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Bethany Abrams

Sinning as Empowerment: Reclaiming God as a Black, Queer Woman in Alice Walker's *The*

Color Purple

ENGL-401 Senior Inquiry

Professor Burge

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Long Analytical Essay

Written in 1982, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* remains an important piece of literature encapsulating the Black identity. Specifically, Walker shines a light on what it means to be a Black woman through the use of multiple female characters and their intertwining storylines. *The Color Purple* follows the journey of Celie, a Black and queer woman who endures a great deal of trauma and abuse throughout her life, especially at the hands of men. When she meets another Black, queer character named Shug Avery, her view of how she should be treated changes. Shug Avery encourages Celie to learn more about her body and to listen to her needs, which ultimately empowers Celie. To understand how Shug empowers Celie, it is essential to first examine how Shug herself became empowered, which she does through redefining God. Shug redefines God as a benevolent, loving entity rather than the fearful, oppressive God that Celie believes in. God becomes something that is within every part of the universe, including within herself, and she effectively breaks away from what she has been taught by preachers of Christianity who have used religion as a form of violence and dominance. She reclaims her new definition of God through the seven deadly sins: lust, pride, gluttony, sloth, envy, wrath, and greed. By viewing sins as acts of empowerment rather than shameful behaviors, the seven sins serve a purpose in building Shug Avery's self-worth as a Black, queer woman. In turn, she reinforces her view that God's happiness is directly connected to her own.

When Alice Walker wrote *The Color Purple* in the 1980s, she was establishing herself as an important figure in shaping African-American literature. During this time, a shift was occurring in literature where Black writers were beginning to write works without the structures of the white canon in mind. In W. Lawrence Hogue's "The Emergence, Renaissance, and Transformation of Multicultural American Literature from the 1960s to the Early 2000s," he explains that Black writers were able to "move beyond protest, the white gaze, and the various

binaries that positioned them as lower halves of binary oppositions,... and to write about people of color as complex and varied human beings whose race or ethnicity was assumed” (174).

Through her writing, Walker focuses on capturing the experiences of Black women. Hogue asserts that Walker exposes “the violence black women experienced at the hands of a patriarchal system, re-telling a repressed story vibrating in the majority language and creating a different image of the black woman” (177). Walker’s focus on Black female characters helps to give voice to a group whose voice has been silenced in existing literature and in society. Even further, though, Walker formulates her characters to represent even more than just their struggles with race alone. Rather, she situates the story around two Black, queer women whose intersection of their gender, race, religion, and sexuality is important to their personal growth. Specifically, by observing how Shug and Celie interact with religion and use sin as a way to reconcile with religion, Walker positions these characters as complex individuals who must fight against oppression in numerous ways, which is a defining characteristic that helps shape African-American literature at this time.

To understand the importance of the reclamation of God in *The Color Purple*, it is first important to situate Shug Avery and Celie’s intersecting identities with Christianity. For instance, as a Black woman, the common view of God that was perpetuated by a white, patriarchal system was oppressive and often used to exploit Black women. In her article titled “Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative,” SallyAnn Ferguson explores how Christianity has been used in slave narratives as a justification for violence. Ferguson explains this oppressive technique used by slaveholders, stating, “With brute force, the enslavers compel their prey to distort ideas of the original Creator, or Providence, into the image of oppressors wearing the mask of the Christian God” (305). To exemplify this in action, she references Harriet Jacobs and her autobiography

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl where she recounts her experiences with slavery and oppression under the name Linda. In this text, Linda confides in a slaveholder named Dr. Flint and asks him to teach her how to be a “good Christian.” In response to this, Dr. Flint uses Christianity and God to take advantage of Linda by preaching that she must follow his rules and be faithful to his wants because that is what God would want (Ferguson 311). By acting as though he is closer to God and knows more about what God wants than she ever will, Linda is further trapped under his control.

The use of Christianity to oppress Black lives, especially during slavery, contributed to a sense of distrust in the church. With this distrust, Black individuals began to stray away from the church and try to build their own, particularly in the 1960s. In “Pieces of a (Wo)man: Feminism, Gender and Adulthood in Black Consciousness, 1968—1977,” Daniel Magaziner traces the ramifications of a movement formed in South Africa called the Black Consciousness Movement. This movement was founded in the mid-1960s by Steve Biko, and it was formed in response to the decisions made after the Sharpeville Massacre, which was an event marked by policemen in South Africa opening fire and wounding over two hundred and fifty Black individuals. After this massacre, the government in South Africa dismantled the two most popular organizations that were established to protect individuals: the Pan-Africanist Congress and the African National Congress. Therefore, the goal of this movement was to fight against segregation and assert that an individual’s African culture should not be changed or altered by white values (Magaziner 45). With this movement also came the emergence of churches where Black individuals were given a space to worship God without white individuals using it as a tool for oppression.

However, although these spaces encouraged the preachings of a more welcoming God, women were still seen and told that they were lesser than men (Magaziner 46). According to

Magaziner, this view of women was seen through the way Biko wrote about the movement. Although women participated and helped lead, there was little to no mention of them in Biko's works about the movement. Magaziner states, "Biko and Black Consciousness were both sexist (their language was unquestionably gendered - and thoroughly masculine) and supportive of women's participation" (Magaziner 47). The sexism that was a part of this movement continued even after the movement ended. As explained by Magaziner, "Men emerged as the spokespeople for the entire community - the imagined vanguard who invoked the future existence of the black nation by struggling and sacrificing on its behalf, while women were supposed to witness male suffering and to deny their own" (Magaziner 57). Although women were allowed to be a part of the Black Consciousness Movement and the movements thereafter, they were still being oppressed on behalf of their gender. Christianity and religion, therefore, were still not inclusive for Black women.

Another way in which Black individuals have grappled with Christianity is through the lens of W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness. Double consciousness refers to the struggle of Black individuals to balance their Black culture with the values of the dominant, white culture. In Shirley White's "A Consideration of African-American Christianity as a Manifestation of Du Boisian Double-Consciousness," she traces Du Bois' own view of religion. For Du Bois, churches created by and for Black individuals were seen less as religious institutions and more as clubs that celebrated numerous parts of Black identity both inside and outside of religion, such as education and theater. Nonetheless, although these churches were different and more encompassing than the dominant, primarily white churches, Du Bois himself still felt ambivalent about religion in part due to double consciousness. He had trouble reconciling with a church and with a God that would allow such horrific happenings and oppression against Black individuals.

However, because he was raised in the church, he has found it hard to completely rid himself of a religious influence. White explains this, stating, “Like many another person of deep faith, Du Bois found it necessary to confront the twoness of being Black and a Christian in much the same way as he struggled with the dichotomy of being Black and American. The reality of the dilemma did not preclude the truth of his identity and position within the contradiction” (36). As Du Bois himself demonstrates, Black individuals can encounter a particular struggle when it comes to their religious identity and race knowing how religion has been used.

In addition to oppression by gender and race, Christianity has been used as a way to silence the voices of queer individuals. Kirk Foster and others quantified the way Christianity has been used as a form of harm for queer voices through a psychological study. They saw that a non-affirming church was harmful to one’s mental and physical health (Foster et al. 193). This was due to the blatant way that queerness was spoken about in the church and how it was openly condemned. Similar to those within the Black Consciousness Movement, these queer individuals interviewed found a new way to reconcile with God that was more welcoming. Some individuals abandoned God and religion altogether, but some simply studied the scriptures with a new, less oppressive lens. In Foster’s study, one participant described how they redefined scripture:

I find a lot of comfort in the scriptures, even though I don’t read them in a literal sense. And I know now how messy translating them is and I don’t believe the Bible is the unerring Word of God. And once you take that and look at that, then everything else loses its power. And for me, when I sit in the presence of God, there’s no doubt that I’m loved just the way I am. (196)

For this participant, by studying scripture themselves instead of it being taught to them by a non-affirming preacher, God became a much more loving, accepting being.

To better understand the role of religion in *The Color Purple*, it is important to understand Alice Walker's own views of religion and how they bleed into her works. In "Green Lap, Brown Embrace, Blue Body: The Ecospirituality of Alice Walker," Pamela Smith traces Walker's religious identity. Smith asserts that Walker adopts pantheism but in a way that does not abandon Christ entirely. Pantheism refers to a religion in which individuals believe that God, or multiple Gods, exist everywhere in the universe, such as in one another, animals, nature, and more. As seen in Smith's article, Walker sums up her view of religion and God, stating:

This feeling of being loved and supported by the Universe in general and by certain recognizable spirits in particular is bliss. No other state is remotely like it. And perhaps that is what Jesus tried so hard to teach: that the transformation required of us is not simply to be "like" Christ but to *be* Christ. (479)

Through this statement, Walker explains that she believes that Jesus exists, but he is not in the way Christianity has depicted him. Rather, Jesus is within everything in the universe, such as in nature and each human being. In *The Color Purple*, the character Shug Avery comes to a similar conclusion about religion.

Existing scholarship about Walker's *The Color Purple* focuses primarily on Celie and her relationship with God. For Celie, she has struggled with religion as a Black woman, which began at a young age when she was taught about religion. In Wirba Mañimo's article "Black Female Writers' Perspective on Religion: Alice Walker and Calixthe Beyala," Mañimo talks of Celie's upbringing and how she was taught that she was inferior to God and must be obedient. Mañimo states, "By ordering Celie not to confide her ruinous sexual experiences to anyone but God, Pa (un) consciously identifies God as a patriarchal overlord, protector of men (His human henchmen), and an accomplice in Black women's ruinous sexual experiences" (126). Not only is

she taught that God is a man, but she specifically views him as a white man, which is damaging to her identity as Black as well as her identity as a woman. Since she is told by her Pa to confide in God and only God, she is stripped of her own voice. This can be seen in the fact that she addresses her letters to God. In Harold Bloom's "Celie in the Looking Glass: The Desire for Selfhood in *The Color Purple*," he explains that Celie's letters are important in showing her lack of agency. He states, "Celie's language exists through much of the book without a body or audience, just as she exists without self or identity" (Bloom 1). This suggests that Celie can overcome her pre-determined view of God is to accept her identity as a Black, queer woman, which she does throughout the novel. Despite scholarship focusing primarily on Celie, the other female characters within the novel, specifically Shug Avery, are vital to Celie's growth.

For Shug Avery, she also found that when God was taught to her in the past, it perpetuated the Christian idea that God is a fearful, white man who only accepts people when they follow his every rule. However, in the novel, Walker showcases that Shug has stepped away from this view. Shug explains to Celie, "My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all" (Walker 195). No longer was she an outsider in her religion as a Black, queer woman. By redefining God, she was a part of God just like everything and everyone else within the world. She continues, "God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like" (Walker 195). Through this statement, Shug asserts that God loves her no matter what. As long as it makes her happy, it makes God happy, even if the means to her happiness differs from what is seemingly accepted by society, such as

engaging in a relationship with a woman. In Smith's article, she references Trudy Bloser Bush, who stated that Shug "develops the holistic consciousness of the Christian mystics, of Buddhist and Hindu thought, and of African animism. She realizes that God is inside each person; people come to church to share, not find" (480). In this way, Shug represents the acceptance and use of numerous religions as a way to redefine a Christian God.

A part of Shug Avery's reclamation of God is to push back against the idea that God is something to be feared and controlled by. She does this through unapologetically being herself and committing each of the seven deadly sins that are condemned in the Bible. Although the Bible states that sinning is evil and will lead to one's demise, when Shug Avery sins, she becomes enlightened and more fulfilled. In the novel, Shug admits to being a sinner, stating to Celie, "I is a sinner, Cause I was born. I don't deny it. But once you find out what's out there waiting for us, what else can you be?" (Walker 192). The most clear of the seven sins which Shug commits is that of lust. In the King James version of the Bible, lust is listed as a deadly sin: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (*King James Bible*, James. 1:15). For Shug, though, lust does not bring about her death but a form of satisfaction. Throughout *The Color Purple*, Shug values sex and places sex on a pedestal. Celie grew up thinking of sex as a means to an end as her body has been exploited and raped. In contrast, Shug views sex as a means of personal pleasure. She has sex because she wants to, rather than for any purpose of marriage or reproduction. In Kaila Story's "(Re)Presenting Shug Avery and Afrekete: The Search for a Black, Queer, and Feminist Pleasure Praxis," Story sees Shug as being excluded and ostracized for this, stating "As a rebel, and as an outsider. Shug's outsider within status didn't have anything to do with her race, as much as it had to do with her transgressive expression of sexuality" (30). Shug's promiscuity is something that

is looked down upon by others. However, this discrimination does not make her any less lustful. Therefore, not only does she commit the sin of lust, but she is also prideful of her lustful acts and encourages Celie to do the same.

In fact, throughout the novel, she teaches Celie exactly how to gain pleasure from sex, stating, “It git hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part. But other parts good too, she say” (Walker 76). When she teaches Celie this, Celie explores her body for the first time and truly gets to know herself. In Christianity, the act of self-pleasure is referred to as a sinful act that God disapproves of. However, for Shug, self-pleasure is an important step in self-discovery. She even compares the acceptance of God to lust, stating, “In fact, when it happen, you can’t miss it. It sort of like you know what, she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh” (Walker 195). When Celie questions if it is dirty, Shug replies, “Naw... God made it” (Walker 195). In her eyes, since God created the means of pleasure, why would God then punish those for appreciating his creation? Once she realized this, she began to redefine God as a presence that accepted all sorts of pleasure. Additionally, through the sin of lust, she breaks away from the patriarchy that situates pleasure for women, especially for Black women, as second to men. In an article titled “‘A View from 'Elsewhere': Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in *The Color Purple*,” Linda Abbandonato also views this use of lust as transformative in pushing against the Christian idea that Celie adopts of God being a white man:

So, for Celie, the discovery of the clitoris (and of the possibility of sexual fulfillment with a woman) is accompanied by a whole range of other discoveries that relegate man to the margins of a world he has always dominated. The most significant of these is a reconceptualization of God the Patriarch. Describing her feminist re-definition of God,

Shug makes an explicit connection between spiritual and sexual jouissance.

(Abbandonato 1112)

Through her sexual experiences, Shug breaks away from the idea of heteronormative sex that should rely on the pleasure of men. Her relationships with women, such as Celie, are just as fulfilling as her relationships with men. Even further, the Bible specifically states that lust will bring about death. Mañimo, in a piece aforementioned, pushes against this outcome of lust and asserts that Celie essentially goes through a rebirth at the hands of Shug through their shared lustful connection. Mañimo states, “Shug Avery, triggers tremulous sensations in Celie and transforms her formerly "dead" body (rendered dead by her husband's battering and sexual abuse) into a living object” (127). Here, the sin of queer, lustful touch is being used in something as Godly and significant as a rebirth.

Along with lust, Shug Avery exudes a great deal of pride in herself. According to the King James version, the Bible condemns pride, stating, “Pride *goeth* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall” (*King James Bible*, Proverbs. 16:19). However, for Shug, her growing pride coincides with her growing self-worth. Meaning, without an excess amount of pride, Shug Avery may not have been able to build such a successful singing career. For Black women especially, building a life outside of the accepted life as a mother and wife becomes increasingly difficult as one is met with scrutiny and judgment. Shug herself has found her own way of making her voice known outside of men, which is through her singing. Shug does not stop singing even when she is not in front of a stage. Rather, she is seen humming and creating tunes around the house. Her pride in her singing career is important in the empowerment of Squeak as well. Walker explains how Squeak begins her singing career, stating, “First she sing Shug’s songs, then she begin to make up songs her own self” (97). By singing Shug’s songs first,

it becomes clear that Shug serves as a sort of inspiration for Squeak. In the same way that Shug uses pride as a means to build her career, Squeak similarly becomes prideful of her singing. This pride is what eventually allows her to assert that her name is Mary Agnes. In addition to singing, Shug is also prideful in her appearance, and she does not change the way she dresses for others. For instance, when Mr. _____ tries to put her down for her tight red dress, he explains that he would never let his wife wear something like this. Instead of apologizing for her promiscuity or changing her dress, she responds, “Good thing I ain’t your damn wife” (Walker 71). Shug does not let Mr. _____ control her and she does whatever she wants to feel confident no matter what others say. This pride is particularly vital to Shug’s reclamation of God. One aspect of Shug’s redefinition of God is to think of God as something internal. Through this logic, she finds God within herself in the same way that she finds God in nature. Thus, it is important to, in a way, worship herself as she would other manifestations of God. To do this, pride is necessary in situating herself as something worthy of worship.

Shug Avery also commits the sins of greed and gluttony, which she does through people rather than money and food. The Bible condemns greed of all forms, not just monetary or gluttonous greed, stating, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (*King James Bible*, James. 4:3). This verse states that God will not grant requests when the individual asking has ulterior, overtly selfish motives. Towards the end of the novel, Shug makes a decision that greatly hurts Celie and exhibits her selfish desires. Although she is happy with Celie, she still wants to try things out with Germaine. She has already begun to establish a life with Celie, but she does not want to commit to this life outright without also having Germaine first. She tells Celie, “All I ast is six months. Just six months to have my last fling. I got to have it Celie. I’m too weak a woman not to” (Walker 246). Not only does Shug

want to try things with Germaine, she *craves* it. Not only is this act itself one of greed and gluttony, but she is also exhibiting greed in her desire that everything remain the same as it has been. She continues to tell Celie, “But if you just give me six months, Celie, I will try to make our life together like it was” (Walker 246). She expects Celie to not only welcome her back with open arms when she returns but also for things to continue as if she never left at all. Wanting to have both Germaine and Celie is a way in which Shug commits these two sins; however, this is also an empowering act for her as she is prioritizing herself and her wants, no matter how large and excessive they seem. When she returns after being with Germaine, Shug commits the sin of envy as she becomes jealous of Celie and Mr. _____ who have begun to talk more. Envy is referred to as “the rottenness of the bones” in the Bible, but this does not stop Shug from being openly jealous and envious (*King James Bible*, Proverbs. 14:30). Celie sees and comments on Shug’s behavior, stating, “What do you know, I think. Shug jealous. I have a good mind to make up a story just to make her feel bad. But I don’t” (Walker 282). This envy stems from her greed and the desire and expectation that everything, including Celie and Mr. _____, were to remain the same in her absence. Therefore, in the same way that her greed and gluttony help Shug prioritize herself, so does her envy. All three of these sins are important in the reclamation of God for a similar reason as to pride. In the past, she has been taught to please God first and foremost. As she begins to reconcile God as an all-loving being that is within herself, she begins to please herself and prioritize her wants over the wants of others. In the novel, as she is talking with Celie, she states, “Us worry bout God a lot. But once us feel loved by God, us do the best us can to please him with what us like” (Walker 192). In this way, although she is actively working against Celie’s wants by pursuing Germaine, she is doing what she wishes to do, therefore abiding by her God’s wishes.

Furthermore, Shug Avery embodies the sins of wrath and sloth, primarily concerning Celie. For instance, she encourages Celie to embrace the sins of wrath and sloth after they discover that Mr. _____ has been hiding Nettie's letters all along. In an article titled "Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple': Redefining God and (Re)Claiming the Spirit Within," Thyreen speaks to this moment between Shug and Celie. Thyreen explains that, despite the Bible saying that anger is forbidden, Shug encourages Celie to feel wrath (53). This encouragement works as Celie becomes angry and even compares herself to Sofia, another female character in the story who sins wrath as a form of empowerment. Celie states, "All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble bout the house crazy for Mr. _____ blood" (Walker 119). In addition to encouraging this anger, Shug also encourages Celie to be slothful and to take time for herself. Slothfulness in the Bible is connected to the decay of the home (*King James Bible*, Ecclesiastes. 10:18). However, Shug puts Celie to bed and tells everyone that she came down with a fever, which is a lie that she forms for the sake of sin. Although Shug lies and commits the sin of sloth, Celie's life does not decay and instead flourishes soon after. Celie states, "I don't sleep. I don't cry. I don't do nothing" (Walker 119). By normalizing the sin of sloth, Shug gives Celie the time and space to do nothing but think and cope. Shug's use of wrath and sloth allows Celie to fully process her emotions and realize that her feelings are valid. This is something new for Celie who has always put her feelings aside for others, especially in her relationships with men. In this way, although wrath and sloth are seen as evil sins, Shug benefits Celie's life through them.

As aforementioned, Shug Avery is not the only female character to commit the sin of wrath. As another empowered character, Sofia does not fail to defend herself against Harpo who struggles with the expectations of masculinity. In an attempt to discipline Sofia, Harpo turns to

violence, leading to the two fighting constantly. Celie makes note of their dynamic, stating, “But it Harpo and Sofia. They fighting like two men... He grab her dress tail and pull. She stand there in her slip. She never blink an eye” (Walker 37). Rather than backing down or submitting to Harpo, his violence only makes her more angry. In the King James Bible, men are situated as the head of the house. For instance, Ephesians states, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (*King James Bible*, Ephesians. 5:22). Bible verses such as this one have been used as a way to justify the oppression and abuse of women, but Sofia does not allow this version of God to control her. She does not submit to her husband Harpo and she commits the sin of wrath by directly fighting against Harpo without conceding to his desires.

Not only does Shug commit each of the seven sins throughout the novel, but she does so without fear. This is particularly revolutionary for Celie who has been taught to repress her desires out of fear of God and the men who taught her about God. In Brooke Peterson’s novel *Religious Trauma: Queer Stories in Estrangement and Return*, she shows the effects of religious fear, specifically on queer individuals. As she interviewed queer individuals and their different experiences with the church, she found their loyalty to religion was rooted in a fear of God. Since they were being told that they have to be a certain way for God to love them and allow them into Heaven, this fear made it difficult to accept themselves. For instance, Peterson spoke about an individual named Beth who saw that “her dedication to the Church was a way of warding off her fears that she was going to hell” (57). For each of the participants Peterson interviewed, she found that there was a collective agreement instilled into them that they should not question anything. Peterson explained this, stating that to them, “The bible was infallible, the church itself was without error... even questioning God’s Word was a sin” (60). In *The Color Purple*, as Shug continues to use the seven sins as empowerment for both herself and Celie, Celie

begins to question her views. However, for Celie, since she has been taught that questioning God is a sign of being an unfaithful sinner, she does not believe that she can both simultaneously question God and believe in God. She assumes Shug has abandoned religion herself, stating, “Big a devil as you is, I say, you not worried bout no God, surely” (Walker 191). Shug immediately pushes against this, stating that it is not God that Celie does not believe in, but rather the Bible and the teachings of white individuals. She explains to Celie, “How come the bible just like everything else they make, all about them doing one thing and another, and all the colored folks doing is getting cursed?” (Walker 193). Through this statement, Shug is encouraging the questioning of religion. Although this makes sense to Celie, she continues to struggle with accepting Shug’s view of God because it differs vastly from what she has been believing in for her entire life. Shug states that, in order to fight against this, Celie must put the power back into herself:

Man corrupt everything... 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. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of

it, tell him to git lost... Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock (Walker 196).

With Shug’s words in mind, Celie repositions her own view of God to match hers. Part of the reason why Celie both confides in and trusts Shug is because she has seen Shug do exactly this. She has seen Shug rebel against the corruptive power of men, sin, and believe in God all at once.

Overall, through the use of the seven sins as a means of empowerment, Shug Avery reclaims God as something completely separate from the oppressive power she and other queer, Black women have been taught to fear. She begins to view herself as a part of God in the same way that everything in nature is God. One way in which she reconciles with this newfound view

is by building up her own self-worth. She accomplishes this through the use of the seven sins. Lust, especially lust for Celie, helps reclaim the female sexual experience as something pleasurable and fulfilling. Pride in herself allows her to view herself as something worthy of worship. With greed, gluttony, and envy, she prioritizes herself and does what pleases her, which is exactly what her God has asked of her. Wrath and sloth give her and the woman she loves the chance to accept all parts of themselves. Thus, sinning is what gives her the power to be herself unconditionally as a Black, queer woman and realize that God will still be there for her no matter what, which is what she should have been taught from the beginning. She then goes on to serve as a teacher for others, such as Celie and Mary Agnes, and watch them grow through sin themselves. As she empowers herself through sin, she reclaims God as something that is everywhere, ever-lasting, and all-loving in the same way that Walker has positioned her own religious views as a Black author writing in the 1980s.

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