From Subordination to Emancipation

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From Subordination to Emancipation: Constructing the Female Self in the Works of Alice Walker and Rupi Kaur

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Sanja Runtić, Associate Professor

Osijek, 2019

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Abstract

Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and Rupi Kaur's collection of poetry *the sun and her flowers* (2017) seem to be two completely different literary works. Although the former is a novel written in the twentieth century and the latter is a poetry volume written in the twenty-first century, both works represent a woman's personal growth from subordination to emancipation. This thesis explores the similarities between Walker's novel and Kaur's poetry volume in order to show that the emotional responses they convey are representative of female experience in general, regardless of the time and place where one lives. In order to prove that, the two works are analyzed according to five life stages proposed by Kaur in her poetry volume – wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming. In each of the five stages of life, the main character of *The Color Purple* and the speaker from *the sun and her flowers* experience various struggles, but the emotions that occur out of those experiences are the same. Their initial scare, confusion, and subordination eventually turn into strength, fearlessness, and quest towards independence. Examining their common themes and motifs, such as heartbreak, racism, violence, abuse, and community, the paper argues that despite the time period, the place, or the cause of the trauma, both texts maintain that hardships can be made bearable and meaningful if one finds support in one's community or resilience within oneself.

Keywords: Alice Walker, Rupi Kaur, *The Color Purple*, *the sun and her flowers*, subordination, emancipation, sisterhood.

Introduction

Twenty first century has brought around "instapoetry," a new type of poetry that is brief, straight to-the point, often accompanied with illustrations and – posted on Instagram. Although originally dismissed by the literary critics for its incongruity with traditional ideas of what poetry should be, it has become globally popular and introduced poetry even to those Instagram users who probably would not be the ones to pick up traditional poetry volumes. One of the founders of "instapoetry" is Rupi Kaur, an author to whom Instagram has brought world-fame and the possibility to publish her online poetry in an actual poetry volume. *The sun and her flowers* is Kaur's second published collection of poetry and the one that discusses some of the most prominent problems that (contemporary) women usually encounter. Because of the easily digestible forms and the topics that are close to everyone's hearts, *the sun and her flowers* has quickly become one of the most popular contemporary poetry volumes. Kaur's speaker shares her thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding heartbreak, abuse, self-love, and independency through five sections of the volume – wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming.

However, Kaur is definitely not the first author to tackle the issues that women usually come across in their lives. Alice Walker, the author of the epistolary novel *The Color Purple* has discussed similar problems that are often encountered by women on their path towards self-love and independence. Altering the traditional epistolary novel and using the diary-like style, Walker has given a voice to a young African American woman named Celie. By embracing the first-person point of view, she came up with an effective tool to fully present the struggles that women in the American South faced during the twentieth century and empower those who might recognize themselves in Celie's character. Describing Celie's path from childhood to adulthood, Walker's novel offers a genuine insight into what it is like to seek liberty and emancipation in an environment that is oppressive and does not give women plenty of opportunities to change the status quo.

This paper examines Kaur's *the sun and her flowers* and Walker's *The Color Purple* with regard to the speaker's and the main character's (different) life circumstances and emotional struggles in order to explore how both of them cope with their respective situations. The first chapter explains the terms "epistolary novel" and "Instagram poetry," and outlines the development and the historical context of the terms. The second chapter provides the general information on *the sun and her flowers* and *The Color Purple*, emphasizing the

structures and the writing styles of both literary works. The third chapter is divided into five subchapters, which are titled wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming, according to the sections of Kaur's poetry volume *the sun and her flowers*. It explores the emotional aspects that the speaker of *the sun and her flowers* and the main character of *The Color Purple* encounter on their emancipation quests, and shows how those emotional aspects are relatable to female experiences in general.

1. Defining the Terms "Instagram Poetry" and "Epistolary Novel"

1.1. Instagram Poetry

We live in the age when the entire world is rapidly changing due to the influence of technology – and poetry is not an exception. The revolution of the online world has begun with blogs and bloggers who became A-list celebrities, while now their place has been taken over by Instagram influencers. Instagram is a social media platform that allows its users to post photos, add descriptions, engage with their followers, but also to follow, comment on, and engage with the content and other content creators who share their interests. Rupi Kaur has established herself as one of the most popular Instagram poets, with the following of over one million people. She has redefined the way modern audience sees poetry – it is no longer reserved only for the published collections of poems, but is now available to everyone through a few taps on their smartphones. The Instagram poetry, also known as "Instapoetry," "consists of verses which are often short and easily digestible" (Leduc 97) and whose authors are mindful not only "of their words but also of the overall look of their individual posts and accounts. Instapoetry, then, is as much about the words on the page as it is about the visual image posted" (Leduc 97). Kaur has begun her career by posting poems on Instagram, and in 2014, after gaining a large social media following, has published her first collection of poems named *milk and honey*. The collection was an enormous success, which has led to another collection of poems titled *the sun and her flowers* in 2017. Although Rupi Kaur eventually published her poems in form of a book, it is inevitable that Instagram was the starting point that has helped her to challenge traditional views and to establish "a new mode of doing poetry, a new type of poetry reader, and a new poetical public" (Leduc 102). Moreover, it has allowed the readers to act as literary critics because they were able to express their views in the comments under the photo/poem. While it can be assumed that the readers / Instagram users do not have the required academic background to critically evaluate poetry, they do not hesitate to express their opinion on the posted poetry. In that way, it can be said that "what is happening in the comment sections of Kaur's posts is similar to what might happen at an academic conference or after a poetry reading" (Leduc 109). Instagram poetry has offered a chance for its users to engage in conversations about immigrants, sexuality, feminism, and racial issues which are provoked by Kaur's writings and drawings. Although poets "have been discussing these issues, they never reached mass culture, until instapoetry" (Leduc 112). Now, it appears that everyone is getting more and more conscious about such global issues, and it is

partially thanks to poetry that has become an equal part of the popular culture as songs and movies are.

1.2. The Epistolary Novel

A novel is a lengthy narrative, usually written in prose and published as a book. Nowadays, the critics distinguish between plenty of different novelistic styles and subgenres, such as the realist, gothic, picaresque, or epistolary, all of which have a common characteristic – they are all "extended works of fiction written in prose" (Abrams 117). Because of their extension, novels have the ability to introduce a number of diverse characters, (sub)plots, settings, and motifs, which usually results in a complex but gripping story. In the eighteenth century, with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), the epistolary novel was established. According to Barnet et al., the epistolary novel is defined as "a long fictitious prose narrative consisting chiefly or entirely of letters" (63). Since this subgenre traditionally implies the *exchange* of letters, it "enables the author to present multiple points of view on the same event" (qtd. in El-Hindi 158). As a result, the readers are able to observe one event from different perspectives, which allows more objectivity.

In the eighteenth century, epistolary novels were mostly written by female authors because the form gave them the opportunity to give voice to subordinated, voiceless women of the period. Following that tradition, Alice Walker has used the epistolary form to depict the struggles of twentieth century African American women. In her epistolary novel, *The Color Purple*, Walker took "the traditional form of the epistolary and manipulate(ed) it to rewrite the life of the protagonist, Celie, who finds her identity and self-worth in an oppressive family" (El-Hindi 159). While traditional epistolary novels would often offer the insight into the psychology of the characters, unlike Richardson, Walker wanted to focus on the tragic events experienced by her protagonist. Therefore, she used neither the letter exchange nor the stream of consciousness technique. In the beginning of the novel, Celie writes to God, but, as he is not going to answer the letters, "the result is a narration that is almost diary-like in form" (El-Hindi 160). In those letters, she does not sign her name in a traditional epistolary-novel manner since she is completely voiceless. However, the moments in which Celie encounters Nettie's letters that have been kept from her mark the beginning of "her transformation into the act of liberation" (El-Hindi 160). After that, she addresses Nettie, and not God, in her letters, and in that way starts to mentally detach herself from the constraints that she has been

in her entire life. By using "black" vernacular and not standard English in Celie's letters, Walker advocates not only the emancipation of African American women but also the emancipation of the African American community in general. Just like Celie, the African American community is able to overcome the obstacles that have been forced upon it by the predominantly white society.

2. A Note on the Works

2.1. Rupi Kaur's *the sun and her flowers*

Although Rupi Kaur's poetry is often dismissed and marginalized by literary critics because it is being categorized as the so-called "Instagram-poetry," it is inevitable that it speaks to a lot of contemporary women. This paper focuses on the collection of poems *the sun and her flowers*, whose structure follows the development of any (young) woman. The collection is divided into five major sections – wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming. The names of the sections represent the life cycle of a flower, presumably metaphorically of a sunflower, which is what the title of the collection suggests. However, once one scratches the surface of each section, it is obvious that each part stands for a certain point in life that most women go through and that corresponds to the rebirth of flowers. Kaur ends the second section of her collection, titled "falling," with a poem that sums up the five different stages of life:

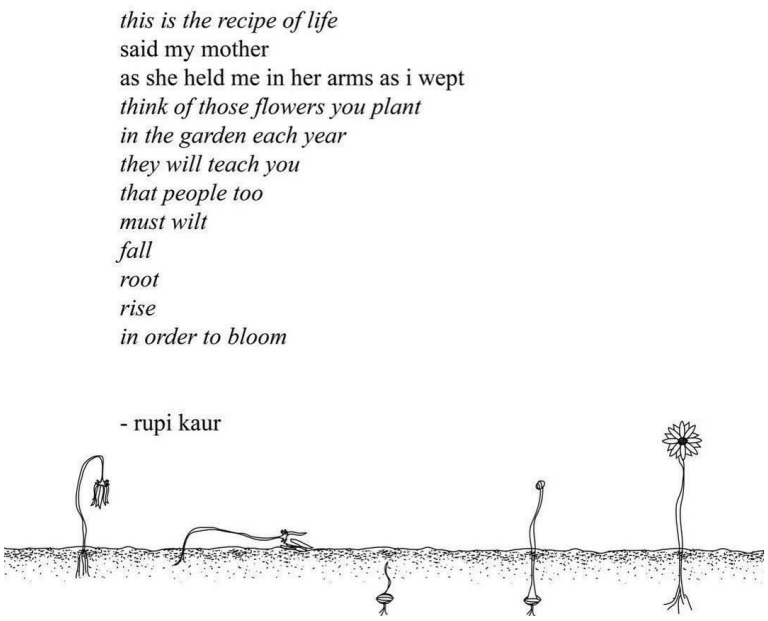


Fig. 1. Kaur's Drawing of the Life Cycle of a Flower from *BinTransition*; bintransition.com, 20 May 2019, www.bintransition.com/2019/05/21/social-private-life-where-do-we-draw-the-line/.

The speaker is engaged in a conversation with her mother, who is comforting her by explaining that people are just like flowers – they have to overcome plenty of difficulties before they are ready to bloom. The speaker should be aware that that is "the recipe of life" and that things have to happen in a certain order. Just like following a recipe, every woman has to experience the bad moments and then pick herself up to reach her full potential.

In Kaur's *the sun and her flowers*, the drawings make up for a lot of missing context. Sometimes they emphasize the speaker of a poem, while sometimes they fill in the gaps so that the readers can completely comprehend the meaning of a poem. In this poem, they allow the reader to visualize the process flowers go through in order to bloom, which also helps visualize the feelings that women go through to until they eventually turn into a flower.

Accordingly, the drawings which follow some of the poems are an important aspect of the structure of *the sun and her flowers*. The drawings are made by the author herself, and they often bring more context to the occasional hidden meanings of the poems. The simple lines of the drawings correspond to the simplicity of the verse, but the deep meaning of each of the drawings makes the reader wonder about the idea of each poem even more. Furthermore, Kaur does not give a traditional title to any of her poems, although some are given a finishing line in italics that can potentially represent a title of the poem. However, such an approach is not consistent, and mostly only emphasizes and sums up the message of some of the poems. In order to convey the idea of a poem as simply as possible, Kaur uses a language that can easily be understood by anyone willing to listen; she steps away from the idea that poetry needs to be complex and carry multiple incomprehensible metaphors in order to be valuable. The same minimalistic attitude is also seen in the linguistic structures – the author does not use capital letters or any other punctuation besides a period. She explains that that is a certain dedication to Punjabi, her mother tongue, in which "all letters are treated the same": ". . . i enjoy how simple that is. how symmetrical and how absolutely straightforward. also feel there is a level of equality this visuality brings to the work: a visual representation of what i want to see more of within the world: equalness" (qtd. in Prabhakar 7). The collection seems almost autobiographical as it appears as though in the poems Kaur were either talking to the reader about herself, about her experience, or giving advice directly to the reader. In each section of *the sun and her flowers* there are a few poems that use the "you-form" and are clearly aimed at helping the readers overcome the difficulties that they are facing at a certain stage in their life. In some of the poems, the speaker addresses the readers and tells them that they are making a mistake and gives them advice on how to overcome it: ". . . you are waiting

for someone who is not coming back meaning you are living your life / hoping that someone will realize they can't live their without you . . . " ("-realizations don't work like that," Kaur 63). By using simple language and structures, Kaur makes the readers feel as if they were talking to a long-lost friend who conveys all the feelings they cannot face without breaking down. In that sense, Kaur is stepping away from the traditional poetry, which is why she is receiving plenty of criticism. However, her poetry allows contemporary people to find immediate understanding without having to read literary criticism in order to decipher the meaning of the poems.

2.2. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel that was published in 1982 and that has served as the basis for two adaptations – a movie directed by Steven Spielberg in 1985 and a Broadway musical which ran from 2005 until 2008, and again from 2015 until early 2017. The novel was allegedly inspired by some of Alice Walker's tragic real-life experiences as she experienced a pregnancy that "alienated her from her own body" (Nguyen 1) and led her into self-harming. Eventually, with friends' help she managed to overcome her personal challenges, which leads to a conclusion that her idea of "womanism" and women helping each other indeed stems from Walker's own life (Nguyen 1). Walker has introduced the term "womanism" as a branch of a wider term "feminism." For her, "womanism" is concerned mostly with "women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or workplace) and more global environment" (Izgarjan and Markov 305). However, Walker is very vocal when she points out that a "womanist" is a *black* or *colored* feminist who "loves other women and/or men sexually and/or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength" (Izgarjan and Markov 305). Those are some of the issues that the author meticulously discusses in *The Color Purple*.

The novel itself consists of letters that act as chapters because each letter starts on a new page. In the beginning of the novel, Celie addresses the letters to God, then she addresses them to Nettie, and finally there are Nettie's letters to Celie as well. There are 92 letters in total, 56 of which are from Celie to God, and the rest are from Nettie to Celie and vice versa. However, "the location from where the letters are written and the plot setting in general is unspecified" (Jørgensen 36) as it is only mentioned that Celie spends some time in Memphis and that Nettie's letters are from Africa and England. While Nettie's letters are written in

standard English, due to her progressive academic background, the language of Celie's letters allows the reader to completely comprehend the complexity of her character. According to Jørgensen, Walker uses black vernacular in order for Celie to be able to genuinely express herself and tell her story exactly the way it is (56).

3. Constructing the Self through Different Stages of Life

3.1. Wilting

According to *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, *to wilt* means "(of a plant) to become weak and begin to bend towards the ground, or (of a person) to become weaker, tired, or less confident" ("Wilt"). This definition perfectly sums up Celie's state of mind in the beginning of the novel as well as the position of the speaker in *the sun and her flowers*.

Alice Walker does not beat around the bush, but begins the novel *in medias res*, with Alphonso threatening Celie, which sets the tone for the entire story: "You better not ever tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (Walker 11). After that, the reader is immediately introduced to the first letter written by Celie to God, which "enables the reader to enter into the private thoughts and emotional state of . . . a traumatized, guilt- and shame-ridden, and depressed fourteen-year-old protagonist" (Proudfit 17). The sole fact that Celie is writing to God as Alphonso has ordered, immediately shows that she is "in mortal fear of the man who has violated her" (Sveinsdóttir 12). From that moment on, the reader starts putting pieces of information together to understand the whole story behind Celie's state of mind. However, that is not a simple task as in the initial letters, Celie's language is extremely childish, uneducated African American vernacular that differs from the standard English; she expresses her thoughts and reflections in short, monotone, chopped sentences, constantly in the simple present. Such a style of writing "mirrors Celie's traumatized cognitive processes and depressed emotional state" (Proudfit 17) and allows the readers to get completely immersed in the psychological complexity of the main character. The state of mind Celie is in when we are introduced to her is the result of many years of negligence and abuse; she lost her (mentally unstable) mother, became a sexual target for her father (at least that is what we think at the time of reading) and gave birth to two of his children, who were then taken away from her. In such a damaged position, Celie tries to find strength, protect her younger sister Nettie, and simultaneously find her own identity. During that search, she seeks help from God and finds comfort in writing letters to him. However, because of the fact that God is never going to reply, it can also be said that the letters are a sort of a diary. The act of writing, thus, helps Celie since it makes her feel as if she were genuinely sharing her burden with someone who cares. Given that God is such an important aspect of Celie's life, one can wonder why does he even let all of those things happen to her? While she questions his existence in certain situations, it still does not weaken her faith. Williams justifies this by stating: "even though he

permits all these negative events happen to Celie, she still gains wisdom and knowledge, which play an important part in how her identity changed in the novel" (7). It is obvious that at this point, Celie is still heavily influenced by her abusive and violent stepfather, and that her identity is widely shaped by his attitudes towards her. She reflects on his opinion about her, and it seems as if she questions it, but is still affected by it: "He act like he can't stand me no more. Say I'm evil an always up to no good" (Walker 13). Moreover, she is not strong enough to stand up for herself, and at that point it seems that she is never going to be because "this dramatic literary portrait of Celie as a traumatized and depressed survivor-victim . . . is in fact a clinically accurate description . . . of 'soul murder'" (Proudfit 19). With that being said, how can one see the light at the end of the tunnel if their *soul* is broken? However, through all those negative experiences, Celie learns one thing – how to stay alive. She is driven by her love towards Nettie to the point where she is ready to endure everything life throws at her if it means that Nettie is going to be safe: "I ast him to take me instead of Nettie while our new mammy sick. . . . I tell him I can fix myself up for him. . . . He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway" (Walker 17). While not being explicit yet, it is implied that the female relationships are going to be influential in the entire novel – although Celie goes through unbearable pain because of her sister, she is going to find comfort in her "sisters" in the future.

It is obvious that Celie hides the abuse, with God being the only "person" who is bluntly aware of everything that is happening to her. As a young African-American woman in the first half of the twentieth century, she is not in a position to stand up for herself at all – she is treated like a property and seen as the means for the men's sexual relief. On the contrary, the speakers in the collection of poems *the sun and her flowers* want to express their pain; they want to share it with the world to serve as either the representation of "1) a consequence of trauma (or) 2) a solution to that trauma" (Victor). In the first section, titled "wilting," Kaur gives voice to all of those voiceless, abused, heartbroken, and soulbroken contemporary women – especially women of color. While the reasons for their feelings are not so explicit as they are in the novel, by reading the whole section, it can be concluded that generally, the poems are indeed written as a response to the emotional and physical trauma. Just like Celie, Kaur's speaker goes through a loss, but we cannot decipher whether it is a loss of a romantic relationship, a friend, or a family member. However, the cause of the trauma is not what is important, but the feelings of pain or hope that appear afterwards:

> . . . i am okay no i am angry yes i hate you maybe i can't move on i will i forgive you i want to rip my hair out over and over and over again till my mind exhausts itself into a silence
>
> (Kaur 18)

The persona is only sharing her current feelings here, without any intention of offering the reader any advice. She cannot offer the advice because she is *wilting*; she is tired of feeling the way she feels to the point where she is so confused that she does not even know *exactly* how she feels. While reading the "childhood" part of *The Color Purple*, it is obvious that this is exactly Celie's state of mind as well – she is not sure about why she is going through that trauma, and just tries to train her mind and body to become numb to all the pain, to become *silent*. The idea that women are only there to help men, to take care of their homes and children, and to endure the abuse as if it were supposed to be that way, has been imposed to the millions of women by the (predominantly male ruled) society. Celie has no voice and no ability to stand up for herself, even while she is practically being sold to another man: "Pa call me. *Celie*, he say. Like it wasn't nothing. Mr. _____ want another look at you" (Walker 20). She realizes that this is wrong as it makes her feel worthless, but she still does not take any action because she is broken and scared. Despite the time frames and the settings being very different, the same emotions are felt by Kaur's speaker when she acknowledges: "you break women in like shoes" (Kaur 28). Just like Celie, the speaker is being constantly broken by someone to whom that is as easy as walking, as breaking in the shoes. While that harsh statement of breaking women might be addressed to men, it is not said to them directly, but is rather written down in a quiet, diary-like style. Yes, it is strong, but it is still just a statement written by someone who is too weak to interfere with the social constructs and to take action against her own pain.

As mentioned previously, thinking of change is just that – *hopeful thinking* – because at this stage in their lives, the victims are not capable of standing up for themselves. They are so caught up in the never-ending circle of violence that they will try to do anything to ease the current pain, which can lead the reader into wondering whether they are witnessing a case of Stockholm syndrome – defined as a "psychological response wherein a captive begins to identify closely with his or her captors, as well as with their agenda and demands" ("Stockholm Syndrome"). In both works this can be observed when the victims start dressing

up for the abuser. For example, Celie says: "I tell him I can fix myself up for him [Fonso]. I duck into my room and come out wearing horsehair, feathers, and a pair of our new mammy high heel shoes" (Walker 17). Likewise, Kaur's speaker reveals:

> i wonder if i am
> or if i am beautiful at all
> five times before i see you
> will make
> beautiful enough for you
> i change what i am wearing
> wondering which pair of jeans
> my body more tempting to undress. . . .
>
> Kaur (40)

Being put down for your looks, behavior, intelligence, basically *everything*, leads both Celie and the speaker into doing some things that a "healthy" woman would never do. Although they are abused, both women want to be appealing to their abusers. They are looking for approval from the men who abuse them because they see them as their superiors, the ones who have complete control over their lives. Their self-confidence is extremely low, which inevitably sparks jealousy whenever another (more attractive or more independent) woman appears. For example, Celie projects jealousy for the first time when she is faced with a photo of Shug Avery: "The most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty than my mama. She bout ten times more prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. . . . And now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing" (Walker 16). If her feelings towards Shug could be summed up in one of Kaur's poems and drawings, it would be in the following one:

Fig. 2. Kaur's Drawing of Jealousy from *Poems*; pinterest.com, 20 May 2019, www.pinterest.com/pin/861383866202566761/?lp=true.

As shown by the illustration, the speaker wants to remove the sadness off of her face in order to achieve happiness. Also, it could be said that she is not so jealous of other women's physical appearances, but of their inner peace and self-acceptance which seem to be out of her reach. Same as that, Celie is admiring Shug for *laughing* ("She be dress to kill, whirling and *laughing*") (Walker 16), which leads to a conclusion that Celie and the speaker are primarily jealous of the happiness and confidence (and not the looks) that other women have and which seem to be unattainable for the two of them.

The first section of *the sun and her flowers* does not contain many poems that refer to the physical abuse, but deals with the feelings that emerge after being cheated, losing a loved one, or being left alone. However, the most prominent emotions in Kaur's volume are the same as those experienced by Celie because abuse, whether being physical or psychological, is still abuse. A broken heart is still a broken heart. A broken *soul* is still a broken *soul*. The most important connection between the two texts, though, is that, in the midst of all of the suffering and abuse, both Celie and Kaur's speaker want to believe that what they have experienced is not their fault – and that is the key to recovery and to their future identity changes. While Celie is still a child and often feels as if there were no way out, the speaker in *the sun and her flowers* is obviously older and thus more hopeful. Kaur ends the "wilting" section of the volume with a poem which sends a message of hope and recovery:

> . . . your skin will shed till there is not
> a single part of you left they've touched
> your eyes finally just your eyes
> not the eyes which held them
> you will make it to the end
> of what is only the beginning
> go on
> open the door to the rest of it
> ("-time," Kaur 55)

The speaker emphasizes that this is "only the beginning" and that the road to the recovery takes time. She is sure that the future is brighter than the present and that one has to have the strength to open the door and head towards the unknown. With such a poem, Kaur ends a rather depressing section of the volume with a notion that things are going to improve because *time heals all wounds* – and that is a message that applies to both Celie and the speaker.

3.2. Falling

After practically being sold to Albert (whom she refers to as "Mr.____) because she was "spoilt," Celie enters a marriage that she has never wanted to be a part of. Her life instantly turns into a stage of bare survival – the abuse continues on, the pressure of motherhood builds up, and Celie only falls deeper into the circle of violence. It all begins on her wedding day when she is not only raped by her new husband but is also injured by her stepson, Harpo: "He pick up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breasts. . . . I lay there thinking bout Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe" (Walker 21). Such a hard beginning of Celie's new reality signifies "the use of male cruelty in the novel as well as the often violent fight for power" (Sveinsdóttir 13). However, at this stage in Celie's life, there is no need for the men to further try and establish their power over her as she has already internalized the powerlessness, and thus admits: "I don't know how to fight. All I know is how to stay alive. . . . As long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along" (Walker 26). Despite her faith, Celie now feels even less worthy than she did before, and while she accepts the position that she is in, she does not understand it.

Likewise, in the section "falling" of *the sun and her flowers*, the speaker is in the exact same state of mind and asks God a question that Celie probably wonders about as well:

why
hanging
were you lazy
or did you purposely leave me unfinished
did you leave a door
open between my legs
did you forget

("-conversations with god," Kaur 65)

Obviously, the speaker sees herself as less worthy, *unfinished,* because she is not a man. Such thinking is a result of the abuse, mentioned in the previous section, and the emotions of fear, confusion, pity, misogyny, and loneliness that emerge out of it. Just like her, Celie is also heavily influenced by the patriarchy to the point where she accepts it when Mr. ___ says: "Wives is like children. You have to let them know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (Walker 42). The fact that Mr. ___ can say that so proudly out loud shows us that Celie lives in a society where a woman fears to even question (let alone stand against) the constant beating and oppression. Obviously, such attitudes are embedded in the entire society, but are especially seen within the African American or other

minority communities, where one can observe "the multiple abuses perpetuated against black women because of their race, class, and gender" (Lynn 5). Walker wanted to stress that the African American women are facing a triple oppression – not only are they subordinated for being black and poor but they are also subordinated for being women. With that being said, it is no surprise that women feel *unfinished*, as if there were something missing between their legs, because they can feel the maltreatment at every moment in their lives, which makes them wonder whether the things would be different if they were men. The patriarchy offers a single vision of a society, the one where "male wisdom claims the natural inferiority of women and the need to keep them under control" (Næss 22) and where women are far from being ready to stand up against that. The inequality and abuse that African American women or women of color were exposed to leads to the aching that Rupi Kaur depicts using a simple two-line poem and a suggestive drawing:

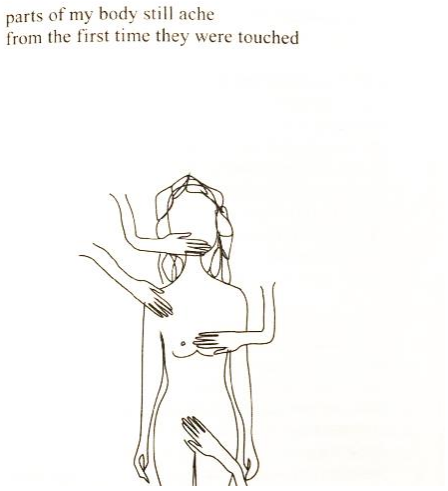


Fig. 3. Illustration to the Poem "parts of my body still ache" from Rupi Kaur; *the sun and her flowers;* Simon&Shuster, 2017, p. 93.

The speaker expresses her ache using a very simple language, which could be interpreted either in the sense of rape or in the sense of violence. Obviously, at that point, in *the sun and her flowers*, the speaker is *still* aching, and the best way to portray this is by drawing where it hurts. The illustration shows that the victim is literally being kept silent while being abused, meaning that she has to suffer without saying a word to anyone about it.

Because Celie has also experienced and been taught that such violent behavior is acceptable, she offers the most horrible advice to Harpo. While he was raised by Mr._____

and thus it would be expected from him to see women as his subordinates, Harpo is truly in love with his wife Sofia. He is so in love with her that it never even occurs to him to beat her. However, Celie, being raised in abusive environment, tells him the only thing that appears logical to her – that he should beat Sofia if she does not obey him. Although it would be easy to blame Celie for giving such an advice, it must be remembered that, at this stage in her life, an abusive relationship is the only kind she is familiar with. For her, marriage is about obedience, and she cannot comprehend that Sofia stands up for herself and is loved by her husband. Because they are in such different positions, and Celie is not half as strong as Sofia, one can sense a certain level of jealousy in Celie's demeanor: "I like Sofia, but she don't act like me at all. If she talking when Harpo and Mr._____ come in the room, she keep right on . . . I think bout how every time I jump when Mr. _____ call me, she look surprise. And like she pity me" (Walker 43). However, Celie's advice does not turn out as expected because "Sofia appropriates male privilege by exercising physical strength alongside a black feminist rhetoric by literally fighting the men in her life" (White 73). Harpo is the one who ends up with bruises, as Sofia tells Celie: "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. . . . But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house . . . . I loves Harpo . . . but I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me" (Walker 46). Such a reaction is something that Celie has never expected, thinking that the beating is a part of marriage that cannot be avoided. The reason for that is her upbringing since Celie, just like the speaker in the following Kaur's poem, has never been taught to fight back:

no was a bad word in my home
erased from our vocabulary
till we became well-behaved kids
yes to everything
every part of my body wanted to reject it
no to save my life
i want to ask all the
what use was obedience then
that were not mine inside me

no was met with the lash
beaten out of our backs
who obediently nodded
when he climbed on top of me
but i couldn't say
. . .
parents and guardians a question
when there were hands

("-how can i verbalise consent as an adult if i was never taught to as a child," Kaur 90)

The speaker has been raised to be obedient and to accept everything that was imposed upon her by the grown-ups. There was no chance of discussion and protest, as *no* was simply a

forbidden word. Even if someone had wanted to speak up, she would have been beaten – just like Celie. When Celie talks to Sofia and admits that she feels ashamed for giving Harpo the advice about beating her, Sofia accepts the apology and says: "To tell the truth, you remind me of my mama. She under my daddy thumb. Naw, she under my daddy foot. . . . She never stand up for herself. Try to make a little half stand sometime for the children but that always backfire" (Walker 46). That is the sentence that starts opening up Celie's eyes and that is going to be one of the key factors for her future identity transition. In such a sincere conversation, the two women form a special bond that is going to be crucial for Celie's development throughout the novel, highlighted by them making quilts together: "Let's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains, she say, And I run git my pattern book" (Walker 47). The fact that Sofia suggests using "messed up curtains" to make something beautiful out of them speaks for the different women getting together and succeeding in a certain aspect of life. This beginning of the creation of supportive female communities, which is going to be further explored in the following chapters, announces that "in the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversations and humor, African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (qtd. in Boone 39). Besides Sofia, in this part of the novel Celie also meets Shug Avery – her husband's mistress. The two do not get along in the beginning because Shug mockingly tells Celie: "You sure is ugly" (Walker 50). However, their relationship is going to become the crucial one in the development of Celie's character as "Sofia shows Celie her weaknesses, but Shug builds her up and helps her grow and gain independence" (Eysteinsdóttir 9). Of course, such strong friendships do not develop overnight, which means that the development of one's identity does not either.

In *the sun and her flowers*, the process of self-growth is summed up in a single-line poem and an "under-title": "you do not just wake up and become the butterfly" ("-growth is a process," Kaur 87). The speaker, just like Celie, is going through a number of different hardships which often make it impossible to see the good in anything. While they are both still at the stage of life where they feel low and subordinated, they find a bit of comfort in being with others and sharing the burden. Towards the end of the section "falling" in *the sun and her flowers*, the speaker sends a positive message through a poem named simply "community," stating that it is "okay to let others / help pick up the pieces" (Kaur 97). Celie realizes the same by starting to build relationships with the women in her community. Therefore, both the speaker and Celie reach an important conclusion which sets the tone for

the rest of the poems and the novel – it is all right to seek help and find comfort in a community as it can create the support system that is needed for the personal growth of every woman. Such a conclusion is additionally supported by Kaur's illustration of the hands of different people holding together to form a tight, secured circle within which a person feels safe and ready to face her problems:

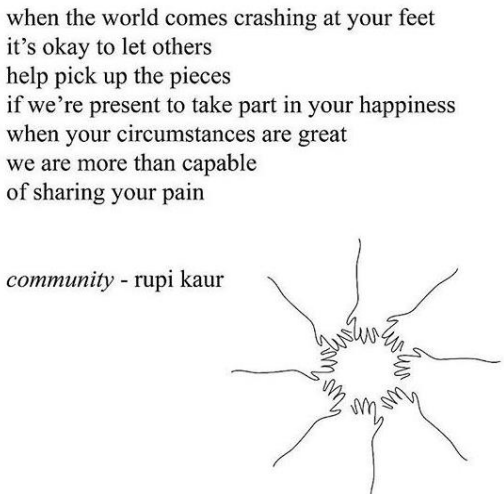


Fig. 4. Illustration to the Poem "community" from *Poems*; pinterest.com, 23 May 2019, www.pinterest.com/pin/538250592959225275/?lp=true.

3.3. Rooting

"Rooting" can be described as a period in a woman's life when she realizes that there are seeds of strength inside of her. For Celie, that period begins after meeting Shug Avery and connecting with her community, and for the speaker, it occurs after she accepts the former pain and realizes that there is room for personal growth. This chapter is going to focus on the similar manner in which Kaur's volume and Walker' novel explore the roots essential to the process of emancipation.

In the section of *the sun and her flowers* titled "rooting," Rupi Kaur explores the root of all the current issues that the speaker and all (colored) women are facing. She discusses the questions such as immigration, abortion, women's positions throughout the centuries, and violence. Such open discussions and realizations are important for the speaker's future progress, which is going to be addressed in the remaining two sections. Kaur suggests that it is crucial for a person's identity to understand the history of why they are in a certain position, and to face their personal trauma as well – only by doing that can one be completely prepared to enter the stages of "rising" and "blooming." Furthermore, the speaker is aware that at this point in her life, she is headed towards healing and identity growth, which Kaur perfectly depicts in the following poem and the matching illustration:

what if we get to their doors *and they slam them*
shut i ask
what are doors she says *when we've escaped*
the belly of the beast

(Kaur 127)

Fig. 5. Escaping from Rupi Kaur; *the sun and her flowers*; Simon&Shuster, 2017, p. 127.

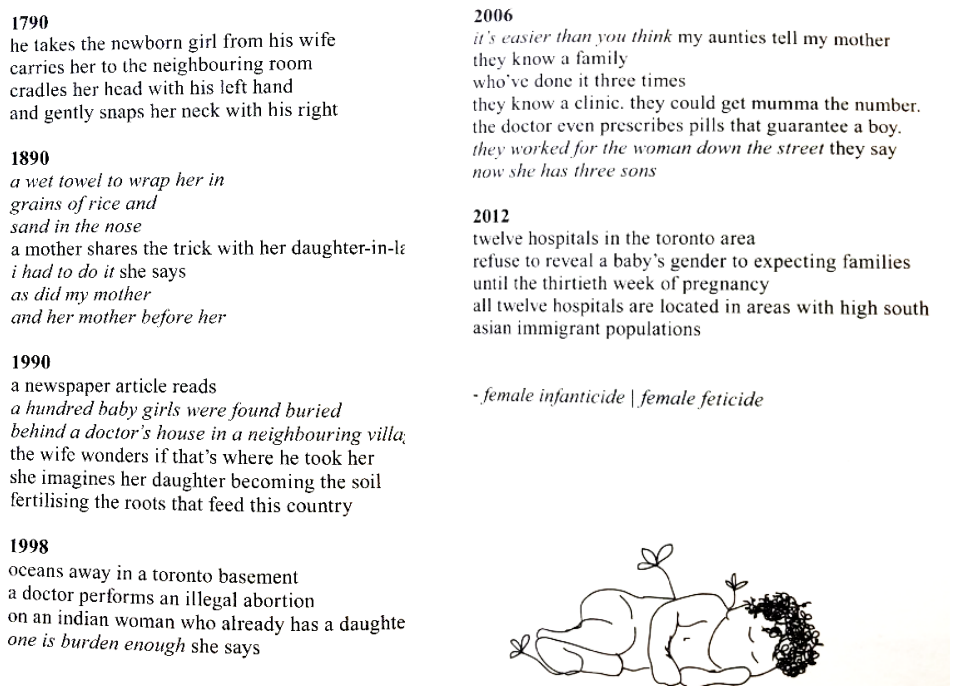
The speaker is talking to someone, and that person tells her that she is free now, and that there are not any other obstacles that she could not overcome. Similarly, Celie is slowly going towards the idea of freedom after being inspired by Shug, "a self-defined, self-realized and sexually liberated African American woman." Such characteristics identify Shug as a "womanist" and a "positive role-model, to counter the inferiority complex that patriarchy has left women with" (Janusiewicz 11). Shug is the epitome of everything Celie wants to be, but at that point still has no chance of becoming.

While the speaker shares her previous trauma sometimes directly with the readers, Celie talks about it with her new girlfriends. She shares her thoughts on intercourse and states that she has never enjoyed it: "The worst part is I don't think he notice. He git up there and enjoy himself just the same. No matter what I'm thinking. No matter what I feel" (Walker 68). Such conversations take place during quilting, which further deepens the relationship and creates a special bond between all the female characters and, as Bilali states, "like the scraps of cloth sewn into Celie's patchwork quilt, characters' lives in *The Color Purple* are stitched together into a unity whose strength and vibrancy depend on each individual's identification with and distinction from the others around him or her" (2). Accordingly, although they are very different, the women understand each other and share similar emotions towards their position in the society, which is why all of them function very well together. The fact that Celie feels comfortable sharing her story with them shows the depth of their relationship. However, the relationships between the female characters are not based only on listening to each other and giving advice, as Shug takes action to help Celie really change her life. After hearing about Celie's struggles, Shug decides to stay by her side to make sure that she is safe: "Then she kiss me on the fleshy part of my shoulder and stand up. I won't leave, she say, until I know Albert won't even think about beating you" (Walker 77).

The fact that women must stand together in order to resist abuse stems from the subordinated and marginalized position of African American women in the American South. However, such a position is not only specific for that part of the world but has also been a global issue for a much longer period of time. While the female characters in the novel quilt and literally "stitch" themselves together in order to move past the maltreatment they experienced, the speaker in *the sun and her flowers* addresses the *collective* pain that the women have been experiencing throughout different eras. A possible reason for such an approach is that the speaker is focused not only on the personal trauma but also on the global traumas that affect most women, so there is no need for it to be addressed in an intimate

setting such as the quilting group – if the readers are women, it is very likely that they are going to relate to the experience described.

By writing a poem "under-titled" "female infanticide / female feticide," Kaur wanted to show that women's position is sealed as a subordinated one from the point of birth, despite what century it is. From a mostly third-person point of view, topics of forced abortion or killings (of female children) are presented as being the cruelest, yet socially acceptable way of coping with the unwanted pregnancies. Female children have been murdered, taken away from their mothers, or forcefully aborted for centuries, and Kaur sheds the light on the fact that this is still happening today:



1790
he takes the newborn girl from his wife
carries her to the neighbouring room
cradles her head with his left hand
and gently snaps her neck with his right

1890
a wet towel to wrap her in
grains of rice and
sand in the nose
a mother shares the trick with her daughter-in-l
i had to do it she says
as did my mother
and her mother before her

1990
a newspaper article reads
a hundred baby girls were found buried
behind a doctor's house in a neighbouring villa
the wife wonders if that's where he took her
she imagines her daughter becoming the soil
fertilising the roots that feed this country

1998
oceans away in a toronto basement
a doctor performs an illegal abortion
on an indian woman who already has a daughte
one is burden enough she says

2006
it's easier than you think my aunties tell my mother
they know a family
who've done it three times
they know a clinic. they could get mumma the number.
the doctor even prescribes pills that guarantee a boy.
they worked for the woman down the street they say
now she has three sons

2012
twelve hospitals in the toronto area
refuse to reveal a baby's gender to expecting families
until the thirtieth week of pregnancy
all twelve hospitals are located in areas with high south
asian immigrant populations

- *female infanticide | female feticide*

Fig. 6. Female Feticide from Rupi Kaur; *the sun and her flowers*; Simon&Shuster, 2017, pp. 144-45.

Not only does Kaur state that many Asian cultures favor sons over daughters in general and endorse female infanticide but she also emphasizes that it is mostly the minorities in the first-world countries who are being told that their daughters are too much of a burden – both to their families ("on an indian woman who already has a daughter / *one is burden enough* she says") and to the entire community ("all twelve hospitals are located in areas with high south/asian immigrant population"). Like the women from Kaur's poem, Celie experiences

the trauma of her children being taken away from her as well. Although at the time she believes that they were murdered, she does not lose hope as she *feels* that they are still alive.

It is important to note that both the speaker and Celie know that, unlike some of the people mentioned in the poem, they have the strength to overcome whatever life throws at them, whether they do it alone or with the help of their fellow sisters. Both of them find the strength to face their problems, be thankful, and seek positivity in a world which is not kind to them. Perhaps they manage to do that by realizing that they overcame the first difficulty that was thrown at them while they were still babies – they survived their own birth despite the odds being stacked against them:

bombs brought entire cities	down to their knees
today	. . .
police shot people dead for the color of their skin	. . .
later at the hospital i watched a mother	lose both her
child and her mind	. . .
how can i refuse to believe	my life is anything
short of miracle	if amidst all this chaos
i was given this life	

(“-circumstances,” Kaur 130)

As explicitly stated in the poem, they were given a life amidst the chaos, and it is in this stage in their identity development that they realize that it is themselves who are in charge of their own lives, not their husband, father, brother, or anyone else. Such conclusions are crucial for their further development as it sets the ground for them to leave the toxicity of their past behind and path the way towards independence.

3.4. Rising

"Rising" is the section of *the sun and her flowers* which corresponds to the part of *The Color Purple* after Shug and Celie enter a romantic relationship up until Celie starts addressing Nettie in her letters. That life stage is the one during which both the speaker and Celie find themselves at the crossroads and luckily choose the path that directs them into questioning their prior life and realizing their worth. For Celie, the questioning begins when she is shown that she is worthy of receiving love and respect; those new discoveries about herself give her the strength to claim her own life. Likewise, the speaker of *the sun and her flowers* realizes that no person, no matter what she makes them to be, is a God who is able to control her life, which gives her the ability to emerge on a quest for her own identity. In that sense, both Celie and the speaker are ready to explore the idea of personal growth that has previously been installed into them.

However, Kaur and Walker use slightly different approaches to emphasize that growth, as Kaur begins from the personal, inner experience that heterosexual women go through while establishing their identity, and Walker focuses on the communal support and mutual dependency as the basis for the development. Although their paths towards emancipation are different, the emotions that they communicate are identical. In *the sun and her flowers*, Kaur has covered a wider range of topics; therefore, this analysis is going to focus only on those themes that correspond to *The Color Purple* – love, life, and happiness. As they strive to redefine the concepts of love, life, and happiness, Kaur's speaker and Walker's protagonist must first tackle the issues of self-acceptance, equality, personal strength, commitment, achieving inner peace, healing, and true love experience.

After Shug decides to stay with Celie a bit longer to make sure that Albert does not hurt her, it seems as though she makes it her mission to help Celie bloom, both spiritually and physically. Despite their initial misunderstandings, mostly because of Shug's attitudes, at this stage of Celie's life, their friendship reaches a much deeper level. It becomes so open that it starts to enter the zone of a romantic relationship, beginning with Shug's intention to teach Celie about her own sexuality, "making possible both Celie's discovery of speech and her freedom from masculine brutality" (Ross 71). Singh argues that "by discovering and then accepting her own body, Celie is able to initiate a desire of selfhood and open the door for her breaking away from male domination" (220). However, at first, Celie is confused and does not understand the concept that women too are supposed to seek pleasure in their relationships. Such an attitude towards sexuality is normal for a woman like Celie who was

raised in an extremely patriarchal society in which her needs have never been even considered, let alone met. The idea that women are allowed to feel loved might seem natural to us, but seen against the twentieth-century American South's violent background, it is almost impossible for African American women to reach that level of self-acceptance. Although set in the twenty-first century, the speaker in *the sun and her flowers* shows that the feeling of lacking something and self-development have little to do with the time period, and everything to do with one's surroundings:

how do i welcome in kindness
practiced
what am i to do with you
love is violence
if your concept of passion is eye contact
rage
. . .
to accept a healthy love
is pain
when i have only
spreading my legs for the terrifying
if my idea of
but you are sweet
but mine is
how can i call this intimacy
how do i teach myself
if all i've ever known

(Kaur 158)

The persona reveals how emotionally difficult it is to accept someone's love if you have been raised in loveless surroundings. However, the sole fact that such a question even exists in one's mind shows that one is critically thinking about one's life and thus is already changing.

Celie is in a similar position because it is only after years of abuse that for the first time in her life, she experiences genuine romantic love – but it comes from another woman. Walker does not give a second thought when introducing Celie and Shug's relationship, and therefore normalizes homosexual love and strips it off common societal prejudice. The characters subtly demonstrate that "love is love," regardless of the gender, time, or place, which is a very progressive way of thinking given the location and the time setting of the novel. According to Ross, "the repossession of her body encourages Celie to seek selfhood and later to assert that selfhood through spoken language" (70).

While Kaur does not explicitly discuss the topic of same-sex love, it is not because she does not support it, but on the contrary, because she sees it as being so common that there is no need to even address it. However, she emphasizes that the most important thing that a

woman must possess before being someone else's partner is self-love and self-respect because only by acquiring that can she engage in a meaningful relationship, the one based on equality and mutual respect: "to be / two legs / on one body" ("-a relationship," Kaur 190). No matter what the nature of a relationship is, the speaker states that equality is something she desires. She finally realizes that she is equally as worthy as the other person, and is therefore able to demand respect and love as well. Walker's novel upholds the same message when it comes to equality within a relationship. That can be observed in Shug and Celie's conversations while they confide in each other and discuss love and sex, as Shug states: "If you was my wife, she say, I'd cover you with kisses instead of licks, and work hard for you too" (Walker 106). Equality is something that is very difficult for a broken individual to demand, so when one does that, it shows that their personal emancipation is in progress.

In this part of *The Color Purple*, there is another side character who experiences the same identity development – Squeak. Although in the beginning, her story is not as tragic as Celie's, she does eventually survive rape and, while that might break someone, Squeak rises from it and starts fighting for herself. After being violated, she no longer feels the obligation to act in a certain way or to respect men who have harmed her. Therefore, while talking to Harpo, who tries to comfort her by saying: "I love you, Squeak. He kneel down and try to put his arm round her waist," she simply replies: "My name is Mary Agnes" (Walker 95). With such a short and cold reply, Squeak breaks the strings that were holding back her development and quickly emerges from being a dependent, voiceless woman into someone who is seeking and demanding independence. She does not *squeak* or seek attention anymore, but claims her own name and thus claims her own identity, leaving behind the undermining nickname that was given to her by a man. On that path to independence, Mary Agnes is also assisted by Shug, who seems to be a true womanist who is selflessly helping other women of color, as she tells Mary Agnes: "Let's go sing one night at Harpo's place. Be like old times for me. And if I bring you before the crowd, they better listen with respect. . . . Yellow like she is, stringy hair and cloudy eyes, the men'll be crazy bout her" (Walker 110). One could claim that Squeak's storyline stands right next to Celie's as it shows how one is able to overcome the hardships by finding inspiration and support within the community, and then demand equality and recognition. Kaur recognizes and illustrates the same problem in the following poem:

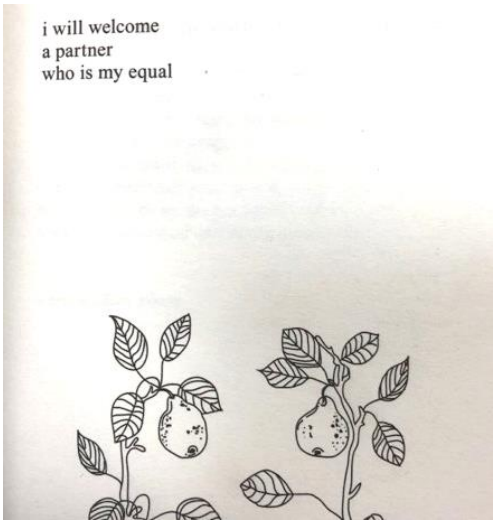


Fig. 7. Equality from Rupi Kaur; *the sun and her flowers*; Simon&Shuster, 2017, p. 159.

Whereas in the poem "relationship," the speaker's request for equality still appears to be wishful thinking, in this poem, she explicitly states that she is not going to accept a partner who does not treat her as an equal. That definitely goes hand in hand with Squeak's and Celie's quest to independency, as they also not only wish for but also demand equality, refusing to settle for anything less than that.

While Kaur's personas and the characters from the novel are both women, and are thus in similar positions, their path to the highest point in their lives is not the same. However, that is to be expected as the former are situated in the twenty-first century, and it has been a while since the abolition of slavery and the fights for women's rights. Yet, they face *the same* issues like the women from earlier times, which begs the questions: Have the problems regarding female rights actually changed that much? If women have to, as the speaker asserts, demand equality in order for it to happen, has the society progressed or has it remained the same as it was in the first half of the twentieth century? It appears that even though society has allegedly modernized, women still come across the same obstacles while growing up. Whereas in *The Color Purple* this manifests through one's quest for equality within a narrow community, in *the sun and her flowers* the obstacles come from both one's immediate surroundings as well as the wider society.

Once the characters start demanding any kind of equality, they find themselves at the crossroads. On one hand, there are the toxic relationships and the oppressive system that they

have been a part of, and on the other hand, there is mental and physical freedom that at moments seems almost unattainable. Celie has been surrounded by toxicity her entire life, and now she is finally gaining the strength to leave it all behind and to start her own life. One of the most important triggers for such a decision is anger. After Shug and Celie discover that Albert has been hiding Nettie's letters, everything changes. Celie no longer feels so intimidated by him as she realizes that she has the unconditional support from the two most important women in her life, both of whom are already successful and independent (as she secretly strives to be as well). Nettie's first letter reads: "You've got to fight and get away from Albert. He ain't no good. . . . He said because of what I'd done I'd never hear from you again, and you would never hear from me" (Walker 119). In the poem "under-titled" "the middle place," Kaur uses the you-form to address the reader directly, making it obvious that the middle place is the stage in life in which one is ready to move on and it is only the fear holding them back:

. . .	this is where
their charm wears off	where they are no longer
the god you made them out to be	
they are unmasked and made mortal again	

("-the middle place," Kaur 161)

Kaur addresses the problem of "the middle place" using the you-form because it is one of the easiest ways to make someone listen. In that way, the readers feel as if they were talking to a close friend who is giving them a benevolent advice. That is an important notion because it means that as soon the poems change into the first-person form, the readers internalize the advice and realize that they should put fear aside and strive for more in every aspect of their lives. Just as the speaker is talking directly to the readers, in *The Color Purple*, Shug and Nettie do the same for Celie. Shug has already instilled the idea of independence in Celie, and now Nettie is giving her the final push with the letters, telling her to leave Albert because he is not a good man. Letter by letter and conversation by conversation, Celie realizes the same thing the persona in *the sun and her flowers* does: "i do not need the kind of love / that is draining / i want someone / who energizes me" (Kaur 163).

Although Celie and Shug's romantic relationship gradually falls off and Shug gets married to a man, they still remain extremely close. Celie reveals: "Us sleep like sisters, me

and Shug. . . . Hugging is good. Snuggle. All of it's good" (Walker 136). In the beginning, they might be completely different, but they soon grow closer and realize that they appreciate each other – Shug acts like a mother for the first time, and Celie finally has someone who takes care of her, and not just the opposite, so it can be said that their "lesbian relationship takes on a new form of black sisterhood" (Singh 219). In that sense, their romantic relationship is important for Celie's personal exploration and growth, but the romance is not the most important aspect of their relationship. What makes it special is the friendship, the care, and the conversations they share. Although the two women are very different, they are essentially similar as they are both selfless when it comes to love and caring for people.

The persona in *the sun and her flowers* comes to the same conclusion – she realizes that there is such a thing as true love, which does not have to necessarily be a romantic love. Moreover, the *broken souls*, whom we were introduced to in the beginning, meet someone who changes their negative outlook on life and provides them with the strength needed to push through the hardships:

god must have kneaded you and i	from the same
dough	. . .
when i look in the mirror	i am looking at you
when you breathe	my own lungs fill with air
that we just met but we	have known each other our
whole lives	if we were not made as one to begin with

("-our souls are mirrors," Kaur 189)

The speaker feels safe because she finds someone who understands her and is providing her with the support that she longs for. While we do not know whom the speaker refers to, whether it is a new lover or a close friend; that is not even important – the important thing is that they understand *her soul* and therefore know exactly what kind of a relationship she needs.

Be it with someone's help or alone, both Celie and Kaur's speaker are, at this point in their lives, very close to emancipation. They are at peace with their history; they have stopped worshipping those who hurt them, and are more than ready to emerge on a new journey and establish a completely new identity. That mindset is best seen in Kaur's poem as the speaker acknowledges the hardships, but also shows an incredible level of acceptance and inner peace:

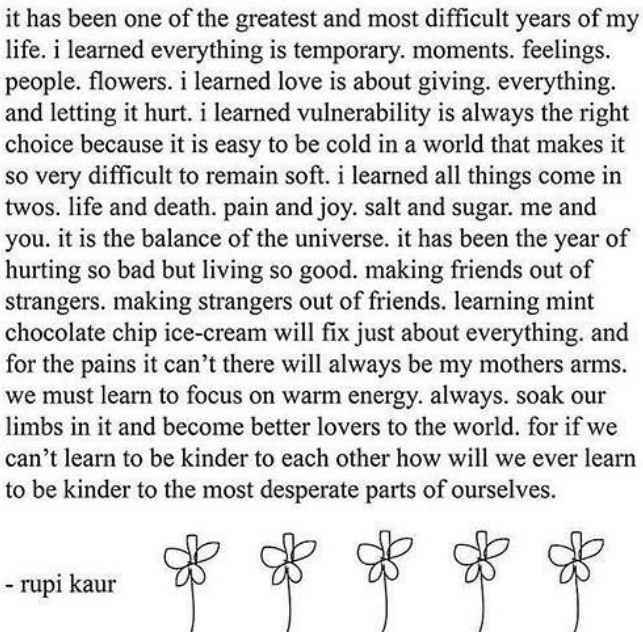


Fig. 8. Illustration to the Poem "it has been one of the greatest and most difficult years" from weheartit.com, 27 May 2019, www.weheartit.com/entry/317104611.

Moreover, the speaker stresses that "all things come in twos. life and death. pain and joy. salt and sugar. me and you. it is the balance of the universe . . . for if we can't learn to be kind to each other how will we ever learn to be kind to the most desperate parts of ourselves" (Kaur 193). With such statements, it is obvious that the speaker is aware that the hardships are inevitable, but that she is also ready to completely accept herself and start living a life of self-love and independence. Celie comes to such realizations as well, and finally, for the first time in her life, experiences kindess from other people and starts to love herself in every aspect possible. Such discoveries, in which the women do not feel dependent or restrained by someone, are going to shape both Celie's and the speaker's further development. Morevoer, they will finally bring them one step closer to the final chapter – to the "blooming" phase in their identity growth and development.

3.5. Blooming

The final section of *the sun and her flowers* presents the final phase in one's healing and search for identity. In a few poems, Kaur shows what an independent and emancipated woman looks like – defying the expectations set for her, she does not dwell on rage and anger, but shares that the key for one's personal development is based on forgiveness, acceptance, and humbleness. While in the previous sections (or life stages) the speaker has dealt with pain in many different, often self-pitied and angry ways, there is not a need for it anymore. The most prominent motifs of the "blooming" phase are self-appreciation, which can be observed when she discusses her physical appearance and intelligence, and thankfulness for the sisterhood, which is embedded in almost all the poems. For Celie, a similar major identity development takes place after she stops addressing God in her letters and starts addressing Nettie. That action is the most important step in Celie's transformation as it requires leaving something behind that has been controlling her life since her childhood. While religion has been an escape and comfort, it has also been, in a way, imposed onto her by her abuser, who said that she can only confide in God – and now she realizes that this is not true. Just like the speaker, Celie pays homage to those who helped her in her search, but also does not undermine her own role in it.

Both *the sun and her flowers* and *The Color Purple* maintain that emancipation is the final stage of one's identity quest. Celie moves on from her past life when she loses faith in God, stating that "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. Act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown" (Walker 175). As she distances herself from the patriarchal views on religion, Celie also distances herself from the violent, patriarchal society that she has been a part of her entire life. She sees God as a typical man who, like all the other men in her life, has the complete control over her: "He big and old and tall and graybearded and white . . . (eyes) ort of bluish-gray. Cool. Big though. White eyelashes" (Walker 176). While it is normal that Celie is scared of such a God and that she does not trust him anymore, Shug offers her a different vision of God, the one that is acceptable for the oppressed women of the time: "I believe God is everything. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it" (Walker 177). Janusiewicz argues that, after the conversation with Shug, "Celie feels for the first time that there is something powerful within her, something which makes her strong, even if it does take a long time to chase the image of the white man out of her head when she prays" (11). Celie's new idea of God is stripped off gender or skin color, and is basically presented as

an inner force that one has to seek within himself or herself. Shug's thoughts on God are very pantheistic, and they are not in touch with the portrayal that has been presented to the masses. Shug believes that God loves her as long as she appreciates everything he has created, from the small things, such as the color purple, to the big things, such as oneself.

In the poem "under-titled" "irreplaceable," the speaker uses the you-form to talk directly to the readers, and it appears to contain the message and the tone of something that Shug would also say to Celie:

> the universe took its time on you
> something different from everyone else
> how you were created
> us both
>
> crafted you to offer the world
> when you doubt
> you doubt an energy greater than
>
> ("-irreplaceable," Kaur 197)

Obviously, the speaker also believes in some form of "an energy greater than us both" that created her and everyone else. Therefore, she has a piece of that same energy inside her as well, which means that she is much stronger and more enlightened than she has previously thought.

In the moments of self-doubt, it is important to have someone, such as Shug, or Kaur's persona, who is going to see the potential in you that you yourself do not see. Be it God, the universe, or the mysterious energy, believing that there is something bigger than you might help you keep going. For the (colored) women, it is also important that they distance themselves from the image of god as a vile, white man who wants to control their life and to accept him/it as someone who is everywhere and cares about everything. Moreover, such notions help one see that one was created in a certain way and at a certain time or place because that is essential for one's personal growth. With the newly acquired idea of God, Celie is able to break free and announce her move to the North. She is not scared of Albert's reaction and says: "I look in his eyes and I see he feeling scared of me. Well, good, I think. I let him feel what I felt" (Walker 199). A few years before, it would have been impossible for Celie to stand up for herself, let alone face her abuser and tell him that she was leaving. Again, Walker stresses how important the idea of sisterhood is as Celie is not moving away alone, but with Shug. She has reached the point in life where she has gathered enough support from her community to be able to stand in front of a man alone and claim her independence.

That ability did not come easily or suddenly as it is a result of many women having each other's backs during the most difficult moments in life.

Likewise, the persona in Kaur's collection of poems manages to see her own worth, but she also knows that it is a result of a continuous support that she has been receiving:

Fig. 9. Illustration to the Poem "legacy" from *Poems*, pinterest.com, 1 June 2019, www.pinterest.com/pin/547469517033696 35/?lp=true.

Kaur has used very simple lines to illustrate the poem "legacy," showing an individual overlooking the past or the future (with the sun either rising or setting), at the same time thanking those who helped him/her climb up where he/she is, but also thinking how he/she can help those who are going to start the climb after him/her. Both Celie and the speaker know that every time when they stand up against the oppressor, they are pathing the way for the women who are coming after them – and that is what real womanists do. The idea of being a role model for other women is something that Celie and the speaker could not even imagine in the beginning, but they end up overcoming all the hardships and showing us that everything is possible once we set our minds to it (and have a little bit of help along the way).

As a part of the "blooming" phase in life, Celie learned that forgiveness is key. Although Albert has put her through so much, starting with abuse, rape, and hiding Nettie's letters, she still decides to forgive him – not because of him, but because she wants to be in complete peace with herself. They spend some time together, reminiscing about the old times and, for the first time ever, Celie gets the impression that Albert respects her: "Us sit, have a

cold drink. Talk about our days together with Shug. . . . You was even sewing good way back then, he say" (Walker 230). After stripping him off the godly features that she has attributed to him, Celie finally sees Albert as a mortal being who is her equal – and mortal beings make mistakes that can be forgiven.

Second, Celie also shows her growth when she has to forgive Shug for falling in love with a man: "Who am I to tell her who to love? My job is just to love her good and true myself" (Walker 236). While she questions her and Shug's relationship now, and is not too happy about the change that is happening, she knows that Shug has been there for her and that now it is time to be there for her as well, no matter what. In her poetry, Kaur addresses the same topic of forgiveness and love, stating that one cannot function without the other:

to hate is an easy lazy thing
but to love takes strength
everyone has but not all are
willing to practice

(Kaur 207)

Obviously, the motif of forgiveness is discussed in both works as it is one of the most important aspects of one's personal growth. A person cannot move on without being in peace with herself, which also includes being in peace with those who have hurt him/her. While it would be much easier for Celie to hate Albert and for the speaker to hate those who have broken her heart, they realize that forgiving takes much more strength than hating someone – and that is something that they are now able to do.

In addition to forgiveness, the main characters are finally able to appreciate themselves and see their own worth. Celie mostly focuses on her personality as she says: "My hair is short and kinky because I don't straighten it anymore. . . . My skin dark. My nose just a nose. My lips just lips. . . . My heart must be young and fresh though, it feel like it blooming blood" (Walker 229). Although she does not appreciate her looks, Celie is thankful for her heart, which gives her the strength needed for reaching this level of independence – and even uses the expression "blooming" blood. Unlike Celie, who is still dissatisfied about her looks, Kaur's persona has come to the level of self-awareness where she appreciates every detail about herself, including the color of her skin, which used to be a kind of a burden before. It is possible that, generally speaking, twenty-first century society is more open-minded than it was before, and thus it is easier for colored women to accept that they too are worthy. After

being hurt and broken, the speaker not only finally accepts herself but also praises her own appearance in multiple poems, comparing her own body to the Earth (and thus accepting it as something natural and beautiful).

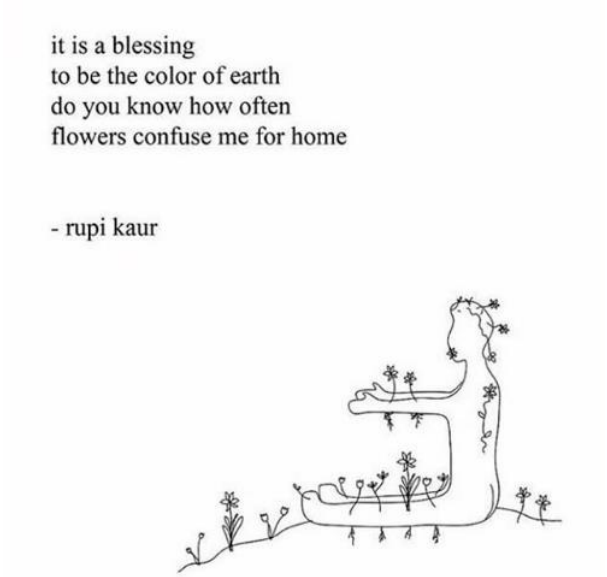


Fig. 10. An Ode to Dark-skinned Women from *Rupi Kaur;* facebook.com, 3 June 2019, www.facebook.com/rupikaurpoetry/posts/-page-227-from-thesunandherflowers/1597858103641793/.

In addition to the very simple, yet powerful metaphor about dark skin color being like earth out of which flowers can grow, Kaur has illustrated it as well. The illustration is the literal manifestation of the metaphor, with a woman's body being the soil needed for the flowers to bloom. In addition, by stating that it is "okay" to "grow flowers" on yourself, "An ode to dark-skinned women" also attacks the idea that a woman's body must always be perfectly smooth and unblemished. While it should be normal in the "progressive" twenty-first century for women not to feel ashamed of their body hair, it is still more often than not frowned upon. One of the major reasons is definitely strong marketing on social media platforms, such as Instagram, so it is refreshing to see a young woman indirectly speaking against this in two of her Instagram poems:

> it is a trillion-dollar industry that would collapse if we believed we were beautiful enough already
>
> ("it is a trillion-dollar industry "Kaur 224)

their concept of beauty is manufactured
i am not

("-human," Kaur 225)

Like the speaker, Celie also comes to conclusion that women should praise and have faith in themselves. In order to confirm that conclusion in practice, she starts her own company – a production of pants. According to Eysteinsdóttir, "Celie chooses a solid name for her company: Celie's Folkpants. It implies that not only men wear pants, but they are for all folks, both genders and people of any social status" (20). During the times when women are mostly bound to the domestic sphere, taking care of the family and the household, she gets to a position where she is able to provide for herself and help her fellow sisters as well. By making and wearing pants, Walker shows how Celie takes complete control over her life, "both emotionally and financially. She is no longer dependent upon anyone to shine. Through her friendship she has gained the confidence to become completely independent" (Eysteinsdóttir 19).

Although set in very different period and life circumstances, both the speaker and Celie, as well as the rest of the women in the novel, reach emancipation. They go through hardships, but with the help of close friends manage to overcome any difficulties and establish themselves as strong and independent modern women. In the same vein, Kaur ends her collection of poems by stating:

there is nothing left
to worry about the sun and her flowers are here

(Kaur 248)

Just as for the speaker the sun has finally risen and the flowers have bloomed, Celie has also reached a point of being in peace with herself and creating a loving community around her, so she concludes that, despite the many years that have taken to achieve that, "this is the youngest us ever felt" (Walker 251).

Conclusion

Whereas Rupi Kaur's *the sun and her flowers* is a contemporary collection of poems that traces its roots back to social media, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel set in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the differences in the approach, technique, and setting, both texts present female personas who have experienced the same phases of life – starting from subordination to emancipation.

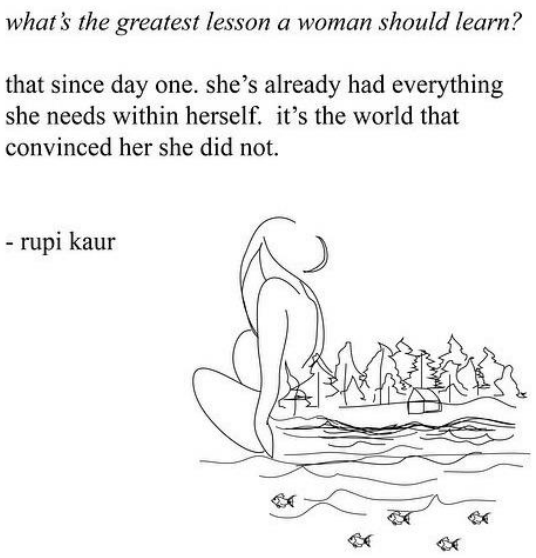
The poems in *the sun and her flowers* cover a variety of topics, and thus at moments it appears that they have various speakers. With that being said, the most common topic is a romantic heartbreak and the pain that emerges out of it, which result in numerous complicated feelings that are presented in the poems. The speaker(s) experience the five stages of life – wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming – by either sharing their experience, referring to the female experiences in general, or giving advice to the reader. In the beginning, the tone of the poems and the illustrations are depressed and full of self-pity, but eventually the speaker reaches the point of emancipation that was unimaginable in the beginning, and therefore the tone and the illustrations change accordingly.

On the other hand, the letters in *The Color Purple* serve as a personal diary for the main character, Celie, and they never get replied to. Celie writes them for herself in order to share her struggles with God and later on with her sister Nettie. Although set in the twentieth century, the novel covers the same five stages of life that Kaur identifies in her collection of poems. In the beginning of the novel, Celie is a lonely, abused girl who is practically born into a violent household, with her stepfather being the first man who takes advantage of her. After she gets married, her situation becomes even worse as she is treated like a (sexual) servant and denied any kind of pleasures. Eventually, she meets women who direct her into changing her life and provide her with the support needed to fight for her own independence. Therefore, Celie becomes a member of an unofficial unity of colored women who care and help each other succeed, which culminates when she leaves her abusive husband and establishes her own business.

It can be said that the women in both works find themselves in certain positions because of the relationships with men. Those relationships are the ones that initially cause their problems and lack of self-confidence – the abuse by the stepfather/uncle/boyfriend/husbands leads to their entrapment in a cycle of violence which cannot be broken apart without them getting help from other women. In that sense, relationships and friendships between

women serve as a glue which helps hold the broken pieces of their minds and bodies together. Therefore, in both works, the idea of community is heavily emphasized as both authors show that it is all right to seek help and that women should take care of each other, regardless of the period in which they live.

Both Kaur's and Walker's work explore similar topics – the oppression of the minorities in society, the subordination of (African American / Asian) women, rape, heartbreak, sexual exploration, the importance of female friendships, the pursuit of self-development, and, finally, independence. Both authors have shown that the path towards emancipation is a rocky, but a rewarding one and that its most important gain is the sisterhood that we form on the way. The messages that they emphasize are timeless, and most women can identify with them, no matter the place or the period which they belong to. With that being said, the readers should bear in mind "the most valuable lesson" that Kaur reminds them of:



12 The most valuable lesson

Fig. 11. The Most Valuable Lesson from weheartit.com, 7 June 2019, www.weheartit.com/entry/280310278.

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