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THE BURDEN OF PURITY IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE THIRD LIFE OF GRANGE COPELAND*

Dr Karim Dembélé -Lecturer/Researcher, University Yambo Ouologuem

Email: rymkademe2015@gmail.com

Kessé Coulibaly

Lecturer (University Yambo Ouologuem) and Ph.D Student at ED-ARCIV-UCAD, Sénégal

Email: kessulshbflsl@gmail.com

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Abstract: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) offers a harrowing examination of the erosion of Black dignity within the sharecropping system. It centers on Mem Copeland as a figure whose middle-class consciousness - defined by literacy, refined speech, and "inner sovereignty" - acts as a radical cultural anomaly. This study aims to demonstrate how Mem's "proper" selfhood functions as a catalyst for a "Male Pathoculture," a social environment where systemic trauma is recirculated as domestic violence. Utilizing a qualitative literary analysis grounded in Black Feminist Thought and Post-Colonial Psychology, the research applies the theories of Patricia Hill Collins and Frantz Fanon to explore the mechanics of "horizontal violence" and the power of self-definition. The findings reveal that Mem's "Burden of Purity" leads to a fatal collision with a masculinity deformed by systemic oppression. Her eventual martyrdom signifies the pathoculture's rejection of Black gentility while simultaneously establishing the moral and spiritual foundation for the novel's final cycle of redemption.

Key words : Emotional Purity, Horizontal Violence, Male Pathoculture, Middle-Class Consciousness, Self-Definition.

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Résumé: Le roman d'Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, propose un examen saisissant de l'érosion de la dignité noire au sein du système de métayage, en se centrant sur Mem Copeland, une figure dont la conscience de classe moyenne – définie par l'instruction , un langage raffiné et une « souveraineté intérieure » – fait d'elle une anomalie culturelle radicale. Cette étude vise à démontrer comment la personnalité « respectable » de Mem agit comme catalyseur d'une « pathoculture masculine », un environnement social où les traumatismes systémiques sont recyclés sous forme de violence domestique. Utilisant une analyse littéraire qualitative ancrée dans la pensée féministe noire et la psychologie postcoloniale, ce travail de recherche applique les théories de Patricia Hill Collins et Frantz Fanon afin d'explorer les mécanismes de la « violence horizontale » et le pouvoir de l'auto-définition. Les conclusions révèlent que le « fardeau de la pureté » porté par Mem mène à une collision fatale avec une masculinité déformée par l'oppression systémique; son martyre final incarne le rejet par la

pathoculture de la respectabilité noire, tout en établissant simultanément la base morale et spirituelle du dernier cycle de rédemption du roman.
Mots clés :Auto-définition, Masculinité, Pathoculture, Violence horizontale, Respectabilité.

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Introduction

Scholars have traditionally focused their research on the cyclical nature of racial trauma and the eventual redemption of the patriarch as far as Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is concerned. However, such analysis does not center Mem Copeland; it rather relegates her to the role of "collateral damage." This article aims at foregrounding the role of Mem, not as a passive victim, but as a complex cultural agent. Her "proper" selfhood - her literacy, polished speech, and middle-class consciousness - acts as a dissonant note within the sharecropping wasteland of the American South. By centering Mem through the lens of emotional purity, we are forced to acknowledge the high cost of maintaining Black dignity within a system designed to stifle it.

The central problem explored in this study is to find out why Mem's excellence - the very "tenderness" and "polish" manners that initially seduced her husband, Brownfield - become the primary trigger for his seething violence? In a normal society, a partner's longing for a "decent" life would be perceived as a strength. Yet, within the racial and oppressive structure of the Jim Crow South, Mem's middle-class consciousness is perceived as a way of challenging the established social order. The research is guided by this central question: How does the systemic racism and masculinity intertwine to transform a woman's "purity" into a "burden" that a pathological culture seeks to annihilate?

To address this problematic, this article introduces the concept of "Pathoculture." A pathoculture is a social environment that has become systemically "sick." It is an ecosystem where dysfunction, violence, and dehumanization are not abnormalities, but are the normalized modes of survival. As defined in modern sociological discourse, pathoculture refers to "a social environment where the internal logic of a community is dictated by the trauma of systemic oppression, causing individuals to replicate the very cruelty they suffer under" (Freire, 1970, p. 62). In Walker's novel, the pathoculture is the "virus" of the plantation that besieges the home, turning the household into a crucible of displacement where Brownfield attempts to "cure" his own demise by infecting Mem with his degradation.

The main purpose of this study is to deconstruct the "Anatomy of the Anomaly" - Mem's refined self - and examine its systemic dismantling. Specifically, this article aims to:

- Analyze how Mem's proper speech and domestic standards become a source of conflict between middle-class consciousness and sharecropping realities.
- Examine how Brownfield uses visceral violence to infect Mem's inner purity.
- Evaluate how Mem's death represents a structural necessity for a pathoculture that seeks to extinguish a pure Black feminine identity.

This study employs a qualitative methodology guided by close-reading of the content. This literary analysis is possible through careful selection of excerpts from the corpus, serving as the primary data. The secondary data come from historical records, articles and other pertaining novels. We utilize three main theories in this study. The first one is Black feminist thought whose advocate is Patricia Hill Collins. She claims that – based on her concept of self-definition – Mem's middle-class aspiration is a political act of resistance. The second one is the Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire's theories of displaced aggression or horizontal violence where they claim that violence is wrongly directed to partners rather than to oppressors. The last one is the Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality which highlights that Mem does not suffer only from racism or sexism but also from classism. Mem's middle-class longing is strongly rejected by white supremacist who cannot tolerate Black people upward mobility. This methodological approach allows a better understand of how Mem's purity conflicts with public pathology in the Jim Crow South.

The findings of this article will be discussed around three main points. The first point highlights Mem's proper self that is perceived as a provocation in a sharecropping wasteland. The second point underscores symptomatic brutality wherein Brownfield uses seething violence to annihilate Mem's pure selfhood. The last point covers the notion of martyrdom of gentility which highlights the contrast between Mem's tenderness and the systemic decay.

1 . The "Proper" Self as Provocation in a Sharecropping Wasteland

In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Mem Copeland is not presented merely as a victim of domestic violence, but as a complex cultural anomaly whose proper selfhood triggers unintentional pathological violence. Mem is literate and articulate, she speaks refined English and enjoys a deep-seated inner sovereignty which gives her the right to belong to the middle-class. This inner sovereignty is incompatible with the sharecropping wasteland in which she lives. This section - analyzing the anatomy of the anomaly - unveils how her purity becomes a provocation to masculinity already eroded by structural oppression.

Mem's effort to speak proper and domestic cleanliness represents what Patricia Hill Collins calls "self-definition" which strongly rejects the controlling images that pathocultural society seeks to impose on Black women. However, this "self-definition" is quickly transformed in a "Burden of Purity" as it collides with a masculinity that takes pride in the degradation of the feminine.

Mem's most visible anomaly in the eyes of the pathoculture is her voice. Unlike the other women in the novel, Mem's speech reflects the purity of her soul, her exalted humanity and her noble education. Walker (1970) mentions:

> She did not sound at all like Josie and Lorene, who talked like toothless old women from plain indifference. Mem put some attention to what she was saying in it, and some warmth from her own self, and so much concern for the person she was speaking to that it made Brownfield want to cry. (p. 55)

In this excerpt, Mem's speech is portrayed as a fundamental act of self-definition. Mem, unlike Josie and Lorene, speaks with precision which reflects her uncorrupted self and her emotional purity. She puts "warmth" and "concern" in what she says, in so doing, she breaks the pathoculture's social codes. Brownfield was initially touched by this "proper speech," but later on it reveals to be a provocation. Mem's humanity is perceived by Brownfield as an unbearable indictment. So, he vows to himself to strip her of her dignity and purity.

Frantz Fanon deals with the same dynamic in his famous *Black Skin, White masks* (1952) contending that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (p. 17-18). For Mem, speaking "properly" would grant her access to a new social class. However, for Brownfield, this "proper speech" creates a "dependency complex." He perceives her good manners and proper education as a threat, an insult, a judgement of his own lowliness. Her soft and pure way of speaking and behaving reminds him that he does not and cannot belong to this world which represents Atlanta education. The paradox lies in the fact, the very thing he was once attracted to turn out to be the subject of his seething rage.

Mem's middle-class aspirations and her sophisticated speech do not fit in the physical environment of the home. Even in the most dilapidated shacks, this behavior can still be observed. She strives to express a sense of "decency" that the sharecropping system denies to Black families. Mem attaches great importance to cleanliness, good manners and social standards, not because she likes it, but rather because it serves as political act of resistance. Walker says:

> I want Daphne to be a young lady where there is other decent folks around, not out here in the sticks on some white man's property like in

> slavery times. I want Ornette to have a chance at a decent school. And little baby Ruth," she said wistfully, "I don't even want her to know there's such a thing as outdoor toilets. (p. 101)

This yearning for "decency" triggered what we termed "Male Pathoculture." bell hooks, in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004), argues that under patriarchal system and white supremacist structure, Black men who are denied the ability to be "providers" often direct their frustration and anger toward the women who remind them of their powerlessness (p. 14). Brownfield, stripped of his masculinity by the white men who "own" him, is unable to provide the safe haven Mem aspires to. Inflated by his masculine pride, he is unfortunately unable to join her in her noble aspirations. Instead, he views her "foolishness" as an affront to his authority. He mocks her search for a standard rental home, sarcastically claiming she is "traipsing off all over creation looking for a mansion to live in." By reframing her modest request for a floor and a roof as a desire for a "mansion," Brownfield attempts to pathologize her health, making her sanity seem like madness as illustrated in the passage below:

> You ought to have stayed at home yesterday instead of traipsing off all over creation looking for a mansion to live in. If you acted like a woman with some sense we'd a had ice." He rolled his eyes to indicate her foolishness and coughed in her face without turning his head. (p. 87)

The most violent collision between Mem's middle-class aspiration and Brownfield's pathological state occurs through the act of writing. Literacy is viewed by Mem as a tool for survival and agency; for Brownfield, it is a mirror reflecting his own powerlessness and degradation. As illustrated in these lines, "you signed the lease? He was furious. He could not, even after she'd tried to teach him, read or write. It had gone in with the courting and out with the marriage. I ought to chop your goddam fingers off!" (p. 105).

This threat is the culmination of the pathoculture's reaction to the anomaly. Brownfield does not want to beat her up because she made a bad deal; he wants to mutilate the "fingers" that represent her ability to express her agency and assertiveness. Her literacy becomes a "Burden of Purity" because it forces her to carry the weight of both their failures. By signing the lease, she emasculated Brownfield the same way the sharecropping system does: taking control of family's spatial destiny.

The origins of the pathoculture are established when Walker illustrates the formative trauma that deprives Black masculinity of its essence. This is illustrated when young Brownfield witnesses the total erasure of his father's humanity under the white control, a psychological

shock that will trigger his later displacement of rage onto Mem. This systemic dehumanization serves as the blueprint for his future brutality. Walker observes:

> He had noticed this difference, one of odor and sound and movement and laughter... the man who drove the truck... [could] turn his father into something that might as well have been a pebble or a post or a piece of dirt (p. 11).

This passage does not only describe Brownfield's realization about white men's cruelty, but it also perfectly depicts the dynamic between him and Mem. Mem's proper self appears to be the truck in Brownfield's domestic life; her presence alone makes him feel like "a piece of dirt." This alludes to James Baldwin's assertion in *The Fire Next Time* (1963) that "the most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose (p. 90). Brownfield has been stripped of his dignity, and he perceives Mem's "inner sovereignty" as an unforgivable reminder of that loss. He is unable to fight the withe man who dehumanizes him that is why he beats up his wife whose purity makes him feel uncomfortable and selfless.

Mem Copeland's "tenderness" is besieged early in her marriage. Her middle-class aspiration and her proper self are incompatible in this sharecropping Wasteland. She is seen as a "healthy cell" in a "sick society," and as the novel unfolds, the pathoculture – embodied by Brownfield – takes on the form of a systematic attempt to "deform" her until she is as "mangy" and "gray" just like him. Her purity is her sin; it is the very thing that entraps her and makes her an easy target for a culture that cannot embrace Black dignity

2. Symptomatic Brutality and the Male Pathoculture of Displacement

while the first part of this analysis presents Mem as a "cultural anomaly," this second section examines the mechanism of her demise. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker does not depict Brownfield's violence as a fortuitous eruption of "evil," but as a progressive, almost ritualistic byproduct of a Male Pathoculture. This pathoculture is a social environment where the trauma of the plantation is transferred within the home. Brownfield, unable to resist or fight the white "gods" who confiscate his labor and his dignity, redirects his seething rage toward the most tangible symbol of grace and tenderness in his life: Mem, his wife.

Brownfield's pathoculture has a psychological origin described as displaced aggression. After being reduced to a "beast of burden" by the sharecropping system, Brownfield is literally deprived of agency. He is powerless before Shipley or the other white landlords who control his wages and his crops. As a result, he reconstitutes a domestic structure where he can finally take on the role of the oppressor.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) which addresses the notion of "horizontal violence," aligns with this dynamic. Freire maintains that the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor, "strike out at their own comrades" because they cannot strike the true masters of their misery (p. 62). Brownfield equates Mem's "emotional purity" with a mirror that reflects his own filth. To endure his own self-hatred, he must make her as miserable as he feels. So, he indulges in a dreadful campaign to "bring her down," proving that her education and her proper ways are meaningless against the raw power of his fist.

In this pathoculture, Brownfield's violence moves from physical aggression to a more totalizing psychological siege. He does not merely attempts to hurt Mem; he is trying to appropriate her identity. He interprets her proper self as a "lie" that he must dismantle through brutality.

> He had a sense that she was looking at him from a great distance, and that she saw him as something small and perhaps slightly disgusting. He wanted to reach out and pull her down into the mud with him. He wanted to see her hair matted with grease and her eyes red with weeping. He wanted to hear her voice break and become the coarse, rough sound of the fields. (p. 55)

This passage foregrounds the pathological nature of his desire. In a healthy and sane environment, a partner's strength is a source of security; whereas in a pathoculture, it is rather a source of shame and degradation. Brownfield uses this "Symptomatic Brutality" as a defense mechanism against the idea that Mem is more superior than him in spirit.

The tragedy here is the erasure of the "Erotic", not in a sexual sense, but in the sense of the creative, life-affirming force advocates by Audre Lorde. In *Sister Outsider* (1984), Lorde argues that "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane" (p. 53). Brownfield's pathoculture aims at crushing Mem's erotic power - her joy, her teaching, her candor, and her tenderness - because that superiority reminds him of his own moral decadence. When Brownfield besieges her "tenderness," he is attempting to extinguish the light that makes his own darkness visible.

Mem tries to cultivate her domestic place as a middle-class sanctuary which turns out to be the battlefield for Brownfield pathology. He intentionally uses his brutality to profane her middle-class aspirations. When she endeavors to secure a house equipped with an indoor toilet and a floor that is not dirt, Brownfield responds with rage, with a malicious project to turn the home into a prison. Walker writes:

> It was his great ignorance that sent her into white homes as a domestic, his need to bring her down to his level! It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, although she was no party to any

> of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. His rage could and did blame everything, everything on her. (p. 61)

In this above passage, Walker presents Brownfield's "great ignorance" and displaced rage as the main cause of Mem's demise. Since he is not able to challenge the oppressive system or his white landlord, this will lead him to cast Mem as a scapegoat. His technique is simple; he forces her into domestic servitude, thus trying to literally strip her of dignity to satisfy his own sense of manhood.

This ritualized violence aligns with the themes in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), where the legacy of slavery-era violence continues to be present within Black domestic life. Jones highlights how "the memory of the whip" is passed down through generations to generations, transforming the home from a place of refuge into a "legacy of scars" (p. 22). In the same way, Brownfield is not just mistreating Mem; he is perpetuating the cycle of violence passed down to him by the white landlord. By the midpoint of the novel, the "Siege" takes on a more drastic the form. Mem's "Emotional Purity" has been undermined by years of "symptomatic brutality." She begins to lose the very features that defined her "Anatomy of the Anomaly." Her speech becomes slower, her shoulders stoop, and the "milky cleanness" of her skin is replaced by the grey pallor of exhaustion.

> The first thing he started on was her speech...When she kindly replaced an 'is' for an 'are' he threw her correction in her face. 'Why don't you talk like the rest of us poor niggers?' he said to her. 'Why do you always have to be so damn proper?'...Mem would turn ashen with shame, and tried to keep her mouth closed thereafter. (p. 62)

In this passage Brownfield systematically destroys Mem's identity by targeting her education and refinement. Her proper grammar triggers his rage, a visible marker of superiority that emasculates him after enduring workplace humiliation. He mocks her corrections and he weaponizes racist language to force regression. He is deliberately cruel to Mem and this cruelty has two purposes: to not only silence her but also to annihilate the very features that make her stand out in this sharecropping wasteland. Mem is not strong enough to endure such traumatic experience. Her shame and subsequent silence show her capitulation to his relentless psychological warfare, transforming her from well-educated woman into a downtrodden object. This section reveals that Brownfield's brutality serves a language; this is a way for him to communicate his own frustration by carving it into Mem's body. He is a catalyst for a "Male Pathoculture" because he refuses to change or break the systems that entrap him, instead he chooses to mistreat and oppress the woman he once loves. Mem's "Burden of Purity" represents

a target for a rage whose origins lie in the white world. In this sharecropping wasteland, her "tenderness" is not just being attacked; it is being systematically dismantled to ensure that the "virus" of the plantation can continue to replicate itself in the next generation.

3. The Martyrdom of Gentility and Systemic Decay

The final moments of Mem Copeland's life are not a slow fading, but a terrible confrontation between a persistent "Emotional Purity" and an environment that has become literally destructive. This section, "The Martyrdom of Gentility," analyses the impact of embracing a middle-class consciousness within a pathoculture. Mem's death does not mean the end of her character. It is rather the systemic erasure of a set of values - purity, literacy, and selfhood - that the sharecropping South could neither understand nor stand.

As the novel unfolds, Mem takes on the form of "healthy cell" in a diseased society. She started enduring martyrdom long before the trigger is pulled. It begins when her "purity" is stained by the mud in which Brownfield lives. When Mem strives to maintain her gentility in a shack with no floor, she shows a form of spiritual and moral exhaustion that eventually shake the very tenderness and purity she seeks to safeguard.

This tragic transformation is echoed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her groundbreaking work on Intersectionality. Crenshaw argues that for Black women, "the experience of being a Black woman cannot be understood in terms of being Black and of being a woman independently, but must include the interactions between the two" (p.139). Mem is entrapped by a racialized poverty that denies her the "proper" self she yearns for, and gendered violence that punishes her for wanting it. Her martyrdom stems from these two interwoven forces, with her "gentility" caught in the center.

In the final phase of her life, Mem's physical presence serves as a testament to her struggle. She stops being "milky clean" woman from Atlanta; now she is a woman whose body has become a map of the pathoculture's scars. Yet, even in her physical decline, she attempts one bold but desperate act of sovereignty by taking up a gun and holding it to Brownfield's temple to demand a "decent" life for her children. Walker narrates:

> Mem was propped up against the wall on her side of the bed, holding a shotgun. At first he saw only the handle, smooth and black and big, close to his head like that. One of Mem's long wrinkled fingers pressed against the trigger...He felt a sharp jab on his body down below the covers…. And when you've cleaned yourself off you come back here and git up this mess. When my children come back from church with their granddaddy they going to find a model daddy, and if they don't you and me is going to know the reason why! (pp. 97-101)

This scene describes the fatal face to face. Mem has to sacrifice her emotional purity, her inherent gentleness to protect the symbols of that purity (the house, the toilet, the education). By taking up the gun, she becomes part of this pathoculture's arena of violence. Of course, she gains superiority over Brownfield, but for how long? She wins the house, but in doing so, she seals her fate. Brownfield will never forgive the fact that she used his own cruelty to humiliate and debase him.

Mem's murder represents the pathoculture's final "cure" of her anomaly. Brownfield kills her not because she is a bad wife, but because her emotional purity and proper self are incompatible with his coarse and savage way of life. Her presence is like a mirror that shows him the life he could have had, the man he could have been, and the oppressive power of the white world that broke him. Killing Mem means shattering the mirror. Walker describes:

> Brownfield began to curse and came and stood on the steps until Mem got within the circle of the light. Then he aimed the gun with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired. What Ruth remembered now with nausea and a feeling of cold dying, was Mem lying faceless among a scattering of gravel in a pool of blood, in which were scattered around her head like a halo, a dozen bright yellow oranges that glistened on one side from the light. (p. 122)

This harrowing passage portrays the ultimate shattering and dismantling of Mem's humanity. Brownfield had the intention of killing Mem, his action was calculated as shown by his "drunken accuracy"; he intentionally targets the face - the seat of her "proper" identity and speech – with the purpose of rendering her "faceless." The "halo" of oranges represents a grotesque and ironical way of aligning her domestic care with his off-putting brutality. Mem is reduced to "gravel" and "blood" which marks her final shift from a sovereign being into a downtrodden, filthy object.

This resonates with the observations of Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2004), where she discusses "grievability." Butler argues that certain lives are not "grievable" in a violent society because they are never recognized as truly human to begin with (p. 32). In the sharecropping wasteland, Mem's middle-class consciousness is seen as a "disorder" or "an anomaly" rather than a right. Her death is not a tragedy to the system; it is the cure of the "anomaly", the repair of the "anomaly".

Fortunately, Mem has not endured this martyrdom in vain. Her "purity" is not totally erased with her death; it is transferred. Grange Copeland, in his "third life," stands as the custodian of Mem's values. He comes to the conclusion that the pathoculture prevailed over Mem because she was alone in her world. To protect and save Ruth (Mem's daughter), Grange is bound to

create a “quarantine” - a space where the transferred purity and tenderness of Mem can thrive safely without being corrupted. Walker depicts :

> Touch her and I lay you out,' he said; with one long arm he pushed Ruth behind him... He (Brownfield) sank limply to the floor and did not manage to get a word out before he died. Underneath his flared tail coat Grange had carried his blue steel Colt 45. With it he had shot down his son. (p. 237)

This horrifying scene highlights ultimate sacrifice and redemption. Grange kills his son Brownfield to break the cycle of generational violence. Spurred by protective instinct of a father, he shields Ruth from Brownfield’s cruelty, thus embodying redemptive paternal love. But this triumph is a double-edged sword. Grange admits what he did requires his own destruction, realizing that certain act demands that we surrender our own lives. Here lies the bitter irony of fate: saving Ruth costs Grange his life, completing his tenuous journey to atonement.

Mem’s experience through *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is a shivering study of “Emotional Purity under Siege.” From her “Anatomy as an Anomaly” to her “Symptomatic Destruction,” she represents the impossibility of the refined and pure Black woman to live in a pathoculture of violence.

Her “Burden of Purity” was the condition to remain “proper” in a world that was “cruel,” to remain “tender” in a world that was “brutal,” and to remain “literate” in a world that was “coarse.” While the systemic decay of the South eventually claimed her life, her “martyrdom of gentility” served as the catalyst for the novel’s final redemption. She proved that while a pathoculture can kill the “cell,” it cannot entirely erode the “dream” of dignity, which survives in the “third life” of those who finally learn to protect it.

Conclusion:

This article has sought to foreground Mem’s demise not merely as a domestic tragedy, but as a systemic “cleansing” of a cultural anomaly. The Burden of Purity has been analyzed to see how middle-class aspirations through the medium of literacy, “proper” speech, and domestic dignity become deadly in a Male Pathoculture marked by displaced aggression and internalized racism. The findings of this study reveal that Mem’s “proper self” is brandished as a psychological mirror that Brownfield Copeland could not endure because it made him see his own moral decadence. In a sharecropping wasteland where Black men were systematically deprived of agency and autonomy, Mem’s “inner sovereignty” was incompatible with Brownfield’s own degradation. This analysis, grounded in the theories of Fanon, Freire, and Lorde, reveals that

violence in this context is symptomatic; it is the "horizontal" strike of the oppressed down to the more fragile target. Mem's life was taken simply because she was emotionally pure, well-educated and had class aspirations. These qualities were seen as a threat to a pathoculture that required Black bodies to remain "gray" and "mangy" to justify their subjugation and alienation. The novelty of this study lies in the fact that it offers a fresh perspective on Alice Walker scholarship by bringing forth the idea of Pathoculture as a metaphor linking biological and social aspects of systemic decay. Unlike earlier research that emphasizes the inherited and intergenerational trauma spanning from Grange to Brownfield, this work introduces Mem as an agent that broke this vicious cycle. It also goes beyond the traditional "victim" narrative by portraying Mem's gentility as a form of radical resistance.

This research offers a novel and compelling perspective by highlighting the concept of "Pathoculture" to explain how structural dysfunction destroys the individual. The study depicts Mem Copeland as an unyielding character whose undisputed "inner sovereignty" directly challenges the harrowing reality of the Jim Crow South. Lastly, Mem's sacrifice stands not as a defeat, but as the moral spark that finally challenges a long history of family trauma. It provides a deeply nuanced analysis of the cost of trying to maintain one's dignity in a hostile setting.

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