

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Rhetoric and Empathic Unsettlement: Mediating Trauma in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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**Received:** September 2, 2025;

**Accepted:** December 8, 2025;

**Published:** December 16, 2025.

**Citation:** Aryal, S., & Niraula, S. (2025). Rhetoric and Empathic Unsettlement: Mediating Trauma in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 7(1), 434-441. <https://doi.org/10.25082/IJAH.2026.01.004>

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to analyze the connection between rhetoric and trauma in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* by unpacking how rhetorical devices produce empathic unsettlement. By analyzing Walker's portrayal of Celie, the protagonist of the novel, this research explores how her psychological and physical trauma are revealed without assigning direct blame. Despite enduring extreme trauma inflicted by her stepfather and husband over three decades, Celie's choice to forgive and entrust justice to God reflects a working-through process that reframes her pain and diminishes its intensity. Drawing on theoretical insights from Kenneth Burke, Dominick LaCapra, Kali Tal, and Ron Eyerman, this study employs key concepts from trauma narrative and rhetoric, including identification, persuasion, the middle voice, and empathic unsettlement. Burke's ideas on identification and persuasion inform the analysis of how Walker connects readers to Celie's experiences, while LaCapra's concept of empathic unsettlement offers a lens to understand the balance between emotional engagement and critical reflection. The study also incorporates Tal's and Eyerman's discussions on collective and cultural memory, situating Celie's personal trauma within broader social and historical contexts. Together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the rhetorical strategies Walker employs to mediate trauma. This study concludes that it is Walker's motive to present Celie as such a benevolent character so that she develops compassion for the ones who hurt her and forgives everybody of their wrongdoings. As a result, Celie's forgiveness does not settle trauma but produces empathic unsettlement inviting readers' engagement with suffering without assigning blame.

**Keywords:** Rhetoric, empathic unsettlement, trauma, middle voice

## 1 Introduction

Representing trauma in a narrative poses a theoretical and rhetorical challenge: how can traumatic experiences be represented in ways that foster ethical engagement without overwhelming readers through emotional excess or producing moral detachment? Trauma studies scholars have long argued that trauma resists direct articulation and is often mediated through narrative strategies such as middle voice, empathic unsettlement, fragmentation, and silence. These mediating strategies foreground the importance of rhetoric which shapes how trauma is represented and communicated.

This study situates itself at the intersection of rhetoric and trauma theory in its examination of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982) to argue how Walker uses a rhetorical approach to trauma that avoids both emotional coercion and indifference. Extreme empathy risks producing vicarious trauma and moral polarization, while emotional detachment risks apathy. Walker negotiates this tension by framing trauma through language that conveys brutality while refraining from explicit blame. In depicting the harrowing journey of the novel's protagonist, Celie, a Black woman subjected to prolonged psychological, physical, and sexual violence by familial and marital figures, Walker's narrative neither amplifies her suffering nor directs the reader's anger toward her perpetrators.

Guided by the research question, "In what ways is trauma mitigated leading to empathic unsettlement?" this study focuses on Celie's painful experiences in Walker's novel arguing that empathic unsettlement allows readers to engage with Celie's suffering without being overwhelmed by affective manipulation or too much hatred towards her stepdad and husband. In

the representation of Celie's trauma, Walker uses language in such a way that the act of brutality gets conveyed, the emotions are aroused in the readers, trauma gets mediated, and all this is done without pointing the fingers at the perpetrators. By framing Celie's trauma in a way that conveys the brutality of her experiences while avoiding direct blame, Walker achieves a balance that elicits empathy without fostering hatred.

## 2 Literature Review

*The Color Purple* since its publication in 1982, has garnered critical acclaim for its exploration of the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class in the lives of African American women in the early 20th century. This literature review assesses the multiple issues such as universalization of the sufferings of victims, male centric symbolisms, race and domesticity to suggest the literature gap and justify the necessity of this research project.

Tucker (1988), in her review of *The Color Purple*, argues that language itself poses a challenge for women in articulating their experiences, as the linguistic codes available to them are rooted in and shaped by a patriarchal society. She views the novel as an emergent text where not only Celie but other different women such as Nettie, Shug and Mary Agnes emerge out of patriarchal values. Celie's problem, according to Tucker, is how to establish her own text against those texts which are established according to male's will: "Women's self-creation is influenced, impeded, constrained by language that has embedded in it the codes of patriarchal culture. For the black women writer, the search for voice-the rescue of her subjectivity from the sometimes subtle, yet always pervasive, dictates of the dominant white male culture- is even more problematic" (p. 81). Tucker underscores that mainstream language, its codes, signifiers, and signified are all structured to favor men. This challenge is evident in Celie's difficulty as she writes letters to God—a figure both absent and symbolically present as a white male.

Though Celie initially addresses her letters to a male, white God, the novelist Alice Walker deliberately departs from the mainstream linguistic norms in *The Color Purple*. The novel is written in "Ebonics," a non-standard form of English, which allows the authentic voice of a suffering woman to emerge in its raw and unfiltered form. This stylistic choice not only amplifies Celie's voice but also brings forth powerful new female figures who collectively transform "his story" into "her story," while still leaving room for the inclusion of male characters. Walker further disrupts patriarchal linguistic codes by referring to her stepfather Alfonso as "Him" and her husband Albert as "Mr\_." These nameless designations reflect Celie's perception of all men as agents of oppression, reducing them to generic terms that strip away individuality, as they consistently wield power over her to assert their superiority.

Likewise, Hesford (1999) in her study of the rape narratives, argues that much of the rape narratives in any part of the world are guided by the victim's mentality of revenge. The stories of the sufferings, pain, trauma and violence turn into commodification in these narratives. Hesford writes, "The revenge fantasy thus illustrates how the language of rape and dominant structures of gendered subjectivity continue to speak through women's resistance and how rape marks the female subject physically and psychologically" (p. 194). She criticizes the rape narratives for portraying women's body as something to be consumed by men as such portrayal of victimization invites the risk of converting trauma into commodity and pain into pleasure. Walker's novel presents this issue with relation to female body but what is important is to consider how Walker's narration moves far away from the issues of revenge and hatred. No blood stained body is presented, no bruises are described, no sensual images of female body is exaggerated and thus is peculiar than other rape narratives which distinct our study from the other.

Similarly, Hamilton (1988) argues it is the writer's politics to create the discourse in any way he or she desires to speak their own mind through the attitudes of the characters. In her reading of the novel, Hamilton finds that Walker's objective is to find Celie's voice but what Cynthia objects is the lack of upsetting or shocking part in the narration rather the brutal sexual violence inflicted upon a fourteen-year black teenager girl written down by Walker as 'sort of wiggle it round' (p. 379). Hamilton questions over walker's narration expressing the concern that people might disagree with such narration in the depiction of a sensitive case like rape.

Early (1992) examines *The Color Purple* from the perspective of realism and declares it a bad novel for Walker's inability of understand history and capture the reality. He criticizes novel for

its “fanciful” representation and its utopian ending arguing that the novel resembles *Cinderella* in its universalization of pain of the main character and thus becomes everybody’s protest art:

*The Color Purple has all the historical sense of “Cinderella,” not quite a folk tale because there are no real folk in it, but a superbly realized feminist cartoon about a women, victimized by cruel relatives, who is transformed into a princess. It is the triumph of the race without precisely being about race, so it has all the overtones of being “universal”... The Color Purple, book and movie, has become everybody’s protest art: an indication of our need to have a bloodless eschatology where there are no devils in the end, no evils that cannot be repented and, indeed no final rendering up of things, because there will be no sin, only all of us simply going, quietly and softly, into that good light. (p. 408)*

However, in making these two different faulty analogies, Early overlooks a crucial difference. While *Cinderella* receives support by the magician, the rats, the dwarfs even the pumpkin that help her to vent out her suffering. On contrary, Celie has no such external support; her only outlet is writing to God, who remains absent throughout the narrative and offers no intervention, even at the end. This study therefore rejects Early’s claim that Celie is transformed into a princess in such easy manners as *Cinderella*. Celie’s transformation is the result of three decades of suffering, endurance, and self-realization.

Selzer (1995) observes *The Color Purple* from the perspective of “race” and “domesticity”. Selzer argues that the text is referring to the unity of Africans not only in America but all over the world. For her, the ability to expose sexual oppression seems to come at the expense of its ability to analyze issues of race and gender. For her, Sofia rejecting Reynolds Stanley as living embodiment of literal heir to the system that oppresses her, puts the Olinka vision of all looking at all human beings as one mother’s children into dichotomy:

*Significantly, these small steps towards progress in race relations come not from some realization of the Olinka ideal or any recognition of identity between the races but from an evolving separatism and parallel growth in racial identity within the African and African American communities. The possibility of treating everyone like “one mother’s children” is achieved within but not within racial groups by the end of The Color Purple. Instead, the conclusion leaves readers with images of an emerging Pan-Africanism in Africa and nascent black nationalism in the American South. (pp. 77-78)*

Though Selzer uses the term domesticity in order to show the unity between racism and female bonding, her interpretation of the text as emerging Pan-Africanism and black nationalism is too much narrow. This study takes a point of departure from Selzer’s argument that the motive of domesticity in *The Color Purple* is approached only to unify the races whether it is outside America or inside America. In fact, there are a lot of instances in the novel where Blacks and Whites go hand in hand. White folks working in Celie’s dry goods store, Miss Eleanor Jane coming to work in Sophia’s home should be looked from broader perspective.

The different opinions of the critics discussed above raise concerns over the issues of race, domesticity, sufferings, victimization. However, in seeking to make these critiques, many scholars overlook the central impulse of trauma writing, the use of middle voice. Walker’s traumatic narration of Celie maintains its ethical force precisely because of her rhetorical choices. Although numerous critics acknowledge Celie’s trauma, they tend to examine it either in isolation or with an exclusive emphasis on language. Yet neither trauma nor language, when analyzed separately, can do justice to the text. It is, instead, the politics of language—the way linguistic form mediates and shapes the articulation of pain—that allows Celie’s traumatic narrative to achieve a balanced and ethically grounded representation.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

Since this study examines how rhetoric of Walker has paved the middle path in mediating Celie’s trauma, it borrows theoretical insights from both rhetoric and trauma studies. This study critically examines the novel *The Color Purple* from Kenneth Burke’s theory of “new rhetoric” as identification combining it with Dominick La Capra’s theory of empathic unsettlement. In addition, it also incorporates Ron Eyerman’s notion of cultural trauma and Kali Tal’s idea of incest.

Burke (1969) in his book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, discusses identification as the key tool for the persuasion, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech,

gesture, tonality, order, image attitude, idea identifying your ways with his” (p. 55). Whenever someone attempts to persuade, identification occurs. He defines identification as a process that is fundamental to being human and to communicating. He contends that the need to identify arises out of division. Each human being exists as biologically separate beings and therefore seeks to identify through communication to overcome separateness.

Likewise, a pioneering scholar in trauma studies, Tal (1996) in her book *Worlds of Hurt* advocates the need of existence of separate literature for trauma. She examines three different strategies of cultural coping in the cases of trauma which are a. mythologization which works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives, b. medicalization which posits the illness of trauma victims into cured category under modified structure of medicine and psychiatry and c. disappearance which is the refusal to admit to the particular existence of trauma. All these are done by undermining the credibility of the victims. But if the dominant culture manages to codify the trauma in its own terms then the status quo is unchanged which helps them to exercise their power without any nuisance. Tal argues “powerful political, economic and social forces will pressure survivors either to keep their silence or revive their stories. . . Incest is so barely reported, and prosecution is so rarely effective that that most incestuous relationships are finally ended by the victim when she becomes old enough, independent enough and powerful enough to escape away from her victim” (pp. 7-19).

Similarly, LaCapra (2004) argues traumatic writings should be approached with empathic unsettlement, where empathy aroused in the readers should be settled neither in the perpetrator nor in the victim. His advocacy for the middle comes stems from his belief that “At least when used in a certain way, the middle voice may be argued to be the most suitable for representing or writing trauma, especially in cases in which the narrator is empathically unsettled and able to judge or even predicate only in a hesitant tentative fashion” (p. 197). He argues the voice which is hovering between the victim and the perpetrator is the most suitable voice in trauma narrative. The middle voice is not a vehicle for truth claims nor it is for ethical-political judgments having any significant degree of decisiveness.

In addition to LaCapra’s notion of middle voice, his ideas on “acting out” and “working through” are employed in this research. For LaCapra, acting out involves a compulsive and repetitive re-living of the trauma; individuals who act out have difficulty distinguishing between the past and the present and struggle with notions of future. They are haunted by their experience and trapped in the past that wounded them. Person acting out repeatedly feels the events in flashbacks, hallucinations or dreams. It is the way of brain to cope up with those unpleasant experiences “a tendency to relive the past” (p. 142). On contrary, ‘working through’ is a strategy of dealing with the trauma in which the survivors of trauma start a healing process accepting what had happened to them. “In working through, a personal tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present and future” (p. 143). Working through refers to the ways where the trauma victims find ways to move on with life in order to overcome their trauma.

Similarly, Eyerman’s (2001) concept of cultural trauma is also taken into consideration in this study. Eyerman defines cultural trauma in opposition to psychological trauma which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, “Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by anyone at all” (p. 2).

## 4 Discussion

Walker, in the portrayal of Celie, attempts to persuade readers by using Ebonics, the language of Celie which is used strategically to build the identification with Celie’s character. Celie in her attempt of articulating her pain through her letters to God struggles a lot as evident in her monologue, “I do not know where England at. Do not know where Africa at either. So I still don’t know where Nettie at” (Walker, 1983, p. 102). Here, Alice’s motive is to make the readers identify with nearly uneducated Celie in her own way, who does not even know how to open letters. In addition, it is necessary that to understand Celie’s feelings, readers must first situate themselves in her position. We identify ourselves in the category of Celie as “hick” where she has no exposure to the outer world. Kenneth Burke defines this identification process as “consubstantiality” which is a practice related concept based on related identifications and

symbolic structures which persuade and produce acceptance.

Burke describes the basic function of rhetoric as the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human beings. Unlike traditional rhetors who define rhetoric as persuasion, Burke defines rhetoric in terms of identification. To Burke, rhetoric is the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols. Burke argues that rhetoric works to bring about change in people be it evident through intentions, motives or attitudes. For him, identification is the key tool for the discussion of rhetoric; whenever someone attempts to persuade, identification occurs. Whether it the young teenager Celie who is raped and who writes letters to God, or the older Celie in her forties writing letters to her sister after knowing her whereabouts, the readers identify with her and forms a connection that fosters persuasion.

Unlike traditional rhetoric that emphasizes the relation to an external audience, Burke stresses on the need to convince oneself first. We can never convince others until and unless we convince ourselves and identification is the most important thing to convince oneself. To Burke, a man can be his own audience even in his secret thoughts. [Burke \(1969\)](#) writes, “A man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him” (p. 38). Celie is her secret audience in herself and she persuades herself first. Burke twists his theoretical attention to identification rather than only persuasion. A writer persuades an audience through the use of identification. His act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with his interests. The identification of interests is done by any writer to build rapport between himself and his audience. Walker does not want her readers to turn rebellious towards her stepfather and husband. Since Burke’s theory focuses on the identification of text more than other things, the identification of the text, the intricate details provided in the novel have contributed the text to make a better understanding of the black community during the decades of 1920s.

Pioneering scholar in trauma studies [Tal \(1996\)](#) in her book *Worlds of Hurt* advocates the need of existence of separate literature for trauma. She examines three different strategies of cultural coping in the cases of trauma which are mythologization which works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives, medicalization which posits the illness of trauma victims into cured category under modified structure of medicine and psychiatry and disappearance which is the refusal to admit to the particular existence of trauma. All these are done by undermining the credibility of the victims. Tal also cautions against the dangers that the narratives of the survivors can be manipulated by the social and political structure, “Powerful political, economic and social forces will pressure survivors either to keep their silence or revive their stories... Incest is so barely reported, and prosecution is so rarely effective that that most incestuous relationships are finally ended by the victim when she becomes old enough, independent enough and powerful enough to escape away from her victim” (pp. 18-19). In Celie’s case her stepdad is socially, economically and politically stronger than her. The discourse created by him gets accepted in the society than her. Celie’s only option is not to be Cassandra and trust only God. The trauma gets unreported as there are no chances to be heard. Again, it takes thirty years for Celie to be bold, economically independent, confident and powerful.

[LaCapra \(2004\)](#) in his book *History in Transit: Experience, Identity and Critical Theory* accurately describes ‘experience’ as a basic and undertheorized concept. He argues that the experience of trauma may be vicarious or virtual. The risk of vicariously experiencing trauma lies in the possibility that one may over-identify with the victim, becoming a surrogate sufferer who imaginatively relives the event—sometimes to the extent of blurring the boundary between real and imagined experience. In doing so LaCapra depicts how experience (in the form of testimony) can enrich existing notions of trauma and ethics:

*Testimony makes truth claims about experience or at least one’s memory of it and, more tenuously, about events (although one clearly expects someone who claims to be a survivor to have lived through certain events in actuality). Still, the most difficult and moving moments of testimony involve not truth claims but experiential “evidence”- the apparent reliving of the past, as the witness, going back to an unbearable scene, is overwhelmed by emotion and for a time unable to speak. (p. 131)*

In Celie’s case, her letters to God serve as testimony to her trauma that she has actually experienced in her past since she had nobody to share her trauma except God. The briefings of her sufferings in her letters also serve as logos which offer good reasons for the readers



to believe that the experience is real. It is Celie who makes an assertion that she is raped, suppressed, silenced and the reliable evidence to her claims are her letters to God which are the compilations of Celie's experiences in written form.

Walker has created Celie as a character who endures suppression but does not revolt openly. Even at the end of the narrative, Celie forgives all her perpetrators and leaves them to God. This narrative choice reflects Walker's motive to mediate Celie's trauma through what LaCapra terms the middle voice. Walker invites readers to empathize with Celie by placing themselves at her place, yet she simultaneously resists encouraging readers to direct their anger toward figures such as her father or her husband. Trauma writing, LaCapra argues, must avoid extremes: neither excessive identification with the victim nor the wholesale othering of the perpetrator. Excessive empathy on one side and othering of the other side fall outwards from the ethics of trauma writing as stated by LaCapra. LaCapra argues traumatic writings should be approached with empathic unsettlement, where empathy aroused in the readers should be settled neither in the perpetrator nor in the victim:

At least when used in a certain way, the middle voice may be argued to be the most suitable for representing or writing trauma, especially in cases in which the narrator is empathically unsettled and able to judge or even predicate only in a hesitant tentative fashion. It would not seem to be a vehicle for truth claims or for ethico-political judgments having any significant degree of decisiveness. It would rather more or less radically problematize such claims and judgments and, at its most forceful be a way of placing basic beliefs or perspectives in an agonistic, possibly fruitful, interaction with one another—hence also a way of placing the self or the subject in question. (p. 197)

LaCapra argues the voice which is hovering between the victim and the perpetrator is the most suitable voice in trauma narrative. The main feature of trauma narrative is to avoid putting blame on one side because the blame politicizes the narration. When the act of violence is given a political dimension, then the moral act of opposing loses its ground. In the novel, Walker employs this rhetorical strategy with notable care. To present Celie's trauma, Walker presents her father's character as a Black male who perpetrates violence against his daughter, Celie who is also Black. Had Walker depicted Celie's father as a white man—and had Celie been driven toward revenge—the narrative might have produced intense pathos in the readers and that would have settled Celie's trauma in one side. Walker avoids this by portraying both the perpetrator and victims as Black and by portraying Celie as a forgiving figure. This narrative choice prevents the novel from becoming a simple Black-versus-white story and instead opens a middle path for trauma narrative.

In the novel, Celie expresses her sufferings, pain and the difficulties through the letters that she writes to God. Writing letter is Celie's attempt to move away from the unpleasant experience of her rape. The act of writing letters not only lessen her trauma but also help her to live her life in a meaningful way. She undergoes both through the process of "acting out" and "working through". The process of "acting out" refers to a response in which a traumatized person continues to relive the past horrendous event as if it were still occurring. Person acting out repeatedly feels the events in flashbacks, hallucinations or dreams. LaCapra defines it as "a tendency to relive the past" (p. 142). Celie is so much devastated that she turns herself into a senseless person despite all the excruciating pain inflicted upon her. She endures everything at the cost of her life. When she thinks about Nettie, she thinks she is dead, which is acting out as she fears both her father and Mr\_ because of her horrible experience with them.

"Working through" is a phase where the survivors of trauma start a healing process accepting what had happened to them. "In working through, a person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present and future" (LaCapra, 2004, p. 143) Working through refers to the ways where the trauma victims find ways to move on with life in order to overcome their trauma. When the victim makes critical distance between the past and present accepting oneself existing in the present as different from the past, the life of the victim becomes meaningful. The act of writing letters functions as a form of 'working through,' helping Celie lessen the intensity of her trauma and prepare to move forward into a life that feels meaningful.

Not only Celie is a victim of physical and psychological trauma, her stepfather, her husband, her own dad, Shug, Harpo, Sofia, Squeak are also victim of cultural trauma. This cultural trauma has its deep impacts in Celie's trauma too. There is a series of those who victimize others and who have a past of victimization. Harpo is the victim of patriarchy since his father shuns him to

marry Sofia at first. This is totally the case with Mr\_ when Old Mr\_ shunned him to marry Shug. Both of Celie's dad are the victims of cultural trauma. The episode in which Squeak is raped by the white Sheriff while seeking justice for Sofia clearly picturizes the situation of Blacks during the then period. Eyerman (2001) writes:

*As opposed to psychological trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by anyone at all. (p. 2)*

Given that the novel is set in 1920s America, a period marked by intense racial tension, the legacy of slavery and the failed promises of Reconstruction continued to shape Black identity. The inability of Reconstruction to fulfill the freedoms implied in the Emancipation Proclamation contributed to growing frustrations and uprisings among Black communities. Walker's portrayal of the racial and social conflicts between Blacks and whites underscores the pervasive effects of this cultural trauma. Celie's suffering, while deeply personal, is also indirectly shaped by the collective trauma inherited from her father and the larger community. By illustrating how each character—whether Celie, her father, her husband, Shug, Sofia, Harpo, or Squeak—carries some degree of trauma, Walker highlights that Celie's pain does not emerge in isolation. Instead, these interconnected experiences of trauma collectively influence and, in some ways, modulate Celie's own suffering.

In the novel, Celie ultimately leaves all her perpetrators to the judgment of God, and her belief in God for a better future helps to temper her frustration and rage. The settling down of Celie's rage paves a middle path- a space that allows her trauma to be acknowledged without collapsing the narrative into a simple logic of blame and retribution. Walker's aim is twofold: to reveal the depth of Celie's devastation and, at the same time, to maintain the ethical balance required in trauma narration. Walker keeps her away from the politicization of trauma by avoiding a dualistic world view in which one is always the perpetrator and the other as victim as such dualistic framework violates the ethics of trauma writing. Accordingly, she avoids framing events in terms of good versus bad, right versus wrong, or what ought to be. Such moralizing would undermine the narrative's complexity and constrict Celie's trauma into rigid binaries. Instead, Walker presents the events as part of a broader social process, allowing the scenes themselves to convey meaning rather than imposing ideological judgments upon them. Walker does not align herself with the victims in the narrative, nor does she explicitly display sympathy toward them. Instead, she upholds an ethical responsibility by refusing to assign blame to any one side

In his essay "On Forgiveness", Derrida (2002) argues true or genuine forgiveness is to forgive the unforgivable. He argues, if one is prepared to forgive only the forgivable then the idea of forgiveness would disappear. To Derrida, forgiveness should not be normal, normative or normalizing "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible"(pp. 32-33). The tortures inflicted by Celie's father and Mr\_ remain indelible deep down Celie's psyche. They have committed serious harms which cannot be forgiven. Celie absolves them by forgiving their unforgivable deeds which is beyond forgiving. Celie's forgiveness is genuine forgiveness as stated by Derrida.

## 5 Conclusion

To sum up, trauma and language have come together to create empathic unsettlement in the novel. The writer drapes a protective shield of rhetoric that deflects unwanted criticisms from tarnishing the narrative which is presented to the readers in a middle voice. Through Celie's letters, Walker employs the middle voice, enabling readers to engage deeply with her pain while resisting the impulse to assign blame or foster hatred toward her oppressors. In addition, Celie's act of forgiving her stepfather and Mr\_ is beyond than just being kind. It resembles more to redemption. It is through her benevolent act of forgiving that everything gets settled in the novel. Pa and Mr\_ become free from their sins. Mr\_ and Celie become friends sewing pants together. Finally, Nettie and Samuel also return home with the grown-up children. Hence, it is the rhetorical motive of Walker that creates the character of Celie as a naïve African American

girl and makes her forgive her perpetrators despite all the tortures they inflict upon her so that a middle path is framed in the narration of Celie's trauma.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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