



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***SUBJECTIVITIES GAINED AND LOST IN MELANCHOLIC FEMALE
EUNUCHS IN ALICE WALKER'S SELECTED NOVELS***

KAMELIA TALEBIAN SEDEHI

FBMK 2016 31



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By

KAMELIA TALEBIAN SEDEHI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Univesiti Putra Malaysia in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2016

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DEDICATION

**TO THE PILLARS OF MY STRENGTH, TO MY UNDERSTANDING MOTHER
AND SUPPORTIVE FATHER**



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in the fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2016

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According to Julia Kristeva, melancholic subject suffers from the sense of loss which results from the loss of mother. As a consequence of this loss, the melancholic subject is a stranger to language, isolates herself, and does not have any interest in actions or even life itself. However, in my study, I contend that the loss of mother is not the only reason for melancholia in the female characters, Celie, Tashi, Mem, and Magdalena in the Alice Walker novels *The Color Purple*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile*, which were selected for this study. These female characters not only lost their mother or mother figures but also their sexuality has been oppressed, and they have been harassed; therefore, they are led to melancholia. These female characters do not have any knowledge about their bodies; therefore, they easily accept whatever old rituals and men impose on them. This condition of women lacking knowledge and the misrepresentation of female sexuality has been referred to by Germaine Greer as that of being a female eunuch. The purpose of my study was to focus on the reasons behind Celie, Tashi, Mem and Magdalena's melancholia, and the ways they attempt to heal it; either successfully or not. Therefore, I merge the concepts of Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch to provide a new reading of melancholia for the selected female characters. Moreover, my thesis also explores Walker's selected novels in light of Kristeva's speaking subject to indicate how the use of language by the main selected female characters and other characters can make and unmake their subjectivity. Through the use of the language two of the female characters gained their subjectivity while the two others lost their subjectivity as the language is not powerful enough to indicate their needs and desires.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**SUBJEKTIVITI DIPEROLEH DAN HILANG DALAM EUNUK WANITA
MELANKOLIK DALAM NOVEL TERPILIH ALICE WALKER**

Oleh

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Pada pendapat Julia Kristeva, subjek melankolik mengalami deria kehilangan yang disebabkan kehilangan ibu. Akibat kehilangan tersebut, subjek melankolik merupakan orang asing pada bahasa, mengasingkan dirinya, dan tidak mempunyai minat dalam aksi atau dalam kehidupannya sendiri. Walau bagaimanapun, dalam kajian ini, kehilangan ibu bukan hanya merupakan alasan untuk bersifat melankolia dalam karakter wanita, Celie, Tashi, Mem, dan Magdalena dalam novel-novel Alice Walker, seperti *The Color Purple*, *Possessing The Secret of Joy*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, dan *By The Light of My Father's Smile*, yang telah dipilih dalam kajian ini. Karakter wanita ini tidak hanya kehilangan ibu mereka atau tokoh ibu, tetapi juga seksualiti mereka ditindas, dan mereka telah diganggu; oleh sebab itu, perkara tersebut menyebabkan melankolia. Karakter ini tidak mempunyai pengetahuan mengenai tubuh mereka; oleh sebab itu, mereka lebih mudah menerima apa juga yang dikenakan ke atas mereka oleh ritual usang dan lelaki. Keadaan wanita ini yang tidak berpengetahuan dan misrepresentasi seksualiti wanita telah dirujuk oleh Germaine Greer sebagai eunuk wanita. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memfokuskan alasan yang dihadapi melankolia Celie, Tashi, Mem dan Magdaleni, dan cara mereka cuba untuk mengubatnya; sama ada berjaya atau tidak. Oleh sebab itu, kajian ini meneliti pengertian subjek melankolik Kristeva dan eunuk wanita Greer bagi menyediakan pembacaan yang baharu mengenai melankolia bagi karakter wanita terpilih. Di samping itu, tesis ini meneliti novel terpilih Walker dari segi subjek lakonan Kristeva bagi menentukan cara bahasa yang digunakan oleh karakter utama terpilih dan karakter lain supaya dapat ditentukan dan tidak dapat ditentukan subjektiviti mereka. Melalui penggunaan bahasa, dua karakter wanita memperoleh subjektiviti mereka manakala dua karakter lagi hilang subjektiviti mereka disebabkan bahasa yang tidak berkesan bagi memenuhi keperluan dan keinginan mereka.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 1 February 2016 to conduct the final examination of Kamelia Talebian Sedehi on her thesis entitled "Subjectivities Gained and Lost in Melancholic Female Eunuchs in Alice Walker's Selected Novels" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Language and identity have been a main topic of research in recent years. Different critics, such as Julia Kristeva (1984), Michel Foucault (1990), and Jacques Derrida (1998), have focused on language and its effect on identity formation, which is the main objective of psychoanalysis. However, in some cases, a person is not able to form her identity as a result of a feeling of loss within herself. Throughout life, the subject can face different losses, but what has been lost that needs such mourning and leads to the inability to form an identity? The reason behind this sense of loss is melancholia. Melancholia has been studied in a range of different disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literature. But why did this topic fascinate so many great minds, and, moreover, why has such a vast body of text been devoted to it? From ancient times to the modern era, different philosophers, literary figures, and psychoanalysts have devoted their time to discussing melancholia and its causes. In the following pages, I apply Julia Kristeva's concept of the melancholic subject to the main female characters in selected novels by Alice Walker *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *The Color Purple* (1982), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998).

Melancholia, based on Kristeva, is non-communicable grief, which, sometimes leads melancholic subjects to lose interest in everything, even life. Every one of us faces different misfortunes that make life unliveable, sorrowful, and made it into a living death situation. According to Kristeva, the melancholic subject has lost her mother and mourns for her; therefore, she is silent and cannot have verbal communication as not only is she a stranger to language, but also she considers this sense of loss as a private feeling that cannot be perceived by others. As the melancholic subject is a stranger to the language, she may convey her intentions through "gestures, spasms or shouts" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 15). Unlike many theses which have applied Kristeva's concept of the melancholic subject to different literary and non-literary works, I do not restrict myself to Kristeva's melancholic subject. Rather, I seek to merge Kristeva's concept of the melancholic subject with Germaine Greer's the female eunuch in order to analyse Walker's selected novels and provide another explanation for this state of mind, melancholia, based on my analysis. While Kristeva emphasises the loss of mother as the main reason behind the subject's melancholia, by including the notion of Greer's female eunuch in the analysis, I intend to demonstrate that many other reasons can complicate the situation.

Based on Greer, women have been oppressed by men throughout history. They have been victimised sexually, physically, and mentally. As women are not able to know their bodies or appreciate and fulfil their sexual needs, they feel loss of sexual experience in their lives. Thus, they have been turned into eunuchs, which is the meaning implied by Germaine Greer's statement, "women's sexual organs are shrouded in mystery" (*The Female Eunuch* 44). The only reason for them to be in society is to fulfill men's sexual needs, bear children, and do household chores. Women were not even allowed to have prominent jobs or social status for much of human history.

In my study, by merging the notions of Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch, I intend to demonstrate the effects of the loss of mother and being sexually victimised on Walker's main female characters. However, I do not intend to blame themale characters as the only reasons behind these female characters' melancholia as women by following patriarchal traditions and supporting different ideologies that have also restricted women.

One can observe that, Alice Walker's female characters are in despair, but not discern what has caused them to be in such pain and agony. These women sigh, complain, grieve, and mourn; however, they cannot share the reasons of their grief. It is my hope that this work will clarify the causes behind Walker's female characters' melancholia in light of Kristeva's and Greer's concepts. Furthermore, my work will highlight the reasons behind the success or failure of these female characters' gaining unified psyches. Thus, I will offer close and detailed readings of individual texts, and, from each text, I have selected one female character to apply Kristeva's and Greer's concepts. As such, I have focused on four female characters, Celie, Tashi, Mem, and Magdalena as the subjects of this study. In addition, I have included discussion of Walker's biography and its reflection within her texts because, according to Kristeva, only a melancholic writer can write about melancholia, and, as far as Walker's biography is concerned, she was a melancholic subject.

From her childhood, Walker noticed how black people were suppressed and oppressed within white racist societies. Moreover, she perceived how black women have been twice-repressed within white racist society and black patriarchal families. She became depressed, and she attributed "most of this depression to the oppression that blacks face from the white— a reality that was unmistakably still present in the south" (Robinson 297). Later, she confessed that "the threat of self-destruction plagued me as it never had before" (Royster 353). When she was a child, and she played with her two brothers, she was blinded in one eye and she considered this event as the sexual blinding of women. Later on, this "blinding motivates Walker's personal sense of sisterhood with women who have undergone genital operations" (Lauret 215). As a result of so many plights she experienced in her life, she became a depressed person. One of these plights was her father's mistreatment of his children, especially his daughters and his wife.

After being treated by psychologists, Walker returned to normal life and participated in different campaigns. She discussed various issues in her books that others did not dare to even mention. She fought against circumcision practiced on women and questioned their identity as human beings. As Taien mentioned, Walker has been active in campaigning and writing about female circumcision in Africa (17). Female circumcision is the subject of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, which I discuss in chapter three of the current study. Walker underwent bitter experiences and observed women's miserable situations, and she depicted them in her novels. In my analysis, the reader will notice how Walker depicts the negative influences of racism, female circumcision, restriction of free sexuality, and rape on black female characters, and the way all these matters, directly or indirectly, lead these women characters to melancholia. She chooses all this subject matter for her books as she intended to "heal some of the hurts of the past and to make it known to the world" (Robinson 309). As it is mentioned before, Walker participated in different campaigns and she has her own website. In alicewalkersgarden.com, Walker discusses different subject matters. Readers can comment and be closer to their favourite author. Besides, one should notice that Walker gained her fame when *The Color Purple* adopted into movies in 1985 and later on she improved her work by being a social figure rather than only an author.

In chapter two of my study, I discuss Walker's biography in more detail. In fact, I have chosen Alice Walker as, to the extent of my knowledge; other African Americans did not deal with the issues that Walker discussed. She passed the melancholic state of mind, which is a requirement for Kristeva when a writer talks about melancholia. Moreover, she discussed female circumcision, which is an issue for Greer as a feminist. According to Greer:

Male mutilation is considered trivial, female genital mutilation is considered devastating even if it involves nothing more than nicking the prepuce of the clitoris to provoke ritual bleeding. (*The Whole Woman* 103)

Besides, melancholia and the female eunuch, I have gone further and discussed Kristeva's other concept, the speaking subject. Based on Kristeva, the subject is not fixed, but she is malleable. By the use of language, interacting others, expressing herself, and being judged by others, the subject's subjectivity is made and unmade. When the subject uses language, her relation to herself and others is changed, and through this change, her subjectivity is shaped (Kristeva, *Revolution* 15). My intention is to show how female characters view themselves and how other characters look at them; therefore, their subjectivity made fluid.

In addition, as I intend to focus on main female characters in Walker's selected novels, I will use female pronouns whenever I explain the concepts in the current chapter of my study, which is a conceptual framework; as the subjects of my study are female characters.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

African American female authors devoted their works to black female characters and different losses they face in their lives. Among the African American authors, Maya Angelou (1928- 2014), Toni Morrison (1931) and Alice Walker (1944) are significant. However neither Angelou nor Morrison focused on female circumcision or other sexual taboo issues in their writing. Therefore, I chose Walker's novels as she covered those unspoken topics in her novels.

Alice Walker's female characters are melancholic subjects and they suffer from the sense of unsharable loss. Their sense of loss is not only related to the loss of their mother or mother figures, but is mostly related to their overlooked sexual desires. One can notice victimised women who are subjects of incest, circumcision, and overlooked sexual desires in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. Women's sexual desires have been overlooked by their husbands, who think of gratifying their sexual desires and ignore women's sexual needs. Even one can notice father figures as victimisers, who ignore their daughters' sexual needs. As such, these sexually ignored and castrated melancholic female characters cannot express their feelings of loss of sexual passion with other people as they consider it private. The melancholic female eunuchs intend to express this loss within language, and they have the desire to share their feelings, but they cannot find appropriate ways of doing so.

In my study, I intend to argue that Kristeva's melancholic subject is applicable to Walker's novels as the main female characters feel the loss of mother, which Kristeva emphasised in her concept of the melancholic subject. However, I intend to amalgamate

it with Greer's female eunuch to highlight the fact that the loss of mother is not the only reason behind the female characters' melancholia. Some previous studies have been devoted to application of psychoanalysis and different critics' concepts to Walker's selected novels, such as Jones, Pifer and Slausser, and Proudfit. However, they did not merge Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch to emphasise women's shattered identity as a result of melancholia and the main reasons behind their melancholia. Furthermore, some other studies pinpointed the theme of sexuality in Walker's novels, which include research by Abbandonato and Cutter; however, they did not consider women as eunuchs, pointing out other aspects of the novels based on the theme of sexuality. As a result, I intend to merge Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch to provide a new reading of Walker's selected novels. Moreover, by applying Kristeva's other concept of the speaking subject, I will argue that the subjectivity of her female characters is not fixed, but they have malleable subjectivity, depending on their use of language and other characters' use of language. By bringing in three different concepts, I examine the way Walker's female characters' subjectivity has been shattered and analyse the way they obtain their identities whether they are successful, or not.

As a result, this study highlights Alice Walker's melancholic female eunuchs in *The Color Purple*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *the Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* in the light of Kristeva's melancholic subject, speaking subject, and Greer's female eunuch.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

As the focus of my study is application of selected concepts by Kristeva and Greer to Alice Walker's selected novels, the first objective of my study was to investigate the way the female characters, Celie, Tashi, Mem, and Magdalena, are led to melancholia. To obtain my objective, I focused on the female characters' sense of loss, especially their loss of mother and mother figures and lack of sexual desire within their life as caused by suppression or abuse. As follows, the second objective of my study aimed at examining how these melancholic female eunuchs, who are sexually maltreated, treat their melancholia. To obtain my second objective, I delved into the novels, focused on selected female characters, and indicated that either they were capable of getting rid of their melancholia by entering the realm of language, or not. The third objective of my study was to demonstrate the way the melancholic female eunuchs shape their subjectivity. To achieve my third objective, I will explore the way these melancholic female eunuchs use language and interact with others, which led to shaping and reshaping of their identities.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

In this study, I focus on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* in the light of Kristeva's melancholic subject and speaking subject and Greer's female eunuch. I will not discuss Walker's other novels and her other literary works as they are not within the focus of my study. Moreover, among all of Kristeva's concepts, I have selected the melancholic subject and the speaking subject. Therefore, I will merge Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch for detailed textual analysis.

Melancholia has been defined by different critics throughout the history. In my study, I focus on Kristeva's melancholic subject which is caused by the loss of mother. Moreover, I merge Greer's female eunuch to demonstrate how denial of female's sexual needs can lead her to melancholia. Besides, among all the concepts by Kristeva, I have just chosen speaking subject to examine the way the characters use language in order to shape their subjectivity. The other concepts by Kristeva or Greer are not the concern of my study.

1.5 Significance of the Study

A primary aim of my study is to contribute toward merging the two concepts of Kristeva's melancholic subject and Greer's female eunuch to analyse Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. I intend to find a new definition of melancholia based on merging Kristeva's and Greer's concepts. Therefore, I intend to emphasise the way suppression of female sexual needs and its abuse lead to their melancholia, which has not been covered by Kristeva. My review of literature, thus far, has not led to the discovery of any prominent studies which combine the concepts of the melancholic subject and female eunuch together as a conceptual framework in order to explore how the selected novels of Walker negotiate within such a framework in relation to the female identity.

Based on my review of literature from different data bases, I found that previous studies have focused on different aspects of Alice Walker's novels. Some of them, focused on male characters rather than female characters, among them is, Gwendolyn Nicole Hale's "*Tis Hard to Dance with One Shoe*": *The Failure of the Fathers in Walker's "The Color Purple" and McCourt's "Angela's Ashes"* (2001) seeks to unravel the effects of tyrannical society on fathers' failures within their families. The main male characters of Walker's *The Color Purple* search for the means to overcome failures and oppression. This study is important as it highlights the way society influences men, which causes them to behave irrationally toward women as a result of social pressure and injustice.

Besides, there are some other studies which focused on psychoanalytic aspects of Walker's novels. For example, "*Hysterical (r)Evolution: The Creation of Embodied Language in Alice Walker's "The Color Purple", Tori Amos's "Little Earthquakes", and Frances Driscoll's "The Rape Poems"*" (2006) by Justine Elizabeth Maeve Gieni explores the effect of sexual violation, its psychological effects, and its healing process. The critic focused on the figure of the hysteric to delve into each literary text and explore the hysteric characters' struggles to reclaim or gain authority.

Unlike Gieni, whose focus is psychoanalysis, Johnson, Robert Stephen Mokaya Matunda in his doctoral thesis "*A Linguistic Analysis of Rhetorical Strategies in Selected Narratives of Alice Walker*" (2009) focuses on the linguistics and relates it to literature. Matunda intended to reveal the way characters dominate each other and the way different issues such as religion, race, and gender are discussed through these rhetorical devices.

In addition to Matunda, Walid El Hamamsy, in "*Epistolary Memory: Revisiting Traumas in Women's Writing*" (2010) intensifies the epistolary style and its importance in characters' self-formation. In this article, Hamamsy analyses *The Color Purple* by

Alice Walker and emphasises that, through letter writing, the protagonist gains knowledge about her own life and her surroundings.

In addition to my contribution of merging two different concepts, I intend to apply Kristeva's concept of the speaking subject to the melancholic female eunuch as this concept by Kristeva has not been covered by Alice Walker scholars. As such, the significance of my study lies in its exploration of the way the sexually abused, mistreated, and overlooked melancholic female eunuchs behave, and how their use of language and other people's use of language shape their identity, and Kristeva's concept of the speaking subject.

1.6 Methodology

My study will examine Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* in the light of Kristeva's melancholic subject, speaking subject, and Greer's female eunuch. I intend to merge Kristeva's melancholic subject with Greer's female eunuch and apply the notion of the melancholic female eunuch to emphasise the way men's sexual mistreatment of women leads them to feel a sense of loss of sexual desire, which causes melancholia. Later on, I will apply Kristeva's speaking subject in Walker's selected novels and focus on the narrative strategies to determine the way these melancholic female eunuchs' subjectivities are fluid and they are under the influence of their own desires, passions, and use of language and other characters' impressions of them.

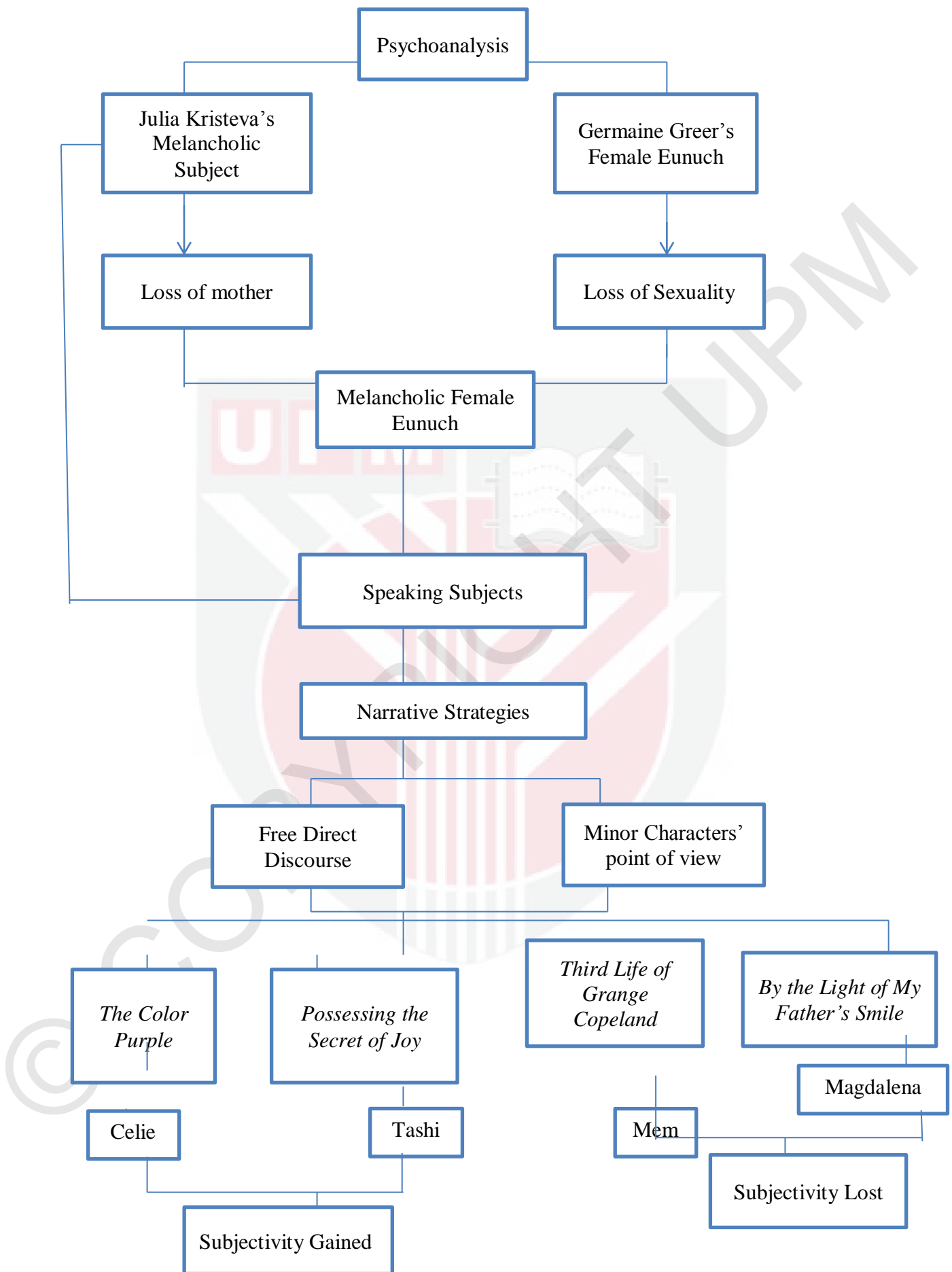


Figure 1: Methodology

1.7 Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the conceptual theories which were applied in the present study's analysis to Walker's *The Color Purple*, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, and *By the Light of My Father's Smile*. One should notice that Kristeva's concepts, the melancholic subject and speaking subject, are selected for this study as "Kristeva persists in disturbing the already said" (Payne 169), she "always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one we could be proud of" (Lodge 206). Further, Greer's female eunuch will be discussed.

1.7.1 The Semiotic and the Symbolic

Kristeva has theories about language, including the notions of the *chora*, the semiotic, and the symbolic. In her book, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva states that language has two aspects: the affective, called the semiotic, and the denotating aspect, referred to as the symbolic. However, these two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process (Kristeva, *Revolution* 34). Kristeva emphasises that "the semiotic aspect of language is not independent of language, but underpins it" (*Constellations* 324). In fact, Kristeva is interested in the manner in which the semiotic flows through the ordered form of meaning (symbolic), and, conversely, the symbolic canalised into the semiotic, especially in Avant-garde literature. To express themselves, people use not only the denotating aspect, but also their inner desires; they make themselves via language. In fact, language and subjectivity have a dialectical relation. The following argument will focus on the *chora*, the semiotic, and the symbolic.

1.7.1.1 Semiotic Chora

Kristeva borrows the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*, but she modifies it according to her theory and believes that from this space "the semiotic drives arise" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 35). In Plato's view, the *chora* is womb or receptacle; however, Kristeva considers it as a rhythm (and calls this rhythm the semiotic) that precedes language. In fact, Kristeva calls bodily drives and impulses semiotic. These drives move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as stable, and then the drives are arranged based on social and cultural constraints (Kristeva, *Revolution* 25). Kristeva sometimes refers to *chora* as semiotic *chora* because the *chora* is a site "from which the semiotic bursts forth" (Stokes-King 61). In Plato's theory, *chora* is a space in which the universe comes to existence. He explains how the universe was created, and, in Kristeva's theory, *chora* is a site for the infant's relation to her mother's body, and this kind of identification with the mother's body is one of the aspects of the semiotic. As the child has a tactile relation with her mother's body, the child's drives are oriented in a constructive way. However, these drives are destructive by themselves. A child's tactile relation to her mother's body leads them to a normal path. In the *chora*, their sexual drives are directed by the mother's body (Kristeva, *Revolution* 27). Also, "the kinetic functional stage of semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign" (Rivkin and Ryan 454). Kristeva considers the *chora* as a "non expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" and this motility precedes generating the meaning and the signifying practice (Kristeva, *Revolution* 25). Furthermore, Kristeva emphasised that its vocal and gestural organisation is subject to what we shall call an objective ordering, which is dictated by natural or socio-historical

constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure (*Revolution* 27).

At first, the child uses gestures and sounds to express herself, but she is not aware that these utterances have their own distinctive meaning. Later on, the child realises that not only can she use language to indicate objects, but also she realises that she is separate from other people and her surroundings. Kristeva calls this stage the thetic break (*Revolution* 43). It is the first step in understanding the independent subjectivity through which the symbolic language which “posits discourse between subject and object comes into being” (Stokes-King 37). Through the thetic break, the child enters the social world, social norms and symbolic realm. In fact, “the thetic is the precondition for both enunciation and denotation” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 53). In order to come to the symbolic realm, the child unconsciously represses rhythmic drives. The more the child enters the symbolic, the more the subject represses the articulation of the spoken and written word. One can see that Kristeva’s theory of the thetic break is the same as Freud’s oedipal stage and Lacan’s mirror stage.

As Freud states, in the oedipal stage, the child understands that her mother is not as powerful as she thinks, and she understands that her mother lacks the male sexual organ. Therefore, her maternal attachment shifts to her father. At this stage “boys develop castration anxiety— a fear of losing the penis, but girls develop penis envy— a jealousy about not having a penis;” therefore, the child enters the realm of language in order to express this painful experience (Thurschwell 59). In other words, castration is separation of the subject from his mother and perception of this deficiency, which leads to the symbolic function (Kristeva, *Revolution* 47). In Lacanian theory, the same processes take place.

In the Lacanian concept, the mirror stage refers to the time when the child identifies herself with her image in the mirror. As she sees herself in the mirror, she understands that she is separate from her surroundings. Then the child uses language to indicate the Other beyond herself. Kristeva’s theories of the semiotic and the symbolic are almost the same as Lacan’s imaginary and the symbolic. In other words, the imaginary is the semiotic and the symbolic is Kristeva’s symbolic.

Influenced by Freudian and Lacanian theories, Kristeva assumes the thetic phase as the stage in which the child becomes able to learn grammar and syntax. In fact, the semiotic is a bridge to the symbolic. In the rhythmic space of the semiotic, which has no thesis and no position, “the signification is constituted” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 26). In other words, it is “a prerequisite for the development of the symbolic” (Stokes-King 39). Now the symbolic stage is shaped. The symbolic stage refers to the use of syntax and semantics. One should be aware that the symbolic and the semiotic aspects of language are not separable.

Kristeva differs from previous theoreticians and considers language as part of a dynamic signifying process. This means that not only bodily drives and impulses are expressed within language, but also, through it, the subjects gain their identity. In other words, language is both the expressions of orderly meaning and the subject’s energy and drives.

1.7.1.2 Interrelation of the Semiotic and the Symbolic

As mentioned before, in the *chora*, there were just rhythms and sounds, which are bodily sounds such as a pulse or heartbeat and gestures. Gradually, the child perceives that she is separate from her surroundings; therefore, she comes to use symbolic language. As Jones emphasises, “the symbolic aspect of language is logical, simple and stripped of stylistic, rhythmic, and poetic ambiguities...the symbolic order is the man’s world;” also the symbolic realm dominates and represses the bodily drives (56). The symbolic has the elements of signification and contains structure. Kristeva considers the symbolic language as “the patriarchal social structure,” and defines it as a language with two functions (Stokes-King 36-37). On the one hand, it permits one to access the order, and on the other hand, it represses unconscious thoughts. One should notice that “the semiotic phase becomes crucial to the signifying process within which no signifying operations could be realized” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 58). Kristeva adds that the symbolic, and therefore, syntax and all linguistic categories are a social effect of the relation to the others established through the objective constraints of biological differences and concrete, historical family structures (*Revolution* 29).

On the other hand, the semiotic is marked by “rhythm, intonation, gestures”(Jones 56). “Voice, gesture, colors, phonic, kinetic, or chromatic units and differences are the marks of these stases in the drives” that Kristeva considers as the semiotic (Kristeva, *Revolution* 28). One can trace the semiotic in word play, semantics, “rhythmic, melodic or intonational structures,” song, baby talk, echolalia, alliteration, onomatopoeia, portmanteau, and even colours in dreams that originate from the unconscious (Feral 12). As Kristeva states:

‘The semiotic’ takes us back to the pre-linguistic states of childhood where the child babbles the sounds he hears, or where he articulates rhythms, alliterations, or stresses, trying to imitate his surroundings. In this state the child does not yet process the necessary linguistic signs and thus there is no meaning in the strict sense of the term. (qtd. in Rice and Waugh 129)

Although these drives are the meaningful parts of language, they do not have any signification. In other words, these drives are like a language, but they are not ordered yet. The semiotic “resists organization and it is very chaotic, while Kristeva links the symbolic to rational world” (Sutcliffe 337). As Kristeva relates the symbolic to patriarchal social structure, she also considers the semiotic as maternal. The semiotic emotional expressions emerge unconsciously and without the speaker’s will. Although “we shall distinguish the semiotic (drives and their articulation) from the realm of signification...in other words, a realm of proposition,” the semiotic and the symbolic are interrelated even after the thetic break (Kristeva, *Revolution* 43). They have dialectic of mutual contradiction; this dialect produces the normal language. The two aspects of language are so interdependent that “without the symbolic we have only a delirium, while without the semiotic, language would be completely empty if not impossible”(Grodén and Kreiswirth 2).

Kristeva considers avant-garde literature as a reaction to the formal, symbolic language on which the writers of the French bourgeoisie focused. As poetry is a kind of creation, Kristeva assumes that poetry is the reassertion of the semiotic within the symbolic because the “creativity comes from drives outside the prosaic, the structures, the symbolic” (Stokes-King 43). Besides, the musicality of poetic language expresses the “unspeakable” events that language is not capable of asserting. In fact, the semiotic has a

rhythmical and melodic structure shown in poetic language, and it transgresses symbolic and grammatical rules. Poetic language expresses the basic impulses of desires and fears that cannot be expressed in rational symbolic language. The poet resists the “prescribed social meaning” through the help of the semiotic to express these unspeakable desires (Cavanagh 292). Moreover, the avant-garde poets resist the grammatical order of the word and all the rules, and mostly focuses on the semiotic aspect of language, rather than its symbolic aspect. As such, “poetic language puts the subject in process/on trial through a network of marks and semiotic facilitations”(Kristeva, *Revolution* 58) and this “semiotic network gives ‘music’ to literature”(63), but this musicality is not without signification as the unity of reason which consciousness sketches out will always be shattered by the rhythm suggested by drives; repetitive rejection seeps in through “prosody,” and so forth, preventing the stasis of one meaning, one myth, and one logic(148).

As mentioned above, one should respect the fact that the signifying process is not unified, but is the result of drives; therefore, it does not produce a unified meaning. This idea leads to the fact that the subjectivity is not fixed but it is always in process. As a result, “the ‘subject’ is seen no longer as the source of meaning but as the site of meaning, and may therefore undergo a radical ‘dispersal’ of identity and loss of coherence”(Selden 141). This subject in process/on trial is always involved in a semiotic process; therefore, bodily energies and psychical marks are articulated in the subject’s speech. The term subject in process will be discussed in the following section.

1.7.2 Speaking Subject

In Kristeva’s theories, the subject is an effect of the signifying process; therefore, language and subjectivity have a mutual relationship. As language is in the process, and the subject and language are interrelated, the subject is in the process too. In fact, both language and the subject have their own processes, and through these processes, both of them are shaped. We refer to the subject as the speaking subject because, through language, the speaking subject “makes and unmakes himself” (Kristeva, *Language* 265). In other words “we do not speak language, language speaks us”(Thomas 77).

1.7.2.1 Subject in Process

Kristeva joins many disciplines to shape her theories. For example, she links psychoanalysis and linguistics to theorise the speaking subject. As mentioned before, Kristeva is influenced by Lacan, but one can trace many differences between her theories and those of Lacan’s.

For example, Lacan assumes that the child learns the culture and its disciplines from her father but Kristeva emphasises that the child learns everything from both the mother and the father. As mentioned previously, the *chora* is the maternal space. In the *chora*, the same as in Lacan’s imaginary realm, there is no gap between the mother and the child. Kristeva thinks that even in the *chora*, the child learns the language of civilisation; therefore, she contends that both the mother and the father educate the child. Therefore, “identification comes about under the domination of the maternal image, which is the one nearest to the child and which allows the child both to remain close and to distance itself”(Rice and Waugh 130).

The other difference between Lacan and Kristeva's theories is the presence of the drives in the process of signification. If one wants to juxtapose Kristeva's and Lacan's theories, it may be assumed that Kristeva's semiotic and the symbolic are somehow the same as Lacan's imaginary and symbolic realms, then the difference becomes apparent. In fact, Kristeva accepts Lacan's theory about the effect of language in subjectivity; but she believes that both the semiotic and the symbolic affect the child, a fact that Lacan has ignored.

In fact, Lacan emphasises the symbolic effect in the subject's construction and leaves aside the inner desires and drives. On the other hand, Kristeva notices the importance of bodily impulses, which she refers to as the semiotic in the subject formation. Otsuka mentions that "Kristeva claims that a child does not completely leave the semiotic behind, but carries residues of it even after entering into the symbolic"(2). Therefore, based on her theory, one can conclude that the subject is not as stable as the previous theoreticians had thought. As the subject is the subject of her inner drives, she does not have a stable subjectivity. Kristeva notices the "linguistic change in the status of the subject– his relation to the body, to others and to objects" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 15-16). In fact, the speaking subject is "a split subject influenced by bio-physiological processes (themselves already inescapably part of the signifying process; what Freud labeled 'drives'), and, on the other hand, by social constraints (family structures, modes of production, etc.)"(Newton 182). In short, "the subject is caught between instinctual drives and social practices within language"(Kristeva, *Desire* 97). This is what Kristeva calls subject in process/on trial:

'process' in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, overruled. (qtd. in Rice and Waugh 128-129)

To understand subject in process/on trial, one should remember Kristeva's semiotic and the symbolic. As Kristeva defines it, the semiotic is the unconscious impulses and bodily desires and these impulses are not stable. As the semiotic and the symbolic have a dialectic relation, and they are two aspects of language, there would not be any stable subject. As such, the "significance puts the subject in process/on trial" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 22). Elaborating Kristeva's theory, Robbins noted that one can notice that the subject is "always a split subject, divided between unconscious and conscious motivations, inhabiting both nature and culture"(127). In other words, as Otsuka observed, the subject is "always split between the semiotic and the symbolic"(1). The subject in process is

a subject equally constituted by symbolic and semiotic elements. It is in this sense, therefore, that the subject is also a rhythmic reverberation in symbolic, a reverberation which is connotative of both union with, and separation from, the mother. (Fletcher 27)

Moreover, the subject is always in the process of becoming and developing. In other words, she is a heterogeneous subject and she is not fixed in the realm of the symbolic. As Bodner states, language constitutes the subject repeatedly (95).

In addition, one should notice that not only can the subject's inner drives influence the subject, but also people's presence can influence her subjectivity. The energies that flow among people and their communication can have a great effect on self-realisation. One

can be influenced by energies, emotions, desires, and memories that other people have. Therefore, the subject is even in the process of the response to other's speech and desires. In fact, the speaking subject cannot stand on his own but she stands on "the fragile threshold as it stands on account of an impossible demarcation"(Kristeva, *Powers* 85). As Iannetta stated, "there are no stable individuals but rather permeable beings easily infected by the subjectivity of others"(218). Kristeva herself likens the speaking subject to a text. She believes that the meaning of an individual person is not fixed the same as each text does not have a fixed meaning, and she says that "as people are born into cultural and historical specificities of which they have both collective and individual experience, they are texts overwritten with traces of other texts or contexts"(Robbins 124). As Kristeva mentions, the subject is in process because she is developed through language. Moreover, she is on trial as she is "tested against the various contexts in which (s)he has [her] being"(Robbins 127).

1.7.3 Melancholia

Kristeva is influenced by Freud's theory of loss in her discussion of the melancholic subject. In her theory, she focuses on self-identity and connection between narcissism and melancholia. As she studied Freud's theory of death, she manages to formulate the notion of depression. Kristeva mentions that she will "speak of depression and melancholia without always distinguishing the particularities of the two ailments but keeping in mind their common structure" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 10-11). Moreover, she claims that depression is the hidden "face of narcissus, the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself in mirage"(5). In fact, Kristeva believes that melancholia is a disorder of self-identity and sense of loss. She defines melancholia as an

abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times, and often on a long term basis, lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself. (Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3)

As the child mourns for the loss of the Thing, she cannot use language, and, as Kristeva holds, "the collapse of the symbolic is a tell-tale sign of melancholia"(Sabo 57). In the absence of the Thing, she feels loss and she cannot share this feeling with others. The melancholic subject expresses that "'I isolate myself from the world, 'I withdraw into my sadness, 'I do not speak, 'I cry. 'I kill myself'" (Kristeva, *The Sense* 47). Even though the melancholic subject speaks, she is a stranger to her mother tongue. In Kristeva's words, "the depressed speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of: glued to the Thing, they are without objects"(Kristeva, *Black Sun* 51). The melancholic subject's sentences are ungrammatical, repetitious and monotonous. Moreover, she mentions that melancholic subjects

utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to stand still. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerges and dominates the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. Finally, when that frugal musicality becomes exhausted in its turn, or simply does not succeed in becoming established on account of the pressure of silence, the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness as asymbolia or the excess on unorderable cognitive chaos. (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 33)

The melancholic subject can bring her mother back through the use of language, and if the child cannot enter the symbolic realm, she will have a heterogeneous subjectivity rather than a unified one. Iannetta points out that the melancholic subject becomes an “I” through language. In fact, a traumatic separation from object of love is the necessary foundation of human identity. As a product of individuation, this crisis is in essence individual, and is, therefore, timeless and unrecorded in history (194-195).

The melancholic writer attempts to enter the symbolic realm, name the lost object that she mourns, and, as a result of naming, she is able to share her sense of loss with other people and express her sadness. However, Kristeva holds that the writer should have the experience of loss to be able to express it in her writing. As such “the texts of Marguerite Duras are about suffering, the experience of sadness, death, suicide; as are the texts of Dostoyevsky. The texts of Nerval, with all their references to the cultural tradition, show us to what extent sadness and suffering can be themes”(Rice and Waugh 133). Kristeva analyzed Duras, Nerval, and Dostoyevsky’s works, and she believes that all of them expressed their suffering and loss that they have faced in life, within their works; therefore, the writers’ biographies are important when analysing their works as there are many traces of their biographies reflected in their writing.

As mentioned before, the child is in his mother’s embrace and all her needs are satisfied without even asking for them. If this child loses her mother before recognising that her mother is Other to her, she cannot name things. Kristeva holds that

the child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in imagination, then in words. (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 6)

Later she can use language, but her ability to name is lost. This child may have a normal life, but years later she will sink into deep depression. This depression has symptoms like moving slowly, sleeping all the time, talking less, and being listless. This depressed subject mourns for what she has lost. The subject both loves and hates the object of loss. She loves it as she cannot do without it and she hates it as she cannot have it. The subject suffers from this loss as she considers it part of herself and not separate from herself. The subject cannot communicate her sense of loss as she is drowned within her sadness and she cannot share it within language. The lost Thing is unnamable as the subject cannot define it within the language. The melancholic subject must separate herself from the lost Thing and identify herself with her father in order to get rid of the melancholia. The melancholic subject can get rid of her sadness by reaching the realm of signs. The melancholic writer intends to name the unnamable Thing. The melancholic writer turns her sadness into language and shares it with other people.

1.7.4 Female Eunuch

Germaine Greer argues that all these years women have been objects of male desires; women have not been treated as subjects who have independent identity and subjectivity. Their sexual desires have been silenced and they have not had any right to express their libidinal desires. Greer emphasises that

it is exactly the elements of quest in her sexuality which female is taught to deny in her sexual contacts, but (for in some subliminal way the connection is

understood) in her contacts, from infancy onward, so that when she becomes aware of her sex the pattern has sufficient force of inertia to prevail over new forms of desire and curiosity. This is the condition which is meant by the term *female eunuch*. (*The Female Eunuch* 78)

Female sexuality is a taboo subject and it is either masked or misrepresented within societies. As aforementioned, women have been treated as objects, especially sexual objects, whose role has been to gratify men's sexual desires. However, their own sexuality has been denied, and they have been denied any knowledge about their sexual needs and their body as this information is censored within societies, and thus women's sexual organs are as mysterious to them as it is forbidden for them to explore their genitals. Greer adds that "every girl child is conceived as a whole woman but from the time of her birth to her death she is progressively disabled" (*The Whole Woman* 9). They have been castrated as their needs have been overlooked by the system which considers men's needs above women's desires.

It is time for women to have personality, passion, dignity and integrity; unlike the past that they have been muted and marginalized and their sexuality was overlooked. They should recognize their sisters and supporters and with their help they can speak out their desires.

The concepts of melancholic subject and speaking subject are the terms defined by Kristeva so that they structure subjectivity. By adding Greer's female eunuch, I emphasize the barriers on subject formation. In the following chapters, I am going to apply the concepts that I have explained to Walker's selected novels.

1.8 Justification of Text Selection

African Americans suffered from various losses in their lives. Different authors portrayed all the plights that black women undergo, among them are Angelou, Morrison and Walker. However, my study is devoted to Walker's novels as all the selected novels illustrate the loss of mother or mother figures and its effect on female characters.

Besides, Walker was courageous enough to cover those taboo subjects that those previous authors did not dare to cover. Subject matters such as female circumcision, rape, free sexual relationship and imposed pregnancies are discussed in Walker's novels which are related to Greer's female eunuch and the way women's sexuality has been masked and ignored by the society.

I have selected these four novels from among Walker's novels as they portray melancholic female eunuchs, who deal with the pain of loss, of love, and of individual and sometimes communal crises. The texts reflect these issues through commitment to pain and loss, which is considered melancholia. Furthermore, all these texts share an underlying sense of the need of supporters in women's lives as Greer believes that women should recognise their sisters and supporters to know their bodies and improve their situations within society. Moreover, based on my reading, I found that the melancholic female characters and the theme of being sexually castrated have not been covered by the critics of these four selected novels.

1.9 Definition of Terms

This section is devoted to the terms which used within this thesis.

Speaking Subject

Kristeva notices that the subject is not stable as she is not only under the influence of her own desire and language but also under the influence of other people's speech and desires. "Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively semiotic" or "exclusively symbolic", and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (*Revolution* 24). The speaking subject is no longer "considered a phenomenological transcendental ego nor the Cartesian ego but rather a subject in process/on trial" (37). The subject shapes her subjectivity through the use of language and interaction with other people.

Melancholia

Melancholia, as it used to be called, is mourning for something lost. In fact, the sad child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his words. This is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in imagination, then in words.

However, the lost object can be an internal object, as well, and the melancholic subject mourns for it.

Female Eunuch

From her infancy, the female child learns to deny her sexual organ and any quest in her sexuality. Later on, she cannot talk about her sexual needs and she cannot have any knowledge about her body. Greer refers to this condition as that of the female eunuch.

1.10 Structure of the Thesis

As demonstrated in this chapter, the present study discusses Walker's selected novels in light of Kristeva's melancholic subject and speaking subject and Greer's female eunuch with the first chapter of this study devoted to the general introduction. The second chapter is concerned with the review of literature. The third chapter is dedicated to Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* as both highlight the presence of emotional supporters in melancholic female eunuchs' lives and their effects on them, and application of Kristeva's and Greer's concepts. The fourth chapter discusses *the Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* as both of these two novels focus on the absence of the emotional supporter and its effect on melancholic female eunuchs, and application of Kristeva's and Greer's concepts to them. Finally, the fifth chapter sums up the whole discussion and recommends further research in this area.

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List of Conferences

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian and Rosli Talif. **“Characters in Process in The Color Purple.”** International conference on Knowledge- Innovatio- Excellence: Synergy in Language Research and Practice. Malaysia, UKM University, 2013

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian, Rosli Talif , Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Hardev Kaur. **“Shaping Identity through Language in Alice Walker's Third Life of Grange Copeland.”** 8th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Malaysia, UPM, 2014

Ming, Alex Lau Zhe, Kamelia Talebian Sedehi, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya. **“A Journey through Nature in Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing.”** 8th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Malaysia, UPM, 2014

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian and Omar Mohammed Abdullah. **“The Bluest Eye and the Two Poles of Language, Semiotic and Symbolic.”** IICON 2014 “Infrastructure Innovation and Transformation for the 21st Century and Beyond. Infrastructure University, Malaysia, 2014

Abdullah, Omar Muhammed and Kamelia Talebian Sedehi and Hardev Kaur. **“Ilaha, the Traumatized Female Eunuch in “The Wedding Night.”** First International Conference on Educational Studies. Malaysia, UTM,

2015 Participation in the following upcoming conferences

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian , Omar Mohammed Abdullah and Rosli Talif. **“Female Circumcision and its effects on Firdaus and Tashi.”** International Conference on Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities. Indonesia, Bali, 2015

Abdullah, Omar Muhammed, Kamelia Talebian Sedehi and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya. **“Forming Subjectivity through Abjection and Lesbianism.”** International Conference on Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities. Indonesia, Bali, 2015

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian, Rosli Talif , Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Hardev Kaur. **“Melancholic Eunuch Magdalena in By the Light of My Father's Smile.”** International Conference on Languages. Malaysia, UNISZA, 2015

Sedehi, Kamelia Talebian , Omar Mohammed Abdullah. **“The Translator’s role in the spaces between two languages in the Translator Translated.”** International Conference on Languages. Malaysia, UNISZA, 2015

Awards

International Graduate Research Fellowship, November 2014- August 2015

Second place in three minute thesis competition faculty level, 2014.

Second place in three minute thesis competition university level, 2015.

Participation in three minute thesis competition in national level within Malaysia, 2015.



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