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Child Abuse and Trauma: A Reading of Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile*

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Abstract

By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998) is about the celebration of the Eros, and the bitter-sweet relationship between fathers and daughters. It talks about the importance of father-daughter relationships, in the making of better, stronger, women. Walker through the novel focuses on the fact that, fathers make invaluable contribution towards the making of self-reliant daughters. The novel contends for the celebration of female sexuality blessed by fathers. It primarily focuses on how child abuse, even in the form of child beating can destroy the personality of a child, and can be extremely traumatic throughout life. Gender norms become a bane when the interests of girls regarding their basic rights like education, health, sexuality and ways of living are taken into account. Fathers privilege patriarchal interests, much against the benefit of their daughters, as they too are conformed and misguided by patriarchy. The novel brings into focus the Robinsons, a black family and the odds faced by them as blacks. Above all, it focuses on their daughters Susannah and Magdalena whose lives remain highly influenced, constrained and wrecked by patriarchy. This paper focuses on the relationship between Robinson and his daughters and showcases how an occasion of child beating, completely destroys the life of his elder daughter Magdalena inside out. Walker through the novel urges fathers to be benevolent, caring, and understanding guardians of faith, trust and well-being for their daughters. She makes an appeal to all fathers, to create confidence, self-reliance and resilience in their daughters and make them successful women leading wholesome lives.

Keywords: relationships, self-reliance, traumatic, sexuality, patriarchy, fathers, daughters



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By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998) is about the celebration of the Eros, and the bitter-sweet relationship between fathers and daughters. It talks about the importance of father-daughter relationships, in the making of better, stronger, women. Walker through the novel focuses on the fact that, fathers make invaluable contribution towards the making of self-reliant daughters. The novel contends for the celebration of female sexuality on par with male sexuality, blessed by fathers. The novel primarily focuses on how child abuse, even in the form of child beating can destroy the personality of a child, and can be extremely traumatic throughout life. Walker through the novel has put forth the truth that it takes two parents to raise a child, and that fathers need to contribute, nurture, and above all stand as pillars of strength, in the making of stronger girls and later on stronger women. Walker through the novel *By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998)* has talked about the importance of father-daughter relationships and the need to foster daughters on par with sons, in the making of strong daughters, and independent individuals.

Child abuse is a common bane to women and children in the modern world, under modern, privileged patriarchy, where men control almost all spheres of life. There is no doubt that women have come much forward, when compared to previous generations, yet when compared to men, they terribly lag behind. If they belong to an unprivileged class or race, they are further forbidden to protect their interests or that of their children. Children are discriminated by patriarchy on many counts like religion, sex, race, education and gender. Mothers in many cases are not in a position to negotiate the interests of their children. Amidst cudgels of race, sex, class, and gender, child abuse can be extremely devastating for children. Child abuse can be in many forms, especially in the form of emotional and physical cruelty. It can be mild like neglect of parents, severe like absence of provision of basic amenities regarding food, clothing, shelter, education and health. Child abuse can be extreme, in the form of extreme child beating beyond spare the rod and spoil the child, sexual abuse, and child sex trafficking. Black women torn and unmade by patriarchy under tripartite curses of racism, sexism and classism are not in a position to protect the interests



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of their children all the time. Girls face utmost gender discrimination. Gender norms become a bane when the interests of girls regarding their basic rights like education, health, sexuality and ways of living are taken into account. Fathers privilege patriarchal interests much to the dismay of their daughters, as they are conformed and misguided by patriarchy. Patriarchy unethically uses gender norms, as a way to benefit men over women. Furthermore, child abuse can be extremely traumatic for children, not only during the period they have undergone abuse, but even after many years after the incident of abuse, be it mild or severe. It can lead to masochism, sadism and even sadomasochism later on, making them abusers of their own selves, and at times even others.

The novel brings into focus the Robinsons, a black family and the odds faced by them as blacks. Above all, it focuses on their daughters Susannah and Magdalena whose lives remain highly influenced and constrained by patriarchy. Mr. Robinson and his wife Langley Robinson an elite African American couple go to Sierra Madre on an anthropological experiment to study a tribe called the Mundo, of mixed African and Mexican descent. As blacks during their times, are not funded for any anthropological project, they fake themselves as African American preachers and go to Sierra to study the Mundo. The Agnostics they are, the Robinsons don't trust any religion or God, but use it as a means to achieve their goal of studying the Mundo. Mr Robinson, preaching religion forgets that he is an anthropologist, father and family man. He gets sucked into the pretentious cloak of religion and subjugates his daughters to undesirable patriarchal decorum aided by Christianity. There is no doubt that as a caring father he thinks of protecting the interests of his daughters, but in the process of doing so, he unwittingly subjects them to patriarchal sexism and misogyny. This paper focuses on the relationship between Robinson and his daughters, and showcases how child beating along with years of patriarchal repression, completely destroy the life of his elder daughter Magdalena, inside out.

When patriarchy collaborates with any religion that privileges men over women, the patriarch of the family becomes more of a dictator than a loving, doting father. Being an agnostic, Senor



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Robinson is not a staunch Christian, but preaching religion he gets carried away, by the tenets of the religion, that privilege men and culturally conform the female sex altogether. He goes to anthropologically study a pagan race, but in the process thrusts Christian ideals not only on the Mundo, but even his family. He goes to Sierra with the intent to study the Mundo, as he wants to show the world that there are alternative ways of wholesome living to European ways of living, that are very much acclaimed. His sojourn in Sierra aims to find out: “How to organize life in a better way than the white man has. How to live in a way that permitted others to live as well.” (Walker *By the* 124). Robinson forgets that he and Langley have faked as missionaries, but in reality are not. He later on recalls and whines: “ In reality her mother and I were both anthropologists, but in the early Forties no one would fund us on any serious expedition. We threw ourselves on the mercy of our church, as black people always do when all other sources of sustenance fail” (Walker *By the* 15). This becomes a bane for the whole family.

Susannah and Magdalena though sisters are complete contrasts and lead different life styles as adults. The novel traces the lives of Susannah and Magdalena from their childhood, to the ripe old age of Susannah and the death of Magdalena. At the beginning of the novel, Senor Robinson is shown as an angel following his daughters and watching them, trying to redress their relationship with his daughters, long after they don't even think of him, and he is dead. To his surprise, both his daughters have turned out to be quite different from what he thought, they would turn out to be. To his surprise, Susannah turns out to be a bisexual, and Robinson watching over her as an angel, wonders how his daughter is able to bear Pauline her lesbian partner. Having seen her feminine ways of doing things throughout her childhood, he thought that she would turn out to be a feminine lady. Never did he think that, she would turn out to be a bisexual. He has always misjudged and conformed Magdalena his elder daughter as a child, who turns out to be quite disciplined to what he has had presumed she would become. Later on, Robinson as an angel reprimands his own stance and remarks “I did not understand her spirit. I yearned for guidance. It



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seemed to be necessary to tame her, though no one among the Indians or in my family showed any signs of thinking so” (Walker *By the* 19).

Senor Robinson and Langley Robinson love each other as a couple and cherish their family. Robinson unwittingly preaching Christianity does not take all that is holy and wholesome in it, but gets inspired by the dictum of gender disparity and woman’s subordination to man. He starts thrusting gender norms of performativity onto his daughters, who are not eager to accept them, as they are growing up in the pagan culture of the Mundo that does not thrust European gender norms onto women. In fact, Robinson loses track of his ultimate goal of being the perfect family man. He tries to psychologically manipulate his daughters to the maximum extent possible to gender norms, that make ladies out of young girls as per Christianity and patriarchy.

Robinson thrusts patriarchal decorum onto his children which Magdalena defies and this becomes an issue of tussle between the father daughter duo. Susannah takes interest in womanly things, while Magdalena is more of a tomboy, who cherishes horse riding and playing with boys, to womanly activities like stitching, gardening and pottery. Robinson tries to acquaint Magdalena to gendered, feminine ways and hobbies, but her hot spirit takes her to adventurous activities. Neither Langley, nor the Mundo find fault with Magdalena’s ways of living. They observe that Magdalena is “a changing woman, a natural one, uninstructed and uninitiated, and therefore very rare” (Walker *By the* 104). Langley tries to admonish Robinson’s restraint and help her be herself, but Robinson unwittingly tries to smudge her free spirit. Robinson constantly nags, brags and restricts the life of Magdalena, as she is not girly. He thinks of imparting life skills to his daughters, but in the process ravages their lives off wholeness. As Magdalena becomes a teenager, he starts monitoring her wardrobe and the way she presents herself. He goes to the extent of monitoring her dressing. He increases the length of her sleeves and hemlines, in a bid to protect her. He monitors almost all aspects of her life. This unnecessary monitoring eats away the vitality of her life. Robinson senses that he is missing something in his relationship with his daughter. He observes: “by now my



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daughter only smiled when I spoke, never showing her sharp white teeth. I felt she tolerated rather than engaged me” (Walker *By the* 23). He sidelines his observation, as he feels that they are teenage tantrums that would subside, but fails to recognize that her changed behaviour is open abhorrence, vehemence and rebellion. Walker through the novel argues that repression by fathers only strengthens and hastens the rebellion of children.

The atmosphere at home becomes stifling for Magdalena that she chooses to spend more time with her childhood friend Manuelito. His company seems to be her lone solace. Despite vigilant monitoring at home, she now and then slips away from home. Unknowingly she discovers her sexuality with Manuelito much to her surprise and happiness, and the dismay and ire of her father. To her, the relationship with Manuelito is more than friendship, a sort of reverence and utmost love. She exclaims: “To feel in myself and in my response to Manuelito such depths of trust and desire caused me to feel innately holy, as I four love made a magic circle about me that cloaked me in a private invisibility when I was obliged to return home” (Walker *By the* 28). As a teenager she does not think and weigh the pros and cons of the sexual intimacy with Manuelito. Above all, she hates her father’s cruel treatment of beating her, on knowing about her intimacy, while he enjoyed sexual intimacy with her mother. As a teenager, she fails to understand that adult sexuality is more responsible than teenage sexuality.

Walker through the novel has prioritized the needs of teenage sexuality but hasn’t concentrated on the right and safe way to approach it. Teenagers are more impulsive in the choices they make out of life. They are in fact unprepared for the job, of discovering their sexuality as they cannot weigh the inadequacies associated with it, when they are in their early teens. Yet, there is no doubt that the sexuality of young women has been bounded by patriarchal movements like the chastity movement, virginity movement and celibate movement in a negative way too. As pointed out by Jessica Valenti:



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The virginity movement . . . is a movement indeed-- with conservatives and evangelical Christians at the helm, and our government, school systems, and social institutions taking orders. . . . the virginity movement is much more than the same old sexism; it's a targeted and well-funded back lash that is rolling back women's rights using revamped and modernized definitions of purity,, morality, and sexuality. Its goals are more mired in old-school gender roles, and the tool it's using is young women's sexuality. (Valenti 23)

When movements of the aforesaid sort aim at educating women about their sexuality they turn out to be protective, but when they encroach and bowdlerize women's free thinking and their sexuality in a negative way, nipping their wholeness, they are not worth it. Walker through the novel advocates wholeness for women.

Walker through the novel has argued that the sexual needs of all women or girls are not monolithic. She has put forth the idea that the personality of a woman cannot be judged by her virginity alone. Walker through the novel has put forth the necessity of freedom to sexual expression, choices and preferences. Magdalena hates the fact that she has been misjudged by her father only by her sexual escapades and not her individual worth as an individual. She hates the fact that her father could have left choices to her, rather than he deciding which behaviour is appropriate. Walker through the novel has argued for a softer stance from fathers, regarding the sexual discoveries of their daughters.

On knowing about her sexual escapades and her relationship with Manuelito, Robinson gets furious and trashes Magdalena with a belt that has metallic disks as if she were an animal, till blood oozes out of her body. During the incident, Langley and Susannah do not come to her rescue and stop Robinson. They resignantly watch all this from the key hole of the locked room. At the moment of beating Magdalena till she bleeds, Robinson does not think about stopping the act of



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beating, or showing mercy on her. He much later on as a dead angel realizes that: “By beating her eldest daughter, to the point of actually drawing blood, caused by the disks on the accursed belt I [he] used. I [He] had betrayed her completely” (Walker *By the* 28). The incident brings in a void, in Susannah’s life. She suffers a spiritual fracture because of the incident. Robinson’s act of beating their child like an animal, leads to a temporary marital discord between him and Langley Robinson. He asks for forgiveness, but is shunned by Langley, only to be loved with the same intensity after few months, which Magdalena loathes.

The beatings of Robinson not only hurt Magdalena’s body, but even her heart and psyche. The wedge thrust by the incident between the father and daughter remains for a life time. It leaves a deft in her whole personality, and she is never the same, smiling, laughing, active person again. She loses her cheerful self forever, and becomes a picture of silence. Above all, she feels left out by her mother, who should have been on her side. She hates her father like no other person, which becomes vehement outspoken hatred, after she becomes independent. Magdalena thinking of her younger days as a middle aged woman observes: “We did not converse, my father and I, we bantered.” (Walker *By the* 77). Even as an adult in her middle age, she has no reverence for her dead parents. Moreover, the relationship between Susannah and Magdalena is one based on hatred and sibling rivalry rather than love. Magdalena hates the fact that, Susannah has been appreciated by her father when compared to her. She hates the fact, that her father has had judged her only by the standards of religious virginity. She has had never expected that her father would beat her mercilessly for having discovered her sexuality that did no harm to her. Talking about how women are unduly judged, based on sexual initiation and preferences, Collins like Walker has spiritedly said: “Dividing women into two categories-- the asexual, moral women to be protected by marriage and their sexual , immoral counterparts--served as a gender template for constructing ideas about masculinity and femininity.” (134). Walker through the novel condemns the division of women into good and bad, based on their sexuality or initiation into sexuality.



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Walker through the novel argues that in a patriarchal world that is unkind to the sexuality of young women and girls, sexual status alone is used as a standard to measure their worthiness. Inopportunately, in an insensitive, heartless patriarchal world which relegates women, their “morals and ethical ability are defined solely by their sexual status Viewing virginity as a commodity- - as it was seen back in the days in which daughters were exchanged as property ...” (Valenti 30) is heart wrenching. Magdalena hates the fact that she has had ben treated like a commodity by her father. As stated by Freud “Woman’s sexuality is evolved as fully as man’s,” (qtd in Beauvoir 66) yet the sexuality and sexual expression of women alone is limited and shackled. Magdalena hates the fact, that she has been labelled as the black sheep of the family. Magdalena hates the mistrust her father has had in her as a child, and loathes him for not having taken her into confidence. As a woman in her middle age she tells Susannah:

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

The sweetness of the relationship between Robinson and Susannah turns entirely bitter after the incident.

Even as adults, Susannah and Magdalena turn out to be totally different. Susannah learns to do what she wants to do, compromises when needed, and moulds herself according to circumstances and relationships. She develops good female friendships that nurture her. She is free about her



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sexuality. As a bisexual, Susannah has had her own share of heterosexual relationships, and a lesbian relationship with Pauline. Having been in relationships with both the sexes, she understands the foibles in human relationships. As a child, she distances herself from her father for some time after seeing her father beat Magdalena through the key hole. Later on, she amends her relationship with him. Susannah makes amends to her personality, with people around and constantly seeks autonomy on all fronts of life. She has a strong, lucid and self-reliant personality, despite her share of heart breaks and lows. Magdalena on the other hand, constantly breeds avarice and disdain towards her father. She nurses a broken heart throughout her life. She feels undone by the one incident of beating from her father. Though he changes his stance later on, and realizes his mistake, she is not ready to forgive him. She distances herself from her mother, who dies out of cancer. She is not on friendly, loving terms with her only sister Susannah. She has no female friends who would enrich her life. She fails to realize that “female friendship is meant to give form, expression, and reality to the ways in which women have been for our Selves and each other” (Abel 434). She shuns all personal relationships in her life which hasten her untimely departure from life.

Magdalena imposes self-exile on herself, from which she never comes out. Her childhood lover Manuelito, who she never meets till her middle age, marries, has children and goes on with life. Magdalena on the other hand, destroys her own life, and makes herself a misfit. She crucifies her sexuality and wails in her own destruction. Magdalena achieves professional success, as she becomes an academician in a university of repute, with her own hard work. She does not enjoy her professional success as her father senior Robinson takes utmost pride in it. She becomes morbidly obese, and least cares about her health. She rejoices over eating and binging. To her, food alone is the solacer and comforter. But to Magdalena, fatness serves a purpose. She tells the doctor and Susannah “When I am fat I feel powerful, as if I could not possibly need anything more” (Walker *By the* 137). She takes on dieting strictly as long as Susannah stays with her, but quits it as soon as Susannah goes away. She feels that she would lose the memory of both Manuelito and her father if she loses weight. “It was as if my memories were lodged in my cells, and needed to be fed. If I lost weight perhaps my memories of Manuelito and my anger at my father would fade away. I felt so



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abandoned already, I did not want them to go” (Walker *By the* 138). The love-hate relationship she nurses with her loved ones, breaks her totally. Moreover, Magdalena resorts to the masochistic activity of crucifying her nipples and labia. Susannah wonders how Magdalena is able to bear such pain. “I wondered, a suffering she so carefully, through compulsive piercing (her nipples had small chains dangling from them, her labia a crucifix) and deliberate overeating” (Walker *By the* 81). It has to be observed that:

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

The cross on her labia is symbolic of the crucifixion of her sexuality by her father. The masochism inflicted by Magdalena on herself might be terrifying to anyone else, but to her, it is way of expiating the pain, that has pent up in her, over a period of time.

A chance meeting with Manuelito, gives Magdalena the opportunity to discover herself again, but, it is cut short by his untimely death. She fails to experience herself totally, and experiences bouts of depression throughout her adult life swinging on overeating. She suffers from Bulimia Nervosa, and binge eating that her slim, lithe figure, becomes morbidly obese. Susannah comes to her rescue at this juncture. This meeting between the two sisters helps Magdalena open up, and discuss things that have been kept in the dark for long. She tells her that she has lost love forever, though she has freed her body of the crosses, in a bid to be together with Manuelito. Manuelito’s death further pains her. Magdalena wails about her love bereft life and remarks:

“Every time a lover leaves you and you are still in love with them, you fantasise about having them once more in your arms. But it is always a fantasy of how it used to be. Your bodies are



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the same that you had before. Manuelito and I were the same people, but our bodies seemed to be those of two other people, . . . But mostly we prayed that our stranger's bodies would come to their senses and find each other again." (Walker *By the* 96)

Susannah tells Magdalena that they can heal each other. Magdalena finds it impossible and says "I'm set in my own ways already. Married to my habits. The biggest habit I have is despising the man who gave me life" (Walker *By the* 135). Susannah tries to comfort her and helps her find the truth. She tells her to forgive her dead father, and adds on : "Don't pin him down to that one moment. He was a human being, like you and me. You just strangled me and took a plug out of my arm, but now you're lying there looking like you're sorry. Are you?" (Walker *By the* 135). Despite all the discourse from Susannah, Magdalena shows no interest in forgiving her father.

Walker through the novel projects the animosity children have towards parents. Reconciliation is impossible between Magdalena and her parents however much she tries. Susannah has no special feelings for her parents, she believes that ". . . every parent betrays the child, . . ." (Walker *By the* 120). She addresses her father as the son of a bitch, which shows the odd feelings she has for her dead father. The father-daughter relationships, Walker projects in the novel are beyond redemption. Magdalena loses her temper, on knowing that Susannah has had been advised on birth control on her sexual initiation during the family's sojourn at Sag Harbour. She wonders how her father was very cruel towards her, and was kind in his dealing with Susannah. Magdalena tells Susannah "He'd taken the moment in my life when I was most secure in its meaning. . . . The moment when I knew my life was given to me for me to own. He took that moment and he broke it into a million bits. He made it dirty and evil" (Walker *By the* 117). Susannah opines that their father has been a hypocrite, who hated being so. Magdalena tells that she always longed for a father who wouldn't have gone hay wire and "ballistic" (Walker *By the* 128) as she was discovering her sexuality. She opines that in either of his professions as an anthropologist and as a preacher he is not advised to batter people. She whines "The man wrecked my life" (Walker *By the* 128).

Walker through the novel argues that relationships without love, trust and faith rarely succeed. Recollecting incidents of the past continuously for years together, is an outcome of the trauma undergone by a person



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at one point of time. In her wailing for life about one incident, and her un-forgiveness Magdalena makes a hell out of her life, which is but a result of the trauma faced by her. Magdalena dislikes the fact that, she was not trusted and liked, while her sister was given reservation after discovering her sexuality. She asks Susannah “How can love exist without trust?” (Walker *By the* 127). Magdalena tells “I wanted reparation, . . . not apology” (Walker *By the* 127). Magdalena considers their father to be brute and their mother to be his moll. “He was a brute, a hypocrite, a liar. And Mama was his moll, . . .” (Walker *By the* 130). In memory, she recapitulates her last moments before being broken into bits, and turns into a “Mad Dog.” (Walker *By the* 131). She throws things away and bites her sister and swoons down. Magdalena describes her action as “going berserk” (Walker *By the* 134). She regains her consciousness in hospital on treatment for her traumatic condition. She realizes that she “had hardened her heart so successfully that it no longer functioned, no matter how I might have wanted it to? And is this what happened when someone broke your heart and you insisted on leaving it that way, just to punish them?” (Walker *By the* 133). Walker through the novel has shown how even very well educated women like Magdalena with all their education forget that “Women must assume responsibility for strengthening their self-esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves.” (Tate 213). Magdalena does not achieve wholeness as she does not realize that self-reliance and autonomy are the sole benefactors of women’s lives.

As a dead angel, Robinson observes that “Susannah will survive anything, with the tenacity of a flowering weed. It is my Magdalena, more faithful and more vulnerable, . . .” As a dead angel he remarks “I was an atheist. More accurately an agnostic. . . . I was “sponsored” by something I didn’t believe in, I thought I could live that way. What a fool!” (Walker *By the* 171) He realizes that with his patriarchal arrogance, he has undone all the women in his life and made their lives cumbersome at one point or the other. He realizes that he became “a man distracted from his belief. His belief in woman. In the woman he made love to, the woman –to-be who was his own child” (Walker *By the* 173). He realizes the importance of a father’s role in strengthening the life of his daughter, and making her a fit warrior to achieve all sorts of success in life. Robinson realizes his mistake for having nipped the wholeness of his daughter, by his act of violence against her. “I had failed her and without reason destroyed her life” (Walker *By the* 233). He senses the need to redress his mistakes towards his daughters as he develops full trust in the Mundo tradition and ways of



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living much later after his death. “The Mundo have a saying that any real love completes itself. The way you tell a love is not real is that it is always unfinished. It is just sort of hanging there, may be throughout your life, this ache, this longing” (Walker *By the* 168). As a dead father, Robinson can do nothing about it, other than watching, what is happening around him. He hopes to redress his relationship with his daughters but cannot do so, as he is a spirit and they are alive. Walker in an interview given to Evelyn C. White has said that “It is time for fathers to deal with the hypocrisy of their own sexual behaviour and to extend themselves to their daughters in a positive way” (201) and the novel vouches for it.

As a spirit, Robinson discovers that of both his daughters “it is Magdalena who is frail. Her obesity is designed to hide this” while “Susannah for all that she seems docile and pliable, and innocent, is a woman determined to have whatever she wants. She is destined to experiment until she finds it. And she is determined most of all to possess her own mind” (Walker *By the* 171). He watches his daughter Magdalena, dying breathless as “she sprawled mountainous and grotesque” with “a hunk of chocolate in one hand, and a can of beer in the other” (Walker *By the* 171). Reconciliation happens between the father daughter duo after death, which is not of great use, as Magdalena has undergone many trials and tribulations, some thrust and some self-inflicted when alive. The unwholesome life of Magdalena is a testimony to the fact that childhood and teenage abuse can be traumatic throughout life in the case of sensitive individuals like her. Walker through the novel argues that “fathers have to assume that these girl children , to whom they have given birth, inherit intelligence and can understand what is said to them. It then becomes imperative for fathers to talk to them about sexual matters and be honest, loving and patient (Walker “On Finding your Bliss” 201).

By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998) harps on the important point that fathers have to be considerate in the upbringing of daughters and let them flourish into wholesome individuals, living life whole, and full. It vouches that gender disparities, and thrust up gender norms on daughters by fathers, eat away the vitality of the lives of daughters and make them puppets without individuality. Walker puts forth the view that redundant, difficult gender norms when accelerated by religious beliefs and dictums do more harm than good, and subject girls and women to pain and trauma. Walker through the novel debates that unrecognized yet encapsulated, prejudiced malice in gender norms hinders the progress and luxuriant growth of girls, into



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self-reliant adult women. She has shown how superfluous gender norms handicap half the population in any society, which is made up of women, hindering the positive growth of any society. Walker through the novel urges fathers to be benevolent, caring, and understanding guardians of faith, trust and well-being of their daughters. She makes an appeal to all fathers, to create confidence, self-reliance and resilience in their daughters and make them successful women leading wholesome lives.

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