

SPECIAL HOLIDAY SECTION: FINDING SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

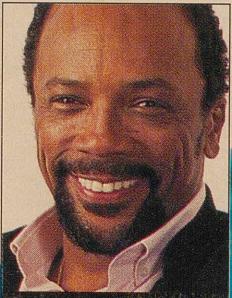
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WHOOPY & ALICE & QUINCY

The Color Purple Becomes A Movie

BY SUSAN DWORKIN



QUINCY JONES: PRODUCER



ALICE WALKER: CREATOR

BACK PAGE: Shirley MacLaine
Talks To Gloria Steinem
Toys For Free Children



WHOOPY GOLDBERG: STAR

The Strange And Wonderful Story Of

THE MAKING OF “THE COLOR PURPLE”

Can one reclusive spirit who wrote a great American novel, one big-time Hollywood director, one obscure Dutch screenwriter, a celebrated musical wizard, and a black performance artist named Whoopi Goldberg make a big-budget movie the film event of the year?

BY SUSAN DWORKIN

Alice Walker was apprehensive—and with good reason. It is not often that a novel of emotion like *The Color Purple* can be successfully translated to the screen. When an offer for the film rights came from producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters, Walker had no way of evaluating it herself, being a reclusive and thoughtful novelist, a gardener, and not a soulmate of popular culture.

In fact, she didn't even know who Guber and Peters were (they produced "Flashdance" and "Missing"). She thought Guber spelled his name Goober, like the peanuts. But she asked around among her friends—Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis,

Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Steinem—and assured herself at least that the money they offered was not peanuts.

When Guber came to see her, he turned out "not to be a Hollywood mogul type" as she had expected, "not balding, fat, cigar-chomping." No, he was very slim, she said, and young, carrying a backpack as he wandered around her San Francisco neighborhood, looking for her door. He pitched the film project to her for an hour or so. He mentioned director Steven Spielberg (who directed "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "E.T.", among other blockbusters).

Walker did not know who Spielberg was. She was not really interested until Guber mentioned Quincy Jones.

Quincy Jones is a genius of popular music and a prolific composer of Hollywood movie sound tracks. He has scored more than 30 films from "The Pawnbroker" to "The Wiz," as well as the television miniseries "Roots." He produced "We Are the World," featuring 45 of the biggest names in rock

BONNIE SCHIFFMAN





THE OFFSCREEN STARS: Alice Walker (left) agreed to the filming of her novel once she knew that Quincy Jones (right) was eager not only to produce the music, but the whole project, and was also committed to working with her closely.

music, a benefit for African famine relief. He produced Michael Jackson's all-time best-selling album "Thriller."

Quincy Jones had broken the black musical artist through the top of fame and fortune into big money, the biggest. "And he has a social conscience," Walker said. "That was very important to me."

Jones had already made his arrangement with Guber. "Guber came to me about writing the music," Jones explained, "and I asked him to just let me have the whole project. Let me produce it and go as far as I can until I make a wrong move and then somebody can pull me back." Guber agreed. When he went to San Francisco to sell Alice Walker the idea of making her book into a movie, he was really offering her Quincy Jones as line producer, guardian angel, guarantor of her art, ideals, and political concerns.

Once Walker knew that Jones was involved, she took Guber's offer very seriously and called a meeting of her own personal advisory committee: Barbara Christian, a literary critic and a professor at Berkeley; Daphne Muse, a writer and social activist; Faith Mitchell, a medical anthropologist; Belvie Rooks, a filmmaker; Rebecca Walker Leventhal, Walker's 16-year-old daughter ("probably the most savvy of us all," according to her mom); and Robert Allen, Walker's partner in life, and associate in her small publishing house, Wild Trees Press, as well as a political writer and, at that time, a professor at Mills College in Oakland. ("Robert was the only man," says Walker, "but he was ample.")

For most of the afternoon, everybody said: "Don't do it." Mainly because of what our experience has been with Hollywood," explained Walker, "and with white people trying to do black work. . . . All you have to do is go to the average movie where you have one black person surrounded by a million white people, and you see how artificial the black character becomes. I did not want that."

On the other hand, all the people at the meeting knew of Quincy Jones and admired him, *trusted* him. "If we always refuse," Barbara Christian offered, "how will we ever know? What will we change if we don't take a risk?"

Here was a novel about 35 years in the life of Celie, a rural Southern black woman undone by tragedy as a young girl, who grows through anger and passion and loneliness and faith to find her life's victory in the payoff of love. Walker had won a Pulitzer prize and an American Book Award for this book. And still millions of people whom she wanted to reach could not read Celie's story. "So much of my constituency just doesn't read," she said, "people in other countries, in Africa, who can't read English. I knew that people in my own hometown [Eatonon, Georgia] might not read the book. But I knew they would see the film. . . . I wanted it to be there, to appear in the villages."

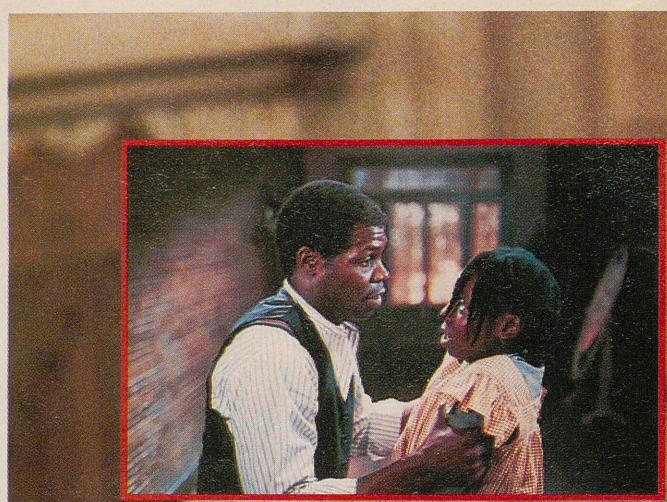
Alice Walker acknowledges that she is a risk-taker at heart. She went to see Quincy Jones.

He asked her what her biggest fears were.

"I don't want them to embarrass us," she said.

He told her not to worry, that he would be on her side.

Jones brought director Steven Spielberg to see her, in a limousine so enormous that it would not fit in her driveway. Walker laughs thinking about that, even now, two years later. "What impressed me about that meeting was Steven's absolute grasp of the essentials of the book, the feeling, the spirit. He loved Sofia [the strong-willed wife of Celie's stepson, Harpo]; he loved her fighting spirit and her strength. Right away he saw everything visually. He said: wouldn't it be great if you had Shug singing beautifully in one room and Squeak trying to mimic her in another room, right next door. . . . things like that. . . . I liked that. . . ."



WARNER BROS.

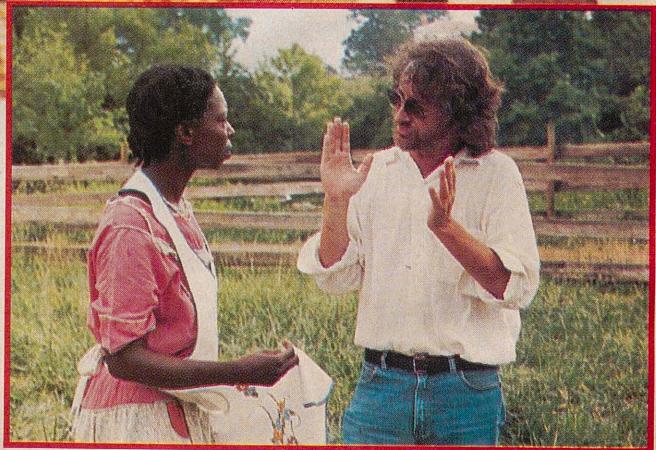
Walker saw that Spielberg had a picture in his mind of Shug Avery, the lusty blues singer who is loved by Celie's husband, Mister, and also by Celie, and how the spirit of her personality and her music would fire the smaller talents of Squeak, the girlfriend of Celie's stepson. She saw that these women and their breaking hearts and soaring spirits did not feel strange to Spielberg.

"Well, maybe if he can do Martians, he can do us," she wisecracked to Rebecca. By then Walker knew about "E.T."

"In ancient times, people believed that you thought with your heart," Walker said. "They didn't really know about the brain. In more modern times, people say you think with your



SCENES FROM CELIE'S REEL LIFE: Celie (above, Whoopi Goldberg) talks to God; (top left) with husband, Mister (Danny Glover), who is often abusive; (left, middle) blues singer Shug Avery (Margaret Avery); at first cruel to Celie, Shug becomes her friend and lover (left, bottom). At right: director Steven Spielberg with Goldberg as Celie.



brain. Only there are a few of us who still actually think with our hearts, and after talking to Steven, I had a lot of confidence that he was one."

She had her terms written into the contract: at least one half the population of the film offscreen would be "women or blacks or Third World people." She got the financial terms arranged so that they reflected the advice of her movie-wise friends. Quincy Jones assured her that she would be consulted about the movie all the way.

"Most people just buy the book and shove the author under the rug," he said. "Not this time. At every moment, Alice was considered the last word."

With these assurances, Alice Walker agreed to let them make their picture. However, she was having anxiety dreams.

Spielberg and Jones asked Walker to write the screenplay. She had never done one before. "I went up to the country and spent about three months working on it," Walker said. "But Steven had no idea how tired I was." Having won the Pulitzer, she had just lived through a year of interviews and notoriety, her privacy and her precious quiet times all yielded to the public. "I had told Robert and Rebecca that after the novel and the Pulitzer, I would be theirs, because I had put



Celie, Shug, and Squeak (Rae Dawn Chong) see better days ahead.

them through a lot; they were always being interrupted, intruded upon. And then there I was going up to the country again to work on the screenplay.... Rebecca started having a lot of physical ailments that I understood to be signals that she really needed attention, really wanted me home even though she was her usual supportive and plucky self, trying to give me the space I needed. But I could tell...

"So I finished a draft and sent it down to Steven. I added things like descriptions of the houses, the rooms, the clothes, the shoes, the parasols—things you wouldn't necessarily get from the book that they could use in the real screenplay. And I gave it up."

It turned out not to be so easy to find someone besides Alice Walker who could adapt Alice Walker. The writers Spielberg saw kept saying it couldn't be done. *The Color Purple* is written in the form of a series of letters to God and back and forth between Celie in the American South and her sister Nettie, a missionary in Africa. This exchange did not immediately suggest the way it could be made visual.

Meno Meyjes (pronounced Minnow May-yes) did not agree. A Dutchman by birth, he had been in this country since 1972. He had the foreigner's freedom with English, and it was his screenplay about the Children's Crusade—called "Lionheart," scheduled for production later this year—that made Spielberg notice him.

"They'd seen just about everybody," Meyjes said, "and

thought they might as well see me too. The more I read *The Color Purple*, the more I realized that it could very easily be made into a film.

"First of all, it had what all great works of art have—simplicity. Outside of the somewhat unusual structure—the letters—it is a simple story; almost all one location; one person's life; one person's point of view; one woman's evolution."

But wouldn't he have to adapt the story by making Celie's narrative the *voice-over* for scenes on camera?

"Of course!" he said. "Voice-over works for me. It worked for me in Terry Malick's film, 'Days of Heaven.' And it worked in 'Badlands,' too."

But Meyjes was apprehensive, and with good reason. "Not only am I foreigner, I'm also white, I'm a man...."

Walker had been introduced to one possible woman writer—Melissa Mathison, author of "E.T." "But the chemistry was not right there," she recalls. "Her being a woman and me being a woman didn't do it." When she met Meyjes, however, she found they "resonated" well.

What was especially important to Walker was: "Even though he's not American, he comes from a part of Holland that has its own folk speech that is looked down upon by people who speak standard Dutch... and he had a real feel for what folk speech is and how it's not substandard, just different. I didn't have the feeling that Menno was a stranger."

Walker had been concerned that the script and the visual design would not take into account that though the characters speak in a certain way, they are not all poor: Mister owns land, and Celie's family gets on in business and commerce. A white writer might be deceived by the speech into making the wrong judgment about economic class.

"I locked myself up in my hotel room," Meyjes said, "with the novel on my lap and the typewriter on the desk and a pencil. I realized that if I didn't write the script very fast, all those things I was worried about would daunt me, I would end up lying next to my typewriter like a dead puppy."

As the drafts proceeded, Meyjes would come to the set of "The Goonies" (one of Spielberg's ongoing projects at the time) and work with him on "The Color Purple," underlining stuff in red, maybe forty-five minutes. We called it Bible Class." Then Meyjes would sit in the office next to Spielberg's at Amblin Entertainment and turn out 10 to 12 pages a day. In the evening they both would go over what he had written.

"There would be times when I would really be feeling the strain, and then Quincy would call me up and say, 'Hey, how're you doing?' It would just lift my spirits," Meyjes said. "Quincy was an angel on this movie, everywhere at once, his influence is all pervasive. He couldn't be heavy-handed if he tried."

As the film went into production last summer in Los Angeles, North Carolina, later in Africa, a phenomenon almost never witnessed in Hollywood projects occurred. The writer of the book and the writer of the screenplay, usually exiles from the production, usually strangers to each other, were on the set, working together, all the time. "There was a party," Meyjes said, "and I wandered over to Alice's room. I said, 'Alice, I need some lines for Sofia.' Three minutes later, I had a legal pad filled with Alice's suggestions, and I sort of ambled back to the party.

"The next day Steven put it in. It's in the movie."

Jones was making good on his promises. With Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall of Spielberg's organization handling the nuts and bolts; with Jones himself in command on every single decision; with Lucy Fisher at Warner Brothers and Guber and Peters doling out freedom and money and confidence, what did Alice Walker have to worry about?

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FINDING CELIE'S VOICE

THE SPRING OF 1984, as I was completing the daily scrutiny of each hollyhock bud in my garden, my neighbor on the next ridge, a lesbian sculptor and potter of great talent, arrived on my doorstep. She had just finished the evening milking of her goats, she said, when she received a call from a feminist bookstore in San Francisco, some hundred and forty miles away; a television news van was apparently parked in front of their door, and the newscasters inside had informed the bookstore owners that *The Color Purple* was up for banning—because a local mother had objected to its use in the Oakland public schools—and since they sold the book, what did they think of this?

Their response was to put the newscaster on hold, call my neighbor, and ask her to tramp up the hills and down the ravines, through the trees and underbrush and sticker-brier, and cross the creek to ask me what they should say.

I learned that a certain Mrs. Green had objected to having her daughter, Donna, read *The Color Purple*. In her opinion the book was too sexually explicit, presented a stereotyped view of blacks, and degraded black people by its “exposure” of their folk language.

Eventually, a committee was formed to study the merits of *The Color Purple* to determine whether it was degrading to black people, repugnant to whites, and generally bad for growing minds. The committee, composed of all

colors and both (or more) sexes, representative of the people as only a Bay Area, California, committee can be, exonerated the book, while at the same time treating Mrs. Green and her objections with patience, understanding, tact, and even gentleness—for which I was glad.

For I feel I know what Mrs. Green was objecting to...the first five pages of the book. The same five pages my mother objected to, because she found the language so offensive. They are the pages that describe the brutal sexual violence done to a nearly illiterate black womanchild who then proceeds to write down what has happened to her in her own language, from her own point of view. She does not find rape thrilling; she thinks the rapist looks like a frog with a snake between his legs. How could this not be upsetting? Shocking? How could anyone want to hear this? She spoke of “pussy,” “titties,” the man’s “thang.” I remember actually trying to censor this passage in Celie’s voice even as I wrote it. Even I found it almost impossible to

let her say what had happened to her as *she* perceived it, without euphemizing it a little. And why? Because once you strip away the lie that rape is pleasant, that rapists have anything at all attractive about them, that children are not permanently damaged by sexual pain, that violence done to them is washed away by fear, silence, and time, you are left with the positive horror of the lives of thousands of children (and who knows how many adults)—lives we are even beginning to hear about now in *People*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*—who have been sexually abused and who have never been permitted their own language to tell about it.

Celie’s stepfather, the rapist, warns her not to tell anybody but God about having been raped. But Celie’s community had already made sure she would not feel free even to use the words she knew. In her backward, turn-of-the-century community the words “penis” and “vagina” did not exist. Indeed, so off limits was any thought of the penis that the closest anyone got to it in language was to call it “the man’s thing.” As for “vagina”—well, this is how my grandmother taught her girls to bathe: “Wash down as far as possible, then wash up as far as possible, then wash possible.”

Of course if I had written of Celie’s rape from the point of view of the rapist or that of the voyeur, very few people—other than feminists—would have been offended. We have been brainwashed to identify with the person who receives pleasure, no matter how perverted; we are used to viewing rape from the rapist’s point of view. I could have written that Celie enjoyed her abuse and done it in such pretty, distancing language that many readers would have accepted it as normal. But to do this would

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BY
ALICE
WALKER

If we kill off the sound of our ancestors, the major portion of us...is lost.

have been to betray Celie; not only her experience of rape, but the integrity of her life; her life itself. For it is language more than anything else that reveals and validates one's existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied us then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of caricature, reflecting someone else's literary or social fantasy.

This is one reason I use the word "mammy" in the book, as a word used by turn-of-the-century black people instead of mother, though already in a somewhat pejorative way. It is my hunch that "mammy"—which in America conjures up only an immensely fat and black wide-eyed slave of thin Vivien Leigh or Bette Davis-like white people—is in fact an African word. For certain it was a word used by early 20th-century African-Americans, until it was expropriated and popularized by whites and used to designate a kind of contented, whitefolks'-comforting black woman of enormous girth of whom black people felt ashamed. I feel immensely grateful that what little understanding I have of the probable transformation of this word comes from having had a grandfather who, while I was growing up, still used it. This is what he called his mother and this is what he called his children's mother—and as a child watching the "mammies" in films like "Gone with the Wind," I wondered why. I knew his mother had been largely Cherokee Indian and was remembered mainly for her meanness and long hair. His wife, my mother's mother, was an obviously oppressed, long-suffering black, black woman who gave birth to 12 children and who, from pictures and memories that I have of her, apparently never smiled.

There is no reason to try to bring "mammy" back. Its intention in racist books and films was to undermine the integrity of the mother of the black race and in the minds of many, many people this was accomplished. This is the reason many black people cannot even say the word aloud without cringing. It will be a great and amusing day in our nation's future when a film—perhaps many films—will be made about the old

plantation South and the story will unfold from a real "mammy's" point of view. Then we will see why the real woman was locked inside the stereotype. It will be like watching a prison break.

But as of now "mammy" is a used, abused, disposed-of word; and the person to whom it applies has met the same fate. This was emphasized for me when a colleague was telling me about the horrors of the 1984 Republican Convention, one of which was the presence of black entertainers who sang.

Who were these entertainers, I asked. "The Mammies and the Pappies," she replied. She then elaborated on the personalities Reagan's staff had chosen to represent black people at the convention. Her harshest words were reserved for the mammy figure whom she imagined consoling Ronald Reagan with johnnycake and clabbered milk in the "classic" mammy tradition. "Now don't you worry none, honey," this modern mammy would say, her sequined gown now replacing her apron of old, "them bombs you settin' up in Europe ain't botherin' nobody. And them shiftless shines you cuttin' off of welfare ought to

find them some good white folks to work for like I done."

And yet, we can learn from what has happened to "mammy" too. That it is not by suppressing our own language that we counter other people's racist stereotypes of us, but by having the conviction that if we present the words in the context that is or was natural to them we do not perpetuate those stereotypes but rather expose them. And, more importantly, we help the ancestors in ourselves and others continue to exist. If we kill off the *sound* of our ancestors, the major portion of us, all that is past, is history, is human being, is lost and we become historically and spiritually thin, a mere shadow of who we were, on the earth.

For Celie's speech pattern in *The Color Purple*, Celie's words reveal not only an intelligence that transforms illiterate speech into something that is, at times, very beautiful—as well as effective in conveying her sense of her world—her speech also reveals what has been done to her by a racist and sexist system, and her intelligent blossoming as a human being despite her oppression demonstrates why her oppressors persist even today in trying to keep her down. For if and when Celie rises to her rightful, earned place in society across the planet, the world will be a different place, I can tell you.

How can you justify enslaving such a persona as Celie? Segregating or sexually abusing such a person? Her language—all that we have left of her—reveals her as irreducibly human. And the answer is, you cannot.

She has not accepted an alien description of who she is, neither has she accepted an alien tongue completely to tell us about it. Her being is affirmed by the language in which she is revealed, and like everything about her it is characteristic, hard-won, and authentic.

The system closed the door on people who sounded like Celie long before I was born. All of us who can hear her today open the shut doors in ourselves and in our society, wide.

And when Celie comes through those doors, Buffalo soldiers on one side,

(continued on page 96)

ritual has led to a growing body of work in feminist liturgies—Christian rites that speak to women and their experience.

There are some comparisons to be made between the celebrations of feminist liturgies and the rites of goddess ritual that have grown out of one segment of the secular Women's Movement. Both rely on nature symbols—tree branches, flowers, and apples are some of the symbols that turn up in the Christian rituals—and from each have come new songs or hymns, and fresh prayers or incantations. And, ironically, at a time when most parishes have forsaken the "smells and bells" of the Mass of yore, feminist liturgy seeks to return such sensual texture to religious celebration, and to allow room for personal expression in it.

Margaret Ellen Traxler asserts that "we don't always celebrate in the same way. When you have a birthday in your family, you don't always do the same thing, the same way, the same songs, the same words. It's a birthday, a coming together, a celebration. Now this [the Mass] is the celebration of the Eucharist. It does not have to be absolutely uniform. And the priest should be chosen from among the people; that's from the Gospel."

Much of the dissent in today's church was precipitated by groundbreaking works in the field of feminist theology. It was only two years after the 1973 release of Mary Daly's radical tract *Beyond God the Father* that the first meeting of the Women's Ordination Conference took place. Over the years, the movement has been fed by the scholarly work of women like historian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and biblical scholar Rosemary Radford Ruether. "The fact that all the fundamental questions are being raised again," says ethicist and theologian Margaret Farley, her voice becoming impassioned, "and being raised in a way that is filled with life—I think it's terribly exciting."

Anthologies of essays by feminist religion scholars have sprung up everywhere, and most of these are ecumenical collections. Farley explains: "The richness of all the Christian traditions is absolutely essential for the fullness of Christianity, in my view." In fact, one of the most amazing things about the work of women in religious studies has been a tremendous sharing with women of other faith traditions, something that happens only rarely among male theologians.

The bishops are not unaware of the importance of the Catholic women's movement. "I feel we are at a moment

The Limits of Mysticism: A Rationalist's Dissent



VIRGINIA BLAISDELL

During the last days of the Plains Indians, a Native American cult expressed resistance to the whites through the mystic ritual, the Ghost Dance. They prophesied through visionary dance and song that the return of their dead warriors would hasten the removal of whites from Indian land, and Indians would be allowed to return to their previous way of life without bloodshed. At Wounded Knee, the Sioux, who had been influenced by Sitting Bull, nonetheless found that neither the dance nor the "ghost shirts," which they believed impenetrable, could prevent the catastrophe that followed.

Much of the current concern with women's spirituality has the flavor of the Ghost Dance. Of course there are many positive aspects to this concern, things that we would want to carry on in a serious struggle to build a humane society: the urge to build new communities and to find alternative ways of taking care of each other outside of patriarchal structures. But the turning inward, and toward mysticism, expressed in much of the concern with female spirituality, will not get us to that better world. Without organization, analysis, criticism, and program, the Man will crush us, as he did the Plains Indians. Even now, as some of us fall into Ghost Dancing, the culture is sinking back to the worst horrors of pre-Movement times, sending out again and again the message (in which some of us collude): women are for fucking.

Nor will the return to spirituality even help to hold us together: mysticism and antirationalism rob us of the protecting mantle of a common agreed-upon standard for justice, leaving us with one person's version of the Truth mystically elevated above another's: covens and the romanticization of witchcraft, the mystical power of vegetables, spiritual healing, astrology, channeling spirits, energy circles, firewalking, and—far worse—the higher forms of these things coming out under the name of female spirituality. Finally this is tyranny. If we dismiss rationalism and scientific method as a male game, we have no way to protect ourselves against such tyranny. Inevitably, when there is no logic or rationality, some will claim to have more of it—whatever it may be—than others, and new matriarchs, claiming to have the spirit within them, will arise to tyrannize over us. Do we really want to replace patriarchs with matriarchs?

—Naomi Weisstein

that could be compared to the doctrinal and theological problems represented by the admission of Gentiles to the church in the apostolic age," said Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco in an interview with the *Boston Globe*. Quinn's comment is of special significance not only because he is heading the study on religious orders, but also because he is comparing this time in church history "with one of the earliest and most decisive changes in church history," according to the *Globe's* religion columnist, James L. Franklin.

But there's another layer to Quinn's comment that bears some discussion. The problems faced by the early church with the admission of Gentiles had much to do with the pagan nature of the religions from which they came; their notion of God had little to do with Hebrew ideals—instead they came from systems of multiple deities, many of which took

female forms. So, it is hard to overlook the importance of the archbishop's choice of analogy when one is trying to discern just how the church views its women. Are women still dangerously pagan and frighteningly mystical in the eyes of the patriarchy?

Responding to feminist insistence on the need for nonsexist translations of the Bible, Father Lorenzo Albacete, a former staff theologian to Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, D.C., told the right-wing *National Catholic Register*: "I think that this has the capacity to destroy biblical revelation and lead us right back in a pagan religion. In natural religions, the ultimate life force was generally feminine."

Margaret Farley feels that "pagan" is a bit too strong a word for the way in which women are viewed by the hierarchy, but she does believe that the Holy See finds in women a nightmare of the

unconscious. "I have often argued," she explains, "that at an unconscious level at least, there is a symbol system still operating in Western civilization generally, and in the Roman Catholic Church, which does tend to associate women with symbols of evil. They may not be considered pagan, but they are considered temptresses, and still more closely associated with boddiness than men are. And Christianity hasn't dealt very well with those questions."

"This is why I think the religious questions and the theological questions are so important for the [secular] Women's Movement generally," she explains, because "in a culture like ours, the symbols are still importantly inclusive of religious symbols. We may not recognize it, but [the religious symbols attributed to womanhood] are partly what we think about when we think about electing a woman Vice President." And one gets the feeling that Farley, as the only tenured woman on the faculty of Yale Divinity School, has thought hard about this problem. And because of her belief that "the Roman Catholic Church is still the bearer of profound symbols for all the churches," she contends that the work toward equality in the church is more than just a Catholic women's issue.

It matters, then, to all women that in many parishes, women are still serving Communion, despite John Paul II's admonishments against such indulgences of the feminine ego. And it matters that in one working-class parish in urban New Jersey, the priest ends the Gospel reading by saying not the liturgical "This, my Brothers, is the Word of the Lord," but rather "My Sisters and Brothers, this is the Word of God," that, according to the *National Catholic Register*, instead of reciting the traditional "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," several priests at the daily Masses held on the campus of Catholic University of America routinely make the sign of the Cross "in the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and the Sanctifier...."

Adelle-Marie Stan is a "Ms." editor who belongs to a small parish in New Jersey. Special thanks to Linda Bennett for news resources.

"The Color Purple"

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Plenty. She had an anxiety dream that the set for the juke joint would look like a McDonald's. But when she got to the set, she found that the juke joint looked just right.

She worried about the power of the music—for the score Quincy Jones was writing encompassed African music, church music, jazz, and blues. Lionel Richie and Rod Temperton (who has written several of Michael Jackson's hits) were helping, as well as gospel singer Andrae Crouch; Tata Vega was dubbing the vocals of Shug Avery; blues artist Sonny Terry and big-band musician Eugene "Snookie" Young were scheduled to be heard on the track; Caiphus Semenya and Letta Mbulu were performing the African music. The richness of the score could sweep the story away. But Walker knew Spielberg and Jones by now—she knew that they "would not let such a thing happen, that they'd fight it out between them." And besides, she knew that Jones would not forget that his score—like the score of "Amadeus"—was the soul of the character, not the other way around.

"Celie is the blues," Jones told her. She trusted him.

When Reuben Cannon, the casting director (one of the few blacks in that business), presented the actors to her, they looked to her exactly like the characters in her book.

Inside the toiling movie, there was a kind of ensemble peace. But in the wide disgruntled world outside, somebody was asking, "Why couldn't they find a woman to direct, a woman to write? This is a woman's story, dammit!" And, "Why do they have to put a lesbian love affair in a black movie? It'll hurt the image of our people!" and "Who gave this white Jew with a background in kiddie flicks the right to mess with our story?! Why didn't Sidney Poitier direct this movie?!"

"These people bitch and moan that you never see a black face in the movies," growled Whoopi Goldberg, who plays Celie, "and as soon as there's a movie with a black cast that is not singin' and dancin', they bitch and moan about it. This is not a movie only about sexual relationships. [The film will probably have a PG-13 rating.] It happened that a woman awakened another woman to a new life. Then people are pissed because Spielberg directed it, which is to me very ridiculous. It's like saying if you're not a junkie, you can't tell anyone that heroin screws up your body. It's like my handicapped lady [a character in Whoopi's one-woman show on Broadway and on HBO this year]... I don't have to be handicapped to know how people treat handicapped people, I can see it! I can feel it! I am open to it!"

"I say to people, cool the fuck out, and see what this man does with the movie."

On the day Walker won the Pulitzer for *The Color Purple*, Whoopi Goldberg—then performing in small clubs in the San Francisco area—had bought the book. She was a performance artist. She had invented characters black and white, male and female: a junkie discovering Anne Frank, a Valley Girl getting an abortion, a disabled woman accepting love. Whoopi Goldberg wrote to Alice and said please let me play Celie.

Alice wrote back to this then fringy and unknown actor and said, "I know your work, of course; you're wonderful." And when Quincy asked Alice who should play Celie, she said Whoopi Goldberg.

For the role of Shug Avery, Whoopi Goldberg favored Tina Turner. "If I'm going to kiss a woman, let it be Tina," she told Gloria Steinem in New York. And Mayjes says he was swept away by the idea of Turner playing Shug. Walker simply says, "Steven and Quincy were trying hard to get the people together, they wanted to cast someone whom Whoopi felt she would like to work with, so they offered it to Tina."

Turner turned it down.

Too close to home, she said. The deep South, the bad old days, too close to home.

Beating around in the fringes where so many good black actors work, casting director Cannon got lots of ideas for Shug. Margaret Avery, who eventually got the part, says she was not one of them, but she begged him for a chance to read. The day before her screen test, she ran down Hollywood Boulevard looking for something Shug-ish to wear. "I found this red ostrich feather in a little porno place," she said. "I just prayed, let's hope this feather has been nowhere but on this rack."

There was talk of Lola Falana, Patti LaBelle. Guber made sounds about wanting to cast Diana Ross as Shug, which gave Alice Walker another anxiety attack.

But Spielberg gave Margaret Avery the role.

Quincy Jones was in Chicago and turned on the TV in his hotel room and saw a popular Chicago talk show whose host was a voluptuous rolling woman named Oprah Winfrey. She became Sofia, Harpo's wife, whose fighting spirit Celie envies, but finally admires.

Danny Glover came on board to play Mister.

In the novel, Mister is a heavy, mean and cold to Celie, humanized only by his love for Shug and for his son Harpo, who has a lot of woman-trouble. Danny Glover played a heavy once before—in

Peter Weir's "Witness" starring Harrison Ford. Glover had first made his mark on the screen as the fatherly Moze in Robert Benton's "Places in the Heart," and as a sharpshooting but good-guy-type outlaw in Lawrence Kasdan's "Silverado." Glover is as gentle as a great kind bear, not at all slick—sweetness and maybe the fear of God in his expressive eyes. The odds were that when they cast him, Quincy Jones and Steven Spielberg were playing a bit of their own tune on the character of Mister.

"Sure, Danny is a bastard as Mister," Jones said. "Drama is conflict. Not everything is nicey-nicey here. But maybe the men in the movie are a little more sympathetic than in the book."

Alice Walker had come through the movie, every step of the way, and she saw what was happening. "Danny is so wonderful in this," she said. "He was in almost every scene, in almost every shot, and sometimes I would worry that it was going to become his story—Mister's story, not Celie's. I think it's true that a feminist woman director would have made different choices in terms of how much of the woman's story there would be. If I had directed it, for instance, I would have placed much more emphasis on what happened between Shug and Celie after they went to Memphis together, whereas in this movie, there's no Memphis. What you have is Celie coming back changed. I think Susan Seidelman ["Desperately Seeking Susan"] or Lynne Littman ["Testament"] or Barbra Streisand ["Yentl"] or you or me or Gloria Steinem would have been much more interested in showing the development of Celie under Shug's loving attention in Memphis, and we would also have had fun showing this humongous house with the statues and all the 'women's culture.' But Steven, I think, was more interested in showing the transformation of Mister to Albert, as well as Celie's changes... I think you really understand Albert better in the movie than in the book. I may be totally surprised at how I feel when I see the film, but so far, I don't think it bothers me very much. When I realized how many ideas Steven has and how quickly he works, I understood that he would necessarily bring a lot of himself to how he manipulates the scenes.

"We may miss our favorite part," concludes Walker, "but what is there will be its own gift, and I hope people will be able to accept that in the spirit that it's given."

The reclusive novelist with anxiety dreams had been transformed into an artistic collaborator.

Quincy Jones had been on the gig



Mister's son Harpo (Willard Pugh) and Sofia (Oprah Winfrey) take their wedding vows.

longer than anybody. For him "The Color Purple" was a breakthrough to film producing. Just as he had done with Michael Jackson, he was bringing the black experience through the top to visibility and celebration, applying the hottest and most successful director in the business, applying a \$14 million budget.

"I don't know how to punt," he said. "I have to go for the ultimate. I have never seen a black dramatic film made with total quality from top to bottom that could stand up against any major picture. I wanted a great director, who had all the sensibilities in every aspect to make this a great film.... Who could handle the million decisions that it takes with skill and confidence? with the strong personal insight and directing skill? White, black, man, woman: these are the wrong considerations. They once asked Stravinsky whether he was thinking about the Acropolis when he wrote 'Apollo.' He said, 'I was thinking about violins.'

By September, the film had gone for editing to Michael Kahn (an Oscar-winner for "Raiders of the Lost Ark"), and Jones worked on the score. Alice Walker relaxed. Danny Glover went to Europe to promote "Silverado." Menno Meyjes went to New York to work with Malcolm McLaren on a production for the Public Theater.

Whoopi Goldberg acknowledged that in her career she had been "born with a silver spoon in my mouth," having been brought to Broadway for the first time by Mike Nichols and to the screen for the first time by Steven Spielberg.

But Whoopi Goldberg mentioned the critics a lot because she has been stung in her time by scathing reviews. "I can always go back to hundred-seat theaters," she said.

Some had said that Whoopi Goldberg had compromised her blackness with her pan-cultural name and had flown to success on the magic carpet of liberal guilt. But in her anxiety about how this movie would be received, she stuck steadfastly to her being as an actress and her belief in the universality of Walker's story.

"'The Color Purple' is not a movie about race," she said. "What happens to Celie is happening to women all over the world, of all races and backgrounds, that is the fact. This is a story about the trials of the human spirit."

As is his habit, the director kept his movie pretty much a secret. It was said in the industry that he is a control freak, and also that he had embarked on this particular journey in order finally to get himself an Academy Award.

But within the proud and upright partnership at the core of the film, no one forgot for a minute that Spielberg's fame rests on his uncanny ability to imagine that encounters between strangers could turn out to be filled with fun and love and self-discovery.

Susan Dworkin, a "Ms." contributing editor, is the author of "Making 'Tootsie,'" "Double DePalma" (both from Newmarket Press), and the novel "Desperately Seeking Susan" (based on the screenplay of Leona Barish; published by Harmony Books).

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Finding Celie's Voice

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 72

Shug and Natty Dread and a clutch of dreadlocked Rastas perhaps on the other, and only when Celie comes through those doors; when Celie comes in from the cold of repression, self-hatred, and denial, and only when Celie comes in from the cold—do I come in. And many of you as well. And when all of us and all of the old ones are hugged up inside this enormous warm room of a world we must build very quickly, really, or die of a too shallow mutual self-respect, you will see with me—through the happy spirits of our grandchildren—such joy as the planet has never seen.

And I can personally deliver the message that the old spirits are more alive today than anyone thought.

When I was a little girl, there was a song that was very popular on the gospel station of the radio. It was called "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" It is about how death breaks the circle of loved ones on earth, but how, in heaven, "in the sky, Lord, in the sky," this will not be the case. In heaven neither father nor mother will die. Nor little sister, brother, lover or husband or wife, either. Heaven, according to the song, is different from here.

It is a mournful song that was written specifically, I think, about the loss of the songwriter's mother, and it used to make me sad and fearful of losing my own. Over the years I have worried about losing not only my mother and other members of my family, but poets, singers, philosophers, prophets, political activists as well. And many of these we have all lost, sometimes to sickness, accident, or disease, sometimes to assassination. But I have found that where there is spiritual union with other people, the love one feels for them keeps the circle unbroken and the bond between us and them strong, whether they are dead or alive. Perhaps that is one of the manifestations of heaven on earth.

After I had finished *The Color Purple* and it was winning prizes and being attacked, I had several extraordinary dream-visits from people I knew before they died and from people who died before I was born, but whose names and sometimes partial histories I knew. This seemed logical and right. But then, at my most troubled, I started to dream of people I'd never heard of and never knew anything about, except, perhaps, in a general way. These people some-

times brought advice, always excellent and upbeat, sometimes just a hug. Once a dark, heavy-set woman who worked in the fields and had somehow lost the two middle fingers of her right hand took hold of my hand lovingly, called me "daughter," and commented supportively on my work. She was only one of a long line of ancestors who came to visit and take my hand that night, all apparently slaves, fieldworkers, and domestics, who seemed to care about and want to reassure me. I remembered her distinctly next morning because I could still feel her plump hand with its missing fingers gently but firmly holding my own.

Since I am not white and not a man and not really Western and not a psychiatrist, I get to keep these dreams for what they mean to me, and I can tell you that I wake up smiling, or crying happily, as the case may be. It seems very simple: because they know I love them and understand their language, the old ones speak to me. It feels too good to be true!

I wrote this poem the morning after my dream, which I feel was not so much my dream as ours, and which I feel would sustain me forever, though Mrs. Green were joined by millions and my book banned from the planet itself.

*The old ones
visit me
in dreams
to thank me for
The Color Purple;*

*They tell me
"Daughter, it's
the best
you've ever done."*

*I can't tell you
how many rough
old hands
I've shook.*

Since this dream I have come to believe that only if I am banned from the presence of the ancestors will I know true grief.

Alice Walker's latest poetry collection is "Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful" (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Her best-selling, prize-winning novel "The Color Purple" has become a movie. She and Robert Allen have founded Wild Trees Press (P.O. Box 378, Navarro, California 95463), which has published "A Piece of Mine," short stories by J. California Cooper, and "Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que," a novel by JoAnne Brasil.