



TRAUMATIC PATRIARCHY AND CHILD ABUSE IN ALICE WALKER'S *BY THE LIGHT OF MY FATHER'S SMILE*

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 11th June 2023 Accepted: 11th July 2023 Published: 18th August 2023</p>	<p>The purpose of this paper is to read, examine, and survey Alice Walker's <i>By the Light of My Father's Smile</i> in the light of the theory of trauma studies by focusing on trauma theory in terms of traumatic patriarchy and traumatic child abuse. To that end, the researcher delves into the turbulent relationship between Robinson and his daughters, showing how child abuse even in the form of child beating can completely destroy the life of his eldest daughter, Magdalena., from the inside out. However, another purpose of this paper is to initiate a textual analysis, so as to record what happens to characters after their experience traumatic events in their lives; Next, seeking to show how such experiences can shape the identity, subjectivity, memory, and their sense of belonging to the wider community. Consequently, the paper address a couple of questions such, what role does trauma play in Walker's novel?, How significant is trauma as a motif in Walker's novel? And How traumatic affects influence the characters in Walker's novel?</p>

Keywords: trauma theory ; traumatic patriarchy, traumatic child abuse; turbulent ; abusive treatment.

INTRODUCTION

The history of studies on trauma goes back to nineteenth century. Initially, trauma found its most significant thinkers and theoreticians under the umbrella of psychology. Sigmund Freud was one of the pioneers whose theories on the subject of trauma paved the way for the following generations of theoreticians and influenced them largely. Freud in his book titled "Studies in Hysteria" (1895), co-authored with Breuer explained the nature of trauma. He argued that the original experience that leads a person to feel as a traumatized one, is not traumatic in its essence. It's undeniably part of 'Trauma Theory'. So it's an interdisciplinary theoretical body that draws from psychoanalytic, feminist, and poststructuralist discourses and focuses on the study of both personal trauma (e.g.22 abuse, mental illness) and collective experiences of trauma (e.g. the Holocaust, slavery, genocide). The theory offers a framework for understanding experiences that – by definition – overwhelm the coping mechanism of individuals, and involves enquiry into the relationship between memory and truth and the ways that testimony can aid the recovery process. Key theorists in the field include Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Dominick LaCapra (Cuddon 753)

Traumatic patriarchy is described as an act that causes a woman mental agony and is committed against her because she is a woman. This word refers to both violent and catastrophic injuries, as well as the painful repercussions of daily, systemic deprivation of women's autonomy. Traumatic patriarchy has an impact on health and social consequences through a variety of characteristics such as discriminatory values, norms, beliefs, and practises, unequal exposures and vulnerabilities to disease, disability, and injury, biases in health systems, and biases in health research (Carroll, 592).

This research gives a starting point about the trauma in terms of traumatic patriarchy. To that end, the researcher delves into the turbulent relationship between Robinson and his daughters, showing how the beating of a child, combined with years of parental oppression and abusive treatment as a trigger of trauma, utterly destroys the life of his eldest daughter, Magdalena, from the inside out.

LITERATURE REVIEW: preliminaries to traumatic (child abuse & Patriarchy) Trauma is a severe and often irreversible injury to a person's mind, body, and spirit: Contemporary theories seem to agree on a definition of trauma in terms of overwhelming life experiences that shatter the social and psychological sense of self and precipitate existential crisis, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or a tendency to hypervigilance. (Linett 160).

Thus, a person's mental state is typically described as "traumatized" if they have experienced things like family troubles, poverty, accidents, war, rape, etc. Because of the intense worry, sadness, or shock that follows a traumatic experience or a state of distress, the individual's behaviour is altered.

Privileged patriarchy, in which men govern practically all sectors of life, child abuse is a prevalent plague on women and children in the modern world. Undoubtedly, women have made great strides in comparison to earlier generations, but they still trail far behind men. The prohibition on protecting one's own or one's children's interests is heightened if the person is a member of a historically oppressed group. Patriarchy discriminates against children on numerous fronts, including race, religion, sexuality, class, and education. Mothers often lack the power to advocate for their children's best interests. Child maltreatment, especially when combined with other forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, classism, and gender, can have severe effects on the victims. Physical and mental cruelty are two common forms of child abuse. It can range from relatively minor cases, like parental neglect, to more serious ones, including going without food, clothing, housing, education, or health care. Abuse of children can reach shocking levels, including physical punishments that go far beyond "spare the rod and spoil the child," sexual assaults, and the trafficking of young girls for prostitution. African-American mothers, who have been systematically disempowered by racism, sexism, and classism, are not always in a position to look out for their children's best interests because of patriarchy's destructive effects on them. Extreme sexism is directed toward females. When girls' needs and desires in areas like education, health, sexuality, and way of life are taken into account, gender stereotypes become a major impediment. When fathers prioritize patriarchal interests, it can cause resentment and confusion among daughters. Patriarchal society exploits gender roles for its own profit, putting men ahead of women. In addition, whether the abuse is moderate or severe, it can have a devastating effect on a kid, both during and long after the horrific event. It can make people abusive toward themselves and sometimes others, leading to masochism, sadism, and even sadomasochism

METHOD

Trauma studies does not have a long history and it is believed to grow out of psychoanalytic criticism during the 1990s when scholars turned to pay serious attention to the way individuals responded to events and occurrences that started to shake their understanding of the world due to the extent of the atrocities worldwide such the holocaust, slavery, genocides, and the rest. Trauma studies, in effect, was launched to evidence the plight and predicament of individuals after their traumatic experiences.

Trauma studies emerged in the 1990s and based on Freudian theory to construct a model of trauma that envisions a severe event that tests the limits of language and even ruptures meaning. This trauma model suggests that suffering is unrepresentable. A more pluralistic model of trauma soon followed, suggesting that the presumed inscrutability of trauma is one of several reactions to a traumatic experience instead of its distinguishing feature. The concept that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning entirely established the basic conditions of the sector and continue to affect the intellectual analysis, despite the fact that various options have displaced this concept. (Rothberg 360).

To illustrate all the findings, the researcher's approach to studying Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* in the light of trauma theory is a psychological approach because this approach deals with personalities, human relationship, personality development, and human motivation. On the other hand, in terms of the psychology of a person and the factors affecting him as well as the tremendous pertinent between trauma theory as part of it, it is related to the individual psyche through analysis, events, influences, and psychological and physical experiences.

The methodology of this approach is to perform a deep psychological reading (trauma reading) of the characters in the novel as well as to scrutinise the novel as best as possible by carefully studying line by line to find any relevant evidence of trauma. In other words, the novel itself will be the first and foremost source of study. Supporting resources will be those books and theory materials on trauma. In order to prove the presence of trauma at that novel . It would be very useful for a deep analysis of the characters depicted. Then doing a study of theoretical concepts and their application to the novel .

Discussion : *By The Light of My Father's Smile*

The narrative brings into emphasis the Robinsons, a black family and the challenges encountered by them as blacks. It concentrates on the two daughters, Susannah and Magdalena, who continue to have their lives heavily influenced and confined by patriarchy. As part of an anthropological experiment, Mr. Robinson and his wife Langley Robinson, an upper-class African American couple, travel to Sierra Madre to meet and learn from a tribe called the Mundo, who are of mixed African and Mexican heritage. Since African Americans at the time were not allowed to participate in any anthropological research projects, two men decided to pose as African American preachers and travel to Sierra to learn more about the Mundo. The Robinsons, being the Agnostics that they are, don't put any stock in religion or God, but they do use it as a tool in their quest to learn more about the world. Mr. Robinson forgets that he is an anthropologist, parent, and family man when he starts teaching religion. He allows Christianity to let him hide behind the pretence of faith as he subjects his daughters to harmful patriarchal norms. He is a doting dad who naturally wants what's best for his children, but he may be unknowingly teaching them patriarchal sexism and misogyny in the process.

Walker has stressed the needs of adolescent sexuality throughout the novel, but has not focused on the correct and safe manner to approach it. Teenagers are more impulsive while making decisions in life. They are

unprepared for the task of discovering their sexuality in early adolescence since they are unable to assess the shortcomings linked with it. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that patriarchal movements such as the chastity movement, virginity movement, and celibacy movement have negatively impacted the sexuality of young women. As pointed out by Jessica Valenti:

The virginity movement.. is indeed a movement— with conservatives and evangelical Christians at the helm, and our government, school systems, and social institutions taking orders. Its goals are more rooted in traditional gender roles, and its tool is the sexuality of young women. (Valenti 23).

When movements of the aforementioned type strive to educate women about their sexuality, they are protective; yet, when they trespass on and stifle women's free thought and sexuality in an unfavourable manner, stifling their wholeness, they are not worth it. Walker pushes for women's wholeness throughout the story.

Walker argues throughout the novel that the sexual desires of women and girls are not uniform. She has argued that a woman's personality cannot be determined solely by her virginity. Walker has argued in the novel for the importance of freedom of sexual expression, choices, and preferences. Magdalena despises the idea that her father has misunderstood her based solely on her sexual exploits and not her particular merits. She despises the notion that her father might have allowed her to choose her own behaviour rather than determining what is acceptable. Walker argues in the story for a gentler posture from fathers about their daughters' sexual discovery.

When Robinson learns about Magdalena's sexual activities and her relationship with Manuelito, he becomes enraged and beats her with a belt containing metal disks till blood flows from her body. Langley and Susannah do not come to her aid and stop Robinson throughout the incident. They resignantly observe all this from the key hole of the sealed chamber. Robinson does not consider stopping the abuse or showing pity to Magdalena when she is being beaten to the point of bleeding. Later, as a deceased angel, he realizes: "By beating her eldest daughter so severely that she bled, caused by the disks on the cursed belt I (he) used. I (He) had completely betrayed her" (Walker Before the 28th). The occurrence creates a hole in Susannah's life. She experiences a spiritual fracture as a result of the event. Robinson's treatment of their child like an animal causes a momentary rift in his marriage to Langley Robinson. Langley rejects his request for forgiveness, only to love him with the same fervour a few months later, which Magdalena abhors.

Robinson's beatings not only harm Magdalena's physically, but also her heart and mind. The event between the father and daughter drove a permanent rift between them. It leaves a mark on her entire demeanor, and she is never again the same lively, happy, laughing person. She loses her joyful personality for all time and becomes the epitome of stillness. She feels most alienated by her mother, who ought to have been on her side. She dislikes her father more than anybody else, and as she attains independence, this hatred becomes vehement and vocal. Magdalena, a middle aged woman recalling her youth, reflects, "My father and I did not converse; we bantered" (Walker By the 77).

Even as a middle-aged adult, she has no respect for her deceased parents. Moreover, Susannah and Magdalena's connection is founded on animosity and sister rivalry rather than love. Magdalena despises the fact that her father appreciates Susannah more than she does. She despises the idea that her father has assessed her based only on religious virginity norms. She never anticipated that her father would savagely beat her for discovering her sexuality, which caused her no harm. Discussing how women are evaluated unfairly depending on sexual beginning and desires. Collins, echoing Walker, asserts: "Dividing women into two categories — asexual, moral women to be protected by marriage and their sexual, immoral counterparts — served as a gender template for constructing ideas about masculinity and femininity" (Walker By the 134). Through the narrative, Walker attacks the classification of women as good or bad based on their sexuality or sexual initiation.

In the novel, Walker argues that in a patriarchal society hostile to the sexuality of young women and girls, only their sexual status is utilized to determine their value. In an insensitive, uncaring patriarchal society that relegates women, their predicament is regrettable. "morals and ethical capacity are solely determined by a person's sexual status.... Viewing virginity as a commodity, as it was in the days when daughters were traded for property..." (Valenti 30). Magdalena abhors the notion that her father treated her as a commodity. According to Freud, "women's sexuality has evolved to the same extent as men's" (Beauvoir 66). However, only women's sexuality and the sexual expression are restricted and constrained.

Magdalena despises the fact that she has been labelled as the black sheep of the family. Magdalena despises her father's suspicion of her as a youngster and abhors him for not having taken her under his wing. As a woman in her middle age she tells Susannah:

I knew I was wild. Disobedient. Wayward and headstrong. But I did not understand his violence, after I had just experienced so much pleasure. So much sweetness. If he had known, If I could have told him, I felt he should have been happy for me. If in fact he loved me, as he often said he did. But no he thrashed me in silence. I withstood in silence. I sent my spirit flying out of the window to land on the glistening black back of Vado, my arms circling Manuelito's neat waist. We flew along our favourite trail through the mountains, bluebells vibrant at our feet. (29).

After the incident, Robinson's and Susannah's relationship becomes completely sour.

Traumatic Child Abuse in Magdalena

Susannah and Magdalena are completely distinct even as adults. Susannah learns to do what she desires, to make concessions when necessary, and to shape herself based on her environment and connections. She cultivates

supportive female relationships. Regarding her sexuality, she is open. Susannah has had her fair share of heterosexual partnerships, as well as a lesbian connection with Pauline. She understands the flaws in human relationships because she has been in relationships with both sexes. After witnessing her father beat Magdalena through the keyhole when she was a youngster, she withdraws from him for a time. She modifies her friendship with him throughout time. Susannah strives for autonomy in all aspects of her life, including her relationships with other people. Despite her share of heartbreaks and lows, she has a strong, lucid, and self-reliant attitude. Magdalena, on the other hand, cultivates avarice and contempt for her father on a continuous basis. Throughout her life, she has a broken heart. One incidence of her father's physical abuse has rendered her helpless. She is unwilling to forgive him, despite the fact that he changes his mind and acknowledges his error. She withdraws from her mother, who passes away from cancer. Susannah, her only sister, and she do not share amicable, loving relations. Life-enriching female companionship is lacking for her. She fails to comprehend that "female friendship is intended to give form, expression, and reality to the ways in which women have been for our Selves and for one another" (Abel 434). She avoids all relationships that would prolong her premature death.

Magdalena places herself in self-imposed exile, from which she never emerges. Her childhood sweetheart Manuelito, whom she does not see again until middle age, marries, has children, and continues with his life. In contrast, Magdalena wrecks her own life and becomes an outcast. She crucifies her sexuality and writhes in self-destruction. Magdalena finds professional success through her own efforts, as she becomes an academician at a prestigious institution. She does not enjoy her professional achievement as much as her father, Senor Robinson, does. She develops morbid obesity and disregards her health. She takes pleasure in eating and bingeing. Food is the sole soother and comforter for her. But for Magdalena, being overweight serves a purpose. She tells the doctor and Susannah, "When I'm overweight, I feel strong, as if I don't need anything else" (Walker By the 137). She begins a strict diet while Susannah is with her, but abandons it as soon as Susannah leaves. She believes that if she loses weight, she will forget both Manuelito and her father, "It was as if my memories were lodged in my cells, and needed to be fed. If I lost weight perhaps my memories of Manuelito and my anger at my father would fade away. I felt so abandoned already, I did not want them to go" (Walker By the 138). The love-hate relationship she has with her loved ones completely destroys her. Magdalena also engages in the masochistic act of crucifying her nipples and labia. She tells the doctor and Susannah "When I am fat I feel powerful, as if I could not possibly need anything more" (Walker By the 137). Susannah wonders how Magdalena can endure such suffering. "I wondered, a suffering she so carefully, through compulsive piercing (her nipples had small chains dangling from them, her labia a crucifix) and deliberate overeating" (Walker By the 81). It has to be observed that:

Accumulated trauma, . lies in narcissistic wounds stemming from being deprived of legitimate developmental needs for merger and mirroring. Traumatic experiences such as physical, sexual, and verbal abuse generate further narcissistic rage which cannot be voice in childhood because it could threaten precarious connections to a disappointing, rejecting and abusive environment. In order to assure continued connection to the frustrating and/or abusive caretaker, infants and young children may develop what Bernard Brandschaft (2007) called "pathological accommodations" that function as protection "against intolerable pain and existential anxiety. (5).

The cross on her labia symbolizes her father's crucifixion of her sexuality. Magdalena's self-inflicted masochism may be terrible to others, but for her, it is a means of expiating the agony that has built up within her over time.

A fortunate encounter with Manuelito affords Magdalena the opportunity to rediscover herself, but his untimely death cuts this possibility short. She fails to fully experience herself and struggles with depression throughout her adult life, which she attributes on overeating. She becomes morbidly obese as a result of Bulimia Nervosa and binge eating, despite having a slender, slender physique. Susannah comes to her aid at this moment. This reunion between the two sisters facilitates Magdalena's opening up and discussion of long-held secrets. She tells her that she has lost love forever, despite having removed the crosses from her body to be with Manuelito. The death of Manuelito causes her extra suffering. Magdalena wails about her love bereft life and remarks: Every time a lover leaves you and you are still in love with them, you fantasise about having them once more in your arms. But it is always a fantasy of how it used to be. Your bodies are the same that you had before. Manuelito and I were the same people, but our bodies seemed to be those of two other people, . . . But mostly we prayed that our stranger's bodies would come to their senses and find each other again. (Walker By the 96).

Susannah informs Magdalena that they are able to heal one another. Magdalena finds it impossible and states, "I'm already set in my ways. Wedded to my routines. "My most ingrained trait is contempt for the man who gave me life" (Walker By the 135). Susannah tries her best to reassure her and lead her to the truth. She begs her to have compassion for her deceased father and continues, "Don't confine him to that one moment. He was a person, just like you and I. You just strangled me and removed a plug from my arm, but now you're lying there apologizing. Are you?" (Walker By the 135). Magdalena displays no interest in forgiving her father despite Susannah's lengthy discourse.

Daughters' self-reliance as a motif of traumatic patriarchy

Walker depicts the resentment children have for their parents throughout the story. No matter how hard she tries, reconciliation between Magdalena and her parents is impossible. Susannah feels nothing special about her parents, She believes that "every parent is a traitor to their child" (Walker Within the 120). She refers to her deceased father as the son of a whore, revealing her peculiar feelings for him. The father-daughter connections shown by Walker in the novel are irredeemable. Magdalena loses her temper when she learns that Susannah was counselled on birth

control during her sexual initiation during the family's stay in Sag Harbour. She wonders how her father could have been so nasty to her but so good to Susannah. Magdalena tells Susannah, "He took the moment in my life when I was most certain of its significance.... The moment when I realized that my life was mine to own. He shattered that instant into a million pieces. He made it filthy and wicked" (Walker By the 117). Susannah believes that their father was a hypocrite who despised his hypocrisy. Magdalena states that she has always wished for a father who would not have gone "ballistic" (Walker By the 128) upon learning of her sexuality. She believes that in either of his professions as an anthropologist or a minister, he should not beat people. She bemoans, "The man destroyed my life" (Walker By the 128).

Walker argues throughout the narrative that partnerships lacking love, trust, and faith are rarely successful. A person's exposure to trauma at one point is the cause of his or her chronic, long-lasting recollection of prior events. Magdalena's misery is a direct outcome of the trauma she has endured, as seen by her crying about a single occurrence and her inability to forgive. Magdalena laments the fact that she was not trusted and liked, while her sister's sexuality was met with suspicion. She questions Susannah, "How can there be love without trust?" (Walker By the, 127). Magdalena states, "I desired reparation, not an apology" (Walker By the, 127). Magdalena regards their father as a brute and their mother as his mistress. "He was brutish, hypocritical, and a liar. And Mama was his mistress. (Walker By the, 130) . She becomes a "Mad Dog" as she recalls her last moments before being shattered into pieces (Walker By the, 131). She discards items and bites her sister before collapsing. Magdalena describes her action as, "going berserk" (Walker By the, 134). She regains consciousness at the hospital as a result of trauma-related treatment. She learns that she had successfully hardened her heart to the point that it no longer functioned, regardless of how much she may have desired it to. And is this what transpired when someone crushed your heart and you persisted on leaving it broken? just to punish them (Walker By the, 133). Through the course of the story, Walker demonstrates how even highly educated women like Magdalena can lose that, "Women must assume responsibility for strengthening their self-esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves" (Tate, 213). Walker demonstrates in the novel how even highly educated women like Magdalena, despite all of her schooling, forget that.

Robinson, speaking as a deceased angel, observes that Susannah will endure anything with the tenacity of a flowering weed. It is my Magdalena, more devoted and vulnerable than ever before." (Walker By the ,171). As a deceased angel, he comments, "I was an atheist. More precisely, an agnostic... Because I was "sponsored" by something in which I did not believe, I believed that I could live that way. What an idiot!" (Walker By the, 171) . He recognizes that his patriarchal attitude has at some point undermined and complicated the lives of all the women in his life. He recognizes that he has a man who has lost his faith. His belief in woman. "In the woman he made love to, the woman who would become his child" (Walker By the, 173). He understands the significance of a father's role in enhancing his daughter's life and preparing her for all types of success in life. Robinson sees his error in severing his daughter's integrity by his act of violence against her, "I had failed her and without reason destroyed her life" (Walker By the, 233). Long after his death, he feels compelled to make amends with his daughters because he has unwavering faith in the Mundo heritage and way of life: "The Mundo have a proverb which states that true love completes itself. A sign that a love is not genuine is that it is perpetually unresolved. This ache, this longing, just sort of lingers, perhaps for the duration of your life (Walker By the, 168). As a deceased father, Robinson can do nothing but see what is occurring around him. He desires to reconcile with his daughters, but he is a ghost and they are still alive. In an interview with Evelyn C. White, Walker stated, "It is time for fathers to confront the hypocrisy of their own sexual behaviour and extend themselves positively to their daughters" (201). The novel endorses it.

Robinson discovers after crossing over that of his two daughters, "Magdalena is the more fragile." Her obesity is designed to conceal this, whereas Susannah, despite appearing docile, compliant, and innocent, is a woman determined to obtain whatever she desires. She must experiment until she discovers it. And she is most determined to possess her own mind" (Walker By the,171) . As his daughter Magdalena gasps her final breaths, he watches helplessly, "she sprawled mountainous and grotesque" with "a hunk of chocolate and a can of beer" in her hands (Walker Bt the, 171). The reconciliation between the father and daughter occurs after the daughter's death, which is of little help because Magdalena has endured numerous trials and sorrows during her lifetime, both imposed and self-inflicted. Magdalena's unwholesome life is evidence that childhood and adolescent maltreatment can have lifelong consequences for sensitive individuals. Walker argues in the novel that "fathers must assume that the daughters to whom they have given birth are intelligent and can comprehend what is being said." It becomes imperative for fathers to discuss sexual matters with their children in an open, loving, and patient manner (Walker, "On Finding Your Bliss," 201).

One of the central themes of the novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998) is the obligation of fathers to raise their daughters with care and to provide an environment in which their daughters can thrive and achieve their full potential. It attests to the fact that inequalities between the sexes, as well as the gender standards that are imposed on girls by their dads, sap the life force out of their lives. Walker argues that religious doctrines and dogmas exacerbating already-existing gender stereotypes are harmful to women and girls and lead to unnecessary suffering.

As she reads the story, Walker discusses the ways in which preconceived gender standards stifle girls' opportunities to develop fully into strong, independent women. She has demonstrated how unnecessary gender stereotypes cripple women, who constitute half of the population in any society, and hence limit that society's potential for constructive development. Through the narrative, Walker encourages fathers to be the trustworthy

pillars of their daughters' faith and safety. She urges all fathers to help their daughters grow up to be strong, independent, and self-reliant women who can contribute positively to society.

CONCLUSION

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So trauma plays a major role in terms of the destructive effect motifs on the individual, such as the beating Robinson endured not only hurting Magdalena's body, but also her heart and psyche. The wedge created by the incident remains between father and daughter for life. It leaves a witty personality in her entirety, and she is never the same, smiling, laughing, active person again. She forever loses her cheerful self, becoming an image of silence.

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