

CHAPTER - III

MERIDIAN : FROM SUBORDINATION TO A NEW SELF

Meridian¹ Walker's second novel published in 1976, is about the female protagonist of the same name who gradually awakens from her subordinate status as a black female, daughter, wife and mother to her own self and tries to become the material provider of the larger black community. She is the woman who prospers herself during the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960's. In short, she ties her tubes, rejects the status of a biological mother but tries to become community's mother.

Meridian is a story of a black woman who experiences motherhood in the initial stages of her life and then decides to get rid of her own baby, Eddie Jr. to take admission in a college to find out her own path and identity. Later on she joins the Movements and becomes active volunteer. This new way and identity enables her to attain the highest point of power, prosperity, splendor, health, vigor. As a result, she develops in herself "a completeness of being."² The novel presents the story of most ordinary school drop out self-illuminated black girl who has attained self-hood and knows what is the purpose and mission of one's own life. To begin as an ordinary black female and to end as a self-assured person is not an easy development. To gain the glimpse of her self which is in full bloom she has had to undergo innumerable trials and tests. As a result, she is evolved "from a woman raped by racial and sexual oppression to a revolutionary figure effecting action and strategy to bring freedom to herself and other poor disenfranchised blacks in the south."³ Meridian

wants the destruction of the rich as a class and the eradication of all personal economic preserves. As stated by Barbara Christian, Meridian's quest for wholeness and her involvement in the civil rights movement is initiated by her feelings of inadequacy in living upto the standards of black motherhood."⁴ Her story is the story of struggle against orthodoxy, inequality, capitalism, and sexual oppression of male society. In fact she fights for equal opportunities, equal status, equal rights and equal freedom for the black women.

Like other novels of Walker this novel also depicts the love triangle. Here Truman is in love with Meridian, but at the same time he keeps secret relations with Lynne. The novel presents the inner struggle that goes on in the mind of Truman. Essentially Meridian is a story of a black woman's recognition of her self. Like other Walker heroines she becomes aware of her status and self and tries to free herself and the black women from the clutches of slavery of the whites by actively immersing in the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, Meridian is a revolutionary who believes in equality and freedom and always struggles for the upliftment of the blacks. It is the Meridian in the end who prefers to live among the blacks in rural south :

And so she had left the North and come back South, moving from one small town to another, finding jobs - some better or worse than others - to support herself; remaining close to the people to see them, to be with them, to understand them and

herself, the people who now fed her and tolerated her and also, in a fashion, cared about her.⁵

The novel depicts the story of an enlightened black woman, named Meridian who would like to dedicate her valuable service to the society to which she belongs. At the same time through a series of chapters she reveals the relationship between the black couples.

Meridian's journey of self-discovery passes through the following sets of interpersonal relationships.

Mr. Hill and Mrs. Hill

Mr. Hill, is a father of Meridian and a school teacher who is quiet, clean and sincere. His wife, Mrs. Hill, mother of Meridian, is also a school teacher who is capable of thinking and creative. She has earned both money and respect in the same school. Mr. Hill is a dreamy and unambitious person. There is no purpose behind Mrs. Hill's marriage and it is only after she begets the children that she feels she could never forgive her community, her family, his family, the whole world, for not warning her against children. In the very first pregnancy she becomes distracted from who she was.

As a result she understands that she has lost her frail independence to the pressures of motherhood, and learns that she is entrapped and that "her personal life was over." It is this understanding which enables her to

instinctively interpret a look in the eyes of other women. It gives her full knowledge of the fact that all these women who are living just for their children are really dead. She becomes assure that she is "being buried alive, walked away from her own life, brick by brick."⁶ Her children are burden to her. Being compelled to do what she never wanted to do out of her own urge, she looses her creativity. She wants to go back to teaching but fails in doing so because she cannot pass new exams and does not like the new generation of students. Having learned to follow others rather than following herself, she indoctrinates Meridian in such things that she herself doesn't believe.

The only instruction Mrs. Hill gives to Meridian at an early age is "keep your panties up and your dress down." When Meridian comes to an age and starts leaving house with her boyfriend, Mrs. Hill cautions her only to "be sweet". However, she never explains to her in detail the meaning of "keeping panties up and dress down," and to "be sweet." In spite of the fact that her role as a mother has deprived her of self-fulfilment and self-realization, she tries to regiment Meridian into the role of a mother. Consequently, when Meridian leaves her son, Eddie Jr., with her mother-in-law, Mrs. Hill calls her a monster who is careless of her child. She asks her, "I just don't see how you could let another woman raise your child It's just selfishness. You ought to hang your head in shame. I have six children though I never wanted to have any and I

have raised everyone myself."⁷ Thus Mrs. Hill wants Meridian to be responsible mother and a believer in God. But Meridian neglects Mrs. Hill's advice and decides to join the college.

Mr. Hill is a choir loft who sings of death and his resignation to it. Eventhough, Mr. Hill sings beautifully and heart-breakingly of God, he doesn't believe on Him. Meridian chooses her father's rationality over her mother's willing ignorance and in the process feels her mother's love withdrawn from her forever. Meridian "loses" her mother because she is unable to go forward and confess Christ as her savior, unable to do the correct thing. Meridian spends years trying to expiate the guilt she feels for having failed her mother. Her family history is one of mothers who sacrificed even life itself for their children. Mrs. Hill's grandmother was a slave whose two children were sold. The third time she stole them back by assuring her master that she would take full responsibility of feeding them. Even Mrs. Hill's own mother made bargain with her husband that their daughter would be allowed to go to school only if the mother raised the annual \$ 12 tution. This she did by taking a laundry, and one of Mrs. Hill's first paychecks as a school-teacher went to buy her mother's coffin. Mrs. Hill doesn't find outlet for her stifled creativity by adorning her home through whatever modest domestic means available. "She never learned to cook well, she never learned to braid hair prettily or to be in any other way creative in her home."⁸

Mr. Hill makes his living by teaching. His fulfilment in life, however, come from farming and from studying Native Americans, a people deprived of their heritage by the white man. His interests sprang from the fact that his small farm was part of an Indian burial ground, called the Sacred Serpant because of the shape of its raised mounds. There Meridian and her father both experienced the dizzying sensation of spirit leaving body and floating free : "Her father said the Indians has constructed the coil in the Serpant's tail in order to give the living a sensation similar to that of dying : The body seemed to drop away, and only the spirit lived, set free in the world." ⁹ When the land taken away by white man to develop it as a tourist center, he grieves a lot over the loss of the farm.

As a mother Mrs. Hill is a failure because she is unable to teach her daughter rationally. She is guilty of not giving Meridian knowledge of sex early in her life. She realizes too late that children are a trap, that a mother's personal life ends with the birth of her first child. Children are burden to be borne. Mrs. Hill sacrifices for children, as did her mother and her great-great-grandmother before her, but "in the ironing of her children's clothes she expanded all the energy she might have put into openly loving them."¹⁰

Thus Mrs. Hill lived a life of a choice. She never likes politics and never voted in her life. Even she doesn't complain about the education of her children . She always believes that teacher should be eminently qualified and has great respect for school teachers. But she does complain against her husband for keeping her ignorant about the outside world. Because of her ignorance she can't teach Meridian uprightly and as a result Meridian leaves with Mr. Eddie without thinking of further consequences.

Mr. Eddie and Meridian

In her high school days Meridian falls in the company of Eddie, her "boy friend" - her current eager, hot-breathing lover. He initiates her into sexual life, resulting into the pregnancy. Meridian's mother never teaches her the meaning of married life. Meridian early in life becomes mother herself, partly because her mother fails to teach her the most biological facts, thinking that her admonition to "be sweet" is enough in the way of sex education. As a result Meridian leaves the house with Eddie and marries him.

However, Meridian is happy because it saves her from responding to other boys or even the whole category of men because she is afraid of men who are always persuing her. For her sex is "not a pleasure, but sanctuary in which her mind was freed of any consideration for all the

other males in the universe who might want anything of her. It was resting from pursuit."¹¹ Thus the black women are always the victims of male society who pursue them. In order to be a friend of male, woman must sexually involve with him; so that the new friends think of her as "So-an-So's Girl".

Eddie feels sorry that because of her pregnancy she is expelled from school. Moreover, he is a worthy husband who is always willing to work hard for their future. He works hard as a waiter who is paid little. Yet he is always patient and gentle with her who always keeps worries away from her. Like her mother, Meridian doesn't know properly how to iron his clothes as well as her own. Meridian is not interested in sex. She loves the warmth, the lying together and the peace. She endures sex because it gives her those things; she would have been just happy, happier, without it.

However, Eddie is always hungry for sex who gets it as much as he wants every night. He gives much more priority for sexual relations. But he is "good" to her. He doesn't even "cheat" and "beat" her. She now knows up to some extent the meaning of sex. Even before marriage she is seduced by mulatto called George Dexter. He entices her into the small back office where he kept a long sofa and two soft chairs. Even in the absence of Dexter, his Assistant is allowed to chase her. He uses his

sweet voice to describe the act of intercourse. He always leaves for her of his little homilies : "Experience is the best, the only, teacher", and "Just looking at water will never teach you to swim."¹² He thinks that she is a fair game just because she is black. Thus since the very beginning of her life Meridian has to prefer the sexual advances not only of the whites but also of the blacks. Meridian's story of her early life reveals the agonies of the black woman who is always treated as a toy or a movable property. It also reveals how immature and ignorant black women who are victimized by their men with their sweet tongue and penis.

However, it is only after giving birth to Eddie junior, that she understands what it is to be a woman and more importantly to be a poor black woman, and a mother. Walker describes the trevails of motherhood in minute details :

She had been in hard labor for a day and half. Then when she brought the baby home, it had suffered through a month of colic, gasping and screaming and rubbing her of sleep. She was so exhausted it was futile to attempt to think straight, or even to think at all. It took everything she had to tend to the child, and she had to do it, her body prompted not by her own desires, but by her son's cries.¹³

The very fact of becoming a mother brought many constraints to her life. Concerns for herself becomes secondary to concern for the child. This makes her to think : "So this is what slavery is like." Meridian views

Eddie Jr. as a ball and chain. Revolted by her situation, she begins to dream each night of ways to murder him or herself. In characteristic fashion she is consumed by self-doubt and vacillation. This leads her towards frustration and even thoughts of self-destruction. Her endless suspicions about Eddie only serves to highlight her growing cynicism.

Meridian finally realizes that Eddie would never be grown up. She thinks that he would always be a boy. More seriously she hates one fact that although he was still in school, he didn't seem to know anything about books - or about the world. She learns more than he knew from watching T.V., quiz programs and movies. He was not interested in "education". Moreover, he is also having an affair with a girl who joined with him by leaving Dexter and his Assistant. Eddie is a man who is always after sexual pleasure.

In the end Meridian does what her mother would consider unthinkable : She gives away her infant son, Eddie Jr., to her mother-in-law, whom she gives a considerable amount of impersonal love. At the age of seventeen she is "a drop-out from high school, a deserted wife, a mother, daughter-in-law."¹⁴ She proves to her mother and to herself that there are limits to how much or how little she is willing to sacrifice for own child. Unlike her mother and long line of mothers before her, Meridian lives in an age of choice. She chooses to leave Mr. Eddie, his son Eddie

Jr. and joins Saxon College, taking advantage of scholarship which she receives from a wealthy white family in Connecticut. Thus she does sacrifice motherhood and prefers education to fight against the injustice, exploitation and cheating of the women by men.

Meridian as a College Student and Revolutionary

The move to Atlanta thrusts Meridian into the heart of the Civil Rights Movement; but it doesn't provide an escape from the guilt that she feels for having failed as a daughter, and as a mother. Meridian keeps it secret from everyone that she has been married and divorced and has a child. Because Saxon's young women are supposed to be as "pure as the driven snow", she has to deny her marriage, her divorce and her motherhood. The guilt starts to affect her physically as she begins to lose her hair. She hears a voice, "a voice that cursed her existence - an existence that could not live up to the standard of motherhood that had gone before."¹⁵ She also begins to have headaches that are so severe they cause her to suffer when she speaks. She also sees horrible dreams in which she is a character in a novel whose existence presents a problem that will be solved only by death. Still she thinks that she is extremely fortunate woman who has an extraordinary opportunity of attending Saxon College, which is known for social and academic reputation. She comes as close to death as the living can come by occasionally shipping into a

death-like trance. She almost dies before Miss Winter, a childless teacher at Saxon, yet a motherfigure, saves her by granting her the forgiveness that her mother never could. Instinctively, as if Meridian were her own child, Miss Winter answered, close to her ear on the pillow "I forgive you." Meridian doesn't die. Her trances never return occasionally, but Miss Winter's words start her back on the road to physical and mental health. She comes to see death in its relationship to life with the clear perspective of her childhood.

Basically Meridian wants to give some meaning to her life as an individual. She is awakened through her true self the moment she learns about Civil Rights Movement. Trapped in her lethargy and lack of direction, Meridian has no idea how to break through her stasis. A bomb blast does what the community and family have failed to do. Provoked by this violence she longs to become a volunteer at the age of 17. She says to the dark young man, "I 've come to volunteer." She protests along with the other volunteers against town's segregated hospital facilities and participates in the freedom march to the Church, in singing freedom songs and keeping a midnight vigil. In a melee the police knock her down, and she is trampled by the people running back and forth. The Sheriff grabs her by the hair and someone begins punching her and kicking her in the back. However, she doesn't even scream except very intensely in her own mind. As a volunteer, Meridian does some typing work, and teaches

illiterates to read and write. As a result, there comes into her life a sea change, the change that helped her to go back to school once again.

Her participation in the Civil Rights Movement gets her a scholarship sponsored by a generous and wealthy white family in Connecticut, who wished to help the poor and courageous black revolutionist. The Saxon college which she attends, was only two hours away and just across the street from Truman Held's School R. Baron College. The Saxon College exercises a great influence on her life. As her scholarship is inadequate to provide for maintenance and pocket money, she works as an assistant to a black professor called Raymond's, who behaves immorally with her.

The first day Meridian attends Saxon College , she feels peace with herself. When she sits under the Sojourner, the largest tree on campus, she believes that no one can see her as she becomes invisible. Being invisible, Meridian can forget that she has rejected the role of a wife and mother. She is also plagued by guilt about her mother, and she suspects that she is responsible for wasting her mother's life. Although she never totally understands why she longs for her mother's forgiveness. In addition, she strives to overcome the guilt of being a black woman.

Impact of Sojourner Myth

The Sojourner tree has a well known legend behind it. It was planted by the slave on Saxon plantation - later, of course, Saxon College. The name of the slave was Louvinie, a tall, thin, strong woman, who was not very pleasant to look at. She had a chin that struck out farther than it should and she wore headrags that made a shelf over eyebrows. She had become something of a local phenomenon in the plantation society because it was believed that she could not smile. In fact, throughout her long life nothing even resembling a smile ever came to her poked-out lips.

Louvinie had inherited the art of story telling from her parents. On the Saxon plantation in America, Louvinie was placed in charge of the kitchen garden. She was considered too ugly to work in the house, much too dour to be around the children. However, children loved her. When requested, she would tell them stories of blood curdling horror. They followed her whenever she went and begged her to tell them all the scary, horrible stories she knew. Louvinie might have continued telling had there occurred a tragedy in the Saxon household that came about through no real fault of her own. One of the listeners, the youngest of Saxon children, and only son, died while listening to a story as he suffered from an abnormally small and defective heart. As a result, Louvinie's tongue was clipped out at the root. Chocking on blood, she saw her tongue on

the ground under the heel of Master Saxon. On a certain day, when the sun turned briefly black, she buried the dried and shriveled tongue under a scarwny magnolia tree on the Saxon plantation. Forty years later after her death, the tree had out grown all the others around it. Other slaves believed it possessed magic. The rumour was that the tree could talk, make music, was sacred to birds and possessed an obscure vision. Once in its branches, a fugitive slave could not be seen. It was also believed that slaves used the platform and the podium built around the Sojonmer tree, to make love unseen by others. In the second year of Meridian's stay at Saxon College, there was talk of cutting down the tree. However, she along with other students stopped the authorities from doing so. The tree was spared, but the platform and podium were dismantled.

The Sojourner tree is a natural metaphor. It suggests an alternate to their definition of black history and language. It represents the black oral and musical tradition and commemorates the atrocities inflicted on black people during slavery. It gives a historical underpinning for Meridian's work in the movement. The tree's history also denounces traditional black motherhood. As suggested by Susan Willis, Louvinie's example affirms that the community of struggle will always exist and that the actions of a single will always exist and that the actions of a single black woman join the network of all.¹⁶ Meridian understands that Sojourner is the living agent of Louvinie's voice and story — the dead

slave's gifts of life and eloquence to the black women who come after her. As stated by John F. Callahan, "Spiritually Meridian recognizes Louvinie, refuses to accept powerlessness or voicelessness, even though she is a slave who cannot speak."¹⁷

Louvinie's Sojourner tree also commemorates Sojourner Truths, an escaped slave woman who questioned those white women who tried to deny her right to speak. Like Louvinie, her mythical earthy sibyl voice exemplifies the struggle for wholeness and equality. In her youth, Meridian inspired by this tree and tries to do what ordinary black women never dare and think to do.

Influence of Wild Child's Story on Meridian

The story of the wild child provides a new dimension to the personality of Meridian. The wild child was a young girl who had managed to live without parents, relatives and friends for all over thirteen years. The wild child, as people say, had appeared one day in the slum that surrounded Saxon College when she was already five or six years old. Her only language comprised of obscenities and farts and she is Meridian's "social antithesis".¹⁸ More slippery than a "greased pig" the wild child is virtually uncatchable. When it becomes obvious that the wild child is pregnant, Meridian takes it upon herself to bring her into the fold. Baiting her with glass beads and cigarettes, she catches the "wile chile",

and takes her to the campus, bathes and feeds her and then sets about finding a home for her. However, Meridian's role as caretaker or mother comes to an abrupt end. When the wild child escapes and bolts into the street where she is struck by a car. In this connection Susan Wills has rightly pointed out that although Meridian and the wild child do not share a common social ground, they come together on one point, and that is the possibility of being made pregnant. For both of them conception stands for oppression.¹⁹ In addition to this, in Meridian, child bearing is associated with murder and suicide. After the wild child is run over by a car and killed, the young women at Saxon College realize that their fate is bound up with hers. But in their rage at the president's refusal to let them use college chapel for the funeral, they turn towards Sojourner, their protectress, the largest magnolia tree in the country with its magical material presence. The very fact that the chapel service was refused to the dead wild child indicates the age old bias of men towards female child. The emphasis at Saxon was on form and the preferred "form" was that of the finishing girl whose goal, whenever she would later find herself in the world, was to be accepted as an equal because she knew and practised all the proper social rules. Saxon's rule prevented smoking, drinking, speaking loudly, going off campus without an escort, remaining off campus after six, talking to boys before visiting hours etc. However, the administration of the college neither condemned Saxon student's

participation in the Atlanta Movement, nor discouraged it. In the very first year Meridian studies hard and makes the Dean's List. But during her second year she finds it impossible to study while others were being beaten and jailed. Consequently, she joins the Atlanta Movement, where she meets Truman Held and falls in love with him.

Truman and Meridian

Truman held is the first of the black Civil Rights workers whom she meets on her way to Saxon college. He is working as a professor in R. Baron College and is a staunch supporter of black peoples rights, and advocate of protecting the virtue of black women from white men. However, in his private life, he oppresses the black women as much as the whites do. Meridian somehow makes compromises and coexists with him. In her quest for self-fulfilment and identity they function as reminders that sex involves compromise. In the beginning Meridian is unwilling to make compromises. Truman falls in love with her since the very first moment he see her.

In their early days, Truman and Meridian along with other students take active part in Atlanta Movement. Meridian is quite happy because she is enjoying the company of revolutionaries like Anne Marion, Meridian's room-mate in College. Many times Meridian leads a group of children. She along with Truman fights for children's right to see freak

show on a day other than that designated for blacks in a small town in Georgia. The townsmen tries to shoot Meridian, a young black lady in a conductor's cap but at the end this battle is won by her. Even in Atlanta while attending Saxon, Meridian learned that the children are not always spared in times of revolution. She invites young black girl to join a protest march, but that night heard the girls screams echoing from another part of the jail. She tries to help Wild Child who was killed by a car. Not all of the child victims of the 1960's violence are strangers to Meridian. One such victim is Camara, a daughter of Truman's marriage to Lynne. The climatic chapter "Camara" is named after this little girl beaten to death in a savage attack.

However, Truman starts dating a white girl called Lynne Rabinowitz, a white exchange student who has come from South to support the movement. Truman doesn't reject Meridian completely but marries Lynne. After marriage with Lynne Truman goes to see Meridian in a small town in Alabama where she is teaching in a Freedom School and keeping her poems. He begs before her and gives her time for reconsideration. He says to Meridian, "I don't love Lynne the way I do you. You notice you don't lie and say I don't love her at all. She is meant a great deal to me. But you're different. Loving you is diefferent."²⁰ She firmly denies knowing that he is not prepared to love her over a long period, but for a short one.

As rightly stated by White, the new liberalism of the sixties sanctioned international unions and Truman takes advantage of this situation to "improve" his standing in the society. Hence, Meridian is casually replaced by Lynne. For Truman, Meridian is the "African Queen" upon whom Truman would like to bestow the honour of bearing his "beautiful black babies." Lynne, however, is a beacon of victory, the symbol that proclaims his equality with the white man since he too possesses white woman.

When Truman starts dating exchange students Meridian feels ashamed of herself as she is black. She can't understand Truman's preference for a white girl : "It was strange and unfair, but the fact that he dated - them and so obviously because their color made them interesting made her ashamed, as if she were less."²¹

This leads Meridian to search her soul and reevaluate her blackness and her femininity. She tries to remember everything that she can about white women. According to Meridian the white women are frivolous, helpless creatures, lazy and without ingenuity. After their marriage they sank into permanent oblivion without doing anything that is interesting. Black woman, on the other hand, like Harriet Tubman, were always "escaping to become something unheard of."²² Meridian notices that the black girls who did leave home and come back as successful secretaries,

school teachers, or doctors, all had one thing in common that is they all had altered their appearance so that they might look more like white women. They straightened and bleached their hair, wore make-up and made other things, all under the guise of "self-improvement".

Meridian too becomes aware of herself as an adventurer. Moreover, she is thrilled to think that she belongs to the people who produced Harriet Tubman, the only American woman who had led troops in battle. Thus, Meridian, a woman who feels guilty of being a black woman, starts reclaiming the black woman's history and tries to associate herself with that positive and inspiring history of the black women. She also realizes that Truman would like her to be Eddie's wife. Truman also didn't want a woman who tried, however encumbered by guilts and fears and remorse, to claim her own life. Consequently Meridian realizes that she can be happy with a man only if he can allow her to be free.

Truman finds in Meridian all the things lacking in Lynne. She was a woman to rest in as a ship must have a port. He wanted her still to make love to her but Meridian was thinking of something else. When Truman groans, Meridian says pleasantly, " Oh, no, ... you wanted a virgin, don't you remember ? You wanted a woman who was not 'sexually promiscuous'. But on the other hand, you wanted a woman who had had worldly experiences ----- to match your own. Now since I already had a

son, whose existence you frightened me into denying, and since you also wanted to make love to me, and since I had no worldly experience to speak of marriage between us never reached the point of discussion."²³

Meridian and Truman continue to love. Her pregnancy complicates her life. She had discovered earlier that she could not bear motherhood because her wild child would rob her of her identity. The very moment she undergoes abortion she becomes "disgusted with the fecundity of her body that got pregnant on less screwing than anybody's she had ever heard of. It seemed doubly unfair that after all her sexual "experience" and after one baby and one abortion she had not once been completely fulfilled by sex."²⁴ After the abortion she asks the doctor to tie her tubes so that she would never have to bear an enforced pregnancy and be free to join in extracurricular activity.

However, Truman starts dating Meridian after the abortion. She boldly tells him not to show interest in her. She also hits him with her book bag when he tells her "You're beautiful. Have my beautiful black babies."²⁵ Although she loves Truman she realizes that he cannot accept her for who she is, and therefore she rejects his proposal. Now, she is fully committed to the cause of Civil Rights Movement. Thereafter she works for registering the voters much more vigorously than in the past. She leaves for South in the end to serve the blacks.

Meridian, still wears the conductor's cap to hide her thinning hair, but now the hair is growing back : She is returning to health, both physically and mentally. Each of her "performances" for the good of the people is followed by one of her fainting spells. She gradually brings out her body out of its paralysis, though crawls out of her sleeping bag and faces life. Truman compares her to Lazarus, but feels the analogy is not wholly accurate because Lazarus needed help in bringing herself back to life; Meridian is strong enough to do it alone. At the end of the novel Truman watches her crawl out of the sleeping bag for the last time. She has chosen to refuse death. Meridian does what she would have the saints and martyrs do : she just walks away to live among the blacks. In the final scene of the novel, Truman takes her place there and puts on the conductor's cap Meridian has finally left behind. Thus, Truman deeply loves Meridian eventhough he marries Lynne for the social status and to become a white man. However, it is joy for him to forgive Meridian and to exist a few days in her presence. But that is not in his fortune, unwillingly he has to stay with Lynne. Thus Meridian's story ends with an optimistic note indicating that art will survive in time of revolution. Throughout her life Meridian continues with her vocation of writing poems.

Truman and Lynne Rabinowitz

Lynne Rabinowitz is one of the white exchange students who had come to support Atlanta Marchers from Swarthmore. Truman seems always busy in dating Lynne because her color made him interesting. That's why Meridian firmly denies Truman's offer of love. Truman agrees with her saying. Truman and Lynne are "incorrect" of course, according to society's standards, because of their interracial marriage. Hence, their relationship suffers from an inability to expand in love.

Walker herself married Mel Leventhal when in Mississippi, but an interracial couple couldn't live together legally. She dedicates that such love is "unfashionable". Truman and Lynne's love is certainly "unfashionable." It brings for them full extent of the danger. When the "fire" under which he and Lynne have been gathering blossoms turns into real bullets aimed at Truman and Tommy Odds, a fellow civil rights worker, who loses part of his arm in the shot. Tommy Odds holds Lynne guilty for losing his hand.

Truman tries to understand in what sense Lynne could be guilty for what Tommy has suffered. On the literal level she is "guilty" of having been in public with the two black men. In a more general sense, she is guilty of being a white woman. The trust that she has gradually built

among members of the black community starts to erode as the movement experiences a shift toward violence.

Later Lynne tries to exploit her guilt by telling Tommy to rape her and accordingly he raped her. For him, it wasn't really rape as she had not screamed once, or even struggled very much. But to her, it was worse than rape because circumstances had not permitted her to scream. Truman fails to understand Lynne, when she is raped by Tommy. Tommy rapes her but informs Truman that she wanted to do so. Rather than protecting Lynne from Tommy, he condemns her. For Lynne, as stated by Wills, "heterosexuality, complicated by the pressures upon the biracial couple in a racist society, leads not to liberation and the self affirmation of a new social mode, but rather the rock bottom debasement of self."²⁶ It is Meridian alone who tries to understand Lynne and offers her love. Meridian tries to understand her and helps her realize that both of them can talk "intimately like sisters". In fact, like an ordinary black woman Meridian could have discarded and denied any love to Lynne. However, her mind has been broadened so much so that she never thinks about Lynne, Truman or any other black and white man and woman in personal terms but thinks about them in the larger context of her black woman community. As a result she rejects the traditional roles imposed on black women and tries to overcome the guilt that she feels for their rejection.

In anger, as the marriage falls apart, Lynne sees their relationship from the opposite perspective and accuses Truman of having married her as a revolutionary act : "You only married me because you were too much of a coward to throw a bomb at all the crackers who make you sick. You're like the rest of those nigger Zombies. No life of your own at all unless it's something against white folks. You can't even enjoy a good fuck without hoping some cracker is somewhere grinding his teeth."²⁷

Lynne and Truman's last chance to expand in love is their daughter Camara, but her death destroys the last thing that held them together. Lynne feels a certain generosity in believing that she is freeing Truman to go back to his own race. She assumes, incorrectly, that he will return to Meridian. He does return to Meridian. By this time, Meridian has forgiven Truman for loving a white woman, at the very time she herself was carrying his black baby. The feeling that she has left for him is not sexual, but a sisterly sort of caring. It is the same sort of brotherly or sisterly love that is all Truman can offer Lynne near the end of the novel in a chapter called "Atonement : Later, in the same life." He says : "I do love you. It's just that - I don't want to do anything but provide for you and be your friend. Your brother. Can you accept that ? "²⁸ She chuckles and tells him that they will go back to South.

In tune with the treatment given by Meridian to Lynne and Truman, they reciprocate by posing personal trust and confidence in her. When Camara dies both of them feel the need of Meridian's presence. It is Meridian who pulls them out of their sufferings and consoles them. It is then that Lynne and Truman really begin to understand Meridian. It was then that her feeling for Truman returned, but it was not sexual. It was love totally free of possessiveness and contempt. It was love that purged all thoughts of blame from her to accurate memory. It was forgiveness. In due course of time, Meridian carves a path that she "prefers to walk".

Meridian wins the trust of Truman. No doubt in the initial stage Meridian feels of taking away her mother's life, guilty for giving away her child to her mother-in-law, guilty for tying her tubes. However, in the end she determines:

I want to put an end to guilt
 I want to put an end to shame
 Whatever you have done my sister
 (My brother)
 Know I wish to forgive you
 Love you
 it is not the Crystal stone
 of our innocence
 that circles us
 not the tooth of our purity
 that bites bloody our hearts. ²⁹

In spite of Meridian's painful private experiences, she is born a new and succeeds in evolving a new self. Thus she emerges as a leader of the blacks and becomes conscious of herself. Meridian completes journey of

knowing herself to the extent that she creates herself in her own image and not as a preconceived one. In addition to this she realizes that she must overcome the idea of "a woman's place" and to fulfil this mission, she must tear herself away from the two institutions which have traditionally sheltered women, 'the family and the church'. Although according to her these institutions have offered comfort and guidance, they have also contributed to a restrictive belief in the proper role and proper sphere of women. Although the journey to self discovery is a lonely one, she undertakes it with great courage and dignity. Thus Meridian is an enlightened Civil Rights Activist who dedicates her life to the upliftment of the blacks. She evolves from subordinate status to "a completeness of being" in the process.

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