Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is a debut novel that basically focuses on the life of a black sharecropping family in the South. The novel discourses three sequential story in terms of its significant pattern of terror for black people in the South. Basically there are different issues concerned with the novel, the primary concern is racism, and the secondary concern in the novel is Grange Copeland's life and activities that reevaluates the arrangement of trepidation over a duration of sixty years. The plot moves on three generation's lives of a Black family of sharecroppers. Grange Copeland is the protagonist, who represent a non-traditional seeking hero--a poor black sharecropper. This particular study will focuses on the different characters in the novel.

Keywords Character, study, analysis, deterioration, angst, racism, identity, submission and self-discovery.

Introduction

The single work which best expresses Walker's powerful ambivalence toward Southern life is her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, a book notable for its vitality and its resonance. Walker's complex vision of the South can be seen in her development of the novel's three main characters—Brownfield, Ruth, and Grange Copeland. (90-91)

The above extract is taken from a critical work entitled *Bloom's Modern Critical Views Alice Walker*, a chapter entitled

"Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*" by Robert James Butler, highlights the significance of the life of Grange Copeland that starts with a happy married life with Margaret as an enthusiastic sharecropper. The novel takes the reader to the three generation consequently, however the three generations in the novel are Grange Copeland and Margaret is the first generation, and their son Brownfield is the second generation and the third one is Ruth, his youngest granddaughter of Grange.

Grange Copeland begins his married life with Margaret that goes on



smoothly at the initial level, however the fluctuations and friction start taking place at the time when their son Brownfield was born. The difference came in life when exploitation took place, the white landowner started manipulating Grange's labour, which eventually caused irretrievable indebtedness. This effect had mushroomed the despairing obstruction in Grange Copeland's life. Walker accomplishes to nurture assorted spirits amongst different readers, she is prominent for breaking taboos.

The novel associates with several issues that reflects Walker's life, such as the circumstantial condition as the daughter of sharecroppers in Eatonton, Georgia, that enlightens much of her writing. In connection to her literary career that highlights the mishandling of black women by their husbands and fathers, the Civil Rights movement, and the provisions of self-sufficiency, moral apprehension and issues ranging from race relations to sexuality. Walker's obstinate credentials is in profound association with the Deep South, and clearly reflects in her literary ground, such as fiction, poetry, and essays that basically focused the antiquity and experience of the South and Southern black people.

In an interview with John O'Brien, published in 1973, Alice Walker distinguished two major strains in black fiction: the chronicle of a black family and the tale concerned primarily with racial confrontation. Her remarks are worth quoting since they suggest, in retrospect, the formal and political problems that she explored and tried to reconcile in her first novel, *The*

Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970).

Thus, mentioned in an article entitled "Speech, After Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*" written for the highly acclaimed Journal *Jstor* by Harold Hellenbrand, who teaches at American Literature and American Studies at California State University, San Bernardino, writes about Walker's special interest with the "black family". The article precipitate a rage different experiences of racial and economic oppression in the South.

Taking into contemplation in detailing with the stories of the three important characters of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, are Grange, Brownfield, and Ruth. Walker's understanding about the crises that solitary exemplifies their personal struggle of sustaining the individual self in the milieu of community, rather she recognises the approaches that are responsible for persistent misery in her non-fiction work. Her perspectives as both black and female, indeed attempts to develop her apparition of the world most frequently over and done with the judgements of her black female characters.

The presentation of these three characters instigate their stories as an exceptional beleaguered in the sharecropping system and in the conforming ambiance of domestic violence and consequential self-hatred of mid-twentieth-century in Georgia. Each character is challenged with a sense of his/her anguish and thus surpassing the suffering and its malicious cycle of brutality. Grange's 'first life' with his wife Margaret and their only son, Brownfield as an underprivileged shed



maintained by a white man was a catastrophe. The amalgamation of hostility towards Black citizens and workers involved in a despairingly debt that was ruined by deficiency.

The struggle that Grange and Margaret had accumulated was the consequences of the diverse forms of scarcity occasionally generated the most detrimental. This critical situation made Grange to abandon to interminable sequences. The magnitudes of this suffering resulted in hard work, celebrate, vehemence and atonement and hence Grange heads for a nearby Juke joint 'Dew Drop Inn' maintained by Josie, a local whore. Walker's presentation of Grange's character is predominantly from an interior and exterior vantage point. The external settings of racism and poverty are significant to the novel's meanings, how Grange reacts to those situations is crucial to his character management. As Grange considered himself as an object of discrimination, that he started venting his anger out on his wife and son.

In search of consolation, Grange particularly finds in Josie, just like on the other side Margaret's solitary alternative was to join the Saturday night adventures and consumes alcohol same as her husband. She does exactly like her husband, who starts involving in physical relationship with other, she too involves with her co-worker and finally with her white boss. This act of sexual relationship with her white master contented her to the core. Ultimately this act lead to in giving birth to a light-skinned baby, on the other hand, Grange deserts Margaret and the children. However, absolutely disheartened, Margaret exterminates the baby and herself, leaving Brownfield all alone. Walker describes Grange as a

coward, a man who is scared to face up to his kinship responsibilities.

Ineffectiveness is the strategic feature in crafting the succession from one generation to the next. This expedition of bad luck does not restrict with Grange, rather it get transferred to Brownfield. He follows the same footstep as his father did, the self-destructive customs that moulded his character. However, Grange escaped from his responsibility but Brownfield does not repeats father's 'first life' where he was trapped.

Considering his father's state of affairs, Brownfield decides not to work for the same white man who controlled his father. However, Walker's objective in this novel is to incite a vicarious as well as perilous reaction to the racial delinquent in America. The main idea that Walker intends to portray through this literary piece of work is to bring awareness of racism and its effects on personality for those who do not comprehend. Nonetheless, the intensity to which the black characters go through and the excruciating circumstances is her strategy to create a kind of sympathy in the readers.

Taking after his father, Brownfield roams for weeks together and ends up coming to the Dew Drop Inn, the same place where his father used to regularly visit. The strong reason for his visit to this place was loneliness that happened after his mother's death. Grange had on numerous circumstance drank and celebrated with the owner, Fat Josie for more than two years. However, the purpose of Brownfield to visit there was to facilitate the business and consecutively sleeping with Josie, his father's mistress and her daughter



Lorene, resulting in a “semblance of manhood as his father had in sex” (53).

As the marital life of Grange starts with happiness, so happens with his son Brownfield, who chances to meet Mem, Josie’s appealing, calm and college accomplished niece. Both of them meet and ultimately marries, initially the married life runs smoothly, they are also contented for several years, same as his father and mother, till poverty and overburden situation forces Brownfield to drinks and mistreats his wife. They had five children and by the time Grange comes back from the North, Brownfield had been imprisoned for murdering Mem. Constructions of masculinity and femininity is through the ages, however the difference is strengthened in many culture, Walker merely highlights the empowerment the male superiority “how his life was becoming a repetition of his father’s” (54).

The epidemic of gendered violence, discrimination and harassment such as wife beating is the impacts gender stereotypes and power dynamics at community level is common. Advantageously, positioning Grange and Brownfield as role models in such assumption who prevent, stop and ultimately end the practices that can have positive outcomes. Brownfield also suffers same as his father, coercion and cruelty does not leave his luck, he agonises domination and meanness of white bosses who treat him no better than a slave. He raises up to be an acrimonious young man in quest of his father who by then had left his family to pursue a life in the North. Brownfield has been imprisoned for murdering Mem. In a critical work *History of Southern Women’s Literature*, a chapter entitled

“Contemporary Writers and Race” by Minrose C. Gwin writes:

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970), Walker’s first novel shows, the exploitation of African American men’s labor can lead to their mistreatment of the women in their lives, just as Walker’s best known novel, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Color Purple* (1982), opens with the rape of the young Celie by the man she thinks is her father and revolves around Celie’s attempt to find power within herself despite continued abuse by her stepfather and later her husband, Albert. (467)

Grange’s ‘second life’ begins in the Northern part of Harlem, there is a sense of development in his character. He understands the universality of fellow-creature’s anguish and the intensity of racial abhorrence. In search of happiness, he get married to Josie, with his saving that gathered through stealing, along with hers. Walker’s understanding about the three concepts such as “Race, class, gender and sexuality” is very prominent as Gwin, describes her as “the best-known author among southern women writing today and one of the most widely read and anthologized American writers of the twentieth century”. (462)

The “third life” was associated with Ruth, Grange’s granddaughter, whom he desires to give a good life. As they progress in a virtuous relationship with each other. As the unfavourable condition Grange does not to want Ruth to encounter Brownfield, who was released from the jail then and would provide a painful life to her. As one can notice, there is a friction at the end of the novel,



where Brownfield and Grange fight over who has the right to Ruth. On the other side she cherishes in her heart whatever Grange had qualified her about happiness and survival. Walker's novels reflect the ideals and limitations that pressure the lives and identities of African American women and men in the South. She is a writer, who comprehensively predisposed by her Southern legacy that is obvious for readers of her fiction as well as of the subjective anecdotes articulated in numerous literary discourses.

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