CHAPTER V
Men see one thing and understand ten while  
Women see ten things and can’t even understand one.       -Zora Neale Hurston

I thank the Universe for my participation in Existence.  
It is a pleasure to have always been present.  
-Alice Walker

Both Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker are eminent black women writers in 
African American literature. In their writings there is a special focus on a particular group 
of people as their novels bear astonishing similarities. Walker valued Hurston and gives a 
special to reference her as she came to know the commitment of Hurston for black women folks and her using of native dialect, by which it can be understood that definitely similarities would be found in their writings. But here the content of both, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, by Hurston and *The Temple of My Familiar*, by Walker are quite different. Though deviated from each other, they did not forget their basic theme of women and their struggle in the dominant white and male society. They discussed about the women through different techniques. Though they worked on differently, their desire for women could make them to glue on to the theme.

Appearing on October 11, 1948, *Seraph on the Suwanee* was Hurston’s last published novel. It was variously called *Angel in the Bed*, *Sang the Suwanee in the Spring*, *The Seraph’s Man*, *Good Morning Sun*, and *Sign of the Sun* before Zora settled on *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Because this novel deals with whites instead of the usual black folks, it has led to charges of assimilationism against Hurston. Perhaps, as some critics have suggested, she was following a new trend among black writers like Willard Motley, Chester Himes, and Ann Petry, who avoided concentrating on black characters. She had written to her editor at Scribner’s that “It was” very much by design” that the book had primarily white characters (Hemenway, 308) and to Carl Van Vechten on November 2, 1942, that “I have hopes breaking that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people… I am working on the story now.” (Hurston to Van Vechten) That “Story” was *Seraph on the Suwanee*. 
As Hemenway has noted, however, “The peril in deliberately choosing a white subject is considerable. There is nothing which prohibits a black writer from creating successful white characters, and black literature is full of brilliant white portraits. But if the novelist consciously seeks to portray whites in order to validate his talent, to prove to the world there are no limits to his genius, the very assumptions of the decision become self-defeating (307). Whether Seraph on the Suwanee is self-defeating is debatable, but whatever Hurston’s reasons for writing Seraph on the Suwanee, to her readers she seemed to be turning traitor, deserting the colourful black folks with whom she had hitherto aligned herself. In her last published novel, however, she seems to show that a lack of humour can poison the life of a character, and consequently, the people around her. Her laboratory became Seraph on the Suwanee, her only published novel about white characters. In Walker’s novel, The Temple of My Familiar she also introduced a white character. Lissie tells how she was once a white man (355-62)

Robert Bone dismissed the novel as an assimilationist work which was written less forcibly than Their Eyes were Watching God (169) While Darwin Turner explained it as “a conscious adjustment to the tastes of a new generation of readers.” (111) Readers presumably, who would no longer tolerate blacks as fictional characters. What these critics have ignored however is the fact that Hurston never leaves the folk milieu in Seraph on the Suwanee. She does change the colour of her characters but she does not change her themes or environment in any significant way. Although Arvay Henson, the novel’s heroine is white, she like all Hurston’s protagonists, searches for self actualization and love, for life affirming rather than life denying experiences. White folks, Hurston perceptively realized must want those things too. Walker follows Hurston in creating characters. Walker balances the darkness of the world’s misery with the light of the sun, not by moving from one to the other but by holding her characters in a state of tension created by living consciously in historical, geographical, psychological, sexual and spiritual domains.

By insisting upon writing her story about “a man” instead of one about the “traditional lay figures” found in protect fiction about the “Negro Problem”, Hurston was practicing her philosophy that Human beings” react pretty much the same to the same
stimuli. Different idioms, yes, circumstances and conditions have power to influence, yes. Inherent differences, no she was interested in casual analysis in what makes a man or woman do such and so regard less of his colour. In *Seraph on the Suwanee* there is individual whose reasons for doing “Such and so” have little to do with the colour of her skin and everything to do with the state of her mind a poor image of self and a chauvinistic though extremely loving husband. In fact, Hurston had written to Buroughs Mitchell at Scribner’s that she has endowed Arvay with feelings that she herself had once felt. “Though brash enough otherwise, I got an overwhelming complex about my looks before I was grown, and it was very hard for a long time for me to believe that any man really cared for me I set out to win my fight against this feeling, and I did” (Hurston to Burroughs Mitchel, 310)

It explores contemporary problems of race, class, and gender while providing a Freudian case study of the consequences of rejection. Hurston’s diagnostic and therapeutic role in dealing with all these issues do indeed get expressed as “competing energies “that are” restored to harmony” of a sort in the final chapter. May be Hurston tried to remove race from her central field of interest made possible a more intense focus on gender but particularly class. There are many possible reasons Hurston decided to write about lower-class but upwardly mobile white characters and their black retainers. Writing a book about white characters enables Hurston to explore some deeply personal feelings behind her most deceptive mask. The internalization of Arvay’s hurt and anger and a resultant inferiority complex that damages her relations with others for years, especially her husband offers a divergence from the facts of Hurston’s life, but the overall pattern of rejection that she suffers matches them.

The plots operates on two basic levels; on the one hand we share the tortured psychological struggles of Arvay Henson, a troubled Cracker mystic who withdraws into a private realm for years after her sister Larraine steals her preacher beau, Carl Middleton. A new man in town, the poor but well-born and energetic Jim Meserve, breaks through Arvay’s resistance, marries her, and takes her away to orange country, where he starts a grove. When she gives birth to Earl, a retarded and deformed son, Arvay feels God still blames her for loving Lorraine’s husband all those years, and her
inner gloom only darkens when Jim’s attempt to use humour to bring her out of it seems merely mocking and based in his sense of social superiority. The devotion of her two subsequent children to Jim makes matters worse. Eventually, however, the tragic death of Earl forces Arvay to rethink things, and when Jim leaves her and her mother dies, Arvay finally breaks through to a personal sense of worth, symbolized when she torches her mother’s rat-infested house, the scene of Arvay’s psychological fixations during childhood and adolescence. She joins Jim at the coast, where his new shrimping fleet is about to set sail.

The novel constitutes Hurston’s love song to Florida, her home, where she was to spend the rest of her life. Her letters written in the North frequently express her longing for Florida. Doing so enabled her to more easily concentrate on simultaneously memorializing the land, its flora and fauna (Morris, 1-12) and the early days of Florida communities. Although some critics presume this book is simply a whitewashing of black characters because the figures supposedly “speak black,” Hurston in the preceding assertion makes crucial observations: the Crackers don’t have a folk culture that memorializes actual events in the history. Their stories and idioms bespeak a repository of folk wisdom, but one unconnected with history. Obviously, African Americans would have more cultural strength in this connection, as so much of their oral tradition is tied to history.

Hurston establishes the class differential between Arvay and Jim quite early, by pointing out that his ancestors had owned plantations on the Alabama River before the war. His supposed social superiority accentuates Arvay’s sense of social vulnerability and makes her overly sensitive to Jim’s jokes. Although he now has nothing and “had come to town three months ago with only a small bundle, containing his changing cloths, he has a flavour about him. He was like a ham-string. He was not meat any longer, but he smelled of what he had once been associated with,” this fits in with the town’s assumption that a husband will provide “meat” for Arvay’s bones.

Poor whites have always been the subject of African American humour. Ralph Ellison speaks of this in remembering seeing avatars of Jeeter Lester and his family in Alabama, near Tuskegee:
But in that setting their capacity for racial violence would have been far more over-whelming than their comical wrong-headedness. Indeed, in look, gesture, and deed they had crowded me so continuously that I had been tempted to armor myself against their threat by denying them their humanity as they sought to deny me mine… an attitude given expression in the child’s jingle

My name is Ran I work in the sand, but I’d rather be a nigger than a poor white man…

But while such boasting brags and there were others provided a release of steam they were not only childish but ultimately frustrating… The necessity for keeping one’s negative opinions of whites within one’s own group became a life-preserving discipline (Going to the Territory. 166).

Ellison’s comments indicate why many black writers had hesitated to write about this group. Hurston solved the problem by presenting them less as caricatures and more as human beings. The Sawley community may be crude, but Hurston allows it its own folk vigor and salty expression and allows the people to demonstrate their humanity, frequently through humour.

Any consideration of the charge that *Seraph on the Suwanee* puts white masks on black characters must confront the language of the book, which several critics claim is not that of poor white Floridians. The complexity of this issue deepens when one factor in the racist nature of early scholarship devoted to the origins of black speech. In the 1930s and 40s, eminent linguist’s chief George Krapp mounted the argument that black rural speech was in fact language that originated with poor whites; blacks however, unlike that group, had failed to “progress,” so that differences between the speech patterns of poor whites and blacks were the school of social thought that viewed overall black culture as a
shabby copy of white culture, rather than something distinct, with a cultural ambiance all its own. More recently, however, Joey Lee Dillard has demonstrated the very significant effect black dialect has had on white southern speech for than three centuries and lists the considerable scholarship that has always.

Although the main characters are white and the style now as lively or humorous as is typical in Hurston, Seraph on the Suwanee’s subject matter differs little from that of Hurston’s other novels. As in most of the other works, including the short stories, the marriage relationship, the search for true love, and the growth of the individual are the main focus. Like Walker’s The Temple of My Familiar, Seraph on the Suwanee explores at some length the feminine psyche. Seraph on the Suwanee takes places near the turn of this century in various parts of Florida and unfolds the complex story of Arvay Henson, a poor white woman of Sawley. At sixteen Arvay renounces the world to become a missionary because her sister Larraine marries the man with whom Arvay imagines herself to be in love. Arvay sees the marriage as an omen that nothing good will ever happen to her. To compound her unhappiness, she fantasizes about an adulterous relationship with her sister’s husband and experiences guilt that manifests itself in the form as of body spasms. These fits sometimes real sometimes simulated, keep all potential suitors at a distance until the manly Jim Meserve arrives in town. By that time Arvay is twenty one. Jim Meserve is a high class, rakish Irishman who subdues, Seduces and marries Arvay and takes her away from Sawley to Citrabelle. Though their marriage is occasionally happy, Arvay’s feelings of inferiority and self pity constantly grow at the relationship until Jim leaves her to find herself and seek him out. In The Temple of My Familiar, Lissie tells she was captured, sold into slavery, raped and after running away, captured again (61-71). In both novels writers have shown rape element.

Arvay does not so but only after shaking off the shackles of the past and embracing what she considers to be her true role mothering and serving. The bulk of the book is about Arvay’s grail like quest for self actualization. Her task is the more difficult because for over twenty years she belittles herself while simultaneously extolling her folks and the backwoods: She lacks the basic understanding and communicative ability
necessary to a good marriage and seeks shelter from the world rather than active involvement in it.

Hurston follows the weighty moment, however, with a comic scene. Hurston’s inventory of the Hensons’ living room through Jim’s eyes provides a detailed satire of lower-class vulgarity, equivalent in effect to Huck Finn’s surveyal of the Granger ford parlour. In addition to skewering Cracker taste, Hurston satirizes the pious myths of the lost cause and the church values that parallel it. We see a picture of:

Some artist’s concept of General Robert E. Lee at Manassas… Though the enemy was always right up under the feet of the general’s horse, he assumed that the men he led could not see them. Generals always pointed either their swords or their fingers to show his men the enemy… Peter was there in this unfortunate attempt to walk the waters like Christ… It struck Jim that if Peter could squat like that without sinking, he could walk, and he started to comment on it, but remembered and held his peace.

Arvay Henson is a woman who does not think much of herself. This point is brought painfully home so often in the book that the reader gets as sick of the whining heroine as Hurston got when she wrote the novel. At sixteen she believes that “happiness, love and normal relationships were not meant for her. Somehow, God had denied her the fate of sharing in the common happiness and joys of the world” (9). Even when the manly and highly sought-after Jim Meserve expresses an interest in her, Arvay believes herself undeserving: “Ah no, this pretty laughing fellow was too far out her reach. Things as wonderful as this were never meant for nobody like her. This was first class and was born to take other people’s leavings” (22). She idolizes Jim in direct proportion to her benefit of self. When Jim mentions marriage, “Arvay began to believe a little in Jim’s sincerity…… Then a terrible feeling of guilt came over her. Even if Jim meant it, she was not of fitten. Here was the most wonderful man in all the world pomping her all up and she had been living in mental adultery with her sister’s husband for all of those wasted years. She was not fitten for a fine man like Jim. He was worth more that she was
able to give him. Several years in to the marriage she still hopes that she might “come to win this great and perfect man someday”

Arvay is so preoccupied with her “adultery of the Mind” that she sees the deformity of Earl, her first child, as “punishment for the way I used to be. I thought that I had done paid off, but I reckon not. I never thought it would be like this, but it must be the chastisement I been looking for” (62). She completely ignores that fact that Earl’s condition is hereditary –from her father’s side of the family. She must heap the blame for everything upon herself. Because she thinks so little of herself, Arvay thinks extraordinarily high of Jim Meserve. Not only is he a “Perfect Man” to her, but often she attributes God-like qualities to him. When Jim first expresses his intentions to Marry Arvay for instance she thinks:

But this was like coming through religion…Like your thoughts while you were out at the praying-ground in the depths of the woods, or being down at the mourners’-bench during protected meetings with the preacher, deacons and all the folks from the Amen. Put your whole faith in the mercy of God and believe. Eternal life, Heaven and its immortal glory were yours if you only would believe (24)

Later when a posse seeks to destroy Earl, who has gone berserk the narrator explains Arvay’s opinion of Jim:

But for too many years Arvay had thought of her husband as a being stronger than all others on earth. What God neglected, Jim Meserve took care of. Between the two, God and Jim all things came to pass. So far God had not made a move so it was up to Jim. So now, Arvay went to her husband and hung by her arms around his neck as she sank to her knees beside his chair (133).

Clearly she is about to offer a prayer to this her second and perhaps greater god. Even Jim’s kiss on her lips came as great mercy and a blessing and Arvay departed from
herself and know nothing until she came to earth again and found herself in the familiar bed” (137). When she reminisces about the twenty years of marriages with Jim she recalls that “she had stood for moments on the right hand side of God (153) and that “the most ordinary minute of peace with Jim in the past appeared like time spent in paradise” (190).

At one point in the novel Jim excuses Arvay’s shortcomings that men see one thing and understand ten while women see ten things and can’t even understand one (229). Such an opinion is chauvinistic and unflattering to women everywhere but Arvay’s consistent actions are a poor defense against the charge. Not only must most thing to be explained to her but they often must be explained without seeking an explanation or even knowing that she should. Jim compares her to an unthankful and unknowing hog under an acorn tree. Eating and granting with your ears hanging over your eyes and never even looking up to see where the acorns are coming from (230). The evidence in four of Jim’s smile is overwhelming and begins to blatantly accumulate when Jim moves his family to Citrabelle, Florida. In Citrabelle, Arvay only looks at the surface of things and concludes accordingly. She sees the fruit pickers as “sinfully” living on a flowery bed of ease:

Things had a picnicky, pleasure look that, while it was pretty, made Arvay wonder if folks were not taking things too down in here. Heaven wasn’t going to be any refreshment to folks if they got along with no more trouble than this…It was the duty of man to suffer in this world, and these people round down here in south Florida were plainly shirking their duty. They were living entirely too easy (64-65).

While Arvay is looking at and judging by appearances, the narrator points out the realities. She did not know that fruit cutters seldom worked at all from the end of the season early in June until it opened around the middle of September when they began to cut grapefruit, however short of money they might be”(66). Nor did she know about “the desperate struggle Jim was going through for their very existence.” When Jim learns something about citrus fruit production acquire a crew arrangements the number of bones the crew cuts by encouraging competition among them and receives a Christmas turkey
as a token of appreciation from the packing house manager, “Arvay baked it and they ate it, but she never asked for the story behind it” (67). The Meserve couple at odds is made apparent by the narrator’s observations:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? Arvay thought that it would be herself when and if she could birth Jim a perfect child and by this means tie him forever to her. Jim felt that he would stand on the mount of transfiguration when Arvay showed some appreciation of his love as expressed by what he was striving to do for her. She knew nothing of his twisting and turning and conniving to make life pleasant for her sake…She never asked anything, and Jim never volunteered to tell her (68-74).

Perhaps what the best epitomizes Arvay’s “deficiencies” is what happens when she is in her third pregnancy. When Jim learns of the pregnancy he playfully tells Arvay. “You can have that baby, providing that you swear and promise me to bring it here a boy” (85). Though Jim believes that anybody at all would see through a joke like that, Anybody with even a teaspoon full of sense knows that you can’t tell what a child ‘ll turn out until it gets born (92), Arvay spends several painful months “muttering prayers for deliverance from her fancied danger” and caressing her stomach in a plea with the unborn child to be rice now and come here a boy child for your mama. You see the fix I am in. Jim is liable to leave me, if you want a boy” (88). Jim is understanding while he says, “There was not sufficient understanding in his marriage” (92).

The climax comes when Jim, ever trying to please and solicit praise and appreciation from Arvay, foolishly pits his strength against that of a rattle snake. He loses the battle and almost loses his life. Because Arvay can only stand and gawk when action is required. Jim decides to leave her. As he explains it,

“I feel and believe that you do me, Arvay, but I don’t want that stand-still, haphazard kind of love. I’m just as hungry as a dog for a knowing and a doing love. You love like a
coward. Don’t take no steps at all. Just stand around and hope for things to happen out right.

“Your kind of love, Arvay, don’t seem to be the right thing for me...I’m sick and tired of hauling and dragging you along. I’m tired of excusing you because you don’t understand. I’m tired of waiting for you to meet me on some high place and trying to free your soul. Our bonds have never been consecrated. Two people ain’t never married until they come to the same point of view. That we don’t seem to be able to do, so I’m moving over to the coast tomorrow for good” (230-34).

Arvay must take the first step toward reconciliation. Before she can do it, however, she must become more communicative, more understanding. The key is back in Sawley.

The town of Sawley its traditions and Arvay’s perception of them are the trouble with Arvay and her marriage. Though Arvay was always soon herself as a “cracker”, she is secretly proud of her heritage and considers it a vantage point. She stubbornly clings to be old ways and allows them to wreak havoc with her life. She often retreats to the Bible for answers a carryover from her teenage days, since the narrator records no instance of Arvay even attending church after she marries Jim and dismisses problems as merely in God’s plans for her. She must break with her past before she can live her life. Arvay returns to Sawley when she learns that her mother is terminally ill. The telegram which brings the message seems like a god send to her:

God worked in mysterious ways His wonders to perform… God was taking a hand in her troubles. He was directing her ways. The answer was plain. He meant for her to go back home. This was His way of showing her what to do. The Bible said, “Everything after its own kind,” and her kind was up there in the piney woods around Sawley. She was a
Cracker bred and a Cracker born, and when she was dead there’d be a Cracker gone.

As the narrator indicates however, Arvay is misinterpreting things again:

Arvay was conscious at that moment that she had not really been trying to defend her background and justify it so that Jim could accept it and her along with it. She had been on the defensive ever since her marriage. Peace, contentment and virtue hung like a rainbow over turpentine shakes and shanties…Arvay felt eager to get back in the atmosphere of her humble beginnings. (238-39)

Hurston’s biblical imagination had turned out to be vital for her art, just as it had always been for the community inspired her. Clearly she saw biblical truths as central for the Cracker community as well, in a more limited and ominous way. Arvay’s deep religiosity, inherited from her mother. Jim, by contrast, obviously more in line with Hurston’s skepticism and irreverence, brims over with humorous interpretative insight. His apparent blasphemy frightens Arvay. She is happy about her pregnancy, but the family still lives in Sawley at that point. Her jealousy of Larraine’s excessive attention to Jim and her fear that Larraine will tell him of her former love for Carl cause her to dream of seeing Larraine’s neck cut; the knife appears in her own hands. Fearing her Cain-like hidden ranges, she vainly begs Jim to take her away.

She has the superstitious backwoods habit of letting the Bible fall open on its own as a sort of divine message each night. When it opens to the killing of Abel by Cain, Arvay becomes horrified. Jim comments pungently,

“I don’t blame God … I’d turn against a man that didn’t have no better sense than to burn a stinking cabbage right under my nose… Cain’s first crime was not killing his brother Abel, but in not having no sense of humour. The man was so chuckle-headed that he couldn’t even take a joke… Common sense ought to have told him God wouldn’t stand for him
stinking up Heaven and all like that. How come he couldn’t have made God a nice cool salad and took it to Him? That would have been something out of his garden too, wouldn’t it? Tell me!”

An outraged Arvay thinks Jim is “crazy or awful wicked one, to be looking for jokes in the Bible” and doesn’t listen as he sagely remarks, “well, if it for people, it must be plenty jokes in there” (59). Arvay’s horror at the intrusion of this passage stems, at least unconsciously, from her nocturnal dreams of Lorraine’s death.

On another level, Hurston seems to be rehearsing in this bedtime quarrel the issues she had to face in writing her own comic stance, which Jim clearly sanctions. “The sacred quality of the Bible, sinner-people who could make mock of holy things. Folks given to jokes and the dumbness of those who couldn’t see a joke, and on and on. Jim was not really annoyed at first, he just enjoyed teasing Arvay, but Arvay went further than Jim thought necessary, and he stung her somewhat with ridicule’ (59).

Jim’s teasing of Arvay should not pass unnoticed. Psychologists have noted the frequent inability of American men, particularly those living in rural settings, to articulate their more tender feelings. Such men use practical jokes, roughhousing, and general forms teasing to hide the supposedly ‘feminine’ side that emotions represent (Sperling, 472). Other southern writers, including Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, emphasize this quality in many male characters. Earlier scenes demonstrate how Jim’s obvious concern for and love of Arvay often finds inadequate, even chauvinistic expression that is at odds with his actual behaviour. The whole syndrome of teasing proves crucial, however, to his interaction with Arvay, for although we see this as a desperate bridge thrown across to her, part of his male world, Arvay has had little positive experience with this type of discourse but even less communication with male forms of linguistic intimacy. She tends to interpret teasing encounters with aggression and as signs of unworthiness to join whatever group is represented.

When she reaches Sawley Arvay at first stubbornly clings to the old ways of seeing things. She is distraught to learn that even Sawley has changed. Turpentining has
been replaced by peanut crops: there are new paved high ways, hotels, restaurants and
taxi, none which, one taxi driver tells Arvay, the old fogies and dumb pecker woods”
like. Arvay however “took sides with the pecker woods in a timid way”. When she
expresses her opinion that in the good old days, the folks in Sawley was good and kind
neighbourly,” the cab driver belligerently differs:

“Lady! You must not know this town too good. I moved in
here fifteen years ago and I done summered and wintered
with these folks. I hauled the mud to make some of ‘em, and
kow ‘em inside and out. Just like they was took out their
cradles, they’ll be screwed down in their coffins” (240).

When the taxi drops Arvay at the old Henson place she finds appalling
corroborative evidence of the driver’s statements. The house is the dilapidate: her sister
Larraine whom she had envied years before, is in a ton of course-looking flesh, a cheap
cotton dress and dirty white cotton stocking”; her brother in law Carl, for whom she had
renounced the world when she was sixteen, is now clearly “soiled”; heavy set” “drab”
“marred”, “Chuckled headed”. But for Raines intervention, she might have been married
to Carl. Been the mother of those awful-looking young men and women that he had
fathered. Had to get in bed with something like that! Do Jesus” (254). Arvay begins to
renounce the house the people, their lives. Larraine and Carl behave so niggardly that it is
easy for Arvay to return her back on them. The house, however, must be burned because
it stands between her mulberry tree, beneath which “her real life had begun” (268), and
the world. It epitomizes and symbolizes her stifled life:

Seeing it from the meaning of the tree it was no house at all.
It was an evil, ill-deformed monstropolous accumulation of
time and scum. It had soaked in so much of doing-without, of
soul-starvation, of brutish vacancy of aim, of absent dreams,
envy of trifles, ambitions for littleness, smothered cries and
trampled love, that it was a sanctuary of tiny and sanctioned
vices. It caught people and twisted the limbs of their minds…

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How much had it blinded her from seeing and feeling through the years! (269)

After burning the house, Arvay “had made a peace and was in harmony with her life” she has come to same view points as her money with her life.” She has come to the same viewpoint as her husband. Nothing remains but to seek him out and belatedly begin her marriage.

After the timely revelations back in Sawley Arvay concludes that “certainly the afternoon of her life was more pleasant than the morning had been “(262). The “Morning” had been so unpleasant because it had been full of shelters and heavens, all escapes from the realities of life. Even her decision to become a missionary was an attempt to retire from the world.

When Jim first meets Arvay he responds to her plans to leave her alone with “You need my help and my protection too bad for that --- I have to stay with you and stand by you and give my protection to keep you from hurting your own self too much” (15). Arvay comes to believe him and has “a tremulous desire to take refuse in this man. To be forever warm and included in the atmosphere that he stirred up around him” (22). Jim throws his “strong arm of protection” around her, all to no avail. He cannot free her soul. Only Arvay can do that. By destroying her shackling past, Arvay breaks free and is finally ready to embrace life. Significantly, this is only made possible when Jim removes his “strong arm of protection.” Unsheltered, unprotected, Arvay tackles her past and wins. She is self sufficient an individual in her own right. She can now protect Jim and “prop him up on every learning side”. By the end of the novel, the trend has been ironically reversed. Arvay is now hovering Jim. “In side he was nothing but a little boy to take care of and he hungered for her hovering. Look at him now! Struggled down and clutching on to her like Kenny when he wore diapers. Arvay felt such a swelling to protect and comfort Jim that tears camp up in her eyes. So helpless sleeping there in her arms and trusting himself to her” (310).

Unflattering attitudes about women occupy a more prominent position in this novel than in any of the other Hurston works. The view that Hurston has her characters
presents is the traditional mole one, and shows that women have been regarded as brainless, thoughtless, inferior helpless wretches for many years. Early in the novel Jim rather authoritatively declares that

Women folks don’t have no mind to make up nohow. They wasn’t made for that. Lady folks were just made to laugh and act loving and kind and have a good man to do for them all he’s able, and have him as many boy-children as he figgers he’d like to have, and make him so happy that he’s willing to work and fetch in every dad-blamed thing that his wife thinks she would like to have. That’s what women are made (23).

Believing that “a woman knows who her master is” (39), Jim continues to verbalize his opinions throughout the novel. Before her marriage, Arvay correctly interprets his meaning:

He had just as good as excused the woman he married from all worry and bother. In so many words he had said, “Love and marry me and sleep with me. That is all I need you for. Your brains are not sufficient to help me with my work; you can’t think with me. Putting your head on the same pillow with mine is not the same thing…and kind around the house and have children for him (32-33).

Jim obviously feels that women are to be subjugated to the will and whom of men once when Arvay is particularly irritating, for instance, he orders her to strip. When she tries to cover herself, Jim responds with:”Don’t you move! You’re my damn property and I want you right where you are, and I want you naked. Stand right there in your tracks until I tell you that you can move “(190). When Jim finally “allows” Arvay to get in bed, he “stretched himself full length upon her, but in the same way that he might have laid himself down on a couch” (190). Even Joe Kelsey, an oppressed minority himself, believes women to be property. When Jim tells of his difficulty understanding Arvay, Joe advises.”Make knuckle under. From the very first jump, get the bridle in they mouth and
redeem hard and stop e’m short. They all alike, boss. Take’em and break ‘em” (41). When Arvay worries herself sick in fear of giving birth to a girl when Jim has expressed firm desire to have a boy, Jim excuses her and blames if on her sex:

Arvay had acted dumb, but what more could you expect? She was a women and women folks were not given to thinking nohow. It was not in their make-up to do much thinking. That was what men were made for. Women were made to hover and to feel (93).

Jim Meserve, then, is a chauvinist who believes that a women’s role is to mother and to serve. Even his name—“Me –serve”, emphasizes his attitude on the other hand, however, Jims name can mean “Me serve you.” Certainly he does serve Arvay and it soon becomes apparent to everyone but Arvay that he wants more from her than just “loving him good, being nice and kind around the house and having children for him.” His name, than, like his attitude, is often ambivalent. To Jim seems to need a mother and looks to Arvay to fulfill that need:

There was something about Arvay that put him in mind of his mother. They didn’t favour each other in the face, but there was something there that was the same. May be that was why he had never missed his family since he married her. All the agony of his lost mother was gone when he could rest his head on Arvay’s bosom and go to sleep at nights (94).

Arvay’s young marriage becomes more viable and more accessible through the introduction of black characters and black life. One day, Jim hears somebody singing blues at a distance. Joe Kelsey, Jim’s black friend, owns the voice, but the fact that a disembodied blues voice represents him initially makes him representative of black folk culture (Wright, 39). Hurston immediately links him with the comedic mode and in a nonstereotypical way:

Joe Kelsey was a reddy brown Negro, ugly as sin, but with the best-looking smile that Jim had on a man. It always lit
him right up. It always made Jim feel like plying and joking. Just seeing Joe put him into a playful mood and he decided at once to slip up on Joe and play some practice Joke. Joe jumped around, pretending great fright... Then they both broke into loud laughter.

Here Hurston has the men play with comic stereotypes, such as the fear of the supernatural that blacks supposedly have, but in virtually every case she explodes it and makes it clear that both men respect each other and are talking around traditional motifs. The kind of exchanges constitutes a variation on a classic joke which African Americans still tell, are to explode the stereotype that Jim has offered and Jim’s laughter at it indicates he knows it (Dorson, 79-80).

As far as Jim is concerned, his marriage to Arvay will never be real one until she sees things as he does. By the end of the novel, their views are the same because Arvay has come to accept her role as mother. When Jims snuggles up to her in the last scene in the novel, she realizes that,

Her job was mothering. What more could any woman want and need? Jim was hers and it was her privilege to serve him. To keep on like that in happiness and peace until they died together giving Jim the hovering that he needed.

Whether Arvay makes the right decision here is questionable. She has after all consciously chosen to mother and lost again to domestic service perhaps, that important thing here; however is, that for the first time in her life, Arvay has found a place for herself and is totally happy. Jim is happy and their relationship seems complete. Perhaps, then, whatever makes both of them happy and content is the right decision. Because Arvay now appreciates her own worth, and has elected a spot that will be nurturing and fulfilling, her potential for growth is greatly increased.

When Hurston stands on all this is unclear. At times she does seem distantly, ironic when she has Arvay ask, “what more could a women want?” Perhaps Arvay’s decision to serve in Seraph on the Suwanee illustrated Hurston’s belief that people are
individuals that is what right for one is not necessarily right for another. To Hurston, the happiness of the individual is paramount. And undeniably, Arvay Henson is happy, by contrast Zora Hurston was never able to put love, mothering serving before her own career. Though she was married at least twice and involved in a number of love affairs, she always returned, sometimes even escaped to her career.

The omission of the folktales (though some familiar mostly because of the other Hurston works-folk sayings and metaphors are included) makes *Seraph on the Suwanee* an anomaly among Hurston’s works. She was obviously moving in a more somber and complex direction in this novel. The language and style are controlled as the reader is given an unrelieved, in depth view into the mind of sick women. No comic relief is forthcoming in this novel; no deceptively simple, engaging style is apparent. The language no longer flows along smoothly and naturally. Rather, it moves slowly and must be read slowly. It is not poetic, as Hurston’s language generally is, but is, instead, what Robert Bone would call prosaic and “causes many readers to yearn for the alleviating force and carefree gaiety of the earlier works. In fact Hurston gave much importance to the folktales which she used to observe folks directly and helped her to use in her writings. According to Franz Boas folktales are the result of an interchange between daydreams and “ardent desires” engendered by the mind (610)

Perhaps Hurston was consciously aligning her style with the kind of story she was relating. Arvay Henson, after all is a character, completely without a sense of humour. And, although narrated in the third person, almost everything in the story is filtered through her consciousness. What style is more appropriate, then, than one which is as somber as the heroine whose story it relates? Too, the style seems appropriate because Hurston seemed to whites as being more somber, more materialistic, more prosaic, and thus less unrelieved than blacks.

On the other hand, Alice Walker’s novel, *The Temple of My Familiar* presents the saga of a black woman called Lissie Lyles who has taken birth in different races and at different times. It is a chronicle not only of the life of a black woman but also of the woman of different races. It is the story about the manner in which women were brought under the control of patriarchal social order. It is also an analysis of how women lost their
happiness and were pushed in to an unhappy life style as Hurston’s Arvay Henson who struggles internally because of male effect. The novel is basically an oral y history, written in the tradition of the African griots, which were the living encyclopedias of their culture in non-literate societies. These poet- priests memorized and stored prodigious amounts of information, passing down the stories of their ancestors from one generation to the next, and thus keeping the communal identity alive. The griots were almost invariably men, but Alice Walker who has spent much of her literary career projecting womanist consciousness in her writing, inserts woman in to male roles and portrays female story tellers. It is sullen and murky, as Walker’s characters drone on about their problems and their feelings and their feelings and their problems (Rhoda, 76-7).

The novel deals with the importance of recognizing one’s past and listening to one’s ancestors. The novel’s epigraph is derived from an inscription on a World War II memorial at Land’s End, San Francisco: “Remembrance is the key to redemption” (The Temple of My Familiar, 332). In this way, each character in the novel learns that remembrance is the key to redemption. Madelyn Jablon comments that:

Moreover, each journey into the past instigates another: Hands on the waists of others, characters leap forward and jump back like a line dance. At the novel’s close, they live together, having realized that they are a collective by which each will grow. And that growth, the growth which comes from reconnecting with the past, leads to the production of art, which makes one’s experience of the past, accessible to others. The book Suwelo transcribes are all recoveries of the past which guide the spiritual pilgrimage of others (136-144).

The griot of The Temple of My Familiar is Lissie; the story of her life is the story of thousands of lives, each one touched by the double concern of race and gender. She has been many women: an African peasant sold in to slavery by her uncle, subjected to the horrors of the Atlantic crossing, raped and brutalized; a Moorish with burned by the inquisition; a lesbian living in a harem, a pygmy living in a prehistoric forest that covered the whole earth etc. The novel opens with an epigraph of Lissie: “If they have
lied about me, they have lied about everything” Lissie suspects that the people are wrongly informed about her. She believes that without knowing the black woman’s story, no story about the world could be completed and authentic. Thus hers is the only true story about herself and by implication about the black women around her. According to J. M. Coetzee, “it is a novel only in a loose sense. Rather, it is a mixture of mythic fantasy, revisionary history, exemplary biography and sermon. It is short on narrative tension, long on inspirational message” (7).

As the novel unfolds and Lissie’s stories multiply, she expands into kind of womanist consciousness that finally attains aspects of universal consciousness too. In the beginning, Walker introduces Lissie in the form of pictures and then, through Mr. Hal, a friend of both Lissie and her lover, Rafe. Lissie was married to Mr. Hal who is a painter and artist. In both Seraph on the Suwanee and The Temple of My Familiar, Zora and Walker concentrated on marital element. Mr. Hal is also a childhood friend of Lissie who used to live on an island off the coast of Charleston in South Carolina. They were in love. While Mr. Hal’s father hated his painting, Lissie helped him point in secret. But their relationship changes when Mr. Hals is forced to deliver his own child and as a result of this traumatic experience he loses interest in Lissie sexually. While giving birth to their child, Lissie’s moans were turning into screams. He ruminates:

I could see in her eyes the hundreds of times she had suffered in giving birth, and I swore it would never happen again, and my desire for her, for sex with her or with any woman died; and I became a eunuch myself. I just knew I would never be able to deal with making love to a woman ever again (Walker, 106-7).

It was like everything between a men and a woman that had anything at all to do with creating new life just scared me limp I felt ashamed. How other man could keep beating up on their wives with more and more births of babies was beyond me (109).
Because of Hal’s saintly conviction that there is too much suffering implicit in child birth, he observes celibacy. As a result, Lissie runs off with a married photographer. The photographer is not only sexually attracted to Lissie, he is enchanted by every picture he takes of her, however, after short. Affair with the photographer, she comes back with a new baby in her womb. In spite of the fact that she has run away and has come back, Hal never hates her. Lissie on her part accepts her husband’s vow of chastity and sets up a ménage a trio to satisfy her physical needs, with a virile porter called Rife, who happens to be Suwelo’s uncle. Thus, Lissie’s life acquires considerable mystery. Lissie herself has told Suwelo that Lissie means “the one who remembers everything” (52) and believes that in her earlier lives in all the lives in the recent past up to a few thousand years, she was always a black woman. And as a black woman, she was forced to undergo the most horrible, painful and dehumanizing experiences.

In her life Africa, when she was twenty years old, her father dies of heart attack. Lissie, her two sisters, a brother and her mother, as per the custom, become her uncle’s responsibility. Being pitiless, her uncle sells all of them off as slaves. In order to escape from slavery, her mother prostrated before him for mercy but in vain. Lissie describes her mother’s plight in moving words. Her mother’s story illustrates the plight of every black mother who has lost their spouse. Once they were told to white man thus thoroughly inspected to test their physical fitness. Lissie reveals that there were a few other black men, who were sold into slavery along with them. They were sold out by the Mohametans because these men and women used to carry on the ancient tradition of worship of the mother, and to see a mother sold into slavery was a great deal of torture to them.

As a result of hundreds of years of the slave trade in Africa, this religion of mother-worship was finally destroyed. The status of women was invaded, raids on the women’s temples, which existed in sacred groves of trees, were carried out and women and children were dragged out by the hair and forced to marry into male dominated tribes. In Walker’s words:

The ones who were forced to do this were either executed or sold into to a tribe whose language was different. The men
had decided they would be creators, and they went about dethroning women systematically. To sell woman and children for whom you no longer wished to assume responsibility or to sell those who were mentally inform or who had in some way offended you, because a new tradition and accepted way of life (63-64)

However, these mother-worshippers would be the hardest of the Africans to break, for they were devoted to the goddess. Consequently, they were heavily punished and assaulted Lissie, in moving words, describes the enormous agony of her enslaved mother:

After a week in the stockade, my mother fell sick. There was no room for any of us to lie down comfortably, but one of the mother worshippers forced a little extra space by the wall, toward which my mother could turn her head for air, and when the pain wracked her, she could kneel. She was sick with vomiting and dysentery. Those sickness it is least possible to hide. Her deeper sickness was over her shame at being filthy and exposed to strangers, in the embarrassed and helpless presence of her children. There never was more fastidious or modest woman than my mother. She bathed at least once a day and her clothes were spotless. I remember how sweet the oil always smelled in her hair! She could not accept so much filth on and about her person…… on the seventh day she willed herself to die (64)

Naturally, Lissie felt helpless and cornered and wanted to die desperately. Walker brings out some of the most horrifying truths about the way women were treated. Lissie tells that they were possessed by men like any other commodity. They were forcibly pushed in the slavery and branded with their master’s name of which Lissie herself is a victim. Lissie tells us that she, along with other slaves was dragged to a ship. At the plank that led up onto the deck, their last reminds garment, the strip of cotton
around their hips, was snatched away and they were forced onto the ship bald, branded and naked as they came into the world. Lissie fought to hold on to that last small badge of modesty but a white man struck her blow to the head almost without looking at her, and because he had blue eyes, she fancied he must be blind. And she reeled onto the ship with the rest. When the ship landed, they were sold to the needy planters. Lissie her sisters and brother were sold to different planters; thus making them impossible to see each other in future. As Lissie is the story of a woman who is born time and again, she uncovers different types of atrocities committed on women. The novel is about compassion for the oppressed, the grief of the oppressors, acceptance of the unchangeable and hope for everyone and everything. “Walker has written beautifully about dreams, the power of stories-and about the remarkable strength of our own history” (Luci, 1, 13).

Alice Walker firmly believes that one of the chief reasons of women’s exploitation has been the male’s greed for possession. She tells that because men,

> Were stronger at least during those periods when women were weak from childbearing, began to think of owning women and children. When man saw he could own one woman and her children, became greedy and wanted as many as he could get (86)

The title of the novel *The Temple of My Familiar* come from an experience Lissie had in one of her former lives. She lived in Southwest as a Native American in temple. It was a simple, square, one room structure, painted with the turquoise and deep blue symbols for rain and storm. Her familiar, what we these days call a”pet,” was creature that was a small, incredibly beautiful creature that was part bind, and part fish. Once, she took it up, put it on the round and placed a clear glass bowl over it. However, the familiar did not die. It was looking up at Lissie curiously. Then again she put a white bowl on top of it. It then was rushing furiously about in the snow. Unconsciously she was trying to control the familiar. It is only after some time that Lissie was able to understand the meaning of this kind of activity on the familiar under a metal washtub and never gave a thought to how cruel. She was to her pot. To her surprise, the familiar broke the bottom of the tub and came out in the open air and looked with pity at Lissie and using wings it
had never used before, it flew away. Thus she understands the primacy of freedom even among the most primitive creatures. Like Lissie, Walker is her own astral projection. The drumbeat of her Word reaches beyond barriers of race, sex, time, space, and species.

Talking about one of her lives, she tells that she has lived with her mother at the edge of an immense wood. They lived in a house that was made of straw. She tells that her mother was queen of the group, a small group or a tribe. Queen then meant a wise woman, a healer, a woman of experience and vision, a woman superbly trained by her mother, a really good person, whose words were always heard by the clan. As a child, Lissie had spent most of her time with her mother. Lissie’s mother had a familiar, an enormous lion, and they used to go together everywhere. However, this lion also had a family of his own. There was a lot of exchange of visits between them and Lissie was always welcome in the lion’s little family of cubes.

This was the time when people used to meet other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. Lissie’s mother and her familiar had known each other since their childhood. All the women those days had their familiars. Men used to live in separate tribes and they didn’t possess any pets. However, eventually in imitation of the women and their familiars, men also learned to tame the forest dogs. But compared with the lions, dogs were basically opportunist and lazy, sorely lacking in integrity, self respect and culture.

Through a series of illustrious instances of the bond between women and agencies of nature, Walker effectively recreates the primeval world of the matriarchs. Virginia Woolf said that “The words ride on the back of the rhythm. The rhythms of Alice Walker’s prose are beautiful and characteristic, flexible, vigorous, easy, the gait of a hunting lion. Even when the pace of the story crowds and races and the words are choked with meaning and intent, the rhythms never falter. The lion goes her way” (Ursula, 12-13). It was a world in which women were independent, free and emancipated in the true sense. Matriarchy, as Walker seems to suggest, through a variety of rich anecdotes and narratives, is synonymous with women’s freedom and autonomy. It was a self-contained and independent system that rested on love, work togetherness and companionship in the truest womanist sense. The harmony and integrity of such an
unfallen world was shattered by man’s feeling of guilt and shame; or we could claim, the skin-complex. Consequently the patriarchal order of violence, greed and power was created.

In continuation of the theme of Lissie’s birth in different races and class structures, Walker reveals that at least once she herself was a lion. Like Husa, her lion familiar, she was friendly with a young a woman and her children. They grew up together and frequently shared the favorite spots in the forest. But that way of life was rapidly ending. By the time she grew up as a big lion, the men’s camp and the women’s had merged. And they had both lost their freedom. The men now took it on themselves to say what should not be done by all.

Lissie’s life seems to be like a story that has no beginning and no ending. Her story reminds of Finnegan’s Wake. In this novel, Joyce shows the rotations of the wheel of life. Through Finn’s multiple metamorphoses, Joyce rebuilds the city across the ages. Dieke comments:

The cumulative effect of Lissie’s story is that she achieves something resembling a universal soul, a transcendent harmony with the entire universe as symbolized by the bird icon. Just as Jesus Christ represents for the Christians this principle of eternal harmonies and Lissie represents for Walker this eternal spirit, a kind of womanist. In this sense, Alice Walker is a theosophist par excellence and so can confidently be regarded as the latter-day Madam Blavatsky of American literature (511).

Lissie as a lion was able to see that this common commune of men and women was in for an eternity of strife and she wanted no part of it. In consorting with man, as he had become, women was bound to lose her dignity and her integrity. It was a tragedy. But it was a fete that lions were not prepared to share. As a result in subsequently periods lions moved farther and farther away from humans, in search of peace. However, there were tribes with whom the lions kept connections. Through connections, the tribes leaned
from the lions that rather than go to war with one’s own kind. It was better to pack up and remove oneself from the site of contention. As long as there is space in which to move, there is a possibility of having uncontested peace. The fact is there are tribes living today in South Africa who have never come to blows with each other for a thousand years. It is because of what they learned from the lions. The last people on the earth who had any real comprehension of lion habits have themselves faded into myth, but at least before they faded completely they erected the sphinx. There are also even today accounts one hears of the free roaming lions that frequently startled visitors of Haile Selassie’s palace in Ethiopia. It never occurred to any one of his ancient lineage. That lions should be anything but free.

Thus we come to know the world of women, the position and status, power and strength, they enjoyed in the past and at the same time how the position and status enjoyed by them was gradually taken away from them. We come to know the very roots of the rise and fall of women in general and the black women in particular.

The Temple of My Familiar begins with the introduction of Zede, a seamstress, from South America and her daughter Carlotta, who escapes the terrorism of their country with help of Mary Ann, a wealthy white American woman hooked on drugs and tactical activism. Zede and Carlotta settle in San Francisco where Zede runs a fashionable boutique. Like Lissie, Zed is also a traveler in time who knew many generations of her own. Her memory is a repository of the experiences of her ancestors as they were brought from Africa to Latin America and then on to the United States. However, it is through Zede we come to know about the situation of women in different centuries and continents.

Zade, in moments of sadness, calls to her mind the memories of her past. She says that mothers used to teach about lover marking and babies when they had come of age. All along the mothers also used to teach them history of their civilization. She also recalls a waterfall where groups of girls used to bathe when they used to have their periods. Then, along with their mothers they used to together by Ixtaphtaphahex the goddess, and participate in rituals such as preparing food, collecting wood for fire, bathing, encircling, around the fire, nursing tattoo , and the act of telling the stories of the
past etc. Ti is through such stories that she learns about the parents. The task of the priests was to pray for the people. They used to wear the costumes made by women from feathers. Zede mother used to prepare such traditional costumes of feathers. For her mother, such task was like praying. She used to make capes and headdresses of great beauty.

Walker comments on the role men and reveals the true reasons for the plight of the women. Women were entirely content with their situation. However men were still infatuated with their relative newness. Women were already in adornment and were already in high fashion however, women did not know why they were even interested in high fashion. Walker describes it thus:

She was more, you know like playing with herself. Making interesting to herself and other women what she already had. So she had tits, sticking out of there! She had a soft brown belly and strong brown legs. SO what, that she had hair to her ass that glistened like the wings of a bird. Women was bored with it. And so she began to play with how she looked. She used feathers stones and flowers. She used leaves, bark, colored send. She used mud. The toenails of bird. For days she had her sisters hung over the edges of the reflecting pools in the jungle, trying this and that. The rest of the time they spent gathering food. Occasionally they were host to man, whom they played with, especially sexually, until they got tired of him; they then abandoned him (49)

Initially men both worshipped and feared women and kept themselves away from them surprisingly they understood that some of the children the women were making bore a striking resemblance to themselves. Obviously they had made in important discovery about women’s ability to produce life. However, men felt that this secret was kept hidden by women for a long time. The fad that the life women produced came out of a hole at her bottom came as a new knowledge to men. Consequently they suffered from vagina envy.
In fact, Walker suggests that the whole idea of priestliness is rooted in vaginal envy. Priesthood as we know it originated from the ideas of celibacy, and going away, from one’s wife and children. For to become a priest in the old days meant one must do without one’s very genitals. Men had castrated themselves at the time of puberty so that, when they were chosen, for the priesthood they could sound like women and speak to the universe in women’s voice. This is how priesthood was established. Subsequently, it was systematically used as a tool to exploit women. So Walker uses every element to show the violation of women as Christopher Zinn comments,”Her considerable store of fable and tragedy, of historical insight and passionate argument, to convey similar strengths and joys to her reader” (90-2).

Lissie and Zede take readers into the past. Carlotta, Arveyda and Fanny Nzingha, a granddaughter of Celie of *Color Purple* and Suwelo, Fanny’s husband, project the problems of women in our contemporary era. Through a set of such relationships, *The Temple of My familiar* unfolds the womanist meaning of freedom and the perpetual attempt by men to dominate women and other women. As stated earlier, the history of the war between the sexes is dramatized through the stories told by Lissie.

Another couple in the novel is Suwelo, a history professor, and his wife, Fanny Nzingha, a women’s studies teacher. Fanny is in love with Suwelo, but she is not in love with marriage. Hence she proposes to divorce her husband and compels him to live in a separate part of the house. She lays down the condition that they could see each other as and when they choose. She puts her ideas in the following words:

> I will always love you probably. But I don’t want to be married. I don’t want to end our relationship, I want to change it. I don’t want to be married. Not to you not anybody. But I don’t want to lose you either. (37)

Marriage for her means slavery. Hence she declares. “I have never felt free never in my life. And I want to “And to her “Freedom must mean never having to embarrass anybody (138) she is convinced of the enslavement through marriage, so much so that she hates the very institution of marriage. She believes that the wedding ring
people wear on their fingers is nothing but a remnant of a chain (240). And chains have always been an enemy of freedom.

Thus, Fanny is not against sexual relationship between men and women, but against any kind of formal regimentation of that relationship. Hence, she disapproves the notions of formal marriage. No doubt, she loves Suwelo, but she does not want Suwelo to be owned by her or vice versa. She wants to have to a free and fair relationship with Suwelo as equals.

Fanny’s temperament is purely womanist. She is devoted to put an end to the enslavement of black woman at the hands of the black man. She wants to lie with Suwelo not as a wife, not as dependent of vice versa but as an autonomous Being. Hence, she plans to build a house the way M’skuta’s clan used to build. Fanny wants to build a house like the one designed by the ancient matriarchal mind and the first heterosexual household ever created. It hast two wings, each complete with its own bedrooms, both study and kitchen and in the center there is a body”- the “Caremonial” or common space which contains a large living room a lofty above if covered by a skylight and a tiny kitchen for the making of soup or hot cocoa or tea. There is a fire place, too and there will be coaches and tables, book cases a stereo, may be even a TV set. The house is in fact a paragon of equality of sexes. After thousands of and thousands of years of women and men living a part, the Ababa, the tribe of M’skuta (a black woman who was the last living species of her own tribe and was kept in the Museum of Natural History, like an animal in Zoo), had with great trepidation experimented with the two tribes living together. Each person must remain free, they believed. That was the main thing, so they had designed a dwelling shaped like a bird” (396).

Thus, Walker recapitulates the history of woman since the days when human civilization began and describes how the society which was based on the egalitarian principles was transformed into a society of male dominance. Walker projects in *The Temple of My Familiar* her own vision of a more completes, harmonious and health human beings, healthy in body and expensive in soul. To do so, she reinterprets history by initiating an alternative myth. The goddess before God, the mother before the father,
womb envy rather than penis envy and presents her perspectives on race, feminism, love, marriage and Africa.

Thus, in *The Temple of My Familiar* women are depicted as risk takers and adventurers, men passive and diffident. Women force, instruct and prevent men from colonizing sexuality. Fanny for instance, advocates a new sexual freedom by way of soon mediating and masturbating and finding herself dissolved into the cosmic all. Naturally, by the end of the novel, Carlotta and Fanny are inventing less constructing forms of marriage and the lovers achieve oppression-Free happiness, California-style, in hot tubs or in a masseuse futon mat. Consequently these women do not turn to men for aid and comfort but they turn to each other. It is only after the feeling of one’s own self. One of the young women dares to wear a T-shirt that denotes: “A woman without a man is like a fish without Bicycle” (384). We can clearly notice here that even the male patriarchal idiom has been undercut.

In short, Alice walker as an African American womanist woman of letters places the predicament of black women in its historical perspective. Throughout her writings, she has tried to highlight the issues pertaining to the lives of these helpless women. Her works are committed to exposing the sexist tragedy of black women and protest against their on-going degradation. Her works expose sexism, realism and the patriarchal power structure and celebrates the black women’s intellectual capabilities and revolutionary vision. They provide a critical perception and reaction to patriarchy. However, her writings while exposing patriarchal excess do not lose artistic excellence. In fact, her women characters are deeply rooted in African American artistic milieu such as quilting, composing writing, singing root work and herbal medicine.

Her black women characters, in earlier works, which depend on their husband, are depicted to be devoid of any sense of self. Walker portrays black man as an exploiter of black women. It is he, the black man, who is responsible for the plight of the black women. However, the black women who decide to live an independent life become self-consciousness and develop love for their own self and from self-love; they begin to love others, especially the black women. This enables them to create a strong sisterhood which empowers these once weak women.
Though Alice Walker exposes Patriarchal legemony, she does not reject the black men completely. Her women characters do reject the atrocious black men but the moment these men change their way life, they are welcomed in their company. In fact, Walker creates such a world of black men and women based on equality and mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence which is full of happiness and prosperity. Thus Walker creates a New World order defined and determined by the female of the species. The new empowerment confers on these black women responsibilities that she is capable of shouldering with compassion and dignity. Walker wants women to walk tell in all spheres of human endeavor.

The content of the rich body of novels written by African American women in the wake of civil rights movements includes that dark hold and the sun drenched scene and almost everything in between. In slightly less than a quarter of a century black women writers have produces a substantial and significant body of novels, some among the most compelling of our times. By confronting in a fictional context the question–where do we go from here? that Martin Luther king, was publically asking at the time of his death and that his followers, as well as, his opponents, have continued to ask, black women novelists may have answered the question in the process of asking if where they are likely to go is into increasingly challenging imaginative worlds where the thorniest issues of race, class, and gender can be wrestled with and brought forth into the public discourse. Their sensitivity to what others can hear and a determination to speak from and into the times has resulted in an amazing variety of voices making trouble “visible”, asking the most troubling questions

Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar* strives to achieve the balance between the dark and light. A far-ranging narrative, temple at first glance seems to have more in common with the novels of Gracia Marquez than with Walker’s earlier novels. Its complex narrative structure merges folk history, myth, fable and high fantasy with a recognizable contemporary story complete with hot tubs, psychotherapists, and references to public figures. In the novel, Walker balances the darkness of the world’s misery with the light of the sun, not by moving from one to the other but by holding her characters in a state of tension created by living consciously in historical, geographical,
psychological, sexual and spiritual domains. Her characters all grow develop and learn, but rather than ending stasis and completion or anything like “happy ever after” they are left with much work to do in the world and with at best, tentative personal commitments. Late in the novel, when one character observes that “there are songs that people what you to sing today… that are jus inappropriate to the times” (383) Walker may be suggesting that Temple, while appropriate to the times, may not be popular with those who went happier songs and who are unprepared to confront the misery of what she has called times like these, “a bull in political protest”. (2)

Approximately twice the length of her previous novels, Temple includes more than forty named contemporary characters in addition to those both animal and human who make up the world of one character previous lives. Most of the characters are associated with two couples who live in California: Carlotta, a former college teacher and her husband, Arveyda, a rock star; and Fanny and Suwelo, once university professors and colleagues of Carlotta, who became disillusioned and eventually leaves academia. Carlotta comes to California as a refugee from Latin America with her mother, Zede who makes elaborate costumes from tropical feathers. Suwelo travels by train to bath more to the funeral of his uncle Rafe, who has left him a house and twenty six thousand dollars. Once Suwelo’s wife, now his sometime lover and friend, Fanny is engaged in a quest for her sanity that has led her to Africa, where for the first time she meets Ola, her father revolutionary, playwright and minister of culture and her half-sister, Nzingha also a playwright. Fanny was conceived during a brief affair Olivia had with Ola shortly before she left Africa;

Nzingha is the child of his marriage to an illiterate bush woman. Ola’s associates include the real life novelist Bessie Head and the presumably fictional Mary Jane Briden a white woman–playwright, painter, an educator-whom we married so that she would not have to leave. Africa when the black regime drove out the whites.

Temple evolves from the interaction of many voices and withholds from readers the comfort of a single resting place appoint of view, a focus or harmony of diverse and after contradictory voices. When the novel ends, the questions characters are in a sense just beginning to see, and the warriors for justice are preparing for the next wave of
action. Temple, completed in the late eighties, suggests in Ola’s last words “how an endless struggle is “(347).

Sorting out the chronology of temple requires effort Walker does not build in the detailed temporal structure but it is clear that the primary action takes place in the 1980. Yuppies have moved into Rafe’s neighborhood, Ola talks of Elvis Presley in the past tense, Suwelo thinks of how long it has been since he and Fanny, “Hippies at heart,” married “bare foot, in the spring, underneath blossoming apple trees (3822). Arveyda Carlotta, Suwelo, and Fanny seem to be of Walker generation, middle aged looking back at their youth in the sixties. The past emerges, as characters tell each other their stories or as they read diaries, letters and even jotlings in books. White waiting to settle his uncle’s estate, Suwelo spends many hours getting to know his uncle’s closest friends, among them Mr. Hal and his companion, Miss Lissie, with whom Rafe has lived in a very compatible ménage a trios. Mr. Hal and his companion, Miss Lissie’s many past lives; Suwelo relates to them stories of his marriage to Fanny and of his recent affair with Carlotta while Fanny was in Africa. Interspersed with these stories are letters that Fanny writes to Suwelo from her two trips to Africa; Zede’s stories of her young Indian lover, Carlotta’s father account of Fanny’s therapy sessions Arveyda’s stories of his family and Olivia’s narrative of her youth in Africa and her new life in America.

Industrial pollution the drug problem card board, presidents the nuclear threat and acquired Immune deficiency syndrome presumably unsettle the already troubled lives of the characters, but these issues remain beneath the surface of the narrative on April 8 1989, speaking in Washington in support of the National March for women’s equality and women’s lives, just days before The Temple of My Familiar appeared in book stores. Alice Walker was much more specific about ‘the way things are going in the world today,’ “let us look around us…..let us consider the depletion of the ozone; Let us consider homelessness and the nuclear peril; Let us consider the destruction of the rain forests in the name of the almighty hamburger. Let us consider the poisoned apples and the poisoned water and the pensioned air and the poisoned earth.”

But neither in this public statement as an activist nor in the less direct context of her latest novel does Walker a specific political solution to the glaring social ills she
addresses. While calling for the “white male lag giver” to step aside, confess his guilt in the rape of the planet and its dark skinned people, and to desist in colluding with the forces that oppress others, Walker also suggests the necessity of a harmonious coalition to confront the white male power establishment. For Fanny and Suwelo, at least the civil rights movement continues to hover over the present. Suwelo even uses a phrase reminiscent of one attributed to Stokely Carmichael in 1964. Musing that “his generation of men had failed women” Suwelo recalls, “For all their activism and political development during the sixties, all their understanding of the pervasiveness of oppression, for most men, the preferred place for women had remained the home; the preferred position for women, wherever they were supine “(28-29).

Balancing the novel’s ongoing concern with the oppression of women however, it is emphasis on the growth and development of the male characters particularly the transformation of Suwelo. As a professor of history in a California university, Suwelo has been content to teach traditional mainstream textbook history with subtle African American tint:

He wanted American history, the stuff he taught to forever be the center of everyone’s attention. What a few white men wanted, thought and did for he liked the way he could sneak is some black men’s faces later on down the line. And then trace those backward until they appeared even before Columbus. It was like a back stitch in knitting =, he imagined, the kind of history teaching that he did, knitting all the pieces, parts and colors. That had been omitted from the original design. But now to have to consider African women writers and Kalahari Bushman! It seem a bit much (179)

As the recipient of stories from others, Suwelo gradually changes from a conventional professor to a willing student of quire unconventional historical tests, including Fanny’s letters from Africa; uncle Rafe’s papers and books and their endless marginalia; Hall personal history; Lissie’s oral, written and tape recorded stories; and even the visual texts that Lissie and that create with their paints. Instead of the mainstream
white man’s history knitted together with his own carefully chosen pieces of black history, Suwelo finds himself enchanted by myth, fable folk stories, personal history and even the narratives incorporated in paintings.

Lissie tells Suwelo fabulous stories about her many reincarnations; she was captured, sold into slavery, raped and after running away, captured again (61-71); how she lived in peace and harmony with her ape like cousins in the trees, only to have that life disrupted by violence (83-88); how she was once a white man (355-62) and at another time a lion living as the familiar of women. In life after lie, Lissie recalls being sometimes the victim and sometimes the perpetrator of oppression, periodically evoking the horrors of slavery. After having been held in thrall for some months by Lissie’s stories, Suwelo at last returns to California prepared to write an oral history based on the very unconventional material that is the stuff of Hal and Lissie’s lives.

More than the other characters, Fanny experiences personal distress while confronting the way the world is going and her won anger at the white people who are at fault. She recalls being traumatized by the violence during the civil rights movement:”In High school I watched the integration of the University of Georgia on television……. the night the whole campus seemed to go up in flames, and white people raged…. I saw a lot of black people and white, beaten up in Mississippi….. I saw a lot of black people and white allies humiliated, brutally beaten, or murdered (298)

Fanny is terrified of the future—or the thought that there may not be a future and she is exhausted by her life as an activist. “I marched so much by now and been arrested so many times, I’ve really quite weary” (302) Most debilitating of all is her hatred of whites and the violent impulses she feels. Freedom from the bondage of her feelings comes when, with the help of her therapist, Fanny confronts the origins of her hatred and fear of whites. Her now middle aged and only white childhood friend, Tanya, explains that she, too, was changed by the movement, in that she married a black man, a “political shortcut” that allowed her to feel that was doing something about racism without changing society. When Fanny asks how the changed from the way she was raised Tanya explains:”The civil Rights movement happened. Selma happened. The university Georgia happened. Dr. King happened it just hit me one night, watching television coverage of
one of the Civil Rights marches. That orders of the world as I’d always know it, and imagined it would before evermore was wrongs (326).

Though Tanya’s stories, Fanny claims, long repressed memories of growing up black in a racist world. Travelling to Africa and discovering her father, Ola, the most political of characters contributes to her recovery. In Ola’s country as in the post civil rights movement “United States oppression is wide spread. More than once Ola expresses his conviction that “the presents you are constructing ….. Should be the future you want” 236 and he does not hesitate to give his daughter specific advice: To the extent that it is possible…. You must live in the world today as you wish everyone to live in the world to come. That can be you contribution “(336) Explaining to her how many Jane Briden and her staff created a school that made a difference for the children and their country’s future , Ola observes that they had a vision of the future that “looked and an awful lot like what they already had together every day (345). In times like these, lulls perhaps, Ola’s observations suggest that the very least those committed to social change can do is to design their personal lives as models for the world they hope to create for others. America:”for the world they hope to create for other. The model life, however is not necessarily an idyllic one, and if may include violence.

In her fiction Walker repeatedly raises the question of violence and its place in personal and social transformation. So The Temple of My Familiar once again raises the issue of violence has a place in the struggle for justice. Ola and Olivia debate with their daughter Fanny about whether violence has a place in the struggle for justice. Ola argues that the fight to over throw the white regime in his county required ruthlessness and violence and that for him there ”seemed no other way”(305) Fanny’s mother, on the other hand, counsels against violence and advocates forgiveness: “Forgiveness is the true foundation of health and happiness, Just as it is for any lasting progress. Without forgiveness there is no forgetfulness of evil; without forgetfulness there still remains the threat of violence. And violence does not solve anything, if only prolongs itself”. (308)

Fanny, however, does not entirely support either position. She wonders if “perhaps” her father might be right in choosing a violent fight for freedom in Africa, but she cannot see how his position could be applied to 1980s America “In the United States
there is the maddening illusion of freedom without the substance. It is never solid, unequivocal, and irrevocable. So much depends on the horrid politicians the white majority elects. Black people have the oddest feeling, I think of forever running in place “(305-306). Equally unrealistic to Fanny is her mother’s position of non-violence and forgiveness. The way things are going in the United States…. There will soon be more black men in prison than on the streets. In South Africa the entire black population is incarcerated ghettos and “home lands” they despise…… forgiveness is not large enough to cover the crime”(308)

Further complicating the characters search for appropriate action in a world dominated by the greedy and self seeking is the possibility that all could be lost in a nuclear holocaust. Demonstrating considerable knowledge of nuclear winter and its accompanying horrors, Mr. Hal observes that “if they’re going to blow us up, or make us freeze to death and starve in the dark. We might as well be enjoying ourselves by having a good story” (274). But Fanny cannot help but be afraid. Responding to her fear of an accidental holocaust, Suwelo insists that the whole world is being affected by the nuclear threat: “prior to this time in history, at least we thought we’d have a future, that our children would see freedom, even if we never did. Now they’ve made sure that none of our children will ever live the free and healthy lives so many generations of oppressed people have dreamed of for them. And fought so hard for I very often think of violence, but any violence I could do at this point would seem and be so small”(302).

The debate between those who advocate violent revolution and those who adhere to non violence that divided movement activists in the sixties is still alive in Walkers fictions, and though Fanny does not resolve this or what Ola calls the other “eternal questions” the novel raises, she does confront her own racism, violent impulses, fear of whites; she progresses a little further down the road toward the inner harmony both her father and mother insist is necessary for progress. Olivia argues that neither revolution nor personal transformation is fostered by those who are fighting within themselves, but rather by those who “unbroken, uncorrupted.” Die “with the same passion with which they’d live ,” and who in the end appear “to see… the beloved community of souls with whom they would kept the faith”(310) Similarly, Ola urges their
daughter to “harmonize” her heart: “only you will know how you can do that; for each of us it is different. Then harmonize, as much as this is ever possible, your surroundings”.

While the novel does not provide any prescription for achieving personal growth and inner harmony, it does through the stories of individual characters; affirm the possibility of achieving balance, sanity and health and it suggests that social progress is best achieved by those engaged in personal growth: the “how to” of personal and public change remains individual and problematic. And indeed, Fanny, Suwelo, Carlotta and Arveyda seem to travel on independent paths. Walker like her other novels, she continues with this novel to attempt to remove from darkness to light. In this context, Ikenna Dieke comments:

From the predominantly Gothic vision Walker moves into The Temple of My Familiar and creates a salutary vision, which points toward a monistic idealism in which humans, animals, and the whole ecological order coexist in a unique dynamic of pan cosmic symbiosis (507-514.)

Most of the characters are or become in the course of the novel. Ola Mary Jane, Nzingha and Fanny are playwrights; Carlotta and Arveyda compose music; Zede and her mother are feather artists; and Hal Lissie Mary Jane, and even Ola’s illiterate wife are painters. There are also a furniture maker a photographer and two novelists. Women in to the narrative are suggestions that in times like these, after the revolutions and before it is clear what next social movement might be, artists and writers, can be the most effective agents for social change. Ola’s African daughter, who argues that writers “cause as much trouble as anyone”, explains her father’s views writers don’t cause trouble as much as they describe it. Once it is described trouble takes on a life visible to all, whereas until it is described and mad visible only a few are able to see it”(259)

At the end of the novel, after having regained a certain personal harmony Fanny has found a way to combine a social activism with creative work. She is preparing to go back to Africa to produce a play she is writing with her sister, and though she believes
there is a good chance she will be with her sister, and though she believes there is a good chance she will be arrested, she is prepared to do her part to insure that Africa will “belong to all its people, the woman as well as the men” (389). Fanny play will incorporate scenes form three of her father’s plays and will presumably be a continuation of his work.

On his last visit to his friends, Suwelo falls asleep on the sunny porch of their house. When he wakes he realizes Lissie and Hal have painted him surrounded by flowers and fruit trees, ”all the things they love”(193)This painting of Suwelo, s sun drenched counter to the dark hold of the slave ship that Lissie has evoked, provides the balance on which Walker has always insisted in her poetry and fiction.

Walker explains in her novel that anger and violence will not change the world, but an appreciation of each other will improve our lot here. It is very much considerable as Luci Tapahonso’s comment quoted in Volume 58 of Contemporary Literary Criticism is relevant in suggesting the preponderance of the lamp image in *The Temple of My Familiar*:

*The Temple of My Familiar* is a novel about love, in all its forms; love for spirits and spirituality, love for the land and plants, love for all people-regardless of color, sexual preference or age- and love for all living things. It is about compassion for the oppressed, the grief of the oppressors, acceptance of the unchangeable and hope for everyone and everything (Martz, Vol. 58 of *Contemporary Literary Criticism*).

Thus, both novels written by Zora and Walker gave the account of African American women. These two novels dealt with sexuality, love affair, slavery, exploitation and male dominance. In *Seraph on the Suwanee*, It explores contemporary problems of race, class, and gender and especially explores at some length the feminine
psyche. It is about lower-class but upwardly mobile white characters and their black retainers. In *The Temple of My Familiar*, it is a chronicle not only of the life of a black woman but also of the woman of different races. It is the story about the manner in which women were brought under the control of patriarchal social order. It is also an analysis of how women lost their happiness and were pushed into an unhappy life style.