Dominant Themes in African-American Women Literature

Kuna, Maja

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i književnosti

Maja Kuna

Dominantne teme u afro-američkoj ženskoj književnosti

Diplomski rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2019.

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i književnosti

Maja Kuna

Dominantne teme u afro-američkoj ženskoj književnosti

Diplomski rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

Osijek, 2019.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Hungarian Language and Literature

Maja Kuna

Dominant Themes in African American Women's Literature

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor

Osijek, 2019

J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Hungarian Language and Literature

Maja Kuna

Dominant Themes in African American Women's Literature

Master's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities

Scientific field: philology

Scientific branch: English Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor

Osijek, 2019

IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravila te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni.

Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasna da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, 27-9-2019.

Maja Kuna, 0111036009

Ime i prezime studentice, JMBAG

Abstract

This paper examines the themes of slavery, racism, freedom, and social equality from African American women authors' point of view. Beginning with a brief insight into African American history that was crucial for the development of African American women's literature, it will pay special attention to the evolution of slave narrative as well as neo-slave narrative tradition. The paper will further analyze three novels written by three African American women authors: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) to show how black women's personal experience of slavery shaped African American women's literature and history. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we will explore the psychological impact of slavery and its influence on the characters; in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* the emphasis will be put on the power of female relationships; in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* we will attempt to argue that the use of time travel as a narrative tool allows us to better understand the present and the past.

Key words: slave narrative, neo-slave narrative, African American women, *Beloved*, *The Color Purple*, *Kindred*.

Table of Contents

Introduction

African American literature has been developed by writers who trace their roots to Africa. Its origins are to be found in autobiographical spiritual narratives and slave narratives. Slave narrative is a literary genre involving written records of people who escaped slavery, their descriptions of slavery, and how they managed to adapt to the life of a slave. As African Americans fought for their place in American society, so have the writing nature and focus of African American literature evolved. In general terms, African American literature explores issues and concerns related to freedom, slavery, segregation, a sense of home, racism, African American culture, gender and social equality, etc. Of crucial importance to the understanding of African American literature is also African American history of the United States. The history of black America dates back to the Atlantic slave trade when Africa lost almost forty million people in the trade. They were first regarded as servants and later as slaves, which forced them to accept the slave way of life on Southern plantations. As the years passed, African Americans outnumbered African-born slaves and slowly began to demand their rights as well as freedom.

This paper will focus on the themes of slavery, racism, freedom as well as social equality from African American women authors' point of view as they are depicted in neo-slave narratives. Beginning with a brief theoretical insight into African American literature and history, the paper will analyze three novels written by three African American women authors: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* with its psychological impact of slavery on the characters; Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and the power of female relationships throughout the novel, and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, which shows how the use of time travel as a narrative tool allows a better understanding of the past and the present.

1. African American History in the United States

Africans first arrived to the American territory, as Lerone Bennett Jr. points out, "a year before the arrival of the celebrated *Mayflower*, 113 years before the birth of George Washington, 244 years before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation," when a Dutch "man-of-war" ship sailed into Jamestown, Virginia, harbored, "and dropped anchor into the muddy waters of history" (28). The history of black America began when Africa lost nearly "forty million people during the Atlantic slave trade, of whom twenty million ended up in the United States. Millions lost their lives in Africa during and after their capture or on the ships and plantations" (Bennett 29).

When first African slaves were brought to Point Comfort in 1619, English colonists regarded them as servants. This, however, changed quickly. One of the earliest examples of this change can be found in John Rolfe's account where he "noted that he was in great need of food and offered to exchange his human cargo for 'victualle.' The deal was arranged. Antoney, Isabella, Pedro and seventeen other Africans stepped ashore in August, 1619" (Bennett 29). Slaves were treated as "chattels personal" or "human property" (Stampp 192-3). According to Walter Rodney, Africans were enslaved "for economic reasons so that their labor power could be exploited" (138). With the colonization of the United States, the distinction between the words white and black occurred: "the word white, with its burden of arrogance and biological pride" (Bennett 40) implied that white people were superior to black people. The word black emphasized, among other things, that slaves were "either naturally devoid or legally dispossessed of a life apart from their masters'– or both" (Moody 114). The process of dehumanization and objectification affected all aspects of slave life. They were torn apart from their families and forbidden to learn to write or to read, children were being murdered by their own parents, or they attempted to run away because they did not want to live enslaved.

While living on plantations, slaves stuck together and developed a way of life that had little interference with their owners' life as the owners were only interested in profit amassed through slaves' work. African slaves presented the ideal labor in the colonies, mostly because they were used to the colonies' climate. As they were directly exposed to a tropical climate in Africa, they developed resistance to some deadly diseases, like malaria, a disease that killed a huge number of Native Americans and Europeans. So, "the rice swamps of the Carolinas or the tobacco fields of the Chesapeake were not as deadly for enslaved Africans, making them

an ideal labor pool" (Rucker 20). The southern part of the United States, with its mild climate, small amount of rainfall, large number of cheap work force, and plantations with its abundant soils, made the United States a flourishing market for cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice production.

As the American market expanded, the need for cheap labor was rapidly increasing. The Northern colonies were, however, more focused on industry as their main resource and that was the reason why the northern part of the country stayed rather low in black population. Unlike the Northern colonies, the Southern ones needed cheap work force in order to fulfill the need for labor on the expanding plantations: "every plantation of the standard Southern type was, in fact, a school constantly training and controlling pupils who were in a backward state of civilization" (Phillips 352). In those conditions, "the experience of slavery had erased most, if not all, African influences" (Phillips 352) in slaves living on Southern plantations.

With the onset of the American Revolution, some states, mostly the Northern ones, started to believe "that slavery was a social evil and should be abolished" (Sharma 26). The Southern states, on the contrary, did not want to abolish slavery as that meant that the states in the South would lose their cheap work force. Despite Southern views and beliefs, the abolition of slavery was inevitable, yet it did not happen overnight. The Emancipation Proclamation, a document issued in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln that would later become the proclamation of human rights and individual freedom, gave slaves everything but their freedom because it did not affect the slaves in the border states who were loyal to the North, also known as the Union:

> the Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave. And that fact hung over the country during the last years of the Civil War. Many Americans during this period would have considered today's veneration of the proclamation misplaced. They knew that the proclamation freed slaves in only some areas – those regions not under Union control – leaving open the possibility that it might never apply to the whole country. (Vorenberg 1)

Vorenberg further asserts that "the proclamation was surely the most powerful instrument of slavery's destruction, for, more than any other measure, it defined the Civil War as a war for black freedom" (1).

The American Civil War, whose origins were "in fundamental debates over the continued existence of slavery throughout the United States" (Williams and Farrar 257), was the war fought between the North and South. Following Abraham Lincoln's presidential

election in 1860, the Republicans advocated the abolition of slavery in all the United States' territory. The Southern states perceived that as a violation of their rights because the Confederates fought the war primarily to protect Southern culture of which slavery was an essential part and they believed that the slaves' freedom would crush the South's economy. Soon after Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in the year 1861 and with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, the war broke out. It lasted four years and when it finished most of the South's economy was ruined, the Confederacy fell apart, slavery was abolished, and millions of blacks were freed.

2. African American Women's Literature

By abolishing slavery, the United States appeared to both confront with and celebrate the removal of a huge barrier in forming a new national identity that expanded the boundaries of democracy set by its founding fathers. African American women' literature also reflects "the national preoccupation with defining freedom and citizenship, points out the connections between those ideas of the burgeoning American identity, and shapes those issues in relation to African American identity" (Foster and Davis 28). Works of African American women authors were ignored and marginalized for a long time because of their low status in society – "It was, after all, a 'difficult miracle' to be black and published before the twentieth century" (Foster and Davis 16). Nowadays, however, they are essential to American literary tradition as well as American culture and have achieved the official status in the Western literary world. The considerable shift in perception of African American women's literature was mostly the result of political and educational changes in the 1960s:

> Without the political changes of the 1960s, educational reform by way of canon reformation and expansion would not have taken place. With the dismantling of legal segregation and the political and social enfranchisement of African Americans as a result of the civil rights movement, historically white colleges and universities in the United States began diversifying not only their student bodies, but also their curricula. Thus, a number of Black Studies programs were created, providing intellectual spaces for the critical examination of African American life, culture, experiences, and contribution. (Mitchell and Taylor 2)

The beginnings of African American women's literature are to be looked for in the poem "Bar Fights" written by Lucy Terry in 1746. It is a ballad about a 1746 battle between settlers and Native Americans in the would-be Massachusetts. "When Lucy Terry composed the first known poem by an African American in 1746, she inaugurated a vital and vibrant literary tradition – African American women's literature" (Mitchell and Taylor 1). African American women authors have written about their lives, historical events such as the Civil War, Jim Crow America, the Revolutionary War, and historical circumstances like slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Their own lives have served as an inspiration to write about slavery and freedom and they have illustrated their own struggle, growth, and achievement while at the same time addressing the issues like race, gender, slavery, and class. And they have done it completely and utterly alone: "alone because of our bodies, over which we have had so little control; alone because the damage done to our men has prevented their closeness and

protection; and alone because we have had no one to tell us stories about ourselves" (Washington qtd. in Mitchell and Taylor 1). However, were it not for the fragmented pieces of manuscripts and several books and pamphlets, the non-existence of texts by African American women authors could imply that "before the Civil War, African American culture was oral [and male] only" (Mitchell and Taylor 15).

The works of African American women authors, especially the ones written before the Civil War, echo with self-expression as they were describing their own life and their experiences during enslavement: "It explores first the interiority of an in-the-head, in the heart, in the gut region of a discovery called the self. It tests the desires, the longings, the aspirations of this discovered self with and against its possibilities for respect, growth, fulfillment, and accomplishments" (Traylor 71). Although the themes of early African American women's literature are broad and they mostly revolve around enslavement, or the reaction to enslavement, freedom is still one of the main interests of African American women's writing. The longing for freedom was an omnipresent theme, addressed in writings from family life to "religion, spirituality, and morality, from issues of race to those of class and gender, of educational, economic, legal, and social equality both in the United States and abroad" (Foster and Davis 26), thus creating continuity between antebellum and postbellum African American women's literature. This is also where autobiography emerges as one of the most prominent genres of African American women's literature, giving a glimpse into African American life in the antebellum and postbellum era and creating the female African American identity within American culture: "The autobiographies of nineteenth-century African American women writers, both political and spiritual, provide unique perspectives about American culture and identity as well as African American life and culture" (Mitchell and Taylor 10).

African American women writers explored a lot of literary genres in the antebellum as well as postbellum era: fiction, non-fiction, stories, essays, autobiographies, poems, etc. In this way, early African American women authors paved the way for many later writers as they addressed the themes such as enfranchisement, religion, sexuality, motherhood, etc. The "most canonized of these genres is the emancipatory narrative or, as it is traditionally known, the slave narrative" (Foster and Davis 7). Slave narratives show that the conditions in which these women lived and created were cruel and inhumane and had enormous influence on their emotional, psychological, physical, cultural, and creative lives:

> The brutal treatment that the black women received during slavery invariably left profound scars on their psyche. Their physical bondage ultimately turned into a

> psychological bondage causing mutation and mutilations of their world. The external forces operating at the socio-economic levels came to bear an unmistakable relationship to the internal fears, worries, anxieties and feelings of inadequacy and frustration. The poisonous fangs of slavery manifested themselves in innumerable ways and finally determined the behavioral pattern of black women. (Kulkarni 59)

Despite the horrors of slavery, slave women still sought and managed to lead meaningful and decent lives while at the same time having the energy and ability to transform their stories into literature. This compelling rhetoric was adopted by different genres and continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth century.

During the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, race and class identity "were two of the most provocative themes for African American women writers as they presented and represented African American experiences during this defining moment" (Mitchell and Taylor 8). These two themes also announce the growing tendency of contemporary African American women authors to diversify their literary interests as they have "sought to understand the self in relation to society, historically and politically, as well as the interior self, often through personal experiences, like motherhood and marriage" (Mitchell and Taylor 8).

African American women authors have thus frequently portrayed African American women as mothers: "By embracing motherhood/domesticity, black women writers redefined and enlarged the domestic sphere. For example, the home became the nursery of future leaders taught and inspired by the wife and mother" (Foster and Davis 26). For example, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, etc. exemplify, among other things, the appeal to rescue African American family and African American motherhood. This initiative, however, did not prevent African American women authors to promote national, public, and political identity as "advancing civic, social, and political equality preoccupies much of the literature by African American women in the nineteenth" (Mitchell and Taylor 7) and further in the twentieth century.

3. Slave Narratives

The beginnings of African American literature are to be looked for in autobiographical spiritual narratives written by writers of African descent; they were followed by slave narratives. Slave narratives recorded slave life mostly in the American South from the first-hand experience of the former slaves, thus revealing the hardships that people of color had to endure. The evolution of slave narratives from autobiographical stories to contemporary fictional works resulted in slave narratives to be recognized as a literary genre. Slave narratives "focused, often with painstaking vigilance, on the actual, daily conditions of slave life, because abolitionist readers and publishers desired – indeed required – that kind of detailed evidence" (Gould 19). The majority of slave narratives of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century depicted the corruption of Southern settlers, the rebelliousness of mixed marriages, the falsity of Southern Christianity, the brutal scenes of torture, beatings, and murder of defiant slaves, and the means with which the Southern plantation system controlled psychological and ethical mystery of slavery. "Most slave narrators made their names as speakers before they became writers per se" (Gould 19). In plain and often broken language, but using compelling storylines, slave narratives unfold a plot typical to all of them. The slave is captured and then held in master's home, the slave or the protagonist escapes somewhere in the wilderness and then narrates the battle for their own existence, also known as their journey to freedom. Yet,

> not until the organization of more radical antislavery societies in America during the 1830s and 1840s, did the genre of slave narrative turn its energies upon Southern plantation slavery (and the false paternalistic myths supporting it). While the early narratives were published and read as much for their religious as racial experiences, the antebellum slave narrative sharpened its focus and became an increasingly popular and effective political means of fighting slavery. (Sharma 28)

Slave narratives usually combined different genres such as "spiritual autobiography, travel narrative, ethnography, political commentary – as well as religious, sentimental, and gothic discourses" (Gould 21) and they were adaptable enough to compete for publication in numerous newspaper magazines and publishing companies. For example, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* is one of the earliest and most influential slave narratives. Olaudah Equiano "was a slave of Igbo descent who became a master seafarer

and traveled the world. The central concerns of his extraordinary life were work on the high seas, struggles for abolition and personal emancipation, and conversion to Christianity. His experiences in royal Georgia are among his autobiography's most dramatic" (Davis). Another influential nineteenth century slave narrative is Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* published in 1845. It became "an international best-seller and sold more than 30,000 copies within its first five years of circulation" (Sharma 34). Douglass's *Narrative* was, in a way, written just to show that he had actually been a slave. This was often the case with slave narratives because it was hard to believe that someone who could not read or write could have written such a story. In fact, "many who listened to his speeches describing his experiences under slavery doubted that such an eloquent speaker had even been enslaved" (Sharma 34).

Proslavery writers tried to degrade slave narratives by claiming that someone who was illiterate was not able to write such inspiring stories and that slave narratives were actually composed and written by abolitionists. However, this kind of narration was only used as a literary device to help ex-slaves' endeavors to abolish slavery in the South. Between the 1770s and 1840s, the slave narratives became a "part of an emerging, capitalist literary market, and the genre was promoted and reviewed accordingly" (Gould 23).

The majority of slave narratives was authored by male African Americans "with less than twelve percent of all published slave narratives being written by women" (Sharma 36). Unlike male slave narratives that tend to emphasize rough individualism, "geographic mobility, and physical strength" (Sharma 36) and present "slave women as helpless victims of lustful white masters" (Sharma 36), female slave narratives only occasionally, if ever, focus on those issues. Female authors "write not about what was done to slave women but rather what the slave women themselves did in response to the institution of slavery" (McDowell 154). Such an example is Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The story follows a journey of a young woman who together with her children escapes slavery. Jacobs also illustrates the hardships black women had to face on plantations, depicting the horrors of sexual abuse female slaves were exposed to by their white male owners. "While male narrators often describe slave women as helpless victims of lustful white masters, Jacobs's narrator emphasizes that a female slave can actively respond to sexual threats by her master" (Sharma 36). In their narratives, women authors attempted to raise awareness to the devastating situation which they were in. Yet, the reaction to slave women narrators' entrance to the world of abolitionist propaganda was at least ambiguous: those who were unsympathetic to abolition questioned their texts' reliability and integrity; others who were

more abolition-oriented praised their stories as they revealed the hypocrisy of Southern society that condoned sexual exploitation of slave women.

3.1. Neo-Slave Narratives

Neo-slave narratives are "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (Bell qtd. in "Neo-slave Narratives" 168). In the last five decades, the genre has expanded to combine "texts set during the period of slavery as well as those set afterwards, at any time from the era of Reconstruction until the present" ("Neo-slave Narratives" 168). They employ numerous perspectives and styles of writing to depict history and memory of slavery. Moreover, they address a number of issues

> in contemporary cultural, historical, critical, and literary discourses, among them: the challenges of representing trauma and traumatic memories; the legacy of slavery (and other atrocities) for subsequent generations; the interconnectedness of constructions of race and gender; the relationship of the body to memory; the agency of the enslaved; the power of orality and of literacy; the ambiguous role of religion; the commodification of black bodies and experiences; and the elusive nature of freedom. ("Neo-slave Narratives" 169)

The authors of neo-slave narratives possess imaginative and verbal independence not available to former slaves who wrote their narratives during the antebellum era. They are written from the point of view enriched by the study of slave narratives as well as the history of slavery, race, and power relations in the United States. The genre consists of modern day fiction that follows the tradition of the first-person slave narrative.

Some neo-slave narratives center around "a late twentieth-century African American ... haunted by a family secret that involves an antebellum ancestor" ("Neo-slave Narratives" 169). Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), and David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981) exemplify this type of neo-slave narrative as they follow the afore-mentioned pattern, thus showing the long-lasting impacts of slavery on modern subjects. The majority of works in this genre also uses the event of slavery to examine present-day problems of gender and sexuality. Jones's *Corregidora*, for instance, shows how the history "of an enslaved woman's sexual abuse" ("Neo-slave Narratives" 173) becomes engraved in the sexuality of her female ancestors through centuries. *Dessa Rose* by Sherley Anne Williams further illustrates both the sexual tension "of stolen moments of intimacy

among slaves" ("Neo-slave Narratives" 173) and an erotic contest between slave women and white mistresses in the antebellum era. Through the gripping plots, detailed descriptions, and expressive characterizations in those novels,

> readers are seduced into contemplating the outrages and ambiguities at the heart of the system of slavery: the meaning of trafficking in human property, the erotics and sexual protocols of the master-slave relationship, the implications of buying one's own children out of slavery and therefore owning one's own offspring, the tenuous position of freed people. (Stephanie Smith 198)

It might seem that this genre is rather difficult to comprehend. Yet, the efforts of black authors to include the heritage of slavery in everyday culture, the constant flow of historical studies on the New World slavery, and the publications of new volumes of unheard-of slave narratives will definitely help develop new appreciation and new understanding of what the genre attempts to achieve.

4. The Psychological and Physical Trauma of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Set in Cincinnati after the Civil War, *Beloved* is a novel about ex-slave Sethe Suggs's search for freedom and emotional completeness and is "considered to be Morrison's greatest literary achievement, the most celebrated contemporary novel of the slave experience, and one of the most highly acclaimed novels of the twentieth century" (*Writing the Moral Imagination* 69). With its main focus on the horrifying impacts of slavery, the remembrance of African American individual, and the ancestral and mutual awareness, it is a novel about the enduring consequences slavery has had on black community. James Berger thus asserts that *Beloved* "operates within the discursive contexts of the 1980s, opposing both neoconservative and Reaganist denials of systemic racism on the one hand and, on the other hand, liberal denials of the cumulative impact of violence and racism within African American communities" (qtd. in *Writing the Moral Imagination* 69). In *Beloved*, Morrison so to say changes and renews the slave narrative tradition. Although traditional slave narrative usually chronicles the slave's escape and his/her journey to freedom, "Morrison enriches this structure by depicting how the slaves survive the psychological trauma" (Bloom 16). In addition, in *Beloved* "memory … revises the classical slave narratives by providing access to the sort of psychological integrity heretofore undocumented" (Mobley qtd. in Bloom 16). *Beloved* thus exposes "slavery as a national trauma, and as an intensely personal trauma as well" (Krumholz 396). The novel's numerous and fragmented story lines and switching points of view form a thick and perplexing narrative structure. This "fragmented structure encourages the reader to interpret the characters' stories and fill in the gaps, to reconstruct and reconsider the unspeakable human cost of American slavery, racism, and sexism, then and now" (Bell 11).

4.1. The Psychological Trauma of Slavery

Beloved consists of three parts, organized into unnumbered chapters and moving from the past to the present, with quite a few flashbacks related to the main characters' stories. Part one, beginning with the arrival of Paul D, one of the men who lived at the Sweet Home plantation, at the house on Bluestone Road and ending with his leaving the same house,

introduces the main themes of the novel such as memory, motherhood, community, slavery, and freedom – the themes common in women's African American literature.

Beloved begins with the trauma of the past tormenting the present: "124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims" (Morrison 1). In the first part of the novel, Sethe's concerns and thoughts circle around her long deceased infant daughter who now haunts the house. Their house is "palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut" (Morrison 2). The ghost symbolizes the horrors of slavery, which, even though the occupants of 124 are freedmen, still "haunts them because they continue to live under slavery's destructive effects" (Bloom 18). Sethe tries to think about the past as little as possible, yet the ghost of her baby daughter does not let her forget it because her "brain [is] devious" and often memories return without warning (Bloom 18). When Paul D comes to see Sethe, the past becomes an even more difficult thing to hold back. His arrival triggers Sethe's memory and interferes with her everyday life. Paul D instantly feels the closeness of the baby ghost to Sethe's home and initially identifies it as evil: "What kind of evil you got in here?" (Morrison 4). For Sethe however, the ghost is not evil, "just sad" (Morrison 4). Despite his first impressions, Paul D also notices this grief: "She was right. It was sad. Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry" (Morrison 4). The ghost's emotional impact on Paul D shows not only his sensitivity but also "the pervasive haunting of the past" (Bloom 18). The characters have been so "profoundly affected by the experience of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horrors or undo its effects" (Smith qtd. in Bloom 18). In *Beloved,* the concept of time as "being either in the past, the present, or the future is rejected as events crisscross through those dimensions and enlarge the spaces that they suggest" (Holloway 50), thus enhancing the psychological trauma of the characters. Even though both Sethe and Paul D do not want to relive the past/the time, emotions/memories are still strongly embedded into their bodies and minds and come "come back whether we want it to or not" (Morrison 6). In the strength of their connection with each other and in Beloved's numerous occurrences, the characters examine the meanings of time: "Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day. Exactly like that afternoon in the wild onions—when one more step was the most she could see of the future" (Morrison 35).

4.2. The Sweet Home Plantation and the Physical Trauma of Slavery

Sethe and Paul D's mutual past revolves around a Kentucky plantation, Sweet Home, which is in the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Garner and home to black slaves Baby Suggs and her five sons: Halle, Paul A, Paul D, Paul F, and Sixo. Halle frees his mother out of slavery, and the Garners replace her with thirteen-year-old Sethe. The stories and memories Paul D and Sethe share are those of Schoolteacher, "the cruel overseer who replaced Mr. Garner after his death" (Bloom 19). When Schoolteacher took over the plantation, it became a place of humiliation, violence, and aggression. On it, Sethe is "treated like a sexually aggressive wet nurse and mammy" (Brooks Bouson 97) as the milk was stolen from her breasts. This act "[c]ruelly mock[s] the maternal associations of nursing by treating Sethe as an animal to be milked" (Barnett qtd. in Bloom 19). For Sethe, this humiliation is worse than the beatings she received when Schoolteacher's nephews brutally whipped her, leaving a tree-shaped scar on her back as a physical reminder of slavery. When Paul D touches Sethe's scar, he feels her agony through it (Bloom 20): "He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches. He would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years" (Morrison 8). The damaged and unfeeling skin refers both to Sethe's useless hope affecting her memories and the long-lasting effects of the past affecting her present. Bloom further asserts that "the deadened nerves that alienate her from her bodily sensations represent the blocked memory and emotions that separate Sethe from a full, subjective identity" (20). While the scar represents cruelty, violence and horrors of slavery, the blooming chokecherry tree mirrors the natural beauty Sethe identifies with Sweet Home.

The novel, among other things, aims its focus on body as the site of psychological trauma, which is obvious both in the scenes depicting bodily suffering and scarred bodies and in the characters' visual experience of the past. Sethe struggles to forget her exploitation, yet her body reminds her constantly of what she suffered: her body is her memory. Sethe is not the only one who endures her past through the sufferings of her body. Paul D also reveals the humiliation of being forced to wear leg irons and the utter feeling of being worthless and objectified on the plantation: **"**Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (Morrison 36).

4.3. Beloved and Rememory

Beloved's subtle, intricate personality is essential to understanding of the novel. She may be, as Sethe thinks, just a typical woman abused by a white man: "'Uh huh,' said Sethe, and told Denver that she believed Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door" (Morrison 59). Her narrow linguistic competence and heart-rending insecurity could be explained by her life lost to captivity. Yet, it turns out that Beloved is a ghost of Sethe's dead daughter – the revelation proved by Sethe's enormous need to go to the toilet when she first sees Beloved, a sensation that could be interpreted as water breaking when a woman delivers a baby:

> She never made the outhouse. Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. So much water Amy said, "Hold on, Lu. You going to sink us you keep that up." But there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now. (Morrison 25)

Beloved may also represent all the slaves who managed to cross the Atlantic. She may have given a lost voice to and embodied all those lost souls who were oppressed by slavery. As she was killed by Sethe, Beloved is driven by a desire to connect with her mother. Beloved is also constantly trying to cause a disagreement between both Paul D and Sethe, and Sethe and Denver. This yearning is what urges her to force Paul D to have intercourse with her, but the accidental result of this occurrence may be what aids Paul D to resist the hidden pain of his own agony. His hesitation to explore his past mirrors his observation that his secrets are found in his heart: "in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid crusted shut" (Morrison 36). Yet, when Beloved forces him to have sex with her, to confront her physically, she tells him: "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (Morrison 58). The sexual act with Beloved helps Paul D to "re-open his heart" (*Writing the Moral Imagination* 78) and to confront the depth of his own agony:

> "Call me my name." "No." "Please call it. I'll go if you call it." "Beloved." He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that

> when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. (Morrison 58)

Sethe and Paul D are both trauma victims and in order to confront their painful memories they have to repress them. Yet, even though they try to hold them back, they appear in broken pieces and sooner or later allow them to accept the trauma they experienced.

Morrison uses the word "rememory" to show how Sethe and Paul D recall moments that have been forgotten. She makes a clear distinction between memory and rememory: while memory refers to the consistent knowledge and depicts the moments we freely remember, rememory, on the other hand, refers to the process of returning to the past/the memories in a way that affects person's present: "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there" (Morrison 17). Morrison's point is that memory is not just a perception of the past but something that affects the present as well – not just Sethe's memory but also the world around her. J. Brooks Bouson, for example, sees rememory as the "uncontrolled remembering and reliving of emotionally painful experiences" (Bouson qtd. in Bloom 25) while Linda Krumholz states that rememory becomes the characters' "central ritual of healing" (396). Another instance of "rememory" in *Beloved* occurs when Paul D interrupts Sethe's memories of Sweet Home:

> It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. When the last of the chamomile was gone, she went around to the front of the house, collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men. And although she could never mistake his face for another's, she said, "Is that you?" (Morrison 3)

Even though Paul D's and Beloved's arrival cause Sethe's emotional pain, they are also the reason for her to remember something she thought she had forgotten. Such an example is when Beloved asks Sethe about her mother and Sethe replies that she barely knew her mother. Her mother was beaten when she was a child and she tries to remember her mother's body by her scar, which is again a reference to the physical scars of slavery. Another "scar" of slavery appears when Sethe recalls that her mother spoke in a different language, "which would never come back" (Morrison 31). This is also "one of many references in *Beloved* that illustrates slavery's attempt to rob slaves of their native African culture" (Bloom 23). Through the

concept of rememory, Morrison re-examines history both spoken and written, experienced and suppressed, thus reflecting on the common and uncommon aspects of slavery and showing a post-emancipation society that has spiritually been disabled by the trauma of slavery.

5. Powerful Female Relationships in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel, "a landmark in African American women's fiction and a turning point in Walker's career as a writer" (Abraham 275), In this, partly autobiographical, novel, "racism succeeds sexism as the cause of social violence in the narrative" (Berlant 27) In addition, the novel addresses the "themes like estrangement and reconciliation, redemption through love, sisterhood, … oppression and suppression, political and economic emancipation of women, relation between men and women, gender discrimination, lesbianism etc." (Hajare 14). In this novel, the male dominated Southern society becomes a thing of the past as Celie evolves from a quiet woman to one who has the courage to stand up for herself.

Throughout the novel, we learn that the ability to express one's thoughts and feelings is essential to understanding and empowering a sense of self, which is, along with the theme of female relationships, one of the leading ones in *The Color Purple*. Celie does not know how to resist her abusers and thinks that the only way to survive is to stay quiet and invisible. Her letters to God, which help her to tell her story, are her only escape. Yet, because she is so ignorant to say clearly what is happening to her, her story is at first inarticulate because of her wrong use of language: "I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was" (Walker 11). Celie first addresses her letters to God because He is her only "epistolary confidant" (Juneja 83) at that moment. Celie sees God as a man who could give her much needed protection from the world around her. After Celie meets Shug Avery, their love helps her to grow mentally and emotionally, which frees her from the traditional image of God as a grey haired man with a beard: "When I think about it, it don't seem quite right … He big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefoot. Sort of bluish-grey [eyes]. Cool. Big though. White lashes" (Walker 194). Celie's journey to "liberation therefore changes her perception of God from the white Christian God to the black animistic all-pervasive God" (Juneja 83). Celie's view of God reflects Walker's own vision of American society as a "racist, sexist and colourist capitalist society which operates on the basis of unnatural hierarchical distinctions. The oppression of Black women by their husbands, brothers, lovers etc. is an outcome of this system" (Juneja 79). Thus, Celie's letters to God and her sister Nettie are a call for help for each and every abused black woman all around the globe. Celie's letters are also a comment on the American society of Walker's time

"guided by the norms of 'whiteness' and 'maleness' [in which] white women have to fight for their feminism, Black men for their blackness but Black women have to fight their battle on two fronts because 'the Black woman suffers both racial and sexual invisibility'" (Willis qtd. in Juneja 79).

By creating her female protagonists in such a way, Alice Walker adds "a third dimension to the two-fold invisibility of her female protagonists, who very often are reduced to the level of animals and insects" (Juneja 79). The brutal treatment of black female protagonists is mainly the result of their poor understanding of the complex structure of powerful society. Celie, for example, experiences an emotional trauma caused not only by her abusive husband and stepfather but also by the American and African American society in general. This emotional trauma makes Celie discover the power of female bonding, which in turn helps her to find her female power and identity. This long-term female bonding "enables Celie—a depressed survivor-victim of parent loss, emotional and physical neglect, rape, incest, trauma, and spousal abuse—to resume her arrested development and continue developmental processes that were thwarted in infancy and early adolescence" (Proudfit 90). In the novel, female friendships operate as a form of emancipation from brutal treatment female characters endure in their everyday lives. These relationships create a community, a place of safety, in a world that is filled by brutal and abusive men. They exist in different forms: relationships between sisters/cousins/female relatives (Celie-Nettie), sexual relationships (Celie-Shug Avery), and female friendships (Celie-Sofia).

5.1. The (Fe)male Relationship between Celie and Shug Avery

The homosexual relationship between Celie and Shug Avery is crucial to the progress of the plot and Celie's process of self-development. "Lesbianism, rather than heterosexual love, is rite of passage to selfhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood for Celie" (Bell 17). Celie's strong attachment to Shug Avery begins almost instantly: "Shug Avery was a woman. The most beautiful woman I ever saw" (Walker 6).

The reader's first encounter with Shug Avery occurs when s/he learns that Shug is a woman of questionable morals. This view quickly changes and the reader gets to know a

woman who both loves and hates and who is both loved and hated, and who is bisexual. She is "the blues/Jazz singer articulating the sorrows, brutalities, endurances and love-fleeting moments of all those women, who, like Celie, are shackled down and rendered inarticulate in this woman-hating world" (Abraham 278).

Shug Avery's lively personality is what attracts Celie and inspires her in her attempts to become independent. When the two first met, they did not quite get along, but Celie's devoted and compassionate care of Shug Avery was what brought them close so much that Shug composed a song for her: "She say this song I'm bout to sing is call Miss Celie's Song. Cause she scratched it out of my head when I was sick... First time somebody made something and name it after me" (Walker 73). Shug Avery thus greatly motivates Celie to transform. They spend a lot of time together and Shug Avery teaches Celie about religion and God, friendships and sexuality. "Celie gives of herself to heal the sick and exhausted Shug, and Shug reciprocates patiently and lovingly teaching Celie to know the joys of her own body and to follow the intuition of her mind" (Abraham 280). Being a victim of the brutal treatment by her father and husband, Celie is also unable to experience sexual pleasure. This is where Shug Avery also helps Celie transform as she teaches Celie to love and respect her body and gives Celie her first satisfying sexual experience:

> She say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth. Um, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say, um, too. Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other. I don't know nothing bout it, I say to Shug. I don't know much, she say. Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast. (Walker 65).

Throughout the novel, Celie and Shug's relationship is shown as being as natural as the air they breathe. During their time together, "Celie finds herself as being a real woman with decency and self-respect. Moreover, their relationship "evokes so profound an erotic awakening" (Hankinson 326) that Celie's previous sexual encounters do not count as such: "Why Miss Celie, she say, you still a virgin" (Walker 77).

In addition to sexuality, Shug also teaches Celie about God and aids her in her own understanding of spirituality and sense of religion: "Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white men out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make" (Walker 197). Shug explains Celie how to accept religious stereotypes presented and handed to her by patriarchy. This new way of thinking

makes Celie more powerful in her transformation and helps her to reject male command: “Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t” (Walker 197). Shug’s love and care for Celie and her guidance provide the basis for a continuous growth of Celie’s self-awareness, eventually enabling her to establish an active, free, and self-reliant life apart from a quiet, dictated, insulting, and offensive one she suffered. Celie recognizes that she is a real woman and that only divine and material independence can rescue her from the paternal subjugation. In her letter to Nettie: “Dear Nettie, I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children” (Walker 215), Walker shows that Celie’s self-awareness Celie transformed her into a strong, successful, liberated woman who, after being silent for so long, is finally happy, satisfied and self-sufficient.

5.2. Celie and Nettie and the Bonds of Sister Love

Celie and Nettie’s relationship is so strong because they did not have anyone to rely on but each other. Missing the parental figures, Celie has to play the role of mother for Nettie and protect Nettie from their abusive “father”: “I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I’ll take care of you. With God help” (Walker 3). Nettie, on the other hand, frequently behaves as both Celie’s guardian angel: “Don’t let them run over you, Nettie say” (Walker 17) and her teacher: “Helping me with spelling and everything else she think I need to know” (Walker 16). Celie’s admiration for Nettie’s intellect is visible in her description of Nettie to Shug Avery: “Smart as anything. Read the newspapers when she was little more than talking. Did figures like they was nothing. Talked real well too. And sweet. There never was a sweeter girl, I say. Eyes just brimming over with it” (Walker 67).

Afraid that their “father” would sexually abuse her, Nettie runs away from home but promises to write letters to her sister: “Nothing but death can keep me from it” (Walker 18). She keeps her promise despite each of her letters remains unanswered. As the story unfolds, Nettie goes to Africa with Reverend Samuel and his wife. Even though they were apart for years and despite the fact that Celie has not received a word from Nettie for a long time, their connection was so strong that it helped Celie to endure the period of brutal treatment by her

husband. Through her letters, Nettie tries to depict brutality and oppression of blacks by whites and of women by men. "Nettie's descriptions of the experiences of African women argue that Black women's oppression is transcultural" (Butler-Evans 190) – it happens no matter where you are. The racial and cultural oppression Nettie encounters in Africa resembles to the exploitation and hardships Celie endures in Georgia: "Do not be offended, Sister Nettie, but our people pity women such as you who are cast out, we know not from where, into a world unknown to you, where you must struggle all alone, for yourself" (Walker 161). At the end of the novel, two sisters are united, which marks an end of Celie's transformation of becoming an independent woman.

5.3. When the Opposites Attract: The Friendship between Celie and Sofia

Sofia Butler is an independent young woman who instructs and guides Celie to be fearless, thus having a huge influence upon Celie's life. Sofia rejects to submit to white people, men, or anyone who tries to control her, which eventually results in her ending up in prison for insulting the mayor's wife: "Sofia in jail, I say. In jail? She look like I say Sofia on the moon. What she in jail for? she ast. Sassing the mayor's wife, I say" (Walker 53). As someone who has a hard time accepting superiority of whites over blacks, Sofia suffers oppression and discomfort, thus symbolizing the obstacles and hardships blacks had to face in order to overcome cultural and institutional racism.

Celie's jealousy of Sofia's personality and character forces her to advise Harpo to beat Sofia: "Beat her. I say. Next time us see Harpo his face a mess of bruises. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. He walk stiff and say his teef ache" (Walker 8). Sofia is, however, strong enough to "fight for herself and not meekly follow her oppressors," thus possessing "a power that Celie cannot fathom" (Martin 31):

> Just when I was bout to call out that I was coming in the yard, I hear something crash. It come from inside the house, so I run up on the porch… I open the door cautious, thinking bout robbers and murderers. Horse thieves and hants. But it Harpo and Sofia. They fighting like two mens. (Walker 37)

Sofia does not hesitate to confront Celie about the advice she gave Harpo about beating her. In this confrontation, Sofia "shares wisdom with Celie that is so fresh and innovative to Celie that she cannot immediately comprehend the implications" (Martin 31). The talk with Sofia makes Celie think about her own submissiveness: "This open the way for our talk to turn another way" (Walker 31). On the other hand, Sofia gets to understand Celie's indecisive mind and fainthearted behavior and tries to find a way to share her powerful energy with Celie: "I say, You feels sorry for me, don't you? She think a minute. Yes ma'am, she say slow, I do" (Walker 41). Their friendship starts when they make a quilt together. The quilt symbolizes Celie's understanding of Sofia's courage and Celie's embracing "parts of Sofia's ideology as her own" (Martin 32). By creating Sofia as a woman who does not tolerate any kind of oppression and abuse, Walker abandons a stereotypical projection of traditional patriarchal family and depicts "female members of the family as more masculine than the male ones" (Baltrušaityte 33) and by doing this reveals "her optimistic approach towards the future family, where a woman can take a leading role" (Baltrušaityte 33).

6. Reliving the Past with the Help of Time Travel in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) is probably one of her most famous and best known works. In it, Butler combines different genres such as autobiography, slave narrative, science fiction as well as fantasy, which made the novel undoubtedly popular. The novel is divided into six major chapters (The River, The Fire, The Fall, The Fight, The Storm, The Rope) in which Butler's usage of science fiction allows the readers "to confront the legacy of slavery through form, content, and the radical possibilities they both engender" (Rehak 1). From the very beginning of the novel, the readers are intrigued by and seduced into a "fictional" world of slavery, racism, freedom, the present and the past. Moreover, Butler's usage of science fiction elements makes the novel a postmodern slave narrative "that is invested in drawing parallels between two distinct time periods while interrogating how each time period informs the other in a mutual commentary" (Spaulding qtd. in Hampton 1).

The protagonist of the novel is Dana Franklin, a twentieth-century African American woman, who lives in California with her husband Kevin. Dana travels back and forth between the present and the past (between her California home and the Maryland plantation) every time her ancestor Rufus Weylin's life is in danger, and comes back in the present day every time *her* life is in danger. Butler never clarifies how Dana travels back in the past, but instead why she travels. Through the usage of time travel as a science fiction tool, Dana survives slavery, however slavery is what forces her to make uncomfortable decisions to stay alive. The longer Dana stays in the past, the more is she involved with the institution of slavery, thus adopting the behavior of a slave.

> I moved, twisted myself somehow, from my stomach onto my side. I tried to get away from my thoughts, but they still came. *See how easily slaves are made?* they said. I cried out as though from the pain of my side, and Alice came to ease me into a less agonizing position. (Butler 176; emphasis Butler's)

After spending time in the past, Dana comes to realization that in order to protect and secure her legacy as well as her life, she must relive different aspects of her forefathers' life. Dana's travels to the past where she reexperiences her ancestors' lives allow the readers to understand how the past, even the distant one, shapes and determines the present. This is the moment of the genre convergence in the novel; a site where science fiction meets slave narrative thus giving rise to a new genre of neo-slave narrative. Some critics, though, believe

that *Kindred*'s generic traits are more fluid. Although Sherly Vint claims that "*Kindred* is a key example of neo-slave narrative, an African American genre that investigates the history of slavery and reworks the nineteenth century slave narrative tradition" (Vint qtd. in Hampton 2), Rehak argues that Butler's novel "cannot be situated within a singular era and cannot be understood through one genre" (Rehak 1) because the term neo-slave narrative was coined after *Kindred* was written. Spaulding, for example, claims that *Kindred* could be described as "a sort of inverse slave narrative" (qtd. in Steinberg 467) where Butler "de-emphasizes its fantastic dimensions in order to analyze the impact of slavery on the sexual politics of interracial relationships in the present" (Spaulding 26). Despite the critical debates on its generic identity, Butler's combination of genres is definitely what makes *Kindred* an influential and authentic representative of African American women's literature.

Kindred's plot begins at its end: "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone" (Butler 1) and offers the readers horrific flashbacks of slavery in the antebellum South:

> The boy stumbled back from me, alarmed. "You lay a hand on me, and I'll tell my daddy!" His accent was unmistakably southern, and before I could shut out the thought, I began wondering whether I might be somewhere in the South. Somewhere two or three thousand miles from home. If I was in the South, the two- or three-hour time difference would explain the darkness outside. (Butler 17)

Although Dana, because of the boy's accent, at first thinks she is in the South, it is important to mention that Butler intentionally chose Maryland (situated on the Eastern shore of the United States) as a geographical setting of the novel, because she wanted to point out that at that time slavery was a general issue all over the country, not just in the southern part of the United States.

6.1. The Reconstruction of Traumatic Memories of Slavery through Time Travel

Kindred addresses the importance of suppressed trauma of slavery in America's shared memory of history. It does it first by recreating the horrifying memories of slavery and then by transferring the novel's protagonist Dana in the slavery past of her family to point out the

importance of Dana's, and by extension every African American woman's, reconnection with *her*, and their, familial past. In order to resist and deal with racial and gender issues going back to the time of slavery, Butler implies that it is of crucial importance to relive those painful memories and thus introduces time travel as a means of doing it. Through time travel, Dana is forced to relive painful experience of slavery of her ancestor, Alice, which makes her more aware of the history of the United States and her own legacy: "And I found a compact paperback history of slavery in America that might be useful. It listed dates and events that I should be aware of, and it contained a map of Maryland" (Butler 112). Dana's time travel transfers her through both time and space where she endures the awful treatment by white male figures and becomes a victim of physical and almost sexual abuse, but tries to fight against it as much as she can:

> They took me to the barn and tied my hands and raised whatever they had tied them to high over my head. When I was barely able to touch the floor with my toes, Weylin ripped my clothes off and began to beat me. He beat me until I swung back and forth by my wrists, half-crazy with pain, unable to find my footing, unable to stand the pressure of hanging, unable to get away from the steady slashing blows. (Butler 175)

Dana's growing experience about aggressive surroundings where her ancestors did everything to survive shows that the novel's focus is on the physical struggle with slavery rather than on the psychological: "My back was cut up pretty badly too from what I could feel. I had seen old photographs of the backs of people who had been slaves. I could remember the scars, thick and ugly" (Butler 113). Even though "Dana's wounds are produced from her experiences in the past, they reflect what she understands of slavery in the present" (Rehak 4).

Butler also highlights the significance of comprehending the history of the brutal treatment black women had to suffer, and the objectification they suffer to the present day. The joining of the past and the present underscores the idea that slavery, in many different forms, still exists in modern day culture, thus raising awareness to the degradation of (black) women. By combining time science fiction's subgenre of time travel and slave narrative, Butler "creates a fantastical and non-linear storyline that re-centers an authentic history, comments on a traumatized present, and provides material for a better future" (Rehak 2) and invites the readers as well as the characters in the actual battle for racial and gender equality through reexperiencing of the past in the present.

In her novel, Butler tried to show that the history of slavery still has its effects on the present. With the use of time travel, Butler actually transported a living person to the past,

revealed the true horrors of slavery and allowed her readers to (re)experience the first-person slave narrative. The facts that shape Dana's story may seem hard to believe but the reader has eventually come to comprehend the purpose of her time travel "and the figurative and literal trauma she incurs while away and upon return" (Rehak 7). Butler's *Kindred* thus requires the reader "to acknowledge that, given the trauma of slavery, the past and the present are inextricably linked" (Rehak 7). Dana's struggle and attempt to secure her ancestor's birth is what generates the past and her experience of being a slave is what shapes the present.

6.2. The Importance of Being Male Then and Now

Through its depiction of Alice and Rufus's and Dana and Kevin's relationships, Butler's novel questions gender relations not only of the past but also of the present. Kevin is initially presented as "the antithesis of what the antebellum white male represents" (Hampton 12). As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Kevin, like Rufus, sometimes assumes the air of authority with Dana, which leads to the assumption that "the most problematic white man in *Kindred* is not the Maryland slave owner but the liberated, modern Californian married to Dana" (Crossley 263). Throughout the novel, Butler thus draws the parallels between Rufus and Kevin as being superior to Dana. The first point of comparison occurs when Kevin asks Dana to type his manuscripts for him: "He was annoyed. The third time when I refused again, he was angry. He said if I couldn't do him a little favor when he asked, I could leave. So I went home" (Butler 109) and when Dana is "obliged to become Rufus Weylin's secretary and handle his correspondence and bills" (Crossley 273).

When Dana and Kevin are transported together to the Weylin's plantation, Kevin states that "This could be a great time to live in" (Butler 97), which makes Dana comprehend "how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (Butler 101) and that Kevin could easily adapt into a role of a white slave owner. While Dana ravels back and forth from her Californian home to the Weylin plantation, "she is aware not only of the blood link between herself and Rufus but of the double link of gender and race that unites Rufus and Kevin" (Crossley 273). The similarities between the two white men show the awful possibility that even a modern white man can get trapped by the allure of power, thus transforming a husband into the master:

> "Who're you?" asked Rufus.
>
> "My name's Kevin—Kevin Franklin."

> “Does Dana belong to you now?”
>
> “In a way,” said Kevin. “She’s my wife.” (Butler 60)

As her husband-owner, Kevin is placed in the position of possessing Dana as he is able to protect her after she lost control over her body at the Weylin plantation. She becomes aware of this possibility and thinks about the negative consequences that could accompany such a change: “A place like this would endanger him in a way I didn’t want to talk about. If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place would rub off on him. The place, the time would either kill him outright or mark him somehow. I didn’t like either possibility” (Butler 78). Dana is thus afraid that the time and place would change the worth of Kevin’s body as it did to her own: Dana’s fears, however, turn wrong as Kevin, even though he managed to adapt to the life in the antebellum United States, did not adopt Southern antebellum race views:

> “One more thing. Just one.”
>
> He looked at me questioningly.
>
> “Were you helping slaves to escape?”
>
> “Of course I was! I fed them, hid them during the day, and when night came, I pointed them toward a free black family who would feed and hide them the next day.”
>
> I smiled and said nothing. He sounded angry, almost defensive about what he had done. (Butler 192).

Dana eventually comes to understand that Kevin as a white man has the privileges, the rights and the power both in the present and the past. She, on the other hand, has to adapt to social and cultural conditions in order to survive in both time periods.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to address some of the dominant themes in the works of African American women authors. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* depicts, through the power of female relationships, the struggle of African American women to gain self-respect and to free themselves from abusive husbands and fathers and thus find their true identity. It is written from a perspective of an uneducated black woman, by which Walker shows sympathy and respect for African American women and their marginal position in the society. Octavia Butler's *Kindred* addresses the brutal treatment of African Americans during slavery, which makes her novel both slave as well as neo-slave narrative. The novel uses elements of science fiction, such as time-travel, to transfer a modern-day person to the past, which makes her novel a postmodern slave narrative. By sending the novel's protagonist Dana to the past, Butler shows that slavery can still influence the present. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* questions gender roles and the impact slavery has on the characters – what happens after you survived slavery and how painful memories interfere with individual's daily life. Morrison clearly describes cruel conditions African Americans, especially African American women, had to endure in order to survive. They are mostly present in the form of Beloved's horrific memories. Morrison identifies Beloved's memories with all African American people who lost their lives during the Atlantic trade.

Works Cited

Abraham, Anjali. "The Journey of Black Woman from Self-Hatred to Self-Love: A Study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*." *International Journal of English Language, Literature, and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2015, pp. 270-282.

Baltrušaitytė, Goda. *Breaking the Boundaries of Masculinity: Men and Women in Alice Walker's novel The Color Purple*. Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012.

Bell, Bernard W. *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.

Bennett, Lerone Jr. *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America*. Penguin Books, 1993.

Berlant, Lauren. "Race, Gender, and Nation in *The Color Purple*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*: *Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2008, pp. 21-51

Bloom, Harold. "Summary and Analysis." *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 16-49.

Brooks Bouson, J. "Sethe's 'Best Thing'." *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 91-101.

Butler-Evans, Elliott A. *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.* Temple UP, 1989.

Butler, Octavia E. *Kindred*. Beacon Press, 2003.

Crossley, Robert. "Critical Essay." *Kindred*, Beacon Press, 2003, pp. 265-284.

Davis, Pablo J. *Olaudah Equiano in Georgia*. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/olaudah-equiano-georgia. Accessed 10 July 2019.

Foster, S. Frances and Davis, Larose. "Early African American women's literature." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 15-31.

Gould, Philip. "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 11-27.

Hajare, Ravindra D. "Predicament of Women in *The Color Purple*: A Critical Study." *Gurukul International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2015, pp. 1-63. http://gurukuljournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Predicament-Of-Women-In-

The Color-Purple-A-Critical-Study-by-Ravindra-D.-Hajare.pdf. Accessed 23 July 2019.

Hampton, Gregory. "*Kindred*: History, Revision, and (Re)memory of Bodies." *Obsidian III* vol. 6/7, no. 2/1, 2005-2006, pp. 105-117.

Hankinson, Stacie L. "From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*." *Midwest Quarterly* vol. 38, no. 3, 1997, pp. 320-328.

Holloway, Karla F.C. "Spirituality." *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 50-52.

Juneja, Om P. "The Purple Colour of Walker Women: Their Journey from Slavery to Liberation." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*: *Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2008, pp. 79-88.

Krumholz, Linda. "Rituals." *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 57-59.

Kulkarni, Harihar. *Black Feminist Fiction: A March Towards Liberation.* Creative Books, 1999.

Martin, Jennifer. "The Quilt Threads Together Sisterhood, Empowerment and Nature in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and 'Everyday Use'." *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines* vol. 14, 2014, pp. 27-44.

McDowell, Deborah E. "Telling Slavery in 'Freedom's' time: Post-Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 150-167.

Mitchell, Angelyn and Danille Taylor. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 1-12.

Moody, Joycelyn. "African American Women and the United States Slave Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 109-127.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. https://is.muni.cz/el/1421/podzim2005/AJ25022/beloved.pdf

Phillips, Ulrich B. *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*. *Archive.org*, https://archive.org/details/americannegrosla00phil/page/n8. Accessed 30 June 2019.

Proudfit, Charles L. "Celie's Search for Identity: A Psychoanalytic Developmental Reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1991, pp. 12-37.

Rehak, Hannah. "Butler's *Kindred*: Non-linear Genealogies and the Transformative Possibility of Breaking Genre Conventions." *Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bfd2/0770f7a9f1a30691ce73a774a7c97b10c3eb.pdf. Accessed 2 July 2019.

Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1983.

Rucker, Walter, C. "African Americans and an Atlantic World Culture." *A Companion to African American History*, edited by Alton Hornsby Jr., Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 235-253.

Sharma, Seema. *Fashioning Self out of Resistance: Slave Narratives as a Genre That Documents the Community's Resistance to Slavery*. *Shodhganga*, http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8080/jspui/handle/10603/161367. Accessed 19 June 2019.

Smith, Stephanie A. "Harriet Jacobs: A Case History of Authentication." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 189- 200.

Smith, Valerie. "Neo-slave Narratives." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey Fisch, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 168-186.

Smith, Valerie. *Toni Morrison: Writing the Moral Imagination*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Spaulding, Timothy A. *Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*. Ohio State UP, 2005.

Stampp, Kenneth. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*. Vintage, 1989.

Steinberg, Marc. "Inverting History in Octavia Butler's Postmodern Slave Narrative." *African American Review* vol. 38, no. 3, 2004, pp. 467-476.

Traylor, Eleanor W. "Women Writers of the Black Arts Movement." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 50-70.

Vorenberg, Michael. *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment*. Cambridge UP, 2001.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. Harcourt, 1992.

Williams, Oscar R. III, and Hayward W. Farrar. "African Americans and the American Civil War." *A Companion to African American History*, edited by Alton Hornsby Jr., Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 257-270.