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"Queer Hospitality and Resistance: Navigating Desire and Power in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and Walker's *The Color Purple*"

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The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Abstract

Hospitality, as a social and ethical concept, heavily influences the portrayal and negotiation of queer desire in American literature. This research explores how the works of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* portray queer female protagonists as they navigate the limits and opportunities of hospitality. The difference in literary eras between the two works will provide significant overlook on how hospitality has shaped the queer experience throughout the times and if any other external factors such as social, cultural, and political contexts have had any significant impact on the presentation of queer desire in American literature. In addition to this, comparing the two texts will help us identify the recurring patterns that queer individuals use to deal with the challenges and opportunities of hospitality throughout the course of American history and literature. This thesis navigates how hospitality in *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* isn't just about letting people in; it is also about breaking down unfair power structures, and this is showcased throughout the two works in the struggle of the main female characters in striking a balance between the hope of finding accepting places and the pressure of society's rules.

Keywords: Queer Theory, Hospitality, Queer Desire, Edith Wharton, Alice Walker, Historical Context, Feminist Perspectives, Intersectionality, American Literature, Comparative Literature.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background on hospitality as a Social and Ethical Concept

Both the custom of receiving and entertaining guests as well as the concept of hospitality, which largely revolves around the connection between a host and a guest, are deeply rooted in human history and culture. The concept of hospitality includes additional social, ethical, and sometimes even political aspects in addition to manners and civility, in the sense that "Hospitality has turned from a discourse of generosity into a discourse of spatiality and (dis)placement, from an interpersonal moral act into a national political issue" (Manzanas Calvo and Benito Sanchez 19). In his extensive investigation into the notion of hospitality, Jacques Derrida maintained that there are two kinds of hospitality: unconditional and conditional. In "Of Hospitality," Derrida argues that one should extend hospitality to guests without any conditions and without any expectations of reciprocation (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 25). This concept calls to question the fundamentals of relationships and moral duties, as well as the traditional definition of hospitality.

Throughout history, hospitality has served as a social lubricant, promoting the development of relationships and preserving social bonds. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss noted in his groundbreaking work *The Gift* that complex reciprocity and social responsibility systems are frequently a part of hospitality customs. According to Mauss, "Nobody is free to refuse the present that is offered. Everyone, men and women, tries to… outdo one another in generosity. A kind of rivalry existed to see who could give the greatest number of objects of the greatest value" (Mauss 25).

Only by analyzing hospitality from a literary and cultural studies perspective will it be possible to understand how queer people and other oppressed groups in general navigate society norms and expectations. In this setting, hospitality provides a filter through which we can examine questions of norms, authority, and social standing. Literary historian Mireille Rosello indicates that hospitality among internment groups entails living in a way that is complex and intriguing

full of conditions of contrasts, since to Rosello, "Hospitality…creates situations in which one party must-second guess the other's desire or needs… creating moments of malaise and discomfort, as well as moments of pleasure and joy" (Rosello 183).

While providing hospitality, the host has moral duties. Philosopher Emannuel Levinas contends that when two people meet in person, an ethical response is always required and that one has an obligation and responsibility towards the Other (Levinas 82). The comprehension and implementation of hospitality concepts rely heavily on this notion of moral obligation.

The experiences of queer people in society can be greatly impacted by the absence of hospitality, even within oneself. This can have an impact on their sense of safety, identity development, and sense of belonging in typically highly unwelcoming settings Sara Ahmed, a queer theorist, notes that societies built around traditional heterosexual ideals can make it difficult for queer people to find places that are supportive of them. Queer to Ahmed is a concept that describes "a sexual as well as political orientation that to lose sight of the sexual specificity of queer would also be to overlook how compulsory heterosexuality shapes what coheres as given and the effects of this coherence on those who refuse to follow this line" (Ahmed 565).

In conclusion, understanding the ethical and societal background of the concept of hospitality provides a valuable foundation for examining literary works that tackle these issues, particularly those that revolve around the notion of marginalized experiences and identity formation, like *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* .By linking these histories to the literary works' exploration of queer bodies, we are able to observe how the protagonists navigate social expectations, challenge norms, and fight for acceptance within a limited community.

1.2. Brief Overview of *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple*

The Gilded Age, a period marked by economic expansion, political corruption, and excessive luxury, saw the emergence of socially and politically critical novels like *The House of Mirth*. Published in 1905, this novel offers a scathing critique of New York's upper-class society during

that period. The protagonist of the book, Lily Bart, is a young lady who had to navigate the complicated social environment of the upper class. The focus of the novel is on the unjust societal structures and expectations that many members of marginalized communities, especially women, are subjected to. The novel also explores the topics of social belonging and the conflict between a person's free choice and society norms. The novel's central theme is hospitality, as the protagonist, Lilly, is forced to move between different social circles in search of peace. She frequently depends on the hospitality of others to survive and to establish a social status in the community, which is not very accepting of non-normative identities and desires. Examining Lily's attempts to maintain a positive reputation within her community and her management of complex relationships with other women from a queer perspective offers greater insights into the topic of analysis. Lily's queer navigation of her circumstances provides a glimpse into the difficulties faced by people who don't fit into traditional societal norms (Fetterley 235).

The Color Purple is a poignant epistolary, that follows the life story of Celie, a queer African American woman, who faces immense hardships of rural Georgia during the mid-20th century South. Her journey is themed with struggle of abuse, oppression, racism and exclusive societal expectations. Ultimately, Celie is rewarded with a supportive environment and finding love that led to more self-love and empowerment.

In contrast to *The House of Mirth*, the protagonist of *The Color Purple* is openly queer and symbolizes queer yearning. We may see this queer yearning in the relationship between Shug Avery and Celie. Along with other themes like the ongoing search for a safe and nurturing space in a hostile world, this relationship, which is primarily responsible for the novel's plot, is peppered with a lot of sexual awakening and female bonding (Smith 167). *The Color Purple* questions traditional ideas of family, community, and belonging. Furthermore, hospitality is essential to the plot of the book. This is demonstrated by Celie, the protagonist, as she moves from the hostile household of her abusive husband to an actual welcoming space particularly in her relationships

with Shug and the small group of women she encountered (Proudfit 22). The novel offers a fresh perspective on hospitality as it is now understood, expanding its influence beyond traditional social institutions. This is due to the point of view from which the topic is approached in the work. Lily's battle sheds light on how marginalized groups and individuals, particularly queer women of color, make their own safe havens of love and acceptance to escape an oppressive, unfriendly, and judgmental society.

It's a terrific opportunity to examine the relationship between hospitality and queer desire by comprehending both works and navigating the problems of each character in negotiating social expectations, finding belonging, and questioning conventional norms. Despite their disparate historical and cultural backgrounds, both novels provide a historical insight that primarily captures the social milieus and eras in which they are set.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Queer Theory and its intersection with Hospitality

Understanding the experiences of the queer female protagonists in these literary works requires that we approach hospitality as a complex concept that goes beyond the traditional act of welcoming the Other. This includes issues of power dynamics, identity, and creating welcoming spaces in typically unwelcoming environments. Through examining the literary notion of hospitality from a modern perspective, we can also explore the ways in which the central characters endeavor to establish hospitable settings within occasionally adversarial societies. This literary approach to defining and evaluating hospitality helps reveal the common issues these characters face and offers a comprehensive examination of how queer encounters have changed over time and throughout literary periods. This approach enables us to examine how hospitality transcends its basic function and turns into a tool for storytelling that advances the plot. We can gain insight into society, politics, and ethics by studying the way characters interact with the outside world through hospitality exchanges (Heffernan 3; Rosello 7).

Queer theory is a critical perspective that challenges traditional ideas about gender, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships. But when the latter meets with hospitality, the study of the former becomes more malleable, offering more chances to look at power dynamics, social connections, and places of belonging. Numerous scholars from diverse fields have investigated queerness and the concept of "queer hospitality." According to leading expert on queer theory Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, being queer is "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" (Sedgwick 8). It is possible to extend this point of view to hospitality in a way that suggests queer hospitality may always require the establishment of warm spaces that celebrate these differences and ambiguity.

2.2. Historical context of Queer Experiences in American literature

Queer experiences have not long been openly discussed in American literature, even though it was largely a convoluted and oftentimes coded past. *The House of Mirth* was published in the early 1900s, a time when discussing openly queer issues was frowned upon. However, other commentators emphasized the subtextual queer elements present in many literary works from that era. Among them is Terry Castle, who is acknowledged as the originator of the literary term "apparitional lesbian," which characterizes a presence that often stays out of sight (Castle 60). Midway through the 20th century, there was a noticeable change in the prevalence of explicit queer content in literary works. Works like James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948) raised awareness of queer themes in American literature. Despite their typically negative outcomes, which frequently result in social alienation (Summers 149), pulp fiction also began to appear around this time, and while it featured lesbian characters, it did so in an excessive and sensationalized way. Nevertheless, it was a positive change because it gave queer characters more attention and exposed them to the public (Keller 385).

The Stonewall riots of 1969 brought about a radical shift in how LGBT+ persons were portrayed in American literature. Because of the riots in the 1970s and 1980s, queer representations in literature grew more open and affirming. Works such as Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) contain more explicitly queer depictions, especially when it comes to LGBT characters and relationships.

The AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s was a major contributing factor to the creation of queer existence in American literature as well as queer literature. Tony Kushner's 1991 work *Angels in America* captures the era's intense interest in LGBT experiences. Themes of grief, community resiliency, and social activity are prevalent in works during this era (Roman 201).

Today's queer fiction in contemporary American literature have gotten more diversified and delves deeper into queer topics. Transgender experiences and queer persons of color have

received significant attention. The narrative has evolved beyond merely retelling coming-out stories to include accounts of other aspects of queer life (Garland-Thomson 25).

2.3. Queer Heterosexuality and Gender Nonconformity

Despite some interpretations of the subtle queer connections, *The House of Mirth* does not explicitly convey any same-sex yearning. One might examine Lily Bart's experience through a queer perspective. One could refer to Lily's battle with conforming to gender roles and society norms as queer heterosexuality. According to academics Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, the term emphasizes the non-binary nature of heterosexual identities as well as the volatility of their institutions. As Lily works through this framework and negotiates the difficulties of conventional expectations, she is seen as a queer figure in a heteronormative setting (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 190).

The notion of heteronormativity, which was introduced by Michael Warner, enables us to comprehend the advantages heterosexual couples have from long-standing social systems (Berlant and Warner 548). Lily's actions, such as her refusal to get married and her effort to find a place in the heteronormative framework that suits her own preferences, are examples of her opposition to heteronormativity. Lily tries to follow the conventional route of marriage and social standing, but because of her own preferences, she also encounters constraints and inconsistencies of the heteronormative system.

The concept of the "epistemology of the closet," first introduced by Eve Kosofky Sedgwick in relation to homosexuality, can be expanded to comprehend Lily's need to strike a balance between her need for concealment and her need for authenticity to avoid societal consequences. As Sedgwick contends: “it concomitantly makes available new possibilities for the camouflage and concealment, or the very selective or pointed display, of proscribe or resisted erotic relation and avowal through chains of vicariation –through the mechanisms that, I argue, cluster under the stigmatizing name ‘sentimentality’.” (Sedgwick 159).

Lily's social battle to fit in takes on new significance when analyzed through a queer perspective; queerness may coexist with seemingly heterosexual relationships. In terms of her relationship to cultural norms that are articulated in certain expectations, Lily may pass for queer even though she may not be seen as queer in terms of sexual orientation.

3. Methodology

This thesis will employ a qualitative research design, focusing on the incorporation of close readings and employing critical discourse analysis to discuss the topic of queer desires and expression in Edith's Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and Alice Walker's *The Color purple*. This thesis will be informed by be queer theory, which questions traditional societal norms, and ancient beliefs about sexuality and gender. Emphasizing the diversity of human nature and sexuality.

The primary texts selected to conduct this research were considered relevant due to their exploration of the issue of queer desire and its negotiation within different social and historical contexts. As Catherine Belsey argues, close readings involve deep analysis of a text to understand its possible meanings and how it functions. According to Belsey, the importance of close readings lies in the fact that, "Any specific textual analysis is made at a particular historical moment and from within a specific culture. It that sense, the analysis is not exhaustive: it does not embrace all the possible readings, past and future" (Belsey 160).

This study uses a comparative approach, that aligns with the basics of comparative literature that is analyzing texts from different periods and genres (Bassnett 1). The primary texts analyzed in this study are *The House of Mirth*, and *The Color Purple*. In addition to these primary texts, we will use secondary sources to further elaborate on the literary criticism of the primary texts, put the texts in their historical contexts, and explain the theoretical frameworks of the work and how it is relevant to the primary texts.

This study relies on several theoretical frameworks. First, Hospitality theory, with the use of works of the likes of Jacques Derrida and Mireille Rosello to analyze how hospitality functions in the novels. Second, Queer theory, which is a tool to analyze non-normative identities and desires, it will be analyzed with works from theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofky Sedgwick. This study will also imply feminist perspectives on the issues of queer experiences and how the female experience was depicted in both novels, such works include studies from the likes

of bell hooks and Barbara Smith. The study will also offer a historical contextualization of both *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* as it is important for the analysis to put the texts in their respective time periods.

This approach evidently has visible constraints. Interpretation is always contextual as it often comes from a particular perspective (Frow 23). The outcomes of this research relatively and certainly will be influenced by the standpoint of the researcher and the framework utilized for the analysis. Moreover, because of the qualitative nature of the analysis of *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple*, which only includes these two works, this limited range of analysis makes the results of this research not widely applicable to all American literature works from these periods.

4. Analysis of *The House of Mirth*

4.1. Social Expectations and The Commodification of Relationships in early 20th century Society

Strict societal norms and expectations marked the early 20th century, commonly known as the progressive era, making it challenging to exhibit any kind of diversity or change. During this time, there was essentially no such thing as unusual desires of any kind, including queer desires, because any attempt to express them was met with rejection, censure, and public hostility.

The early 20th century was characterized by profound social shifts in American society, rapid industrialization, and urbanization. Urban areas like New York City saw the imposition of new, strict social hierarchies because of the emergence of the new affluent class. This age was noted for how affluent individuals use their wealth to flaunt their social status and impress others. This display of wealth is eloquently demonstrated in *The House of Mirth*, where characters plan lavish parties or splurge on pricey mansions and clothes to outdo one another in a sort of bragging. This is consistent with the idea of "conspicuous consumption," which was first used by Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Veblen argues that wealth bring social status as, “The possession of wealth, which was at the outset valued simply as an evidence of efficiency, becomes, in popular apprehension, itself a meritorious act. Wealth is now itself intrinsically honorable and confers honor on its possessor.” (Veblen 15).

Marriage was seen as an economic arrangement and a means of preserving economic stability in the strict society of *The House of Mirth*. At the time, marriage determined a woman's social and financial standing, and obtaining a wealthy husband increased her prospects of achieving a respectable social standing. Historian Nancy F. Cott notes that Lily Bart's struggles demonstrate how a woman's position is directly related to her chances of getting married (Cott 156). As Lily learned, “There is nothing society resents so much as having given its protection to those who have not know how to profit by it: it is for having betrayed its connivance that the body social

punishes the offender who is found out." (Wharton 111).

Edith Wharton criticizes the world of the upper class, to which she belongs, for being predicated solely on material wealth and social status. Wharton draws attention to the manners of the time that shaped class distinctions, highlighting how hospitality turned into a commodity and a means of displaying and upholding social standing (Hemphill 145).

A major theme of the novel is the objectification of women's bodies and social personas, which draws attention to how little social and economic prospects there are for women in the conservative society of New York. This disparity is clear in Wharton's observation that "a girl must, a man may if he chooses" (Wharton 12). Concerns about the progressive period are becoming more and more evident in Edith's criticisms of high society. The people of the time were deeply invested in issues such as the unfairness of capitalism and the widening wealth divide (Hofstadter 5).

By setting the novel in its historical perspective, we can better understand the issues posed by the societal mores of the time and appreciate how progressive the work was in relation to other works of the same period, especially in regard to its portrayal of female characters.

4.2. The Aesthetics of Social Performance and Self-commodification

In *The House of Mirth,* Lily Bart's ability to find a balance between societal rules and hospitality is critical to the plot. Lily had little alternative but to seek and accept the hospitality of others in order to maintain her status as a single woman in affluent New York society throughout the early twentieth century.

According to Wharton, Lily is a socially conscious person who recognizes that not all kind deeds she experiences are real or driven by love. Hospitality often means paying back favors and considering other people's interests. "But her enjoyment of her surroundings was, indeed, tinged by the unpleasant consideration that she was accepting the hospitality and courting the approval of people she had disdained under other conditions" (Wharton 249) is a clear example

of Lily's internal conflict in the novel, as she finds herself caught in a web of social obligations.

Like a commodity being promoted, Lily realizes she needs to market herself to draw attention and make people want to be associated with her (Wolff 322). The experience of Bart can be interpreted from the perspective of "cultural capital," as defined by Pierre Bourdieu. In order to preserve her social standing, she must use her physical attractiveness and social graces as forms of cultural capital with others around her. According to Wai Chee Dimock, Lily's body becomes the hub where aesthetic and economic values converge (Dimock 738).

The scene when Lily pretends to be a painting is a perfect example of how social life has become more artistic in nature. The tableau vivant serves as an excellent illustration of how artificial the social setting in New York's strict society. Wharton describes how “TABLEAUX VIVANTS depend for their effect not only on the happy disposal of lights and the delusive interposition of layers of gauze, but on a corresponding adjustment of the mental vision (Wharton 142). Judith Fryer claims that as the tableau vivant presents social life in New York's upper society as a staged show in which each character plays a part that satisfies social expectations, it serves as a metaphor for the novel's approach to art (Fryer 78).

Lily finds herself in a complex social circle, a swirl pool, and a multifaceted gesture of hospitality. When Lily is asked to attend parties or other social gatherings, she must graciously accept and value the generosity she receives from her group, but she also feels as like she is being objectified. She understands that the hosts are entertaining her in order to elevate their social standing. Lily’s awareness is highlighted by Wharton, noting that: “Differences of personality were merged in a warm atmosphere of praise, in which her beauty expanded like a flower in sunlight, and if Selden had approached a moment of two sooner, he would have seen her turning on Ned Van Alstyne and George Dorset the look he had dreamed of capturing for himself” (Wharton 220). Lily acknowledges the shallow nature of the admiration she receives which is mostly based on objectification.

The novel also explores the idea that a guest's hospitality might be used as a weapon against them. Emily Orland contends that Wharton's story in the book "demonstrates how women can use hospitality as a means of power" (Orlando 78). This is demonstrated in the book by Bertha Dorset, who abuses her position of authority and hostess duties to harm Lily's reputation and control social circumstances in her community. Wharton details that “Lily knew that Rosedale had overstated neither the difficulty of her own position nor the completeness of the vindication he offered once Bertha’s match in material resources, her superior gifts would make it easy for her to dominate her adversary” (Wharton 278).

Wharton depicts Lily as having never had a house she could call home. Lily kept moving to different borrowed locations, giving the impression that she was destitute (Showalter 135). Lily was always reliant on other people's kindness to let her stay, which made her more vulnerable to their abuse and depending on their decision as to whether or not to accept her, since for Lily “it was easy enough to despise the world, but decidedly difficult to find any other habitable region” (Wharton 278). The concept of "Home" is helpful as it clears how Lily handles this unfair struggle. As long as Lily cannot find her home, her social circle will continue to treat her like an object. It's never easy to go to Lily's house.

Wharton uses Lily as an example to criticize society's limited alternatives for women in terms of lifestyle choices, as well as the manner in which these possibilities are restricted. The emphasis on style and aesthetics in *The House of Mirth* broadens our understanding of hospitality as an act that combines content and flare.

4.3. Power Dynamics and Their Influence on Queer Experiences

The narrative of *The House of Mirth* illustrates how the upper class of New York society controls the lives of people who defy societal conventions. The purpose of this story is to examine the experiences of persons who are viewed as outsiders and the ways in which power structures in particular societies impact individual social life. The severe portrayal of upper-class New York

society in the novel, along with its rigid gender norms, is consistent with Judith Butler's theory that gender is a performative act in which characters, such as Lily, must conform to rules and expectations to negotiate their place in society (Butler 25). Furthermore, although marriage would provide Lily with financial stability, Lori Merish refers to Lily's willingness to not give up her independence decision as a "rejection of compulsory heterosexuality". This defiance of social pressure on women to marry can be understood as a form of queer resistance (Merish 332). Moreover, Sharon Marcus refers to Lily's relationships with women like Judy Trenor and Gerty Farish as being "between women," a concept wherein strong female bonds may be seen as subtly hinting at queer desire (Marcus 113). Furthermore, the way in which gossip and social monitoring are portrayed in the novel is connected to the queer experience of being "outed" to the public. As demonstrated by Bertha Dorset's character, who used social perception manipulation to exclude Lily for whom “it was growing clear…that Bertha was pursuing an object, following a line she had marked out for herself” (Wharton 219). Lily's descent from affluent, class-obsessed high society is reminiscent of queer experiences in the sense that it highlights the marginalization that inevitably results in social isolation. This demonstrates how social identity is a fluid and unstable concept, necessitating ongoing negotiations about one's place in society. According to the novel, social events served as both a venue for networking and a location to either uphold or subvert societal standards. These social spaces can be compared to queer spaces, where resistance to heteronormative roles and norms and conformity interact. Ultimately, Lily's terrible ending offers a lesson or reflection on the "lethal elasticity of heteronormative culture," as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick may put it, which is the tragic outcome that can result from disobeying social standards.

5. Analysis of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

5.1. Representation of Queer desire in mid-20th century African American context

In the middle of the 20th century, queer impulses were still illegal and unfamiliar to others. Most queer beliefs were suppressed, and instead of being discussed or expressed in public, people choose to keep them private.

Even if queer views were still deemed taboo at the time, the United States made significant changes. The civil rights movement, which fought for equal rights for black people, gained traction, as did the Gay Liberation Movement, which advocates for equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. These developments, along with shifting political and humanitarian movements, made it more difficult for writers to explore the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality. As attention on these under-represented groups has grown, it has become necessary to delicately touch these subjects to prevent censure while faithfully capturing the experiences of their characters.

African Americans who identify as queer experience double marginalization. In *Aberrations in Black*, Roderick A. Ferguson makes the case that homosexuality has been exploited by American groups to further stigmatize and dehumanize their members. According to Ferguson, discussions about queer sexuality in African American contexts were frequently framed from a racial politics perspective. Ferguson argues that "African American culture could be deemed excessive and pathological through the lens of queer sexuality" (Ferguson 20). In analyzing African American culture, society would exploit the issue of queer desires as a means of casting further blame on them, portraying them as aberrant or troublesome, therefore exacerbating their marginalization.

Queer aspirations frequently interacted with family, social justice, and community themes in American literature. Rather than merely adhering to the conventional definitions of what it means to be queer, African American writers developed their own distinctive approaches to exploring the idea of queer sexuality (Somerville 187). James Baldwin's work *Another country*,

which narrates the love journey of two persons of various racial and sexual orientations, is a good illustration of this shift, demonstrating the connections between these concepts and how each influences the others.

Discussing the idea of "blues aesthetic" will expand the framework that we can use to comprehend queer portrayals in African American literature. According to Angela Davis, blues literature and music gave queer and heterosexual people a forum to talk about and investigate gender identities and sexualities that were taboo and unaccepted (Davis 3). This idea is applied in *The Color Purple*, where the writer influenced the story with blues cultural aspects including music, themes of longing and loss, and language. With these components that facilitate the exploration and debate of non-accepted sexualities and identities, *The Color Purple* can also be understood as a coded space for the expression of queer experiences.

5.2. The Protagonist's Journey Through Hostile and Hospitable Environments

Celie, the protagonist of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, suffers enormously in a convoluted and chaotic society with severe societal standards. Initially, Celie is regularly split between hostile environments that do not correspond with her objectives and rare instances of genuine welcome. Celie's journey begins in a difficult household; her first unpleasant contact could have been with Mr. _____, as she describes: "he beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them" (Walker 18). Celie's horrible marriage experience implanted in her a lot of incorrect assumptions and views about hospitality, notably about women's duties in society, particularly after marriage, and about women's sexuality, which is commonly overlooked. As Celie journeys deeper, she realizes that not everyone is as zealous and inhospitable as her husband. Celie found much comfort and optimism in Sister Nettie's letters, as well as a sense of kinship in her interactions with people like Shug Avery, whose presence was very nurturing. These individuals who are mostly females challenged Celie to reassess her preconceived beliefs about hospitality, and they also showed her that not all places are the same as the harsh realities she had faced in the

past, as Celie herself testifies: “I don’t even look at mens. That’s the truth, I look at women, tho, cause I’m not scared of them” (Walker 7). Shug signified Celie's departure from traditional societal conventions and expectations around love, relationships, and gender roles. Shug had a major impact on Celie's personal development. Their romantic connection shows an unexpected and undesired gay longing. Shug and Celie's connection provided Celie the confidence to investigate her own sexuality and grow as a person. As Celie expresses: “Lord, I want to go so bad. Not to dance. Not to drink. Not to play card. Not even to hear Shug Avery sing. I just be thankful to lay eyes on her” (Walker 19). Celie has found a base to build on as she navigates her new relationship with Shug, transitioning from a posture of vulnerability to strength and empowerment. Shug even goes so far as to say, "Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church?" in an attempt to rectify Celie's erroneous perspective of God and replace it with newfound faith in herself. Celie then says, "I never did". Shug then tells Celie that "people come to church to share God, not find God." (Walker 116). Celie and Shug build their own safe haven, which she refers to as both her physical and mental home. Celie's transformation altered her personality, allowing her to extend hospitality and forgive people who had wronged her in the past. This change is visibly reflected when Celie joyfully claims, “Oh, Nettie, us have a house! A house big enough for us and our children, for your husband and Shug. Now you can come home cause you have a home to come to!” (Walker 148). This can be regarded as a fundamental rewriting of the conceptions of hospitality and social expectations. Celie's transformation from a helpless victim to a strong, capable person is proof of the effectiveness of hospitality as a form of resistance. Her capacity to prioritize creating safe spaces for herself and other individuals who had similar experiences in a society that actively works to suppress variety and change is a powerful example of how hospitality can support the development of a sense of agency and belonging.

5.3. Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in relation to Hospitality

Celie's journey in *The Color Purple* exemplifies the complexity of race, gender, and sexuality as seen through the perspective of hospitality. The novel illustrates how these ideas interact with one another and how closely the lives of the characters and their experiences tie them together. Walker illustrates how hospitality may be given and received based on societal structures and power dynamics, as well as how much of an impact they have on the lives of Black women, through Celie's experience.

When it comes to the Celie in *The Color Purple* receiving hospitality, race plays a significant role. In the racially segregated, white-majority South in the early 20th century, African Americans like Celie face an antagonistic public sphere. When attempting to establish safe havens where the community may survive and feel like it belongs, black people are forced by this rejection to look for hospitality in other places, even their own. Walker strives to emphasize the value of communities banding together to combat institutional racism throughout the book, and one of his main goals is to foster a sense of communal solidarity. The ability of the community and family network to help and protect those in need, who are frequently disregarded, demonstrates the significance of these networks (Collins 100).

In *The Color Purple*, the intersections of race and gender make the characters' surroundings more hostile, particularly for Celie. The patriarchal systems that society imposed on women at the time supported her husband's acts, and for her, domestic spaces, her previous household with her abusive husband, which should have been a haven became a source of suffering and daily abuse. However, Celie's close bonds with other women, such as Shug and Sofia, exposed her to different interpretations of femininity and hospitality. Celie's connections with these women and their joint efforts to establish safe spaces specifically for women pose a challenge to the inequitable patriarchal nature of society.

The overlapping experiences of hospitality in *The Color Purple* become even more complex when one considers sexuality. While Celie saw her relationship with Shug as a means of overcoming her ordeal on a physical and mental level, society saw it as a threat to heterosexual norms (Walker 118–125). Walker emphasizes how Shug and Celie's close bond can provide a haven for queer people in a world that is notoriously hostile to them. The depiction of queer desires in the novel serves as a refuge that Celie and most women often endure in heterosexual relationships (Jenkins 982).

Shug Avery, the character who Walker uses in *The Color Purple* to represent intersectionality and hospitality, is an example of a radical kind of hospitality that welcomes outsiders excluded by society. Celie looks forward to Shug as a Black woman who openly questions gender roles and society conventions, helping her on her path to self-acceptance and personal development as she constantly reminds Celie of her true value and purpose: “Shug say, you not my maid. I didn’t bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet” (Walker 128). Celie's journey towards owning her identity serves as evidence that a more empowered existence can result from accepting one's individuality. Shug is a representation of a brand-new hospitality model that is targeted at and developed by underrepresented communities.

Crucially, *The Color Purple* criticizes the exclusion of some members of society from hospitality because of the intersections of their identities. For example, Sofia's determination to defy gender norms and racism brought her serious legal consequences from white authorities, as Celie explains: “It was sofia you saw working as the mayor’s maid. The woman you saw carrying the white woman’s packages that day in town. Sofia Mr.____’s son Harpo’s wife. Polices lock her up for sassing the mayor’s wife and hitting the mayor back” (Walker 119). This incident serves as more evidence of the potentially harmful effects of resisting marginalization as someone who is already marginalized. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, which

combines various social categories to create a singular experience of oppression, Sofia's experiences and those of the other women in the book can be understood as a type of overlapping forms of discrimination based on their multiple and unaccepted identities (Crenshaw 1241–1245).

In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, hospitality is shown as a complex and multifaceted idea. On the one hand, it can be used as a weapon of tyranny and to further impose the generally unfair societal norms. However, hospitality can also be a source of hope, as marginalized communities can unite to build their own loving, supportive, safe place.

6. Comparative Analysis

6.1. Similarities and Differences in the Protagonists' Strategies for Negotiation

The characters of *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* both encounter neglect, but they also adopt comparable coping mechanisms to manage their queer identities in their prejudiced social circles. Lily Bart and Celie both turn to following societal norms in an effort to survive. At first, they both repress their own wants in order to conform to societal norms and fit into their social group (Wharton 44-50; Walker 1-50). However, Celie, for instance, is able to break free from the social conventions that held her captive and finds a more comfortable environment where she is surrounded by individuals who have similar experiences. In Lily's instance, she is well aware of how to blend in with her group by using her charm and attractiveness to control those around her. However, by putting her own needs and desires aside in order to fit in, Lily has put herself in a cage. Lily's terrible ending stems from her failed attempt to strike a balance between her personal goals and what society expects her to deliver in order to fit in (Wharton 256-260). Although Lily and Celie both attempted to connect with others in order to find support and survive, their paths to connecting have been very different. Lily attempted to get approval from high class pals, but most, if not all, of these connections were shallow and never should have been sincere. On the one hand, Lily struggles to form genuine connections because there is a lot of pressure to fit in with her group. On the other hand, Celie has been successful in establishing sincere and solid bonds with other women, particularly with Shug Avery (Walker 118-125). Unlike Lily, Celie has benefited from these relationships by being able to challenge unjust societal norms and grow as a person. Celie now finds strength and empowerment in her friends and lover (Wharton; 147-150; Walker 280-288).

Eve Kosofky Sedgwick refers to "closetedness" as a way to help explain how Lily and Celie have handled their problems. It is evident that the two protagonists have employed techniques that have produced different results. Lily is the type of person who keeps their genuine desires to

herself; she lives in a "glass closet," whereby everyone around her can see that she is concealing something, but she never talks or acknowledges her sentiments honestly, even though her actions usually make it clear what her true intentions are. Celie, on the other hand, is very vocal and accepting of her peculiarities. Celie has evolved into a threat to her society's established conventions (Sedgwick 67-90).

6.2. The Impact of Social, Cultural and Political contexts on Queer desire and Hospitality

The House of Mirth and *The Color Purple* are two excellent examples of the significant and intricate influence that social, cultural, and political contexts have on queer desire and hospitality-giving. *The House of Mirth* tells the story of the strict rules that individuals, particularly women, had to live by during the Gilded Age in New York. Women's roles were limited to marriage and procreation; they could not choose an alternative path that could lead to serious repercussions. For this reason, Lily and other female and queer characters had to follow the rules and participate in the societal game to preserve their social standing (Wharton 256–260). *The House of Mirth* serves as an excellent illustration of how welcoming environments can turn into oppressive spaces with extreme pressure. Individuals who don't fit in with society must always be conscious of their surroundings and behave differently to avoid being shunned or penalized. Events like parties and other types of social gatherings became to Lily a source of anxiety because of the ongoing temptation and pressure to conform to avoid judgments. The setting in *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* is completely different. People like Celie, a black queer woman, were not protected or accepted in this rural South setting. In addition to racism and gender inequality, queer people of color also experienced homophobia and despite the hurdles they faced at the time, *The Color Purple* demonstrated that there is hope in the community and that, if a solution isn't already in place, it can be developed mainly in the form of safe spaces established across communities (Walker 118–125). It is important to take into consideration that during that period of time, various rights-based initiatives arise, such as civil rights and women's movements, allowing more

people to live in a better future where they will feel safe and welcome to be themselves, including persons of diverse sexualities (Walker 280-288). The Wharton era had unusual social and political settings that made expressing anything different a risky behavior, prompting people to be extremely cautious about how they act in public and communicate their genuine desires. In contrast, Walker's time, the 1960s and 1970s, saw social and political upheaval that gave individuals greater freedom to express themselves, particularly those of color who experienced systemic discrimination. And even though there were still difficulties, society at the time was becoming more conscious and accepting of difference. This demonstrates how queer people's life and their experiences with love, acceptance, and relationships may be greatly influenced by the larger society backdrop (Ferguson 110).

7. Recurring Patterns in Queer Navigation of Hospitality

7.1. Strategies for Finding Accepting Spaces

Despite the disparate historical and cultural settings of the works. The characters in both pieces used similar coping mechanisms to locate welcoming environments. To discover safe havens within their oppressive society, Lily and Celie used a combination of keen observation, selective disclosure, and building alternative groups. In the strict upper-class society of New York, Lily frequently uses her social awareness to find possible allies who can help her feel more secure in the community. Lily finds conformity in the company of individuals such as Gerty Farish, with whom she had a few intimate moments that may have contained a touch of queer overtones (Wharton 147–150). In the midst of her social and emotional isolation, Lily finds herself "utterly alone except for Gerty Farish" (Wharton 244), with Gerty serving as a symbol of the only relationships that will last for Lily. Lily formed private ties with those she felt most comfortable around while maintaining a dishonest public image of belonging to her social group. She used this strategy to withstand the pressure from her social circle. Celie in *The Color Purple* employs comparable techniques to get by in her harsh and repressive environment. She uses her keen observational abilities to gauge people's intentions and determine whether they are suitable to be a source of acceptance for her. Shug's introduction to Celie to environments where her queer impulses can be freely expressed has made their relationship vital (Walker 118–125).

Both Lily and Celie search out marginalized spaces, spaces where they feel more at ease being who they are, which are typically found on the periphery of society where societal rules are less strictly enforced. For Lily, this location represented the somewhat unusual world of writers and artists. Celie sees the blues music genre and Shug Avery as places where conventional notions of love and sexuality are not idealized. These spaces are vital for people who feel different because they provide them the freedom to express themselves without fear of judgement, which helps them build their identity and self-expression (Muñoz 31).

Both characters employ the crucial tactic of creating chosen families. Through their bonds, Celie and Lily can discover acceptance. It is less evident in *The House of Mirth* because Lily is a more solitary character but still tries to forge closer bonds with people she views as allies. In *The Color Purple*, the creation of chosen families is more overt, with Celie being more willing to form a chosen family with other women who choose to become a source of strength together. Lily still finds room for people who make her feel different from the rest of her surroundings, despite the fact that social pressures frequently ended her friendships. To varying degrees, both characters highlight the value of interpersonal relationships and the ability of select families to foster an environment that is more accepting of individuality.

Private and domestic spaces are crucial because they serve as safe havens for queer expression, which is another crucial component of the protagonist's tactics for navigating the confluence of their queer desires and selves with hospitality. Time spent in close female companionship occurs at *The House of Mirth*, frequently in private and behind closed doors, away from prying eyes (Wharton 147-150). This idea is clearly established in *The Color Purple* because Celie succeeds in making her house a place where people may welcome her with open arms, feel free to express their queerness, and accept change, what Shug describes as a place where "Everything want to be loved. Us sing and dance and holler, just trying to be loved" (Walker 280–288).

Coded language and behavior are another obvious aspect of the characters' tactics. Because of the historical setting of that era, which resulted in a more rigid society about what may be said or done, the codes in *The House of Mirth* are more subtle and hidden. Though more overtly, *The Color Purple* is another example of this. Characters frequently use mutual understanding and shared experiences to communicate without explicitly saying things. The notion of coded language and behavior is historically validated by study on queer people, which demonstrates that people evolved unique communication strategies to establish a feeling of community (Chauncey

187-189).

It appears that the two main female characters in the novels take advantage of the social norm that accepts intimate female friendships to forge closer bonds with one another. The characters exploit the fact that that women can be quite near to one another without it being deemed improper. This cover allowed for stronger emotional bonds to form between them that otherwise would not have been conceivable if they had been honest about it or if it was between two men. Many researchers have suggested the fact that many queer and atypical relationships have historically been disguised as standard friendships, a concept Sharon Marcus describes as "the female world of love and ritual" in her analysis of Victorian-era female relationships (Marcus 56-58). Using this widely acknowledged societal norm, the novel's characters were able to explore their identities and feelings on a deeper level and through new interactions.

There are clear parallels in the methods employed by the protagonists of the two works to deal with their differences in their communities, even though their stories are set in rather different historical periods and locales. Though on separate levels, both ladies were able to find a means to live in an intolerant and unwelcoming culture. They employed a variety of strategies to locate a place where they could feel free and safe, including masking their own desires, figuring out who to trust, and eventually attempting to create their own safe havens. This demonstrates how various people, regardless of the setting or circumstances they find themselves in, frequently encounter nearly identical experiences. The fundamental need to belong and be accepted has not altered, despite shifting opinions on gender norms and queer issues. Due to their differences, many people still have difficulty fitting in with their community, even in the present era.

7.2. Challenging and Subverting Societal Norms

The female characters in *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* both tend to defy societal norms that restrict their independence and prevent them from being who they truly are.

Lily's connections with women in Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, particularly her bond with Gerty Farish, can be interpreted as an allusion to the heteronormative standards of her social group. Lily's and women's roles in general were rigidly expected by society, but their emotional intimacy challenged these assumptions even if their relationship was never depicted as romantic or sexual. Their partnership shows that women can form deeper connections than the shallow ones that were previously established by the culture of the day. Their intimate interaction challenges the concept of femininity at the time (Warthon 147–150). Furthermore, Lily's decision to forgo marriage to achieve financial stability is another example of how she resists social pressure and challenges conventional gender norms regarding appropriate behavior and roles for men and women in society (Wharton 256–260). Even though she followed societal norms, Lily was always conscious of the restrictions placed on her and that the laws that apply to her and other women are unjust and constricting.

Celie's experience in *The Color Purple* was more of a coming-out narrative than Lily's. Her relationship with Shug Avery is a perfect illustration of how she defies social expectations in her actions. The pair has begun to plan a life together and openly show their queerness, thus challenging the heteronormative expectations of their community, as stated by Shug: "Celie is coming with us, say Shug… Celie is coming to Memphis with me" (Walker 119). Along the way, Celie has also had to confront patriarchal power systems. One example of this is when she confronted her violent husband, Mr. _____, whom she eventually came to terms with for his treatment of her as she confesses, she no longer hates him, "…For two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself" (Walker 157). When it came to breaking free from her harsh home and discovering her own voice, Celie defied the expectations of a society that held black women to be subservient to males, especially white men.

The techniques used by the characters may vary, but the objective remains the same: to break away from society standards. Lily takes a more subdued approach, relying on a deliberate display of femininity while utilizing cunning strategies to navigate her surroundings. Celie, however, expresses her disobedience more overtly. She fully rejects the gender norms that have been imposed upon her, from her capacity to leave her abusive husband's hell to her ability to build meaningful and fulfilling relationships with other women. Celie's racial and sexual identities inform her tactics for fighting injustice. Roderick A. Ferguson refers to this as the "queer of color critique," and it is the junction of her identities that strengthened her resistance to social pressure. Celie's queer identity gave her a sense of community and solidarity that she shared with others in the place she considers home, while the racism and sexism she encountered made her more conscious of power dynamics restraining her freedom (Ferguson, 4-6).

In the end, Celie and Lily choose to break the norms despite strong social pressure, albeit in different ways. Despite the limitations imposed by time and their surroundings, their actions can be seen as a significant advancement in the struggle for acceptance and equality since they demonstrate that it is possible to defy the law even in the most trying situations.

7.3. Balancing Personal Desires with Social Pressures

The main characters in *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* both battle to balance their queer identity with the expectations of their respective cultures. The stories' internal conflict between the two characters is crucial to the plot and character development of the story.

The complicated nature of Lily's character places her in a precarious position where she must choose between following her own ambitions or living up to societal norms. She yearns for personal relationships and independence, but she is equally drawn to the opulent lifestyle she was able to enjoy by following societal rules. Lily's story is one of self-sabotage since she had a difficult time striking that equilibrium. The tragedy of Lily is that she can't seem to make peace with who she really is and what her social role in her group is intended to be (Wolfe 337). Lily's

sad demise was caused by an internal conflict that underscored the peril of living in a culture that values outward appearances over an individual's comfort and happiness.

Because of the trauma she has experienced in the past, particularly with her marriage, Celie's character initially lacks direction in life. Subsequently, Shug awakened Celie, prompting her to recognize and pursue her genuine desires. Because Celie preferred to satisfy her emotional needs and pleasure herself above adhering to heteronormative gender norms, this caused her to stand apart from a large portion of her community. Celie's path embodies what hell hooks refers to as "coming to voice," a process in which a person discovers the voice that best captures their actual self and eventually decides what they want for themselves, regardless of what a rigidly traditional society may have to say about it (hooks 12).

Lily and Celie both try to strike a balance between their true identity and society's expectations, but the choices they made had varied, and one of those ends was miserable. While Celie chooses to publicly confront her surroundings and form relationships with people who will give her a sense of freedom and deepen her sense of self-fulfillment, Lily seeks to play the societal game and fit in. Lily's sad collapse resulted from her decision to live her true self in secret, whereas Celie was happier and more content with her life once she chose to put her comfort before society. The eras in which Celie and Lily lived had an impact on the disparate results of their respective deeds. The early 20th century society depicted by Wharton is more inflexible and rarely accepting of differences. In contrast, human rights were improving in Walker's Day and in the rural south in the middle of the 20th century, though not completely. Moreover, social standards were beginning to be questioned, allowing for greater diversity and transparency.

It is significant to remember that every work's narrative framework represents the difficulties the characters encounter. Since the story of *The House of Mirth* is narrated from the outside, Wharton's use of third-person narration preserves a certain amount of distance while reflecting Lily's sense of being observed and imprisoned. Whereas Walker provides us with a

more in-depth glimpse into Celie's innermost thoughts and emotions in *The Color Purple* by using her first-person letters to tell the tale, allowing us to share in her emotional development.

Both Celie and Lily have trouble finding a balance between their personal desires and their social status; they use nearly identical strategies to navigate their belonging issues, but one chooses to openly address her issues and acknowledge her true feelings, while the other remains ambivalent. The protagonists' actions resulted in diverse ends, demonstrating that being oneself in a rigorous society comes at a heavy cost, and that the search of real self-expression can lead to triumph or catastrophe.

8. The Role of Hospitality in Challenging Power Structures

8.1. Hospitality as a means of Resistance

The narratives of *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* both revolve around the theme of hospitality serving as a tool of resistance against repressive societies, albeit in distinct social and historical circumstances. In *The House of Mirth*, the stern social structures of New York's high society are navigated and avoided through the subtle use of hospitality. Lily's visits to people such as Lawrence Selden in her flat serve as a means of breaking free from the inflexible societal norms (Wharton 7–15). Often discussed throughout the book, these private areas offer a brief break from the perpetual performance required of upper-class living. Characters discover that they can engage authentically in these private areas, free from the strict obedience and perfectionism that characterize upper-class living (Wharton 147–150).

The character Celie in *The Color Purple* undergone a positive transfiguration that improved her social life. After experiencing abuse, she turned her life around by making a warm and secure environment for herself. This eventually became a haven for others and a source of empowerment for Celie and other people who struggle to fit in. bell hooks' idea of the "homeplace" is congruent with Celie's rejection of the repressive society. “Homeplace” is a location that serves as a catalyst for resistance and liberation (hooks 42). Celie's ability to establish a network of support for herself and those in need exemplifies her act of resistance.

Shag character in *The Color Purple* exemplifies the subversive potential of hospitality. The normative expectations of heterosexual partnerships at the period are challenged by her decision to include Celie into her life and bed, giving more space for open and honest queer expression rather than subtlety. Shag and Celie's deed of establishing a haven for everyone away from society is consistent with Jose Esteban Munoz's concept of "queer world-making," which holds that queer people are inclined to create alternative universes away from the oppression of rigid civilizations (Munoz 199).

As marginalized persons in both books receive the warmth and assistance they need to work through their differences within the community, hospitality breeds resistance. Characters like Gerty Farish from *The House of Mirth* and Sofia and Squeak from *The Color Purple* offer a more overt critique of structural injustice.

In the presence of a safe space that values variety, provides an accepting environment for individuals to express themselves honestly and without fear of repercussion, the idea of hospitality can also take on the shape of resistance. These spaces, whether they be emotional or physical, become the foundation from which people start to express and shape their identities and ideas to challenge unjust power structures. This is demonstrated more clearly in the instance of Celie, who overcame an abusive and traumatic upbringing to find herself in a loving environment where she is surrounded by people who genuinely accept her for who she is. Making a shelter is a refusal to remain in the circle of misery (Ahmed 189).

Creating a space for discourse is important, but so is listening to each other's hardships and validating them. This is a type of resistance. The attempts of inflexible societies to suppress and invalidate the experiences of marginalized people are challenged by characters who genuinely listen to and bear witness to their stories. Even if empathy is generally subdued in the majority of the novels' events, it is nevertheless a powerful tool for resistance since it forces readers to recognize the importance of creating a more just society.

Hospitality can be more or less explicit and take many different shapes as a form of resistance depending on the historical and social circumstances. The characters in *The House of Mirth* are compelled to be more subdued in their act of rebellion. In contrast, more transparent and successful forms of resistance are possible during the period of significant social and political transformation shown in *The Color Purple*. This demonstrates how society changed between the two eras and how the civil rights and women's liberation movements grew in power both then and now.

8.2. Transformative Potential of Hospitable Spaces for Queer Individuals

Both *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* emphasize the healing power of accepting environments for queer people, as well as how these spaces can help characters Celie and Lily grow as people and improve their sense of self-acceptance and resistance.

The House of Mirth illustrates the transformational power of hospitable locations through Lily's ephemeral moments found in the few hospitable places she visits. She can think about her public identity and have the chance to be herself in these fleeting and unique moments of freedom from the repressive society. Lily's needs for a fleeting sense of freedom is clear when Wharton writes, "When had Lily ever really felt, or pitied, or understood? All she wanted was the taste of new experiences: she seemed like some cruel creature experimenting in a laboratory" (Wharton 173). She is exposed to different ways of being, in places with people like Lawrence Selden, who she meets with in her private flat, and who helps her escape the continual performance and scrutiny required by her surroundings.

The character of Celie in *The Color Purple* offers a clearer illustration of the transforming potential of welcoming environments for queer people. Celie's social and sexual awakening was greatly influenced by Shug Avery, who also provided a loving environment for the other ladies they chose to embrace. Together, they have allowed one another to openly express and discover who they are without fear of social criticism (Walker 118–125). Shug gave Celie the chance to understand that a fresh start with new identities is possible.

In both instances, the transforming power of hospitality extends beyond individual development to foster community building, which in turn fosters collective resistance. Celie's house, which eventually served as a haven for other women going through comparable circumstances which bell hooks refers to as a "homeplace" became a network of support for those who need it to confront racism, sexism, and hierarchy (hooks 41).

Welcome spaces provide guests a glimpse of a better future free from exclusion and marginalization. Because of their safe havens, the characters have had the opportunity to live freely and think differently from society, which has allowed them to reevaluate previously held ideas. The potential of safe spaces for queer individuals to assist marginalized people in envisioning a better future in which they may be accepted for who they are is what José Esteban Munoz refers to as the idea of "queer utopia", as he highlights that, “Queernes is utopian, and there is something queer about the utopian…to participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity” (Munoz 26).

Another clear advantage that welcoming environments provide to their visitors is the capacity to reinvent and recover one's identity. Celie, for instance, was able to change from a state of self-loathing to one of empowerment and self-love because of the welcoming environment she established. Theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would refer to this as "reparative reading," in which safe places are used as a tool to help queer people reflect on their former lives and experiences and decide which ones are most meaningful to them to reclaim (Sedgwick 128).

Apart from serving as a platform for self-reflection, safe spaces can also contribute to an increase in self-awareness by disseminating information. Shug's teachings on spirituality, sexuality, and self-acceptance are evident in *The Color Purple*, as Celie's perspective on these issues is improved, which is clear in her declaration of her newfound self-awareness: “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook… but I’m here” (Walker 207). This demonstrates how accepting venues for queer people may be used as a tool for larger social change in addition to serving personal needs.

It's crucial to remember that these protected areas are constantly in danger and always have been. These places of acceptance and transformation must be created and maintained, as the hostile outside world amply demonstrates.

8.3. Limitations and Complexities of Hospitality in Affecting Change

A common belief is that hospitality may promote inclusivity and constructive social change. But this idea also has drawbacks and complications that could reduce its efficacy and occasionally worsen the situation for the excluded person. Jacques Derrida contends that even when it isn't meant, hospitality is not always totally unconditional and that the host has a position of authority that is always subject to occasionally subtle restrictions and limitations. For the simple reason that the host welcomed the guest into their home, Derrida claims that the host may always have preconceived notions about what should be addressed and how the guest should act (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 25).

The propensity for hospitality to reinforce preexisting hierarchical power structures is one of its drawbacks. According to Mireille Rosello, extending hospitality to a guest might serve as a means of retaining control over them merely by making them feel welcome (Rosello 11). One excellent illustration of this is how Lily in *The House of Mirth* relies on the hospitality of others, which entails unstated expectations of behavior. Because she must live up to the host's expectations, these restrictions frequently rob the guest, Lily in this case, of her independence and cause her to feel unfairly treated or in control of her own life.

The transactional aspect of hospitality presents another drawback. Oftentimes, hospitality turns into a commodity, a swap for another. One becomes more selective about whom they extend hospitality to, since they may anticipate a reciprocal gesture based on their initial generosity, rather than engaging in an authentic act of hospitality that could spark a successful social revolution. In this instance, hospitality, which had the potential to alter social relations, is now being used as a means of upholding rather than challenging social standing. Being hospitable can keep things as they are (Still 14).

The act of hospitality can become a place of exclusion when it attempts to suggest inclusion. Particularly when the idea of hospitality meets matters of race, sexual orientation, and class. You are keeping some individuals out when you want to welcome them. In the case of *The Color Purple*, the safe spaces that the characters established for the community to be freely themselves serve as both an inclusive place for the marginalized people and a place where the rest of mainstream society is excluded. Being hospitable can be a great way to build a more diverse community, but it's not a flawless act because you can't always welcome everyone.

Additionally, providing hospitality may lead to dependency. Due to their continual reliance on the host's benevolence, guests are more susceptible to manipulation and exploitation. Lily's terrible ending in *The House of Mirth* was primarily brought about by her reliance on the goodwill of others to allow her in. She lost her independence because of becoming overly reliant on her social circle's kindness on both an emotional and financial level. This emphasizes how crucial it is to create a balance between reliance on hospitality and self-sufficiency.

Societal norms place pressure on queer people to live up to heteronormative standards to be accepted. Another aspect of the constraints that hospitality may face is the conflict between hostility and assimilation. When a guest is welcomed, they could find themselves in a situation where they are forced to erase their individuality and adapt to the host's standards (Cheah 57). It takes a great deal of emotional labor to build and subsequently maintain these safe and welcome spaces, the act of delivering and receiving hospitality can be emotionally abusive. Sara Ahmed's research on "affective economies" may be helpful in this situation since it implies that the emotionally taxing and often harmful work involved in providing hospitality can be extremely draining (Ahmed 119).

To successfully effect social change, hospitality alone is insufficient. It is crucial to welcome and acknowledge individuals from diverse origins. Structural disparities that resulted in some groups' limited access to opportunities and resources must be addressed if there is to be any

significant social change, as Fraser notes: “For the politics of recognition, in contrast, the remedy for injustice is cultural or symbolic change. This could involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups. It could also involve recognizing and positively valorizing cultural diversity” (Fraser 7).

9. Conclusion

Analysis of *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* shows how complicated hospitality is and how it intersects with queer desire and social standards in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. The characters in both novels utilize hospitality as a technique to negotiate power dynamics, question societal norms, and locate safe havens away from dangerous situations. In the early 20th century, Lily's persona in *The House of Mirth*, which is set in an upper-class New York society, emphasizes how hospitality can be both a force to be reckoned with in surviving social injustice and a tool employed by society to constrain it, particularly for women like Lily who are attempting to play roles that they are not permitted to play in their rigid society. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's friendship with Shug and other women demonstrates how oppressed groups can build their own welcoming small community to feel accepted and to get away from the hate of society. These books' queer perspectives, whether overt in *The Color Purple* or more subtly in *The House Mirth*, emphasize the value of the idea of chosen families and the establishment of safe spaces for the experiences of queer people. *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* highlight the complexity of hospitality, which is not always clear-cut and easy. A greater social change can be achieved through hospitality, but to be effective, it must consider structural inequality across borders as well as the complexity of interpersonal interactions and human nature. In addition to upending social conventions, hospitality also serves to maintain hierarchies. In the same way, it may lead to resistance or a bad feeling of dependence.

9.1. Implications for understanding Queer Experiences in Literature and Society

Through the lenses of hospitality and queer theory, *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* are analyzed to show how challenges faced by queer people in their hostile environment have changed over time and remained consistent throughout history. One such challenge is finding safe spaces to navigate societal pressures. Knowledge of the past and the cultural framework of the West is necessary to comprehend the social ideas and attitudes of present Western culture as well

as how they have evolved over time. Particularly in queer environments, where we can explore how attitudes regarding gender and sexuality have changed over time (Sedgwick 1). Characters like Celie suffer because of their overlapping identities like class, gender, and race. Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality emphasizes how multiple layers of oppression and exclusion can exist for marginalized people and how queer experiences can vary based on the various social circumstances in which they find themselves (Crenshaw 1241). The difference between the coded language used in *The House of Mirth* and the more open and clear speech and portrayal of queerness in *The Color Purple* illustrates the history of queer representations in different literary works and American literature in general. Even if they are not stated explicitly, texts like *The House of Mirth* may require significant readings between the lines since they may contain implicit references that we are unaware of due to the discreetly shown queerness in those historical periods (Castle 60). Furthermore, both novels show how safe spaces turn into important havens where queer characters can flee from oppressive environments. Jack Halberstam's theories on "queer space and time" and how these realities become the key to social resistance are in line with the ongoing need to construct alternative realities and communities, as demonstrated by the analysis of the novels (Halberstam 6). Furthermore, the idea of "chosen families," which is reflected in the novels' unconventional relationships, emphasizes how important it is for these partnerships to provide a welcoming environment for queer individuals (Kath Weston 116). Through the research of the texts, we were able to observe the intricate relationship between conformity and resistance. While both work to break free from social oppression, Celie and Lily may occasionally find themselves in situations where they must abide by the law. Judith Butler describes this process of defying convention in an intricate dance where people may yet act in a way that respects societal norms as "subversion and performance," which Celie and Lily may occasionally find themselves in (Butler 25). This is primarily evident in Lily's situation. In heteronormative societies, queer people frequently struggle between disclosing or keeping their

true identities a secret. Between the explicit and implicit queer expressions in *The House of Mirth* and *The Color Purple* rises a tension of visibility and invisibility that highlights the significance of taking social and historical context into consideration. (Warner 52).

The Color Purple and *The House of Mirth* provide profound social commentary on vital issues, including gender and sexuality. Their representation of queer suffering and how marginalized populations navigate their place in society challenges conventional norms and expectations. This is consistent with Barbara Smith's view of literature as a transformative force capable of bringing about social change and challenging dominant ideas (Smith 168).

9.2. Suggestions for Further Research

A review of *The Color Purple* and *The House of Mirth* through the lens of hospitality and its intersection with queer theory throws up a lot of ideas for additional study in this field. First, comparative studies are useful for identifying any changes in how queer representations and hospitality are portrayed in literature since they allow researchers to examine a topic using texts from various historical periods. This is consistent with Fredric Jameson's "always historicize" philosophy, which holds that a text's historical context should always be considered before evaluating it, because it reflects the viewpoints and ideals of those in that era. We can better understand how the queer experience and representations have evolved over time to identify any social changes by comprehending the social and historical complications of that era, from limitations to challenges and possibilities that queer people faced (Jameson 9). Second, examining how queerness intersects with other identities, such as race and class in the texts this thesis analyses, can help us understand the queer experience in literature. Third, deeper comprehension of the intricate structure of queer identity and the influence of social and cultural elements can lead to a greater understanding of the experiences of queer characters across various literary, cultural, and historical contexts (Crenshaw 1241). Fourth, taking international viewpoints into account provides insightful analysis of queer experiences. Recognizing that queer experiences can

vary globally based on the social and cultural environments that influence them will expose us to new ideas about families, countries, and identities (Gopinath 11).

In addition to this, reader reception studies can be used to understand how readers understand queer themes and hospitality in literature. This is crucial information. We can see how these queer representations in literature impact the real world by examining how readers respond to these representations in reality (Fish 3). Another way to further the research on this subject is through adaptation studies, which look at how these works were made into plays or films. By doing so, one can see how societal and cultural perspectives on queer issues have changed. Stories can change and adapt to fit various historical and cultural situations, as Linda Hutcheon contends (Hutcheon 176). Lastly, studying queer temporalities can aid in our comprehension of how queer people or characters see time. Jack Halberstam's insightful work on "queer time" provides a useful context for this study, arguing that the marginalized status of queer people causes them to experience time differently, which may have an impact on how they navigate social expectations (Halberstam 1).

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